

**In Search Of Clearer Water: An Exploration Of Water
Imagery In Late Medieval Devotional Prose
Addressed To Women**

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ABSTRACT

In his encyclopaedic work *On the Properties of Things*, John Trevisa describes water as ‘able.’ Water is an element which has no determinate properties of its own but which takes up properties from its surroundings and, at the same time, enacts change on those surroundings. This thesis argues that the inherent flexibility or ‘ableness’ of water, which Trevisa and other encyclopaedic writers identify, is crucial to late-medieval understanding of the element and, in turn, informs its use in a variety of religious writings. The multivalent potential of water enables devotional writers to use references to the element to symbolise and articulate access to God whilst they simultaneously deploy it as a metaphorical limiting agent that can regulate this access.

Although there has been some critical attention paid to certain kinds of water in late medieval devotional prose, this thesis contains the first holistic study of various manifestations of water. It considers the material and historical realities of water in the Middle Ages as well as representations of water in different literary genres and demonstrates the ‘ableness’ of water within them. These findings are then used to shed light on a specific genre: spiritual guides authored by men and addressed to women, from the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. The thesis identifies a literary language of water in late medieval devotional prose – a complex and recurrent set of images that authors draw upon to explicate Christian doctrine and portray different aspects of religious life. These images provide the organisational structure of the thesis. Three significant tropes of water are

considered in light of its 'ableness': the imagined and encouraged relationship between water and the body in spiritual guidance, the importance of laundering the soul in such works, and the relationship between blood and water in Passion meditations.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMS	Abrahams Magazine Service
ANU	Australian National University
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	English Literary History
LV	Latin Vulgate
MED	Middle English Dictionary
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
N. S.	New Series
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
O. S.	Original Series
OUP	Oxford University Press
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SUNY	State University of New York
TEAMS	The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

Where this thesis refers to the Bible, it cites both the English translation and the Latin of the online edition of the Douay-Rheims Bible: Douay-Rheims Bible + Challoner notes <<http://www.drbo.org/>> [13.04.16]

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INTRODUCTION

IN SEARCH OF CLEARER WATER

I nel neuere be no wey þat þu be to siker of þy-self, bote euere be in drede, and hold þy freelte suspect, and, as a dredful douve, haunte ryueres of cler water, wher þu miȝt isee þe ymage of þe raueynous hauke þat flikt aboute þe, and be war. Þyse ryueres beþ holy scriptures, þat welleþ out fro þe welle of wisdom, þat is Crist, þe whyche wyl schewe þe schadue of þe deueles suggestioun.

*A Rule of Life for a Recluse*¹

The above passage, taken from a late medieval vernacular translation of Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* (*A Rule of Life for a Recluse*), begins with ordinary water situated in an *extra*-ordinary metaphorical landscape. The 'ryueres of cler water' allow the 'dredful dove', or female anchoritic reader, to keep watch for ravenous predators in their clear surfaces, an explanatory image drawn directly from everyday life. However, it quickly becomes apparent that these are not just mundane, ordinary waters but also a rich, generative and flexible symbol. The 'ryueres' transform twice in a very short textual space. Firstly, they are revealed to represent Christian scriptures, a familiar religious trope dating back to the Song of Songs.² Secondly, they become a different type of water altogether when their

¹ Vernon version, *Aelred of Rievaulx's 'De Institutione Inclusarum': Two English Versions*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, EETS, O. S. 287 (Oxford: OUP, 1984), p. 30. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

² One of the *Glossa Ordinaria* entries for Song of Songs 5:12, which Aelred is paraphrasing here, reads as follows: "They [the scriptures] are called "[waters] flowing in spate" because concerning whatever things counsel is sought in scripture, through that [scripture counsel] is found in full'. The Latin reads: *quae fluentia plenissima dicuntur quia de quibuscumque in scriptura consilium queritur per illa ad plenum inuentur*. See *Glossa Ordinaria, Pars 22, In Canticum Canticorum*, ed. Mary Dove, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 170 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), Gloss 125, pp. 302-303. This use of streams or rivers as an analogy for scripture is a familiar one throughout the Middle

ultimate source is revealed: the ‘welle’ of wisdom that is Jesus Christ. The deliberate and simultaneous evocation of *both* these possibilities emphasises the richness not only of real rivers, which serve a pragmatic function, but also of their literary counterparts. Such waters can just as easily represent an aspect of heaven, for example the life-giving water of eternal life provided by Christ or the words of Holy Scripture, as they can of earth. Multifarious meanings and transformations jostle and intertwine in this short quotation, serving to illustrate the complex role water can play in devotional prose.

Whilst these rivers hold much spiritual promise, access to them seems limited in this passage. The reader of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* is encouraged to seek out clear waters but, once she has reached them, she should simply ‘haunte’ them, venturing close enough to discern the reflection of the imagined hawk within their depths, but not so close that she might disrupt their ‘cler’ surfaces. Water should be something to gaze upon rather than something to touch, taste or otherwise interact with – or so *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* apparently suggests. Yet, as will become evident as this thesis progresses, direct interaction with water, whether in the form of immersion in metaphorical seas, ingestion of Christ’s own bodily water, or everyday labour with water, is often presented as a means for access to Christ himself, not only in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* but also in devotional prose more generally. Such interaction is desirable in, or even essential to, spiritual life.

Ages. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, compares writing sermons on the Song of Songs to drawing water from a river. This quotation is given in full in chapter two of this thesis, pp. 103-105.

This thesis concentrates on these shifts in meaning and identifies a literary language of water in devotional prose – a recurrent but complicated set of watery images that authors draw upon to explicate Christian doctrine and to portray different aspects of religious life to their readers. It sets out to explore the significances and functions of water in works similar in a number of ways to the *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, to discover what patterns can be uncovered and how different factors, such as authorship, translation, and audience can affect or disrupt these patterns. Aelred was a male author writing for a female audience and his Middle English translators were also male.³ The translators were aware of the potential for wider readership but they also maintained Aelred’s initial and special emphasis on women. Works with similarly involved transmission histories but which also have different and often flexible associations with female readers are deliberately selected for consideration. Comparing these various kinds of devotional prose, authored by men but addressed to female audiences, opens the way for assessing whether the language of water is used in gender-specific ways, or whether widening readerships can create revealing deviations from the norm.⁴

THE CRITICAL LANDSCAPE AND METHODOLOGY

³ At various points, this thesis will refer to readers of the devotional works under discussion. Whilst all the works were recorded by scribes or printed, and therefore were undoubtedly read, it should be noted that some women (and men) may well have received these texts orally.

⁴ In paying particular attention to devotional works written by male authors for female readers, this thesis contributes to the work begun by Anne Clark Bartlett in *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Water, the humble and ordinary, life-giving and sacred element wends its way through many works of medieval literature.⁵ Arguably the most famous work of the English Middle Ages, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, opens with a very English kind of water, April's 'showres soote'.⁶ Falling asleep by a stream signals a narrator's transportation from reality into a dream world in many alliterative and pastoral poems. For instance, Langland's narrator Will stops to rest 'by a bournes syde' and when he awakes finds himself in a 'fair feeld ful of folk', with allegorical figures such as Holy Church and Charity on the horizon.⁷ Tears are shed shamefully, noisily, and ardently by forlorn lovers, such as Troilus and Criseyde;⁸ grieving mothers, such as the Virgin Mary; and devoted followers of Christ, such as the sobbing Margery Kempe.⁹ The sea is a gateway to military triumph overseas but it is also a passage by which absent husbands make their way home to

⁵ A full survey of the semantic field of water is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the *MED* and *OED* have been consulted and reference will be made to specific definitions where relevant; *Middle English Dictionary*, University of Michigan, online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>> [22.04.16]; *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edn (2016) <<http://www.oed.com/>>, [22.04.16].

⁶ 'The General Prologue', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 23, l. 1.

⁷ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd edn (London: J. M. Dent, 2011), p. 1, l. 8 and p. 2, l. 17.

⁸ Troilus calls Criseyde's name until he nearly drowns in 'salte teres' and the tears of Criseyde fall like 'shour in Aperil ful swithe'; 'Troilus and Criseyde', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, pp. 473-585 (Book 1, l. 543 and Book IV l. 751). See also Mary Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer's Lachrymose Troilus in Context', *Representations*, 93 (2006), 1-21.

⁹ There are too many articles on Kempe and her tears to cite here. Major studies include: Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe Answers Back', in Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 143-182; Ellen Ross, "'She wept and cried right loud for sorrow and for pain": Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women's Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), pp. 45-59; N. Largier, 'Inner Sense – Outer Senses: The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism', in *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter (Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages)*, ed. C. S. Jaeger and I. Kasten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), pp. 3-14; Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, NY: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 119-150.

neglected spouses. Dorigen, one such waiting wife, contemplates the sea and its black rocks with acute anxiety: is this brooding mass of water a friend, which will see her husband's safe return, or is it a foe, whose waves will dash his ship upon the rocks?¹⁰ Saints such as Christina the Astonishing demonstrate their devotion to God (as well as the special care he takes of them) through the medium of water; Christina famously and miraculously punishes her body with both scalding and freezing water, neither of which leave any visible signs of suffering on her body.¹¹

Given the prevalence of water in medieval literature, the paucity of critical studies devoted to actual and literary medieval water is surprising. Typically, critics have tended to address only one or two aspects of water. In studies of medieval baptism and liturgy, water naturally makes an appearance. The degree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) emphasises the crucial role of water in this rite, as well as the ability of the rite to cleanse spiritually, as water cleanses physically:

[t]he sacrament of baptism is consecrated in water at the invocation of the undivided Trinity [...] and brings salvation to both children and adults when it is correctly carried out by anyone in the form laid down by the church. If someone falls into sin after having received baptism, he or she can always be restored through true penance.¹²

¹⁰ See 'The Franklin's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 180, ll. 847-861.

¹¹ 'Christina the Astonishing', in *Thomas de Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives*, ed. Barbara Newman, trans. Newman and Margot H. King (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), p. 129 and p. 124.

¹² *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), I, pp. 250-251. According to R. N. Swanson, medieval baptism 'was the initiation rite, admitting to the body of the universal church, with the rejection (at least in theory) of human proclivities to sin, and acceptance of Christ's offer of salvation. Except in cases of conversion to Christianity, baptism almost invariably occurred soon after birth – often on the birth day. It swept away the penalty of Original Sin which was the inheritance from the Fall, and

Baptism was so important that even members of the laity could perform it in an emergency.¹³ Critics such as Peter Cramer consider how the very ‘ordinariness’ of readily accessible water enhances the miracle of baptism and other liturgical rites, like the Eucharist where consecrated water was mixed with wine.¹⁴ However, the focus in such studies tends to be on the rituals themselves, the theologies supporting them and changes over time – rather than the element used to enact them.

Turning from liturgical history to literary criticism, water is sometimes afforded a chapter or two in explorations of themes, images and iconography, to which this thesis is particularly indebted.¹⁵ V. A. Kolve, for example, urges readers of Chaucer to consider the visual contexts of his works, specifically *The Canterbury*

made the baptised a potential entrant to Heaven. [...] Baptism was vital, and consequently, it could be administered in emergency by anyone – technically, even by a non-Christian. As long as the correct words were said, it was effective’; *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215-c.1515* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 31. For further discussion see Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c.20-c.1150* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993); Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Martin R. Dudley, ‘Sacramental Liturgies in the Middle Ages’, in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), pp. 215-245; John D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West, A Study in the Disintegration of the Primitive Rite of Initiation*, Alcuin Club Collections, 47 (London: SPCK, 1970). The role of water in rites of baptism is undoubtedly central to much religious water imagery and this thesis will reference and consider the rite when it is evoked in certain watery tropes. However, a study of baptism itself is beyond the scope of this thesis and would be out of place in a project that aims to identify alternative and less well-researched traditions of thinking and writing about water.

¹³ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, p. 66.

¹⁵ Although D. W. Robertson, Jr, does not consider water specifically or at any great length, his study of images in Chaucer was one of the first literary explorations to encourage readers to apply methods of allegorical interpretation to Chaucer’s writings. So, for example, Robertson argues that we must consider the miracle of water into wine at the marriage of Cana when considering *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*; Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 319-320.

Tales.¹⁶ He puts this theory into practice in relation to the first five Canterbury Tales, where his analysis of *The Man of Law's Tale* considers the iconography of the rudderless boat in which Custance travels, as well as the richly symbolic sea she travels upon. Kolve uses both Christian imagery (such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the rite of baptism) and contemporary depictions of pilgrimages across the sea as interpretative tools.¹⁷ His work reveals the extent to which attention to specific themes and images can be instrumental in approaching texts of this period and should whet the appetites of water enthusiasts. However, extensive discussion of the element's literary and visual role, as opposed to consideration of it as one small aspect of a larger landscape of images, is scarce.¹⁸

In terms of 'types' of water, the sea has arguably received the most critical attention, alongside its attendant theme of flooding, as both abound in medieval literature.¹⁹ Although medieval people relied on the sea for trade and travel, the dangers attendant on it were particularly acute in the Middle Ages. Harold S. Fox observes that:

¹⁶ V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p. 1.

¹⁷ Kolve, pp. 297-357. Helen Cooper also explores the topos of the rudderless boat, this time in romance literature; *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 106-136. Although this thesis does not pay much attention to specific artistic depictions from the period, it draws on the symbolic contexts of watery images.

¹⁸ Christiania Whitehead's monograph *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) should also be mentioned in this context, particularly the chapters 'Ark' (pp. 39-48) and 'Household' (pp. 117-142). Whitehead considers the allegorical settings of various works and how they contribute to their schemas. She considers traditions and symbols of Noah's Ark in 'Ark' and in 'Household' turns to domestic imagery, which frequently includes water, in devotional writings such as *The Doctrine of the Hert*.

¹⁹ Although it focuses on a period much earlier than this thesis, a good example is Daniel Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

All medieval people lived very close to nature [...] Those who lived close to the sea were especially affected by what we still call today “Acts of God”. Their houses and their lives could be taken away by waves during a great storm and flooding or coastal erosion could severely damage settlements [...] Drowning at sea was commonplace.²⁰

Moreover, biblical episodes such as Noah’s Flood (Genesis 5:32-10:1) and the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-14:29) made the destruction that water could cause frighteningly clear. Thus, the sea became a particularly ambivalent metaphor from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards. In *The Sea and Medieval English Literature*, which is one of the most noteworthy studies of the sea of recent years, Sebastian I. Sobecki argues that ‘the literary history of the sea in English literature becomes part of the vernacular discourse of Englishness’ and explores the use of the sea as a symbol for unpredictability.²¹ The eclectic mix of genres considered by Sobecki, which stretch across a significant time period, demonstrate the ability of water to traverse the usual critical categorisations.²² His close readings of Middle English poems such as the *Gawain*-poet’s *Patience*, which he analyses in light of broader contextual knowledge and symbolic traditions, is a persuasive model for exploring what is both an everyday part of the English landscape and a potent literary metaphor.

²⁰ Harold S. Fox ‘Fishermen and Mariners’, in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 76-80 (p. 78).

²¹ Sebastian I. Sobecki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007).

²² Sobecki’s work begins with the Norman Conquest and concludes as pre-modernity draws to its end. It is also worth noting that Sobecki draws on a number of small studies of both flood and sea tropes, which have not previously been consolidated. These include: Robert Ashton Kissack, Jr, ‘The Sea in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English Poetry’, *Washington University Studies: Humanities Series*, 13 (1926), 371-89; Ursula Dronke, *Growth of Literature: The Sea and the God of the Sea* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Nicolas Jacobs, ‘Alliterative Storms: A Topos in Middle English’, *Speculum*, 47 (1972), 695-719.

The Sea and Medieval English Literature also represents a renewed interest in travel writing and cartography, in which the sea necessarily features.²³ John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and Travels* not only describes various seas navigated, but also mysterious healing wells, great lakes from which the poor can gather pearls and jewels and biblical water sources, such as the stone which Moses struck, causing water to gush forth.²⁴ Analysis of such travel writing certainly paves the way for projects wishing to consider both real and imagined water; however, the role of water within the genre has not yet been afforded any detailed scrutiny.²⁵

Growing interest in the history of emotion has produced significant recent studies focusing on another aspect of water: tears.²⁶ Attempts to understand medieval tears in a spiritual context have been pioneered by Piroska Nagy, whose comprehensive exploration of tears in early and medieval Christian writings is now a landmark in medieval studies of emotion.²⁷ *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, edited by Elina Gertsman, is the first collection of articles dedicated

²³ With regard to cartography, see Alfred Hiatt, "From Hulle to Cartage": Maps and the Sea', in *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. Sebastian I. Sobecki (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), pp. 133-157.

²⁴ John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

²⁵ Recent articles on John Mandeville's *Book of Marvels and Travels* and on travel writing more generally include *Jean de Mandeville in Europe*, ed. Ernst Bremer and Susanne Röhl (Munich: Auflage, 2007); Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the 'Book of Sir John Mandeville'* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2003); *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); and *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

²⁶ For an introduction to the significance of the History of Emotions in medieval studies see Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 821-845 and Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Piroska Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Age, Un instrument spirituel en quête d'institution* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000). For an article in English which condenses many of these arguments see Nagy, 'Religious Weeping as Ritual in the Medieval West', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, 48 (2004), 119-138.

specifically to waterworks of the Middle Ages. Divided into three key sections – Tears and Image, Tears and Religious Experience and Tears and Narrative – it incorporates both real and literary tears.²⁸ The role of tears as gifts and offerings is given particular attention in the final chapter of the current thesis; however, this bodily form of water is treated as part of a wider, landscape of water rather than a free-standing focus.

In the fields of ecocriticism and theory, the journal *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* has drawn attention to the presence and significance of nature in medieval literature, particularly the four elements.²⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, devotee to the elements and regular contributor to *postmedieval*, recently edited a collection of ecocritical essays entitled *Inhuman Nature*, which includes an article by James Smith exploring the ambiguities of fluid within ‘medieval moral anxieties’.³⁰ Smith’s own thesis considers the function of water as an ‘intellectual entity’, by which he means the existence of water as a thought system within the history of ideas. He explores how analogies to water can help authors to articulate practices of intellection and imagination.³¹ Studies such as this are already making great steps to fill a very particular, theoretical gap in water’s written history and are essential reading for any student of water but this thesis places more of an

²⁸ Elina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

²⁹ See *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, ‘Ecomaterialism’, 4 (2013) especially Sharon O’Dair’s article, ‘Water Love’, 55-67 and Jane Bennett’s response essay, ‘The Elements’, 105-111.

³⁰ James Smith, ‘Fluid’, in *Inhuman Nature*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, DC: Oliphant Books, 2014), pp. 115-132.

³¹ James Smith, *Water as Medieval Intellectual Entity: Case Studies in Twelfth Century Western Monasticism* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Western Australia, 2013), p. 1.

emphasis on material history, exploring the relationship between cultural valences and literary traditions of water.

This thesis is indebted to and, to a greater or lesser extent, informed by, all the research outlined here. However, these studies all cover particular aspects of water with a relatively narrow focus. The following analysis breaks new ground by focusing on a small sample of late medieval devotional prose works and considering water holistically within them, taking account of its numerous, and sometimes contradictory, forms. It uses cultural history and a number of other literary genres, alongside devotional prose, to explore the cultural nuances of water – to sketch, in effect, a cultural landscape of water. This landscape takes into account historical realities of water, biblical references to water, the treatment of water in encyclopaedic writings, and the use of water as a metaphor in secular works, rather than focussing on just one of these aspects. It reveals that, however various, forms of water all share a slipperiness that allows the element to seep through and disrupt dichotomies such as human and divine, practical and spiritual, pure and contaminated, contained and uncontained. Moreover, water features again and again, albeit in different ways, as a vehicle for, or expression of, access to God. Close analysis of this specific literary usage of water reveals how authors can use the cultural landscape of water to their own metaphorical advantage, deliberately exploiting watery's slippery nature in order to manage their female readers' interactions with God. Water, due to its slippery cultural valence, can simultaneously represent both sides of a dichotomy, for example, pure and contaminated. It can therefore be deployed as a literary metaphor which both

promotes access to God and also limits and regulates it in devotional prose writings – without apparent contradiction.

In order to examine water in light of its medieval, cultural history, this thesis is indebted to a number of scholarly investigations and approaches, not all of them devoted to water. However, rather than singling out one of these approaches, the thesis endeavours to incorporate all the considerations outlined below. It is therefore able to create a fuller picture of water in the Middle Ages, and reveal how this understanding informs a specific genre: devotional prose. In an exploration of blood and water imagery in the Gospel of John, Sebastian A. Carnazzo sheds new light on its imagery by taking into account the cultural milieu of the two fluids as represented not only in the Gospel itself, but also in the Bible and its historical context more generally. He argues that the author of the Gospel of John would have expected this ‘cultural background’ of blood and water to influence his audience, informing their understanding of the fluids and what they represent.³² This thesis draws on Carnazzo’s specific analysis during the final chapter on the relationship between water and blood in Passion narrative, and also adopts his productive methodology throughout by using the cultural landscape of water in the late Middle Ages as a vehicle for providing new insight into devotional writings, and in turn into the spiritual and cultural practices of which those writings are a part.³³

³² Sebastian A. Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water: A Narrative-Critical Study of John 19:34* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), pp. 9-24.

³³ For some specific passages concerning Carnazzo’s methodology, see chapter four of this thesis, especially pp. 212-213 and pp. 235-239.

Because of its attention to the cultural valences of water, one growing area of research on which this thesis relies is social history.³⁴ Carole Rawcliffe's *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* offers a survey of public health and hygiene in the late Middle Ages, including a lengthy chapter on water in which Rawcliffe challenges preconceptions that medieval people were content to live in polluted towns.³⁵ This thesis uses Rawcliffe's research into the realities of life in the Middle Ages to illuminate various tropes of water in devotional literature, to show the ways in which everyday anxieties about water inform these tropes. A related field of enquiry, into the role of bathing in medieval culture, is examined in a recent collection of essays, *The Nature and Function of*

³⁴ A related area of research investigates water's role in sacred spaces and as a focus of devotion. See for example Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 2012); James Rattue, *The Living Stream: Holy Wells in Historical Context* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995); Peter J. Fergusson 'Prior Wibert's Fountain Houses: Service and Symbolism at Christ Church, Canterbury', in *The Four Modes of Seeing: Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness*, ed. Evelyn Staudinger Lane, Elizabeth Carson Pastan and Ellen M. Shortell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 83-98; Ellen F. Arnold, 'Engineering Miracles: Water Control, Conversion and the Creation of a Religious Landscape in the Medieval Ardennes', *Environment and History*, 13 (2007), 447-476. Terje Oestigaard has produced a body of anthropological studies about water's religious and social role in the Middle Ages. See 'Heavens, Havens, and Hells of Water: Life and Death in Society and Religion', in *Water: Histories, Culture, Ecologies*, ed. Marnie Leybourne and Andrea Gaynor (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), pp. 94-105; 'Holy Water: The Universal and the Particular', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 21 (2014), 162-165; 'Purification, Purgation and Penalty: Christian Concepts of Water and Fire in Heaven and Hell', in *The Ideas of Water from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Oestigaard and T. Tvedt (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 298-322; and 'Water', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, ed. Timothy Insoll (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp. 38-50.

³⁵ Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013). For other articles which explore issues of clean water, public health and water technology in England and elsewhere, see Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987); Jonathan Gil Harris, 'This is not a Pipe: Water Supply, Incontinent Sources, and the Leaky Body Politic', in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 203-228; Richard Holt, 'Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies', in *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource Use*, ed. Paolo Squatriti (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2000), pp. 51-101; Derek Keene, 'Issues of Water in Medieval London to c.1300', *Urban History*, 28 (2001), 161-179; Carole Rawcliffe, "'Delectable Sights and Fragrant Smelles": Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', *Garden History*, 36 (2008), 3-21; Paolo Squatriti, *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); and Georges Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: CUP, 1988).

Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance.³⁶ Like Rawcliffe's writings, these essays challenge modern assumptions that hygiene did not play a role in the lives of medieval people and they also encourage readers to think more deeply about the various associations clinging to water during the later Middle Ages.³⁷ This relatively new research into medieval bathing becomes integral in chapter two of this thesis, which considers how literary metaphors of bathing and immersion are utilized by devotional authors.

A number of critics have proved the value of applying social and material history to literary interpretation of Middle English texts. Susan Signe Morrison frequently considers the historical contexts of pollution, be it on an individual or larger, social scale, in relation to sacred filth and fecopoetics in Chaucer's writings. She uses an understanding of Chaucer's environment to explore the interrelationship between Christian symbolism and earthy descriptions in his works.³⁸ Britt Rothauser reads both *Pearl* and Lydgate's *Troy Book* in light of concerns about pollution after the Black Death, and Paul Strohm's contribution to *Lydgate Matters*

³⁶ *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, ed. Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott, Technology and Change in History, 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

³⁷ Elizabeth Archibald is currently working on a major interdisciplinary study of baths and bathing in medieval literature and society, announced in outline in 'Did Knights Have Baths?: The Absence of Bathing in Middle English Romance', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 101-116. See also her inaugural lecture at Durham University; 'Baths of Bliss in the Middle Ages: Fact and Fiction' (27th February 2014) <<https://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/baths-of-bliss-in-the-middle-ages-fact-or-fiction/>> [08.03.15]. Another tangentially related area of critical enquiry into water concerns the role of fountains and wells, rather than baths, in Arthurian literature. See for example Hester Lees-Jeffries, *England's Helicon: Fountains in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 22-33 and Sue Ellen Holbrook, 'To the Well: Malory's Sir Palomides on Ideals of Chivalric Reputation, Male Friendship, Romantic Love, Religious Conversion – and Loyalty', *Arthuriana*, 23 (2013) 72-97.

³⁸ Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetics* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 41. Although her work focuses on the somatic and faecal, she also writes authoritatively on the relationship between dirty towns and *The Canterbury Tales*. See pp. 57-72.

pays particular attention to Lydgate's imagery of conduit pipes, and their political implications, using them to suggest that 'a well-flushed city is [...] a matter of politics as well as hygiene' in Lydgate's writings.³⁹ The following analysis contributes to these existing works by using the cultural landscape of water as an interpretive tool specifically for late medieval devotional prose for women, a genre which has not yet been explored in this way.

Because gender is central to this current exploration of water, the study necessarily takes account of the perceived relationship between women and water, which is entrenched in various genres of literature throughout history. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* water feminises Hermaphroditus and Cyane actually dissolves into water in her grief.⁴⁰ John William Waterhouse's depiction of the Lady of Shallott, sorrowful in white, travelling on a boat towards Camelot and her impending death, is surely one of the most compelling and popular images of Victorian womanhood. In his study of Freikorps sexuality, German sociologist Klaus Theweleit wryly mimics the attitude of literature emerging from this culture when he notes that 'women are whores in any case and wetness is their natural

³⁹ See Britt C. L Rothauser, "'A reuer...brighter þen bope the sunne and mone": The Use of Water in the Medieval Consideration of Urban Space', in *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 245-272 and Paul Strohm, 'Sovereignty and Sewage', in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 57-70 (pp. 60-62).

⁴⁰ See *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010). For the account of Hermaphroditus' transformation, see Book 4, pp. 100-103, ll. 372-533 and for the dissolving of Cyane, see Book 5, p. 133, ll. 594-606. For the Latin see *P. Ovidi Nasonis, Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 103-108, ll. 271-388 and pp. 140-141, ll. 409-437.

element'.⁴¹ On a more practical level, women act as stewards of water throughout history, even inspiring modern charitable campaigns.⁴² The relationship between women and water therefore pre-dates the Middle Ages and certainly endures long afterwards. However, it was a particularly potent and dangerous relationship in the medieval world, underscored by both theological and medical authorities.⁴³ Women, like their original mother Eve, were considered to be slippery and unpredictable – just like water.⁴⁴ Their humoral make-up was imagined to be excessively liquid, and this was by no means a positive quality.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 172. In a particularly poetic passage, he writes: 'A river without end, enormous and wide, flows through the world's literatures. Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through, with tributaries, pools, surfs, and deltas; woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling bodily fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges', p. 283.

⁴² For consideration of the role of women as stewards in early Jewish culture, see Elisheva Baumgarten, "'Remember that Glorious Girl!': Jephthah's Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 97 (2007), 180-209. For evidence that water tended to play a larger role in the domestic lives of women than men, see Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Medieval English Women in Rural and Urban Domestic Space', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998), 19-26, (p. 20). For an exploration of women's role as laundresses, and its attendant associations, see Carole Rawcliffe, 'A Marginal Occupation?: The Medieval Laundress and her Work', *Gender and History*, 21 (2009), 147-169. A modern example of this more practical aspect of the relationship between women and water is the 2016 'Walk In Her Shoes' initiative, run by the charity CARE. Both women and men were encouraged to walk 10,000 steps a day for a week in order to replicate the everyday experience of women in poorer countries, who walk miles to find water for their families. <<https://walkinhershoes.careinternational.org.uk/>> [10.04.16].

⁴³ For an exploration of the medieval relationship between women and water, which may well explain why so many knights meet the loves of their lives by fountains in Arthurian literature, see Lees-Jeffries, *England's Helicon*, p. 27.

⁴⁴ 'Fundamental to the idea of the female, according to both Galen and Aristotle, was the belief that women were excessively moist'; Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 42-167 (p. 145); 'And so that from them [men and women] there might emerge fertile offspring, he endowed their complexions with a certain pleasing commixtion, constituting the nature of the male hot and dry. But lest the male overflow with either one of these qualities, He wished by the opposing frigidity and humidity of the woman to rein him in from too much excess'; 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. and trans. Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 65-88 (p. 65); even wombs could be slippery, preventing conception: 'Some women have a womb so slippery and

A number of medical historians, literary critics and feminists have produced research on this relationship and its effect both on women specifically and medieval writings more generally.⁴⁶ One of the most noteworthy studies is Elizabeth Robertson's chapter on medieval medical views of women and female spirituality. Robertson's analysis begins with 'the medieval belief that women were physiologically cold, wet, and incomplete, and therefore by nature sought heat, purgation of moisture and union with the male'. She then applies this belief to a thirteenth century handbook for anchoresses – the *Ancrene Wisse* – and Julian of Norwich's later *Showings*. She persuasively suggests that contemplative life offered women such as Julian a way of celebrating their own fluid femininity, rather than eradicating or stifling it.⁴⁷ Robertson's work provides a theoretical underpinning for this project as a whole, as will be seen throughout in the various explorations of how tropes and figures of water have gendered inflections. Most especially, it informs the first and final chapters of this thesis, where the various medieval

smooth that the seed, once it has been received, is not able to be retained inside'; 'Book on the Conditions of Women', p. 76.

⁴⁵ See Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), particularly p. 184.

⁴⁶ See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*; Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 43-76; Brenda Gardenour, 'Gender in Medicine and Natural History', in *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey and Faith Wallis (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), pp. 182-184; Kristen McQuinn, "'Crepe into that blessed syde": Enclosure Imagery in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*' and Susannah Mary Chewning, 'Gladly Alone, Gladly Silent: Isolation and Exile in the Anchoritic Mystical Experience', both in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 95-102 and pp. 103-115, respectively.

⁴⁷ Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women', p. 142. Robertson's monograph also considers this relationship between women and water in some detail. See *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), particularly pp. 32-43.

associations of water are considered and where the significance of water and blood as a pairing is attended to in devotional prose.

Rather than focusing on biblical precedent, cultural history, or gendered inflections alone, this thesis incorporates these various critical approaches into a wider discussion of the cultural landscape of water, one which takes account of various ways of thinking and writing about water in the later Middle Ages. By selecting a specific corpus of texts, which all belong to the genre of devotional prose, the thesis is able to widen its scope in terms of water itself. It not only takes account of the myriad of possibilities that water offers but shows how understanding the existence of water as a polysemous symbol is crucial to interpreting references to water in late medieval devotional prose, where the meanings of water shift in surprising and contradictory ways.

CORPUS OF TEXTS AND CHAPTER OUTLINES

Throughout this thesis, various writings, both religious and secular, are drawn into discussion to help illuminate how cultural valences of water inform literary uses of the element – from Lydgate’s ‘Tretise for Lauandres’ to the fifteenth-century sermon series *Jacob’s Well*.⁴⁸ However, the special focus of this thesis is late medieval devotional prose, particularly works authored or translated by men and

⁴⁸ Both *Jacob’s Well* and Lydgate’s ‘Tretise for Lauandres’ will be introduced more fully in chapter three of this thesis; see pp. 140-143.

addressed to women. The majority of works considered originate in the early Middle Ages but are investigated here in their late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century forms, therefore bridging the now well-worn boundary constituted by the legislation of Archbishop Thomas Arundel in 1409.⁴⁹ Fashioned partly in response to Wyclif and his followers and named by Nicholas Watson as ‘one of the most draconian pieces of censorship in English history’, Arundel’s legislation caused a sharp decline in the production of vernacular books and scriptural translations.⁵⁰ However, more recent scholarship has suggested that certain works, including translations, are actually examples of new and innovative happenings in ‘vernacular spirituality’, even after 1409.⁵¹ The thesis is particularly interested in works that attract a wider readership over time, largely because of translation into the vernacular but also because of the advent of print. What happens to literary images of water in these works when they are translated into Middle English? Does an acknowledgement of wider readership lead to any changes in how they present water as a metaphor?

⁴⁹ Arundel’s legislation consisted of thirteen articles restricting preaching without a license. See Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-864.

⁵⁰ Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England’, p. 826. Watson also argues for a decline in the scope and originality of works that *were* produced after 1409, but also to the substantial increase in translations of older, often Latin works (p. 832).

⁵¹ Critics such as Vincent Gillespie have urged readers not to overemphasize the shadow cast by the legislation of Arundel, at the risk of devaluing the works that were produced in this time, and Jeremy Catto has drawn attention to ‘the cosmopolitan nature’ of fifteenth century society and its new, variegated readers. See Vincent Gillespie, ‘Chichele’s Church: Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel’ and Jeremy Catto, ‘After Arundel: The Closing or the Opening of the English Mind?’ both in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 3-42 and pp. 43-54 respectively.

Most of the texts under discussion are English translations of earlier Latin texts and they all have complex readerships, which seem to frequently disrupt the perceived gap between lay and clerical devotion. Many are originally written for the cloistered but circulated more widely in their later versions. Because this thesis is structured thematically, certain texts are more relevant and useful for exploration in individual chapters than others. However, there is one spiritual guide which permeates the entire thesis due to its particularly rich, dynamic and complex use of water in metaphor and allegory: the fourteenth-century vernacular translation of *De Institutione Inclusarum*, sometimes known as *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*.

The Cistercian abbot St. Aelred of Rievaulx wrote *De Institutione Inclusarum*, or *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, perhaps between 1163 and 1164.⁵² Addressed to an anchoress whom Aelred calls his sister, the text remained popular throughout the Middle Ages, playing an important role in the development of medieval English anchoritism and mysticism.⁵³ The work is split into two halves, the first concentrating on the ‘outer’ life of an anchoress – her prayer, food, and daily routine – and the second guiding the reader’s ‘inner’ life – her religious meditations and her internal devotion. Aelred is also credited with creating the first Passion meditation of its kind in *De Institutione Inclusarum*, a genre which

⁵² See *Aelred of Rievaulx’s ‘De Institutione Inclusarum’*, ed. Ayto and Barratt, p. xii.

⁵³ *De Institutione Inclusarum* appears almost without change in Richard Rolle’s fourteenth-century *Rule for Hermits* and a case can also be made for its influence on the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*. See Marsha Dutton-Stuckey, ‘A Prodigal Writes Home: Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*’, in *Heaven on Earth*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, Studies in Medieval Cistercian History, 11 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), pp. 35-42 (n. 2) and Domenico Pezzini, ‘Two Middle English Translations of *De Institutione Inclusarum*: The Varieties of Medieval Translational Practice’, in *The Translation of Religious Texts in the Middle Ages: Tracts and Rules, Hymns and Saints’ Lives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 75-94 (p. 83).

encourages reflection on Christ's sufferings and which was destined to experience something of an explosion.⁵⁴ There are two extant Middle English translations of *De Institutione Inclusarum*. One can be found in the Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1), a compilation of largely devotional works dated around the end of the fourteenth century, perhaps between 1390 and 1400;⁵⁵ the other survives in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 423, which is usually dated somewhere between 1430 and 1480.⁵⁶ This thesis will draw primarily on the earlier translation in the Vernon manuscript, where arguments for female readership seem most convincing; however, it will also comment on significant variations between the two translations.⁵⁷ Despite their differences, water trickles

⁵⁴ Watson credits Aelred with 'the earliest developed Passion meditation'; 'The Middle English Mystics', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 539-565 (p. 545).

⁵⁵ Ayto and Barratt posit 1382 as the earliest possible date but suggest 1390-1400 for the most likely window; *Aelred of Rievaulx's 'De Institutione Inclusarum'*, p. xvi. For a recent summary of internal evidence for dating, see A. I. Doyle, 'Codicology, Palaeography and Provenance', in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contents of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS eng. poet. a. 1*, ed. Wendy Scase (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 3-26 (p. 8). The translation of *De Institutione Inclusarum* was not made specifically for inclusion in the Vernon manuscript but must have existed in earlier forms, no longer extant (Ayto and Barratt, p. xviii). For detailed surveys of this manuscript, see *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990); and *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Scase.

⁵⁶ Ayto and Barratt suggest the dating 1430-1480 in *Aelred of Rievaulx's 'De Institutione Inclusarum'*, p. xxix.

⁵⁷ In terms of readership, the original commissioners and owners of the Vernon manuscript are unknown. A. I. Doyle makes a case for 'nuns or other specially devout women, anchoresses, vowesses, or noble ladies', acknowledging that there are 'some texts presuming masculine audiences [in Vernon] and some explicitly for lay ones' but suggesting that these may simply be copied from the diverse exemplars for the manuscript; 'Codicology, Palaeography and Provenance', p. 16. Ayto and Barratt suggest a wealthy, devout laywoman as potential owner, as many other Vernon texts have a female readership in mind - for example, Richard Rolle's *The Form of Living* and the *Ancrene Wisse*; see *Aelred of Rievaulx's 'De Institutione Inclusarum'*, p. xviii. Not all critics agree with these arguments, however, and Scase makes a hypothetical case for William Beauchamp as patron of the manuscript; 'The Patronage of the Vernon Manuscript', in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript*, pp. 269-294. A comprehensive bibliography of commentary on Vernon can also be found in Scase's collection. With regard to Bodley, conclusions are even more difficult to draw. However, Bartlett points out that a codex almost identical to Bodley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS li. 6. 40) belonged to Shaftsbury nun Dame Joan Mouresleygh during the mid-fifteenth century, which suggests that the manuscript would have appealed to a female audience; see *Male Authors Female Readers*, p. 51. Moreover, Bodley begins with the address 'suster' (p. 1) and continues to employ this throughout.

through both translations, flowing from Christ's side in the Passion, streaming from the eyes of the reader as bodily tears, offering a mirrored surface as scriptural stream, acting as cleansing agent for the soul and even becoming the corrupt flood of earthly life. The work is particularly apt as a nexus for the kinds of water investigated in this thesis because it was such a live text throughout the Middle Ages, frequently used, adapted and made accessible to a wider readership.⁵⁸

Three other spiritual guides, ranging from the late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, will also be central to discussion: *The Doctrine of the Hert*, the *Orchard of Syon* and *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. *The Doctrine of the Hert*, a fifteenth-century, Middle English translation of a Latin intellectual treatise, *De doctrina cordis*, has only recently begun to receive the critical attention it deserves.⁵⁹ This pragmatic, didactic and devotional guide is comprised of seven sections or chapters. Each chapter deals with an aspect of the heart and then aligns it with the seven gifts of

⁵⁸ Bella Millett has shown that *Ancrene Wisse*, a thirteenth-century treatise for anchoresses, has potential for *mouvance* because it is a practical work of spiritual instruction and despite its very specific initial audience, a much wider readership is capable of benefitting from it. In much the same way, the potential for textual variance of Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* can be ascribed to its genre and its awareness of how a wider readership might benefit from its spiritual advice. See Millett, 'Mouvance and the Medieval Author: Re-editing *Ancrene Wisse*', in *Late Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 9-20.

⁵⁹ Although it became an immediate 'devotional bestseller' after its composition in the thirteenth century, *De doctrina* and its various vernacular translations remained somewhat unnoticed until 2010, when the first ever edition of the Middle English treatise was published. See '*The Doctrine of the Hert*': *A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Christiana Whitehead, Denis Renevey and Anne Mouron (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2010). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. For a thorough discussion of the Middle English treatise, see *A Companion to 'The Doctrine of the Hert': The Middle English Translation and its Latin and European Contexts*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiana Whitehead (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2010).

the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ In terms of readership, the editors of the vernacular translation conclude that '[w]hereas the Latin text is an intellectual treatise aimed at educated readers (most probably preachers) accustomed to an exegetical style, the Middle English version [is] written for poorly educated nuns [...] It seems that the changes implemented by the translator are due to the difference in audience, rather than to the move from Latin to vernacular'. However, there is still a marked emphasis on *female* readership.⁶¹ The often startling imagery implemented throughout *The Doctrine of the Hert* has been the subject of revealing scholarship, but as yet little attention has been paid to the text's regular (and often contradictory) recourse to water as metaphor or allegory.⁶² Water mills bursting, eyes drying out, scalding water causing glass to shatter – these are the particular moments which this thesis will focus upon.

⁶⁰ The reader should 'make redy here hert to God' with the 'yifte of drede'; 'kepe here hert to God' with the 'yifte of pite'; 'opyn here hert to God' through the 'yifte of kunnyng' 'stable here hert to God' with the 'yifte of strengthe'; '3yve here hert to God' through the 'yifte of counseile'; 'lefte up here hert to God' with the 'yifte of undirstondyng'; and finally 'cutte here herte be the yifte of wisdom'; *Doctrine of the Hert: A Critical Edition*, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ *Doctrine of the Hert: A Critical Edition*, ed. Renevey and Whitehead p. xlvi. The prologue, an addition to the Latin, informs us that the treatise is for 'edificacioun of simple soules' (p. 3) offering 'stable lvyng' (p. 4) to the unlearned. The suggestion for readership made by the editors is also corroborated by the compiler's translational practice; much of the Latin is removed rather than glossed or explicated, to simplify the text (p. xlvi). Catherine Innes-Parker agrees, arguing that the *Doctrine* differs significantly from other similar texts, such as *The Chastising of God's Children* in the respect it demonstrates for its *non-litteratus* readership, assuming that, if properly prepared, they are 'fully capable of affective, meditative devotion' and further suggesting that the treatise 'reflect[s] a concern about individual devotional practice outside the context of the convent'; *The Doctrine of the Hert and its Manuscript Context*, in *A Companion to The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Renevey and Whitehead, pp. 159-181 (p. 181).

⁶² See for example Vincent Gillespie, 'Meat, Metaphor and Mysticism: Cooking the Books in *The Doctrine of the Hert*', in *A Companion to The Doctrine of the Hert*, pp. 131-158 and Denis Renevey, 'Household Chores in *The Doctrine of the Hert*: Affective Spirituality and Subjectivity', in *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c.850-c.1550: Managing Power, Wealth, and the Body*, ed. Cordelia Beattie, Anna Maslakovic and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 167-186.

The Abbey of the Holy Ghost is a short, allegorical treatise, which asks its readers to construct an idyllic abbey, including a clean, fresh, flowing river, in their minds.⁶³ It seems to have originated in the second half of the fourteenth century, although new manuscript versions appeared throughout the following century (it was clearly a popular work) and it is a translation of an earlier French text.⁶⁴ Its source, the French *Abbaye du Saint Esprit*, is addressed specifically to aristocratic laywomen, and although *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* removes direct references to this specific readership, Julia Boffey has shown how the translation still retains an emphasis on female audiences.⁶⁵

The *Orchard of Syon*, a Middle English translation of Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo della divina providenzza*, was composed in the fifteenth century.⁶⁶ Originally created for the first generation of Bridgettine nuns at Syon Abbey, which was founded between 1415 and 1420, it may well have appealed to a much wider readership

⁶³ 'Abbey of the Holy Ghost', in *Middle English Religious Prose*, ed. N. F. Blake (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), p. 90. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

⁶⁴ Blake identifies the most important extant manuscripts as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud 210 (c.1370); the Vernon manuscript; the Thornton manuscript (Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91); Columbia, Columbia University Library, MS Plimpton 263 (c.1440); and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 432 (fifteenth century). It was modified for print by Wynkyn de Worde (c.1496); 'Abbey of the Holy Ghost', p. 88. The text Blake uses, and which will be referred to throughout the thesis, is from the Bodley manuscript.

⁶⁵ Julia Boffey traces the manuscript history of the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (and the *Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* which frequently accompanies it in such manuscripts) throughout the fifteenth century, offering the most comprehensive survey of potential readership available. She notes the 'ready adaptability' of the two works 'to the needs of late-medieval readers of all kinds' as well as their 'capacity to be reshaped and redefined according to various contingencies'; however, she also provides substantial evidence to suggest a retained emphasis on female readers; Boffey, 'The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost and its Role in Manuscript Anthologies', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 120-130 (pp. 129-30).

⁶⁶ The translation stands at two removes from Catherine's original dictation, as the anonymous translator uses Raymond of Capua's Latin translation for a source text. In its content, however, the treatise is a 'full and faithful paraphrase' of the *Dialogo*. *The Orchard of Syon*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey, EETS, O. S. 258 (Oxford: OUP, 1966), p. vi. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

during its early transmission; in 1519 Wynkyn de Worde published a printed edition of the *Orcherd of Syon*, which has led to speculation about possible readers beyond the walls of the Abbey.⁶⁷ Following its source text, the *Orcherd of Syon* is structured around four petitions which Catherine makes to God in her contemplating soul: the first is for herself, the second for the reformation of Holy Church, the third for the whole world and the fourth for the providence of God. However, the fluid structure of Catherine's *Dialogo* is harnessed in its Middle English form.⁶⁸ The *Orcherd of Syon* is one of the most complex works considered in this thesis, with regard to its very particular male and female authorship. Catherine of Siena's original dialogue was dictated by Catherine herself. However, it was recorded in written form, even edited, by male scribes. The *Orcherd of Syon* was translated by an anonymous Syon brother and is categorised by Dirk Schultze as 'theology light' – part of a larger genre of treatises written by male translators, possibly with Carthusian connections, who wanted to provide simpler vernacular

⁶⁷ *The Orcherd of Syon*, p. vii. There are three extant manuscripts of the full translation, all 'large, finely written' and 'elaborate'. Several extracts from the translation, called 'Clenesse of Sowle', also exist in a number of fifteenth-century devotional miscellanies; see Jennifer N. Brown, 'From the Charterhouse to the Printing House: Catherine of Siena in Medieval England', in *Middle English Religious Writing in Practice: Texts, Readers and Transformations*, ed. Nicole R. Rice (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 17-45 (p. 19). A number of scholars, including Jane Chance, believe that the *Orcherd of Syon* was as popular and widely disseminated amongst lay hands as cloistered ones, due to the potential availability of the text and its focus on Christian labour, as well as its 'erasure of class and gender distinctions'; see Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 107. Not all critics are in agreement, however. Studies by Denise Despres and Rebecca Krug aim to show how the text was initially, and even exclusively, concerned with cloistered life. See Despres, 'Ecstatic Reading and Missionary Mysticism, *The Orcherd of Syon*', in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 141-160 (p. 146) and Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 185-200. Brown nuances this view and makes it more inclusive when she suggests that the *Orcherd of Syon* was never intended for a general lay audience, but instead 'most likely appealed to and circulated within a particular lay culture closely tied to Syon and its devotional texts'; 'From the Charterhouse to the Printing House', p. 36.

⁶⁸ Catherine's own scribes imposed order on the *Dialogo* in the form of chapter headings. The Syon translator follows their lead and goes further, implementing in a lengthy prologue his sustained allegory of an orchard, as a spiritual schema for the text. See Brown, 'From the Charterhouse to the Printing House', p. 31.

theology for their increasingly female audiences'.⁶⁹ Classed by Nicholas Watson as one of the only works of real complexity 'after Arundel', the *Orchard of Syon* deserves inclusion here not simply because of its female, devotional focus but also because it hinges on a spiritual allegory with water at its heart.⁷⁰ Christ's body offers a bridge from the tempestuous, filthy sea of earthly life to the peaceable sea of God.

A number of other devotional writings are used to inform discussion throughout this thesis, either to indicate certain longstanding traditions of water's use as a literary metaphor or to show how related devotional works, which lie outside the male author/female reader category, deal with the metaphoric potential of water in comparable ways. The thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* was written by an anonymous male author and addressed to a community of female anchoresses – Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* may well have been an inspiration for it.⁷¹ There are seventeen versions of the work: nine in English, four in French and four in Latin. The manuscripts date from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, indicating the popularity and longevity of the work into the Middle Ages and beyond. Like *De Institutione Inclusarum* it offers spiritual advice to the reader concerning both her inner and outer life.⁷² *The Revelations of Divine Love* do not

⁶⁹ Dirk Schultze, 'Translating St Catherine of Siena in Fifteenth-Century England', in *Catherine of Siena: The Creation of a Cult*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Gabriela Signori (Brepols: Turnhout, 2013), pp. 185-214 (p. 198).

⁷⁰ Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', p. 833.

⁷¹ See footnote 53 of the introduction to this thesis.

⁷² See Yoko Wada, 'What is *Ancrene Wisse*?' and A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Middle English Manuscripts and Early Readers of *Ancrene Wisse*', both in *A Companion to 'Ancrene Wisse'*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 1-28 and pp. 103-112 respectively. Because the Vernon translation of *De Institutione Inclusarum* is the most significant treatise considered in this thesis, the Vernon version of *Ancrene Wisse* will be used throughout. See *The English Text of the*

form a spiritual treatise but are rather an account of divine visions recorded by their beneficiary, anchoress Julian, herself. Very little is known about Julian but she is uncharacteristically specific about when she received these visions, which occurred during a serious illness in May 1373. She describes herself as a simple uneducated woman but she dedicated much of her anchoritic life to interpreting, explaining, and communicating her visions, during which Christ appeared to her emitting both blood and water from various wounds, so that later readers could benefit from her individual experiences.⁷³ Finally, the writings of Margery Kempe, whose copious tears have already been mentioned in this introduction, will also be drawn on in this thesis, as Kempe puts into practice much of the advice given to female religious and devout laywomen, and articulated through references to water, in the later Middle Ages.⁷⁴

The writings of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, as male authors who offered guides for female religious life and whose works became increasingly popular during the fifteenth century, would be candidates for inclusion in an extended

'Ancrene Riwle', The 'Vernon' Text, edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet a. I, ed. Arne Zettersten and Bernhard Diensberg, EETS, O. S. 310 (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 27-28. However, the most authoritative edition of *Ancrene Wisse* to date is *'Ancrene Wisse': A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millet, 2 vols, EETS, O. S. 325 and 326 (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

⁷³ See *A Revelation of Love*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1976; repr. 2010). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. For an introduction to these revelations, see Glasscoe's introduction to her edition and also Nicholas Watson, 'Julian of Norwich', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 210-221.

⁷⁴ See *The Book of Margery Kempe: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. For a general introduction to her *Book*, see *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007). For critical examination of Kempe's tears, see footnote 9 of the introduction to this thesis.

survey of the ideas raised in this thesis.⁷⁵ Whilst reference is made to Rolle and Hilton where relevant, there are a number of reasons for their marginalisation in the present study. Firstly, Rolle and Hilton are traditionally discussed alongside other fourteenth-century mystics, such as the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, rather than grouped with the kinds of devotional guides which form the focus of the subsequent pages.⁷⁶ Chapter two offers some comparisons between mystical writing and devotional writing, which seem to share a language of bathing and immersion.⁷⁷ However, it is necessary to narrow the focus by limiting the amount of space given to mystical writers, in order to keep the scope of this thesis within reasonable bounds. Secondly, the key devotional works that will be compared with *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* – namely, the *Orchard of Syon*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and *The Doctrine of the Hert* – all hinge upon analogies which are deliberately drawn from everyday life: the leisurely orchard, the tranquil abbey, and the individual heart.⁷⁸ This thesis is particularly concerned with how the

⁷⁵ For the changing readership of Rolle and Hilton see Jeremy Catto, ‘1349-1412: Culture and History’ and Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous, ‘1349-1412: Texts’, both in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), pp. 113-132 and pp. 133-162 respectively.

⁷⁶ See for example *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: CUP, 1994). Although Windeatt does include *The Doctrine of the Hert* alongside Rolle and Hilton, showing the fluidity of categorization, its editors emphasise its devotional rather than its mystical focus; see introduction to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey, and Mouron.

⁷⁷ See chapter two of this thesis, especially pp. 130-132. It is worth noting that although Catherine of Siena is a mystic, Annette C. Grisé has shown how Middle English translations of her writings are repackaged with a more devotional and instructional purpose. See “‘In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour’: Female Religious Readers and Textual Reception in the *Myroure of Oure Ladye* and the *Orchard of Syon*”, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Exeter Symposium 6 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 193-212 (p. 207). Despres similarly argues for this in ‘Ecstatic Reading’, pp. 141-160.

⁷⁸ The framework of the orchard is the innovation of the Middle English translator. Despres argues that it transforms the work ‘into a distinctly monastic image of an enclosed garden’ where the reader can browse and select fruit for spiritual meditation; ‘Ecstatic Reading’, p. 154. Grisé adds: ‘By treating the text as if it were a leisure activity (walking through the garden), the writer suggests that the reader take what will be of benefit to her from the text, and to enjoy the experience rather than to see it as actual work and struggle, as religious life was often seen, in

ordinary, everyday element of water can be transformed into spiritual metaphor, and these works, which glean their organising properties from the earthly realm, are therefore more appropriate for inclusion than the works of Rolle and Hilton.

Rather than treating different aspects of water separately, the chapters in this thesis are organised around a number of common but particular usages of water as literary metaphor, and they also reflect throughout on how the cultural landscape of water informs and influences these various tropes – using both historical realities and the manifestations of water in different literary genres to inform discussion. Because many of the texts draw on a common body of sources, both cultural and biblical, there is inevitably a degree of overlap and intertextual reference. However, consideration of shared tropes will help to reveal the different ends to which water is being used as a metaphor. Advice about interacting with water, the understanding of water as a cleansing agent for the soul, and the significant pairing of blood and water recur across all of the texts. These three tropes are not limited to rivers, wells, seas, tears, or any other specific type of water – they frequently encompass many of them at once. The number of references can therefore seem dizzying in their sheer abundance. However, each of the tropes identified engages with issues of access – to the water of spiritual grace which God offers to His devoted followers and, ultimately, to God himself.

Each of the chapters focuses on a specific use of water in the devotional prose works outlined above. Chapter two offers an overview of reader-water

such texts as Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and Richard Rolle's works'; "In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour", p. 205.

interactions. It finds that the works central to this thesis frequently deploy tropes and figures where interactions with metaphorical water, which often represents scripture, are limited or regulated. Yet the works undermine this metaphorical usage when they articulate direct communion with God by making reference to direct engagement with water. Chapter three considers tropes of water-inclusive labour, such as digging wells and doing laundry, where authors encourage readers to clean their souls using the language of the everyday. It explores the literary relationships between the battles with filth that medieval readers face and their more elevated, spiritual tussles with metaphorical dirt. The fourth and final chapter examines the specific relationship between water and blood in a number of works, suggesting that critical attention to blood piety has led to an occlusion of water's role as a more accessible offering to Christ. It argues that water is a crucial part of a special economy of fluids, in which readers can offer water, metaphorical or actual, in exchange for Christ's redemptive blood. However, before any of these tropes of water can be identified and examined, it is first necessary to discover some of the cultural representations and traditions that helped to produce them.

CHAPTER ONE

A VERY 'ABLE' ELEMENT: WATER AS ALL-PURPOSE

METAPHOR

Watir is and semeþ now salte, now swete and fresshe, now clere, now trubly, now þikke, now þenne [...] For watir hath no determinate qualite, noyþer colour noiþer sauour, and þat for he shulde be *able* to fonge eseliche alle colours and sauours. And þerefore þe more pure and clene þe watir is, þe more dyrke and dym hym semeþ whenne the sonne beme cometh nocht þereynne to 3eue to it coloure and hewe.

John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, italics added¹

In the above quotation, John Trevisa explains how water is 'able' to absorb easily various different properties from its surroundings. This chapter will argue that this 'ableness' of water, recognised by medieval encyclopaedists, informs its use in late medieval prose. Study of devotional works written by and for women in the later Middle Ages reveals that water is used in a curiously pragmatic way. The element functions as a particularly 'able', all-purpose metaphor for the authors of these texts, invoked in order to represent and illuminate multifarious – and often contradictory – aspects of the religious experience. The range of references to water is almost overwhelmingly abundant in such works, creating a large and multivalent tapestry of the element. For instance, in the first book of Walter

¹ 'On the Properties of Things': John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88), I (1975), p. 647, italics added. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. The precise manuscript Trevisa used for his translation is unknown. However, reference will be made throughout to the readiest available version of the Latin, an edition originally printed in Frankfurt in 1601. For this passage, see Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Rerum Proprietatibus* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), p. 553.

Hilton's fourteenth-century guide to contemplative life the *Scale of Perfection*, initially addressed to a woman who has taken religious vows but undoubtedly read by a much wider audience later in its transmission, there are numerous examples of this trend.² In one instance, Hilton invokes water as a bland, tasteless substance in contrast to superior wine (the parallels with the miracle at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) are clear). In so doing he conveys the unsatisfactory spiritual state of 'knowynge' without 'edification':

Knowynge aloon bolneth up the hert into pride, but medle it with charite and thanne turneth it to edificacion. This knowynge aloone is but water, unsavery and cold; and therfore yif thei wold mekeli offer it up to oure Lord and praye Hym of His grace, He schulde with His blissinge turne the water into wyn (p. 35).

Shortly after, however, Hilton describes the water of 'good sweet teres' as a cleansing agent which can 'schoure and clensyn the herte fro al the filthe of synne, and maken hit melten into a wonderful swettenesse of Jhesu Crist, buxom, souple and redi to fulfulle al Goddis wille' (pp. 36-37). An element previously depicted as sub-standard suddenly becomes, in an altered and bodily form, a component of a spiritual aim.

A lesser-known treatise also addressed to religious women, *The Doctrine of the Hert*, similarly describes water as an agent of spiritual cleansing. However, towards the end of the treatise having a dry body is presented as a spiritual ideal. The second token of ecstatic love, which devoted Christians should offer Christ, is:

² See introduction to Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Bestul, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 2. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

drinesse of al þe bodily lymes [...] because þe hert is sore applied with alle þe bodily myghtes to þat þing þat it lovith. Right so to oure gostly purpose, a lovyng soule, for þe gret passyng of love þat sche hath to God, is in maner dried up fro þe humorys of fleschly lust (pp. 87-8).

Despite earlier celebration of tears in the work, as both expression of devotion and healing liquid, it is a dry state rather than a wet one which ironically produces a clean and loving soul in this instance.³ Neither author offers any explanation for these sudden shifts in significance; the assumption is that the reader will simply accept them. Water can thus be used as a symbol for absolute purity but it can also become corrupt and dangerous; the element, in these works, is changeable, fluid, slippery and impossible to pin down as its significance slides from the literal to the figurative, the pragmatic to the miraculous.⁴ At every turn it resists categorisation in a way that might confuse readers and audiences, despite the explicit intention of these works: to guide and teach their readers, to help them access and practice a better Christian life.

This chapter considers some of the cultural representations of water from which such literary usage of the element emerges in devotional prose. It uses these representations to suggest that a reader or listener who was well-acquainted with the particular cultural valences of water in the later Middle Ages would be unlikely to feel confused or frustrated by the chaotic abundance of references to water in

³ The Eucharist should be received with tears, according to the *Doctrine of the Hert*: 'Whan þat ever blissed sacrament is receyvid of a soule þat hath þe heete of þe sonne, þe wiche is charite, it meltith al in teris, ouþer in outward teris or inward or ellis bothe, and in love and devocioun' (p. 20); Christ provides an 'helyng bath of swet and teris' which both washes the reader and makes her whole (p. 37).

⁴ The *MED* lists the figurative use of 'water' (s. v., n., 1b): 'persons without substance, unstable or inconstant people'; *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> [22.04.16].

late medieval devotional works. Rather, audiences would recognise the productive ‘ableness’ and flexibility of water. In order to establish this argument, the first half of the chapter addresses biblical and medical writings, two of the more established genres of influence. Medieval medical theories reveal an association between women and water that also informs modern critical approaches to devotional texts written by men for women; biblical writings offer a template for the multifarious, even contradictory uses of water as a metaphor.

The second half of the chapter identifies a missing portion of this cultural landscape of water: encyclopaedic writings, or compilations as they have become known, and especially John Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. This genre is often overlooked in discussions of devotional imagery and bringing it into dialogue with medical and biblical works therefore bridges a certain gap in our critical understanding – specifically the use of water as an ‘able’, all-purpose metaphor. Sections of Trevisa’s translation offer illuminating context for some of the references to water in the vernacular treatises considered in this thesis. Water is presented in his encyclopaedia as productively ‘able’, and this valence informs and inspires literary usage of water in certain religious treatises. *On the Properties of Things* cannot be proved as a direct source for devotional prose works such as *The Doctrine of the Hert*, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and the *Orchard of Syon* but references to water in this work (alongside biblical writings, medical texts, and other encyclopaedias) contribute to a cultural landscape of water that, in turn, informs late medieval devotional prose. Thanks to its very particular associations in the medieval period, water acts as both a

useful pragmatic and spiritual reference point for devotional writers, thereby assisting rather than confusing the guidance their works offer.

BIBLICAL WATER

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2⁵

The Bible is one of the richest and most thoroughly documented sources for water imagery in literature throughout the Middle Ages. In her study of the British landscape pre- and post-reformation, Alexandra Walsham notes the importance of healing, miraculous water in the Scriptures:

The Bible provided a rich repertoire of iconographical motifs connected with the natural environment and supplied plenty of evidence that it was the setting for sublime spiritual experiences. Water was closely linked in the Scriptures with spiritual regeneration and thaumaturgic healing, notably in the guise of the River Jordan where Christ baptized his disciples and the Pools of Siloam and Bethesda, which an angel stirred before each miraculous cure.⁶

This thaumaturgic aspect of water clearly informed the imagination of many medieval writers as well as their perception of the surrounding landscape. Lydgate invokes the healing sheep pool of Bethesda (John 5:2) in a poem dedicated to the Virgin Mary; the use of bathing in water or blood as a cure for leprosy becomes a

⁵ LV: *In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi: et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas.*

⁶ Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, p. 39.

central and troubling motif of medieval narratives concerning the disease, such as *Amis and Amiloun*.⁷ However, healing waters are only a small fraction of a much wider and more complex picture. Water can heal but it can also harm. In the Old Testament floods and seas are destructive as well as curative. The devastating effects of Noah's flood, for example, are frequently retold throughout the Middle Ages.⁸ The Red Sea parts for just long enough to save God's followers but its waves come crashing back down to destroy Pharaoh's army and bar their path. In the New Testament, Christ's disciples find themselves in trouble at sea and Christ himself must walk on water to save them. Water can also be a gift, an example of God's munificence and power. In the Old Testament, when men and women of ancient Syria and Judea really knew what it meant, in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, to 'thirst after justice' (Matthew 5: 6), water is a literal example that the Lord will provide.⁹ In Deuteronomy the people of Israel are promised that, if they obey His commandments, the Lord will bring them 'into a good land, of brooks and of waters, and of fountains: in the plains of which and the hills deep rivers break out' (Deuteronomy 8:7); in Isaiah God pledges to 'pour out waters upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land' (Isaiah 44:3).¹⁰ However, all gifts can be withheld as well as bestowed. The threat of what might happen if God's followers displease him is ever present in these promises of water.

⁷ See 'A Balade in Commendation of Our Lady', in *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Walter William Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), pp. 275-280 (esp. l. 134); *Amis and Amiloun*, ed. MacEdward Leach, EETS, O. S. 203 (Oxford: OUP, 1937), p. 90, l. 2244. Leviticus instructs readers to wash lepers in both blood and water (14:9) and biblical lepers like King Naaman are exemplars of this (2 Kings: 5).

⁸ See 'The Shipwrights: The Building of the Ark', in *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp. 78-82; 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 66-76.

⁹ LV: *Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam: quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.*

¹⁰ LV: *Dominus enim Deus tuus introducet te in terram bonam, terram rivorum, aquarumque et fontium, in cujus campis et montibus erumpunt fluviorum abyssi and Effundam enim aquas super sitientem, et fluenta super aridam.*

Water appears in Scripture in the form of tears, too. In the Book of Lamentations tears become a plea to God, a sign for his attention, even a form of labour:

Their heart cried to the Lord upon the walls of the daughter of Sion: Let tears run down like a torrent day and night: give thyself no rest, and let not the apple of thy eye cease [...] Arise, give praise in the night, in the beginning of the watches: pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands to him for the life of thy little children, that have fainted for hunger at the top of all the streets (2:18-19).¹¹

The writings of the Desert Fathers clearly develop this theme as Abba Poemen reminds Christians that ‘weeping is the way of the Scriptures and the Fathers [...] Truly, there is no other way than this’.¹² The sentiment further endures in many devotional works, which encourage their readers to sprinkle prayers with tears¹³ – after all, Jesus himself cries in the New Testament, an example of appropriate grief for Lazarus’ death (John 11:35).¹⁴ As well as being a sign of respect or an offering to God tears can also function as a warning. When Jesus is led away for

¹¹ LV: *Clamavit cor eorum ad Dominum super muros filiae Sion: Deduc quasi torrentem lacrimas per diem et noctem; non des requiem tibi, necque taceat pupilla oculi tui [...] Consurge, lauda in nocte, in principio vigiliarum: effunde sicut aquam cor tuum ante conspectum Domini: leva ad eum manus tuas pro anima parvulorum tuorum, qui defecerunt in fame in capite omnium compitorum.* In *De Institutione Inclusionum*, tears function in a similar way, as a device to help readers attract God’s attention. Aelred encourages his female readers to ‘gredyly cry to hym wit-owte cessayngge’ in order to ‘ouercome’ him (Vernon, ed. Ayto and Barratt, p. 43).

¹² The *Apophthegmata Patrum* is a written collection of the wisdom of some of the early desert fathers and mothers, still in print as *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, ed. and trans. Benedicta Ward (Oxford: Cistercian Publications, 1975), p. 155.

¹³ A number of examples can be found in the Middle English Vernon version of Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusionum*, ed. Ayto and Barratt. Aelred encourages his reader to offer tears and pity instead of alms, for ‘bitere terys [...] sched out þy clene preyeres (p. 38). She should also ‘preye and lefte vp þe armes of bitere terys aʒens þe temptour of lecherie’ (p. 28).

¹⁴ It is worth noting that excessive outpourings of tears, when they were shed over earthly matters, were not considered appropriate in medieval Christian theology. Brian Patrick McGuire explores this issue with regard to Bernard of Clairvaux and his famous sermon where he grieves for his dead brother. See McGuire, *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and his Tradition*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), pp. 133-151. A fuller discussion of tears in the context of watery imagery in late medieval devotional prose can be found in chapter four of this thesis; see pp. 229-235.

his Crucifixion the gospel tells us that many women ‘bewailed and lamented him’ (Luke 23:27). Rather than comforting them, Jesus replies: ‘[d]aughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me; but weep for yourselves, and for your children’ (Luke 23: 28).¹⁵

Clean, pure water can cleanse the soul and the body in the Bible, as well as providing a figure for Christ himself.¹⁶ St. Paul urges the Hebrews to ‘draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith’, to have their hearts ‘sprinkled’ from an evil conscience and their bodies ‘washed with clean water’ (Hebrews 10:22).¹⁷ In the prophecy of Isaiah readers are told to wash themselves, to be clean, for ‘if [their] sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool’ (Isaiah 1: 18).¹⁸ These verses find an echo in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, by Paul the Simple: ‘In truth, as it was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah, God washes those who are dirty with sin, whitens them as

¹⁵ LV: *Sequebatur autem illum multa turba populi et mulierum, quae plangebant et lamentabantur eum. Conversus autem ad illas Jesus, dixit: Filiae Jerusalem, nolite flere super me, sed super vos ipsas flete et super filios vestros.* Although tears could be a gift from God, they could also fall under suspicion in the Middle Ages. Gertsman dubs crying an ‘intrinsically ambiguous act’ during this time; “‘Going they went and wept’”, pp. xi-xx (p. xii). Kimberley Joy Knight shows how even religious tears could be shed in an improper or transgressive manner in ‘*Si puose calcinaa’ propi occhi: The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Thirteenth-Century Religious Women and their Hagiographers*’; both in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), pp. 136-155 (p. 144).

¹⁶ God describes himself as ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jer 2:13) and in the New Testament, in the parable of Jacob’s Well, Christ offers himself as the fountain of eternal life (John 4:13-14). The parable of Jacob’s Well will be discussed in more detail in chapter three of this chapter; see pp. 136-138.

¹⁷ LV: *accedamus cum vero corde in plenitudine fidei, aspersi corda a conscientia mala, et abluti corpus aqua munda.*

¹⁸ LV: *Si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabuntur; et si fuerint rubra quasi vermiculus, velut lana alba erunt.* In the *Use of Salisbury* this aspect of biblical water is made very clear in the words of the priest at baptism: ‘Let this fount be living, this water regenerating, this wave purifying, so that all who are to be washed in this saving laver by the operation of the Holy Spirit in them may obtain the favour of a perfect cleansing’; ‘[h]ere let the stains of all sins be blotted out’; ‘The Sarum Rite’, trans. E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson, rev. edn (London: SPCK Publishing, 2003), pp. 284-307 (p. 297).

wool and as snow and bestows the good things of heavenly Jerusalem on them'. Many devotional works use water as a cleansing agent in their spiritual allegories, clearly inspired by biblical words such as these from Isaiah.¹⁹ However, if tainted, water can be a sign of corruption or sin as well as an agent of salvation as the following proverb makes clear: 'A just man falling down before the wicked, is as a fountain troubled with the foot, and a corrupted spring' (Proverbs 25:26).²⁰

Finally, there is substantial overlap in the Bible between real and metaphorical water, which can be difficult to disentangle. Writers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian saw in John the fulfilment of Old Testament imagery such as the wilderness rock that gave water (Exod. 17: 1-7, Num. 20:2-13).²¹ In the New Testament, the figurative water of baptism and of 'life everlasting' (*vitam aeternam*, John 4:14) becomes more prominent than actual water; this living water will satiate the soul which is thirsty not for liquid but for salvation. In the Book of Revelation such water becomes integral to the ideal vision of heaven: 'And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. To him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely' (Revelation 21:6).²² Although the metaphorical importance of water appears to grow across the course of the books of the Old Testament and the New, there is no clear-cut division between how the two testaments use water.

¹⁹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. and trans. Ward, p. 174. The need to keep a soul clean from spots and stains of sin, a common motif in devotional prose, is treated in more depth in chapter three of this thesis.

²⁰ LV: *Fons turbatus pede et vena corrupta, justus cadens coram impio*. Detailed consideration of the appearance of filthy floods in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and the *Orchard of Syon* can be found in chapter three of this thesis; see pp. 156-160.

²¹ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 1.

²² LV: *Et dixit mihi: Factum est: ego sum alpha et omega, initium et finis. Ego sitienti dabo de fonte aquae vitae, gratis*.

Jesus invokes the spiritual water of everlasting life in his parable of Jacob's Well, when Christ rests by a well and speaks with a Samaritan woman. He describes the metaphorical as superior to the literal, offering her living water instead of the actual well water she has come to draw.²³ Nevertheless, actual water is still pivotal in the passage, rooting it in the everyday and thereby making it more accessible. The river of Revelation may represent the metaphysical water of everlasting life but the river itself is equally instrumental. For example, in the fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Pearl*, water becomes the centrepiece of an ideal vision of heavenly Jerusalem. A swiftly flowing river, free from impurity or slime, 'fylthe, galle' or 'glet' runs through the holy city in this poem, described in a way which is influenced as much by the physical as the metaphysical.²⁴ The deliberate similarities between this river and that in Revelation – '[a]nd he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Revelation 22:1) – are made plain.²⁵

There is a similar interdependence between literal and figurative references to water in the Old Testament. In Psalm 113:7-8, God demonstrates his power by making rock into liquid: 'the earth was moved, at the presence of the God of Jacob: Who turned the rock into pools of water, and the stony hill into fountains of waters'. Although this passage certainly has a literal meaning, demonstrating

²³ See pp. 156-160 of this thesis for a fuller description of the parable of Jacob's Well.

²⁴ 'Pearl', in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: 'Pearl', 'Cleanness', 'Patience', 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 5th edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), pp. 53-110 (p. 104, ll. 1055-1060). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

²⁵ LV: *Et ostendit mihi fluvium aquae vitae, splendidum tamquam crystallum, procedentem de sede Dei et Agni*. Wendell Stacy Johnson was one of the first critics to discuss this direct parallel between *Pearl* and the Book of Revelation; see 'The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*: Toward an Interpretation', *ELH*, 20 (1953), 161-180 (esp. p. 178).

God's power and his ability to satiate the thirsty, the concept of turning stone to water is traditionally interpreted metaphorically. In *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* Abba Poemen compares the softening of stone to the softening of the human heart through divine grace:

The nature of water is soft, that of stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone. So it is with the word of God; it is soft and our heart is hard, but the man who hears the word of God often, opens his heart to the fear of God.²⁶

Although in this parable water gradually erodes stone (stone is not transformed miraculously and instantaneously into water) the association of water and stone with the power of God may well spring from such Old Testament passages, gaining affective weight in devotional writing of the fourteenth century.²⁷ The hard heart should be made liquid through compunction, compassion and watery tears, facilitated by the divine mercy of God.

As should already be clear from this brief sample of images, water appears in the Bible in various forms, representing different and sometimes contradictory things, both real and allegorical. It is a gift and a punishment, a sign of purity and of corruption, an expression of emotion, a bland substance which must be transformed into wine and an agent of spiritual salvation. Scriptural commentary, such as the *Glossa Ordinaria*, does nothing to help the categorisation of these different types and meanings of water. In the gloss on the Song of Songs, for

²⁶ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. and trans. Ward, p. 162.

²⁷ For a consideration of the use of softening as a devotional metaphor, for example the hard rock softening into water, see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 110-111.

example, rain signifies persecution but also preaching; rivers and streams represent the eloquence of divine grace, which leads to eternal life, but also temptation, which seduces the hearts of the faithful.²⁸ The *Use of Salisbury*, in its instructions for baptism, draws all these watery threads together in a long passage that incorporates both Old and New Testament usage, uniting biblical instances through water but at the same time highlighting the plethora of meanings the element conveys:

God, whose Spirit was borne upon the waters at the very beginning of the world so that even now the nature of water might conceive the power of sanctification, God, who washing away the sins of a guilty world by water signified a type of regeneration by the outpouring of the flood, so that by the mystery of one and the same element there might be both an end of vices and a beginning of virtues [...] you who make glad your city with the rush of the flood of your grace, and open the fount of baptism for the renewing of all nations in the whole world [...] Therefore I bless you, creature of water, through the living God, through the God who in the beginning separated you by his word from the dry land, whose Spirit was borne upon you, who made you to flow from paradise, and commanded you to water the whole earth in four rivers [...] who in the desert giving sweetness to your bitterness made you good to drink, and for a thirsting people brought you forth from a rock. I bless you through Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who in Cana of Galilee in a wonderful sign by his own power turned you into wine, who with his feet walked upon you and was baptized by you by John in the Jordan, who shed you together with blood from his side, and commanded his disciples that those who believed should be baptized in you.²⁹

Eyal Poleg has asserted that '[t]he creation of a quasi-biblical language rendered biblical and liturgical texts inseparable', and this passage from the liturgy concerning the sacrament of baptism is particularly illustrative of his argument,

²⁸ See *Glossa Ordinaria*, ed. Dove. For rain, see Glosses 89 (p. 169) and 105 (p. 173) for chapter 2 of the Song; for streams and rivers see Gloss 64 (p. 397) for chapter 8 of the Song.

²⁹ 'The Sarum Rite', in *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. Johnson, pp. 296-297.

where biblical citations flow in and out of one another in words which remind the congregation of the variety of water Scriptural writings include.³⁰ The rite also stresses the importance of water itself, as both a humble element and an agent of divine grace – ‘[w]ith your mouth bless these simple waters, so that besides the natural cleansing which they can impart for the washing of men’s bodies they may also be able to purify their minds’ – and makes clear that no other fluid will do – ‘[i]t must be noted that every parish priest must frequently on Sundays explain to his parishioners the form of baptizing in pure, natural and fresh water, and in no other liquid’.³¹ If Poleg is correct that the liturgy is one of the primary vehicles for mediating the Bible to the laity then here the *Use of Salisbury* offers an awe-inspiring but also potentially destabilising survey of the element, as the biblical references span so many different sections of their primary text.³²

The Bible, then, offers a shifting tapestry of references to the element of water, an associative density which is difficult to disentangle but which offers a range of possibilities for authors seeking metaphorical material. The next section will reveal how the association between women and water in medieval medical and religious understanding was similarly complex. Various authors used references to water to represent female purity. However, the perceived connection between women and

³⁰ Eyal Poleg, *Approaching the Bible in Medieval England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 199.

³¹ ‘The Sarum Rite’, in *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. Johnson, p. 297 and p. 303.

³² Poleg suggests that the Bible was primarily mediated to the laity through ‘a carefully structured array of rituals and images, sermons and chants’ and liturgy was a key aspect of this, particularly as, out of all the various methods of mediation, liturgy was the most stable: ‘the uses established after the Norman Conquest were employed all through the period [thirteenth and fourteenth centuries], with local customs gradually succumbing to the hegemonic use of Sarum’; *Approaching the Bible*, p. 1 and p. 5.

water was also considered to be a troubling one when it came to real women and their excessively liquid bodies.

MEDICINE, RELIGION, GENDER

A river without end, enormous and wide, flows through the world's literatures. Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through, with tributaries, pools, surfs, and deltas; woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling bodily fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges...

– Klaus Theweleit³³

In Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*, the divine intellect (Noys) is characterized as a *fons luminis* and Endelechia, the world's Soul, emanates from Noys in the form of a liquid, flowing fountain.³⁴ Centuries later, John Lydgate uses water to describe the Virgin Mary in many of his poems, comparing her in 'A Balade; In Commendation of Our Lady' to a well and a spring, a clean conduit, a fountain yielding 'stremes clere'.³⁵ Nevertheless, these idealized imaginings of crystal clear waters are at odds with the realities of the female body as documented in medical and theological treatises. When the eye is cast from depictions of religious and

³³ Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, p. 283.

³⁴ *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. and trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (London: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 73-74.

³⁵ Lydgate, 'A Balade in Commendation of Our Lady', in *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Skeat, pp. 275-280, lines 18, 22, 32, and 51. For other examples see *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's 'Life of Our Lady'*, ed. Joseph A. Lauritis, Ralph A. Klinefelter and Vernon F. Gallagher (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1961). In this longer poem, Mary is described as a 'welle of our welfare' (l. 76) and 'of womanhode the welle' (l. 547). Further idealisation of the women-and-water relationship can be found in the fourteenth century Anglo-Norman prose text, *Livre de seyntz medicines* (c.1354). In the *Livre* the heat of the sun is used as an analogy for the Virgin Mary's heart, which is 'heated' by God. The heat forces Mary to release healing tears, liquid like rose water. See Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones and Herbs: The Healing World in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 141.

allegorical figures to considerations of real women, who emit bloody menses rather than streams of pure water, then the relationship between women and water in medical and theological thought is revealed to be far more complex, even disconcerting, than Lydgate and Bernard's writings might suggest.³⁶

Women are not alone in producing bodily excretions made up of, or associated with water. Both men and women urinate, sweat and shed tears.³⁷ However, there is undoubtedly a special connection between women and water in medieval medical and religious thought. The primary medical model for the gendered understanding of water in the Middle Ages derives from Aristotle's reproductive theories, most usefully delineated in *De Generatione Animalium*, which associate

³⁶ Although menstruation is blood, not water, all bodily fluids were considered to be intimately related in the Middle Ages and therefore the two can be considered alongside one another, even as interchangeable: 'All other bodily fluids [...] were at some point separated from blood and digested further, and were thus considered variant forms of blood'; Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 24. Also 'different kinds of moisture were interchangeable [in the Middle Ages]. The Middle Ages adopted the Galenic theory of dealbation, in which blood is transformed into milk, and both these substances [...] were related to semen'; Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women', p. 145. For more on the interdependence between blood and water in medieval thought, see chapter four of this thesis.

³⁷ Both the *OED* and the *MED* list tears, urine and sweat under the definition of 'water' (s. v., n.) as a physical exudation. *OED* online edn (2016), III 15, 17 and 18, respectively <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/226109?rskey=v0WmMA&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [22.04.16]; *MED* online edn (2013) 7a, a, b and c, respectively <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> Because of their special place in devotional literature, tears will be examined more closely in chapter four of this thesis, pp 226-232. However, sweat and urine are less prominent. Sweat is sometimes referenced in connection with Christ's bloody sweat on the cross, which will also be considered in chapter four, pp. 197-198. Mention of urine is even scarcer in the watery tropes and figures considered in this thesis, however, it is worth noting that urine was used as a major diagnostic tool in the Middle Ages. The art of examining urine (uroscopy) was so common in the Middle Ages that the vessels used to examine urine became ubiquitous with the medieval medical profession. See Faith Wallis, 'Signs and Senses: Diagnosis and Prognosis in Early Medieval Pulse and Urine Tests', *Social History of Medicine*, 13 (2000), 265-278. Urine could be used to identify emotional states and disorders as well as more physical maladies; see Jake Walsh Morrisey, 'Anxious Love and Disordered Urine: The Englishing of *Amor Hereas* in Henry Daniel's *Liber uricrisiarum*', *The Chaucer Review*, 49 (2014), 161-183. For more gendered discussions of urine, and its use in verifying virginity, see Jane Cartwright, 'Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose', in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 56-80 (pp. 69-73).

women with matter.³⁸ Nature wants to create the most perfect animal – the male. However, if there is a lack of generative heat, or unfavourable climactic conditions during conception, then an imperfect animal is produced: the female. And, whilst the female is necessary for creation and therefore essential to God’s plan, she is defined as a deficient version of the male. As Ian Maclean summarizes, the male principle in nature, according to Aristotle, ‘is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics, while the female is passive, material and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete.’³⁹ Because women do not receive sufficient heat during gestation they are wet and cold by nature. Their primary impulse is to seek heat and completion from the male, during sex, and their bodies must purge excess fluid through cleansing processes such as menstruation.⁴⁰

Critics such as Vern Bullough and Elizabeth Robertson have demonstrated how such medical theories were as crucial in creating misogynistic views of women as patristic works in the Middle Ages. Bullough’s convincing thesis is that ‘it was not only Christianity or the unsupported prejudices of the medieval clergy which led to medieval (and modern) misogyny but also the medical and scientific

³⁸ ‘The male provides the “form” and the “principle of the movement”, the female provides the body, in other words, the material’ and ‘[b]y now it is plain that the contribution which the female makes to generation is the *matter* used therein, that this is to be found in the substance constituting the menstrual fluid, and finally that the menstrual fluid is a residue’; *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 729 A 25-34 and 727 B 10-25. For a useful summary of Aristotle’s theory and how it pertains to conceptions of gender, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p. 8.

³⁹ Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 31.

assumptions of the ancient world that were incorporated into medieval thinking with but little challenge.⁴¹

The ‘Trotula’ compendium’s first text, *Conditions of Women*, is clearly informed by Aristotle’s theories about women and conception. It begins with a creation narrative, reminding readers of the dangers of excess water in the female body:

And so that from them [men and women] there might emerge fertile offspring, he [God] endowed their complexions with a certain pleasing commixtion, constituting the nature of the male hot and dry. But lest the male overflow with either one of these qualities, He wished by the opposing frigidity and humidity of the woman to rein him in from too much excess, so that the stronger qualities, that is the heat and the dryness, should rule the man, who is the stronger and more worthy person, while the weaker ones, that is to say the coldness and humidity, should rule the weaker [person], that is the woman.⁴²

Although in its medical recasting of the Genesis story it makes the essential role women play in the reproductive system clear, the *Conditions of Women* also reiterates the theological understanding of women as the weaker sex and explains this weakness in part through water, or at the very least through moisture. Men

⁴¹ Vern L. Bullough, ‘Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women’, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1973), 485-501 (p. 486). See also Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, pp. 32-36.

⁴² *The ‘Trotula’*, ed. Green, p. 65. The *Trotula* is a compendium of three works of independent, twelfth-century authorship which was generally understood in the Middle Ages to be one work and which could often ‘pass’ for, or be confused with, the pseudo-Albertan *Women’s Secrets*. The *Conditions of Women* is one of the three *Trotula* texts, and is considered to be the most scholarly of the three parts, in contrast with the more haphazard *Treatments of Women*, which seems to stem from a more oral tradition. Monica Green argues that the fusion of these three independent texts probably occurred to meet the needs of an audience looking for a basic reference work on fertility. The *Trotula* is extant in at least 29 manuscripts from Latin Europe, and was widely popular throughout the Middle Ages. Although the *Trotula* is by no means representative of all medical approaches to women in the period, its frequent reproduction, in various forms, is testament to its longevity and influence in the field. See *The ‘Trotula’*, ed. Green, esp. pp. 44-61 and Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), esp. pp. 205-510.

might require a certain amount of coldness and humidity in order to reproduce, and women can meet these needs; however, *Conditions of Women* makes clear that these properties are the ‘weaker ones’ provided by the ‘weaker’ woman. Further, the text goes on to warn female readers about the dangers of excess moisture:

Because there is not enough heat in women to dry up the bad and superfluous humors which are in them, nor is their weakness able to tolerate sufficient labor so that Nature might expel [the excess] to the outside through sweat as [it does] in men, Nature established a certain purgation specially for women, that is, the menses, to temper their poverty of heat.⁴³

Balance and harmony were central to conceptions of good health in the Middle Ages, and women’s natural inclination to water threatens this balance.⁴⁴ They were not hot enough to process their own fluids properly, with the result that these fluids were runnier and more likely to seep out of the body. Menstruation, as outlined above, was the purgative remedy for this excess.⁴⁵

Translating Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Trevisa reflects on the dangers of excess moisture, which would occur in the female body without menstruation, explaining that:

⁴³ Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine*, p. 65.

⁴⁴ Writing on Hildegard of Bingen’s work, Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies argue that ‘[w]ithin the cosmic order of things, humankind (we who contain within ourselves the elements both of heaven and earth) represent a central mediating point located between the divine and the earthly. We are called ourselves to live in harmony “with the elements”; to maintain a proper balance in all things so that the humours and the system of dryness and moisture within the body will be kept in ordered harmony’, *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology*, ed. Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, trans. Robert Carver (London: SPCK Publishing, 1990), p. 31. However, it is also worth remembering that greenness and moistness are portrayed very positively in many of Hildegard’s writings; she compares the soul directly with that moisture which gives life to the earth, p. 29.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of dryness and moisture in relation to Christ’s body, see chapter four of this thesis, pp. 206-207.

ȝif þe substancial moisture is destroyed in þe body, al þe worching of þe soule is ilet. ȝif þere is in þe body oþir in any partye þerof to moche moisture þat may not be ireuled of kynde, þan moisture is cause and mater of rotyng and of corrupcioun, and brediþ in þe body ful evel passiouns and sikenesses (p. 144).⁴⁶

Although menstruation is an integral part of this balance-seeking system, helping to expel superfluous fluid, it can also disrupt it. The ‘stream’ of menstrual liquid (as Hildegard of Bingen terms it) must be regulated, to ensure it does not flow too much or too little, which could cause illness.⁴⁷ Trevisa conceives of the distasteful consequences of a moist body in loaded spiritual terms, as the condition will quickly breed ‘evel passiouns and sikenesses’ as well as causing rotting and corruption of the flesh.⁴⁸ However, equally loaded are the terms given by other authors to that menstrual flow which rebalances the female body and restores its harmony. The late-thirteenth-century, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s *Women’s Secrets* labels menstruation as ‘impure’.⁴⁹ It further suggests that women cry more often because they need to purge the humidity in their bodies: ‘weeping is indicative of women’s ignorance, for dampness coarsens the women’s brains and hinders their ability to learn; it points to their excessive wickedness, for it is by way of abundant

⁴⁶ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 98. See also Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Hildegard of Bingen: *Essential Writings and Chants of a Christian Mystic*, ed. and trans. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2016), p. 153; *The Trotula*, ed. Green, p. 65.

⁴⁸ Words like ‘corrupcioun’ abound in devotional prose where they gain allegorical weight alongside their more material meaning. In one Middle English translation of *De Institutione Inclusarum (A Rule of Life for a Recluse)*, for example, Aelred talks of the ‘corrupcyon of nature that aboundith in vs’ even after Baptism (Bodley version, ed. Ayto and Barratt, p. 15). Conversation with miscreants can lead to a soul being ‘corrupted and envenemyd’ and all men after Adam are ‘corrupte vessels’; *The Orchard of Syon*, ed. Hodgson and Liegey, p. 31 and p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s ‘De Secretus Mulierum’, with Commentaries*, ed. Helen Rodnite Lemay (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 68.

tears that “evil humours leave the body through the eyes.”⁵⁰ These tears might be an indicator of wickedness but they are also absolutely necessary because excess moisture in the womb, if not released by tears or menstruation, inhibits conception, trapping the female subject in an unfortunate double bind. Isidore of Seville goes further. He expresses his distaste for the necessary female process in his encyclopaedic work *Etymologies* by warning his readers that in the presence of a menstruating woman, ‘crops do not germinate, wine sours, grass dies, trees lose their fruit, and iron rusts’.⁵¹ Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa explains this paradox: ‘[a]lthough menstrual blood was thought to nourish the embryo during pregnancy and to be turned to milk after childbirth, medieval medicine explained that menstruation was designed to get rid of harmful humours in the body and defined menstrual blood as poisonous’.⁵² Water can therefore be used to describe the holiest of women, the Virgin Mary, but excesses of water in the female body are a source of ambivalence and even fear.

FEMINIST READINGS OF WOMEN AND WATER

⁵⁰ Gertsman, ““Going they went and wept””, in *Crying in the Middle Ages*, ed. Gertsman, p. xii. These excesses of moisture, and the porous bodies required to manage them, did have their advantages, however. Heloise, for example, uses them as a justification for allowing nuns to drink wine. She ‘appeals to the “nature” of women as humid and fummy to argue that women are less apt to become inebriated than men are’; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 23.

⁵¹ See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 175. For the original Latin see Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1911), bk. XI, ch. i. Isidore’s *Etymologies* (early seventh century) is one of the most popular encyclopedias of the period; as Twomey puts it, the work is ‘unquestionably one of the basic texts of the Middle Ages, examining fallen nature through etymology in an attempt to recapture original, unfallen nature embodied in each world’s earliest form’; ‘Medieval Encyclopedias’, in R. E. Kaske, *Medieval Christian Literary Imagery: A Guide to Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 182-215 (p. 184).

⁵² Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, ‘Introduction’, in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 1-26 (p. 18).

There are a number of diverse examples where critics have used the perceived relationship between women and water in the Middle Ages as a theoretical foundation for their analysis of medieval literature. Susan Signe Morrison, in her appraisal of Chaucer's fecopoetics, points out that a fourteenth-century London reader of *The Canterbury Tales* would not only have associated marshy, wet Southwark with 'the tradition of watery filth and its concomitant moral ambiguity' but also with the gendered female body, because of an existing link between women's bodies and filth and watery pollution, and also because 'in this economy, linked to early Church Fathers' hostility to the polluting and leaking female body as a source of sin and disgust, the feminine is the site of crime, filth, and pollution'.⁵³ This view of women as leaky and dangerous carried over into the sixteenth century. Jonathan Gil Harris shows how 'a delinquent, leaky femininity becomes symbolic shorthand [...] for the grotesque transgression or infiltration of London's city limits' in Dekker's *The Dead Terme*.⁵⁴

Because of the often inextricable link between medicine, religion and gender in the Middle Ages, some of the most revealing critical approaches to the relationship between women and water are to be found in explorations of

⁵³ Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Harris, 'This is not a Pipe', in *Enclosure Acts*, ed. Burt and Archer, p. 212. There are further examples of critical studies where the association between women and water in the Middle Ages underpins their analysis. Roberta Gilchrist uses this association in part to explain why many medieval nunneries were built near water, or in wetlands; *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 66. Liz Herbert McAvoy, writing on Grimlaicus of Metz, suggests that the male anchorite negotiated the paradox of marrying a 'culturally feminine' form of life (anchoritism) with *miles christi* by frequently using the apparently feminine metaphor of water and incorporating its fluidity into his narrative style; *Medieval Anchoritisms*, p. 29.

religious, devotional and mystical writings.⁵⁵ Most notably, Elizabeth Robertson and Karma Lochrie have argued that the conception of women as excessively wet carried the potential for spiritual transformation. Robertson explores how the anchoritic life offered women a chance to embrace their femininity in productive, spiritual ways. Beginning with ‘the medieval belief that women were physiologically cold, wet and incomplete, and therefore by nature sought heat, purgation of moisture and union with the male’, her research reveals how Julian of Norwich uses hyperbolic images of fluids, such as tears and blood, in a celebratory rather than subversive way, thus providing ‘a new celebration of femininity through Christ’s “feminine” attributes’.⁵⁶ Lochrie suggests that the medieval female mystic’s imitation of Christ ‘resists the medieval law of the sealed body by exploiting woman’s situation in the heaving powers of the flesh’. Signs of transgression such as blood, odour, wounds, tears and other kinds of bodily effluvia not only help women to recollect the Passion but also symbolise a powerful transgression of bodily boundaries. Thus the concept of women as leaking, fissured flesh is reclaimed, in order to ‘topple abjection into the sublime’; bodily emissions are produced by the mystic’s desire and, simultaneously, the mystic’s revulsion produces closures and blockages. An illustrative example is Catherine of Siena, who demonstrated disgust for food by extreme fasting, which led to blockages in her body (she no longer defecated). However, Lochrie suggests

⁵⁵ This established connection between the fields of medicine and religion in medieval thought is most recently explored in the illuminating collection of essays *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Yoshikawa.

⁵⁶ Robertson, ‘Medieval Medical Views of Women’, p. 142 and p. 161.

that her revulsion is inseparable from her greedy craving of the Eucharist, which takes advantage of the female body's porous and excessively wet nature.⁵⁷

Both arguments, whilst compelling, must be accompanied by a caveat. Robertson concedes that the female spirituality she discusses ultimately stems from medical and theological (male) conceptions of what 'feminine' might mean, rather than breaking free from them completely. Lochrie also makes clear that practices by the women she discusses, such as Catherine of Siena, derive from a patriarchal view of the female body. In other words, even if women transform male conceptions of their bodies into a spiritual opportunity, these positive transformations still hinge on patriarchal constructs of femininity. More recently, Liz Herbert McAvoy has contributed to this larger discussion in an exploration of the trope of baths of blood in devotional literature. She summarises the most relevant part of her argument thus:

According to medieval medical lore [...] the menses provided a natural means for the female body to purge itself of impurities by eliminating regularly those bodily contaminants which accumulated within the womb as a result of the Fall, and in this sense there are again clear correlations between both types of female blood-loss [menstruation and childbirth] and that of Christ's salvific bleeding on the cross, which was also necessary to redeem the Fall.⁵⁸

Following Lochrie and Robertson before her, McAvoy here realises the potential in medical conceptions of the female body for Christic imitation. The very fluid which marks out their weakness, both figuratively as a sign of Eve's curse and

⁵⁷ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 38-41.

⁵⁸ Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Yoshikawa, pp. 85-102 (p. 96).

literally as a biological process required to moderate their deficiency (excess moisture), allows women to identify with Christ and his redemptive sacrifice. Nevertheless, this perception still hinges on the prevailing assumption that women are excessively humid by nature.

Biblical writings and medieval medical theories about women are thus a crucial part of the cultural landscape of water in the later Middle Ages. The multi-functional role of water in scripture partly explains its confusingly multivalent use in late medieval devotional prose, and the medieval assumption that women and water were closely associated means that many of the tropes of water investigated by this thesis are gendered. Nevertheless, this thesis aims to provide a more complete picture of water by also taking into account encyclopaedic writings. This is a genre which is often overlooked in discussions of devotional imagery but which will be attended to in what remains of this chapter.

CATEGORISING WATER

Water is always in a flux. The fluid matter changes qualities and capacities wherever it is, and it always takes new forms [...] Water is a medium which links or changes totally different aspects of humanity and divinities into a coherent unit; it bridges paradoxes, transcends the different human and divine realms, allows interactions with gods, and enables the divinities to interfere with humanity.

Terje Oestigaard⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Oestigaard, 'Water', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, p. 38.

Encyclopaedias, which were inevitably influenced as much by theology as they were by science, attempt to sort and categorise kinds of water but the frequently shifting hierarchies they produce prove, repeatedly, to be unstable. Thus, references to water in these works are as multivalent as scriptural waters themselves. What differentiates encyclopaedic writings from scriptural is the *ableness* of their water – its very flexibility and adaptability –, which becomes a more explicit concern in the later, scientific works. Instability might cause some anxiety, as the element slips and slides between categories, however, this quality of water is simultaneously held up as worthy of readers’ admiration in encyclopaedias, helping to reveal water’s unique potential as a literary metaphor for devotional authors.

Encyclopaedias enjoyed significant popularity throughout the Middle Ages. *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, written by a Franciscan author often referred to as Bartholomew the Englishman (Bartholomaeus Anglicus) is critically grouped with other large-scale compilations of the late twelfth to thirteenth centuries, in particular *De Naturis Rerum* of Alexander Neckham, *De Natura Rerum* of Thomas of Cantimpré, *Speculum Naturale* of Vincent de Beauvais and the interpretations of Aristotle by Albert the Great.⁶⁰ However, *De Proprietatibus Rerum* was undoubtedly

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Keen, *The Journey of a Book: Bartholomew the Englishman and ‘The Properties of Things’* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), p. 3. Keen summarises the genre: ‘These compilers were close contemporaries who all produced their major work in the 1230s to 1250s. They did not necessarily come into contact with each other, and they differ in the degree to which each incorporates the liberal arts curriculum, in the empiricism or otherwise of their approaches to nature, and in this way they organise their material – the works have in common that their compilers were clerics and mendicant scholars who drew upon the writings of the church fathers and of the classical philosophers, their commentators and translators. While the group as a whole has in the past been described as innovative, it has now been convincingly identified with a much

the most popular of these compilations in the medieval period.⁶¹ Its status as both a religious and secular authority endured from the thirteenth century onwards and was arguably cemented when it was translated into vernacular English in 1398 by John Trevisa, as *On the Properties of Things*.⁶² Bartholomew offers an authoritative description of each subject, from scientific to spiritual, and then uses his descriptions to draw moral conclusions (these were later built upon by other hands, in the form of manuscript glosses). He relies heavily on etymology and in nineteen books he manages to cover topics as wide-ranging as natural history and astronomy, the angels and the elements.⁶³

After giving detailed attention to a number of specific examples, Elizabeth Keen concludes her study of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, by enjoining critics to identify and acknowledge Bartholomew's influence in other works of medieval literature as an aid to interpretation.⁶⁴ The final section of this introductory chapter takes up

earlier-established genre of medieval *compilatio* or “world book”, following early medieval models such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Michael W. Twomey calls *De Proprietatibus Rerum* ‘the pearl of great price’ among medieval encyclopaedias, arguing that ‘[f]or literary authors, both religious and secular, Bartholomaeus’ encyclopaedia is far and away the encyclopaedia of choice – at least, as far as current research suggests – with Vincent's *Speculum* a distant second’; ‘Towards a Reception History of Western Medieval Encyclopaedias in England Before 1500’, in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. Peter Brinkley (Brill: Leiden, 1997), pp. 327-419 (p. 357).

⁶² Bartholomew is the only Franciscan compiler whose work is accessible in English and it therefore had a greater influence on English writings, both religious and secular. For further background to Trevisa's translation and his patron Thomas, Lord Berkeley, see A. S. G. Edwards, ‘John Trevisa’, in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. Edwards (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 117-126. For discussion of the linguistic nature of Trevisa's translation, and of M. C. Seymour's edition of the text, see Edwards, ‘The Text of John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum*’, *Text*, 15 (2003), 83-96 and Ronald Waldron, ‘John Trevisa and the Use of English’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988), 171-202.

⁶³ Twomey, ‘Medieval Encyclopaedias’, p. 193.

⁶⁴ ‘It is not possible – or necessary – to claim that readers or writers knew the work directly; but by doing so ourselves we might understand better what was being conveyed in those exchanges’; Keen, *Journey of a Book*, p. 164.

Keen's challenge by drawing attention to Bartholomew's (and Trevisa's) potential influence on late medieval devotional prose, specifically their treatment and use of water as a literary metaphor. Although there is no specific evidence that the authors of the works addressed in this thesis read Bartholomew's text, the wide ranging influence of his work means that it undoubtedly informed ways of thinking and writing about water in devotional works of the later Middle Ages.⁶⁵

Michael Twomey identifies three different kinds of reception for medieval compilations such as Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things* and its Latin original. They could be used as pedagogical aids in schools, raw material for sermons and, in the later Middle Ages, as possessions of monetary value in private libraries.⁶⁶ Each of these functions allowed the works to significantly influence spiritual, educational and literary writings. Keen convincingly suggests that versions of Bartholomew's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* 'fed into the pool of ideas' that both contemporary and later writers, preachers and artists could dip into, in order to create new meaningful works for their own time.⁶⁷ Her description of Bartholomew's influence is articulated through fluid imagery, in order to convey how Bartholomew's ideas informed other genres. She suggests that his 'accounts of the

⁶⁵ Keen identifies *Jacob's Well*, Richard Lavynham's *The Littel Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Prick of Conscience* and *The Cloud of Unknowing* as religious works which may well be indebted to Bartholomew; *Journey of a Book*, p. 81. Twomey identifies *De Proprietatibus Rerum* as a source for the preachers Thomas Brinton and Thomas Wimbleton as well as for a number of anonymous fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sermons written in England ('Towards a Reception History', pp. 343-344). He notes the debt John Waldeby's treatise on the *Ave Maria* owes to the compilation, as well as the fifteenth century prose dialogue *Dives et Pauper*. Thomas of Walsingham's *Historia magna principis Alexandri* and the *Court of Sapience* both cite and borrow from Bartholomaeus, sometimes calling him the 'Master of Properties' or 'The Master of Nature'; 'Towards a Reception History', p. 360.

⁶⁶ Twomey, 'Towards a Reception History', pp. 329-362.

⁶⁷ Keen, *The Journey of a Book*, p. 81.

properties of things entered the pool of popular preaching and devotional material in England, and began to be diffused in written and oral form before the end of the thirteenth century'; those from all three estates could have 'imbibed Bartholomew's imagery with or without a clear idea of its source'.⁶⁸ Medieval authors might not have read *De Proprietatibus Rerum* or its vernacular translation themselves, but many of its ideas, she convincingly suggests, would have filtered through to them anyway by other means – either through education, conversation or sermons.

De Proprietatibus Rerum is a curious blend of the religious and the scientific. Some critics have viewed this as problematic. However, it allows the encyclopaedia to be put into a productive dialogue with the kinds of water imagery discussed in this thesis, where ordinary, everyday uses of water are mined for religious metaphor and allegory.⁶⁹ Trevisa's prologue clearly states that one must know more of nature if they want to know more of God, for:

It is not possible to oure witte to stye up to þe contemplacioun
vnmateral of þe ierarchies of hevene but by material ledinge þat
longith thereto; as þey he wolde mene þat oure wit may not stiȝe

⁶⁸ Keen, *The Journey of a Book*, p. 96.

⁶⁹ David C. Greetham, for example, considers the wide-ranging aims of Bartholomew's treatise, which attempts to incorporate biblical exegesis, practical information and affective stories. He argues that these aims reflect the intellectual discomforts of medieval science; 'On Cultural Translation: From Patristic Repository to Shakespeare's Encyclopedia', in *Voices in Translation: The Authority of "Olde Bookes" in Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of Helaine Newstead*, ed. Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi and Gale Sigal (New York, NY: A. M. S. Press, 1992), pp. 69–84. However, he also finds a pleasing tension between nature and religion in the work; 'The Concept of Nature in Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Floruit 1230)', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41 (1980), 663–77 (p. 677). Keen puts the problem in notably watery terms when she posits that the inclusion of religious allegory in the medieval compilations has been a source of concern for historians because it seems to 'muddy the spring' of scientific thought and to 'contradict their assumed purpose'; *Journey of a Book*, p. 21.

vnto þe contemplacioun of vnseye þinges but it be ilad by
consideracioun of þinges þat beþ iseye (p. 41).

Furthermore, religious and spiritual functions of everyday objects are often reflected upon in the same breath. Water is cause of ‘alle þat is ybredde and springeþ, for [he] bredeþ corne and fruyt, and bryngeþ forth treene, herbe[s] and gras, and wipeþ offe hore and filthe, and wasshiþ awaie synnes, and ʒeueþ drynke to alle men and bestes’ (p. 646); it helps plants grow and cleans the body but it also washes away the sins of the soul and, the text implies, offers not only literal refreshment but also the metaphorical sustenance of eternal life. In fact, Trevisa himself was a cleric and may well have been attracted to Bartholomew’s work because he was ‘interested in testing the capabilities of [the vernacular] for works that contained a devotional with an informational purpose’.⁷⁰ Biblical allusions saturate his writing and he has an acute sense of how the most ordinary elements, such as water, can be the most sacred.⁷¹ Throughout the following analysis, Trevisa’s translation will be referred to, rather than Bartholomew’s original, as it is more contemporary with the devotional writings surveyed in this thesis. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Trevisa is translating from a specific source and that many fourteenth and fifteenth century devotional works

⁷⁰ Keen, *Journey of a Book*, p. 94. Whilst this argument is persuasive, it is worth remembering that Trevisa’s translation may well have been the choice of his patron, Thomas Berkeley, instead of his own. Although it is impossible to know with any certainty, Ralph Hanna has shown how invested Berkeley was in the work of those he patronised; see ‘Sir Thomas Berkeley and his Patronage’, *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 878-916.

⁷¹ With regard to the ordinary and the sacred, liturgy, by definition, is a place where the two meet according to Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, p. 10. Bynum discusses how ‘matter was a more insistent and problematic locus of the sacred in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries than in the early medieval period [...] the piety of the later period might be characterized as a turn to, rather than away from, the object’ (p. 19). Widespread reference to stories of bread, herbs, water and other material things that cure or convey power come mostly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, she argues, indicative of the increasing interest in the ordinary as sacred; *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, NY: MIT Press, 2011), p. 22.

are translations of early Latin works more contemporary with Bartholomew's original compilation.

The commingling of religion and science is not the only difficult aspect of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. Equally challenging for critics are the apparently failed attempts by Bartholomew and Trevisa to categorise the natural world around them.⁷² All the elements, including water, are carefully introduced, described and classified in *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, a tradition that dates back to Rome's imperial writers; they are then placed into a hierarchy based on their individual proximity to the heavenly realm, and this is sustained in Trevisa's translation.⁷³ Water is the penultimate element, almost at the bottom of the elemental ladder and succeeded only by earth. The two lower elements occupy their position because their distance from 'þe spere and roundnesse of heuene' makes them less obedient than air and fire to 'þe virtue of movynge of hevene' (p. 557).⁷⁴ However, in the chapter devoted to water, Trevisa undermines this hierarchy almost immediately using a quotation from Basilus's *Exameron* (370 AD) to claim that 'amonge alle elementes watir is moste profitable element [...] For watir makeþ heuen temperale and þe erþe plentiououse, and incorporeþ the aire with vapores and makeþ it

⁷² As Keen writes in *The Journey of a Book*, '[t]he categories seem, on the face of it, clear and well-defined, leading modern readers to expect the kind of ordered and objective descriptions of things consistent with modern expository texts. These are not forthcoming, however, and commentaries have expressed bafflement at Bartholomew's failure to keep his stated categories in a rational manner' (p. 29).

⁷³ 'The roots of the early medieval system for the classification of pure and impure waters extended into antiquity. Rome's imperial writers had enunciated a hierarchy of waters, with the potable sort at the top. The details of the ranking were not settled'; Squatriti, *Water and Society*, p. 37.

⁷⁴ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 473.

thikke, and styeþ vp into hie place and chalangeþ heuen' (p. 646).⁷⁵ The compilation therefore presents a conflicting view of water. While it may well be relatively low on the elemental hierarchy it also possesses life-giving properties – both literal and spiritual – and a spirit that actively challenges its position by striving to move up to heaven itself. In this sense it is comparable to Christian readers who are themselves struggling to ascend from the earthly realm to the spiritual and who might well use the text to aid them.⁷⁶ Already the carefully demarcated hierarchy of the encyclopaedia is being disrupted.

Attempts at categorisation become more transparent but also more difficult to maintain in the chapter focussed on water. Trevisa, borrowing heavily from one of his sources (Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*) lists and classifies each and every type of water. Physical and spiritual preoccupations interweave throughout. Water that is further from heaven is necessarily less valuable, less 'vertuose' (p. 652); however, more practical concerns also help to dictate categorisation.⁷⁷ Water that is salty and thick, impure rather than fresh and which doesn't clean itself with constant movement and renewal is less safe to consume than well or rainwater.

Dew, rain, ponds, bogs, mires, seas, rivers, wells, muddy, watery ditches – all are considered and appraised for their virtues and shortcomings. According to Trevisa, rain is the superlative type of water because it falls from above, where the

⁷⁵ *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 552.

⁷⁶ According to Keen, the fundamental criteria for a 'world-book' like Bartholomew's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* are that 'it should function as a library substitute, as a repository for knowledge' but also 'as a guide to salvation' leading, ultimately, to knowledge of God; *Journey of a Book*, p. 22. Bartholomew aspires 'towards moral and spiritual usefulness' (p. 22) and therefore readers might be hopeful that reading his work might aid them in ascending to a more spiritually perfect life.

⁷⁷ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 558.

elements are closer to the heavenly realm than to the muddy ground (p. 647).⁷⁸ After rainwater, ‘welle water is beste’, particularly if it springs out of stones or descends from very high wells, because ‘þe welle is heuede and sprynge of lyuyng water [þat] springeþ and renneþ continuliche out of priue veynes of þe erþe’ (p. 648).⁷⁹ Wells have a number of evocative connotations for the Christian and medieval imagination, which will be considered in more detail in the next chapter; Trevisa alludes to these when he mentions pilgrims who find refreshment, and writes of the well: ‘[f]or alweie he reneweþ his waters and 3ueþ benefice of renuyng and amending to hertes þat plungeþ himself in welles, as þe glose seith *super Psalmos*’ (p. 648).⁸⁰ More central to his reasoning here, however, is the *movement* of the water in the wells, which is integral to determining where different *kinds* of water are positioned in this internal hierarchy: the element ‘springeþ and renneþ continuliche’ from wells and therefore it is cleaner and purer than any other type. Rivers, too, are high on the list because their movement is constant; they are ‘clene’ because ‘þe cours þerof is downward and swifte. And swiftnesse is more vertuose, for it bereþ downe alle lettes þat he fyndeþ in his cours (p. 652).⁸¹ On the opposite end of the spectrum, still waters are frequently at the bottom of the aquatic hierarchy for this very reason. Pit water occupies a low position because of its distance from the air (and heaven) but also because it is stagnant: it

⁷⁸ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 553.

⁷⁹ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 554.

⁸⁰ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 554.

⁸¹ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 558. *The Use of Sarum* instructs priests to clean the baptismal font and renew it with fresh water regularly, because ‘water grows stale’; however, it also reminds them that ‘the water of Baptism must not be changed in deference to somebody of distinction, *unless* it has become stale’; ‘The Sarum Rite’, in *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. Johnson, p. 292, italics added.

‘is thikkeſt and worſte to defye for ſaltnesse of þe erþe and for ſtondyng of þe watir, and alſo for depenes and fernesse from þe aire’ (p. 650).⁸²

Despite Trevisa’s careful attempts to ſort the different types of water according to both ſpiritual and pragmatic concerns, his hierarchy is frequently ſubverted. Rain is labelled the beſt type of water but Trevisa uſes ſuperlatives throughout in reference to other kinds of water, leading to ſome confusion. For example, after extolling the merits of well water and rainwater he claims that ſtreams actually have the ‘moſte freſſhe watir and moſt clene grounde, and renneþ moſt ſwyftelych þenne eny oþer partie of þe watirs’ (p. 663).⁸³ Furthermore, the changeable nature of water is emphasised, which means it can eaſily defy claſſification through transformation. It is an important binding agent – ‘by ſtrengþe of grete dryneſſe the erþe ſhulde falle to poudre but ʒif þe parties were y-oned and y-ioyned togedres by moyſture’ (p. 647) – but it can alſo act diviſively: ‘[f]or þer a welle ſpringeþ and walmeþ, by violence of his mevyng [a] paſſith þurgh the parties, and departeþ and deleþ partie fro partie’ (p. 648).⁸⁴ Water can affect its ſurroundings – ‘[he] bredeþ corne and fruyt, and bryngþe forth treene, herbe[s] and gras (p. 646) – but it can alſo *be affected* by its ſurroundings; its purity depends on the type of earth it paſſes through and over: ‘ʒif the grounde is ſwete and pure, þe water ſhal alſo be ſwete and pure’ (p. 650).⁸⁵ Streams might ſometimes poſſeſs the cleaneſt and freſheſt water, but when they run through towns ‘filþe and hore of cites falleþ into ryuers, and waſſhinge and baþinge of flex

⁸² See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 556.

⁸³ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 563.

⁸⁴ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 552 and p. 553, reſpectively.

⁸⁵ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 552 and p. 556, reſpectively.

and of oþer þinges, of the whiche ryuere watir sometime takeþ corrupcioun' (p. 653).⁸⁶ Water becomes stagnant and impure if it is not moved, hence why rivers and streams are classed as better quality water than that in 'layes' or 'maryes', because 'put water', just like sinners in bad company, often 'taketh corrupcioun whenne it is noȝt ymeude' (p. 651).⁸⁷

The slippery nature of water as an element, its adaptability, its capacity to both transform and be transformed and its need for movement are all made evident in the above examples. This is not necessarily particular to water; Ernest Brehaut rightly asserts that Isidore, whose *Etymologies* greatly inspired *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, believed all the elements to be:

the visible manifestations of one underlying matter. They were not mutually exclusive but "all elements existed in all", and it was possible for one element to be transmuted into another. Their properties were not invariable.⁸⁸

Trevisa also records the interpenetrating nature of the elements, and their properties:

Euene bytwene þe qualitees of elementis is contrariousnesse and strif. Bycause þerof þey wurchiþ togidres and suffriþ and beþ igendrid and corrupt. And by þe elementis ner so contrarie eueryche to oþir, ȝet by influence of heuene and virtue of planetis þey beþ recouncyled in here doynge and ibrouȝt to accorde (p. 556).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 559.

⁸⁷ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 557.

⁸⁸ Ernest Brehaut, *An Encyclopedist of the Dark Ages: Isidore of Seville* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1912; repr. 1972), p. 55, italics added.

⁸⁹ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 472.

One element frequently pervades another; there is a description of dew in a chapter on air (p. 583); fire, just like water, can purge and clean (p. 560); in the section on earth the dangers of lack of water and moisture are re-iterated once more in a description of the desert, despite the fact that the section on water has already been completed (p. 721). This is the natural order of things, according to medieval scientific thought.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, such tensions and fluidities are even more pronounced with regard to the element of water, allowing it to inspire the religious writer as a ‘catch-all’ or ‘all-purpose’ figure, perhaps because we can touch it and feel it change and transform in our hands. Because the ‘ableness’ of water is so resonant with medieval scientific and theological thought about water, writers such as Hilton and the anonymous translator of *The Doctrine of the Hert* felt their contradictory references to water needed no explication or excuse.

Trevisa’s translation lists some of the multifarious qualities of water: saltiness, sweetness, freshness, clarity etc., using the word ‘now’ to convey the speed and surprise of such transfigurations: ‘*now* trubly, *now* þikke, *now* þenne’ (italics added). He explains them thus: ‘For watir hath no determinate qualite, noyþer colour noiþer sauour, and þat for he shulde be able to fonge eseliche alle colours and

⁹⁰ In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid also describes the elements as intermingling, almost impossible to disentangle: ‘Though they are spatially distant, each element rises / out of another; and into that other, collapses; / when earth is unbound, for example, it changes to water, / then, as it loses its moisture, it once again changes, / this time to wind and air, and, as it grows thinner, / bursts into flame and rises through heaven as fire; / from there the way is reversed, and in the same order; / fire, condensing, turns into air, which turns into water, / and fluid water, changing to earth, becomes solid’; *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. C. Martin, Book 15, p. 418, ll. 289-302; *quae quamquam spatio distant, tamen omnia fiunt / ex ipsis et in ipsa cadunt, resolutaque tellus / in liquidas rarescit aquas, tenuatus in auris / aeraque umor abit, dempto quoque pondere rursus / in superos aer tenuissimis emicat ignes. / inde retro redeunt, idemque retexitur ordo; / ignis enim densum spissatus in aera transit, / hic in aquas, tellus glomerata cogitur unda*; P. Ovidi Nasonis, *Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant, pp. 455-456, ll. 244-251.

sauours'. Water is a blank canvas; without inherent, 'determinate' (p. 167) properties of its own, it is remarkably 'able' to absorb external characteristics. Whilst the variable properties of the other elements are certainly acknowledged, none of them is described in such a way. This theory is developed further in a depiction of the abyss, one of the many categories of water:

It is seide þat *abissus* is þat bodilich þinge þat God made to be matere of bodiliche þinges, and þat matere was with[out] forme and shape, þat is *materia prima* "þe firste matere", as Austyn seiþ [...] Austyn seiþ þat by þis name *abissus* holy writte nempnede þe mater þat was ymade of no3te to be firste fonger of shappes [and forms] and þat by moste ordinate 3ifte of God. And forþer al þinge þat hath shape and fourme shulde be yshaped and yfourmede. And so þe same mater is yclepid watir, for it is fletynge and rennynge and also for it fongeþ al manere of fourmes and shappes (p. 665).⁹¹

The ableness of water identified by Trevisa takes on a spiritual nature, here. Water is aligned with the *materia prima* out of which all things were created. Its indeterminate nature, specifically, gives rise to this association, it 'fongeþ' many different forms and shapes. It can mean a myriad of different things and it is therefore productive *materia* for literary minds.

CHAOTIC ABUNDANCE

The attractive term "world book", used to describe works such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, was coined by Christel Meier and seems particularly appropriate in this context. Challenging the view that medieval

⁹¹ See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 569.

encyclopaedias fail in their attempts to categorise, Meier suggests instead that they give the impression not of chaos or confusion but of glorious abundance, ‘so that the ‘world book’ again resembles the world itself; like the world, nobody can grasp it all, but they can recognise that there is an ordering principle at work’.⁹² The world itself can be read, like a book, and these works offer methods and approaches for doing so, ultimately helping readers further their knowledge not just of the material world but also of more heavenly things. The world Bartholomew and Trevisa present is not static but constantly moving and changing, just like water and, most importantly for devotional works, just like an individual soul in its relationship to God.

The next chapters will use the cultural landscape of water outlined above to illuminate a number of central motifs of water which gloriously abound in late medieval devotional prose works, particularly in those written for women or the laity. As we shall see, the treatment of water as productively ‘able’ in medieval encyclopaedic writings informs how many devotional authors use water as a literary metaphor. They use hierarchies of water, as they are presented in compilations such as *On the Properties of Things*, as an analogy for *spiritual* hierarchies and they take inspiration from the frequently confusing, even contradictory nature of such hierarchies, as well as their potential to collapse. The fifteenth-century treatise *Orcherd of Syon* is an illuminating example. An elaborate, extended metaphor of water runs throughout the text, in which the wild, tempestuous sea of earthly life must be exchanged for the spiritual rest and refreshment offered by

⁹² Keen, *Journey of a Book*, p. 22.

the peaceable sea of God.⁹³ The kinds of water that languish at the bottom of Bartholomew's hierarchy are utilized, therefore, as a metaphor for imprisonment by earthly sin.⁹⁴ Humans tossed in the filthy floods, described with great detail in the *Orcherd of Syon*, are notably akin to those inferior waters, mentioned in *On the Properties of Things*, which do not strive to reach the heavenly realm but instead mingle themselves with the muddy earth. God tells Catherine that he formed man from 'þe grutty moisture of þe erþe' (p. 68). The sin of those souls who do not reach the 'siker' (p. 104) bridge provided by Jesus – and therefore cannot make the subsequent journey to the peaceable sea of God – are punished for clinging too tightly to this 'grutty moisture' rather than making the decision to leave it behind.

However, the *Orcherd of Syon*, inspired by the flexibility of water in encyclopaedic compilations, actually subverts this carefully demarcated hierarchy when it draws its lengthy analogy to a close. The 'peaceable' sea of God, which is the end-point of the spiritual journey depicted in the *Orcherd of Syon*, is not 'troublws', it is absolutely static. Its surface is therefore undisturbed and able to reflect, to act as a mirror, which reveals to any Christians peering into it that they are made in the image of God (p. 420). This depiction of holy, superlative water is therefore in

⁹³ For a more detailed consideration of this allegory see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 120-127. It is also worth noting that rest and refreshment are also integral motifs to *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. See Keen, *Journey of a Book*, p. 39.

⁹⁴ Keen observes that in his section on the sea (*De mari*) Bartholomew 'paints a vivid picture of the open sea, with its dangers to sailors: waves, weather, monsters, sandbanks, sea-sickness, distance from land. He cites Aristotle and others on the medicinal properties of sea water, its incessant motion and changeable colours under different winds' (p. 59). The glosses for these passages 'demonstrate a reader's contemplative response to a dynamic description of physical experience. They also show us a stage in the process by which the sea-unstable, stormy, and full of monstrous danger – became such a fruitful metaphor in the later Middle Ages for the world of secular society'; *Journey of a Book*, pp. 60-61.

tension with the categories presented in *On the Properties of Things*. Water that is ‘stondynge’, unmoved, unchangeable, is perceived in this work as more impure and therefore both less valuable and less ‘vertuose’. In contrast, the *Orcherd of Syon* uses it as a symbol for purity. The Christian desire for an enduring and tranquil afterlife, a counterpoint to the ‘troublws’ sea of earthly life, is here prioritised over scientific knowledge about types and qualities of water. This subversion may disrupt attempts at water categorisation, but it still reflects, to a certain extent, medieval scientific thought, as evidenced in the confused and disrupted water hierarchy presented in Trevisa’s *On the Properties of Things*. The comprehension of water as something changeable on earth ironically allows the element to become a symbol of stasis in heaven, where such miracles are possible.

A similar subversion of Bartholomew and Trevisa’s hierarchy, implemented for very different reasons, can be identified in the late fourteenth-century work of spiritual instruction, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. The work preserves Aelred of Rievaulx’s use of the first person as he compares his own spiritual life to that of his sister in unfavourable terms by using images of filthy polluted water.⁹⁵ The language is comparable to that used by the *Orcherd of Syon* translator, when he describes the sea of earthly life, and Aelred asks his sister to recall how bad company and sinful occupations eventually caused his soul to be drowned ‘in þe

⁹⁵ The contradictory treatment of water in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, especially with regard to Aelred of Rievaulx and his sister, will be discussed at more length in chapter three of this thesis; see pp. 183-193. See also Hetta Elizabeth Howes, ‘Fulling Linen, Haunting Clear Waters, and Crying Bitter Tears: Two Middle English Versions of Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*’, *Florilegium*, 31 (2014 [2016]).

stynkynde flood of synne' (p. 53).⁹⁶ What is notable here is the lowly place that such kinds of water occupy on the aquatic scale presented by *On the Properties of Things*, which makes the filthy floods a ready metaphor for sinful, earthly life – made even starker when juxtaposed with the laudatory descriptions of his sister. *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* seems to disrupt this aquatic hierarchy, however, when Aelred draws his comparison with his sister to a close: 'sooply, suster', he writes, 'wite it wel þat hit ouʒte be a maner schame to þe ʒif þat I, after so manye abhominable vnclenneses, be yfounde euene wit þe in lyf þat is to comen!' (p. 54). Implicit in this statement is a spiritual challenge to the sister-reader of the treatise. Filthy water may be low down on scientific hierarchies of the element, yet the man who finds himself challenged with such water and manages to emerge from it onto the shores of heaven seems more blessed, more worthy of admiration than she who has been defended and saved from earthly temptation and sin and who has had no obstacles to overcome. Chapter three of this thesis argues that Aelred uses imagery of water in the quoted passages *deliberately* to construct his religious experience as equal, if not superior to, that of his sister. Particularly significant, however, is the flexibility of water as a symbol. Such flexibility is largely indebted to medieval perceptions of water, which can both shape, and be shaped by, its surroundings – and therefore could be easily manipulated to an author's own ends.

⁹⁶ A more detailed comparison of the appearance of floods in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and the *Orcherd of Syon* will be given in chapter three of this thesis; see pp. 156-160.

References to water in late medieval devotional prose may be slippery, even contradictory at times. They may even be used to manipulate the reader, for example to prioritise male spiritual experience. All of these usages, however, contribute to a sense of a glorious abundance of water and encourage an ascent to God, even if that ascent is a carefully regulated one. There may not always be a clear ordering principle, and the use of water may not always be easy to grasp. But if medieval readers seeking spiritual development (and contemporary readers in search of figurative meaning) approach it without any preconceived notions of firm categorisation then they will certainly be rewarded.

The next chapter will begin disentangling this wealth of material by examining metaphors of female interaction with water. Where water represents scriptural writings or even God himself, are female readers encouraged to interact with water – to ingest it, bathe in it, immerse themselves in it – or are they advised to maintain a certain distance? Why, when boundaries and margins are integral to so many of these images are the most divine spiritual experiences articulated through melting, even drowning? What can these interactions reveal about the author-reader relationships fostered in these works – and, more importantly, what can they reveal about relationships between the individual soul and God?

CHAPTER TWO

TAKING THE WATERS, PROXIMITY AND INTERACTION

I praie þee illumyne me wiþ þe liȝt of holy feiþ, for þat liȝt is a see, which norischiþ þe soule in þee, þat art þe pesible see, eendelees trinite.

Orcherd of Syon, p. 420

The Abbey of the Holy Ghost, a fourteenth-century prose allegory for women seeking to construct a religious life outside of institutional walls, encourages its readers to build an internal and allegorical abbey of their own.¹ Before mental construction can begin, readers must first clean the building site in preparation and two maidens, Ryght-wysnesse and Love-of-clennesse, will help them to cast all manner of filth from their hearts and minds. Once this initial step has been completed the abbey must be ‘set on’ a river, which ‘maketh the syte lykende of God’ because good rivers are ‘clene and syker and ryche of alle goodes and marchaundyses’ (p. 89). Just like the ‘ryver of teres’ (p. 90) which cleanses the Holy Jerusalem, this river will help to carry away sin and it will also provide metaphorical riches. As the previous chapter demonstrated, water is curious ‘able’ in medieval thought, and a number of abilities are attributed to it. Water can cleanse and purify but it can also contaminate and pollute; it can soften and erode hard materials like stone. It can nourish and refresh but it can also infect and cause illness. When murky, it can obstruct our view but when clear, water can offer a reflective surface, acting as a

¹ For a comprehensive introduction to this text, its manuscripts and its readers see Boffey, ‘*The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and its Role in Manuscript Anthologies’, pp. 120-130.

mirror. In *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, water cleanses sin and provides metaphorical wealth for imagined inhabitants of the abbey, acting on its environment to enact positive change. However, it is the responsibility of the inhabitants to help facilitate this change, by preparing the building site where the river will flow and by engaging with the water itself – fetching water to provide sustenance and nourishment, for example. Water acts of its own accord but in order to unleash and then harness its potential, human interaction with it the element is also required.

The necessity of having a river, or water more generally, close to one's imagined, allegorical abbey is drawn from the physical realities of religious institutions. Real and metaphorical waters, whether in the form of natural, earthly rivers or the flow of tears, are alluded to in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and become integral to the spiritual programme it offers. However, this allegorical river throws up the question of whether, and how, imagined, literary water is treated or utilised differently in devotional prose from everyday water used for washing, cooking and general cleaning. And, perhaps more importantly, how are readers encouraged to interact with this water (if at all)? This chapter considers the different kinds of relationships with allegorical water which are advocated or warned against in late medieval devotional writings for women. Readers are encouraged to manage water, to withhold it, to sit beside it, to imbibe it, to bathe in it, to immerse themselves in it. In these descriptions of water-reader interactions a number of water's abilities are revealed and reflected upon. Gazing at the waters of scripture, readers can spot the temptations of the devil, as the streams act as a mirror.

Bathing in water can produce a closer relationship with God as the reader is metaphorically softened by the liquid from his body – in the form of tears as well as blood. Water seeps through the artificial boundaries, creating a complex network of water-and-human – or more accurately water-and-reader – imagery. Many of the devotional works considered in the following pages encourage management of water and a careful observation of the boundaries between body and liquid. However, the most sublime spiritual experiences are frequently expressed through direct interaction with water in these works and therefore a breakdown of those carefully demarcated boundaries.

‘MAKETH THE SYTE LYKENDE OF GOD’: THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The allegorical river in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* symbolises the cleansing of sin, purity and God’s grace. However, it also has specific parallels with real religious institutions of the Middle Ages and their relationship to water. The location of Rievaulx Abbey close to the River Rye, which is the foundation of a complex of watercourses in the Rye valley, is integral to the religious practice of one of its most famous abbots, Cistercian Father St. Aelred of Rievaulx who, according to his biographer, bathed in freezing cold water daily in order to purge his bodily lust.² Monasteries often boasted advanced water systems, demonstrating the

² Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, ed. and trans. F. M. Powicke (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950), p. 25. For a more general discussion of Rievaulx’s water systems see Holt, ‘Medieval England’s Water-Related Technologies’, esp. p. 89.

importance of water in both the internal and external landscapes of these institutions.³ One famous example is the elaborate structure at Christ Church Canterbury, which is depicted in ‘the most celebrated architectural drawing to survive from the twelfth century’.⁴ Although the cathedral itself figures in the drawing, it principally documents the conventual buildings and the water systems designed to serve them, indicating an admiration for, and fascination with, this new technology.⁵

Of course, not all water systems for religious communities were as advanced as those at Christ Church. Nevertheless, the provision and management of water in most religious institutions was certainly an improvement on what could be found in many cities, towns, villages or manor houses. This had much to do with the ‘view of the ritual importance of personal cleanliness and of fresh, clean water’ which was perhaps the principal source of the complex construction of hygiene found in clerical and monastic communities, where the body and blood of Christ were handled, through the eucharistic elements, many times a day.⁶ Personal hygiene was prescribed in the Benedictine *Rule*. Every Saturday one of the brothers should ‘wash the linen the brothers use to wipe their hands and feet’ and although healthy brothers should only be allowed to bathe ‘occasionally’ the sick

³ A brief study of the distinction between water systems for religious and the laity can be found in Holt’s ‘Medieval England’s Water-Related Technologies’. He observes that ‘[t]he most impressive examples of water engineering from anywhere in the medieval British Isles were those undertaken by English monastic communities’, p. 88. See also Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*.

⁴ Fergusson, ‘Prior Wibert’s Fountain Houses’, p. 83.

⁵ Fergusson, ‘Prior Wibert’s Fountain Houses’, p. 85.

⁶ Holt, ‘Medieval England’s Water-Related Technologies’, p. 52.

could bathe as often as they wished.⁷ Furthermore, any guests of a monastic community should be offered water for their hands, and the whole community should wash the feet of their guests at the *Mandatum* ceremony on Maundy Thursday, as much an act of piety in imitation of Christ as a form of hygiene.⁸ Monks washed their hands every morning and before every meal, and most of the monasteries and abbeys had *lavatoria*, whereas the majority of the population relied on natural drainage. To service these practical as well as religious needs, impressive water systems were necessarily created. And water served a symbolic function, too. Peter Fergusson draws compelling conclusions about the four fountain houses at Christ Church, Canterbury. He argues that whilst they certainly performed a practical function, serving the cultivators of the Infirmary garden with its *herbarium* and visitors to the sick (amongst other things), these fountain houses were designed primarily to exploit the power of water as an evocative symbol for Christians, suggesting that ‘the regenerative associations connected with water can be assumed to have played a central role on the building’s intentions’.⁹

⁷ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. and trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p. 57 and p. 59.

⁸ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, p. 78.

⁹ Fergusson, ‘Prior Wibert’s Fountain Houses’, p. 92. These fountain houses also evoke the association of God and everlasting life with fountains. God describes himself as ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jer 2:13); an Old Testament promise is made that ‘a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord’, understood to be a fountain of God’s grace; the Prophecy of Zachariah opens with a fountain: ‘In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman’ (Zach 13:1); and in the New Testament, in the parable of Jacob’s Well, Christ offers himself as the fountain of eternal life (John 4:13-14). For a fuller description of the parable of Jacob’s Well see chapter three of this thesis, pp. 133-135.

Water systems were less advanced in most female religious institutions, with few possessing flushing latrines.¹⁰ However, water was still integral to these sites, albeit in a different way. Suburban and extramural nunneries were often built on rivers, which served as the main routes of communication into towns, and many others were founded in more isolated spots, on the bends of rivers. Roberta Gilchrist writes:

Many [nunneries] were at home in waterlands, sited at the highest points of marshes [...] or fenland [...] Frequently nunneries were surrounded partially by rivers given to flooding [...] Medieval nunneries were liminal places – located at the physical and psychological margins of society. To a degree their prospects resemble the places craved by early medieval ascetics. In Britain the solitude and penitence of desert eremiticism was translated into surroundings of marsh, fen and moor.¹¹

The design features of male institutions, such as the famous fountain houses of Christ Church Canterbury, can be incorporated into a spiritual schema of water which taps into both its practical uses and its Christian, biblical traditions. In Gilchrist's analysis, however, the very watery landscape of nunneries and convents

¹⁰ See Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, especially pp. 65-91 and pp. 125-127. The reasons for poorer water and drainage facilities in medieval nunneries are unknown; however, Gilchrist suggests two convincing possibilities: poor funds and the embracing of eremitic, ascetic life. These same watery landscapes could also be associated with moral ambiguity. Morrison considers medieval Southwark and its role in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: 'If Southwark was a body, how was it gendered? Southwark was a marshy, wet place where ditches were often being built. Ditches suggest land drainage and often indicated sewers. The association between fluidity and water with negativity and corruptness appears in numerous medieval texts. A late fourteenth-century London reader of Chaucer's poem would have identified Southwark with the tradition of watery filth and its concomitant moral ambiguity [...] London stigmatized Southwark with its "stews", a term referring to both fishponds and brothels that were permitted on the South bank. Southwark is fluid, variable, changing, in contrast to the solidity, permanence (at least in the imagination), and superiority of London [...] This is the body of Southwark: feminine (loose, sexual, filthy) to the masculinity of London'; *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 71.

¹¹ Fergusson, 'Prior Wibert's Fountain Houses', p. 66.

becomes itself an expression of asceticism, of the position of female religious in society and theology – at the physical and psychological margins.¹²

Water is thus an integral part of the external landscape of religious institutions, due to its practical functions as well as its spiritual significance. Literary water, which draws in part on this landscape, has an equally important and arguably more complex role to play in religious writings, particularly devotional prose. Such works use references to water to encourage the imagined union of the female reader's soul with her God. However, they also use references to water to direct and regulate the behaviour and devotional practice of their readers. The next section will consider the use of water as a metaphor in advice to readers about restricting their speech. Readers are encouraged to maintain the water of their speech within the boundaries of their body. Only when this metaphorical water is contained can it be transformed into something more spiritually profitable.

WATER WITHIN, WATER WITHOUT¹³

¹² For further discussion of nunneries on the margins see Elizabeth Freeman, 'Male and Female Cistercians and their Gendered Experiences of the Margins, the Wilderness and the Periphery', in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs*, ed. McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards, pp. 65-76.

¹³ This section is informed by the arguments of a number of critics who have considered the margins both of anchorholds and the female body in devotional writings, especially works of spiritual instruction. See in particular the various essays in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs*, ed. McAvoy and Hughes-Edwards; the introduction of Lochrie's *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 13-47; and Jocelyn Price (now Wogan-Browne), "'Inner" and "Outer": Conceptualizing the Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 192-208.

A well-known quotation from the thirteenth-century anchoritic treatise *Ancrene Wisse* involves water. It is taken here from the late fourteenth century Vernon version of the treatise, which would have reached a wider audience than simply female anchoresses:¹⁴

Also, as 3e mowen seon watur whon me punt hit. [and] stoppeþ hit bi fore wel. þat hit ne mowe downward ; þenne reboundeþ hit a3eyn. forte clymben vþward. And 3e also. on þis wyse. Puyndeþ oure wordes. for stoppeþ or þou3tus. as 3e wolleþ þat heo clymben ; and hi3en toward heuene. ¶ And not to fallen downward and to fleten 3ond al þe world; as doþ muche Iangle. Whon 3e nede moten. A luytel wiht. louseþ vp oure mouþes flood 3aten. As me doþ at Mulne; [and] leteþ adoun sone.¹⁵

Thoughts and speech are imagined as water, which is prevented from flowing downwards by a dam and so is forced to climb back up again.¹⁶ Rather than allowing her thoughts an outlet through speech ('Iangle') the female anchoress should stop them up.¹⁷ In this way, they can climb and rise towards heaven, like

¹⁴ For readership of the Vernon manuscript, see footnote 57 in the introduction of this thesis.

¹⁵ *The English Text of the 'Ancrene Riwle'*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, pp. 27-28. Many feminist critics have analysed this 'damming up' passage. Lochrie uses it to focus wider discussion about 'the sealed body' expected of medieval religious women in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 13-55. Linda Georgianna compares this passage with another, related watery analogy in which lengthy talk begins as a drop but then becomes a vast flood capable of drowning the soul. She argues that the prescribed 'denial of the senses' in the treatise (where the reader should dam up the mouth, close her ears, lock her windows, etc.) results not in the 'elimination of sense activity' but rather the concentration of it in the reader's imagination for another purpose, namely, devotion to God. However, she makes no comment on the use of water in both passages; *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the 'Ancrene Wisse'* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 68-69.

¹⁶ There is a *locus classicus* for the association of water and language. Horace addresses ode 3.13 to the spring of Bandusia and describes its *lymphæ loquaces* (speaking waters). See *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. David West, 2nd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 3.13, ll. 15-16. The notes to this edition demonstrate how the waters are personified as a 'busy chattering woman' in this ode (p. 171). See also *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book III*, ed. R. G. M. Nisbet and Niall Rudd (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 171-2.

¹⁷ 'Iangle' or 'jangle' is defined by the *MED* as '(a) An idle word, idle speech, gossip, prating; (b) vicious gossip, slanderous conversation; (c) dispute'. See s. v. 'jangle', n., *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=jangle&rgxp=constrained>> [17.02.16]. In medieval religious literature this word, particularly with regard to the first definition, is often associated

dammed up water, rather than spilling out and floating through the world like so much idle chatter.¹⁸ When needs must, the anchoress should open the flood gates of her mouth temporarily but then close them again as soon as possible, speaking only a little and when absolutely necessary. Constant and unerring vigilance is required to monitor speech for ‘þe tonge is slibri’ and ‘wadeþ in wete’.¹⁹ A few words can easily become many; speech is nearly impossible to control and more dangerous than a weapon, particularly in the hands of a woman: ‘[m]o sleþ word; þen swerd’.²⁰

with women and their troubling speech. Edwin D. Craun argues that speech was a cause for concern for both genders during the Middle Ages; see *Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997). However, R. Howard Bloch’s later work reveals its gendered emphasis: ‘The view of woman as the one who through speech sowed discord between man and God lies at the core of the narrative of the Fall, the Old Testament association of the feminine and verbal allurements’, *Medieval Misogyny* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 15. Two particularly useful sources about jangling are Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) and Susan E. Phillips, “‘Janglynge in church’: Gossip and the Exemplum”, in *The Hands of the Tongue: Essays on Deviant Speech*, ed. by Craun (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 61-96. The Bodley translation of *De Institutione Inclusarum (A Rule of Life for a Recluse)* depicts women as ‘wantownes’, full of ‘bakbitynge’ and ‘sclaundre’ (Ayto and Barratt, p. 1) and Ann Clark Bartlett, in her analysis of *A Rule of Life*, advances the view that ‘Aelred’s treatise attempts to absolve female readers of a feminine identity and to fix them within a masculine-gendered economy of speech and silence, asceticism and sexuality’; *Male Authors, Female Readers*, p. 41.

¹⁸ According to John Trevisa’s fourteenth-century encyclopaedic work, water is a heavy element and its natural movement is downwards: ‘And tweyne neþir elementis, water and erthe, beþ kyndely more heuy þan þe oþir tweyne, and meueþ forward þe roundenesse toward þe myddes, donward, and haueþ partyes igadred nyze and þicke and beþ sad and boystous’. However, water also seems to want to break free of this natural movement, to rise up towards heaven: ‘watir is moste profitable element [...] For watir makeþ heuen temperale and þe erþe plentiuouse, and incorporeþ the aire with vapores and makeþ it thikke, and styep vp into hie place and chalangeþ heuen’; Trevisa, ‘*On the Properties of Things*’, pp. 556-557 and p. 646. See also *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 473.

¹⁹ *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 28.

²⁰ *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 28. This is emphasised in the Vernon version of *Ancrene Wisse* with the following reference to Solomon: ‘Ne may not mucche speche biginne hit neuer so wel; be withouten sinne. ¶ For from soþ ; hit slit to fals. Out of good ; In to euel. From Mesure ; in to vn mesure .¶ And of a drope waxeþ ; in to a mucche flod. Ðat a drencheþ þe soule’; *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 28.

In this passage, then, water only conveys an admirable spiritual state when it is preserved within the boundaries of the female body. Hovering on the margins it is matter in flux and if released it becomes no more than ‘iangle’, floating uselessly through the world and in so doing causing real damage to the speaker’s soul. Retained water, in contrast, undergoes a positive transformation in the imagination of the text, defying gravity and moving upwards towards heaven where it can help accrue spiritual credit. The climate of anxiety created in *Ancrene Wisse*, where temptation and the filth of earthly sin can permeate the anchorhold through doors and windows, as well as through the eyes and mouth, only enhances the potentially destructive power of the water described, and the ever-present possibility that the metaphorical dam might burst.²¹ Female readers must carefully guard the ‘flood ȝaten’ of their mouths to prevent the water-of-speech from flowing forth.

There is another, very similar passage to be found in *The Doctrine of the Hert*, a spiritual guide which was composed two centuries later than the first version of *Ancrene Wisse* but is roughly contemporary with the Vernon version:

þer ben summe ydel religious folk þat gadir togedre in places of
silence, wordis of superfluite and so, occupy here þoughtes in
lernyng and answering of wordis raper than in swetnes of

²¹ The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* treats the anchoritic life as an extremely precarious one; he is forever anxious that, even if anchoresses follow his guidance, the external filth of the world and the internal filth of sin will still enter their anchorholds and their bodies: ‘þe fend of helle with his host. went þorw þe tutel. þat is euer open ; in to þe herte’ (p. 28) he observes. He compares female flesh (and more importantly, virginity) to a ‘bruchel vessel’ that, once broken, is worthless and therefore requires extra protection within enclosed walls (p. 59). Furthermore, holy men and women are far more likely to be tempted than the laity: ‘Holy men and wymmen. beoþ of all fondynges ; swiþest ofte I.temptet’ (p. 69). In such an environment, the dammed up water/speech can only remain stable for so long. All page references to *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg.

devocioun. Alle suche I may likne to þe water of a mylle, þe wiche gadreth at þe clouse dore, abidyng þe dore tille it be openyd, and whan þe dore is openyd, it rennyth þorogh with an hasty cours (p. 43).

The reference to ‘ydel’ religious folk and words of ‘superfluite’ are immediately comparable with the useless ‘iangle’ of the above quotation from *Ancrene Wisse*: speech is sometimes necessary, but both authors warn against superfluous, idle speech.²² The violence and speed of the water once released – only implicit in the passage from *Ancrene Wisse* – is here made explicit as the water ‘rennyth þorogh with an hasty cours’. This enhances the sense that the reader loses control over water/speech as soon as it is released from a heart or mouth, as if from a mill or dam. The treatise goes on to explain exactly *how* this water/speech will behave when released:

For right as a verre or a glasse, whan it is ful of hoote scaldyng water, al to brestith for violence of þe heete, right so þe hert of suche a religious persone, yif it be ful of scaldyng water of wraþe, it brekith oute with stryvyng wordis and wordis of debate (p. 44).

The sense of violence and loss of control reaches a narrative climax here: the water is ‘scaldyng’ and therefore harmful; it ‘brestith for violence’ and ‘brekith out’. The ‘stryvyng’ words themselves are described in similarly dynamic terms.

There are some subtle but significant differences between these two small, self-enclosed allegories from *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*. The climate of insecurity, so heightened in *Ancrene Wisse*, makes the breaking of the dam of

²² In older versions of the *Ancrene Wisse* this sense of speech as a waste product is conveyed even more emphatically because it is described as ‘muchel chaffe’, referring to the waste produced during the milling process; *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition*, ed. Millett, p. 30.

water/speech seem very likely. In choosing to deploy a dam as a metaphor, the author suggests that the anchoress will be forgiven if she repents and rebuilds her dam by sealing her mouth. Failure to meet the ideal warrants remorse, but the *Ancrene Wisse* seems to imply that the instability of anchoritic life and human tendency to sin make it almost inevitable. *The Doctrine of the Hert* is similarly practical about religious life elsewhere, advising the female reader on how to seek God's mercy when she falls short of the ideal spiritual state presented in the treatise.²³ Nevertheless, in this specific passage of *The Doctrine of the Hert*, where the mouth is compared to a mill, the treatise deliberately gives the imagined reader more agency than the *Ancrene Wisse* and therefore increased culpability. Although the implicit violence of the water in the *Ancrene Wisse* is vocalised in *The Doctrine of the Hert*, the later treatise uses a mill, rather than a dam, to illustrate its point. Immediately the connotations of a dam bursting are lost. *The Doctrine of the Hert* then describes that water 'abidyng þe dore tille it be openyd, and whan þe dore is openyd, it rennyth þorogh with an hasty cours' where '[a]bidyng' makes the element of water/speech passive, as it waits by the door for release. The agency that the water loses in this trope is transferred to the individual reader who has control of it – the reader *opens the door*, allowing the water to flow through quickly. Although the *Ancrene Wisse* also invokes mills as metaphor, the subsequent reference to flood gates immediately diminishes any realistic sense of control.

²³ The prologue of the *Doctrine of the Hert* makes clear that 'stable lvyng' (p. 4) is a primary concern of the treatise as a whole; the author believes the unlearned often do not have such a life, and he devotes a whole chapter to the stable life of nuns in the main body of the text: 'Capitulum quartum. How and in what wise a mynche shuld stable here hert to God be þe yifte of strengthe' (p. 4).

In the second passage from *The Doctrine of the Hert*, scalding water breaks glass, just as violent water would break a dam, which detracts from the reader's role as its steward. Nevertheless, the treatise describes the words issuing forth from the metaphorical glass in negative but also dynamic terms, as 'stryvyng' and 'of debate'. The power balance between water/speech and its container (the mill, the glass, the dam) is therefore deliberately redressed. The words burst forth because the reader uttering them has allowed herself to be wrathful; her increased agency carries the burden of increased responsibility, even blame. Further, the emphasis in this passage is on the negative consequences of allowing thoughts to flow forth as watery speech, rather than the spiritually positive potential of retaining them.²⁴

Despite a greater emphasis on agency and individual responsibility in *The Doctrine of the Hert*, water is used in both the later treatise and the *Ancrene Wisse* as a powerful metaphor for idle or even angry speech and both devotional works draw on the material world, in the form of mills, dams and shattering glass, in order to warn against it. The violence and power of water is employed to highlight, through the tools of analogy and metaphor, the violence and destructive power of female speech and thereby encourage constant vigilance in the female readers. The role of women in both texts is to manage their internal, metaphorical water, to maintain the boundaries of their own bodies and to prevent speech/water from

²⁴ The metaphor of a glass container breaking could also partly derive from medieval understanding of women as fragile vessels. Cadden notes that '[t]he word *vas* in the sense of "jar" or "vessel" occurs in medieval texts as a synonym for woman' and she cites the familiarity of 'the image of the womb as an upside-down jar (dissociated from any person)'; *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 178. In the prologue to the Vernon version of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* Aelred describes his sister as a fragile vessel, uniquely susceptible to breakage and spillage: 'be-þenk-þe how hou precious a tresoor in hou freel a vessel þu berst about' he urges his reader (p. 26). The composer of the Vernon *Ancrene Wisse* likewise describes the reader as a 'bruchel vessel' (p. 59).

penetrating or disrupting them. Will the reader's internal water become miraculously changed into spiritual wine, after climbing upwards towards heaven, or will it spill out into the earth as bland water, idle jangling? Hard work is required if the reader wants to keep silent, as instructed, and maintain the frontiers of her body.²⁵ For, as the *Ancrene Wisse* author reminds us:

Vre lord is not in erþe. Forþi. ne þorre 3e not. deluen dounwardus. Ac heuen vpward þe herte. for þat is þe vpdrawynge; a3ein þis worldus strem [...] And what is þe deluynge? 3eornful sechyng þou3t. wher hit beo? which hit beo? Hou me hit may fynden? þis is þe deluynge Ben bisiliche. [and] 3ernfuliche. euere her abouten. with a wil 3erninge. with hete of hongri herte. waden vp of unþewus. crepen out of flesch. breken vp ouer hire, [and] stei3en vppon ou selven; with hei3 þou3t toward heuene.²⁶

In order to reach God and heaven, the reader must therefore imagine herself 'deluynge' upwards, against the stream of the world, just as the metaphorical gravity-defying water climbs upwards.

BESIDE STILL WATERS

As well as representing troubling female speech, references to water are also used in devotional prose to signify the opposite end of the spectrum: the superior and enduring word of God. Scriptural water is external, rather than internal and is also far less ambiguous in nature, certainly not prone to transformation. However, the

²⁵ Chapter three of this thesis will consider the role of labour in devotion in more detail, with particular regard to maintaining a clean soul.

²⁶ *The English Text of the 'Ancrene Riwle'*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 130.

relationship with scriptural water prescribed by certain devotional works is surprisingly similar to the relationship between readers and the water of their own speech considered above. The female reader is encouraged to occupy a space beside scriptural waters but she should not venture too close; there are still strict boundaries that must be managed, rules that must be followed, where the word of God is concerned.

In the Bible, being immersed in water is often a signal for being in trouble.²⁷ Jonah, whose story is retold in the Middle English alliterative poem *Paciencie*, is famously cast into the sea and swallowed by a whale.²⁸ Noah's Flood, a famous example of God's wrath, drowns the majority of the earth's inhabitants: '[b]ehold I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, under heaven. All things that are in the earth shall be consumed (Genesis 6:17).²⁹ In the New Testament, Christ saves his disciples from peril at sea by walking on water to rescue them, defying the laws of nature in this miraculous demonstration of both his love for his disciples and his heavenly powers (Matthew 14:23-7). Peter, too, is temporarily granted this ability, until he wavers in his faith and almost drowns again:

And Peter making answer, said: Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee upon the waters. And he said: Come. And Peter going down out of the boat, walked upon the water to come to Jesus. But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid: and when he began to sink, he cried out, saying: Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus

²⁷ One of the most 'obvious physical properties' of water (n., 3) is 'that which drowns, submerges, destroys'; *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> [22.04.16]

²⁸ See 'Patience' in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Andrew and Waldron, pp. 185-206 (esp. pp. 195-199, ll. 245-340).

²⁹ See 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 66-76.

stretching forth his hand took hold of him, and said to him: O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14: 28-31).³⁰

This account is testament not only to the consequences of doubt and despair, but also to the inherent power of water, which only God can govern.

Being *in* water can be a sign of potential danger in the Bible, but being *beside* it can signal the opposite, particularly when water represents Scripture, or, more generally, a good Christian life. Psalm One, for example, compares holy men, who have resisted the influence of ungodly company and are therefore free from the stains of sin, to a tree planted beside running waters:

Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence. But his will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off: and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper (Ps.1:1-4).³¹

From such a position the tree can take in enough water through its roots to bring forth fruit. However, it is not so close to the water that its roots are fatally drowned. Fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle cites these verses from the psalm in his widely transmitted work, *De Emendatio vitae*, which may have been a

³⁰ LV: *Respondens autem Petrus, dixit: Domine, si tu es, jube me ad te venire super aquas. At ipse ait: Veni. Et descendens Petrus de navicula, ambulabat super aquam ut venerit ad Jesum. Videns vero ventum validum, timuit: et cum coepisset mergi, clamavit dicens: Domine, salvum me fac. Et continuo Jesus extendens manum, apprehendit eum: et ait illi: Modicae fidei, quare dubitasti?*

³¹ LV: *Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum, et in via peccatorum non stetit, et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit; sed in lege Domini voluntas ejus, et in lege ejus meditabitur die ac nocte. Et erit tamquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum, quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo: et folium ejus non defluet: et omnia quaecumque faciet prosperabuntur.*

‘pastoralia’ for English priests but later reached a far wider, mixed audience.³² He

writes:

On þis wyse to lyfe þe man of God sete sal be as a tre þat is sett
be the rynyng watyr and flowyng of gras, þat alway sal be
greyn in vertu and neuer dry by synne, þat sal gyfe fruyt in tyme,
þat is gude warkis in exaumpyll, and gude wordis to þe
worschyp of God, and þis sal not seell for vaynglory.³³

The scriptural message is emphasised in Rolle’s commentary. True men of God are like trees beside ‘rynyng’ waters, green in virtue rather than dry from sin. Because of their metaphorical spiritual location, they will produce the ‘fruyt’ of timely ‘gude warkis’.

The Song of Songs and its medieval gloss introduce a similar relationship between water and scriptures to Psalm One. In chapter five, verse twelve, the eyes of the spiritual bridegroom (Christ) are likened to doves upon brooks of waters, which are washed with milk, and sit beside the plentiful streams.³⁴ ‘Brooks’ and ‘plentiful streams’ communicate both bounty and tranquillity – these are not tumultuous,

³² See John Hugh Kempster, *Richard Rolle: Emendatio vitae: Amendinge of Ljyf: A Middle English translation, edited from Dublin, Trinity College, MS 432* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, 2007), pp. xxviii-lxxiv.

³³ Kempster, *Richard Rolle*, p. xlix.

³⁴ The male persona in the Song of Songs is usually understood to be a figure of Christ as spiritual bridegroom, an interpretation originating with patristic writers like Origen: ‘Origen insists that the literal carnality of the Song veils a spiritual meaning (allegoria), even as the human body houses a soul. Indeed, the overt (“in prima fronte”) eroticism of the text offers a series of stumbling blocks (“offendicula”), calling the reader to search for a deeper truth (“ad inquisitionem veritatis altius”) and discover a divinely appropriate meaning [...] The Song’s hidden meaning then unfolds in a rich array of correspondences once the exegete has correctly identified the principal actors veiled behind the outward masks of the drama. As Origen explains it, the Song actually refers to the mystical union between the Church and Christ or the soul and the Word [...] under the appellations of Bride and Bridegroom’; Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 2. Significantly, in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* the metaphorical dove must remain beside still waters rather than immersing herself in them and therefore her soul and the words of scripture (or, in terms of allegorical readings of the Song of Songs, the bride and Christ) are never completely united.

dangerous waters but pastoral streams – and the specification of a seated position adds to the overall sense of restfulness but also emphasises passivity and distance. The doves do not engage with the waters in question, they maintain a position beside it. The medieval gloss for this passage supports such an interpretation:

Doves are accustomed to sit down beside the flowing [waters] so that they may see the shadow of flying birds in the water and thus avoid talons. So holy men see the wiles of demons in the scriptures, and from the deceit which they heed they know the enemy as if from his shadow and flee. They [the scriptures] are called “[waters] flowing in spate” because concerning whatever things counsel is sought in scripture, through that [scripture counsel] is found in full.³⁵

The gloss emphasises distance from water, which functions as a reflective surface for spotting danger, specifically ‘the wiles of demons in the scriptures’. Entering the water would not only disturb a peaceful scene, it would render the water itself useless by troubling its transparent surface.

The self-defensive awareness of the doves, which are like the holy men of psalm one, is recalled in the gloss to another verse of the Song of Songs (1:14):

The dove is lacking in anger, does not harm its beak, nests in the crannies of rocks, nurtures others’ offspring, stays beside flowing waters, chooses the best grains, utters a groan in place of a song, flies in company with others, defends itself with its wings, and recovers its sight. Thus holy men sitting beside the flowing waters of doctrine choose the best judgements, nurture for God’s ends people separated from Christ, do not put aside any good opinions they find in heretical writings, are lacking in

³⁵ *Glossa Ordinaria*, ed. Dove, Gloss 125, p. 302. The Latin reads: *Solent columbae iuxta fluentia residere et uolantium auium in aqua umbram uideant et sic ungues uitent. Sic sancti in scripturis fraudes demonum prospiciunt et ex deceptione quam attendunt quasi ex umbra hostem cognoscunt et fugiunt, quae fluentia plenissima dicuntur quia de quibuscumque in scriptura consilium queritur per illa ad plenum inuentur*, p. 303.

irrational anger, take refuge in faith in the words of Christ and groan for their sins.³⁶

Just as doves stay beside flowing waters, without directly interacting with them, holy men metaphorically do the same in this scriptural gloss, ‘sitting beside the flowing waters of doctrine’ in order to select the best judgements from them.³⁷ The doves described here are on the defensive as they nest, hidden, in the crannies of rocks, fly in the company of others rather than alone and use their wings to protect themselves against any danger they discern in the clear, flowing waters. They are therefore protected from various perils, including, of course, drowning. The comparison implies that wise, holy men are also safe if they remain beside the metaphorical waters of doctrine, taking refuge in the words of faith flowing from them.

Such verses and glosses from the Song of Songs permeate the language of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*:

I nel neuere be no wey þat þu be to siker of þy-self, bote euere be in drede, and hold þy freelte suspect, and, as a dredful douve, haunte ryueres of cler water, wher þu miȝt isee þe ymage of þe raueynous hauke þat flikt aboute þe, and be war. Þyse ryueres beþ holy scriptures, þat welleþ out fro þe welle of wisdom, þat is Crist, þe whyche wyl schewe þe þe schadue of þe deueles suggestioun, and wyt and consayl to eschewen hem [...]for þer

³⁶ *Glossa Ordinaria*, ed. Dove, Gloss 173, p. 132. The Latin reads: *Columba felle caret, rostro non ledit, in cauernis petrarum nidificat, alienos pullos nutrit, iuxta fluentia manet, meliora grana eligit, gemitum pro cantu reddit, gregatim uolat, alis se defendit, uisum recuperat. Ita sancti iuxta fluentia doctrinae sedentes meliores sententias eligunt, homines a Christo alienos, nutriunt deo, si quas bonas sententias in hereticis inueniunt non peruertunt, ira irrationabili carent, in fide plagarum Christi refugium habent, gemunt pro peccatis* (p. 133).

³⁷ Scripture-as-water is a familiar trope in Christian writings. Among medieval writers, Bernard of Clairvaux describes the Song of Songs as a stream from which he can gather spiritual teaching for his audience. Aelred of Rievaulx and his later Middle English translators, inspired by the Song of Songs, also use streams as a metaphor for Scripture. See footnote 2 in the introduction to this thesis.

is noþyng þat so put away wyckede and vnclene þou3tes as dooþ
good ocupacioun in holy scripture (pp. 30-31).

Aelred urges his readers to defend themselves against the dangers of the earthly world by exercising caution. An anchoress may renounce the world but this will not prevent her from being assailed even more fiercely than ever by the devil and earthly temptation.³⁸ In order to be wary of these dangers Aelred advises readers to imitate a dove by staying close to ‘cler water’, echoing the medieval gloss on the Song of Songs (5:12): ‘[d]oves are accustomed to sit down beside the flowing [waters] so that they may see the shadow of flying birds in the water and thus avoid talons’. The water in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* functions in exactly the same way as the water in the scripture and gloss. It is a reflective surface, which allows those who ‘haunte’ it to ‘beholde’ potential spiritual dangers within it; it is also a spiritual tool, representing ‘holy wryt’, ‘holy scriptures’. What is simile in the original gloss becomes metaphor in these Middle English translations of Aelred’s interpretations, serving to strengthen the symbolic connection between water and holy writing. These rivers are not *like* the scriptures, they *are* the scriptures ‘þat welleþ out fro þe welle of wisdom, *þat is Crist*’ (italics added). They do not show the devil *as if* from his shadow, they reveal to the onlooker the *actual* ‘schadue of þe deueles suggestioun’ as well as teaching them how to eschew it.

³⁸ A famous example of this philosophy can be found in the *Ancrene Wisse*: ‘For so þe hul is here; so þe wynd is here þer on. ¶ So þe hul is here of holy lyf and of hei3 ; so þe fendus puffes. þe wyndes of fondinges. beoþ þeron þe more’; *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 64.

Although the word 'beside' is not used in the treatise, the choice of 'haunte' in the Vernon version evokes a very similar sense.³⁹ The anchoress is advised to visit these waters frequently but it is never suggested that she should immerse herself in them. The anchoress can, like the dove, look into the water and glean scriptural insight from it but the treatise never suggests that she drink this scriptural water, or interact with it in any direct way. The anchoress-reader therefore remains as passive as the dove in the Song of Songs. Moreover, Aelred asks that the anchoress imitate the behaviour of the dove in other ways, by remaining alert, watchful and defensive. He does not want her to be too 'siker' of herself, but to 'euere be in drede', just like the dove who 'nests in the crannies of rocks', 'stays beside flowing waters', 'flies in company with others' and 'defends itself with its wings'. Dangers can be discerned in the surface of scriptural water, which is the best aid to 'sikernesse'; meditation on the words of God which this water represents will help the reader to put away 'wyckede and vnclene þouȝtes' and she should therefore turn them over in her mind before she goes to sleep. If she wakes up she should 'let renne to here mende sum clause of holy techyngge' until she falls asleep again and, if she can, she should 'let cleue to here ribbes sum sentence of holy wrytyngges' even whilst 'slep is on her' (p. 31). Even in sleep the anchoress should feel 'drede', keeping one eye on the scriptural waters, which can offer her protection, at all times.

³⁹ The online *MED* cites a number of definitions of this word, the most relevant in this case being 'b.) the place frequented; dwelling place, habitat' and 'c.) a gathering or company of birds' which could allude to the community of anchorites, all gathered together around the streams of the scriptures. See *haunt* (n.), *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=haunt&rgxp=constrained>> [16.04.15].

A Rule of Life for a Recluse first refers to its reader as a dove, in the passage above, when it borrows from the language of the Song of Songs in order to encourage the reader to ‘haunte’ clear waters of scripture, but also to maintain a necessary distance from them, in order to spot the shadow of the devil’s suggestion in their surface. However, when the reader is again compared with a dove it is in an entirely new context, where the carefully demarcated boundaries become blurred and direct interaction with water becomes central. In the climactic moments of the Passion meditation in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the female reader is encouraged to approach the bleeding, dying Christ, whose wounded body now resembles a ‘culverhows’ (dovecote) and to enter into the ‘wal’ of his flesh, which is now a nest made up of hot blood (p. 49).⁴⁰ She enters his side, protected inside his body like a dove, but she also metaphorically reddens her lips with speech about him and thus establishes a reciprocal relationship, where Christ enters her too.⁴¹ As we have already seen in *Ancrene Wisse*, female speech can be dangerous if

⁴⁰ Marsha L. Dutton analyses this passage in the Vernon translation as follows: ‘In the third meditation Aelred urges the anchoress to become even more active, to drink the fluids from the crucified Jesus’ side, the water and blood turned into milk and wine to nourish and inebriate. Having reached that stage of intimacy and ecstasy, she is also able to enter into Jesus’ body, to become physically one with him as to provide both nourishment and union [...] Thomas [the Vernon scribe] again allows the contemplative to be active, to obtain the blood and water from Jesus’ side, but he also expands the idea of her hiding there, taking shelter in Jesus’ wounds as protective nests’; ‘Gilding the Lily: The Enhancement of Spiritual Affectivity in a Middle English Translation of Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*’, in *The Medieval Translator/Traduire au Moyen Age*, 10, ed. Jacqueline Jenkins and Olivier Bertrand (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 109-124 (pp. 120-121). Dutton also argues that Thomas ‘insists on the pious and moral results of her experience rather than suggesting that she may become one with Jesus’ (p. 121); however, such a reading does not take enough account of the passage’s climactic place in the fluid context of the Passion meditation, where earlier the reader is denied the eucharistic wine of Christ’s blood but here, in contrast, she is invited to redden her lips with speech about him as she nestles in the wound in his side. The fluid imagery alone suggests a mingling, a permeation of boundaries suggestive of union.

⁴¹ Dutton has shown that this ingestion is even more explicit in Aelred’s Latin original: ‘Thomas [the Vernon scribe] again insists that her nourishment is not literal but spiritual [...] She is not to share in Jesus’ blood through kissing his wounds but by speaking and talking of him to others’; ‘Gilding the Lily’, p. 121. However, the reddening of the lips still evokes this original sense,

not used properly and female readers must restrain their speech in order to transform it into heavenly, dutiful thoughts. Here, in contrast, speech can be miraculously transformed *as it flows forth*; the anchoress can make her lips as red as scarlet ribbons by opening the dam of her mouth to speak about Christ.⁴² Water gushes forth alongside blood, the liquid that will transform into milk to nourish whoever ingests it and it is also ever-present in the language of the text, ‘fayre fressche rennyng ryueres in a stoon’ (p. 49). Although milk and blood are figured as prominent fluids in this description, the language of water used to describe them is inescapable. Moreover, the water in the narrative of this treatise is even more intimately connected with the reader than the blood as, earlier in the Passion sequence, the anchoress is told to ‘ren [...] to þe pappys of [Jesus] manhede, and þerof suk out melke’ which will ‘gostly fed’ her, ‘in þenkyngge what he dude for vs in vre flehs’ (p. 46). In the later description of the Passion, water becomes interwoven with the nourishing milk. Thus, in the literary imagination of this treatise we have moved a long way from the ‘dreadful’ dove, close but not too close to the writings of God. Where the reader cannot metaphorically bathe herself in the streams of the scriptures, she is instead encouraged to imagine a union with Christ borne out of his more human water and blood.⁴³

particularly when coupled with earlier references to the ingestion of Christ’s fluids in the Passion sequence which are preserved (for example, the milk of his manhead).

⁴² Margery Kempe certainly makes scarlet ribbons of her lips, rather than heeding instruction that women be silent unless words are absolutely necessary. She is banned from sitting at the same table as her fellow pilgrims because she talks about holy matters too much. One religious man wishes she were enclosed, like an anchoress, so that she cannot speak to anyone anymore: ‘I wold thow wer cloyd in an hows of ston, that ther schuld no man speke with the’; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 93.

⁴³ For further discussion of this relationship with regard to spiritual instruction for female readers see the conclusion of this thesis, pp. 249-253.

ALTERNATE TRADITIONS: APPROACHING AND INTERACTING WITH WATER IN OTHER MEDIEVAL WRITINGS

Both the Bible and devotional prose prescribe a position beside water rather than in it. Readers of *The Doctrine of the Hert* and *Ancrene Wisse* are instructed to ensure that their metaphorical water is retained safely within the sides and edges of the body; readers of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* are encouraged to imagine themselves at the edges of external, spiritual waters. Water, sides and edges are all integral to these tropes, whether the water represents dangerous female speech or the holy word of God. Nevertheless, during the Passion meditation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the permeation of these boundaries is used to articulate a sublime spiritual experience. Other spiritual texts explore similar tensions between maintaining and blurring bodily (and allegorical) boundaries. Different genres, from medical works to travel writing, also express the miraculous, ambiguous, or even dangerous results of interacting with water. These alternate traditions, which will be outlined below, can be used to shed some light on the surprise reversal in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*.

The desert fathers (and mothers) were Christian hermits, ascetics and monks who retired to the deserts of Egypt in the third century, hoping that their self-imposed exile from society would help them to find a deeper and more spiritual

communion with God.⁴⁴ One such Father, Abba Poemen, meditates on Psalm 42:

It is written: “As the hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for Thee O God” (Ps 42.1). For truly harts in the desert devour many reptiles and when their venom burns them, they try to come up to the springs, to drink so as to assuage the venom’s burning. It is the same for the monks: sitting in the desert they are burned by the venom of evil demons, and they long for Saturday and Sunday to come to be able to go to the springs of water, that is to say, the body and blood of the Lord, so as to be purified from the bitterness of the evil one.⁴⁵

The thirst described in this extract would have been especially enhanced for these spiritual fathers both physically, as they lived in the desert, and metaphorically, as their lives were devoted to God and to interaction with him. A week in the life of a desert father or mother naturally hinges on anticipation of the coming weekend, when communion can be enjoyed, and the body and blood tasted. However, the deliberate use of the language of water in this passage – the body and blood as ‘springs of water’, the longing in terms of thirst – stems from more than the aridity of Poemen’s physical environment. He deliberately equates communion with both physical and spiritual need. Any mediation between the fathers and the water, symbolic of the Eucharist, is eliminated in this imagining. The interaction between monk and eucharistic fluid and monk and Jesus is direct, uninterrupted and therefore all the more powerful.

⁴⁴ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. Ward. Medieval anchoritism stems from this tradition. See Mari Hughes-Edwards, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism: Ideology and Spiritual Practices* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. Ward, p. 144.

The later, twelfth-century sermons of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (which are roughly contemporary with the Latin original of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*) also reveal a desire for more direct interaction with spiritual waters and a sense that mediation is somehow inadequate. Bernard, inspired by the Song of Songs, uses water more directly to interrogate concepts of spiritual access. In his sermon series on the Song of Songs, he describes his role in curiously watery terms:

I shall be the last to intrude rashly where the bride alone may enter [...] Let her be as a fountain entirely his own, unshared by any stranger, untouched by unworthy lips; for she is “a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain”, though rivulets flow from it into the streets. There I may use, though I want no trouble or ingratitude from anyone if I offer what I draw from a public source. I shall even pay myself a mild compliment in this matter, for no small effort and fatigue are involved in going out day by day to draw water(s?) from the open streams of the Scriptures and provide for the needs of each of you, so that without exerting yourselves you may have at hand spiritual waters for every occasion, for washing, for drinking, for cooking of foods [...] For my part, I offer for the common good what I have received from a common source. He is the fountain of life, a sealed fountain brimming over from within the enclosed garden through the pipe of St. Paul’s mouth.⁴⁶

In writing sermons about the Song of Songs, Bernard presents himself as labouring on behalf of his listeners (and, later, his readers), taking water from the

⁴⁶ *On the Song of Songs II*, ed. and trans. Kilian Walsh, 3 vols (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), III, 15-16. The Latin reads: *Ego vero haud temere mihi arrogarim sponsae praeerogativam [...] Sit tibi fons proprius, in quo ei non communicet alienus, nec indignus bibat ex eo: est quippe hortus conclusus, fons signatus (Cant 4.12). Ceterum derivantur aquae inde in plateas. Eas me habere ad manum fateor, dum tamen nemo mihi molestus sit aut ingratus, si de publico haurio et propino. Nam ut paulisper ministerium meum in hac parte commendem; nonnullius profecto fatigationis est atque laboris, quotidie scilicet exire et haurire etiam de manifestis rivulis Scripturarum, et ex eis singulorum necessitatibus inservire, ut absque suo labore quisque vestrum praesto habeat aquas spirituales ad omne opus, verbi gratio, ad lavandum, ad potandum, ad cibos coquendos [...] [e]go quod de communi accepi, profero in commune. Ipse siquidem fons vitae, ipse fons signatus, de intra hortum conclusum erumpens, per os Pauli fistulam suam; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, ed. H. Hurter (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1888), pp. 164-166.*

streams of the Scripture then bringing it to them for their own spiritual use.⁴⁷ His pre-emption of ‘trouble or ingratitude’ indicates that he anticipates both and therefore feels the need to justify his use of a ‘common source’. Yet his justification is, at first glance, confused. On the one hand, the passage defends and explains not only the ‘common’ and ‘public source’ but also Bernard’s role as mediator between that source and his audience. The streams of the Scriptures are ‘open’ for all and by going to them to draw water daily he saves his listeners from exertion and physical labour. He reminds his listeners that, thanks to his tireless effort, they can have ‘at hand’ water to meet every spiritual eventuality, acting as facilitator and providing for their every need.

However, underlying these words is Bernard’s awareness that he is offering something diluted.⁴⁸ He depicts three points of access to the waters, which represent both Scripture in general and the Song of Songs more specifically. First the private, eminently spiritual source is described with sensual language that echoes the Song of Songs itself: ‘Let her be as a fountain entirely his own,

⁴⁷ In a preface to Bernard’s sermons, Jean Leclercq discusses the problems of deciphering their original audience and delivery. ‘Could such a polished text’ he asks, ‘ever have been delivered as it stands, and then later have been written down without change either by the speaker or his hearers?’ After detailed consideration of the various issues, and full acknowledgement of the difficulties involved in drawing any firm conclusions, he persuasively suggests that even though Bernard undoubtedly spoke to his monks about the Song of Songs, ‘and on the same themes which inspired his written work’, the two do differ, with the written sermons showing Bernard ‘in the fullest stature of his genius’; *On the Song of Songs II*, ed. and trans. Walsh, p. vii and p. xxx.

⁴⁸ The preference for a private over a public water source, which informs this metaphor, would have been even more relevant in the Middle Ages. Water was very rarely clean, particularly in urban spaces, during this period. Communal sources were far more likely to be polluted than, say, a private source in a monastery or other religious house, or indeed a house belonging to the aristocracy; Rawcliffe records not only squabbles between users of communal water sources but also increased risk: ‘Drawing water was a potentially dangerous business, especially for the poor, whose lodgings rarely enjoyed direct access to private wells or conduits. The records of most English cities reveal that the risk of drowning was considerable, not least because children and young female servants were often entrusted with the task of hauling heavy pots and buckets out of pits, streams and rivers’; *Urban Bodies*, p. 212.

unshared by any stranger, untouched by unworthy lips'. This original water source is enticingly held up for consideration but then denied to both listeners and to Bernard himself. Next come the rivulets, which spill out from this source and are open to all those willing to travel there, the 'open streams' which Bernard himself ventures to, from which he draws water to share with his listeners. Finally, there is the pragmatic water offered by Bernard, 'for washing, for drinking, for cooking of foods', which can be accessed if one listens to, or reads, his sermons. The juxtaposition of this final point of access with the first creates a stark contrast between the mysterious sealed fountain and garden enclosed and the water 'for washing, for drinking, for cooking of foods'. His words belie his own argument as in the same breath he describes the Scriptures themselves, using echoes of the sacred language of the Song of Songs, but then asks listeners to be content with his more pragmatic, second-hand offerings. Part of Bernard's discomfiture in this passage stems from recognition that his listeners may well long to go straight to the rivulets, even the very source, themselves.⁴⁹

Bernard's sermons, and the sayings of Abba Poemen, suggest a yearning for direct interaction with water-as-spiritual-knowledge. This yearning seems to be fulfilled in the Passion meditation of Aelred's treatise. Devotional prose works, which use metaphors of drinking, bathing or immersing in water to represent a bridge between the human and divine, reflect and extend this rhetoric. Authors advise

⁴⁹ Desiderius Erasmus uses similar rhetoric to justify his use of the Greek as a source for his translation of the New Testament: 'I perceived that the teaching which is our salvation was to be had in a purer and more lively form if sought at the fountain-head and drawn from the actual sources than from pools and runnels'; *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 298 to 445, 1514 to 1516*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 203.

against letting the boundaries of the body dissolve and become liquid, but such melting and softening also holds all sorts of spiritual promise. The ambiguity of prolonged contact with water, the inherent dangers of direct interaction as well as its potential for spiritual experience in such references, is partly inspired by the role water plays in medieval thought as a site of change, whether that change be good, bad or ambiguous.

Caroline Walker Bynum uses a revival of interest in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and particularly its tales of transformation, as evidence for a new preoccupation with change during the later Middle Ages.⁵⁰ The catalyst for such change in Ovid's poetry is frequently the element of water, and one particularly relevant episode concerns Hermaphroditus, a beautiful man who is spied on by the amorous nymph Salmacis whilst bathing in the crystal clear waters of a river.⁵¹ Unable to overcome her attraction to him she follows him into the water and embraces him, begging the gods to join them together, forever.⁵² Immersion in water therefore

⁵⁰ Bynum suggests that 'concepts of change themselves tended to change in the years around 1200 and that two images in particular, hybrid and metamorphosis – images prominent in imaginative literature, theology, the visual arts, and natural philosophy – were sites of these competing and changing understandings'; *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2001), p. 21. The majority of this work considers various approaches to, and uses of, hybridity and metamorphosis in written documents and literature. In *Christian Materiality*, the significance of change from the twelfth century onwards becomes part of a wider discussion about religious practices in late medieval England, most notably a new focus on transformation miracles and a new investment in the power of holy matter.

⁵¹ Lees-Jeffries dubs water 'the 'ur-metamorphosis', for water is itself a metamorphic element' and argues that this Ovidian episode, alongside a number of others which show water to be transformative, 'foreground[s] anxieties over desire, specularity, and identity [...] the water of a fountain is the catalyst for the transformation or loss of identity'; *England's Helicon*, pp. 9-11. The *MED* lists two of the most 'obvious physical properties' of water as 'that which embodies mutability' and 'that which softens, dissolves, erodes'; s. v. water, n. *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> [22.04.16].

⁵² 'Now these two figures in their close embrace / were two no longer, but were something else, / no longer to be called a man and a woman, / and although neither, nonetheless seemed both'; *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. Martin, p. 103, ll. 517-20; *sic, ubi complex coierunt membra tenaci, /*

proves irrevocably dangerous for Hermaphroditus. He becomes a hybrid form, neither male nor female, but melded with his pursuer forever.⁵³ Nevertheless, this change could be perceived more ambiguously, even positively. In Peter Bersuire's moralized version of Ovid, the transformation of Hermaphroditus is read as an allegory of the incarnation in which Hermaphroditus represents Christ and descends into the fountain of mercy, the blessed Virgin Mary, represented by the nymph Salmacis.⁵⁴ The union of male and female therefore becomes a potent symbol for Christ's dual nature, which can also be communicated through the intermingling of blood and water.⁵⁵

To further complicate a simplistic reading of Hermaphroditus' softening limbs, religious writings throughout the Middle Ages repeatedly ask their readers to *seek out* a figurative softening, a positive transformation brought about by the element of water. In one particularly relevant fifteenth-century carol the narrator, who remains unmoved by the Passion, hears a woman weeping, only to discover that

nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque uidentur. / ergo ubi se liquidas, quo uir descenderat, undas / semimarem fecisse uidet mollitaque in illis / membra, manus tendens, sed iam non uoce uirili; P. Ovidi Nasonis, *Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant, p. 107, ll. 377-382.

⁵³ Critics such as Brenda Gardenour remind us that medieval thinking about gender identity was not quite so rigid as it has sometimes been portrayed, as 'an individual might not just be one or the other, but both. [...] the gendered womb was also seen as a gradient, with areas closer to the center producing more ambiguous sexes'. However the categories of 'male' and 'female' were still demarcated in both science and theology, thanks to the influence of Aristotle on medieval medicine. See Gardenour, 'Gender in Medicine and Natural History', p. 183 and p. 182, respectively.

⁵⁴ See Leah deVun, 'The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69 (2008), 193-218 (p. 212). For other interpretations of this myth, see Matthew Robinson, 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid, Met. 4.285-388)', *The Classical Quarterly*, N. S. 49 (1999), 212-223; and Lauren Silberman, 'Mythographic Transformations of Ovid's Hermaphrodite', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988), 643-652.

⁵⁵ See chapter four of this thesis for an examination of the relationship between water and blood in devotional Passion meditations.

she is actually the Virgin Mary.⁵⁶ Seeing her tears of grief he tells her that he cannot cry, for he is ‘so harde hartid’ (l. 10). She continues her weeping, saying that nature must ‘move’ him and he must be ‘converted’ (l. 12). As a consequence the narrator does indeed start to shed tears himself: ‘Forsooth than I sobbid’ (l. 16). The hard-hearted narrator’s interaction with Christ’s grieving mother softens his heart, allowing him to adopt the correct affective response to meditation on the Passion: ‘Who cannot wepe come lerne at me’ is Mary’s repeated refrain, given in a number of variations. With this she teaches not only the fictional narrator but also whoever might be reading or listening to the carol to soften their hearts, to allow Christ’s suffering to permeate. Softening, in a theological sense, is therefore associated with cleansing and a preparation of the heart for union. Crucially water – in the case of this carol, tears – is the catalyst for change, the softening agent.⁵⁷ Both the carol and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* explore a softening through water as a facilitator of positive transformation and a preparation for a divine union.

Legends recorded in texts such as *Mandeville’s Travels* and Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (translated into the vernacular by John Trevisa as *On the Properties of Things*) enjoyed significant popularity during the Middle Ages. Natural water sources are recorded which possess the power to change, in ambiguous

⁵⁶ *The Early English Carols*, ed. Richard Leighton Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) [161], pp. 108-109. All line references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

⁵⁷ See George R. Keiser, ‘The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos’, in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 167-93 (pp. 174-175). Walter Hilton associates heretics with those who are dry, rather than those who soften and melt with the grace of God: ‘Ypocrites ne heretikes feele not this mekenesse, neither in good wille, ne in affeccioun; but wel drie and wel cold aren here hertis and here reynes [kidneys, loins] fro the softe feelynge of this vertu [...] Thei gnawen upoun the drie bark withoutyn, but the swete kernel of it and the inli savoure may he not come to’; *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Bestul, p. 51.

ways, those who unsuspectingly interact with them. These waters do not need a pursuer to cast a spell and release their inherent power; their potency is all their own. Although they are very different kinds of texts, both *Mandeville's Travels* and *On the Properties of Things* record superstitions about water sources abroad. At the foot of mount Polombe, Mandeville informs readers, one can find 'a fair welle & a gret þat hath odour & sauour of alle spices. And at euery hour of the day he chaungeth his odour & his sauour diversely'.⁵⁸ Not only does this well change its physical appearance, it also has the power to change those who drink from it for the better: 'And whoso drynketh .iij. tymes fasting of þat water of þat welle he is hool of all maner sykeness þat he hath And þei þat duellen þere & drynkenj often of þat well þei neuere han sekeness & þei semen all weys 3onge' (p. 113). The well is so 'vertuous' that many men claim it must flow straight from Paradise. In *On the Properties of Things* Trevisa documents a number of different transformative waters, often with contradictory effects: 'Also in Boecia ben two welles; that one maketh gode mynde, and þat oþere makeþ for3etfulnesse [...] Also in Cicilia beþ two welles: and one þereof maketh femeles bareyne, and þat oþer makeþ hem þat ben bareyne able to conceyue' (pp. 649-650).⁵⁹ Such a tradition of transformative water can also be traced back to the Bible itself. Baptism, the most significant example

⁵⁸ 'Mandeville's Travels', edited from MS. Cotton Titus c.xvi in the British Museum, ed. P. Hamelius, EETS, O. S. 153, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1919), p. 113. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

⁵⁹ Bartholomaeus, and Trevisa in translating him, uses Isidore of Seville, here. See *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, with the collaboration of Muriel Hall (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), p. 276. For Isidore's original Latin, see Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1911), bk XII, ch. xiii, ll. 6-13. For Bartholomew's original Latin, see *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, pp. 555-556.

of immersion in the Scripture, signals a conversion to new faith.⁶⁰ Healing waters also appear in both the Old and New Testaments as examples of God's power and Grace, restoring the vigour of those who bathe in them – although it is worth remembering that immersion in water can also cause destruction in the Bible.⁶¹

Immersion in water is ambiguous, possessing the potential for harm as well as help, the outcome dependent both on the nature of the water and the body entering it. Medieval medical treatises reflect and inform this ambiguity, advocating bathing but simultaneously warning against prolonged immersion. A fifteenth-century version of *Secretum Secretorum*, which is addressed to King Alexander and titled *Regimen Sanitatis: The Booke of Goode Governance and Guyding of þe Body*, describes water as an aid for retaining bodily moisture whilst also reminding its readers that water lets natural body heat escape into the atmosphere.⁶² In the

⁶⁰ Water is biblically integral to baptism. The gospels describe how John baptized Jesus in the water of the river John and how, afterwards, a dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit, came down to the water (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-33). Acts 8:36-38 describes how a eunuch is baptised in water: 'And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water; and the eunuch said: See, here is water: what doth hinder me from being baptized? And Philip said: If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answering, said: I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch: and he baptized him'. Oestigaard has shown how Noah's Flood began to be perceived not only as a destructive force but also as a 'type' of the saving rite of baptism and discusses the symbolic significance of complete immersion in baptism; 'Heavens, Havens and Hells of Water', in *Water: Histories, Culture, Ecologies*, ed. Leybourne and Gaynor, p. 96. For some specific studies on baptism in the Middle Ages, see footnote 12 in the introduction to this thesis.

⁶¹ Naaman, host of the King of Syria suffers from leprosy but is healed when Elisha sends him a message, instructing him to bathe seven times in the River Jordan (2 Kings, chapter 5); 'a great number of sick, of blind, of lame, of withered' wait on the banks of the sheep pool of Bethesda because at a certain season an angel will come down and trouble the waters. Whoever immerses themselves in the water first once the angel has done this will be healed (John 5:2-4).

⁶² See '*Secretum Secretorum*': *Nine English Versions*, ed. M. A. Manzalaoui, EETS 276 (Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 4. All future references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. Also known as *Secret of Secrets* or *The Book of Good Governance and Guiding of the Body*, *Secretum Secretorum* is a mid-twelfth century Latin translation of a tenth-century Arabic encyclopaedic treatise. In the late Middle Ages a number of English versions of this work emerged; see pp. xxiv-xxxix of the introduction to the edition. Framed as a manual for King Alexander, offering advice for many

‘somir season’, one fifteenth-century version of the treatise offers the king the following advice: ‘wesse thi hondis, bifore þu goist oute fro thi chamber, with colde watir, for þe coldenes of þe watir shettith þi naturell poris, and letteth þi naturell hete to passe from the, which wold passe if þi poris were not closed’ (p. 4).⁶³ Doing so will help the king ‘kepe [his] natural moistur, and so folowith [his] naturall hete’ (p. 8). Thus, in hot weather, washing your hands with cold water allows your body to retain its moisture and prevents it from drying out, whilst simultaneously letting natural body heat dissipate, thereby cooling it down. Water in this extract regulates a boundary, allowing certain properties to leave the body whilst others are retained. In the Ashmole version of the text, also written in the fifteenth century, the water takes on a more troubling aspect. The king is told to ‘entre into swete bathes of fresh water and litell tarying ther-in, that the body take moisture of the bathe and not the bathe of the body, for thurgh tarrying there the body wold be febled’ (p. 59).⁶⁴ The text prescribes bathing in ‘swete’ and ‘fresh’ water, as the body will ‘take the moisture of the bath’ and hydrate itself. However, it also warns the king against tarrying in that water. Lingering will allow the water to enfeeble the king by leeching away his power. The author thus recognises the relationship between the porous body and seeping, leaking water. Water, functioning as an agent which can flow disruptively across and through boundaries, needs to be utilised for good health but it must also be controlled and

different aspects of his everyday life, it was reputedly sent from Aristotle to Alexander in its original form.

⁶³ These quotations are taken from the only known Middle English version of Johannes Hispaniensis’ translation, which is known as *The Booke of Goode Governance & Guyding of the Body*; see ‘*Secretum Secretorum*’: *Nine English Versions*, ed. Manzalaoui, pp. 3-9.

⁶⁴ These quotations are taken from ‘The Ashmole Version of the Secrete of Secretes’; see ‘*Secretum Secretorum*’: *Nine English Versions*, ed. Manzalaoui pp. 18-113.

regulated at all times, just as the boundaries of the body must be managed in the *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*. The quality of the water in *Secretum Secretorum* is insignificant: even sweet, fresh water can do harm. There is a fine, almost imperceptible line between productive and dangerous immersion.

To summarise thus far, water, both actual and literary, played a central role in medieval Christian life. Water could often be associated with disruptive female speech, which should be carefully managed, and ideally restrained. Further, usually *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* is careful to prescribe distance between female reader and metaphorical water (which can represent the written word of God, or Christ himself), again emphasising the importance of boundaries. However, there is a reversal in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, where holy speech gushes forth and the boundaries between individual soul and Christ, reader and metaphorical water, are blurred. Alternate written traditions of approaching and interacting with water have also been considered and the second half of this chapter will reflect, more specifically, on how these traditions inform devotional, literary uses of water – particularly images of immersion. Investigating how two other fifteenth-century devotional works, the *Orchard of Syon* and *The Doctrine of the Hert*, navigate interactions with water will allow for a fuller explanation of the turn in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, when the gap between reader and water is rapidly closed.

UNSTABLE BOUNDARIES AND TRANSFORMATIVE WATERS IN THE ORCHARD OF SYON

The fourteenth-century allegorical poem *Pearl* is not a devotional work.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Christian doctrine is central to its schema, and it uses water to articulate and explain that doctrine. The poem can therefore be used as a tool of comparison, shedding some light on the central allegory of water in the later *Orcherd of Syon*. *Pearl* explores the dual function of water as both barrier and bridge, hinting at the spiritual possibilities of direct interaction with metaphorical waters whilst also demonstrating the risks of ill-advised interaction. In devotional prose, however, this tension is transformed from a spiritual anxiety into a spiritual progression, an allegory for a soul's journey from earthly sin to divine rest and spiritual knowledge. The *Orcherd of Syon* is a fifteenth-century translation of Catherine of Siena's dialogue with Christ; whilst it was originally dictated by a woman, Catherine, it is translated into its later, Middle English form, by a man. Like *Pearl*, it channels both the dangers and benefits of interaction with metaphorical waters. However, unlike *Pearl* it ultimately focuses on the divine potential of interaction, presenting its reader with a sublime, but also sublimely attainable, goal. Immersion in earthly waters can be exchanged for immersion in spiritual waters in the *Orcherd of Syon*. Where *Pearl* ends in failure, the *Orcherd of Syon* uses water to depict spiritual transformation, a linear journey in which interaction with the metaphorical waters of Scripture, or even God, becomes possible.

⁶⁵ *Pearl* exists in a unique manuscript, London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x. and is the first of four poems written by a single scribe (the others are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*). For an overview of scholarship on this poem, whose author remains unidentified, see Laurence Eldredge, 'The State of *Pearl*-Studies since 1933', *Viator*, 6 (1975), 171-93 and Robert J. Blanch, 'The Current State of *Pearl* Criticism', *Chaucer Yearbook*, 3 (1996), 363-86.

Throughout *Pearl*, a heavenly maiden delivers Christian doctrine to a narrator/dreamer (who many critics believe to be her grieving father) across a river.⁶⁶ The dreamer understands this doctrine only ‘imperfectly’.⁶⁷ Although she explicitly tells the dreamer that he cannot cross the river, which flows directly from the wounds of Christ and leads to the heavenly Jerusalem, he ignores her and tries to cross anyway.⁶⁸ He lets his emotions rule him and is seemingly unable to grasp the importance of the actual and metaphorical distance between his soul, the pearl maiden, and the heavenly city. The poem constantly reminds readers that the divine is beyond human comprehension and can only be fully experienced after death. Despite the glimpses of heaven allowed to him, the dreamer finds much of the vision to be ineffable: ‘I hope no tong moght endure / No saverly saghe say of that sight, / So was hit clene and cler and pure / That precious perle ther hit was pyght’ (ll. 225-8).⁶⁹ J. J. Anderson argues that ‘the poem is the record of an attempt to bridge the gap between human and divine’ and that the dreamer is dragged prematurely back to the waking world because he attempted to see the

⁶⁶ See Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the ‘Gawain’-Poet* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p. 147.

⁶⁷ See the introduction to *Pearl*, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. J. J. Anderson (London: Orion, 1996), p. xi.

⁶⁸ The river in *Pearl* runs directly from the throne of Christ, seeming to stem from his wounds: ‘A rever of the trone ther ran outryghte’ (p. 104, l. 1055); ‘Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende hys hert, thurgh hyde torente; / Of his quyte syde his blod outsprent’ (p. 107, ll.1135-7); ‘Pearl’, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Andrew and Waldron. All further line references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. Johnson persuasively argues that because it flows from the wounds in Christ’s side this river has associations with both the Eucharist and baptism. He suggests that any interpretation of this poem ‘must take into account the complete scope of the imagery of gem, earth, and water images, which makes *The Pearl* a picture of two worlds and the means of transition between them, a vision embracing heaven and earth’; ‘The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*’ p. 180.

⁶⁹ Rothausser comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that ‘[t]he river serves not only to defend the city from unwelcome foreign presences, but it also acts within the text of the poem to symbolize the Christian soul’s attempt to understand his relationship to God. While the Christian may contemplate God’s nature, or strive to cross the river, he may not fully interact with God, or enter the city in *Pearl*, until the moment of death’; “‘A reuer...brighter þen boþe the sunne and mone’”, in *Urban Space*, ed. Classen, p. 263.

divine face-to-face rather than in a glass darkly, across the water.⁷⁰ By refusing to observe the water as a barrier he fails to learn the lessons delivered by the pearl-maiden throughout.

This pessimistic reading needs some revision, however, as a tinge of hope actually suffuses *Pearl*.⁷¹ The allegorical river certainly features as a divisive agent in the poem. When the dreamer first comes to the riverbank one of his first impressions is of the river as a barrier:

I hoped the water were a devyse
Bytwene myrthes by meres made.
Byyonde the broke, by slente other slade,
I hoped that mote merked wore.
Bot the water was depe, I dorst not wade,
And ever me longed ay more and more (ll. 139-144).

He understands the water as a 'devyse' separating him from both the pearl maiden and the heavenly Jerusalem. He describes the 'meres' of the river, the deep water that he dares not wade across, although his desire to do so is already growing. The distance, emphasised by the device of the ever-present river, is maintained throughout the poem not just spatially but also emotionally.⁷² Nevertheless, to focus on these suggestions of division alone is to offer only a partial reading of the poem, for the river also acts as a bridge, an agent of connection and access, even if the full potential of this access ultimately remains untapped. There is not a

⁷⁰ See the introduction to 'Pearl', in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. Anderson, p. xi.

⁷¹ Anderson argues that the narrator's positive statements at the end of the poem 'have a tinge of uncertainty and sadness about them'; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, p. x. It is this reading which the thesis nuances, by suggesting that they are tinged with possibility as well as sadness.

⁷² 'Although there are daughterly moments she does not respond to the Dreamer as he wants her to, remaining intractably apart, like the Heaven she speaks for'; Anderson, p. xi.

wall dividing the dreamer and the pearl maiden, or any other more solid, impenetrable boundary, but rather there is water, fierce and difficult, but not necessarily impossible, to traverse. The river moves and flows, but not violently; it is daunting but still potentially accessible for the dreamer. The river allows the dreamer to converse easily with the pearl maiden on the other side. It also allows him to clearly see, albeit at a distance, the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which a more substantial barrier would prevent. The poet's words, towards the end of *Pearl*, encourage the reader to see the potential for connection in the symbol of the river, even as they simultaneously recognise it as a barrier:

To that Prynces paye hade I ay bente,
And yerned no more then was me given,
And halden me ther in trwe entent,
As the perle me prayed that was so thriven,
As helde, drawen to Goddes present,
To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryven (ll. 1189-1194).

The conditional tone of this passage makes one thing clear: had the dreamer yearned for no more than was given to him, had he held fast by the riverbank instead of attempting to cross it and reach the pearl maiden, then he might have been drawn further into God's presence, and more divine mysteries might have been revealed to him. The heart of the narrator's failed immersion is twofold; it is premature but it is also carried out for the wrong reasons – to 'fech' back the pearl maiden rather than to know or access God. In these lines *Pearl* suggests that if a Christian reader is patient and their intentions are pure then they might well be 'drawen' into God's presence even before death. The danger of being pulled back or even drowned are very real but so too is the far more glorious potential that

one might, if fortunate, be allowed to cross to the other side: ‘To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryven’.

The *Orcherd of Syon* transforms the potential for metaphorical immersion, which is hinted at in *Pearl* but never fulfilled, into an attainable goal. At the very end of the *Orcherd of Syon* the author depicts the following scene:

I prairie þee illumyne me wiþ þe liȝt of holy feiþ, for þat liȝt is a see, which norischiþ þe soule in þee, þat art þe pesible see, eendeles trinite. Þe watir of þi pesible see is not troublws. Perfore hym nedip not to drede þat is in þat see, for he knowip þe truþe of þin oonli soþfast sone, Ihesu Crist. He is sich a mirror þat needis I moste biholde, in þe which myrroure is represented to me þat I am þin ymage & creature (p. 420).

Coming at the end of a long, complex text, which grapples throughout with challenging doctrine and theology, this restful passage offers a moment of calm, a proverbial *shavasana*. Water, significantly, wends its way throughout the vignette, where the light of holy faith is a sea, which has the power to nourish the soul in the ‘pesible see’ of God. The water of God is not ‘troublws’ but calm; there is nothing to ‘drede’ within its depths, for whoever is immersed in it knows the ‘truþe’ of Jesus Christ, a ‘myrroure’ who reveals to mankind that they are made in God’s image. Water, in its ideal form, is calm; it reflects, just as the mirror of Christ reflects; it illumines the soul, offering clear spiritual sight, and, more importantly, clear spiritual understanding. Only when understanding is perfectly reached can a soul find herself ‘in’ this sea; only when she has acquired enough spiritual knowledge and ‘truþe’ can she discover the peace and tranquillity hinted at in this passage. Water is the best way that Catherine of Siena, with only earthly

tools available to her, can think to portray not only God, but also an individual soul's relationship with God.

To reach spiritual understanding, which is the key to the peaceable sea of God in the *Orcherd of Syon*, a soul needs to make an active effort to rise from immersion in the wild, dangerous and polluted waters of the earthly world. She must shake off every last drop of this corrupted water and make her way to the 'siker' bridge of Christ (which leads, ultimately, to the peaceable sea). The text records a dialogue between St Catherine and God, where God depicts earthly life as a flood. Souls who have not yet turned to God and refuse the doctrine of Christ are metaphorically trapped in murky, hazardous waters. One such unfortunate is described by God 'as a blynd wrechche' who 'putteþ hersilf to the flood, and takeþ noon heed how sliper and how swift þe watir is, and abideþ nobody' (p. 80). Sinners are 'walowid in þe flood þat lediþ to þe watir of deep' (p. 115) and 'þe wrecchidnesse of hem þat goon and drenchen hem in þe flood, not kepyng hem by þe brigge of my soothfastnesse, which [God] putte because þei schulden not peresche' (p. 191) is described. These souls, God tells Catherine, are 'as foolis' because 'þei hadden leuer be drenched in wrecchidnesse and filþe of þis world' than be saved by Christian faith (p. 191). The water of sin and earthly preoccupation is 'sliper' and 'swift' making it almost impossible for one trapped in its depths to gain a foothold. The water is associated with the 'filþe of þis world' and is therefore unclean, corrupted. The use of the word 'drenchen' implies both an absolute saturation of this water and actual drowning; those who do not accept the bridge God offers in the form of his son, and the sacrifice he made to redeem

the sins of all mankind, will surely ‘peresche’ in the ‘watir of deep’. The choice of ‘walowid’ is particularly evocative, invoking mires of filth.⁷³ It is also, to a certain extent, indicative of a self-indulgent action. The water is excessive and fast moving: it is a flood, or a tempestuous sea, not a gently flowing river or stream.

Such descriptions are powerful. Their aim is to encourage readers to preserve their faith and so avoid such a fate. Readers are urged to look upon their own sin as God does, to see what God sees from his imagined aerial perspective, depicted in these frightening and very visual terms. Moreover, this specific description adroitly plumbs the everyday fears and concerns of a fifteenth century reader. Clean water, particularly in urban spaces, was difficult to locate, and both flooding and deaths at sea were far more common in this period than they are now, at least in England.⁷⁴ Most significant, however, is the change in agency that these unfortunate souls undergo, and the association of the water itself with a lack of sight or understanding. Take, for example, the blind wretch who ‘putteþ’ herself

⁷³ s. v. ‘wallow’ n., definition 3: ‘to roll about, or lie prostrate and relaxed in or upon some liquid, viscous, or yielding substance (e.g. mire, blood, water, dust, sand). Often implying sensual enjoyment or indifference to defilement’; *OED*, online edn (2016) < <http://0-www.oed.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/Entry/225332> > [21.04.16].

⁷⁴ Fox, ‘Fishermen and Mariners’, in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Rubin, p. 78. According to Keene, at low tide ‘a good deal of noxious matter was revealed on the foreshore [of the Thames], including entrails and the bodies of drowned persons’ and it was common to ride horses along the foreshore and into the river, where riders were sometimes thrown off and drowned; ‘Issues of Water’, pp. 168-169. Children were particularly vulnerable to drowning, either in vessels of liquid or outside wells, rivers, and streams when collecting water or playing; see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Childhood* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 76 and p. 100. A miracle story from 1200 tells how a year old child nearly drowned when its nurse left it in a bath over a fire and went out to get more firewood, leaving the child alone; *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury*, ed. R. R. Darlington, Royal Historical Society, Camden 3rd series, 40 (London, 1928), p. 120. For further discussion of the dangers of drowning, see Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘Childrearing among the Lower Classes in Late Medieval England’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8 (1977-78), 1-22; *Records of Medieval Oxford*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford: Oxford Chronicle, 1912), p. 26. For further investigations into the dangers of drowning see footnote 19 of the intro to this thesis and footnote 48 of the current chapter.

to the flood, taking no heed of the slippery, swift nature of the water or of anything else, ignoring the ‘siker’ bridge provided for her by God, and the warnings to stay away from the dangerous waters. This selective sight becomes genuine blindness as soon as she makes the decision to enter the water. Similarly, in another section of the treatise, God deplores the wretchedness of those ‘þat goon and drenchen hem in þe flood’ (italics added). These souls do not fall into sin, it does not seize them, but rather they make the deliberate choice to ignore the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and to go and metaphorically drown themselves in sin. These descriptions not only emphasise the dangers of temptation, they remove sympathy for those souls trapped in the flood and issue a warning to readers:

And he þat goop out fro þis wey, holdeth hym by þe brynke of þis flood, which wey is not wallid up wiþ stones, but al with watir. And forasmyche as *watir haf no sustentacioun, or berynge vp*, therefore by þat wey no man may passe ouer þat flood wiþ þe liif, but needis he moste be drenched (p. 72, italics added).

In these passages, at least, it seems that once the earthly waters of sin have been willingly entered there is no alternative but death: ‘needis he moste be drenched’.⁷⁵

A rather bleak picture is therefore painted by the voice of God in the *Orcherd of Syon*. Nevertheless, the overall vision of the spiritual journey of a soul is by no

⁷⁵ There are some echoes of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, here, where men are conceived of as blind wretches in earthly mire, who need to ascend up and out of the earth towards the light of spiritual understanding. ‘Ah! How steep the seas that drown him! / His mind, all dulled, its own light fled / Moves into outer dark [...] This man / Used once to wander free under open skies / The paths of the heavens [...] But now he lies / His mind’s light languishing, / Bowed with these heavy chains around his neck, / His eyes cast down beneath the weight of care, / Seeing nothing / But the dull, solid earth’. *Heu quam praecipiti mersa profundo/Mens hebet et propria luce relicta / Tendit in externas ire tenebras [...] Hic quondam caelo liber aperto / Suetus in aetherios ire meatus / Cernebat rosei lumina solis [...] Nunc iacet effeto lumine mentis / Et pressus gravibus colla catenis / Declivemque gerens pondere vultum / Cogitur, heu, stolidam cernere terram*; ‘The Consolation of Philosophy’, in *Boethius: The Theological Tractates*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester (London: William Heinemann, 1973), pp. 130-436 (pp. 137- 139, ll. 1-27).

means wholly pessimistic. Despite the warnings in the above extracts, and the apparent loss of agency a soul undergoes once she is gripped in the corrupting flood, other passages in the text, such as the following one, make clear that falling into these waves is not necessarily irreversible:

Whanne [a soul] desireþ inwardly me þat am her eende by sich inwardly desier, a soule bigynneþ first to put away þe cloude þat haþ longe blyndid hir fro þe cleer siȝt of vertu. And þanne by seruile dreede of tribulaciones sche bigynneþ to come out of þe flood þat sche haþ longe be drenched ynne, castynge out fro hir þe venym wiþ þe haate þat sche was poysened wiþ [...] Thei knowynge þis bygynnen graciously to arise, and toward þe hauene bygynnen to sette her paasis, cleuyng f[a]st to þe same brigge of þe which I speke afore (p. 116).

In these hopeful lines, which serve to inspire the reader, a journey is charted from the flood, in which a soul can so easily be ‘drenched’, to the stable ‘brigge’ of Christ. In the previous extracts the souls caught in this flood lost all agency, after making the deliberate decision to enter the water. They have made their exchange and now, it seems, they are helpless. However, in this passage the soul manages to rise up actively out of the water. Her journey begins, as so many journeys must, with desire.⁷⁶ With actions that stem from love and yearning for God she ‘put[s] away’ the clouds that have long blinded her (instead of putting herself into the earthly flood, like the errant soul considered above), and takes on instead the clear sight of virtue; one is exchanged for the other. With the help of the grace of God she casts out the venom of the water which ‘poysened’ her, setting her own path towards heaven and cleaving fast to the bridge of Christ as soon as she reaches it.

⁷⁶ The *Roman de la Rose*, dedicated by its author Guillaume de Lorris to his lover, begins with the dreamer/narrator finding the Garden of Love; see *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. and trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: OUP, 1994). The narrator of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* goes forth into the wider world because of his desire to hear ‘wondres’; *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, p. 1, l. 4.

In the dialogue, God reminds readers that he plays an integral role in this spiritual journey, and the translator makes clear that only ‘graciously by him sche may come out’ (p. 350). This trope of spiritual journey from flood to bridge is ultimately an empowering one, encouraging a sinful reader to emulate the soul and to actively turn their mind and purpose toward God and heaven. The promise of God’s aid if she does so is a strong incentive.⁷⁷

From these passages then, immersion in water appears to be overwhelmingly negative. Nevertheless, as the description of the peaceable sea in the *Orcherd of Syon* suggests, the spiritual journey both begins and ends with immersion⁷⁸: ‘O my riȝt swete douȝtir, how glorious is sich a soule þat so rialy can passe out of þis troiblous see of þe world and come to me, þat am þe greet peesable see, and fille þe vessel of þe herte in þe see of myn euerlastynge souereyn godheed!’ (p. 196). The earthly floods of temptation and sin are given up in exchange for the divine and peaceable ‘sea of God’. Where the earthly flood is polluted, the sea of God is pure; where it clouds sight and is equated with blindness, the sea of God is clear, and associated with the light of spiritual knowledge and ultimately spiritual understanding – that which the dreamer in *Pearl* can never perfectly achieve. Where the earthly flood is unstable, its waters slippery and swift, the sea of God is ‘pesible’. It is calmed, still and tranquil, offering an unchanging vision whose end

⁷⁷ Similarly, in depictions of Aelred’s sinful youth in the present meditation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the role of God’s grace in Aelred’s conversion is consistently emphasized. This is given some consideration by Dutton-Stuckey in ‘A Prodigal Writes Home’, in *Heaven on Earth*, ed. Elder, pp. 35-42.

⁷⁸ *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* describes Aelred of Rievaulx undergoing a similar trial; however, when he imagines himself emerging from the earthly water he comes out onto the dry shores of heaven rather than finding himself immersed in the peaceable sea of God. See chapter three of this thesis, pp. 183-193.

point is love for and knowledge of God. This water does not transform souls but instead welcomes into its warm, soft embrace those who have, already, deliberately changed themselves.

Jesus beckons souls to the safe, stable bridge and desire for Him facilitates their spiritual progression:

Jesus said “Come to me and drink”. Why? “Bycause alle þo þat suwen his doctryn, or siche þat neiȝen nyȝ to hym, eiþir by kepyng of hise comaundementis wiþ þe counceilis mentaly [etc...] ȝe fynden anoon what ȝe schulen drynke; þat is, þe fruyt of his precious blood; and also by taastyng, by oon[hee]d of dyuyn nature knyht and ooned in mankynde. And þanne ȝe so abidyng in hym, schulen also fynde ȝouresilf in me, þat am þe pesable see; for I am oon wiþ hym, and he oon wiþ me. In þis wise ȝe ben beden for to come to þe welle of liifly watir of grace” (p. 123).

In this imagining Jesus is not just a bridge but also a ‘welle of liifly water of grace’, which echoes the parable of Jacob’s Well (John 4: 13-14).⁷⁹ Therefore, in this extended analogy, water is the signifier for each step in a spiritual journey, where a successful soul moves from the earthly flood to the bridge of Christ, where they can drink from him as from a well before hopefully finding themselves immersed in the sea of God. Jesus calls to the souls, beckoning them to him, urging them to come and drink, in order to begin their journey. Spiritual education and understanding are essential aspects of this process and the water represents both. What coming to Christ means in this analogy is following Christian doctrine, keeping the commandments. Drinking from the well of Christ, which is the blood

⁷⁹ For a fuller description of the parable of Jacob’s Well 8chapter three of this thesis, pp. 136-135.

of sacrifice, means understanding that the divine and the mortal are 'knit' together in Christ.⁸⁰ Only when these theologies and their ramifications are fully comprehended can a soul enter the peaceable sea of God. In *Pearl*, although the dreamer has certainly grown in spiritual understanding during the course of the narrative, he has not yet reached this perfect knowledge. He prematurely tries to immerse himself, in order to reach his daughter rather than in an attempt for fuller divine understanding, and because of this his wonderful vision is brought to a sudden close. In the *Orcherd of Syon*, immersion is the end-point to the journey, not one intermediate step. Nevertheless there are clear parallels between the poem and the treatise. The *Orcherd of Syon* certainly displays the potential for water to act as a barrier between the mortal and the divine, as those who get caught up in the earthly flood might never reach the 'siker' bridge of Christ. Nevertheless, the spiritual treatise also offers a more hopeful outcome. If a soul is diligent, loves God and follows Christian doctrine, they might one day simply 'fynde' themselves safe and protected in the 'pesible' sea of God. The potential for this spiritual rest, expressed through metaphorical immersion in spiritual waters, haunts *Pearl* and contributes to its poignant and regretful final lines. The *Orcherd of Syon*, however, makes this potential explicit in order to directly encourage readers to pursue it. Where *Pearl* exposes the ambiguity of immersion in water, and the anxieties attendant on it, the *Orcherd of Syon* navigates these anxieties by providing a spiritual alternative, a more positive immersion as a substitute.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between blood and water in devotional prose and how this significant pairing can help facilitate a more participatory redemption for Christians, see chapter four of this thesis.

BATHING AND BLURRED BOUNDARIES IN *THE DOCTRINE OF THE HERT*

It is precisely the leaking, seeping quality of water and its ability, according to medieval medical and literary thought, to permeate the skin and other boundaries which makes bathing or immersion in water such an apposite metaphor for interaction with God. It embodies the concept of exchange so central to descriptions of blood and water which will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, a relationship which is reciprocal and intimately connected with Christ's humanity. In *The Doctrine of the Hert* women are repeatedly instructed to manage the water of their own speech and the cleanliness of their own souls, expressed through tropes of water-inclusive, domestic labour such as cleaning the house of the heart.⁸¹ However, control of water, or liquid more generally, is relinquished when the author attempts to express Christ's sacrifice. Crucially, this sacrifice is expressed through bathing and immersion.

The author describes three baths, offered to the reader by Jesus in preparation for the divine union of their marriage. The first bath is made up of the water of baptism, the second of the blood flowing from Christ's side after the Passion and the third of his tears:

First, he seith þat he hath wasshe the with water, þat is with
water of bapteme, þe wiche come out of his side in his passioun,

⁸¹ For a discussion of this more domestic imagery in *The Doctrine of the Hert*, see chapter three of this thesis, especially pp. 171-176.

be þe wiche water he hath clensid þi blode, þat is þi synnes, fro the. What merveyle is it þough such water clense synnes? Trewly, none, for it come oute so boylingly fro þe hert of oure lord, made hote be þe fire of love abounding in his brist, þat it both clensith þe hert fro synnes, and also scaldith þe fende. Bi þis blissed water we ben wash in oure bapteme, and not only with water, but also with blod, for of hem bothe oure lord hathe made a lygh to clense synnes away fro oure hertes clerly, as Seint John seith: *Lavit nos a peccatis nostris in sanguine suo*. “He hathe wash us fro oure synnes with his blode”; þer come no blode oute withoute water. With such blissed lygh, sister, þou must clerly wassh þin hert, for þou hast defoulid it, peradventure, seth it wasse first wassh with bapteme [...] For to wassh away such malice of hert fro the, oure lord Jhesu, þi lavendir, hath not only ordeyned for þe a clensyng ligh of water and blode in thi bapteme, but also an helyng bath of swet and teris, þat þou shuldist bothe be wasshe þeryn and be hole. Into þis bath þou must ofte entre, for it is medicinable. For to entre into this bath is noþing ellis but for to drenche þin affecioun and þi þoughtes in Cristes passioun, considering bothe þe shedyng of his blode and water, and also þe swetyng and þe wepyng of his body (pp. 36-37).⁸²

Exchange and sacrifice are prevalent in the description of the first bath. The water of baptism stems from Christ’s side, given selflessly during the Passion to cleanse the sins of mankind and it runs ‘boylingly’ from his wound, symbolising the love and devotion poured into the sacred bath. Christ is the reader’s ‘lavender’ and has prepared a special ‘lygh’ from his bodily fluids, which can wash the body and make it whole. *The Doctrine of the Hert* instructs the reader to offer submission to Christ’s bodily fluids and sublimation of her self in return for this bath. The third bath, made up of Christ’s tears, is ‘medicinable’, like the baths prescribed to King Alexander in *Secretum Secretorum*. In getting into this spiritual bath, however, the

⁸² Chapter three of the thesis considers this quotation in a slightly different light (pp. 167-173). In some versions of *Ancrene Wisse*, the author similarly describes how Christ creates three healing baths in order to cure Christians of sin and infection. The first bath is made up of the water of baptism, the second of tears (either external or internal), and the third of Christ’s redemptive blood. See ‘*Ancrene Wisse*’: *A Corrected Edition*, ed. Millett, p. 149.

reader does not manage the boundaries of her body but instead metaphorically drowns herself in meditation on the Passion, allowing herself to be submerged within the saving stuff of sacrifice, '[f]or to entre into this bath is noþing ellis but for to drenche þin affecioun and þi þoughtes in Cristes passioun'.

Although the descriptions of immersion do not include any mention of Christ's tears and the liquids from his side seeping into and past the boundaries of the body, the medieval understanding of bathing as outlined in *Secretum Secretorum* contains the possibility of fluid exchange, of Christ's liquids flooding the heart and mind. Where elsewhere in *The Doctrine of the Hert* busy and mental occupation with Christ is prescribed, achieved through menial chores or meditation on the Scripture, here it is imagined and brought to life in vivid terms which draw specifically on water as a fluid which not only separates but also, more importantly, unites – as slippery and permeable as female flesh itself.⁸³ The ambiguous, dangerous practice of bathing is here transformed into something spiritually sublime, in the same way that the water of speech is transformed into holy thought when retained within the body in *Ancrene Wisse*, and immersion in the earthly flood is exchanged for immersion in the sea of God in the *Orcherd of Syon*. Contrary to advice given in *Secretum Secretorum*, a female reader who tarries in this bath is not enfeebled but is actually made 'hole' in her union with Christ.

Language of complete immersion in God possesses echoes of mystical writings, whose authors frequently express a yearning for *unio mystica* and express the

⁸³ For a full discussion of female flesh as leaky, permeable and fissured, see the introduction to Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, especially pp. 16-27.

hypothetical fulfilment of their desire in liquid terms.⁸⁴ Richard Rolle, in his shorter meditation on the Passion, requests an internalisation of Christ's water and blood: 'I haue appetite to peyne, to beseche my lord a drope of his rede blode to make my soule bloody, and a drop watyre to weshe with my soule'.⁸⁵ He expands upon this metaphor in a more lengthy allegory of a similar process:

I wolde among þe dede, þat lyn styngynge fouly, lay me flat on þe grounde, and neþerere 3yf I my3te, þe vertu and þe grace to kepe of þi blood. Pennes wyl I not ryse, ne non gate flytte, tyl I be with þi precyous blood bycome al reed, tyl I be markyd þerewith os on of þine owne, and my soule softyd in þat swete bath. So may it falle, gloryouse Lord, þat myn herd harte may opene þerewith, þat is now hard os ston, bycomen al nesche and quyckenen in þi felyng.⁸⁶

Rolle's desire for an internalization of Christ's blood here becomes immersion in a sweet bath that can soften his soul and loosen his hardened heart.⁸⁷ He becomes 'marked' as one of Christ's own, disguised and covered with Christ's own identity via his redemptive fluid. Expressions of Christ's love as fulfilment or melting in the soul similarly suggest a dissolving of boundaries between an individual and God. Walter Hilton, in *The Prickynge of Love*, describes how God's absence causes

⁸⁴ Wolfgang Riehle was one of the first critics to note that in medieval mysticism a prerequisite for experiencing God is the annihilation of the self for God; *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. by Bernard Standring (London: Routledge, 1977; repr. 1981), p. 59. Such an experience often reaches a climax in German mysticism in metaphors for drowning, he observes. However, in English mysticism he argues that such tropes are usually negative, a way of depicting souls lost to sin (p. 140). The analysis in this chapter suggests that this view requires adjustment: although immersion, bathing and even drowning may be ambiguous motifs in devotional prose they can also express the same spiritual 'dissolving and merging' of German mystical writings.

⁸⁵ 'Meditation B', *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS, O. S. 293 (Oxford: OUP, 1988), pp. 69-84 (p. 78). Rolle's 'appetite to peyne' here is shared by a number of prominent religious writers of the later Middle Ages. Julian of Norwich, for example, asks that she might experience Christ's suffering in the Passion in an extreme instance of affective piety: 'I would that his peynes were my peynes'; *A Revelation of Love*, ed. Glasscoe, p. 5.

⁸⁶ 'Meditations on the Passion, Text 1', in *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), pp. 19-26 (p. 26).

⁸⁷ Rolle continues with a plea which re-iterates this emphasis on softening: 'Whe, Lord, a drope of þi blood to drope on my soule in mynde of þi passyoun may hele al my sore, souple and softe in þi grace þat is so harde'; 'Meditations on the Passion Text 1', p. 26.

his followers to mourn and live in longing but his presence ‘schal fille thee with pyment of his swetnesse and make thee liik drunken’.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, in *The Scale of Perfection*, Hilton encourages readers to clean their souls in preparation for spiritual contemplation, for this will ‘maken hit melten into a wonderful swetnesse of Jhesu Crist’.⁸⁹ Finally, *The Chastising of God’s Children* tells how, at God’s coming, the soul ‘wexiþ liȝt and ioieful’ and ‘al þing þat was hard and sharp and impossible to semynge, anon thei wex softe and swete [...] þe soule is fulfilled wiþ charite and al maner clenness’.⁹⁰ These images of softening, filling up, melting and liquefying in mystical texts find their fullest expression, in devotional prose like *The Doctrine of the Hert* and the *Orcherd of Syon*, in images of bathing in or internalising Christ’s bodily fluids. The permeation and dissolving of boundaries and even the self is central and, crucially, it is articulated in these works through the literary vehicle of water.

CONCLUSIONS

When water represents female speech or, on the opposite end of the scale, the written word of God, devotional authors encourage a strict regulation of the boundaries between the element and the individual souls of their readers. If the water of speech is withheld and internalised within bodily boundaries then it can

⁸⁸ ‘The Prickyng of Love’, in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, ed. Windeatt, p. 177.

⁸⁹ Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Bestul, p. 37. Riehle also identifies a recourse to melting or ‘images of sweet flowing’ in the works of Richard Rolle to express his relationship with God. According to Riehle these contribute to Rolle’s ‘characteristically soft, almost female tone’, *English Mystics*, p. 36.

⁹⁰ *The ‘Chastising of God’s Children’, and the ‘Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God’*, ed. Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pp. 99-100.

transform into a more heavenly liquid, becoming dutiful thoughts turned towards heaven. In *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the metaphorical dove of the reader is urged to 'haunte' clear waters of scripture, to remain near them, gaze into their surface and occupy her thoughts with them. However, no further direct interaction with this water is even hinted at and the reader cannot go directly to the source of these scriptures and drink. Holy wisdom is bestowed, it cannot be seized; only God can transform water of knowledge into the wine of spiritual wisdom:

Knowynge aloon bolneth up the hert into pride, but medle it with charite and thanne turneth it to edificacion. This knowynge aloone is but water, unsavery and cold; and therfore yif thei wold mekeli offer it up to oure Lord and praye Hym of His grace, He schulde with His blissinge turne the water into wyn.⁹¹

The narrator of the devotional dream poem *Pearl* finds himself flung back into the earthly world, away from the delights of heaven and his daughter, when he tries to swim across the river of Christ's wounds; immersion in holy waters can be dangerous, even impossible. Such literary metaphors suggest that readers should occupy positions near water but they need to remain at its side rather than within its depths.

Nevertheless, the union between soul and God is recurrently expressed through imagined interactions with water – most particularly, bathing, immersing and drowning. When water is used in the context of salvation, to represent the saving stuff of sacrifice, the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, the reader is advised to fill herself up with them and sink herself into them, in an attempt to temporarily

⁹¹ Walter Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, ed. Bestul, p. 35.

break down the boundaries between her soul and God. She does not sit beside the wound in Christ's side but instead enters into it, then reddens her lips with speech of his Passion. Water is particularly appropriate for depicting this intimate relationship because, whilst it allows transference, seepage and exchange it remains necessarily separate, not breaking down the boundaries of body and soul completely but allowing them flexibility. The ambivalence towards bathing in medieval medical treatises is transformed into something more positive in these depictions, the blurring of boundaries celebrated rather than managed. It may be beyond the imaginative scope of these male authors to envision a scenario where a female reader can truly immerse herself in the intellectual written word of God. However, by drawing on medical as well as theological understanding of water, they do offer an image of immersive union which encourages their readers to remain patient and dutiful, which promises that doing so will be worth the wait.

Whilst most devotional prose writings seem to advocate a position beside water, close but not too close, metaphors of immersion and bathing are used to articulate imaginative union with Christ. However, it becomes not only less problematic but also absolutely necessary for male authors to prescribe reader-water interactions when water no longer represents the word of God, but is used instead in connection with various spiritual tools on the journey to salvation. Throughout devotional treatises such as the *Orchard of Syon*, *The Doctrine of the Hert*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* water becomes instrumental as a cleaning agent, necessary to tackle and eradicate contamination of the soul. Rather than God's word or sacrifice, references to water in such tropes are used to help

represent the arduous spiritual process of making the soul clean. Exchange and transformation remain central aspects of these more earthly metaphors. In the allegories of cleansing to be considered in the next chapter, female readers must labour diligently with water if they wish to be rewarded with spiritual grace. If they follow the advice of devotional works carefully, the earthly water of drudgery can ultimately be exchanged for, or transformed into, the living water of Christ.

CHAPTER THREE

MAKING THE SOUL CLEAN: WATER, LABOUR AND CONTAMINATION

If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

John 4: 10

In the Gospel of John (4:6-15), a weary Jesus sits down by Jacob's Well to rest.¹ Before long, a Samaritan woman also arrives at the well to draw water, and Jesus says to her: 'Give me to drink'. Instead of granting his request, the unnamed woman expresses surprise that a Jew would even speak to a Samaritan and Jesus makes reference to a different kind of water in reply: 'If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water'. The Samaritan woman reminds him that the well is deep and that he has nothing to draw water out with. However, Jesus' response only serves to make the living water he offers

¹ LV: *Erat autem ibi fons Jacob. Jesus ergo fatigatus ex itinere, sedebat sic supra fontem. Hora erat quasi sexta. Venit mulier de Samaria haurire aquam. Dicit ei Jesus: Da mihi bibere. Discipuli enim ejus abierant in civitatem ut cibos emerent. Dicit ergo ei mulier illa Samaritana: Quomodo tu, Judaeus cum sis, bibere a me possis, quae sum mulier Samaritana? non enim contuntur Judaei Samaritanis. Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: Si scires donum Dei, et quis est qui dicit tibi: Da mihi bibere, tu forsitan petisses ab eo, et dedisset tibi aquam vivam. Dicit ei mulier: Domine, neque in quo haurias habes, et puteus altus est: unde ergo habes aquam vivam? Numquid tu major es patre nostro Jacob, qui dedit nobis puteum, et ipse ex eo bibit, et filii ejus, et pecora ejus? Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: Omnis qui bibit ex aqua hac, sitiet iterum; qui autem biberit ex aqua quam ego dabo ei, non sitiet in aeternum: Sed aqua quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam. Dicit ad eum mulier: Domine, da mihi hanc aquam, ut non sitiam, neque veniam huc haurire.*

seem more enticing. Such water will become ‘a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting’ in whoever drinks it, relieving their thirst forever. This is enough to persuade the Samaritan woman, who then makes a request of her own: ‘Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, not come hither to draw’.

In this water-centric parable real and allegorical water are merged. Christ, the proverbial well of everlasting life, rests by an actual well. He offers the Samaritan woman the metaphorical water of spiritual life as a substitute for the material, everyday water which she needs to draw in order to cook, clean, and live. The travail of daily life is intimately connected with the water from the well, which can relieve such hardship only temporarily. Jesus is weary after a long journey and so seeks water as physical refreshment. The Samaritan woman makes reference to the fact that the well is deep, and therefore difficult to draw from and, significantly, she requests the water of everlasting life not only to quench her thirst but also to put an end to her laborious visits to the well: ‘Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, not come hither to draw’. This superior, allegorical water, offered in exchange for faith, promises not just an end to thirst but also to physical drudgery. Christ’s interaction further reflects everyday life as it takes place with a woman rather than a man and it was usually a woman’s duty to transport and provide water for her family and household, both in the cultural milieu of the Bible and in the Middle Ages, centuries later.² Although the various problems and dangers attendant upon drinking water from a well are not reflected upon in this

² Hanawalt has shown that 37% of women’s accidents in rural England correlated with their responsibility as householders, which often required the sometimes hazardous task of fetching water from nearby wells and streams; see ‘Medieval English Women’, p. 20. See also footnote 42 of the introduction to this thesis.

parable, the everyday nature of the scenario, coupled with the Samaritan woman's reference to hard work, would bring them to mind. Contamination, pollution and drowning only serve to make life more difficult for a stewardess of water.

The element of water, then, is implicated in tasks involving manual labour, particularly those tasks typically assigned to women, and these dangers cause anxiety. However, water also holds all sorts of spiritual promise. This chapter will examine how devotional writings from the later Middle Ages navigate such contradictory aspects of water and present a special kind of exchange: with enough hard work and diligence, earthly water can be transformed into (or exchanged for) the far more desirable water of spiritual refreshment.

POLLUTED WATER, POLLUTED SOULS

Preparing and maintaining a clean soul for the entry of God, making it ready to receive the water of His divine grace, is frequently presented as manual labour in devotional writings.³ It is difficult, time-consuming, and should be repeated

³ The language of cleansing sin with water dates back to the Bible: 'Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin [...] Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow' (Psalm 50: 4, 9). LV: *Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me [...] Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealabor*; 'In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: for the washing of the sinner' (Zachariah 13:1). LV: *In die illa erit fons patens domui David et habitantibus Jerusalem, in ablutionem peccatoris, et menstruatae*; '[l]et us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with clean water' (Hebrews 10:22). LV: *accedamus cum vero corde in plenitudine fidei, asperse corda a conscientia mala, et abluti corpus aqua munda*. This relationship is only strengthened in the later Middle Ages by a renewed emphasis on confession. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 demanded annual confession and communion, enabling Christians to 'maintain a good clean soul'; Yoshikawa 'Heavenly Vision and Psychosomatic Healing: Medical Discourse in

endlessly during life. However, instructions to launder the soul continually are in tension with the awareness that, due to original sin and the frailty of human nature, humans are bound to fail repeatedly at this task during their lives.⁴ As the Gawain-poet observes, ‘[þ]e faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed, / How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe’.⁵ Through the penance enjoined at confession, a penitent cleanses and purifies their soul of sin and misdeeds. However, immediately after confession and absolution they become vulnerable and susceptible to sin once more.⁶ Even sins in a fairly innocuous form, such as idle thoughts, can spot and stain the recently whitened soul.⁷ In spiritual guides such as *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Doctrine of the Hert* and the *Orcherd of Syon*, the spiritual practice of cleansing the soul is brought down to earth in a way readers are able to easily access and understand. The metaphor

Mechtild of Hackeborn’s *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*, in *Medicine, Religion and Gender*, ed. Yoshikawa, pp. 67-85 (p. 72). As Swanson notes, ‘[t]he purification needed to receive communion, to be more than a spectator at the rite of consecration (the status accorded to most of the laity for most of the time) had to be obtained through confession and absolution. By the thirteenth century the consensus was that the absolution was the sacramental act – that Christ working through the priest removed the stain of the confessed sin. Confession, however, was a necessary preliminary to absolution, and to penance, with the whole process being seen as a unity’; *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p. 34. See also Leonard Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology’, in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Heffernan, pp. 30-43. Emphasis on confession and absolution led to an ‘outpouring of works [...] designed to help priests teach their flock’; Lisa H. Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 107; also *The Myroure of Recluses: A Middle English Translation of ‘Speculum Inclusorum’*, ed. Marta Powell Harley (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), p. xx.

⁴ Humans should remember the ‘foul mater’ of earth from which they were created and have humility. God tells Job that the first part of man’s life ‘[c]ontenes mykel wrechednes’ as they are imprisoned in the ‘myrk dungeon’ of their sin and ‘corrupcion’; Richard Morris, *Richard Morris’s ‘Prick of Conscience’: A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text*, ed. Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood, EETS, O. S. 342 (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 13, ll. 385-387 and p. 15, ll. 439-457, respectively.

⁵ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon and Norman Davis, 2nd edition (Oxford: OUP, 1967) p. 67, ll. 2435-2436.

⁶ ‘Confession was integral to the constant process of purification and reparation necessitated by a continuous rejection of sin and acceptance of Christian morality – even though at the same time its repeating acknowledged man’s inability to achieve immunity from sin’; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p. 34.

⁷ *The English Text of the ‘Ancrene Riwle’*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 104. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

of washing is a particularly useful expression of this process, as textiles and bodies are bound to become dirty once they come into contact with the outside world, no matter how many times they are washed.⁸ Even anchorites, who have renounced the world, must wash themselves, their garments and other materials on a regular basis.⁹ Such analogies make the task seem achievable, presenting it as nothing more than a singular sort of manual labour, difficult but essential to everyday life. Simultaneously, however, they impress upon the reader the importance of repetitive cleansing. Readers cannot preserve their soul's cleanness indefinitely, just as the integrity of a white cloth cannot be preserved once it is exposed to its environment.

Central to such cleansing tropes is the element of water, the most commonplace detergent. The cultural landscape of water in the later Middle Ages, which can be pieced together both from historical evidence of everyday realities and from different sorts of texts which make reference to water, may be used to shed light on such literary metaphors of cleaning. To this end, the following analysis will not only draw on research into water and waste management in the Middle Ages but it will also make use of different literary genres. Two particularly helpful resources will be a unique sermon series, *Jacob's Well*, and a short lyric by Lydgate, the

⁸ It is a recurring theme in devotional prose, used ostensibly to deter spiritual complacency, that the more virtuous the individual, the harder the devil will assail their soul with temptation. One famous example of this can be found in *Ancrene Wisse*, when the author warns his reader that the higher the proverbial tower of virtue, the stronger the winds of the devil's suggestion will be: 'For so þe hul is herre . so þe wynd is herre þer on. ¶ So þe hul is herre of holy lyf and of heiz . so þe fendus puffes . þe wyndes of fondinges . beoþ þeron þe more', p. 204.

⁹ As Robertson points out, laundering would have been a familiar task to anchoresses; *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*, p. 29. Texts such as *Ancrene Wisse* follow monastic rules in making clear that a certain standard of hygiene was expected of religious women. The author assumes that his readers wash their hands once or twice a day (p. 115) and informs them that 'þe wassching withouten . bi tokneþ þe wassching of soule with Inne', p. 118.

‘Tretise for Lauandres’. *Jacob’s Well*, dated approximately to the late fifteenth century, consists of ninety-five sermons which use the parable of Jacob’s Well (John 4:7-15) as an allegorical framework.¹⁰ The series is therefore contemporary with the devotional texts this thesis spotlights. Moreover, it engages with both real and metaphorical water – more specifically, the labour involved with real, earthly water and the spiritual grace metaphorical water can offer. *Jacob’s Well* has received little dedicated attention from critics, partly because there is no full edition of the series and also because it has been dismissed as orthodox and even uninspiring.¹¹ Clinton Atchley, however, encourages readers to look again at the sermons, describing the series as ‘unique’ and ‘the work of a clear-sighted, well-organized mind’.¹² Internal evidence suggests that the author was a parish priest in charge of a rural population, an educated man with knowledge of Latin, but one who was more preoccupied with stirring his listeners to devotion than showing off his

¹⁰ The only published edition of *Jacob’s Well* is incomplete, including only the first 50 sermons: *Jacob’s Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man’s Conscience*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS, O. S. 115, 1 (London: Trübner, 1990). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. Clinton P. E. Atchley transcribes all 95 sermons in *The “Wose” of Jacob’s Well: Text and Context* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1998) and Leo Carruthers has published the final chapter of the series in “‘And what schall be the ende’: An Edition of the Final Chapter of *Jacob’s Well*, *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), 289-297. The work creates a sustained and thorough allegory of cleansing a soul, spanning 95 sermons. It has one unique manuscript witness, London, Salisbury Cathedral, MS 103, and although this perhaps suggests that the sermon series was not widely known or circulated, internal evidence from the text implies a relatively large, dedicated (albeit site specific) and immediate audience. Its modern editor, Brandeis, assumes that the manuscript was originally copied in Salisbury Cathedral, where it has remained ever since, p. x. L. M. Carruthers challenges his assumption and proposes a Suffolk provenance, specifically somewhere between Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich (although, he hastily adds, not these towns themselves); ‘Where did *Jacob’s Well* come from?: The Provenance and Dialect of MS Salisbury Cathedral 103’, *English Studies*, 71 (1990), 335-340 (p. 338). Atchley largely agrees with Carruthers with regard to provenance, but suggests that dialectal evidence is not conclusive enough to pinpoint a specific town and certainly not substantial enough to rule out Bury St Edmunds as a possible location; Atchley, ‘The Audience of *Jacob’s Well*: Problems of Interpretation’, Henderson State University Online (November 2002) <<http://www.hsu.edu/interior2.aspx?id=6225>> [18.01.16].

¹¹ Watson somewhat dismisses *Jacob’s Well* as ‘a simpler work of pastoralia’; ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England’, p. 833.

¹² Atchley, *The “Wose” of Jacob’s Well*, p. 18.

intellectual ability.¹³ In terms of audience, most critics agree that the series is aimed at a mixed congregation of clerical and lay people; however, the specifics are more difficult to ascertain. Where Leo Carruthers imagines an audience ‘largely composed of that pious middle class found in England at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, a class to which Chaucer himself belonged’, Atchley uses rigorous analysis of the language of *Jacob’s Well* to argue more convincingly for a mixed but predominantly lower class group, including both lay and clerical, male and female.¹⁴ The sermon series survives in only one unique manuscript, so it cannot be argued that the series enjoyed a widespread reception. Nevertheless, as these sermons are markedly concerned with the dangers attendant on water and the spiritual grace it can afford, the series offers significant insight into the cultural landscape of water in the later Middle Ages.¹⁵

Lydgate’s short poem, the ‘Tretise for Lauandres’ (Treatise for Lauandresses) is an entirely different kind of text, addressing an unnamed lady’s domestic servants.¹⁶

However, like *Jacob’s Well* it does offer advice about cleaning, this time specifically

¹³ Atchley, *The “Wose” of Jacob’s Well*, p. 28.

¹⁴ Leo Carruthers, “‘Know Thyself’: Criticism, Reform and the Audience of *Jacob’s Well*”, in *Proceedings of International Symposia at Kalamazoo and New York*, ed. Jacqueline Hammesse et al. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d’Études Médiévales, 1998), pp. 219-240 (p. 240) and Atchley, *The “Wose” of Jacob’s Well*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁵ Water does of course appear in a number of other sermons as well as *Jacob’s Well*. For example, London, British Library, MS Harley 2268 references the filthy vessel of the soul in need of cleaning; see *Four Middle English Sermons edited from British Library MS Harley 2268*, ed. Veronica O’Mara, Middle English Texts, 33 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2002), p. 99, l. 899. However, consultation of O’Mara’s repertorium of prose sermons makes clear that *Jacob’s Well* contains not only the most individual instances of water references of any other sermon, but also that it includes the most sustained water-inclusive allegory; see *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, ed. O’Mara and Suzanne Paul, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

¹⁶ See John Lydgate, ‘A Tretise for Lauandres’, in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate vol. 2*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS, O. S. 192 (London: OUP, 1934; repr. 1961), p. 723. All further references will be to the line numbers of this edition and will be given in the text.

addressed to women. It reminds laundresses of their obligations to their mistress and her clothes, lists the various luxury fabrics under their care, and then offers advice about how to remove certain stains and spots from such fabrics, summed up in the pithy Latin maxim: ‘Vinum lacta lava oleumque licore fabarum / Incaustum vino cetera mundat aqua’ (ll. 15-16) (Milk for wine, lye for oil, wine for ink, and water for everything else).¹⁷ Like *Jacob’s Well*, this poem has fallen victim to critical disdain, as the title for Maura Nolan’s article about it (‘Lydgate’s Worst Poem’) indicates.¹⁸ However, in recent years critics, including Nolan herself, have drawn attention to its potential for figurative reading and the tension it presents between the earthly and the spiritual.¹⁹ The metaphorical possibility of the ‘Tretise’, its emphasis on water as a cleansing agent, and its understanding of the labour required for removing either real or spiritual stains, make it a useful tool for comparison in a discussion about devotional metaphors of cleaning. The ‘Tretise’s’ engagement with medieval understanding of women as inherently unclean makes the poem especially relevant to discussion about devotional works that are addressed to female audiences.

¹⁷ A full version of the ‘Tretise’ is only extant in one manuscript: the Findern manuscript (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. 1. 6, leaf 141). However, variations of it appear in at least six. All of these variations are shorter and are frequently accompanied by the Latin dictum cited here. Separate versions of this Latin hexameter couplet appear in two other manuscripts, London, British Library, MS Harley 3528 and London, British Library, MS Royal 17 B.XLVII.

¹⁸ Maura Nolan, ‘Lydgate’s Worst Poem’, in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 71-88. For a long time, Lydgate’s poem has had a dubious reputation amongst scholars; Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 5.

¹⁹ Nolan, ‘Lydgate’s Worst Poem’, and Anthony Bale, ‘A Norfolk Gentlewoman and Lydgatian patronage: Lady Sibylle Boys and her cultural environment’, *Medium Aevum*, 78 (2009), 394-413.

Works of this kind, however disparate in genre, reveal how uses and representations of water in devotional prose are informed by common cultural tropes as well as by a common awareness of the element's contradictory values. As a sacramental element, water is imbued with a special significance in a way that many other parts of chores and tasks, such as vegetables that need peeling or domestic animals that need feeding, are not. Nevertheless, as this thesis has argued, water is also an ambiguous element, slippery and difficult to pin down in terms of meaning.²⁰ As well as being an expressive Christian symbol, water possessed less positive connotations in the medieval period – of uneasy changeability, femininity, susceptibility to contamination, and dangers such as flooding and drowning.²¹ Regardless of its potential for multifarious meaning, water is absolutely essential to human life and features in many of the tasks that should be carried out on a regular basis: drinking, preparing and cooking meals, washing.

In a meticulous study of communal health in England, Carole Rawcliffe dispels various myths about late medieval attitudes towards hygiene as well as water-and-waste management, challenging traditional views by arguing that 'the purity as well as the availability of water mattered to the rulers and residents of late medieval English towns'. This is made evident, she suggests, not only by expenditure on aqueducts, conduits, dikes, wells and gutters but also by 'concerted efforts' to

²⁰ See chapter one of this thesis, which considers treatment of water in religious, medical and scientific writings.

²¹ For dangers of drowning in the late Middle Ages see footnote 74 in chapter two of this thesis.

maintain such structures once they had been built.²² Whilst magistrates were often forced to ‘accept an uneasy compromise with the practitioners of noxious crafts and industries’, they still attempted to regulate and contain such industries as best they could.²³ And it was not only authority figures that made a concerted effort to tackle filth. Rawcliffe also draws attention to the numerous complaints from urban dwellers about pollution, proving they were not prepared to simply put up with dirty streets and contaminated water sources.²⁴ In so doing she confronts the common conception that society in the later Middle Ages enjoyed languishing in their own filth, or at the very least unquestioningly tolerated it. Nevertheless, the ‘uneasy’ compromises she refers to meant that, despite attempts to control their cleanliness, streets in the Middle Ages often ran red with the waste from butchers and tanners, particularly in London.²⁵ Wells could all too easily become contaminated and the banks of the river Thames became lined with dangerous refuse.²⁶ Systems of waste and water management – particularly when considered

²² Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 228. As a specific example, Rawcliffe cites Norwich, where treasurers and chamberlains ‘shouldered a significant part of the cost of scouring and repairing the city’s many public conveniences, culverts, sewers, and freshwater streams’ (p. 186). In chapter 15 of *The Story of Water Supply* (Oxford: OUP, 1946), F. W. Robins also stresses that upkeep of gutters, wells and watercourses rapidly became an official priority. In the port of Lyme ‘all men of the vill’ were fined 12d if they didn’t scour their gutters; Dorset Record Office, DC/LR B₁/2, nos 3, 9, 13. In Bridgwater, residents who didn’t cover their gutters were presented in front of juries; T. B. Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Archives, 1200-377* ([n. p.]: Somerset Record Society, 1971), nos 317-26, 328-30, 332.

²³ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 228. She also reminds readers that the slaughtering of animals anywhere in London was prohibited during the plague years of 1361 and 1369, due to protests from Franciscan communities and other persons of note (p. 197).

²⁴ Philip E. Jones records how public indignation from residents near St Nicholas’s Shambles (Newgate, London) about the ‘uncle and putrified waters’, contaminated with waste from butchering – ‘blod and other fouler thynges’- resulted in a petition to parliament; *The Butchers of London* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), p. 81.

²⁵ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 198

²⁶ Social historian Bronislaw Geremek identifies a relationship in Paris between these watery margins and the margins of society: ‘The basic principle of medieval regulation was to designate certain areas to prostitution, either inside or outside the walls, and limit vice strictly to them. The aim of this sort of social hygiene was to locate these places well away from burgess or seigneurial residences, in poor districts, often close to the river’; *The Margins of Society*, p. 87.

in comparison with those in affluent monasteries and religious houses – left a lot to be desired in the rest of England.

Rawcliffe also challenges the truism that only the poor drank water in the Middle Ages and even then, only when they absolutely had to.²⁷ She recognises the ‘widespread awareness [by 1347] that contaminated water, or food prepared in it, might cause illness or even death’ and concedes that water was used in medieval households predominantly for cooking, brewing and washing rather than for immediate consumption. Nevertheless, she also reminds readers that the poor sometimes had little choice in the matter. Further, medical advice, which the rich may well have heeded, recommended drinking water to combat the effects of excessive heat and to help nourishment flow more easily around the body.²⁸ A picture of a society engaged in an on-going battle with dirt and pollution therefore emerges from Rawcliffe’s research. Medieval authorities were not naïve enough to believe this battle could be won quickly or easily and nor was society; however, the evidence suggests that, despite this, both struggled to clean up their streets and water sources.

This constant threat of contamination, which could be both transmitted and counteracted by water, appealed to medieval writers as a vehicle for describing

²⁷ In Chaucer’s ‘The Clerk’s Tale’, Griselda’s virtue, rather than her poverty, is emphasized by her consumption of water: ‘Wel ofter of the welle than of the tonne / She drank, and for she wolde vertu plesse, / She knew wel labour but noon ydel ese’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, pp. 138-153 (p. 140, ll. 215-7).

²⁸ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 195. Here Rawcliffe challenges the assertions made by Holt in ‘Medieval England’s Water-Related Technologies’, p. 98.

spiritual contamination, the persistent pollution that tarnishes a soul.²⁹ In such metaphors the stain of sin is no longer figured as an abstract, all-encompassing corruption but becomes, very specifically, the everyday dirt or pollution that confronts humankind on a daily basis. The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* warns his readers that, although mere cogitations cannot necessarily hurt their pure, white, absolved souls, they still have the power to fleck them with black marks, which will mar the soul until the next confession:

Cogitaciuns beoþ fleoinde þou3tes þat ne lasteþ not. And þeos
as seint Bernard seiþ. ne hurteþ not þe soule. Ac þauh a bi
spoteþ hire . with hire blake spekkes so. þat nis heo nou3t worþ .
þat Iesu hire lemmon. þat is al feir bi cluppe hire . ne cusse hire .
er heo beo I.wasschen (p. 104).

In the later *Doctrine of the Hert*, confession is described as ‘puttyng ought filthes of the hous of oure herte be the dore of the mowth with þe brome of þe tunge’ (p. 7) and the treatise, in a similar vein to the *Ancrene Wisse*, warns its reader that dark spots show up more clearly on a clean, pure and chaste soul than on a dirty one: ‘For right as in a white clothe a spot of filthe aperith sonner þan in anoþer colourid cloth, right so in a chast mayde a spot of synne semeth more fouler þan in anoþer commune synner’ (p. 29). All of these filths need to be dealt with using water. The cloth of the soul must be washed as soon as it is tainted; the filth of the house must be tackled with cleansing water (as well as a broom), as any good housekeeper will know.³⁰

²⁹ Morrison offers a particularly lively and comprehensive study of the long-standing association between literal and metaphorical filth, used by Church Fathers to control and shame the laity; *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages*, pp. 25-44.

³⁰ Such analogies tap into the paradox developed to discourage spiritual complacency, an example of which is referenced in footnote 8 of the current chapter. The more virtuous an individual, the more shocking and worthy of condemnation their sins will be if they give into temptation.

The analogies go beyond dirty clothes and houses that need sprucing up. Polluted water itself is often employed as a particularly apt metaphor. Walter Hilton compares stirrings of hatred, melancholy and anger with water running out from ‘the sprynge of a stynkande welle’³¹ and *Jacob’s Well* turns this evocative trope into an extended analogy spanning hundreds of pages, comparing in almost obsessive detail the process of cleaning a soul with that of building a well: ‘ȝyf þou haue a pytt or a welle þat is depe wyth corrupt watyr’ the author warns, ‘then stynkyng & infecte, of which watyr ȝif þou drynke, or vse, þou schalt be enpoysonyd; þe nedyth, for salvacyoun of þi lyif, to scope out þat corrupte watyr’.³² Corrupt water, which must be cast out of a site before an adequate well can be built, becomes a metaphor for the lingering sins carried within the hearts of those listening to the sermons compiled in *Jacob’s Well*. Again, the sense of repetitive action and the need for maintenance are integral to the analogy: as most people would have been well aware, water sources such as wells could all too easily become re-contaminated once built.³³ In Aelred of Rievaulx’s *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, corrupt water becomes an actual flood with the power to drown a sinful man’s soul: ‘and so metyngge to-gydere biter swetnesse of charnel affeccoun and vnclennesse of fleshly concupiscence, þey rauysschede me syke and feble age of childhood in-to manye foule vices, and *dreynte my wrecchede soule in þe stynkynde flood of synne*’ (p. 53, italics added). Literary tropes of water thus engage with augmented

³¹ Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Bestul, p. 46.

³² *Jacob’s Well*, ed. Brandeis, p. 5.

³³ See, for example, Keene, ‘Issues of Water in Medieval London’, p. 172 and Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 195.

knowledge about, and fear of, contamination and disease, which society was increasingly aware could both be expunged *and* carried by water.

Despite widespread acceptance that the battle against filth was one worth fighting, the ambiguous nature of laundering, a smaller scale labour that engaged in this battle on a more personal, intimate level is hinted at in literature of the time and has been uncovered by cultural historians of the period. The metaphorical possibilities of Lydgate's 'Tretise for Lauandres' have been identified by Nolan and Bale. As well as offering practical instructions on how to eradicate stains from cloth, the 'Tretise' has the potential to function as moral and spiritual advice to a general audience, reiterating that Christians need to keep both their bodies and their souls clean. However, the fact that the verse is addressed to women, specifically laundresses, adds a gendered angle to the poem's conception of cleanness. Bale argues, for example, that '[t]he register of the 'Tretise' is [...] not without ironic possibilities: the sentiments of praise are not far removed from the sentiments of antifeminist slander, of popular images of the laundress as a mistress or whore'.³⁴ Nolan focuses on the word 'lavander' itself, which she describes as 'a remarkably flexible word whose range of meaning extends from the literal ('laundresses') to the metaphorical ('spiritual cleanness') to the colloquial ('prostitutes')'.³⁵

On the one hand, laundresses became more necessary, and consequently their work more highly valued, in the later Middle Ages, in light of increased knowledge

³⁴ Bale, 'A Norfolk Gentlewoman', p. 268.

³⁵ Nolan, 'Lydgate's Worst Poem', p. 86.

about disease and the importance of personal hygiene. As members of a profession, laundresses were as necessary to religious institutions as to royal households. However, laundresses and sexual license seemed to be synonymous for many authors, including Chaucer, because the usually female practitioners enjoyed unusual freedom of movement, occupied a quintessentially female and ‘gossipy’ space and possessed troubling associations with dirt, poverty and the disease their practice, ironically, helped to control.³⁶ Using water to battle filth and eradicate contamination, if only temporarily, was a necessary part of medieval life. However, the uneasy associations between laundresses and sexual license metaphorically stained women who made a living by removing *actual* stains from the dirty laundry of others. In Lydgate’s verse, then, women, and specifically laundresses, are targeted as the more unclean members of society.

Although this particular association between women and cleaning can also be identified in devotional literature, any traces of ambiguity attached to the act of cleaning and laundering seems to be wiped clean in them. This is a notable absence that will be considered in the second part of this chapter. However, the parallels between the daily medieval struggle with filth and the soul’s perpetual battle with the contamination of sin are made clear. The following section will consider how such tropes are made manifest in three particularly significant works, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, the *Orchard of Syon*, and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, with the sermon series *Jacob’s Well* utilised as an instrument for comparison. Whilst all four treatises express ideas of sin through the language of cleansing and

³⁶ See Rawcliffe, ‘A Marginal Occupation?’, pp. 147-169.

contamination, it will be shown that the discourse is inflected differently in relation to women.

LAYING CLEAN FOUNDATIONS IN *THE ABBEY OF THE HOLY GHOST*

The late fourteenth-century *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* asks its readers to imagine their heart is an abbey that must be built, prepared and (significantly) maintained for God. Whilst the allegorical river in this treatise has already been considered in the previous chapter³⁷, it is also important to note how *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* stresses the importance of building on a clean foundation:

Now behoveth it thane at the begynnyng that the place of the concyence be clenched thorow wyse clensynge. The Holy Goost schal senden ii maydens wel connende: that on is cleped Ryght-wysnesse; that other is cleped Love-of-clennesse. These two schul casten out fro the concyence and fro the herte all maner filthes of foule thoutes and foule yernygys. Whanne the place of concyence is wel iclensed, than schal the fundament be made large and dep (p. 39).

Before the abbey can be built, ‘all maner filthes’ (foul thoughts and yearnings) should be ‘casten out’ of the building site (the soul). Only then does the dual site of the heart and the conscience receive its spiritual planning permission.

³⁷ For a discussion of the allegorical river in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and its parallels with rivers at real religious sites, see pp. 83-87 in chapter two of this thesis.

The word ‘casten’ is also used repeatedly in *Jacob’s Well*. The anonymous author sets out his monumental task in the very first sermon: man is an oozy pit of corrupt water and sin and the author’s job as priest is to help his audience transform this pit into a clean, functional well, specifically a replica of the biblical Jacob’s Well. In an expansion of the biblical narrative, here Jesus can quench his thirst without accidentally consuming corrupt or polluted water. The medieval narrator thus transplants his allegory into contemporary medieval England. He fleshes out his analogy with a great deal of specific terminology and detail but never loses sight of the metaphorical importance of the well under construction. At each step of the actual building process he draws an analogy with one of the stages involved in the metaphorical process of cleansing the soul. One particularly lengthy item concerns the ‘casting out’ of filth, which allows the well to be built on a ‘syker’ foundation (p. 75). At the beginning of the text the author warns that,

Be dedly watyr of curse entryth 3ou be 3oure v. wyttes. 3oure soule, in þis pytt of corrupte watyr, nedyth to cry in-to god [...] Saue me, þou god, fro drenching, for watrys of cursyng han entryd my pytt to my soule. what þise watris of cursyng be, & how it muste be *cast out* of 3oure pytt with a scope of penaunce, þis schal be my labour to teche 3ou here-after (p. 2, italics added).

He further instructs his reader: ‘3yf þou haue a pytt or a welle þat is depe wyth corrupt watyr, stynkyng & infecte, of which watyr 3if þou drynke, or vse, þou schalt be enpoysonyd; þe nedyth, for salvacyoun of þi lyif, to *scope out* þat corrupte watyr’ (p. 5, italics added).

Both *Jacob's Well* and *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* thus clearly stress the importance of a clean foundation and they both offer clean water as a reward for any successful participant in the process, in exchange for the filth that has been cast out. Once he has laid down guidelines for clearing the site, the author of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* informs the reader that their abbey shall be set on a good river that is 'clene and syker and ryche of alle goodes and marchaundyses' (p. 90). This river is then compared to the river of tears that cleanses God's own city for 'as the holy man seyn that the fylthe of synne departeth ryches of vertues and of alle goode thewes' (p. 90). A diligent listener of *Jacob's Well* is eventually rewarded (if they have followed the many steps in the process correctly) with discovering 'a spryng of grace' (p. 238) that flows directly from God and helps the devout to 'swymmyn in-to þe hyze hyll of hevene' (p. 68). This medieval handling of the Jacob's Well story therefore makes explicit the implicit exchange in verses 6-15 of the Gospel of John 4. Hard work, associated with earthly water, can lead to, and eventually be substituted by, a spring of grace.

Despite the obvious similarities between these two analogies, both draw on water to illustrate very different aspects of medieval daily life. Nicole Rice, in her analysis of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, summarises the function of the treatise, as described in the work's prologue: it 'translate[s] monastic models of regulation, stability, and enclosure for lay readers, while carefully discouraging the detachment from the world that actual cloistered life (at least in its ideal form)

would entail'.³⁸ The work is explicitly translated for those who 'wolde ben in religioun but they mowe nowt for poverte or for awe or for drede of her kyn or for bond of maryage' (p. 89), offering readers an imaginative access to a religious vocation. More implicitly it underlines the divide, which certainly could not be crossed physically, between lay people and *actual* religious. By following the original author's analogy of an abbey, the translator encourages the reader to invent and visualize their own religious institution whilst at the same time delineating a certain distance between the individual and their abbey; the reader looks on as the abbey, which represents a religious vocation unattainable for most lay readers, is constructed before the eyes of their imagination, without their direct involvement.³⁹ The significant points of departure between monastic water systems and those of the laity have been discussed already in this thesis, but suffice to say that they were far more superior for the religious.⁴⁰ The ebb and flow of the Thames may well have been utilised as a 'powerful cleanser' but, as Derek Keene puts it, '[i]n the city clear streams quickly became clouded and undrinkable, and blocked by the filth which it was also their purpose to carry away'.⁴¹

³⁸ Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 17.

³⁹ Even the 'good river' of the imagined Abbey, with its constant cleansing function, would have been a desire rather than a reality for most readers, except the very rich. Rothauser argues that after the plague, when filth-strewn streets and waste management became a larger civic concern, 'it is not entirely surprising [...] that authors [...] echo this civic concern for filth, contagion and cleanliness'. She analyses the heavenly stream in the fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Pearl* in this light, suggesting that the river, ceaselessly 'sluicing' the already spotless streets, indicates a very real yearning after just this sort of cleanliness in late medieval urban spaces. See "'A reuer...brighter þen bope the sunne and mone'", in *Urban Space*, ed. Classen, pp. 266-271.

⁴⁰ See, Holt, 'Medieval England's Water-Related Technologies', pp. 88-90 and Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 177. See also chapter two of this thesis, which discusses the importance of water in religious institutions (pp. 83-87).

⁴¹ Keene, 'Issues of Water in Medieval London', p. 168 and p. 179. For more consideration of water in the countryside, specifically, see Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*.

Whereas the translator of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* offers an imaginative haven which in reality is only accessible to religious, the author of *Jacob's Well* thus engages with the everyday problems of the laity and offers a realistic solution for them.⁴² One possible explanation for this lies with the author of *Jacob's Well*, who is ostensibly concerned to communicate an accessible message, interspersing detailed expansion on his analogy with absorbing, humorous and entertaining *exempla* in order to retain his audience's attention.⁴³ However, it is noteworthy, and certainly more than a coincidence, that *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, designed for female readers, does not expect the same interactivity in spiritual construction as *Jacob's Well*, which is targeted at a mixed but probably largely male audience. Where the audience of *Jacob's Well* actively partake in the construction process, female readers passively observe a fantasy form in their mind's eye. Nevertheless, both works emphasise the importance of building a religious life or a devoted soul

⁴² Wells were a necessary and usually safe source of drinking water but they could also harbour corruptions and infections. Latrines or cesspits must often have been close to wells in backyards, and so would sometimes have polluted the water supply'; Keene, 'Issues of Water in Medieval London', p. 172. Wells could become 'a source of congestion, spillages and dirt' when used by laundresses and noxious waste from the carcasses tanners washed could easily seep into neighbouring wells, despite attempts to regulate the practice; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 198 and p. 207, respectively. This potential for contamination heightened existing anxieties about water that had been in prolonged contact with the earth, which date back to the hierarchies of water developed by Rome's imperial writers. See Squatriti, *Water and Society*, p. 37. According to Trevisa, '3if the grounde is swete and pure, þe water shal also be swete and pure' and vice versa. Thus, if well water sits in prolonged contact with 'corrupte and viciouse' earth, then 'alle þat rennep oute' of the well (the water) will be 'viciouse and corrupte', too. See Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour, p. 650. See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 556. Various measures and procedures were put in place to try and maintain the integrity of wells and the water they housed; during the later Middle Ages, for example, more permanent stone-lined shafts started to be used in the construction of wells, as a replacement for timber; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 215. It is precisely this method, significantly, which is outlined in *Jacob's Well*.

⁴³ In the preface to his edition of the first part, Brandeis notes that 'the short stories and anecdotes attached to the end of each chapter' were probably included 'with an intention to rouse the interest of the congregation or to make up for the dullness of the sermon' (p. ix). See also Atchley, *The "Wose" of Jacob's Well*, pp. 30-31.

on a sure, and clean foundation, and ask readers to beware the contamination that threatens such a foundation, even after it has been prepared.

FILTHY FLOODS IN *A RULE OF LIFE FOR A RECLUSE* AND THE *ORCHERD OF SYON*

The overwhelming flood that can muddy or wash away a cleansed foundation and in so doing figuratively drown a sinning soul is another recurring motif in devotional prose that draws on cultural anxieties. Such tropes are certainly not unique to the late Middle Ages. As Rawcliffe observes: ‘the equation of sin with the miasmatic contents of drains, pits and sewers gave rise to the type of arresting metaphor beloved of medieval preachers’.⁴⁴ However, flood-as-metaphor became more focused with the increase of knowledge (and anxiety) about the pollution and contamination such floods can bring. Archbishop Arundel, for example, spoke of the infected waters of Lollardy in Oxford, at a time when Oxford was itself being blighted by floods.⁴⁵ This not only reveals a direct correlation between reality and analogy, but it also indicates the aplomb with which religious authors and speakers could mine current problems and use them to add weight – and a frisson of fear – to their message.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 193. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), expresses the futility of a sinner’s attempts at penance by comparing them to attempts to prevent a filthy flood, which can contaminate an entire house; *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 21: *La Conversion*, ed. J. Leclercq, H. Rochais, and C. H. Talbot, trans. F. Callerot, J. Miethke, and C. Jacquinod (Paris: Cerf, 2000), p. 344.

⁴⁵ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins, 3 vols (London: R. Gosling, 1737), III, 318.

⁴⁶ In a much clumsier, modern day version, a member of the UKIP party caused a social media backlash (and general condemnation) in recent years, when he suggested that new laws allowing

Although the floods in the *Orchard of Syon* have already been considered in terms of delineating spiritual progression, an examination of the role of pollution within them is also revealing. The use of flooding as an analogy for sin is particularly terrifying as the soul seems to lose its agency and is overwhelmed by external, restless waters that cannot be controlled.⁴⁷ One possible result of flooding is drowning, which only enhances the flood's impetus as a didactic image. In the *Orchard of Syon*, wicked souls are 'walowid in þe flood þat lediþ to þe watir of deep' (p. 115). They have chosen to sin, and in so doing have allowed their souls to be drowned: '3it as foolis þei hadden leuer be drenched in wrechchidnesse and filþe of þis world' (p. 191). The words 'flood' and 'drenched' are used repeatedly in the *Orchard of Syon* and, although some souls manage to rise up out of the 'greet flood of temptaciouns', the majority are overcome. In the late fourteenth-century Vernon translation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, tropes of flooding are used to illustrate the sins of Aelred of Rievaulx's youth before his conversion to Christ:

Spekyngge and styryngge of wycked companye hadde hard
ywrount vppon me, þe wyche in swete drynke of fleshly loue 3aue
me puousoun of fowl vnclennesse; and so metyngge to-gydere
biter swetnesse of charnel affeccoun and vnclennesse of fleshly
concupiscence, þey rauysshede me syke and feble age of

homosexual couples to marry had caused the devastating floods of 2014. Oxfordshire councillor David Silvester was suspended in January 2014, after writing to a local paper claiming that Oxford had been 'beset by storms' because of David Cameron's decision to change marriage laws in support of homosexual couples; BBC News Oxfordshire, 'UKIP councillor blames storms and floods on gay marriage' (January 2014) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-25793358>> [11.04.16].

⁴⁷ In nearly all the texts that use flood imagery, surviving said floods *is* presented as a possibility, however. In *The Orchard of Syon* souls are described as pulling themselves up out of the earthly flood towards the 'siker' bridge of Christ, see, for example, p. 116. In the Vernon version of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* Aelred does, eventually, emerge from the turbulent sea (sometimes described as a flood) on p. 54. Nevertheless, this can usually only occur after significant endeavour, trial and tribulation.

childhood in-to manye foule vices, and dreynte my wrecchede soule in þe stynkynde flood of synne (pp. 52-53).

Aelred is ‘cast and possyd in-to alle maner fulþe’, drowned in the stinking flood of sin (p. 53).

When describing filthy floods, the *Orcherd of Syon* and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* differ in their treatment of agency. Where Aelred is ‘cast and possyd’ in the ‘stynkynde flood’, the souls in the *Orcherd of Syon* choose to eschew the ‘siker’ bridge of Christ – they would ‘leuer’ wallow in the flood of earthly sin (p. 191). As with *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *Jacob’s Well*, these distinctions map on to gender. The author of the *Orcherd of Syon* warns his female readers against spiritual pollution by painting a picture in which female souls that are swept up in filthy floods are culpable. In contrast, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* depicts the original male author (Aelred) as a helpless victim, making the decision to remove masculine agency in order to reduce masculine blame. Nevertheless, both texts are united in their presentation of a flood that is not only dangerous in its power as a large body of water, but also polluted and filthy. In the above extract Aelred’s translator employs a plethora of words that evoke pollution and dirt: ‘puyson of fowl vnclennesse’, ‘vnclennesse of fleshly concupiscence’, ‘foule vices’ and, most significantly, ‘þe stynkynde flood of synne’ in which his soul can be ‘dreynte’. In the *Orcherd of Syon*, the translator repeatedly informs readers that the flood of sin is made up of ‘filþe of þis world’ and similar language is employed in *Jacob’s Well*, where the author refers to the biblical flood of Noah: ‘þe watyr of noes flood was so depe & high, þat it flowyd abouyn ony hill in erthe, & drenchyd al þe world,

saaf a few soulys' (p. 6). This is further developed in the sermon series through a comparison of destructive water, which sweeps away sin, with *actual* sin which itself becomes a flood. When the deadly 'watyr of curse' (sin) enters the body, the soul must cry out to God: 'Saue me, þou god, fro drenching, for watrys of cursyng han entryd my pytt to my soule' (p. 2). This flood is 'dedly' as well as cursed; it is stinking and infected.

Such images clearly derive in part from biblical floods, often referenced in devotional literature of the later Middle Ages.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, these particular figures of flooding are also in dialogue with specific associations and fears of flooding in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely contaminated floods. Keene points out that '[i]n controlling the running water within [London] the authorities were primarily concerned to maintain the flow, and so prevent flooding and avoid pollution and smell'.⁴⁹ Rawcliffe emphasises the relationship between floods and pollution in her own study; open trenches and canals were vulnerable to floods, pollution and blockages and 'flooding, itself a recurrent hazard of late medieval life, was directly associated in the medical literature of the

⁴⁸ Floods are first mentioned in Genesis, when God tells Noah 'Behold I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, under heaven. All things that are in the earth shall be consumed' (6:17); LV: *Ecce ego adducam aquas diluuii super terram, ut interficiam omnem carnem, in qua spiritus vitae est subter caelum: universa quae in terra sunt, consumentur.* The Red Sea is also described as a 'flood' in Psalms 66:6. Jonah laments to God 'And thou hast cast me forth into the deep in the heart of the sea, and a flood hath compassed me' (Jonah 2:4); LV: *Et projecisti me in profundum in corde maris, et flumen circumdedit me: omnes gurgites tui, et fluctus tui super me transierunt.* In the New Testament, Jesus uses a flood as part of a parable: 'Every one that cometh to me, and heareth my words, and doth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like to a man building a house, who digged deep, and laid the foundation upon a rock. And when a flood came, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and it could not shake it; for it was founded on a rock' (Luke 6: 47-48); LV: *Omnis qui venit ad me, et audit sermones meos, et facit eos, ostendam vobis cui similis sit: similis est homini aedificanti domum, qui fodit in altum, et posuit fundamentum super petram: inundatione autem facta, illisum est flumen domui illi, et non potuit eam movere: fundata enim erat super petram.*

⁴⁹ Keene, 'Issues of Water in Medieval London', p. 168.

period with stagnant water and pools of rotting debris that bred the miasmas of plague and other epidemic diseases'.⁵⁰ The assumed dangers of flooding are only exacerbated by the synonymous relationship between floods and pollution in certain strands of medieval thought, according to Rawcliffe's analysis.⁵¹

Anxieties about both polluted water sources, which could contaminate domestic water and cause illness and disease, and polluted floods, which could overwhelm an individual, are driving forces in the analogies discussed thus far. However, it is clear that not all of the writings under discussion use these anxieties in exactly the same way. Having identified the common cultural tropes shared by many devotional works, this chapter will now reveal the specific *functions* of such tropes in the spiritual schemas of individual works. It will show how quotidian water-inclusive labour is used as a metaphorical tool, to encourage meditation on Christ. By recalling tropes of water, readers should be able to focus their minds and prevent sinful distractions from contaminating the soul.

LATHER, RINSE, REPEAT⁵²

⁵⁰ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 181 and p. 188. See also Christopher Bonfield, 'Medical Advice and Public Health: Contextualizing the Supply and Regulation of Water in Medieval London and King's Lynn', *Poetica*, 72 (2009), 1-20 and Joseph Pickett, 'A Translation of the *Canutus* Plague Treatise', in *Popular and Practical Science of Medieval England*, ed. Lister Matheson (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1994), pp. 263-282; this treatise advises citizens to avoid the 'grett stynche' of stagnant pools of water.

⁵¹ Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 181.

⁵² The Urban Dictionary gives the following definition of the commonly used phrase 'lather, rinse, repeat': 'To mindlessly repeat past patterns or behaviors without critical thought'. *Urban Dictionary*, Definition of 'Lather Rinse Repeat' <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lather%20rinse%20repeat>> [18. 07. 14].

The phrase ‘lather, rinse, repeat’ encapsulates the most significant elements of cleaning the soul as presented in late medieval devotional writings for women: their inclusion of water (rinse), a bit of elbow grease (lather), and regularity (repeat). There is also a meditative aspect, particularly with regard to the repetition of such a spiritual action. In his *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, Walter Daniel describes the meditative practice of Aelred, who did not ‘let his thoughts wander among earthly forms’ but instead fixed his heart on God. ‘The whole strength of his mind’, according to Daniel:

poured out like a flood upon God and His Son; it was as though he had fastened to the crucified Christ a very long thread whose end he had taken back as far as the seat of God the Father. By this thread I mean the strain and concentrated vigour of his mental being.⁵³

This thesis suggests that when male authors try to help their female readers to reach a similarly meditative state they frequently turn not just to domestic, but specifically water-dependent practices in order to do so, consciously harnessing those ‘earthly forms’ which Aelred himself avoids. It has been convincingly argued by a number of scholars that male authors tended to use object-oriented, earthly, and often domestic imagery to stimulate the spiritual lives and meditative minds of their female audiences.⁵⁴ The devotional prose works considered below engage

⁵³ Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, ed. and trans. Powicke, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Robertson’s seminal work *Early English Devotional Prose*, in particular her chapter on *Ancrene Wisse*, ‘The Rule of the Body: The Female Spirituality in *Ancrene Wisse*’, pp. 44-76. She writes of the AB texts, which include the *Ancrene Wisse*, that ‘[t]he assumption that a woman’s nature was sensual led these writers to focus on tactile and sensual images, as well as on other images emphasizing such “female” characteristics as moisture, blood, tears, suffering, endurance and compassion’, p. 43. Vincent Gillespie, in a more recent article, builds on such theories in his exploration of domestic imagery in *The Doctrine of the Hermit*; see ‘Meat, Metaphor and Mysticism’, in *A Companion to ‘The Doctrine of the Hermit’*, ed. Renevey and Whitehead, pp. 131-158. He views ‘the cramming of infinite imaginative riches into the little rooms of an anchorhold or reclusory’ as a

with this practice – often in specifically watery terms – and comparison with texts produced for more male or mixed audiences serve to highlight this. Water might be central in works directed at both genders where instruction for cleaning the soul is concerned; however, the ways in which authors place water in their various allegories suggest some variation between works written specifically for women and those intended for wider audiences.

The literary tradition of using earthly, domestic imagery to instruct female readers is relatively well established by the fourteenth century. In the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, cogitations – or ‘fleeting thoughts’ as one translator labels them – have the potential to fleck and mar the brightest and cleanliest of souls.⁵⁵ The author rebukes his reader for imagining that one cleaning of the soul would ever be sufficient, and draws attention to the body and to cloth in order to make his case:

Wule a web beon ed en chearre wið a weater wel iblechet? A
sol clað wel iweschen? Ðu weschest þine honden in anlepi dei
twien oder þrien, ant nult nawt þe sawle – Iesu Cristes spuse, þe
eauer se ha is hwittre, se fulde is senre upon hire, bute ha beo
iwesschen – nult nawt to Godes cluppunge ofte umbe seoueniht
wesschen hire eanses.⁵⁶

‘major rhetorical concern’ of anchoritic literature and adds that ‘[t]he metaphorical empowerment of those who lead lives of reclusion from the world is both a convenient didactic enrichment of the limited space they occupy and the creation of a series of parallel imaginative landscapes layered onto their actual locus to endow them with a set of resources that are necessary both for their psychological well-being and for their long-term spiritual development’, p. 131.

⁵⁵ This translation can be found in *Ancrene Wisse – Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation Based On Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, trans. Bella Millett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009) p. 109.

⁵⁶ To show how these trends have developed, Millett’s edition of *Ancrene Wisse* is used here, rather than the later Vernon version; *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition*, ed. Millett, p. 123

The author marvels that the anchoress takes such care to wash her hands daily but never thinks to wash her soul with the same regularity – she cleans a white cloth more than once, so why should her white soul be any different? The rhetorical questions are designed to highlight the senselessness of prioritising the physical over the spiritual and of failure to recognise the parallels between the two. Underpinning the analogy is the awareness that even a clean soul is not safe, but in fact even more susceptible to filth than a dirty one. Elsewhere, the *Ancrene Wisse* author also stresses the importance of occupying the mind with appropriate thoughts. He instructs his reader not to delve downwards but rather to turn her attention upwards, towards heaven and against the current of the world. This upwards ‘deluinge’, he informs the reader, is nothing more than ‘zeornful sechyngge þou3t’, which she should always be ‘bisiliche’ about (p. 130). In doing so she can break out of sin and rise above it, like the soul emerging from the filthy flood in the *Orcherd of Syon*.

The importance of repetitive cleansing and mental preoccupation with heavenly matters are woven together in many devotional texts, particularly *The Doctrine of the Hert* and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. The detailed descriptions of processes, often in the form of a step-by-step guide of varying length, not only emphasise the importance of repetition but also serve to occupy the mind, chasing out undesirable thoughts and replacing them with a core spiritual concept. The detail helps to create a more accessible version of the ‘mindless’ state that Aelred manages to achieve. In the same way, preparing a spotless, uncontaminated foundation and maintaining it are fundamental components of both *The Abbey of*

the Holy Ghost and *Jacob's Well*, as demonstrated above. Both works urge readers to cast out any unsavoury matter from the site of construction for their abbey or their well. In *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* the reader is asked to imagine two allegorical figures handling this groundwork, 'Ryght-wysnesse' and 'Love-of-clennesse', which creates a certain distance between the reader and the action. Furthermore, the essential cleansing which follows is carried out not by the reader but by the imagined 'good river' beside the abbey. Initial cleansing and upkeep are pivotal to the allegory. However, the reader is positioned as spectator rather than participant, encouraged to watch the idealised religious house slowly appear before their mind's eye.

In *Jacob's Well*, the amount of repetition and specific terminology is quite overwhelming but is arguably employed to the same end, namely, to help those receiving the work to internalize its central concepts. The reader might not be able to recall all the details but their mind should be completely occupied with them as they listen to, or read, the sermon.⁵⁷ In contrast to *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, however, responsibility for cleaning and building is firmly placed with the individual. The audience of *Jacob's Well* was probably mixed. However, as Atchley

⁵⁷ At least, this seems to be the authorial intention; whether it was successful in practice is another question more difficult to answer (although one can assume there would be a few distracted listeners and readers who let their minds wander rather than becoming enthralled with the technical narrative of well building). The frequent use of *exempla* indicates the author's awareness that, alongside the extended metaphor, he needs to employ other rhetorical devices in order to keep his audience interested. 'Short edifying anecdotes became one of the most useful instruments of persuasion at the disposal of the preachers [...] Provocative, humorous or frightening, they were meant to motivate the audience to accept the Church's message'; Sophia Menache and Jeannine Horowitz note, in 'Rhetoric and its Practice in Medieval Sermons', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 22, (1996), pp. 321-50 (p. 323). See also G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period, c.1350-1450* (Cambridge: CUP, 1926; repr. 2010), especially pp. 309-355.

has observed the most common forms of address are ‘sires’ and ‘frendys’ which, coupled with a number of references to farming, suggest an emphasis on male listeners.⁵⁸ Both texts are preoccupied not only with water-inclusive labour but also with the use of earthly detail and repetition as tools for focusing the mind on God. Nonetheless, the more active role prescribed in the series can be attributed to the fact that construction is considered to be man’s work, which may also explain why the female reader of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* is not encouraged to get her hands dirty with actual building.⁵⁹

The spiritual activity described in *Jacob’s Well* is elaborate and lengthy.⁶⁰ Introducing the ‘labour’ the author tells his audience that first they must scoop out corrupt water from the site of their well (the soul), to extract the deadly ‘wose’ of sin and water of the great curse (original sin). This must be carried out first with a ‘skeet’ of contrition, secondly with a ‘skavel’ of confession and finally, with a shovel of satisfaction, which eradicates the final ‘crumbys’ of sin.⁶¹ After this task has been completed the water gates (hearing, sight, smell, taste) must be stopped up, to prevent recontamination by the ‘wose’, or cursed water. Then, because the pit is not deep enough for perfection and is ‘schelde in frelte and in febylnes’ (still susceptible to the taints of sin) the individual should ‘dolvyn

⁵⁸ Atchley, *The “Wose” of Jacob’s Well*, p. 25.

⁵⁹ See above in the current chapter, where these two texts are compared in terms of inclusivity and accessibility, pp. 151-156.

⁶⁰ Brandeis writes that ‘the matter is treated very exhaustively’ which is no overstatement; *Jacob’s Well*, p. vii.

⁶¹ s.v. ‘skeet, n. 1’, meaning ‘a long-handled scoop or shovel and s.v. ‘skavel, n. 1’, meaning ‘a small spade’; *OED*, online edn (2016) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180672?rskey=0LdI7z&result=1#eid>> and <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/172187?redirectedFrom=skavel#eid>> [11.04.16]. For both words the earliest recorded reference is from *Jacob’s Well*.

deppere' with the spade of cleanness. Only after all this toil is the pit deep enough to spring water of grace as a reward.

The description of the process in such minute detail not only helps to occupy the mind with religious matters but also emphasises the tedium of the process, and the repetition involved. At each stage in the process direct comparison is made with the human soul so that, despite the technical detail, the reader is never allowed to get lost in the earthly but is encouraged to constantly apply and compare it to the spiritual. The following quotation illustrates how the author draws back the earthly to the spiritual, evoking the high hill of heaven as the fulfilment of the pragmatic instruction:

þerfore, scope out *wytb* penauns þat corrupte watyr, and þanne schal springen newe watyr of grace in 3ou, here in 3oure lyuyng, whiche grace schal flowyn so hey3e, þat it schal make 3ou in 3oure ende to swymmyn in-to þe hy3e hyll of hevene (p. 68).

Maintenance is key, 'ffor whanne þe watyr of curs euermore flowyth in, & is no3t voyded out, þat man is depe in curs' (p. 7), and the use of technical tools such as the skavel and the skeet in the allegory of contrition and confession constructs a very specific frame of reference. Water, and the idea of cleansing, play an undeniably significant role throughout the allegory, not just because the author is primarily concerned with representing the cleansing of the soul, but also because of water's susceptibility to contamination, its ability to leak through constructed boundaries and its dual potential for destruction and salvation. By the end of the ninety-five sermons the 'wose' of sin should have been transformed into the pure

and clean water of God's grace, if the individual has put in their spadework, scooping out the corrupt water of their souls through the activity of penance.

Water is drawn upon yet again in the same pragmatic but spiritual way in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. However, this time fulling linen, an endeavour more associated with the female realm, forms the central allegory.⁶² The process of fulling is described, and then each stage in the process is compared to the various necessary stages of cleaning an individual soul, from birth up until death. The analogy therefore functions in a remarkably similarly way to the allegory of *Jacob's Well*. To give a brief overview, flax must first be brought out of the earth, then cast into water and washed. After it has been dried, it is beaten with a 'betyl' to make it suppler, before being purged 'wit grete yrene kombes'. A comb of smaller 'pryckes' is then applied, for a 'closer' clean, and afterwards the cloth is 'i-spunne' for a substantial period of time.⁶³ Finally, to make it perfectly clean and white, it must pass through both fire and water. The translation, like Aelred's twelfth-century original, delineates the principal aspects of this process. To begin with, the

⁶² The analogy can be found on p. 35. The fifteenth-century Bodley translation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, printed in the same modern edition, also includes this passage in a slightly more condensed format (p. 15). For the original Latin passage, see *Aelredi Rievallensis, Opera Omni*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), p. 657. The Vernon text follows its source closely, but does embellish. For example, where the Latin mentions water of compunction, the Vernon version adds the adjective 'sharp', to emphasise the spiritual trials involved in this process: 'water of scharp contricioun' (p. 35). The Latin reads: *Porro ut ei perfectior accedat pulchritude, ignis adhibetur et aqua, et nobis transeundum est per ignem tribulationis et aquam compunctionis, ut perueniamus ad refrigerium castitatis* (p. 658), which can be translated '[f]urther, in order that its beauty may be perfect, fire and water are applied to it, and we have to pass through the fire of tribulations and the water of compunction in order to arrive at the refreshing coolness of chastity'; *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, ed. David Knowles (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971), p. 73.

⁶³ For more information about the process of fulling linen and its domestic context in the Middle Ages, see Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), esp. pp. 221-222 and Penelope Walton, 'Textiles', in *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, ed. John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 319-354 (esp. pp. 330-332).

process is presented as lengthy, tedious and hard work, like the construction of a well or the washing and bleaching of a cloth. The Vernon translator reminds readers that linen can only be brought out of its earthen colour ‘[w]it [...] muche travayl and betyngge’. He describes the spinning process the linen must undergo, emphasising the length of this process and the importance of perseverance: ‘[o]uermor after þis flex is ispunne a-long; [...] so we by long perseuerance mote dure in oure good purpose’.⁶⁴ He also makes clear that the linen will never be completely clean until it passes through the fire of tribulation and water of compunction and laments the ‘syknesse of synne’ which ‘dureþ’ even after baptism.

The analogy therefore details with fine lines the process in between each confession and then fills in with broad brushstrokes the overarching spiritual process that should occupy the entire life of a Christian individual, re-iterating that true cleanness can only be achieved in death. *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, like *Jacob’s Well*, uses technical details to make the process feel difficult but ultimately achievable. Both texts endeavour to teach the necessary techniques involved, and use water-dependent labours from everyday life to help readers internalise and memorise them. Where female readers of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* watch the process of construction rather than participating in it, they play an active role in the fulling of linen, perhaps because this labour is lifted from the female rather

⁶⁴ The description of the spinning process derives from the original Latin: *Iam tunc a nentibus linum in longum producitur, et nos in anteriora perseuerantiae longanimitate extendimur*, *Aelredi Rievallensis*, ed. Hoste and Talbot, p. 658. However, it is not included in the Bodley version, see p. 15.

than the male sphere. Use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘vs’ in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* encourages personal identification with the process in question:

And ryȝt as afterward þis is iput to flex: a comb of smallere pryckes, to clense it more curiously – ryȝt so *we*, whan *we* haue ouercome, wit gret trauayle, grete and wickede temptaciouns and passiouns of þe flehs, *we* schal be aboute to make vs clene of cotidian defautes by meke schryfte and due satisfaccioun (italics added).

The word ‘ouercome’ implies a spiritual triumph, appealing to the individual, and the analogy is framed with a routine, everyday task, firmly tying it to the quotidian. The adornment of an altar is used as a scaffold for developing the analogy of cleaning both linen and an individual soul: ‘Let faire lynnene towayles ligge vppon þin awter, ȝif þu hast eny’ (the addition of ‘ȝif þu hast eny’ brings the analogy right back down to earth before it has even begun) and ends ‘[s]wyche þynges let brynge to þyn myende þe ornamentes of þyn oratorye, and not fulfyllen þyn eȝen wit vnlyfsum iaperyes a[n]d vanities’.⁶⁵ A dutiful reader should recall this process of fulling linen, and its relationship with cleaning a human soul every time they array their altar, every time they look at the altar cloth.⁶⁶

In what is arguably the most significant exploration of this passage to date, Jocelyn Price (now Wogan-Browne) identifies processes of anticipation, recognition and confirmation in the analogy, which are created by the shared

⁶⁵ The phrase ‘ȝif þu hast eny’ is an addition to the original Latin, adding an extra layer of pragmatism to the analogy. For the original Latin, see *Aelredi Rievallensis*, ed. Hoste and Talbot, p. 658.

⁶⁶ As Mari Hughes-Edwards observes when analysing this passage, it should be borne in mind that the altar cloth was one of the few material objects which could be viewed from an anchorite’s cell: ‘Cells [...] featured a squint which opened onto the church and through which an altar cloth might be glimpsed; ‘Anchoritism: The English Tradition’, in *Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), pp. 131-152 (p. 143).

language of cleaning linen and penitential purgation. Because of this structure, she argues, readers receive the details of penance with recognition, rather than as new information. This is significant because ‘the audience must be drawn sufficiently into the metaphoric logic [of the analogy] to accept the conclusion that in the proper development of a human life penitential purgation is a necessary and continuous condition’.⁶⁷ Cleaning linen and cleaning the soul should not be an optional or unique event. Austerity and penance should not be comprehended as individual acts or irregularities but as the very condition of human life, just as the very condition of linen cloth depends on the process of fulling that brings it into being. Wogan-Browne’s argument can be developed further if attention is paid to the linguistic intermingling of the two processes in the passage. In one instance the Vernon translator informs his reader that ‘whan flex is itake out of þe irþe, hit is icast in-to þe water of bapteme’. Although at this stage in the narrative he is describing the linen, and is about to compare it to the soul, he still evokes the ‘water of bapteme’ for the pragmatic rather than spiritual process, the ‘fulling’ of linen rather than the spiritual cleansing of the soul. The potential elision of the two processes is therefore linguistically impressed upon the reader.

A Rule of Life for a Recluse and *Jacob’s Well* are concerned with creating accessible images, not only ones that are easy to imagine but ones recalled by the everyday experiences of the reader. They are concerned with lathering, rinsing and

⁶⁷ Price [now Wogan-Browne], ““Inner” and “Outer””, in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature*, ed. Kratzmann and Simpson, p. 201. It should be noted that Price takes the Latin original as the primary text in this essay, whereas this thesis is concerned with the Middle English translations.

repeating, with encouraging their readers to carry out their cleansing activities in the face of a persistent threat of recontamination. Water can act in these allegories in a singular way, because of its simultaneously earthly and heavenly properties and the layers of meaning attendant on it as well as the simple fact that it is required for nearly every cleaning process imaginable. Moreover, water is transformative – in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *Jacob's Well*, after a certain amount of labour, water flows pure and clear; in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* it is used to transform the soul into something clean and bright. Although all the works, regardless of the gender of the audience, are concerned with making the soul clean, the specific tropes and figures used by their authors do reveal certain differences. Where construction is concerned, women are envisaged as spectators of cleansing, which they are encouraged to imagine being enacted by allegorical figures. Only where the labour concerned is a specifically female practice do authors suggest that their readers imagine more direct participation.

‘NOÞING ELLIS BUT’: WATER AND ACCESSIBILITY IN *THE DOCTRINE OF THE HERT*

Another work that retains an emphasis on female readers is *The Doctrine of the Hert*. In their introduction, its modern editors observe how the attention to detail when core visual concepts are introduced – such as ‘household preparations’ or ‘the besieged castle’ – can help the female reader to internalize and memorize them.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ ‘Introduction’ to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, p. xxiv.

The editors further argue that the Middle English translation is noticeably different from the Latin text that inspired it (*De doctrina cordis*) in its use of more concise imagery. The primary goal of the later vernacular treatise, they suggest, is reading rather than meditation; the text deliberately avoids repetition and can therefore be read at a faster pace, which makes reading it a practical, rather than meditational or intellectual, exercise.⁶⁹ In many ways, then, the analogies and figures in *The Doctrine of the Hert* function very differently to those we have just considered in *Jacob's Well* and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. Rather than lengthy, often repetitive depictions of seemingly endlessly domestic chores or earthly labour, the author of *The Doctrine of the Hert* is more concerned with succinct, memorable metaphors, such as the broom that is charged with putting out the filth of the house, referenced above in the context of contamination. The 'down-to-earth, almost conversational' tone of the text is reflected in the use of its imagery (particularly the 'household preparations' mentioned above) and thereby sets this text apart.⁷⁰ *Jacob's Well*, despite its pragmatic subject matter and entertaining anecdotes, adopts a suitably hortatory and authoritative tone. The analogy of the linen altar cloth in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* is elevated and formal, despite its reliance on the tedious and quotidian. *The Doctrine of the Hert* couples an even more domestic and feminine task – cleaning one's house – with its more informal and familiar tone and in so doing presents cleaning the soul as an easier task – even if it remains repetitive or potentially uninspiring. The repeated use of the phrase 'noþing ellis but' is crucial to this effect. Consider for a moment these three examples from *The Doctrine of the Hert*:

⁶⁹ 'Introduction' to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, pp. xxiv-xxxvi.

⁷⁰ 'Introduction' to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, p. xl.

The brome wherewith the hous of þin hert shuld be made clene is drede of God [...] knowleche of the synnes be þe mouthe in confessioun *is noþing ellis but* puttyng ought filthes of the hous of oure herte be the dore of the mowth with þe brome of þe tunge (p. 7, italics added).

For to wassh away such malice of hert fro the, oure lord Jhesu, þi lavendir, hath not only ordeyned for þe a clensyng ligh of water and blode in thi bapteme, but also an helyng bath of swet and teris, þat þou shuldist bothe be wasshe þeryn and be hole. Into þis bath þou must ofte entre, for it is medicinable. For to entre into this bath *is noþing ellis but* for to drenche þin affecioun and þi þoughtes in Cristes passioun, considering bothe þe shedyng of his blode and water, and also þe swetyng and þe wepyng of his body (p. 37, italics added).

Stabilnes *is noþing ellis but* a stabil and a perseveraunte purpose of goodness in þe soule [...] This is ayenst hem þat passyn away fro þe trew undirstonding of doctouris and yif faith to sone to þe spirit of errour and so, in as moche as in hem, þei defoule here trew feyth (p. 68, italics added).

All of these passages gesture towards daily, or at the very least routine tasks from the female sphere that involve water. In the first, the author tells his reader that to acknowledge their sins in confession is nothing more than to proverbially put out filth from a house, although in this case the heart is the house, the broom is the tongue and the door is the mouth through which the broom chases out sinful thoughts and deeds. In the second example, the practical action of bathing and the spiritual action of ‘drench[ing]’ one’s affections and thoughts in God’s Passion, of meditating on the pain he suffered and the blood and water that he shed, become even more intertwined in the language of the analogy. This functions in a similar way to the water of baptism referred to in the linen allegory from *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, water which humankind should be dipped into. Meditation on Christ’s Passion is likened to entering a medicinal, ‘helyng bath’ of Jesus’ sweat and tears.

Although the author doesn't directly compare these spiritual endeavours with *actually* having a bath, or sweetening one's prayers with contrite, empathic tears, these commonplaces of spiritual life are central to the language of the analogies. In both *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and *The Doctrine of the Hert* this intermingling is most striking where water is concerned because water, by its very nature, allows these boundaries to be traversed as it leaks between the spiritual and literal, the heavenly and earthly.

In the final example, 'stabilnes' is described as a constant, persevering goodness in the soul. Those that are distracted from the 'trew undirstanding of doctouris' unsettle this spiritual stability and 'defoule' their truth. The passage is subtler than the others as it does not mention any specific cleansing process. Nevertheless, it evokes these previous passages through its deliberate use of the word 'defoule'. Previous tropes and analogies should be recalled in this moment, to help the reader visualise more clearly what 'defoul[ing]' truth might mean, and what it might (metaphorically) look like. The modern editors of *The Doctrine of the Hert* write in their introduction that '[i]t is striking to notice how the visual concepts which serve as structural foundations in the early books of the *Doctrine* recede in the final books to become briefer images simply strengthening one point or another'.⁷¹ These passages from *The Doctrine of the Hert* are an illustrative example as the author begins with the pragmatic image of the broom, carefully and with clear boundaries delineating spiritual action and earthly metaphor transmitted to its audience; however, the author transforms his trope in the second example,

⁷¹ 'Introduction' to *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, pp. xxiv-xxvi.

creating a more complex nexus of imagery in which the practical and spiritual are harder to extract and define. Finally, in the last image one evocative word – ‘defoule’ – is all that is required to illustrate a complex, abstract concept and recall the earlier figures which are similarly concerned with contamination and cleansing, with lathering, rinsing and repeating, to facilitate this process of understanding.

The seemingly innocuous phrase ‘noping ellis but’ is used to punctuate the progression within these tropes. All of the quoted passages use this phrase at the heart of their analogies to create, as set out above, a sense of accessibility and ease. This is only enhanced when one considers that the spiritual actions, followed each time by ‘noping ellis but’ and then a suitable analogy, become increasingly more challenging. Confession, the first requirement, is by no means an easy rite, particularly if the penitent is forced to acknowledge sins they are acutely ashamed of. Nevertheless, confession should be a regular part of any good Christian’s life, regardless of their vocation.⁷² Whilst it might often be difficult, shrift was perhaps more comforting in its regularity and structure than the other spiritual tasks *The Doctrine of the Hert* encourages readers to attend to. For example, in the second passage the wholehearted meditation on the Passion and empathy with the suffering Christ required of the reader is far more their individual responsibility, without a mediating priest, and unlike confession it is not a finite task. It is less

⁷² See footnote 3 of the current chapter. Denis Renevey suggests that, written after confession was made compulsory by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, *The Doctrine of the Hert* ‘finesses methods of introspection developed during confession by inviting the female reader to maintain the inner state that confession triggers as a permanent, daily state, configured and sustained via the memorization of the visual aids provided by the treatise’; ‘Household Chores in *The Doctrine of the Hert*’, in *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe*, ed. Beattie, Maslakovic and Rees Jones, p. 174.

tangible, more abstract, yet the use of the same phrase, ‘*noping ellis but*’, incites the reader to consider it in much the same terms rather than shying away from what seems to be an arduous challenge. The final passage tackles something even more intangible and abstract, the somewhat obscure befouling of truth, which could encompass all kinds of unchristian thoughts and actions. Yet again, the author employs *noping ellis but*, a phrase that should now be familiar to the reader, and which should motivate them in the phase of difficulty – by encouraging them to regard it in the same terms as a domestic chore. Tedious and challenging, dependent on hard work and determination, but more than feasible if the worker is willing.

CLEANING UP AMBIGUITY

In many of the water-dependent analogies considered so far, control is central. Floods are dangerous not only because they are polluted but also because they have the power to overwhelm whomever may lie in their path. The cleanliness of a proverbial house of the heart or soul should be maintained and controlled between confessions with water, broom and brush and single-minded vigilance is required to maintain the soul in purity. Very particular processes should be observed if cleanliness is to be achieved, and guidance for this is offered in various kinds of devotional prose for both men and women, as explored above. However, to grasp what is really at stake in the analogies tailored to female audiences, and to understand why control is so central within them, it is also necessary to

understand the ambiguous nature of female, water-inclusive labour in the later Middle Ages. Anthony Bale suggests that Lydgate's poem, the 'Tretise for Lauandres', displays a faith in controlling oneself and one's environment and delineates 'a world in which mess is "made clene"' (l. 20).⁷³ Although devotional prose serves a very different purpose to Lydgate's poem this chapter will claim that it, too, is concerned with making women, or more particularly their souls, clean.

Britt Rothausser suggests that water in late medieval literature, particularly in urban contexts, can function either to highlight mankind's achievements in civilization or failure in its absence. She therefore identifies the image of a fountain in Lydgate's *Fall of Troy* as a metaphor that expresses 'the highest level of that achievement', where the 'divinely controlled torrents' of contained water articulate both the element's power and, more importantly, the power of a society that can harness it.⁷⁴ In a similar vein, the male authors and translators of the devotional treatises considered in this thesis frequently employ analogies that hinge on encouraging readers to manage their souls by imagining that they are in fact managing *water*. In *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, readers are told to envisage a linen cloth, made perfectly clean by water, alongside other necessary tools; in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a river is harnessed by allegorical figures to help clean and facilitate an imaginary religious house. Lydgate's preoccupation with laundering in his 'Tretise for Lauandres' demonstrates a more practical, earthly mode of

⁷³ Bale, 'A Norfolk Gentlewoman', p. 268.

⁷⁴ Rothausser, "'A reuer...brighter þen boþe the sunne and mone'", in *Urban Space*, ed. Classen, p. 271.

controlling water, where the various stains from a mistress' laundry must be removed using innovative means. Nonetheless, control and ambiguity are still central to the poem.

This chapter has already shown how the Middle English word for laundress, 'lauandre', carried associations with prostitution and thus with sin. When proposing their spiritual allegories, devotional writers omit all reference to this possibility. In refusing to even gesture towards such metaphorical possibilities in the same narrative space as the allegories themselves, authors deliberately separate the domestic practice from its more troubling associations. In the original Latin version, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* begins by decrying the type of loose-tongued, roaming woman that popular culture perceived in some laundresses, and this is preserved in the fifteenth century Middle English Bodley translation – certain types of women are described as 'wantownes', full of 'bakbitynge' and 'sclaundre' (Bodley, p. 1). Nevertheless, this stereotypical female gossip is not allowed to venture across the textual boundary of the spiritual allegory of fulling linen.⁷⁵ The earlier Vernon version goes further by removing these references completely.⁷⁶ This allows emphasis to be placed on an alternative, cleaner community, the 'daunce of holy virgynys' led by the Virgin Mary, of whom it is written: 'þise hit beþ þat beþ not defoyled wit wymmen; þyse beþ clene maydenes' (p. 27).

⁷⁵ See footnote 17 in chapter two of this thesis.

⁷⁶ The Vernon version does not translate the 'outer rule', which explains the absence of these references. However, regardless of whether they were deliberately removed or whether they were simply a casualty of the untranslated 'outer rule', the reading impression created by the absence of such details remains the same.

Moreover, as demonstrated above, the Vernon translator repeatedly urges his female readers to occupy themselves in domestic labour in order to prevent their mind from wandering and keep them focused on devotional matters. In the Bodley version of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the translator identifies idleness as the ‘former of vnclene affeccions, sturer of vnclene desires’ (p. 6). These unclean desires can only be combatted, or cleaned, with the sort of diligent labour and godly observance also prescribed by Lydgate. Such spiritual allegories are tailored to help a female reader absorb her mind with Christ, and thereby to avoid the sort of communal, shared experience of laundry presented in Lydgate’s poem, which is addressed to ‘[y]ee maisteresses myne’ (l.1). There is a conscious emphasis on *internal* devotion and individual practice in evidence throughout all the examples of domestic allegories in devotional works. Cleaning or doing laundry therefore becomes, in contrast to Lydgate’s poem, a reflective, meditational task, allowing the female reader to be transported into a more devotional state. As a consequence, many of the unsavoury associations of doing laundry, particularly troubling where women are concerned – freedom of movement, gossip, the possibility of sexual license, for example – are absent.

All the figures of water-inclusive labour discussed thus far depict the experience of soul cleaning as repetitive, tedious but also necessary and eventually achievable. Authors differ in their approaches; for example, we can compare the ‘conversational’ tone of *The Doctrine of the Hert* to the laborious detail in *Jacob’s Well*. However, the analogies, tropes and metaphors of water-inclusive labour are all invested in creating a vision in which the soul can be dealt with in the same way as

a pile of dirty laundry, purged of any unsavoury associations. Spiritual labour, in the form of focused meditation alongside confession and spiritual vigilance, can prepare female readers to receive the water of God's grace in their newly clean and whitened souls. However, it is also reasonable to argue that there is a special emphasis on cleaning the soul where female audiences are concerned, and that advice for women on this topic is dealt with in a different way, burdened as it is by the associations of women with uncleanness. The tropes of cleaning, for both genders, become further complicated when one considers the lucky few who can receive the water of spiritual grace and have their souls metaphorically whitened by it without any of the attendant spiritual labour usually prescribed to both men and women. For Aelred of Rievaulx, the original male author of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the water of spiritual grace suddenly and miraculously replaces the filthy water of earthly sin, rather than being slowly earned in exchange for hard work.

LABORIOUS EXCHANGE OR MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION?

In most of the devotional works discussed thus far, responsibility for controlling metaphorical water, which is used as an analogy for living a good spiritual life, is placed firmly on the shoulders of the individual. Authors can help their readers to live a good spiritual life, but the agency involved in this remains with the reader; and the reader is also the object of blame if this responsibility is ignored. Hilton's very brief watery analogy in *The Scale of Perfection* compares the heart to a corrupted well, out of which flows stinking, polluted water. Stirrings of undesirable emotions

such as hatred, melancholy and anger ‘wole alwey boylen ought of the herte as watir wole renne from the sprynge of a stynkande welle, and letten the sight of thi soule, that thu mai neither see ne fele clenli the love of Jhesu Crist’ (p. 46). A reader ‘mai not perfightli have goostli felynge of [Christ]’ until they take action and cleanse their hearts from such sins through ‘bisi beholdynge’ of Jesus Christ (p. 46). Hilton apportions blame here; the feelings may ‘boylen ought’ of the heart with an agency of their own once released, but it is an individual soul that releases them by courting sin. The responsibility for cleansing the heart again belongs to the reader. Redress can only be made through ‘bisi beholdynge’, prayers and charitable works. This figure clearly draws on contemporary anxieties that water could become easily tainted if it suffered prolonged contact with the earth. The water here is corrupt because it has lain in contact with a heart tainted by sin.

The Doctrine of the Hert uses similar imagery to warn readers against filling their hearts with wrathful or vengeful thoughts:

For right as a verre or a glasse, whan it is ful of hoote scaldyng water, al to brestith for violence of þe heete, right so þe hert of suche a religious persone, yif it be ful of scaldyng water of wraþe, it brekith oute with stryvyng wordis and wordis of debate (p. 44).

Water, like that which boils forth in *The Scale of Perfection*, possesses a fearsome agency in this extract. Initially it is the glass which breaks but in the second image the water rather than the heart (glass) becomes the subject of the sentence, the ‘it’ breaking forth in the form of ‘stryvyng wordis and wordis of debate’.⁷⁷ In the

⁷⁷ Chapter two of this thesis examines this quotation more fully; see pp. 90-92.

writings of both Hilton and the anonymous author of *The Doctrine of the Hert*, water possesses this agency only because an individual has allowed it to. The woman in this second analogy lets her heart ‘be ful of scaldyng water’ and as a consequence she loses control of the water and it breaks out. The corrupt water in Hilton’s *Scale* only boils forth because the female reader has stirred it with the flame of destructive emotions.⁷⁸

Even in the *Orcherd of Syon*, where the central allegory concerns a filthy flood that overwhelms the individual soul, the author is careful to emphasise not only individual responsibility but also the laborious (albeit ultimately rewarding) nature of the extraction process. When a soul in the midst of the water realises that she ‘desireþ inwardly’ her God, she ‘bigynneþ first to *put away þe cloude*’ that has long blinded her, and she then begins to come out of the flood (p. 116, italics added). She sets her path to heaven and, with the help of the requisite prayers, tears and good works, eventually reaches the ‘siker’ bridge of Christ. The *Orcherd of Syon* author uses the trope of the flood to emphasise the triumph of the human spirit over sin and temptation. Those individuals who make it out of the flood do so in the face of ‘sliþer’ and ‘swift’ water, progressing from a state of spiritual blindness to spiritual understanding. Furthermore, the trope is used to highlight, rather than detract from, human agency. Readers are taught to admire the individual soul who begins to ‘put away’ earthly things and embarks on the difficult journey away from them, towards heaven; they are also taught to deplore those souls who choose to

⁷⁸ In *Jacob’s Well* responsibility for controlling water is also placed with the individual. The author warns his readers that cursed water of sin can permeate their well/soul via the five senses; it is the reader’s duty, therefore, to preserve these boundaries by managing these senses (p. 2).

‘goon and *drenchen hem* in þe flood’, who ‘putteþ’ themselves to the flood and ‘takeþ noon heed how sliper and how swift þe watir is, and abideþ nobody’ (p. 80).

A Rule of Life for a Recluse is also preoccupied with the question of individual agency and responsibility. In the spiritual schema of Aelred’s treatise only unerring vigilance can prevent the female reader’s soul from becoming tarnished by sin. She should actively avoid speaking with men, but if such discourse becomes necessary then she should ‘be alwey in drede to here eny-þing or to speke þat myȝte make derke þe brytnesse of here clenness’ (p. 28). The laborious, time-consuming nature of cleansing a soul, and the susceptibility of a soul to recontamination after baptism, are both emphasised in the linen altar cloth allegory. Readers are instructed to frequently return to the clear waters of Scripture, as we have seen, in order to discern the suggestion of the devil. Nothing can drive out impure thoughts so effectively as God’s word. The reader should therefore occupy her mind with the Scriptures at all times, whether waking or sleeping. (p. 31) The reader must ‘be war’, and she must busy herself with various devout exercises in order to ‘put away’ wicked and unclean thoughts, as if she has already succumbed to the suggestions of the devil (p. 30) Only ‘good ocupacioun’ in holy scripture can prevent sin from distracting the reader (p. 31).

It is therefore somewhat surprising that *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* references the element of water in a different way when describing Aelred’s own spiritual experiences. Where its female readers are concerned, the treatise makes clear the importance of arduous spiritual processes and perseverance. However, in an

account of Aelred's youth, water is carefully employed to reduce his individual responsibility and thereby present him as a victim of sin rather than its agent. Aelred is a man, writing to a woman about the spiritual labour she needs to carry out if she hopes to replace earthly water with the allegorical water of spiritual grace. But the final, autobiographical passages of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* also make clear that more miraculous, instantaneous exchanges and transformations are possible without the drudgery that is prescribed to female readers in the various devotional writings. Strikingly, such miraculous instances seem to be reserved for men, at least in the narrative space of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* itself.

A monk is described in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* who cannot shake the stirrings of lust besieging him and who therefore turns to various different forms of penance for purgation. He is clearly presented as a victim of external forces, 'assaylede' by the spirit of lechery (p. 30). However, he is also active in trying to defend and protect himself: he 'areysede hym-self a3ens hym-self' (p. 12). The first spiritual tool he employs is asceticism, as he bathes in cold water and rubs his body with nettles, hoping that the burning of the plant will replace the burning of his lust.⁷⁹ When these practices have little effect he throws himself at the mercy of God instead:

⁷⁹ For a thorough discussion of asceticism in the high and low Middle Ages that pays particular attention to spiritual guides for anchorites (including Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusionum*), see Mari Hughes-Edwards, 'Hedgehog Skins and Hairshirts: The Changing Role of Asceticism in the Anchoritic Ideal', *Mystics Quarterly*, 28 (2002), 6-26. Her work defines asceticism as 'understood by all guidance writers, both high- and late-medieval alike, to be the practice of cleansing the spirit through the purification of the flesh', p. 8. See also her more recent work, *Reading Medieval Anchoritism*, esp. pp. 60-80.

I knew sum-tyme a monke, which in þe bygynnyngge of his conuersioun, what þorou3 steryngge of naturel complexioun, what for violence of vicious vs and custum, what also þorou3 suggestioun of þe wyckede temptour, he, dredyngge his clenness be persced and spild, areysede hym-self a3ens hym-self, and, co[nc]ey[u]yngge a wondur gret hate a3ens his owne flehs, he coueytede no-þyng more þan þat my3te do his body turment and disese. And þefore wit mysese he made his body lene, in so muche þat forto refreyne vnlyffful mocious of / flehs, swyche þynges as were ry3tful and lyffful to þe body, oþerwyle he witdrow hem. But afterward, whan gret feblenese compellede hym to take more hede of his body, anoon þe flehs gan wexe proud, and gan to fi3te a3ens þe rest þat he hadde had a whyle in clannesse. And what dude he þanne bote sum-tyme caste hym-self in cold fresyngge water, and so cheueryngge he cryde and preyde a3ens his temptaciouns; and oþerwyle he frotede his nakede body wit brymme brennyngge netlys, for þat he wolde wit on maner brennyngge haue ouer-come þe brennyngge off flehslich mocion to vnclennesse. [...] But whan al þis no suffiscede not, and neuere þe lattere þe spirit of lecherie asaylede hem – certes, þo cowed he noon oþur refut, bote ful doun longstrei3t by-fore þe feet of Ihesu Crist, preyingge, wepyngge, sy33yngge, coniuryngge, besechyngge þat he wolde hele hym, or ells slen hym. Pitously and ofte he cryde, as þe booc seyde: *Non te dimittam nisi benedixeris michi* – “I nel neuere go hennys, I nel neuere haue reste, I nel neuere lete þe er þu haue izeue me þy b[l]essyngge”. And þanne oþer-wyle as for a tyme he hadde lysse; bot soerte deveyed hym. Bote 3it whanne þys wrecche hadde so gret temptacioun, he was boþe syk and hold; and napeles he was vnsyker (p. 30).

This holy monk wages a war against his own body to reassert its boundaries and prevent the ‘clennesse’ protected within it from being ‘spild’. Spiritual water is prioritised over the freezing water of asceticism, which the man casts himself in for relief. Tears, alongside a number of other spiritual tools such as ‘preyingge [...] sy33yngge, coniuryngge, besechyngge’, can succeed where more severe measures fail.⁸⁰ The contamination in this passage, unlike Hilton’s ‘stynkande’ well

⁸⁰ The requirement for moderation in asceticism is long-standing. Most monastic rules of the West were derived from the Rule of Benedict of Nursia ‘which is a model of common sense and

of the soul, is external to the body, assaulting it from the outside rather than springing out from within.⁸¹

The direct appeal to Christ in the passage above foreshadows instructions given to the reader in the Passion meditation. When the reader is encouraged to imagine her participation in the events leading up to the Crucifixion, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* enjoins her to follow the blessed sinner Mary Magdalene into Simon's house, where she should wash Christ's feet alongside Mary. In the event that Christ denies his feet to the reader, or tries to pull away, she must use the same steadfast abiding demonstrated by the anonymous man/monk:

Stand stille, napeles, stede-fastly and pray mekly, sete þyn eþen
on hym al for-smoteryd wyt terys, and wit depe siþþyngges and
pytous cryingge cacche of hym þat þu coueytest [...] loke þu
abyde stille, and gredyly cry to hym wit-owte cessyngge (pp. 42-
3).

The 'stedfaste abidyng' of the unknown monk is here recalled and tears figure equally prominently. Both examples, like the linen cloth allegory and the dove

moderation in regard to all forms of asceticism'; Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 16. Nevertheless, incitation to moderation enjoyed a particular and more urgent renewal in late medieval spiritual guides for women, in direct response to extreme and dangerous practices that women carried out and which were becoming more widespread. Bynum explores this issue in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (California: California University Press, 1987). She notes that '[t]heologians such as Gerson and David of Augsburg, who saw the extravagance of women's religiosity and sometimes themselves described it in extravagant language, were upset by its exuberance and sensuality [...] Moreover, women themselves sometimes suggested, in their strident refusal to accept counsels of moderation, that moderation was exactly what they objected to', p. 241. Aelred himself advocates a far tougher line on ascetic practices than was typical, and one which later treatises inspired by *De Institutione Inclusarum* (such as *Ancrene Wisse*) modified. He chastises, for example, those who claim to be too weak to fast or deprive themselves of earthly pleasures: 'Alle men ben witty and wyse and discret now-a-days, for for the drede of bodily siknes thei ben negligent aboute the helthe of her soule' (Bodley, p. 12).

⁸¹ The imagery of an intact but fragile and easily breakable vessel assailed in just this way is highly feminine. See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 178. *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* describes the female reader as a fragile vessel, referring to their virginity: 'Be-þenk þe hou precious a tresoor in hou freel a vessel þu berst aboute' (Vernon, p. 26).

returning to scriptural waters, impress upon the reader the spiritual trials she may have to face, the perseverance she will need to demonstrate in order to overcome them, and the importance of tears and prayers in her spiritual labour. Moreover, they both seem to follow trends of previous imagery of water in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* by placing responsibility firmly with the individual. God's grace may be able to save the monk or the reader, but in order to try and win this grace they need to perform various, frequently water-dependent rituals. Nevertheless, the final lines of the monk anecdote complicate such a reading, particularly when one considers the possibility that the monk might not be quite so anonymous as he initially appears. Critics have suggested that the anonymous monk may well be Aelred himself, in which case the hint at spiritual rescue towards the end of the anecdote accrues even more significance.⁸²

The fifteenth-century Bodley translation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* concludes the anecdote about a besieged monk in a noticeably different way from the earlier Vernon translation, however. 'Sikernesse might he noon gete', Bodley informs its readers, 'and this passion lefte him neuere, yonge ne olde, but euere in sondry tymes began vpon him fresshe and fresshe'. In this version, the spiritual instability of the monk is indefinite. Tears and prayers may have been successful but only temporarily. The Vernon translation offers a lengthier and more complex

⁸² See 'A Rule of Life for a Recluse', in *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, ed. Knowles, n. 27. This suggests that Aelred and the monk may be one and the same. Although Aelred never reveals the identity of the monk, he is candid elsewhere about his own experiences with sin and temptation. Walter Daniel, in his famous biography of Aelred describes him carrying out a number of ascetic practices. *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, ed. and trans. Powicke, p. 25. Recent research at Rievaulx has proven that the water Aelred bathed in was certainly cold and could well have been in rapid motion, for maximum penitentiary effect. See Roger G. Cooper, 'New Light on Aelred's Immersion', *Harvard Theological Review*, 69 (1976), 416-419.

conclusion to the anecdote, one that follows its source more closely. At first, readers are told that 'soerte' was denied the monk in the long term and the passage re-iterates the torments he suffered. However, this is followed by a brief but significant reference to the monk's unshakeable chastity, bestowed on him by God: 'alwhat þer was igranted hym so gret delytyngge in chastete þat alle þe lustes þat mowe be þou3t or spoken ne scholde not haue moved hym'. The passage, after this glimmer of security, is quick to remind readers that 'napeles he was vnsyker'. However, this statement is further confused by the implication that such chastity was in fact 'igranted' to the monk after all.

The subtle reference to spiritual rescue in Vernon is expanded upon in a number of autobiographical passages in the 'de presencium meditacione' (meditation on things present, p. 51) towards the end of the treatise. Readers are invited to consider these passages alongside the anecdote of the monk not only by the suggestion that the monk and Aelred may be one and the same, but also by the descriptions of spiritual trials which both of them face. In the Bodley translation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* the autobiographical references in the second section of the meditation, concerning the present, are largely absent.⁸³ The Vernon translation, however, copies the Latin by including a number of passages comparing Aelred's own spiritual experience to that of his sister, apparently unfavourably.⁸⁴ The reader is asked to remember Aelred's 'foule corrupcions' in his

⁸³ For the original Latin, see *Aelredi Rievallensis*, ed. Hoste and Talbot, pp. 673-675.

⁸⁴ Although Aelred is not technically the author of this translation, he will be referred to throughout the analysis of the following passages in order to preserve, as Vernon itself does, their autobiographical sense. For a more detailed consideration of how the Bodley and Version

youth, when ‘þe cloudes of vnclennesse smokede vp in [him] of þe irþi and stynkynde concupiscence of flehs and of owtrage styrynge of childhood, and no-man was to defende [him] ne saue [him] of suche myscheues’ (p. 52). Carnal affection and uncleanness ‘rauyschede’ Aelred, and foul vices ‘dreynte’ his soul ‘in þe stynkynde flood of synne’ (p. 53). The stinking flood (which in the Latin is more literally whirlpool: *gurgite*)⁸⁵ and the wild, tempestuous sea are used to sharpen the distinction between Aelred’s own spiritual state and that of his sister:

Bote þu askest me [...] what I haue lasse þan þu of Godes ȝiftes.
A, suster, where is he more fortunat þat wit esy and softe wedur
brynkt his schip saaf and sound to þe hauene, ful of
marchandise and of richesse, or elles he þat in wylde wawes
and in greet tempest alto-breket his vessel, and vnneþe naked
and quakyng asschapeþ to lond alyve? (p. 54).

This reads as a confessional of sorts from Aelred. By using oppositional imagery, which is typical of male religious writers, he emphasises both his own difficult youth and his sister’s exemplary devotion.⁸⁶ Furthermore, his experience is immediately comparable to that of the anonymous monk assailed by fleshly lust. Whether the anecdote is autobiographical or not is impossible to prove but, regardless, the similarity between the two spiritual experiences is clear. Just as Vernon concludes its depiction of the anonymous monk with a hint at his spiritual rescue and security so too do these autobiographical passages. In doing so, they overshadow the pious sister-reader’s own spiritual successes. Aelred asks the

versions of *De Institutione Inclusarum* differ, particularly in their treatment of water, see Howes, ‘Fulling Linen, Haunting Clear Waters, and Crying Bitter Tears’, forthcoming.

⁸⁵ *Aelredi Rievallensis*, ed. Hoste and Talbot, p. 674.

⁸⁶ For male use of opposition imagery in late-medieval Christian writings, see Bynum, “‘...and Woman his Humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages”, in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Steven Harrell and Paula Richman (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 257-288 (p. 271).

following question of his 'suster' as he draws the reflection on his youth to a close: 'Sooply, suster, wite it wel þat hit ouʒte be a maner schame to þe ʒif þat I, after so manye abhominable vnclenneses, be yfounde euene wit þe in lyf þat is to comen!' (p. 54). If this warning, suggestive tone is coupled with the earlier image of an hypothetical Aelred emerging from the sea – naked and quaking perhaps, but having been rescued from various trials – then the metaphorical immersion which he speaks of begins to look and feel a lot more spiritually positive than the safe passage of his sister. Vernon's concluding lines for the anecdote of the anonymous monk may appear to include a degree of uncertainty, but they nonetheless make reference to the monk's preservation of his chastity in the face of lust. The autobiographical passages discussed here work in the same way, depicting Aelred's spiritual trials in unfavourable contrast with his sister's purity but suggesting all the while that Aelred's own spiritual successes may prove equal, if not superior, to the sister-reader's own.⁸⁷

Ultimately, Aelred denies his reader an opportunity for the spectacular conversion that he enjoys, made all the more dramatic by the filth and danger which preceded it; a sense which is preserved in Vernon but removed from Bodley, in order to focus more closely on the spiritual progression of the female reader. These

⁸⁷ In an article that engages with this current discussion, Dutton-Stuckey convincingly argues that: 'the work is not centrally for or about the seeker after God's love, not about the anchoress who is chosen for and maintained in purity by God's mercy. Rather, it focuses on the sinner, the one who flees God's love but who comes at the Last Judgement into the company of the blessed through God's tireless pursuit and love [...] Aelred presents himself as the exemplum of this understanding, as he uses his sister as the model of the chaste seeker after God, and it is the extended autobiographical portion of the treatise which best enunciates it'; 'A Prodigal Writes Home', p. 36. Bartlett also comments on these passages, suggesting that they ultimately call into question the ability of women to exercise "'free will". They imply that Christ's mercy was necessary to protect them from the certain moral doom that would follow the free exercise of feminine will'; *Male Authors, Female Readers*, p. 49.

autobiographical passages seem to present smooth spiritual sailing for Aelred's sister. Her 'clennesse and chastete' (p. 52) have been defended and kept by God, the proverbial ship of her chastity preserved by 'softe wedur' (p. 54). Yet the treatise as a whole depicts an entirely different spiritual experience for its readers, characterised by arduous spiritual labour. Moreover, these references to the sister's spiritual safety have a specific, rhetorical function, designed to highlight Aelred's torments by contrast, and to make his rescue even more spectacular when it occurs. Where the reader should, like Mary Magdalene in the Passion meditation, pursue God, God actively seeks out Aelred in Vernon and brings him back to the fold, pursuing him as the reader is encouraged to pursue God throughout:

And of ow gret grace, mercy and goodnesse of my God was it
þat wan I ran away fro hym, he pursuede after to drawe me aȝen
[...] whanne I was most vnkynde, he auausede me wit his gret
benefys to styre me to turne aȝen to hym (p. 53).⁸⁸

These various descriptions that make Aelred the object, rather than the subject, of the verb deliberately present him as a victim rather than active agent of sin. 'Cloudes of vnclennesse *smokede vp*' in Aelred from the earth and there was no man present to defend or save him; the phrase '[s]pekyngge and styryngge of wycked companye *hadde hard ywrou*t vpon me' places the blame squarely with the external 'wycked companye' who are doing the '*ywrou*[ing]'; the 'swete drynke of fleshly loue' gives him uncleanness, detracting from Aelred's ingestion of that

⁸⁸ The Latin for this passage reads: *Ad illud quantae fuit gratiae, quod fugientem prosectus est [...] quod suis obruit beneficiis ingratum, Aelredi Rievallensis*, ed. Hoste and Talbot, p. 675; 'How generous was his grace in following me when I fled [...] overwhelming my ingratitude with his kindness?' (p. 95). Note here how Vernon embellishes the Latin to place even more emphasis on God's pursuit of Aelred in the face of his ingratitude.

‘swete drynke’ (all italics added). He repeatedly reminds his sister that she was protected and kept safe whilst he was ‘lete alone’, to face a battle by external forces which work upon him in ceaseless active verbs. One of the only moments any linguistic blame is apportioned to Aelred himself – ‘foylede *me-self*’ (italics added) – is rapidly followed up with an address to the sister, making clear that her protected state is due to God: ‘How blessyd were þu, whos clenness and chastete only þe grace of God defendede and kepte!’ (p. 52). The sister can take no credit.

Throughout these passages the evocation of filthy floods highlights Aelred’s triumph in reaching the shores of heaven alive, suggesting he will be found not only equal with but perhaps even superior to his pious sister in the life that is to come, despite their different spiritual opportunities and experiences. As we have seen, water is frequently used in devotional works to stress an individual’s responsibility and even culpability. Sin is portrayed as bubbling out from a corrupted soul, or as stinking water; conversely, the individual is urged to actively cleanse their own soul with water if they come under attack from external sin. In Aelred’s allegory, however, the helpless soul is overcome by a polluted flood of sin, and metaphorically drowned. His fall into sin is depicted as almost entirely the fault of external forces. Unlike the *Orchard of Syon*, which uses floods to emphasise spiritual labour and progression, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* uses them to cement Aelred’s role as a victim, to enhance his imagined spiritual victory – ‘naked and quakyng’ he ‘asschapeþ to lond alyve’ – and to gloss over the long and laborious spiritual process which he prescribes for his female readers in the analogy of the linen altar cloth.

The only time such a spiritual process *is* described, Aelred is careful to ensure that it is framed with anonymity. He refuses to claim ownership of the story about a monk who feared his cleanness might be ‘persced’ and ‘spild’, and he therefore also refuses to claim ownership of the arduous and repetitive ascetic practices the monk has to undergo in order to reach the (hypothetical) triumphant conclusion offered in Vernon’s conclusion to the anecdote. Nevertheless, in creating parallels between himself and the anonymous monk, Aelred also arranges the narrative so that the tropes introduced earlier in the treatise – the protection of boundaries, the fear of attack from external forces, the role of God hearing the monk’s prayers and the creation of a victim (rather than agent) of sin – can be developed in the later passages, where he becomes candid about his sinful youth but also his spiritual rescue, and his imagined entry onto the shores of heaven. Where elsewhere in the treatise Aelred uses the element of water to encourage his readers to repeat difficult and tedious spiritual labour, in these moments he exploits the slippery and mutable nature of water to create a different spiritual experience for himself.

CONCLUSIONS

In the parable of *Jacob’s Well*, Christ offers living water of spiritual grace to a Samaritan woman as a superior substitute for the actual water she has come to draw from the well. The images of cleansing that have been considered in this

chapter, from a sample of devotional prose works written by male authors for female readers, reveal two different ways of achieving this living water, and therefore spiritual grace. The most prominent method demands toil and drudgery. Female readers are encouraged to engage in difficult and sometimes tedious spiritual labour for the eventual reward of a clean soul. If they can be vigilant enough to protect that soul and to maintain its purity, then they may also be granted the water of spiritual grace. Water is frequently utilised to articulate this exchange, not only because it offers a neat parallel with Christ's 'living water' (as reflected in the parable of Jacob's Well) but also because it is both sacred and ordinary. Water in daily life needs to be carefully regulated and managed and channelled for specific uses, such as cleaning. It therefore becomes a particularly serviceable reference point for describing carefully regulated processes for cleaning the soul, such as confession and tearful prayer.

A Rule of Life for a Recluse presents another, more tempting means for achieving this living water. The autobiographical passages in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, which deal with Aelred of Rievaulx's sinful youth, describe a miraculous transformation. Aelred is tempted by lust, assailed by the devil, but instead of utilising the various cleansing processes described in devotional writings he surrenders, submerses himself in sin, imbibes it like a poison. Yet he does not drown in this filthy flood, like the wilful souls described in the *Orchard of Syon*. Rather, he is pursued by God and granted freedom from sin, a clean soul, and entry onto the hypothetical shores of heaven. These passages suggest that although a dutiful Christian has to be prepared for spiritual labour throughout their life, divine rewards can also

come out of the blue. God can suddenly bestow the water of grace without any of the attendant drudgery it usually requires.

In the narrative of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, such miraculous transformation is preserved for the male author. The spiritual negotiations on display in the original Latin version of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* are directed at Aelred's sister specifically rather than female readers more generally. However, because the Vernon translation preserves the autobiographical passages, they become an integral part of the reading experience. If the advice throughout the treatise is intended to be transferable to a wider readership, years after Aelred's death, then the anxieties about the female addressee's comparable spiritual journey are transferable, too. In these passages Aelred is miraculously offered the water of spiritual grace that female readers are told they must toil laboriously and repetitively to achieve.

The next chapter will continue this theme of transformation and miraculous exchange in late medieval devotional prose. However, it will draw another, spiritually-charged fluid into the conversation. Blood and water, it will be suggested, are frequently presented as a particularly significant pairing in devotional writings, especially those addressed to women. They are distinct fluids, with their own metaphorical connotations. However, they become inextricably linked in depictions of Christ's Passion and draw readers into a special economy of fluids, where water can be offered in return for Christ's redemptive blood. In these analogies there is no sense of the male spiritual experience being prioritised over the female and authors are less preoccupied with regulating and limiting

female access to the divine. Rather, blood and water become an accessible and inclusive vehicle for more active participation in one of the most significant moments in Christian history: the suffering and death of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘BLOOD AND WATER’: AN ECONOMY OF FLUIDS AND A PARTICIPATORY SACRIFICE.

For to entre into this bath is noþing ellis but for to drenche þin affecioun and þi þoughtes in Cristes passioun, considering bothe þe shedyng of his blode and water, and also þe swetyng and þe wepyng of his body.

The Doctrine of the Hert, p. 37

As the gospels tell us, Christ offered his ‘blood of the new testament’ for his disciples to drink at the Last Supper ‘unto remission of sins’ (Matthew 26:28).¹ His blood, a symbol of his suffering on behalf of mankind’s sin, saturates late medieval devotional prose and verse concerned with the Passion and plays a significant role in religious practice, not least because it is central to the Eucharist, one of the most important Christian sacraments.² anchoress Julian of Norwich,

¹ The LV reads: *Hic est enim sanguis meus novi testamenti, qui pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum.*

² See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Other key discussions include: Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, and ‘Medieval European Conceptions of Blood: Truth and Human Integrity’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19 (2013), S57-S76; Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Liz Herbert McAvoy ‘Bathing in Blood’, in *Medicine, Religion and Gender*, ed. Yoshikawa, pp. 85-102; Nancy Thebaut, ‘Bleeding Pages, Bleeding Bodies: A Gendered Reading of British Library MS Egerton 1821’, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 45 (2009), 175-200. For the cult of the sacred heart, particularly at Helfta, see Rosalynn Voaden, “‘All Girls Together’: Community, Gender and Vision at Helfta”, in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 72-91. For a consideration of the wound in Christ’s side see Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Violence Occluded: The Wound in Christ’s Side in Late Medieval Devotion’, in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White*, ed. Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 95-116. For the Eucharist in late medieval devotion see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) and Marilyn McCord

who had a number of Christic visions in 1373 and then spent most of the rest of her life carefully recording them, mentions blood repeatedly in her account of the divine revelations bestowed on her by God, in which Jesus first appears to her with wounds that bleed ceaselessly.³ Richard Rolle also includes bloody imagery in his descriptions of the Crucifixion. In his shorter meditations on the Passion, he addresses Jesus and reveals a secret wish to prostrate himself on the ground among the dead and to receive there the grace of God's blood until he is completely reddened and marked by it.⁴ In Rolle's imaginings the more plenteous the blood which flows from Christ's side and covers him, the more intoxicating is his reception of it, a sweet bath which can melt his stony heart.⁵ In historical terms, from the twelfth century onwards relics, particularly those related to the Passion of Christ, became significantly bloodier; holy matter which bled developed into a symbol of continuity, of resurrection and rebirth as well as an

Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

³ 'In this sodenly I saw the rede blode trekelyn downe fro under the garlande, hote and freisly and ryth plenteously'; 'In all the tyme that he shewed this that I have said now in ghostly sight, I saw the bodily sight lesting of the plenteous bledeing of the hede. The grete dropis of blode fel downe from under the garland like pellots [...] and in the comeing out it were browne rede, for the blode was full thick; and in the spreading abrode it were bright rede [...] the bleding continuid till many things were seene and understondyn'; Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, ed. Glasscoe, pp. 5-10. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text. For an introduction to these revelations, see Watson, 'Julian of Norwich', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace, pp. 210-221.

⁴ 'I wolde among þe dede, þat lyn styngyngge fouly, lay me flat on þe grounde, and neþerere 3yf I my3te, þe vertu and þe grace to kepe of þi blood. Þennes wyl I not ryse, ne non gate flytte, tyl I be with þi precyous blood bycome al reed, tyl I be markyd þerewith os on of þine owne, and my soule softyd in þat swete bath. So may it falle, gloryouse Lord, þat myn herd harte may opene þerewith, þat is now hard os ston, bycomen al nesche and quyckenen in þi felyng'; 'Meditations on the Passion, Text 1', in *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, p. 26.

⁵ See chapter two of this thesis for tropes of bloody baths (pp. 128-130) and spiritual softening (pp. 110-111).

indicator that the immutable *must* change and that this change is necessary for salvation.⁶

It is surely right, then, that blood is now recognised as a prominent part of the religious literature of the later Middle Ages, including mystical writings by hermits such as Rolle, works of spiritual instruction such as Aelred of Rievaulx's *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and divine revelations such as those recorded by Julian of Norwich in her *Revelations of Divine Love*. In recent years, from Bynum's *Wonderful Blood* to the aptly named 'Blood Project' at Oxford University, critics have rightly given this aspect of medieval piety greater attention.⁷ However, frenzied bloody piety and its recent critical popularity can overlook the *lack* of blood in the Bible, the source of all other narratives on the Crucifixion and the events of the Passion which both precede and encompass it. Furthermore, it can conceal the role played by water, a different but equally important fluid in the Passion of Christ, at least in devotional reconstructions of the event. This chapter redresses this imbalance and draws attention to the pairing of blood and water in many medieval works, materials which were mixed together in the medieval eucharistic rite itself.⁸ It asks readers to recognise the equal importance authors place on *both* fluids, particularly

⁶ For discussion of a new type of bloody, holy matter see Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, pp. 125-177. For a discussion of Christ's blood as symbol for triumph over death and decay, see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 148-167 (p. 152). For a specific English example see St Clair Baddeley, 'The Holy Blood of Hayles', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 23 (1900), 276-284.

⁷ 'The Blood Project', University of Oxford <<http://www.thebloodproject.net/>> [04.03.16].

⁸ For the practice of mixing wine and water together in the Eucharist, see Thomas M. Izbicki, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), p. 67. The *MED* lists the liturgical and theological uses of 'water' (n.) under definition 6, including 'b.) consecrated water employed in the Eucharist; also *fig.* the water of spiritual refreshment; c.) baptismal water; also, water employed in ritual purification or spiritual cleansing; d.) the water that issued from Christ's pierced side'; *MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> [22.04.16].

in Passion narratives.⁹ Moreover, it identifies a special economy of fluids, in which water figures as a kind of retrospective payment for Christ's redemptive blood and thus as a means of access into their own salvation.

THE CRUCIFIXION: A BLOODY, WATERY DEATH?

'Crucifixion is not a bloody death' begins Bynum's *Wonderful Blood*, a monograph concerned with blood piety in late medieval northern Germany and beyond.¹⁰ Yet late medieval devotional writings, and particularly depictions of the Passion, are frequently and excessively bloody. Bynum documents the only two places in the Gospel where blood is actually mentioned when describing the Passion:

The synoptic gospels mention literal bleeding only in connection with Christ's sweating on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:43-44) [...] Only the gospel of John mentions the piercing of Jesus' side with a lance and the subsequent outflow of blood and water; and John makes it clear that the wound came only when Jesus was already dead.¹¹

However, Bynum overlooks water, which accompanies these two solitary examples of literal bleeding. When Christ sweats blood on the Mount of Olives, water is conspicuous by its absence: 'And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed the longer. And his

⁹ For the most recent and comprehensive study of Passion narratives see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 1.

¹¹ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 1.

sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground'.¹² Jesus' bloody sweat is miraculous because he should be sweating water, not blood. When Christ's side is pierced with a lance it is not blood alone which flows from the wound but also water: 'But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water' (John 19:34).¹³ This pairing is reflected in medieval writings, such as the revelations of Julian of Norwich who describes the 'dereworthy blode and pretious water' which 'poure al oute' of Christ's side, for love (p. 35). In the Bible (Matthew 27:34,48; Mark 15:23, 36) water is mentioned again very close to Jesus' death: Jesus is offered gall rather than water whilst suffering unbearable thirst (so the nature of his death leads us to assume). Many medieval devotional treatises meditate upon this cruelty – *Ancrene Wisse* uses it twice to signify two different religious ideals.¹⁴

The proffering of gall instead of water concludes the list of water-related moments in Scripture concerning the Passion. But in late medieval meditations on Christ's suffering and death water becomes a common feature, from the defiling spit of the Jews to floods of tears and the use of the language of water to describe blood. In the Vernon translation of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, which was one of the very first texts to offer guided meditation on the Passion, such images of

¹² LV: *Apparuit autem illi angelus de caelo, confortans eum. Et factus in agonia, prolixius orabat. Et factus est sudor ejus sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentis in terram.*

¹³ LV: *sed unus militum lancea latus ejus aperuit, et continuo exiit sanguis et aqua.*

¹⁴ In the first instance, the *Ancrene Wisse* author describes Christ refusing to drink the gall offered him and uses this as an exemplar for anchoresses, who should refuse to drink temptation offered by the devil: 'betere hit is to þole furst þen to ben a poysunt'. In the second, Christ does accept the gall and this action is used to persuade readers to suffer some discomfort, as Christ himself did in accepting the gall; *The English Text of the 'Ancrene Rimle'*, ed. Zettersten and Diensberg, p. 86 and p. 130, respectively.

water recur and are then emulated in later texts of the same tradition.¹⁵ Aelred urges his sister to replace the foul spit of the Jews with her own, purer tears of grief and piety: ‘þat fairest face þat euere was, þe whiche þe cursede Iewes defoyleþ wit here foule spatelýngge, þu whash hitwit terys of þyn eyen’ (p. 49). Mary’s tear-stained face, far from being an image of serenity, is instead a true and visceral indicator of her inner torment: ‘loke how here fresche maydenly visage is al to-bollen and forsmoteryd wit terys. Lord, suster, whoþer þu schulle stoned by-syde wit drie eþen, whanne þu sikst so manye salte teris lassche adoun so vnmesurably ouer here rodye chekes’ (pp. 48-49). Finally, at the climactic moment when Jesus’ side-wound opens, Aelred writes:

Hye þe, suster, hye þe and tarye þe not, foonde forto gete þe sum of þyse precious liquours, for blood is yturned to þein-to wyn, to do þe confort, and water in-to melke, to nursche þe gostly. Þer beþ ymaad to þe fayre fressche rennyngge ryueres in a stoon, and þat beþ Cristes reed woundes in his bodyly menbris; and riȝt as in culverhows beþ ymaad holys in þe wal forto warsche þe culvren in, ryȝt so in þe wal of Cristes flehs be þy maad nestes al hoot of blood (p. 49).¹⁶

The often-unobserved language of water is utilised to accentuate certain aspects of Christ’s sacrificial blood and nourishing milk; their abundance, the sense of nurture and protection they bring, as well as the cleansing function specific to

¹⁵ Watson, ‘The Middle English Mystics’, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. Wallace, p. 545.

¹⁶ In the Bodley translation of the work, this scene is much condensed: ‘Crepe in-to that blessed syde where that blood and water cam forthe, and hyde the ther as a culuer in the stoon, wel likyngge the drops of his blood, til that thy lippes be maad like to a reed scarlet hood’ (p. 22). Nevertheless, all the key features of the Vernon passage considered in this chapter are present in the Bodley: blood and water *both* flow forth from Christ’s side; the dove is referenced, recalling an earlier scene in which the anchoress is encouraged to imitate the dove who returns to and hovers above clear waters of scripture; the anchoress licks the drops of blood until her lips are like a scarlet hood (head covering). This indicates that both Middle English translators felt these moments to be integral to the spiritual schema of the text.

blood. The image of ‘fayre fressche rennyng ryueres’ transforms what could be a gruesome and even frightening image into something almost pastoral and certainly beautiful.

Furthermore, such literary language is not confined to versions of Aelred’s text. In the *Myroure of Recluses*, a popular religious manual translated from the Latin *Speculum Inclusorum* (which, unlike the Latin original, addresses female recluses as well as male recluses) the blood of Christ is repeatedly described in terms of rivers and streams, a common trope in such literature.¹⁷ In the meditation section the author describes the flow of blood and water from Christ’s side:

Wherof þe welle of mercy þat neuere schal cece ne fayle flowed out in large strem[e]s vn-to synners to wassche and purge hem of her gyltes. And 3if þat cas, yt semeth to þe þat his blood suffiseth nat to clense þe, þanne remember the of þe precious water that stremyd out from his herte, þat was þerlyd wip a scharp spere, to wassche away þerfitly þe synnes of contryt folkes.¹⁸

Both blood and water are essential in this description. If a sinner feels as though Jesus’ blood might not be sufficient to cleanse their many sins, they should keep in mind the water that also flowed from His heart and side. Coupled with the blood, this water can ‘perfitly’ wash away the sins of all contrite folk. The blood itself rushes out in ‘large stremes’; it washes in the same way as water.

¹⁷ For some general background to this text, see the introductions to *The Myroure of Recluses*, ed. Harley, pp. xi-xxix and *Speculum Inclusorum/ A Mirror for Recluses: A Late Medieval Guide for Anchorites and its Middle English Translation*, ed. and trans. E. A. Jones (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. lxxviii-lxxxvi. See also Alan Rogers, ‘The Ownership of *The Myroure of Recluses* (London, British Library, MS Harley 2372) in the Late Fifteenth Century’, *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 15 (2014), 187-192.

¹⁸ *The Myroure of Recluses*, ed. Harley, p. 27.

The fifteenth-century *The Doctrine of the Hert* also uses the relationship between blood and water to articulate the doctrine of redemption. The reader is encouraged throughout to clean and prepare their heart for union with God by washing away their sins ('blood'), for 'þer come no blode oute withoute water'.

The author explains:

First, he seith þat he hath wasshe the with water, þat is with water of bapteme, þe wiche come out of his side in his passioun, be þe wiche water he hath clensid þi blode, þat is þi synnes, fro the. What merveyle is it þough such water clense synnes? Trewly, none, for it come oute so boylingly fro þe hert of oure lord, made hoot be þe fire of love abounding in his brist, þat it both clensith þe hert fro synnes, and also scaldith þe fende (pp. 36-7).

The fluids springing from Christ's bloody heart are imagined as the water of baptism. With them, Christ washes clean our own unclean blood – our sin. Using the 'blissed lygh' of this water and blood, a 'defoulid' heart can be made clean and prepared for union with Christ's own. Both water and blood flow from Christ's side, the gospel tells us so and one can be used to describe and accentuate the other. Crucifixion may not, historically speaking, be a bloody or watery death but in such narratives and meditations it becomes both.

WONDERFUL BLOOD (AND ITS WATERY MARGINS)

Water often jostles alongside blood in these narrative moments. However, references to the element are rarely given attention in critical readings of them.¹⁹ Given Bynum's interests, it is unsurprising that the primary focus of her monograph (*Wonderful Blood*) is blood, just as the primary focus of this thesis is water. Nevertheless, Bynum, more than many of her later disciples, recognises the significance of other fluids – milk, honey and gall as well as water – which are interconnected with blood in late medieval religious thought.²⁰ One particularly resonant example is the final prayer of the *Fifteen Oes*, in which Jesus is described as a wine-press. He is completely drained of blood and water so that his children, mouths open and eager, can ingest these salvific bodily fluids:

O blessed Jhesu, verai and true plenteuous vyne, have mynde of thy passion and habundaunt shedyng of blode that thou sheddest most plenteuously, as yf it had be threst out of a ripe clustre of grapes, when they pressed thy blessid body as a ripe clustre upon the pressour of the crosse, and yave us drynke both blode and water out of thy body perced with a knyghtes spere, soo that in thy blessed body was not lefte a drope of blood ne of water. Thenne at last as a bundell of myrre thou hengest on the crosse on high, where thy tender flesshe changed his colour by cause the licour of thy bowellis and the mary of thy bones was dried up.²¹

¹⁹ Robertson explores the use of moisture in *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* but emphasises the role of blood rather than water in her interpretation of various passages; 'Medieval Medical Views of Women', pp. 142-167. In her analysis of the Passion sequence in Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, Dutton mentions water a number of times but prioritises milk and blood in her interpretations; 'Christ our Mother: Aelred's Iconography for Contemplative Union', in *Goat and Nail*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* 10 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), pp. 21-45.

²⁰ 'If we read carefully [...] we find that what flows from Christ's side in mystical visions, prayers, and hymns is often the sweetness of milk and honey, not blood'; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 14. An in depth analysis of other fluids such as milk, honey, oil and gall is beyond the scope of this project. However, this is certainly an area deserving of further research and could provide the groundwork for a discussion of the interrelationship between all of these fluids in devotional literature.

²¹ 'The *Fifteen Oes*', in *Women's Writings in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barratt, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1992; repr. 2010), pp. 175-182 (p. 182). The *Fifteen Oes* are a set of Latin prayers from

The trope of wine-press, whilst certainly redolent, is not original as it recurs throughout Passion meditations: ‘Why þoenne ys þy schroud red wyth blod al y-meind, / Ase troddares in wrynge wyth most al by-spreynd?’ the narrative voice asks of Jesus in the lyric *Quis est iste qui venit de Edom?*²² However, Bynum selects this extract not for its gruesome analogy but as an example of a text that has received a skewed reading from critics, who overemphasise the role of the Eucharist within it. Her exploration of the passage therefore encourages us to take equal notice of both fluid aspects:

Although it is true that grapes and the winepress are traditional eucharistic images, the text speaks here of eating not the Eucharist but penance; and it is important to note that, in many fifteenth-century devotions, the side wound is invoked either as the source of all seven sacraments or as the source of two non-eucharistic ones – penance (blood) and baptism (water). Indeed, the legends introducing the ‘Fifteen Oes’ in many exemplars focus on ransom and sacrifice, pain experienced, debts paid.²³

the early fifteenth century, which were translated into a number of vernacular languages throughout Europe, including Middle English. For further information see Claes Gejrot, ‘The Fifteen Oes: Latin and Vernacular Versions, with an Edition of the Latin text’, in *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernacular*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O’Mara, *The Medieval Translator*, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 213-238.

²² *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), [25]. Most critics agree that the trope of Christ as winepress derives from Isaiah 63:1-7. Thomas H. Bestul notes that the winepress of Isaiah was most often connected to the Crucifixion, but that ‘it was extended in the *Glossa ordinaria* to include all the agonies of the Passion’. This wider interpretation, some have argued, ‘engendered a cluster of images where blood is pressed, squeezed, or trampled out from Christ’s body’, such as the imagery of this final prayer in the *Fifteen Oes*; ‘Chaucer’s Parson’s-Tale and the Late Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation’, *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 600-619 (pp. 608-609). Other explorations of the Christ-as-winepress trope include Russell M. Hillier, ‘The Wreath, the Rock and the Winepress: Passion Iconography in Milton’s *Paradise Regain’d*’, *Literature and Theology*, 22 (2008), 387-405; Achim Timmerman, ‘A View of the Eucharist on the Eve of the Protestant Reformation’, in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 365-398; James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Metaphor* (Kortrijk: Van Ghemmert, 1979), pp. 82-90.

²³ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 12-13.

A relationship begins to emerge in this analysis between water and blood, sacrifice and pain and, of course, the two most significant sacraments with reference to the side wound: baptism and the Eucharist, one represented here by water, the other by blood. As the *Fifteen Oes* makes clear, both blood and water are drained from Christ's body in the winepress, causing complete dehydration: 'in thy blessed body was not lefte a drope of blood ne of water'.²⁴ Bynum also notes that after the prayer has begun 'praise and pleading then tumble forth in verbs of drinking, washing and drowning'.²⁵ In the language of this passage as well as in its imagery, water and blood intertwine. A literary language of water is used by Bynum to emphasise her argument that 'descriptions of Christ's blood are not only evocations of his suffering love. In their emphasis on washing and inebriation they are also references to baptism, penance and the Eucharist'.²⁶

The relationship between blood and water dates back to the Bible. In the New Testament, the two fluids not only stream from the side of Christ after the Passion, but they are also mentioned in 1 John 5:6. The Gospel reads: 'This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood', and therefore emphasises the interdependence of both fluids associated with Christ.²⁷ Vincent of Beauvais reflected on this relationship:

²⁴ Bynum notes that in many different forms of medieval spiritual writing 'blood stands in for love, and love must be boundless, expressed in images of boundlessness' such as complete exsanguination'; 'Violence Occluded: The Wound in Christ's Side', p. 105.

²⁵ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 12.

²⁶ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 171.

²⁷ LV: *Hic est, qui venit per aquam et sanguinem, Jesus Christus: non in aqua solum, sed in aqua et sanguine. Et Spiritus est, qui testificatur quoniam Christus est veritas.* For a detailed study of blood and water in the gospels, with a special focus on the gospel of John, see Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*.

With great precision, John says [of the soldier with the lance]...“he opened”, not “he struck” or “he wounded”. By this he wanted to indicate that...the door of life was opened, from which came the sacraments of the church...From this, it follows that there ran out without ceasing blood and water, blood in the remission of sins and water to sanctify, as in baptism.²⁸

The authoritative voice of Vincent, whose work would have been familiar to many devotional writers of the later Middle Ages, makes explicit here the relationship between blood and water, baptism and the Eucharist, cleansing and sacrifice.

Thomas Aquinas also wrote eloquently on the subject:

This [flow of blood and water from wound] showed what he was; if you like, a true human. For humans are of a double composition: on the one hand, if you like, of the elements, on the other of the humours. One of the elements is water, and amongst the humours, the principal one is also blood.²⁹

Bynum uses this theology throughout her exploration of blood piety, noting the importance placed on both water and blood even if the focus of her study does not allow for more thorough consideration of the two fluids and their particular relationship. It is therefore surprising that Bettina Bildhauer, whose monograph *Medieval Blood* is the next full-length study of blood piety after Bynum’s own work, uses many of the same examples and materials as Bynum but almost completely

²⁸ For the original Latin see Vincent of Beauvais, ‘Historiale’, in *Vincentius Bellouacensis, Speculum quadruplex: sive Speculum maius: natural, doctrinale, morale, historiale*, (Graz: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, 1964-5), IV, bk 7, chap. 42, vol. 4, p. 236.

²⁹ English translation is Bildhauer’s own; *Medieval Blood*, p. 30. The original Latin reads: *Quod quidem factum est ut Christus ostenderet id quod erat, scilicet verus homo. In homine enim est duplex compositio: una scilicet ex elementis, alia ex humoribus. Unum elementorum est aqua; inter humores autem praecipuus est sanguis*; St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*, ed. P. Raphaelis Cai (Rome: Marietti, 1952), p. 455 (para. 2458). A devotional treatise attributed to Dionysius the Carthusian (d. 1471) also gives equal weight to the water and blood, interpreting the wound in the side thus: ‘And there was a watery element...for the body of Christ was composed of four elements...Thus Christ had a true human body not a celestial or fantastical one as the heretics say...For a fantastical body does not give forth blood and water’; Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, p. 249.

ignores any references to water in its interpretations – or perhaps more importantly, references to the relationship between water and blood.

Bildhauer's introduction makes the point that '[a]ll other bodily fluids [...] were at some point separated from blood and digested further, and were thus considered variant forms of blood'.³⁰ This is perfectly true. However, this medical understanding does not justify a marginalisation of all fluids other than blood in critical readings. Bildhauer references the widely used commentary on the Gospel from Thomas Aquinas (above) to support the theological argument that Christ's blood, not just to theologians but also to devoted laymen and women, was proof of his humanity and therefore evidence of an unbreakable bond between saviour and saved.³¹ However, Aquinas seems particularly interested in the relationship between both blood *and* water in this passage. The side wound is cited and both fluids evoked in their full flow; it is the presence of *both* that ultimately proves that Jesus was, in fact, a 'true human' as well as the divine godhead. Humans are of a 'double composition', made up of both elements and humours. Jesus' body is turned to here for evidence of humanity precisely because it contained a representative of both parts of this double composition. The specific relationship

³⁰ Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p. 24.

³¹ A popular medieval belief was that 'having taken on human flesh from Mary and been fed by her own transmuted blood in the form of breast milk, Christ's own blood and the breast milk which fed him were ultimately one and the same, which further proves the connection between divine and human through the mediating fluid of blood'. See McAvoy 'Bathing in Blood', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender*, ed. Yoshikawa, p. 94.

between two fluids is not accommodated in Bildhauer's commentary, in which she argues for blood as an indicator of truth.³²

Elsewhere, Bildhauer utilises a particularly memorable anecdote from the life of Adelheit of Brisach, from the Adelhausen convent, to illustrate attitudes to blood in the later Middle Ages. She tells us how Adelheit, a widow who was very concerned about her loss of virginity, 'cried day and night', asking through the petition of her tears that it might be returned to her.³³ After many years of such weeping an angel came down to visit Adelheit and revealed God's intention to fulfil her wish, as far as is possible:

And he led her into the air; and there were other angels, too, who had a wine press, and they laid her into it and pressed her so hard that she thought that not a drop of blood remained in her body. And they said to her: "We have pressed out of you all the blood that has sinned in you, and we shall pour virgins' blood into you, and you shall become as much like a virgin as you possibly can, but you cannot become a virgin". And when she came to, she lay soaked in blood.³⁴

³² Other bodily fluids could also be indicators of truth in the Middle Ages. *Women's Secrets*, ed. H. R. Lemay, informs readers that 'the urine of virgins is clear and lucid, sometimes white, sometimes sparkling' and therefore a good way to test whether or not a woman is truly a virgin, p. 128. See also footnote 37 in chapter two of this thesis.

³³ Adelheit worries about the loss of her virginity because of the special status bestowed on it in medieval theology. Christina of Markyate, a famous female anchoress, goes to extraordinary lengths to preserve her virginity, asking God to grant her 'the beauty and integrity of virginity' through which God may 'repeat' in Christina the image of His son; *The Life of Christina of Markyate* ed. and trans. Monica Furlong (Berkhamstead: Arthur James, 1997), pp. 34-35. Margery Kempe also expresses anxiety about her status first as separated wife and then as widow, rather than virgin, although Christ reassures her that he loves her as much as any virgin; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 135. For a history of the rise of the Virgin Mary in devotion and theology, from the earliest decades of Christianity to 1600, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Bildhauer, 'Medieval European Conceptions of Blood', p. 70. For the original German see Anna von Munzingen, *Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen*, ed. J. König (Reiburg: Herder, 1880), p. 155. The Adelhausen convent in Freiburg produced a Sister-Book, in which this anecdote can be found. The scribe of the earliest surviving copy (a Middle High German version from 1345 to 1350) dates the original text, no longer extant, to 1318 and identifies Anna von Munzingen as the

Bildhauer uses Adelheit's bloody tale to argue that there was a significant difference in attitude towards the blood of deflowered women, which flows excessively and dissolves, and the blood of virgins, which might 'retain some of the integrity ascribed by medical theory to men's blood'.³⁵ Whilst this analysis is illuminating, it ignores another crucial element of the anecdote, on which the bloody aspect depends. What Bildhauer glosses over, but what this thesis suggests to be paramount, is that the blood is received only after years of water, years of crying, which are offered to God in exchange for the new blood. Furthermore, once the exchange has taken place, earned by the shedding of one fluid for another, the shedding of both blood *and* water ceases, leaving the body completely intact once the sacrifice borne out through an economy of fluids is complete: 'she does not bleed *or cry* any longer' (italics added).

This chapter therefore argues that water can feature in devotional literature as part of an exchange, in which blood is paid for with water, usually in the form of tears. In order to prove this it will pay detailed attention both to the language of blood and water in a number of devotional works (namely Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*) and the role of blood and water in medieval theology and daily life. It will reveal how the cultural landscape of both fluids inform references to them in devotional writings, and the way they figure an economy of fluids.

author. For more details on the Sister-Book and the convent see Erika Lauren Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters: Monastic Women and Spirituality in Medieval Germany* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 12-13 (p. 13).

³⁵ Bildhauer, 'Medieval European Conceptions of Blood', p. 70.

A RED FLOOD: CHILDBIRTH IN BIBLICAL AND MEDIEVAL THOUGHT

The cultural valences of water and blood in both the Bible and late medieval culture emphasise the shared associations of these two fluids, which become even more potent when they intermingle. Sebastian Carnazzo documents each independent reference to 'blood' and 'water' in the Gospel of John and argues that every instance deliberately guides readers towards an interpretation of the moment when these two fluids become a pair, flowing forth from Christ's side. He reveals how these various references to the fluids are frequently linked to concepts of purification (which in turn bind the two fluids together, when their independent, cultural connotations of purification are considered), fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and access: 'the primary purpose of the imagery in 19:34 is to show that Jesus' death fulfilled the piercing, purificatory and life-giving elements prophesied in the eschatological imagery of Zech 12:10 and its immediate literary context'.³⁶ In the wedding at Cana the word 'water' is used frequently, a hint at Christ's glory. This glory is 'not yet' available, but will presently be made accessible through the outpouring of blood and water at the Crucifixion, predicted through the miracle of water-into-wine.³⁷ Water here reveals something about Jesus and his relationship to the eschatological hopes of Israel, promising that they will soon be fulfilled when the side of Christ is pierced and blood and water flow forth. Carnazzo argues that through the New

³⁶ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 114.

³⁷ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 68.

Testament fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and the very deliberate construction of blood and water throughout the Gospel of John prior to this fulfilment, access is suddenly provided with a gush of these two fluids. The door is now ‘open’; Christ is now glorified; the water which was previously turned into good, drinkable wine now flows alongside blood, and the two ‘purifying streams’ – as dubbed by the earliest commentator on the wounded side, Apollinaris of Hierapolis – become the language through which this sudden access to salvation is expressed.³⁸

References to blood and water in devotional prose are similarly informed by a medieval cultural understanding of the two fluids, as well as by the scriptural associations outlined above. Moreover, they become even more potent as an expression of access when paired, just like the blood and water in the Gospel of John. Taken independently, blood and water in medieval understanding retained some of their older, biblical associations, but shed others. For example, the purifying qualities of water were certainly appreciated, as the element was used in the period (as now) for washing clothes and bodies, communal church rituals such as baptism, churching (the purification of women after childbirth) and foot-washing (which possess both literal and spiritual importance) and for more exclusive rituals – for example, the priest must wash his hands with water before he handles the Eucharist.³⁹ By the late Middle Ages blood was no longer actually

³⁸ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 67.

³⁹ Colin Morris has shown how much church and papal reform, from the eleventh century onwards, was driven by ‘the need to purify the clergy for the performance of their liturgical functions’; *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050-1250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 100.

used for cleansing, unlike in the Old Testament. The sacrificial system in which the blood of an animal could be used to purify sin, for example, was no longer prevalent. Nevertheless, its function as a cleansing agent is retained metaphorically, as in the New Testament, because Christ's blood can cleanse the sins of mankind.⁴⁰

From the second century to the twenty-first, theologians, historians and literary critics have all argued convincingly for the connection between the 'blood and water' (John 19:34) and the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.⁴¹ Although very distinct sacraments with very different functions, the element of purification connects the Eucharist and baptism just as it connects actual water and blood. Baptism denotes a cleansing of sin as well as a conversion to Christianity and a spiritual rebirth; the Eucharist allows faithful Christians to ingest Christ's body and blood, a symbol of His sacrifice. This sacrifice is understood as a cleansing and purification of the sins of the world, just as baptism is understood as a cleansing of individual sin. Christ took on the burden of sin and suffered so that mankind could be cleansed and access salvation.

Other genres of late medieval literature which are Christian in focus, if not strictly speaking 'devotional', are aware of the relationship between baptism and the Eucharist, blood and water, and the sense of access and participation that accompanies their pairing. In what remains one of the most convincing

⁴⁰ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 39. For more detailed discussion of bloody baths in devotional literature see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 128-130.

⁴¹ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, pp. 1-10.

explorations of imagery in the alliterative poem *Pearl*, Wendell Stacy Johnson not only recognises the relationship between the two major sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist but also suggests that the poet would have expected his reader to be aware of this relationship and that this awareness would, in turn, have helped readers comprehend the poem's complicated imagery. 'The water-imagery, picturing divine grace as a never-exhausted fountain, is reinforced with the traditional symbols of the water and the blood: grace given in the form of Baptism and of the saving sacrifice' he writes, making the 'grace' of God which fuels both sacraments explicit in his analysis.⁴² He then elaborates upon the specific connection between baptism and the Eucharist, expanding upon the relationship between blood and water as liturgical symbols or specific sacraments and relating their relationship specifically to *access*:

In the water and blood, liturgic symbols which are, again, drawn from the Bible, the poet imagines the connection between heaven and earth. The link is the saving blood of Christ symbolized in the water of baptism and the wine of Eucharist. It was the baptismal water which brought the maiden to salvation, and this water is shown as the boundary between earthly and heavenly realms; it is the blood of Christ which saves all men, and which, in the form of wine, must be accepted by them as a way to heaven.⁴³

Blood and water, baptism and the Eucharist, are not just interconnected because they both possess meanings of purification or cleansing. They are interconnected because they both provide access to heaven, functioning as a passageway between the heavenly and spiritual realms, between an individual Christian soul and God. 'The link', Johnson convincingly suggests, 'is the saving blood of Christ'

⁴² Johnson, 'The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*', p. 172.

⁴³ Johnson, 'The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*', p. 179.

symbolized *not only* by ‘the wine of Eucharist’ but also by the ‘water of Baptism’. *Pearl* itself follows many iconographic features of the depiction of Christ in order to make this relationship clear and guide the reader towards an understanding of the ‘blood and water’ in John 19:34. The blood from the wound in Christ’s side flows out as a crystal clear stream of water, which cleanses the streets of Jerusalem. The dreamer not only speaks with his Pearl maiden across the stream but he also sees the heavenly city of Jerusalem. On a more metaphorical level this river helps the dreamer to achieve a richer understanding of the spiritual realm and Christian doctrine. The water in *Pearl* divides and acts as a barrier but it also connects – just like the ‘blood and water’, and baptism and the Eucharist.

With regard to actual blood and water in medieval life, and with a more specific focus on female audiences, the *combination* of these elements is also pivotal. The two fluids, with their attendant biblical meanings and associations, remain visibly distinct in everyday life, yet come together at weighty moments. One very relevant human process that endures throughout time, which is specifically feminine and in which both ‘water and blood’ remain distinct but flow alongside one another miraculously at the climactic moment, is childbirth. ‘In childbirth, too, streams of water and blood – red floods – are released before the baby is delivered. Pharaoh’s daughter actually *did* pull Moses out of the river’ writes Klaus Theweleit, a social historian who considers the relationship between women and water in early Nazi writings from Germany.⁴⁴ Although the years on which his writing focuses are many centuries later than the Middle Ages, here he highlights a

⁴⁴ Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, p. 232.

basic medical fact that was as true then as it is now. In the moment of release during childbirth, when the baby slips out into the world, both blood and water gush forth from the ‘wound’ of the vagina, mingled perhaps, but distinct in their mingledness.⁴⁵ Contemporary readers of the Gospel and medieval readers would presumably have been better acquainted than modern readers with the visuals of water and blood during childbirth, as it was usually experienced at home rather than in a sanitized hospital.⁴⁶ The significant relationship between this basic but potent physical process and the wound in Christ’s side is made manifest in popular medieval theology.⁴⁷

Various influential thinkers and theologians subscribed to the theory that the natural world acts as a myriad of signs, helping those who take notice of the signs to better understand their Creator. This belief also contributed to the popularity of literary analogies in which everyday life is turned to in order to explain

⁴⁵ There is also a symbolic connection in the later Middle Ages between the wound in the side and the opening of the vagina, which ties into the idea of childbirth. See Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, p. 46 and McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero*, pp. 106-109.

⁴⁶ For more detailed discussion of medieval childbirth, see Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life, Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), pp. 138-139. The *MED* lists amniotic fluid under s. v. ‘water’, n., 7a; <*MED* online edn (2013) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED51881>> [22.04.16].

⁴⁷ It is also worth noting that after childbirth, women were re-integrated into the Christian community and the physical church through a purification ceremony, with water at its heart. For more thorough discussion of the churching and purification of women in late medieval England, see Gail McMurray Gibson, ‘Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women’s Theatre’, in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), pp. 139-154; Sue Niebrzydowski, ‘*Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo*: Male Voices, Female Interpretation and the Medieval English Purification of Women after Childbirth Ceremony’, *Early Music*, 39 (2011), 327-334; Eamon Duffy, ‘Holy Maidens, Holy Wyfes: the Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England’, in *Women in the Church*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History*, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 175-196. Margery Kempe also discusses the purification of women; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 329 and pp. 357-358.

doctrine.⁴⁸ The medieval Church was conceived of as one body, born from the water and blood from Christ's wounded side, and, like the wound, it could encompass all mankind after its birth.⁴⁹ This analogy can be partly attributed to a revived interest in Aristotle, which in turn led to an impulse within thirteenth century theologians, like Giles of Rome and Peter of Palude, 'to provide Christianized interpretations of sexuality and conception'.⁵⁰ A number of variations on the wound in the side as a metaphor for childbirth developed, as well as childbirth itself as a metaphor for a spiritual birth, both of which are summarised by Michael Goodich.⁵¹ In one version, the foetus feeds on menstrual blood, which is likened to the blood shed by Jesus. A direct link is therefore provided between women's excess moisture and Christ's own cleansing blood. In another account, the womb represents the soul and the foetus represents sin. Finally, in yet another, the afterbirth rather than the foetus symbolises original sin, and this afterbirth must be washed away via baptism. Pierre Bersuire, writing in the fourteenth century, quotes Job in support of this interpretation: 'Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth as issuing out of the womb. When I made

⁴⁸ As Trevisa writes, all material things have the potential to reveal the spiritual: 'By help of God þis werk is compiled, profitable to me and on cas to oþir þat knowith nouȝt þe kyndes and propirtees of þinges þat beth toschift and isprad ful wide in bokes of holy seyntes and philosophis, to undirstonde redels and menynges of scriptures and of writings þat þe holy gost hath iȝeue derkliche ihid and wrapped undir liknes and fygures of propirtees of þinges of kynde and craft'; *On the Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour, p. 41. See *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Bildhauer, 'Blood in Medieval Cultures', *History Compass*, 4/6 (2006), pp. 1049-1059 (p. 1052). Julian of Norwich describes the wound as 'a faire delectabil place, and large enow for al mankind that shal be save to resten in pece and in love' (p. 35).

⁵⁰ Michael Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age: The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought, 1250-1350*, (London: University Press of America, 1989), p. 84.

⁵¹ Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age*, pp. 84-85.

a cloud the garment thereof, and wrapped it in a mist as in swaddling bands?’ (Job 38: 8-9).⁵²

Throughout these evocative interpretations, despite their variations in exact symbolism, the material and metaphorical properties of blood and water are repeatedly merged in order to create new meaning. Real childbirth is used to represent the spiritual birth of the church. But this metaphor also depends on the real wound in Christ’s side, that visceral, leaking lesion and all the figurative meanings attendant on it. Both blood and water are pivotal in these allegories, as two individual fluids with their own associated literal and figurative associations, which are drawn upon in equal measure, but also as an inextricable pairing. Crucially, access and participation are of prime importance in each instance. Only when both fluids pour forth from the wound in the side, in that climactic, metaphorical moment of ‘birth’ do we have access to something that previously was denied to us – be it access to the church (born of the blood and the water), or access to salvation, once our sin has been purged, washed away by the waters of baptism.

BLURRED DISTINCTNESS IN JULIAN OF NORWICH’S *REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE*

⁵² Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age*, pp. 84-85. LV: *Quis conclusit ostiis mare, quando erumpebat quasi de vulva procedens; cum ponerem nubem vestimentum ejus, et caligine illud quasi pannis infantiae obvolverem.*

In the Gospel, in medieval understanding of the Christian sacraments, and in everyday medieval life, blood and water are a significant pairing with a multitude of associations. However, what unites all the examples given above is an emphasis on access. This thesis has, until its final chapter, been concerned primarily with arguing for water as one of the most significant fluids in late medieval devotional literature. However, these other contextual materials reveal that water, which can be sacred and astonishing by itself, can become potent in new and different ways when mingled with blood. One female writer who seems particularly engaged with these two fluids is anchoress Julian of Norwich. In the longer version of her *Revelations of Divine Love*, blood and water appear as a significant pairing a number of times and Julian clearly expects her readers, whether lay or religious, highly educated or simply literate, to be able to engage with the fluids as a meaningful pairing with various biblical and cultural significances. She compares the ‘plentiousede’ of Christ’s blood to ‘the dropys of water that fallen of the evys after a greate showre of reyne that fall so thick that no man may numbre them with bodily witte’ (p. 11). She also reminds readers that the flood of Christ’s mercy is made up of both ‘his dereworthy blood *and* pretious water’ which is ‘plentious to make us faire and clene’ (p. 101, italics added). In both instances, water is crucial for signalling the purgative effects and ‘plentious’ nature of Christ’s blood, which, like a shower of rain or a flood, washes away filth in immeasurable quantities. Julian draws attention again to the plenteous nature of both water and blood when she explains that what God most desires is for us to wash our bodies with his blood, which can purify souls from sin:⁵³

⁵³ Julian’s revelations were not circulated in the same systematic way as other Middle English

God hath made waters plentivous in erthe to oure service and to our bodily ease, for tender love that he hath to us, but yet lekyth him better that we take full homely [h]is blissid blode to washe us of synne; for there is no licor that is made that he lekyth so wele to give us; for it is most plentivous as it is most pretious, and that be the vertue of his blissid Godhede. And it is our kinde and alblissfully befloweth us be the vertue of his pretious love (p. 19).

Blood and water are considered in this passage as two distinct but interpenetrative fluids. Julian introduces the concept of worldly, material water: ‘God hath made waters plentivous in erthe to oure service and to our bodily ease’. There is not yet any gesture towards the more spiritual properties of water, most significantly baptism and the living water of the Holy Spirit. Rather the provision of actual water by God is focused on, which, like the showers of rain referenced above, reflect his immeasurable love and generosity.⁵⁴ The discussion of blood and water becomes more spiritual only as the two fluids intermingle in her language. Julian tells us that Jesus prefers us to use his ‘blode’ to ‘washe’ away our sins, recalling baptismal water. The word ‘washe’ interconnects the actual cleansing agent of water and the metaphorical detergent of blood. Both fluids are deliberately united, moreover, through the repeated adjective ‘plentivous’. Julian’s interpretation of actual water and Christ’s bodily blood supports their much older, biblical interpretations, which also reflects their intermingled properties and natures: ‘[b]lood is associated with life and purification from sin. Water is associated with

religious texts, like Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, nor were they promoted in the same way as other comparable works, such as the writings of Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. Nevertheless Margery Kempe accessed a copy, which suggests a small hand-to-hand circulation between an informal group of priests, monks, anchorites, and laypeople. For a more detailed discussion of Julian’s readers, see *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: ‘A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman’ and ‘A Revelation of Divine Love’*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2006), pp. 10-23.

⁵⁴ Chapter one of this thesis gives some examples of God providing water for his followers in the Bible; see pp. 45-46.

life and purification from uncleanness'.⁵⁵ Metaphorical and literal meanings intertwine, from the literal and plenteous waters of earth, which God provides and which are deployed figuratively to represent the cleansing properties of blood, to the blood of Christ, which is literal in so far as he is a real historical figure who shed blood at His Crucifixion but which is simultaneously elevated in the description as a metaphor implying symbolic purification of sin. Julian consciously places this merging of the literal and figurative, the water and the blood, alongside – but not in tension with – the concept of water and blood as distinct in their literal, physical forms.

Moreover, both the blood and water together in this passage provide a very deliberate access point for the reader. As in many other devotional works which aim to provoke affective piety, interaction with Christ is encouraged. Jesus wants us to 'take full homely' his body into our arms and, in so doing, to use his own blood to wash our bodies. He wants to give us this 'licor' – as God gave 'waters plentivous' – as a gift. Both Christ's water and his blood therefore become a direct offering from one human suffering body to another, emphasised by the final lines of the quoted passage: 'for it is most plentivous [...] And it is *our kinde*' (italics added). In essence, Jesus likes to give us his blood and his water more than any other fluids *because* they are of 'our kinde'. Recalling the words of Aquinas, the

⁵⁵ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*, p. 43. The cleansing quality of water was the basis for its use in various sorts of ritual purifications, evidenced in the Bible. For example, it was used to cleanse in preparation for ceremonial functions (Exod 29:4), after having touched a dead body (Lev 11:40) and after contracting any sexual impurity (Lev 15). Although many of these precise practices had died out by the High Middle Ages, such traditions lived on in rituals such as the churching of women after childbirth and a reader familiar with the Bible would have been aware of this more symbolic use of water and its connotations. See footnote 47 of the current chapter.

blood and water from Christ's side act as a special symbol of his humanity whilst on earth, as well as his divinity. Elizabeth Robertson uses the medieval medical conception of women as excessively moist to suggest that there is a special emphasis for women in Julian's use of the word 'kinde'.⁵⁶

The above passage from the *Revelations of Divine Love* therefore engages with biblical understanding of blood and water, as well as its more immediate and enduring properties, and slides between the actual and the metaphorical. It provides a point of access to readers and invites them to share in the revelation. The simple but crucial connective 'and' in the Gospel of John, which is used to describe how both blood 'and' water flow from Christ's side, expresses this very particular relationship in perhaps the best possible way and likely influences such medieval devotional imagery. The two fluids flow alongside one another, distinct and yet inextricably linked. God gave humankind access to literal water, Julian explains, so that they could use it for their 'bodily ease'; Gospel accounts of the Passion, from which such narratives ultimately stem, give readers access to the bloody, watery details of the Passion; Christ's blood is a vehicle of access to his humanity and his human body, but it also functions as a gateway to a deeper, more spiritual relationship with him, born of the blood and water flowing from the wound in his side and metaphorically cleansing sin.

⁵⁶ Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women', p. 155. Glasscoe identifies the word 'kind' as central to Julian's writings. She omits it as a noun from the glossary of her edition to Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love* for this reason, claiming that it is too complex to be so easily defined (pp. xvii-xviii).

Actual uses of water and blood (such as bathing) are employed in Julian's writings to communicate difficult theology in a more accessible way to literate lay readers. Reference to the two material fluids can then become metaphor or analogy.⁵⁷ Julian thus deliberately evokes both the literal and figurative meanings of blood and water, so that readers can apply their cultural understanding of the fluids in order to better comprehend how God offers them as a point of access, a portal to the divine.

A FLUID ECONOMY AND A PARTICIPATORY SACRIFICE

In Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love*, the significance of both blood and water is made clear, and the use of the word 'kinde' hints towards a shared relationship between individual and God. Julian's emphasis is usually on Christ's love and the divine gifts which express it. By contrast, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* use the two fluids to present an even more reciprocal relationship between saviour and saved, which serves to deepen individual devotion and make Christians feel more personally involved in the events of the Passion. Medieval religious writings make frequent recourse to the language of exchange, a literary feature which springs from a theological understanding of Christ's sacrifice in the Passion and which helps Christian writers express this sacrifice in comprehensible

⁵⁷ See footnote 48 above for John Trevisa's description of how the material world can reveal spiritual meaning.

terms.⁵⁸ In *Piers Plowman*, the allegorical figure of Peace draws on mercantile language to remind readers that Christ ‘suffrede to be sold’ for mankind’s salvation.⁵⁹ Margery Kempe is reduced to tears when she hears about ‘the parfyte lof that owr Lord Jhesu Crist had to mankynde, and how der he bowt us wyth hys bittyr Passyon, schedyng hys hert-blood for owe redempcyon’.⁶⁰ Often, this exchange is articulated with special regard to fluids, be they actual bodily fluids or elements of spiritual allegories. The thirteenth century lyric ‘Our Lady Sorrows for Our Son’, which Kempe’s writings in many ways echo, reminds us that Christ ‘boute’ salvation for our sins ‘wit his blod’, and in the same century, the Benedictine saint and mystic writer from Helfta, Gertrude the Great, records visions which celebrate the union of her own heart with Christ’s in both liquid and transactional terms.⁶¹ The *Liber* of Mechtild, which was compiled by two members of the Helfta community and records the life of another thirteenth-century visionary from Helfta, makes explicit the bloody and watery transaction at the heart of the Passion, where water and blood intermingle in order to create a potent expression of God’s love:

He opened the gate of his divine heart [...] and there she saw a flood of running water from the East into the West [...] This

⁵⁸ The sixth vision (Passus XVIII) of *Piers Plowman* enacts this theology of exchange for readers throughout presenting it in a more accessible and dynamic way. See James Simpson, *Piers Plowman’: An Introduction to the B-Text* (London: Longman, 1990), pp. 208-217.

⁵⁹ Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, Passus 18, l. 213.

⁶⁰ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 337. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

⁶¹ *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932). Gertrude, for example, recounted being washed in the blood and water from Christ’s side, which she describes with suitably watery imagery as ‘the fountain of love’; Gertrude the Great, *The Herald of God’s Loving Kindness: Books One and Two*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Barratt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), p. 111.

soul [Mechtild] entered into this water, and there she was washed clean of all filth and spots of sin.⁶²

Mechtild's visions are frequently accompanied by what Rosalyn Voaden calls 'an exchange of fluid', whereby Christ's blood is combined with water, or transforms into water.⁶³ In both these examples from *Helfta*, allusions to water and blood accompany a moment of union and access. Gertrude's visions are primarily concerned with the union of her own heart with Christ's and Mechtild's *Liber* depicts Christ opening the gate of his heart in order to provide life-giving water, with its bloody associations.

Back in England, the language of spiritual exchange inspires both contemporary and later devotional treatises, particularly those written for women. The anonymous, male author of *Ancrene Wisse* seems as preoccupied with his reader's role in the economy of salvation as he is with their passive experience of Christ's sacrifice:

Wepe is soul leche [...] Vr lord doþ toward us as me doþ to vuel dettor. Nimeþ lesse þen we owen him . and he is þauh wel apaizet ¶ We owen him blood . for blood. And vre blod þauh a 3eyn his blood . þat he schedde for vs weore ful vn euene change. Ac wostou how me 3are haþ seid. Me nymeþ ate vuel dettur. oten . for whete. ¶ And vre lord nymeþ at vs vre teres for his blood . and is wel a payet (p. 112).⁶⁴

⁶² Mechtild of Hackeborn, *Liber specialis gratiae* in *Revelationes Gertrudinae ac Mechtildiana*, vol. II, ed. Dom L. Paquelin (Paris: Henri Oudin, 1875), 2:2; translation by Voaden, "All Girls Together", p. 85.

⁶³ Voaden, "All Girls Together", p. 85.

⁶⁴ "Tears are the salvation of the soul. Our Lord treats us as one treats a bad debtor – takes less than we owe him and is satisfied nevertheless. We owe him blood for blood, and even so our blood would be a very unequal exchange for the blood that he shed for us. But do you know the saying, "People take oats for wheat from a bad debtor?" So too our Lord takes our tears in

A language of exchange is used to prioritise water over blood as an offering; readers might owe God blood for blood, but their impure blood is insufficient for this exchange and so they should offer Christ the much purer water of their tears instead, with which He will be well pleased.⁶⁵ Blood is still pivotal in this passage, but as part of a transaction in which water is equally pivotal. Water is easier for readers to imagine giving than blood as it is so much more accessible but the trope still prescribes a process which requires a certain amount of effort, as readers must be emotionally engaged in order to produce and proffer tears.

This unique accessibility demands a reassessment of our understanding of Passion narratives and even blood piety in the later Middle Ages. It has been suggested by Bynum that Christians during the late Middle Ages were concerned about their passive role in their own redemption, exacerbated by the laity's increasingly marginalised role in the medieval Eucharist.⁶⁶ This argument has been used to try and explain the explosion of blood piety in the later Middle Ages. Bynum writes persuasively that:

It was in sprinkling and washing (words which reverberate again and again in fifteenth-century hymn, story and prayer) that the faithful were touched by salvation [...] Perhaps then the frenzy for some sort of palpable contact with *Blut Christi*, in cup or vision, monstrance or miracle, was not, as some historians have

exchange for his blood, and is well pleased'; this translation is taken from *Ancrene Wisse – Guide for Anchoresses*, ed. and trans. Millett, p. 119.

⁶⁵ Sin and blood are frequently equated in Middle English devotional writings. In the *Doctrine of the Hert*, for example, the author writes: 'First, he seith þat he hath wasshe the with water, þat is with water of bapteme, þe wiche come out of his side in his passioun, be þe wiche water he hath clensid *þi blode*, þat is *þi synnes*, fro the' (p. 37, italics added). In *Ancrene Wisse* readers are reminded that '[b]lod bi tokenep sunne. For also as mon bi bled is grislich [and] atelich . in Monnus eize . also is þe synfole . bi foren godes eizen' (p. 43).

⁶⁶ See Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p. 100 and Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp. 36-37.

argued, doubt about presence or guilt over such doubt but rather a desire to participate in the saving stuff of sacrifice in the only way left if one could be neither gift nor giver – by being washed in (that is, marked by) the blood of the Lamb.⁶⁷

Bynum thus reappraises the negative comprehension of blood piety, which stems from doubt about Christ's presence within the blood, and offers a more positive and persuasive interpretation. Through the devotion to blood, Christians seek a 'palpable contact' in order to participate more fully in the sacrifice of Christ which, as Bynum also points out, had the effect of excluding the saved: they could be neither gift nor giver, although they could wash themselves and mark themselves with the blood of Christ. This theory recalls the anchoress's red lips, marked like scarlet ribbons in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, or the vision of Richard Rolle in which he bloodies himself with Christ's own blood, cited at the beginning of this chapter. In the passage from *Wonderful Blood*, water appears to be not only implicit in but also integral to Bynum's writing. The faithful are 'sprinkled' and 'washed' in Christ's blood both in literary and historical accounts, and these words 'reverberate' in many different genres of late medieval devotional works. Language that must be used of liquids such as blood – sprinkle, wash, drown, streams, rivers – evokes water, but this allusion is often overlooked in critical discussion. Ultimately, Bynum's language recalls the wound in the side, from which 'blood and water' flowed forth as distinct but inextricably linked fluids.

Evidence suggests that Christians of the later Middle Ages were certainly concerned with fuller participation in the sacrifice. The popularity of Passion

⁶⁷ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 244.

meditations alone is testament to this fact. However, rather than participating through blood, Christians recognised the possibility of participating through both ‘blood *and* water’ (John 19:34, italics added). The biblical and cultural associative density of blood and water as a pairing culminates in its deployment, in both *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, as a literary tool which represents access to the sacrifice of Christ, and which invites an individual reader’s active participation in their own salvation, enacted through Christ and his life-giving blood.

In *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, even before the Passion meditation begins, the anchoress is repeatedly encouraged to offer Christ her bodily water, in the form of tears. She should only ever consume meat and drink with ‘bitter terys’, which she presents to God as a mark of her shame (Vernon, p. 28); she should ‘preye and lefte vp þe armes of bitere terys aʒens þe temptour of lecherie’ from her chaste bed (Vernon, p. 28); she should offer ‘bitere terys’ as alms to the poor on behalf of Jesus as this ghostly gift is more pleasing to him than material wealth (Vernon, p. 38). Such practices are not unusual, as the importance of prayer and tears date back to the Bible and are repeatedly expounded upon by Desert Fathers, Church Fathers and other religious writers.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, these offerings of water increase in their significance in the Passion narratives. One of the central purposes

⁶⁸ St Peter Damian devotes several chapters of *On the Perfection of Monks* to the efficacy of tearful prayer; *St Peter Damian: Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, ed. and trans. Patricia McNulty (London: Harper, 1959), pp. 106-113. One of the sayings attributed to Abba Poemen also emphasises tears: ‘He who wishes to purify his faults purifies them with tears and he who wishes to acquire virtues, acquires them with tears; for weeping is the way the Scriptures and the Fathers give us, when they say, ‘Weep!’ Truly, there is no other way than this’; *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. Ward, p. 155.

of such narratives was to provide devoted readers with a role in the Passion. Thus Margery Kempe, in her visions of Christ's crucifixion, imagines herself as an active participant in the action. She comforts the Virgin mother when she falls down in grief during Christ's processes to his crucifixion and encourages her to rise up so they can keep him in sight as long as possible (p. 342). She is distracted with grief after Christ's death, 'crying and roryng' and running all about the place like a 'mad woman' (p. 350). She wishes that she had the precious body all to herself, 'that sche myth a wept anow in presens of that precyows body' (p. 351).

In *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, water is frequently drawn upon to facilitate this active participation. The anchoress is urged to imagine Christ washing her own feet, establishing a relationship between her own soul and her God directly through the element of water. This was still a prominent practice in Christianity at the time of writing (even though it dated back to the Bible) and therefore would have been easy for an anchoress, as well as other contemporary and later readers, to imagine.⁶⁹ With her wet tongue and spit, the reader is encouraged to run and 'lik away þe dust' of Christ's feet when he sweats blood on the Mount of Olives (p. 46). Her own water is perceived as a purer replacement to the defiling spit of the Jews, when she is told to imagine washing Christ's face with her tears: 'þat fairest face þat euere was, þe whiche þe cursede Iewes defoyleþ wit here foule spatelngge, þu whash hit wit terys of þyn eyen' (p.

⁶⁹ For a summary of the tradition of foot washing in the Christian liturgy in the Middle Ages, with particular reference to the association between both women and the poor with the rite in the medieval period, see Carol Hogan, 'Eucharistic Metamorphosis: Changing Symbol, Changing Lives', in *Reinterpreting the Eucharist: Explorations in Feminist Theology and Ethics*, ed. Anne Elvey, Carol Hogan and Claire Renkin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 10-30.

47). Finally, like Mary Magdalene, she should ‘whasch Cristes feet with hote terys’ (p. 42) in the vivid world of her imagination and wipe them dry with her hair rather than a cloth, which deepens the physical and organic connection between them. She should use tears to forge an even deeper connection if Christ tries to pull his feet away:

Stand stille, napeles, steadfastly and pray mekly, sete þyn eʒen on hym al for-smoteryd wyt terys, and wit depe siʒzyngges and pytous cryingge cache of hym þat þu coueytest. Wrastle irnestly wit þy God as Iacob dede, for feyþfully he wil be glād þat þu ouercome hym. [...] abyde stille, and gredyly cry to hym wit-owte cesyngge (pp. 42-43).

Significantly, although the Passion narrative is imagined and the anchoress could thus easily be guided to contemplate something out of the ordinary (gifting her own blood, for example) accessible uses of water are the focus in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, in terms of fostering a relationship between the reader and her saviour. Bodily water, readily available, is prescribed, be it in the form of spit or tears. The familiar rite of foot washing is also invoked, but tears rather than fresh water are utilised in order to personalise the ceremony.

There are fewer homely images of water than might be expected in the visions of Margery Kempe, whose book makes readers privy to a devoted woman’s own meditations on the Passion. Nevertheless, Kempe’s copious tears have been the focus of much critical attention.⁷⁰ Later critics and some of Kempe’s own contemporaries, as they are described in the work, find her tears to be disruptive, annoying or even demonic, accompanied as by loud and violent roars as well as

⁷⁰ For critical analysis of Kempe’s tears, see footnote 9 in the introduction to this thesis.

physical movement; others consider them to be a gift from God, a sign of Kempe's special grace.⁷¹ Alongside the many persuasive readings of Kempe's tears, there is room for another interpretation, namely, that the work attempts to portray Kempe's tears as part of a reciprocal relationship, a fluid exchange, where water is offered to Christ by the faithful (Kempe, in this case) in return for his redemptive blood. A number of moments in the text support such a reading. First, *The Book of Margery Kempe* presents Kempe as a sound negotiator who makes a number of deals with Jesus. This evokes the language of exchange discussed above and in particular the idea that Jesus 'bowt' the redemption of mankind with his blood (p. 337). Secondly, Kempe makes Jesus her 'executor', and asks that all her 'good werkys' (which she very properly attributes to God, who works within her when she carries out such virtuous deeds) might be divided between her confessor and her friends and enemies, as God himself is enough 'mede' for Kempe herself (p. 81). Thirdly, Kempe is clearly aware that both blood *and* water flowed from the wound in Christ's side. She is not entirely focused on his blood and is therefore able to recognise this exchange of fluids. Thus, in one Passion meditation she sees Christ on the cross and describes 'the revery of blood flowing out plentevowsly of every membre, the gresly and grevous wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt *blood and watyr*, for hir lofe and hir salvacyon – than sche fel down and cryed wyth lowed voys' (p. 167, italics added). The latter part of this quotation provides the most compelling evidence for reading Kempe's tears

⁷¹ 'And as sone as sche parcevyd that sche schulde crye, sche wolde kepyn it in as mech as sche myth, that the pepyl schulde not an herd it, for noyng of hem. For summe seyde it was a wikkyd spyrte vexed hir; sum seyde it was a seknes; sum seyde sche had dronkyn to mech wyn; sum bannyd hir; sum wissched sche had ben in a bottumles boyt; and so ich man as hym thowte. Other gostly men lovyd hir and favowrd hir the more'; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 165.

as part of an economy of fluids, for immediately after the blood and water are described Kempe falls down and cries. She responds to Christ's offering of blood with an offering of her own tears.

Kempe's tears are prompted by all manner of other sights and imaginings, not just this reference from the Gospel of John to Christ's blood and water. Nevertheless, they are frequently described as not only a gift *from* God, but also a gift *for* God. Christ twice refers to Kempe's tears as a drink for God, Christ, his mother, and all the angels in heaven: "Dowtyr, thu schalt be ryte welcome to my Fadyr and to my modyr and to alle my seyntys in hevyn, for *thu hast jovyn hem drynkyn* ful many teerys of thyne eyne" (p. 137, italics added) and "[m]yn awngelys arn redy to offryn thyn holy thowtys and thi preyeris to me and the terys of thyn eyne also, for *thi terys arn awngelys drynk*" (p. 304, italics added). Christ reminds Kempe that there is no 'bettyr token of lofe' than to weep for Him and Kempe prays to God that she might be granted 'a welle of teerys, wherthorw [she] may receive [His] precyous bodye wyth al maner terys of devocyon' (p. 184), as though her tears aren't already excessive enough. Thus she asks for God's body and blood and offers her tears in return, as a vehicle for receiving them and as a means for thanksgiving once they have been received: 'sche thankyd hym with gret wepyngys and sobbyngys' (p. 377). Finally, tears weaken Kempe, which makes them a suitably vigorous offering – she is not without suffering for Her God. In one vision, the Virgin Mary asks Kempe to be more moderate in her penitential practice because she is already weakened enough by her tears (p. 306).

The reciprocal exchange of tears for blood is at its most resonant during a series of short visions of Christ's Passion. Kempe sees God in her ghostly sight with His 'woundys bledyng as fresch as thow he had ben scorgyd beforn hir'. Kempe 'wept and cryid wyth alle the myghtys of hir body' in response to this sight (p. 368). A few lines later Kempe recounts a dream in which she sees God's body before her again with her ghostly eye. However, this time she sees another man who comes to Christ's precious body and cuts it with a knife. Kempe's immediate response comes once more in the form of tears: 'And anon sche wept wondyr sore' (p. 369). Although Kempe's tears are not unusual, the structure of these visions, which are both close together in Kempe's narrative and relatively succinct, emphasises the equation within them. At the sight of Christ's blood, Kempe offers water, in effect filling in the blanks from the Gospel. According to John, blood and water should run forth from the wound in the side, and Kempe herself describes this moment almost verbatim earlier in the work. However, here the Gospel is made complete by Kempe's participation: the two liquids which flow forth in these moments are Christ's blood and Kempe's watery tears.

Kempe's tears, then, act as a kind of signpost for a diligent reader.⁷² When the reader encounters a description of her crying, they should immediately have the Passion, and Christ shedding his life-blood, in mind. This chapter has already

⁷² Sue Ellen Holbrook argues that 'one of the salient organizing mechanisms based on association and memory is the use of four salient points of reference around which to cluster events and images: sex, words, food, and tears'. She connects the use of tears as a narrative signpost with childbirth, suggesting that whereas she begins her book bound on a bed of childbirth she is made 'increasingly fertile by tears' as the book progresses. However, she does not examine the use of both blood *and* tears as spiritual markers in the narrative; 'Order and Coherence in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *The Worlds of Medieval Women: Creativity, Influence, Imagination*, ed. Constance H. Berman, Charles W. Connell and Judith Rice Rothschild (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1982), pp. 97-112 (p. 97 and p. 105, respectively).

shown how the reader is encouraged to offer her own water as a gift in the meditation on Christ's life and death in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. However, water also acts in this religious guide as a signpost, or punctuation point, delineating stages on a contemplative journey. Carnazzo has drawn attention to how independent references to the two fluids in the Gospel of John contribute to a moment of sudden access to superior knowledge.⁷³ This thesis argues that *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, which makes direct reference to the Gospel of John through its invocation of Christ's blood and water, borrows this technique as a blueprint for its own use of water and blood in its Passion meditation, where earlier instances of blood and water in the work punctuate steps on the reader's spiritual journey – which will, of course, culminate in her experience of the wound in Christ's side.

It is well established that Aelred's work is guided by an individual reader's yearning for union with Christ and that the work can be read as a spiritual progression – although, necessarily, a cyclical one as contemplative union before death can only ever be temporary and fleeting.⁷⁴ Aelred and the later Vernon translator both frame the meditation sequences as a spiritual journey during which the anchoress-reader is made to realise that merely living in virtuous cleanness is not enough; she must become an active participant, pursuing contemplative union with God throughout her journey rather than just seeking to maintain her clean

⁷³ Carnazzo, *Seeing Blood and Water*.

⁷⁴ Dutton draws attention to the previously overlooked contemplative nature of the work, and persuasively conceives of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* as a contemplative journey. Although her analysis focuses on the Latin original, many of the central passages she draws on for evidence are preserved in both Middle English translations, making her reading more widely applicable; 'Christ our Mother', in *Goad and Nail*, ed. Elder, p. 25 and p. 41, respectively.

soul.⁷⁵ The invocations of blood and water throughout *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, and the suggestion that they might merge, should be read as deliberate narrative signposts which gesture towards the more spiritual merging of blood and water. Every mention of blood and water contributes to a consciously guided reading of the climactic passage, cited earlier in this chapter, where the blood and water flow forth from the wound in Christ's side and the anchoress is urged to rush to him and partake of these fluids.

Up until this moment, the anchoress is allowed short, tantalising glimpses of the union that is to come. Christ sweats blood when he should instead sweat water, and Dutton observes how this predicts the pivotal moment of contemplative union whilst also emphasising the reader's journey as incomplete. The dust mentioned in the passage insists on Christ's mortality. It reminds the reader that he has not yet died for their sins and ascended to heaven.⁷⁶ The wound in Christ's side, when it is finally described, is compared to a dovecote into which the reader can creep, like a dove, for protection. This description should remind readers of another instance when the anchoress-reader is referred to as a dove, and instructed to return to clear waters of Scripture but not to directly interact with them.⁷⁷ Echoes of the earlier passage make the reader's interaction with Christ's fluids in this pivotal moment even more poignant and also mark it out as an end point of the contemplative journey. Just as the water and blood only become spiritual when they merge in the passage from Julian of Norwich, the narrative

⁷⁵ Dutton, 'Christ our Mother', pp. 25-41.

⁷⁶ Dutton, 'Christ our Mother', p. 37.

⁷⁷ Chapter two of this thesis compares the moments where the anchoress-reader is described as a dove in more detail; see pp. 98-103.

promises of blood and water are not wholly fulfilled in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* until the two fluids mingle, when they pour out from the wound. Dutton describes the merging thus:

Here the anchoress has come to full knowledge of God through Christ. She knows him still through the milk of his humanity, but now the wine of his divinity is also available to her [...] The milk no longer flows from his two breasts, but as a fountain from his opened side, just as in the previous passage John received the wine while “imbibing from that fountain”. The sweetness is now fully present for the anchoress at last, no longer associated merely with Christ’s humanity or reserved for John.⁷⁸

Dutton’s arguments can be advanced, however, if the crucial role that water and blood play in this merging is recognised. When Christ’s side is pierced, something previously denied to the anchoress – and to all mankind – is made not only present but accessible. She can come to ‘full knowledge’; the sweetness of Christ’s bodily fluids is ‘now fully present at last’ – in this moment (‘now’), completely (‘fully present’) and after what has been, not only for the anchoress but also for other readers, a long wait (‘at last’). Previously in the narrative readers, along with the anchoress on the fringes of the event, had to passively watch a man (John) ingest superior wine, whilst they contented themselves with milk:

And ȝif þu darst aunter þe no furþere, let þilke pryue disciple
Ihon slepe stille at Cristes brest, and let hym drynke þe precious
wyn of ioie in knowyngge of þe grete godheede; and ren þu
suster, to þe pappys of his manhede, and þerof suk out melke,
þat þu mowe gostly fed in þenkyngge what he dude for vs in vre
flehs (p. 46).

⁷⁸ Dutton, ‘Christ our Mother’, p. 31.

Now, when Christ's side is pierced, a more potent fluid – the blood symbolised by the eucharistic wine rather than the wine alone – flows freely for the reader, a 'fountain' which recalls both fluids. She can cover herself in Christ's blood until her lips become like a scarlet ribbon. Although the theological sense is that the bodily blood and water are fully accessible for all, the description of the anchoress' receipt of it creates a sense of intimacy, even exclusivity. John is not present in this scene. The anchoress-reader is first at the wound, first to partake of these far more precious fluids. Through her, so are any subsequent readers who also attempt the meditative exercise.

All of the pragmatic references to material water and blood lead us to this moment; they lend it potency and, simultaneously, include the reader in its power. The active language used to describe such moments emphasises the sense not only of inclusion but also of direct participation: '*go nyer* and *chalange* sum partye of alle þis swete wurþynesse [...] *ren þu* suster [...] 'Wher-aboutte standest þu, suster? *Ren to*, for Godys sake, and *suk* of þe swete blesseyde dropes'; 'Hye þe, suster, hye þe and tarye þe not' (p. 49, italics added). The devoted reader is encouraged to participate in an economy of fluids where their own water can be offered in return for salvific blood. In this way the saved become active contributors to the exchange, the language of which, in previous religious writings, has been preserved for Christ alone, who 'boute' our salvation with his 'blud'.

In both the gospel and a number of devotional writings from the late Middle Ages, the side wound and its gushing fluids thus act as a culmination of certain

tropes. Purification and access issue forth through the water and blood, which flow from Christ's side. Both fluids are visibly distinct but undeniably connected by their functions, spiritual and literal, as well as their shared meanings. An exploration of these shared meanings, as perceived by contemporary medieval society, therefore only strengthens critical understanding of these fluids and their uses in late medieval devotional writings, both as two independent fluids and as an inextricable pairing, mingled but distinct.

CONCLUSIONS: AN EVERYDAY MIRACLE

Earlier, this chapter made reference to a passage from the life of Adelheit in order to highlight Bildhauer's commentary on the anecdote.⁷⁹ It argued that water is conspicuous by its absence in Bildhauer's analysis of the text. The widowed nun Adelheit received a spiritual blood transfusion from God and his angels in return for years of crying: an unusual and unique exchange to say the least, and one by no means available to everyone. Because of her privileged spiritual position, new virginal blood is bestowed upon Adelheit to replace the inferior, deflowered blood and the language used to describe this exchange recalls that of mystic winepress motifs which stem from Isaiah.⁸⁰ Just like Christ, Adelheit is placed in a winepress and drained dry. Her startling *imitatio christi* is therefore exclusive and unprecedented. It is a miracle. Nevertheless, such miracles are not practically attainable for the majority of the devoted, be they laity or religious. For such

⁷⁹ See pp. 210-211 of the current chapter for this anecdote and Bildhauer's analysis.

⁸⁰ See footnote 22 of the current chapter.

faithful Christians a different kind of exchange is prescribed in devotional literature of the later Middle Ages. This exchange still hinges on the pivotal blood and water which flow from the wound-in-the-side, but it is altogether more accessible and easier to imagine. Aelred guides his reader throughout his narrative to comprehend the importance of blood and water as two distinct fluids which are nonetheless inextricably linked and share multiple meanings, helping her to understand not only the particular significance of blood and water but also to recognise the role she can play herself in this very special economy of fluids. He offers a participatory sacrifice which readers, such as Margery Kempe, are shown to actually live out in their own contemplations of Christ's life and his sacrificial death.

As the first three chapters of this thesis show, water is an element which should be spotlighted in late medieval devotional writings. With its range of biblical, medical, scientific and cultural associations, it articulates the constant battle of an individual soul with sin and it can also be used to express access to Christ. At the same time, male authors can manipulate it in order to regulate this access, to discourage their female readers' immersion in the words of Scripture.

As this final chapter demonstrates, it is also crucial that critical readings of devotional writings recognise and understand the special relationship between blood and water in the medieval devotional imagination. When paired with this other fluid, water accrues new meanings and its symbolism expands and transforms, expressing the relationship between human and divine whilst also

emphasising the mystery and miraculous nature of sacraments such as baptism and the Eucharist, where the ordinary and the sacred meet. Although the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council affirmed that the elements of the Eucharist (the bread and the wine) were transubstantiated, the actual nature of that process remained unclear. As Robert Swanson notes, theologians differed until the sixteenth century over ‘whether the process was one of instantaneous replacement of one set of substances by another, or whether the substances were actually transformed’.⁸¹ However, two things were made clear: the change itself and the fact that the ordinary object and its divine counterpart could not co-exist. The wine could not be the blood of Christ *and* earthly wine at the same time. There is therefore a real potency in the transformation of ordinary elements into sacred objects in the later Middle Ages, as well as in the idea of exchange and especially the replacement of one fluid for another. It is only by recognising the cultural valences of both water *and* blood in depictions of the Passion which make deliberate reference to the two fluids as a pair that readers can detect the economy of fluids that is encouraged, the exchange of water for blood.

⁸¹ Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p. 23.

CONCLUSION

READING WATER

According to Augustinian hermeneutics, the greater the plenitude of meanings a text or symbol contains, the more accurately it can reflect the bounty and munificence of God.¹ Read in this light, the associative density of water in devotional literature highlights the glorious abundance of creation and, more specifically, the literary potential of water to reveal it. The range of references to water in medieval religious writings, and the multitude of traditions which influence and inspire such references, are dizzying. Rivers, streams, wells, seas, and tears all saturate the pages of Christian works, frequently slipping and sliding out of the readers' or listeners' grasp, eluding definition and categorisation.

This thesis has shown how any attempt to categorise references to water must take account of this element's inherent ableness and adaptability. Even more crucially, it has challenged critical reluctance to fathom the prevalence and range of references to water by conducting a study of the detailed working of this image over a large span of years, a period of time marked by significant changes in religious belief and literary culture. In order to highlight the rich, generative

¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1958), 3.27, p. 38. See also Eileen Sweeney, 'Hugh of St Victor: The Augustinian Tradition of Sacred and Secular Reading Revised', in *Reading and Wisdom: The 'De Doctrina Christiania' of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 61-83 (p. 67).

potential of water, literary tropes involving water have been brought into dialogue with socio-historical analysis of water's role in medieval life; and the thesis has experimented with reading the tropes of water in devotional writings alongside water in other medieval literary genres ranging from encyclopaedic works to alliterative verse. It has argued that images of water should not be traced back to biblical precedents alone, or simply understood as manifestations of the association between women and water in medieval thought, outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. Whilst these allusions can certainly contribute to a greater understanding of figures and tropes of water in such writings as a whole, there is a larger and more complex landscape against which medieval literary water should be read. More particularly, this landscape sheds light on water's function as a mediator between the earthly and the spiritual. In many devotional texts, figures involving water are used to depict access to God, enabling active meditation on the Passion, but they can also regulate this access, controlling the extent to which female readers should interact with the written word of Scripture. The analysis in this thesis has therefore revealed the complexity of the landscape of water in late medieval prose works and it has also offered a number of approaches which can help readers to more fully comprehend this landscape.

In paying close attention to the way water features in the metaphorical texture of late medieval devotional prose works authored by men and addressed to women, this thesis has also explored the associations of water with gender in such writings. As chapter one demonstrates, women and water share a close relationship in a number of literary, theological, and scientific works of the Middle Ages. Male

authors might therefore be expected to inscribe water upon the religious lives and imaginations of their female readers in gendered, even misogynistic ways – and this is to a certain extent borne out. There are multiple instances where water is used as a metaphor for troubling, disruptive female speech which must be contained within the boundaries of the body rather than released as idle jangling. In *Ancrene Wisse* women’s speech is compared to water in a dam, and the text instructs readers to stop up this dam, to prevent wasteful words spilling out. In later works such as *The Doctrine of the Hert*, which assigns more agency and therefore blame to its female readers, the mouth becomes a mill that must be carefully guarded in order to prevent idle or argumentative words from gushing out of it.² In such analogies female readers must actively manage the water of their speech, exercising constant vigilance to prevent them from sliding into sin. This association between water and women’s speech endures well into the seventeenth century, where it becomes even more explicitly associated with the leaky, porous and sexually disquieting female body.³ The related conception of women as inherently dirty, filthy and unclean – a preconception which Lydgate artfully exploits in his ‘Tretise for Lauandres’ – also permeates, to varying degrees, all the devotional works which have been considered. *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* worries about the ‘vnclene’ affections that may be stirred in female readers and the vernacular translator of *The Doctrine of the Hert* repeatedly enjoins his readers to clean their proverbial hearts in various ways to prepare them for meditation on

² See chapter two of this thesis, pp. 87-94.

³ See Harris, ‘This is not a Pipe’, pp. 203-228 and Diane Cady, ‘Linguistic Dis-ease: Foreign Language as Sexual Disease in Early Modern England’, in *Sins of the Flesh: Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Kevin Siena (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 159-186 (pp. 168-169).

Christ. In the original twelfth-century version of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, Aelred of Rievaulx uses water in his autobiographical passages to diminish his sister-reader's own spiritual achievements, placing them in uncomfortable contrast with his own dramatic transformation and conversion. The fourteenth-century Middle English translator of Aelred's treatise does not gloss over such autobiographical scenes but preserves the distinction between author and reader – and therefore also preserves the gendered overtones of such scenes, as set out in chapter two.

Up to a certain point, then, gendered applications of water in these devotional prose works are consistent with troubling associations of women-and-water in late medieval medical, theological and literary thought. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown how such dichotomies become problematized when pressed – there are always exceptions to complicate, if not prove, the rule. Many of the tropes and figures of water recorded in this thesis can also be understood in ways which are not gender-specific. Although women may be conceived of as more inherently dirty and unclean than men, water-dependent analogies for making the soul clean are by no means reserved for women. Chapter three of this thesis showed how *Jacob's Well*, a sermon series which was written for a mixed audience but seems especially applicable to men, is concerned with water as a cleansing agent for the soul. This cleaning might be articulated in different ways (where well construction is used for men, more domestic cleaning practices, such as fulling linen and sweeping the floor, are preferred for women) but it remains a central concept for male readers, and references to water loom large in texts addressed to both genders.

Although female speech can be dangerous it can also be transformed into something spiritually rewarding, proverbially staining the female readers' lips with Christ's own blood in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*. And when water becomes intermingled with the holy blood of Christ, it becomes more potent, creating even more possibilities for both men and women. The final chapter of this thesis argues that in devotional works readers are encouraged to participate in a particular economy of fluids. They can offer their own water in the form of tears, which acts as a token of their remembrance and an offering of gratitude, allowing them to participate more actively in their own redemption. This exchange undoubtedly bears a special significance for female readers as it is informed by childbirth, associations between the wound in Christ's side and the vagina, and ideas of female fluid, namely, the blood of menstruation. However, this exchange is not necessarily limited to women. Men weep as much as women in medieval Christian tradition and they also bleed, just like their female counterparts, and just like Christ.⁴ This thesis has focused on writing for women, but it has paved the way for further investigation into this economy of fluids in devotional works for male and mixed readerships.

The flexible relationship between water and gender, outlined above, can be explained in part by the changing readership for vernacular devotional works in

⁴ Abba Paul weeps before God and Abba Poemen describes tears as the way of the Scriptures; *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. Ward, p. 144 and p. 155. Saint John Climacus offers a description of compunction which highlights the significance of tears for both men and women; John Chryssavgis, 'A Spirituality of Imperfection: The Way of Tears in Saint John Climacus', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 37 (2002), 359-72. For a discussion of the distinctions between male and female bleeding in medieval literature, see McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*.

the later Middle Ages. This thesis began with Aelred of Rievaulx's *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* which was initially addressed to a female reader, Aelred's anchoritic sister, but which reached a much larger audience in its late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century manifestations. One of its translations can be found in the fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript and scholars such as A. I. Doyle have provided convincing evidence for a female reading community for this manuscript, beyond the walls of the anchoritic cell.⁵ Although evidence for readership of the fifteenth-century Bodley manuscript is more difficult to find, Anne Bartlett points out that a codex almost identical to Bodley belonged to Shaftsbury nun Dame Joan Mouresleygh during the mid-fifteenth century, indicative of Bodley's potential appeal to other female religious readers more generally. All the other writings selected for discussion offer interesting variations on this pattern. The *Orchard of Syon* derives from a dialogue between Catherine of Siena and God, but was recorded by a male scribe and then translated into Middle English in the fifteenth century by a male translator for the nuns at Syon Abbey. Although the intended audience of the *Orchard of Syon* is therefore quite specific, a number of critics have persuasively argued that it eventually reached a wider readership, particularly when printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1519. In its Middle English manuscript reformulations, of which the *Orchard of Syon* is the most famous, the focus of Catherine's texts shifts from mystical to devotional. Translators made subtle but significant changes in order to transform Catherine into a more suitably contemporary and didactic model for a late medieval English audience.⁶ Printed

⁵ See footnote 57 in the introduction to the thesis.

⁶ C. Annette Gris , 'Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation', in *The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages, The*

versions further expanded their audience by targeting readers interested in vernacular devotional literature'.⁷ *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* was translated and directed at an audience that seems to have widened over time to include both men and women, although it retained a special emphasis on female readers.⁸ Whilst *The Doctrine of the Hert* began its literary life addressed to educated readers, the Middle English version seems to have been prepared for more poorly educated nuns.⁹ In each case, then, although the appeal of these devotional works widened, they also retained particular significance for female audiences. The decision of the Vernon translator of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* to exclude the 'outer life' of an anchoress from his version and to focus instead on the interior life of devotion is a good example of this *mouvance*.¹⁰

The transmission and reception of these texts are therefore complex and frequently difficult to navigate, a problem exacerbated by the very particular spiritual climate of the fifteenth century, which brought both increased regulation of vernacular literature and its increased popularity and widening availability.¹¹ Fifteenth-century spiritual culture has enjoyed a significant revival of critical

Medieval Translator/Traduire au Moyen Age, ed. Rosalynn Voaden, René Tixier, Teresa Sanchez Roura, and Jenny Rebecca Rytting (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 149-160 (p. 152).

⁷ Grisé, "In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour", in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition 4*, ed. Glasscoe, p. 207. Despres similarly shows how Catherine-texts shift to a devotional focus in the fifteenth century; see 'Ecstatic Reading', pp. 141-160. For readership of the *Orchard of Syon*, see footnote 67 in the introduction to this thesis.

⁸ For readership of the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, see footnote 65 in the introduction to this thesis.

⁹ For readership of the *Doctrine of the Hert*, see footnote 61 in the introduction to this thesis.

¹⁰ See Pezzini, 'Two Middle English Translations of *De Institutione Inclusarum*', p. 84.

¹¹ The regulatory aspect can be partly attributed to Arundel's legislation on vernacular devotional writings, which was fashioned partly in response to Wyclif and his followers. It consisted of thirteen articles regulating and restricting preaching without a license and restricting the production of vernacular texts and of translations of the Bible, among other matters; see Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change', pp. 825-828.

interest in recent years.¹² The traditional view that Archbishop Arundel's legislation made this century a time of religious conservatism that produced writings devoid of originality or innovation has been challenged, and more attention is being paid to the profusion and vibrancy of its many vernacular translations – a new area of enquiry to which this thesis contributes.¹³ Devotional works from the period, which have sometimes been cited as evidence of spiritual regulation (at best) or condescension and censorship (at worst), are now being read more positively, suffused with hope and concerned with practical encouragement.¹⁴ However, fifteenth-century attitudes towards women, religion, and vernacularity are still a site of critical debate, persuasively characterised by Annette Gris  as 'contradictory and ambivalent'.¹⁵

Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is a particularly useful example of such contradictions and ambivalences. On the one hand, Love's Middle English translation of pseudo-Bonaventuran Latin meditations on the life and death of Christ, initially addressed to a single female reader, are explicitly

¹² Alongside increased regulation, the fifteenth century also produced a huge number of translations, which have been given more critical attention in recent years. For further discussion of vernacular literature after Arundel, see *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Gillespie and Ghosh and the section on fifteenth-century spiritual culture in *Lost in Translation?: The Medieval Translator/Traduire au Moyen  ge*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), esp. Michael Sargent, 'Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and the Politics of Vernacular Translation in Late Medieval England', pp. 205-222, and Ian Johnson, 'The Non-Dissenting Vernacular and the Middle English Life of Christ: The Case of Love's *Mirror*', pp. 223-236.

¹³ See Windéatt, '1412-1534: Texts', pp. 195-224 (pp. 195-197).

¹⁴ A particularly good illustration of this tendency is Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which Watson offers as an example of spiritual regulation in 'Censorship and Cultural Change'. Johnson challenges this view, treating Love's *Mirror* as a reassuring and ultimately hopeful meditation on the life and death of Christ; Johnson, 'The Non-Dissenting Vernacular', p. 234. For a more pessimistic reading of Love's *Mirror* as a form of 'social and linguistic condescension', see Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, pp. 63-70 (p. 65).

¹⁵ Gris , "In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour", p. 211.

tailored to a wider audience, ‘boþe men & women & euery Age & euery dignite’ who are stirred to hope of everlasting life.¹⁶ However, where the initial author encourages his female reader to enact ‘gostly chewyng’ of the gospel of Christ, Love instead offers the ‘mylke of ly3te doctryne’ to his ‘symple’ readers rather than the ‘sadde mete of grete clargye & of h[ye] contemplacion’.¹⁷ Exploring Love’s work, which was sanctioned by Archbishop Arundel, Carol Meale considers whether female readers would have been ‘empowered by the text and the identification they were encouraged to make between their own contemplative practice and that of the Virgin’ or whether the religious orthodoxy of the work, the milk of light doctrine which is offered to readers instead of the bread of high contemplation, would have been ‘inseparable to them from its social conservatism, serving only to confirm existing power-relations between the genders’.¹⁸ This thesis has asked similar questions of the various devotional prose works it considers, and it has shown how water plays into the tension between increased accessibility – the widening appeal and readership of works originally intended for very specific readers – and increased regulation in the early fifteenth century. Chapter two, which considers imagined reader-interaction with water, reveals a tension in devotional prose between the prescription of distance from water (which in this instance is used to represent Scriptural writings) and the description of meditational union with Christ in watery terms – bathing, melting

¹⁶ *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Revised Critical Edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael Sargent (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2005), p. 10.

¹⁷ *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Sargent, p. 11 and p. 10.

¹⁸ Carol M. Meale, “‘oft siþis with grete deuotion I þought what I miȝt do pleyſyng to god”: The Early Ownership and Readership of Love’s *Mirror*, with Special Reference to its Female Audience’, in *Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20-22 July 1995*, ed. Shoichi Ogura, Richard Beadle and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977), pp. 19-46 (p. 44).

and dissolving. In the first part of *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, the reader is described as a dove who should 'haunte' the clear waters of scripture but should not engage with them in any more direct way. However, the next time the reader is described as a dove, she undergoes an imaginative melding with Christ in a meditation on the Passion, during which water is used to enhance the sense of union and connection. Where previously readers had to watch John imbibe the blood of Christ, here they are first at the scene, washed in the water and blood from his side.¹⁹

This use of water as a metaphor may be partially explained in light of Nicholas Love's milk of light doctrine. Traditionally, and when Aelred of Rievaulx was writing his original treatise in the twelfth century, meditation on the life and death of Christ was understood to be an exercise for spiritual beginners, in contrast with the superior contemplative practice of reading and meditating upon the Latin words of the scriptures.²⁰ Although meditation on the Passion accrued a meaning and significance all its own in the later Middle Ages, these scenes from Aelred's treatise, which are preserved in its vernacular translation, can be read as simultaneously promoting and regulating access to God. The water of Christ's body, like Love's milk of light doctrine, is offered to the less spiritually proficient female reader as a replacement for the waters of the Scriptures, which she only has regulated access to in this spiritual schema. Nevertheless, the description of Christ's Passion and his bodily water, which is so vivid and engaging in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, may well represent an instance where water, due to its slippery

¹⁹ See chapter four of this thesis, pp. 235-238.

²⁰ Introduction to *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Sargent, p. x.

nature, slides out of a regulatory author's control. For how can this union, articulated through water and fulfilling the proverbial thirst of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, be received as substandard?

Writing on the translator's preface to *the Orchard of Syon*, Gris  notes the illustration of 'ideals suitable for emulation by other readers, ideals which attempt to regulate devotional practices and especially vernacular reading practices in the growing audience for the devotional literary tradition in late medieval England'.²¹ Similarly, she argues that the 'hortatory process' of the *Orchard of Syon* 'presents the idea of conformity as both an enabling practice and one that allows for the regulation and containment of female religious'.²² Her essay therefore argues that although there was increased access to the *Orchard of Syon* in the fifteenth century, the text actively regulates the spirituality of its readers. This thesis has helped to clarify some of the contradictions hinted at in the above quotations from both Meale and Gris , although many questions remain. Would female readers have been empowered by such images of water or would their understanding have been constrained by social conservatism and gender norms, as Meale speculates with regard to *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*? Would female readers of the *Orchard of Syon*, or any of the other works under discussion, have felt enabled, contained, or both at once? There is not sufficient evidence of individual reader responses to argue either way. But an argument can be advanced that the presence of water in these devotional works, because of the element's multivalent meanings, creates the

²¹ Gris , "In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour", p. 199.

²² Gris , "In the Blessid Vynezerd of Oure Holy Saueour", p. 209.

potential for both readings, and many other interpretations besides. The possibility of a disjunction between authorial intention and audience reception must therefore be acknowledged when it comes to the functionings of water. Male authors may well have been attempting to regulate female spiritual practice in these devotional writings and they may have used water to help them do so. However, the element is slippery by nature and associated with ideas of accessibility in the medieval religious imagination, which makes it a difficult image to contain in literature. There are numerous moments in devotional prose where water is deliberately made to function as a means for spiritual access, and these moments make attempts to use the element as a *limiter* of access, particularly in the same texts, difficult to maintain.

FUTURE WATERWORKS

This thesis has endeavoured to open up the sealed fountain of watery possibility rather than contain it, and it has uncovered a number of new directions in which the present research could be taken. The intention of this thesis was to chart a chronological route from Aelred of Rievaulx's twelfth-century *De Institutione Inclusarum* through to its later medieval vernacular versions and to bring these into dialogue with some works which followed similar, involved patterns of transmission – which circulated in various manuscript versions and, with regard to the *Orchard of Syon*, eventually made it into print but which retained an emphasis on female audiences. Productive enquiry could be made into how a number of as

yet unedited works deal with water in their own spiritual schemas. This thesis has shown how *Jacob's Well*, only the first half of which is actually in print, can make for illuminating comparison with devotional prose writings, even if it is not itself devotional in focus. Whilst reference has been made to a number of the later sermons, where relevant, there is still much work to be done on the latter, unedited half of this sermon series. Another relevant, and more obviously devotional work is the Middle English extract, translated from Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo*, which appears in eight manuscripts and which Grisé refers to as 'the most significant Middle English extract taken from the *Dialogo*' as well as an example of 'the way in which an excerpt from the revelations can be given a didactic purpose'.²³ Whilst the *Orchard of Syon* has been considered extensively in this thesis, the 'Clennesse of the Sowle', as it has become known, has not yet been considered in terms of its use of water. The extract could be usefully compared not only with its original source but also with its Syon counterpart – how integral to this extract is the allegory of water, which frames both Catherine's original and the fifteenth-century *Orchard of Syon*, where sinners must rise from the filthy floods of earth to the peaceable sea of heaven? Does it become more or less pronounced alongside a more didactic and devotional focus? Finally, there are a number of unpublished and uncollected prayers for women which could usefully be drawn into discussion about the use of water as a literary metaphor. One particularly striking example is *The Feistis and the Passion of Our Lord Jesu Crist*, a collection of meditative prayers composed by an anonymous female writer at the request of her

²³ Grisé, 'Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts', p. 152 and p. 158.

‘religious sister’.²⁴ A number of extracts from this collection have been edited by Alexandra Barratt, and these snippets suggest that water is not as pivotal a feature as one might expect, given the range of tropes and figures which this thesis has identified in comparative devotional and meditational works. Although the parable of Jacob’s Well is recounted, for example, water is only given a cursory mention: ‘A, gracious Jhesu, graunte me also the water of lif that I thurst not endelesli and make me drunke in youre swete love, wherthorw I may at the laste come to everlasting lif’.²⁵ Similarly, the tears of Mary Magdalene, which are so crucial in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, are included but they are not afforded any more significant reflection than the following: ‘and ther sche wepte for here misdedis and wessch youre feet with here terys and wiped hem with here heer’.²⁶ Initial research therefore suggests that the symbolism of water in the *Feistis* is less complex. However, in terms of this project’s interest in the ambivalent role of women readers and their engagement with meditations, this collection seems promising. Barratt, in her brief introduction to the published extracts, suggests that ‘the writer of this collection mainly treats her meditative subjects with restraint and in her address to Christ keeps a respectful distance’ but also observes how ‘the author is apparently encouraging her audience to identify with these New

²⁴ ‘The Feistis and the Passion of our Lord Jesu Christ’, in *Women’s Writings in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barratt, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1992; repr. 2010), pp. 211-223. The unique manuscript for this set of prayers is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Holkham Misc. 41. For further reading see William F. Pollard, ‘Mystical Elements in a Fifteenth-Century Prayer Sequence’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium 4*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), pp. 47-60.

²⁵ ‘The Feistis’, in *Women’s Writings in Middle English*, ed. Barratt, p. 213.

²⁶ ‘The Feistis’, in *Women’s Writings in Middle English*, ed. Barratt, p. 214.

Testament women who are all, in some way, even more marginalised than is usual for women'.²⁷

Pictorial representations of water in manuscripts from the late medieval period, particularly those with a devotional focus, are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, an exploration of manuscript illuminations of water and water-inclusive images in churches and religious institutions could certainly inform and develop the arguments made here, particularly as so many of the literary tropes of water uncovered by this thesis are used to stimulate meditation. A question worth asking, then, is how actual images might differ from or complement meditation on literary figures of water. With regard to meditation on the Passion, for example, there are a plethora of illustrations of Christ soaked in blood. However, it is very difficult to find any where water is also visually present. Initial research suggests that illustrators might expect certain images to recall water, even if the element itself is not actually depicted, or they might use the written word to suggest it. For example, a rood screen at the monastery church in Doberan, dated to 1368, figures a prophet on the left arm of the screen carrying the words *putens aquae vitae* (a well of living water). According to Gertrud Schiller, these words explain the changing of bitter water into sweet water in relation to Christ's death.²⁸ Schiller also notes that where there was an image of the Mystic Winepress, that medieval image of Christ treading the grapes during his Crucifixion which became

²⁷ 'The Feistis', in *Women's Writings in Middle English*, ed. Barratt, p. 211.

²⁸ *Iconography of Christian Art, volume 2: The Passion of Jesus Christ*, ed. Gertrud Schiller, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1968; repr. 1972), p. 130.

increasingly popular during the later Middle Ages, the concept of the Fountain of Life would most likely be evoked by association.²⁹

There is at least one English illustration, from a fifteenth-century Book of Hours, where the attentive reader will spot drops of water flowing from Christ's side, alongside the more startling blood.³⁰ What does it mean that a reader has to look closely to decipher actual depictions of water in art of the Passion, where it can be found at all, despite the fact that most late-medieval devotional writings explicitly follow the gospel in mentioning Christ's blood *and* water? Or that we have to comprehend the associative density of water – to be aware of its cultural milieu – in order to intuit its metaphorical presence in late medieval depictions of Christ's suffering and death? This project is concerned with the multifarious allusions that one single reference to water can prompt and the relationship between water, speech and the written word of scripture.³¹ Coming to the end of such a project, the use of specific allusions to *recall* water in medieval art and the use of writing to represent water seem worthy of further investigation.

²⁹ *Iconography of Christian Art*, p. 110. For the mystic winepress see footnote 22 in chapter four of this thesis.

³⁰ This illumination can be found in London, British Library, MS Harley 2915. For a digital version of the image see Harley 2915, f. 167v, Crucifixion, in British Library: Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=39299>> [31.03.16]. The illuminations are by the Fastolf Master but the original owner of the manuscript is unknown. There is a prayer composed for the Duke of Bedford and other prayers seem to be written for a soldier. However, there are also prayers added for a woman in the manuscript. See *Gothic: Art for England 1400-1547*, ed. Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (London: V&A, 2003), no. 224, pp. 344-345.

³¹ Lees-Jeffries identifies the fountain, rather than the stream, as 'the most common and potent metaphor for the Scriptures in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries' and shows how the motif is also central in discussions of the Christian imperative to right reading. See *England's Helicon*, p. 106 and pp. 113-114.

Whilst the focus of the analysis in this thesis has been water, the final chapter demonstrates the spiritual potential of intermingled fluids in devotional prose. Alongside blood, which has already been the centre of critical interest in recent years, other liquids such as milk, oil, and honey are often seen to intermingle in intriguing ways, not only in late medieval devotional prose but also in secular verse, such as Lydgate's 'Tretise'. The methodology that this thesis applies to water could inform investigation into the significance of other Christic fluids, in order to enhance understanding of their workings and significations.

The focus could usefully be broadened to include other genres, such as Middle English Passion lyrics, which would help to reveal how various different genres treat liquid moments, and which could be used as a vehicle for tracking trends and continuities over time. For instance, water retains its significance in early modern religious writings. Rosemary Woolf compares a medieval lyric to a sonnet by the seventeenth-century Catholic poet William Alabaster, both of which imagine the Passion of Christ.³² Her choice of sonnet reveals the endurance of the reciprocal, liquid relationships in devotional writings which this thesis has identified, although the significance of the fluids is not commented on in her own analysis. The voice of Alabaster's sonnet sees Christ on the cross 'through tears' (l. 1) and imagines

³² Rosemary Woolf uses this comparison to suggest that, whilst the influence of medieval lyrics on seventeenth-century poetry must be acknowledged, the differences between the two are particularly interesting and worthy of further investigation. She argues that where the medieval lyric is written in a simple style to reflect a great general truth, Alabaster's sonnet underlines the sense that in metaphysical poetry there *are* no great general truths and that 'the way to the heart is through the head'; *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 370-371. The medieval Passion lyric can be found in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Brown, 56. Alabaster's sonnet can be found in *The Sonnets of William Alabaster*, ed. G. M. Story and Helen Gardner (Oxford: OUP, 1959), 39. Line references for both of these poems will be to these editions and will be given in the text.

Him bending down from the tree to actively offer his blood: ‘And from his side the blood doth spin, whereon / My heart, my mouth, mine eyes still sucking be’ (ll. 7-8). In the final lines of the sonnet these two fluids become exhilaratingly intermingled and offer the possibility of another realm where Christ – through these very fluids but also beyond them – can be more fully accessed: ‘let my heart tears bleed / Or bring, where eyes, nor tears, nor blood shall need’ (ll. 13-14). To a reader familiar with medieval Passion lyrics, these lines may well recall the various versions of ‘A spring song on the Passion’ in which the poetic voice beholds Christ on the cross through their tears as they watch His wounds, which weep unceasingly and fully, becoming likewise wet.³³ Moreover, these lines reflect the exchange of blood for water, central to the final chapter of this thesis, and the sense of active participation and access which can be achieved through imagining these fluids in devotional prose. In terms of content, then, this seventeenth-century metaphysical sonnet is not so different from writings on the suffering and death of Christ discussed in this thesis.

There is also work to be done with regard to the significance of the other three natural elements in devotional works of the later Middle Ages – earth, fire, and air. Although Richard Rolle’s allegorical ‘fire of love’ (which Margery Kempe seems to be familiar with) has been the subject of much critical discussion, there is no comprehensive study of how individual elements function in devotional writings, and how cultural understanding of these elements informs their usage.³⁴ One

³³ See *A Selection of Religious Lyrics*, ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 31.

³⁴ See, for example, Christopher Roman, ‘Opening the Inner Doors: Richard Rolle and the Space of the Soul’, *Mystics Quarterly*, 32 (2006), 19-45 and W. F. Pollard, ‘Richard Rolle and the “Eye of

element which would be particularly productive to consider alongside water is earth. According to John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, water and earth (unlike fire and air) are heavy, and their natural movement is downwards. Due to their comparative distance from heaven these two elements are frequently in partnership, together creating liminal spaces such as mires, bogs and filthy floods. However, water – not content with this base position – wishes to separate itself from earth. It 'styeþ vp into hie place and chalangeþ heuen'.³⁵ In devotional literature humans are encouraged to be like water, rising up out of their earthly prisons to attain a cleaner, spiritual state, as we have seen in the *Orchard of Syon*.³⁶ If readers can pull themselves out of the mires, bogs, and filthy, earthly seas – which represent spiritual stagnation – then they can rise up and eventually possess spiritual rest.³⁷ In large part due to humanity's particular relationship with earth, however, this apparently linear spiritual journey is more often than not revealed to be a pilgrimage of false starts, failure and repetition. In poems such as *Pearl*, unlikely protagonists are depicted as trying (and

the Heart", in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. W. F. Pollard and Robert Boenig (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 85-106 (p. 90). Margery Kempe seems to make reference to Rolle's fire of love, too. She describes the 'flame of fire of love', which is 'marvellously hot and delectable', never diminishing but always increasing; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, pp. 193-194. For a critical discussion of Kempe's use of this image see Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 115.

³⁵ Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. Seymour, p. 646.

³⁶ See, for example, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* in which the reader is imagined as bound in 'shameful chains / By cheating lust that lives in your earthbound minds' and must endeavour to rise out of it, to achieve 'rest' in 'a haven of quiet abiding calm'. *Quos fallax ligat improbis catenis / Terrenas habitans libido mentes, / Haec erit vobis requies laborum, / Hic portus placida manens quiete*; *Boethius: The Theological Tractates*, ed. Stewart et al., pp. 284-285, ll. 1-5. See also Richard Morris's *The Prick of Conscience*, ed. Hanna and Wood, which emphasises how humans were made from the 'foulest mater' of earth (p. 13, ll. 373-374).

³⁷ In *The Orchard of Syon* such rest is depicted in watery terms, described as a 'pesible see' (p. 423). For a more detailed comparison of *Pearl* and the *Orchard of Syon*, see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 115-127.

failing) to ascend into these higher places.³⁸ This thesis has shown how water is used as a spiritual signpost in a number of devotional treatises. Individual references to water and blood in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* help contribute to a greater understanding of the Passion, and tears mark spiritual progress in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.³⁹ However, it remains to be seen how other elements, such as earth, function as signposts in devotional narratives. Comparison of this kind between works of spiritual instruction or encouragement and literary depictions of spiritual struggles, such as the alliterative religious poems *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience* could provide further insight into medieval understanding of the role of the four elements in spiritual life.

BATHING AND BURNING FOR LOVE

This thesis has begun to identify a literary language of water, a stock set of images which are made to figure in multifarious, even contradictory ways in various works of devotional prose from the later Middle Ages – particularly those which have specifically female associations. Gifts of tears, stormy seas, filthy floods, blanched sheets of souls, streams of scriptures – have all been recorded and examined in a sample of devotional literature. It seems apt, therefore, to end with a continuance of this search for clearer water. A brief analysis of the writing of Robert Southwell is offered here as a microcosmic example of how the various

³⁸ The narrator's failure in this poem, significantly, is signalled by his attempt to cross the river. See chapter two of this thesis, pp. 115-119.

³⁹ See chapter four of this thesis, pp. 229-239.

associations of water identified in this thesis – and the various functions and significances of water within devotional literature – might flow beyond the boundaries of the Middle Ages.

In a recent survey of weeping throughout English history, Thomas Dixon suggests that modern day opponents of British weeping, such as those who scorned the tears of George Osborne at Margaret Thatcher's funeral, 'embody an element of anti-Catholicism still inhabiting our mixed-up national unconscious half a millennium after the Protestant Reformation'.⁴⁰ After the Reformation, tears were considered to be 'excessive, effeminate, and ineffectual'. Dixon cites the tears of Mary Magdalene as an emblem of everything the new, Protestant culture was trying to reject.⁴¹ However, there were underground Catholic writers who tried to keep the power of the penitent and longing tear alive, one of whom was Robert Southwell. After training as a Jesuit in France, Southwell returned to Elizabethan England as a Catholic missionary, where he was executed in 1595. His poems and prose, borne out of the uncertainty and danger of Catholic life in Protestant England, make for fruitful comparison with late medieval meditational and devotional writings, particularly with regard to the role not only of tears, but of water more generally, as a literary metaphor in his work.⁴²

⁴⁰ Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 28.

⁴¹ Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, p. 28.

⁴² For an introduction to his life and writings, see Scott R. Pilarz, S. J., *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595: Writing Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). For further discussion of the meditative and devotional aspects of his prose and poetry, see Helen C. White, 'The Contemplative Element in Robert Southwell', *The Catholic Historical Review* 48 (1962), 1-11 and Warren R. Maurer, 'Spee, Southwell, and the Poetry of Meditation', *Comparative Literature*, 15 (1963), 15-22. For a comparison of Southwell's poetry with contemporary Protestant writings with a similar focus, Martin Elsky, 'History, Liturgy, and Point of View in Protestant Meditative Poetry', *Studies in Philology*, 77 (1980), 67-83. For the relationship between William Alabaster and

Water, in Southwell's writings, retains the 'ableness' and productive flexibility of its position in late medieval prose, as it can represent both the purest love for Christ and the seductive, destructive love for earthly things. So, according to *Marie Magdalen's Funeral Teares*, Southwell's famous tract published anonymously in 1591, the tears of Mary Magdalene are 'pretious' water, 'pure streams' flowing from her eyes. In contrast, water becomes transformed into something far more disquieting in his poem 'Love's Servile Lot'.⁴³ In this poetic reflection on earthly love, Southwell describes the 'honnie shower' (l.13) which rains from the lips of the feminine figure of love, who 'settes afloote some luring streames / But makes them soone to ebb' (ll. 31-2). May is not the season of this earthly love, Southwell informs us, but rather April, 'for love is full of showers' (l. 40). Such love is the bringer of 'slipperie hope' (l. 62), whose sighs blow the fire of human desire and distract man's thoughts from God. Water is associated with the feminine in both positive and troubling ways in Southwell's writings here, just as in late medieval prose. It also has a similarly transformative potential; tears can be spiritually productive or spiritually damaging, depending on their intent and cause. Where in *Marie Magdalen's Funeral Teares* the water of tears brings the proverbial ship of Mary's soul into safe harbour, the figure of love in 'Love's Servile Lot' causes ships to sail in waters which soon diminish, causing wrecks. Water is 'slipperie' in

Robert Southwell, see John W. Dickinson, 'Southwell's Burning Babe and William Alabaster', *Notes and Queries*, 8 (1961), 425-426.

⁴³ Robert Southwell, *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares* (London: I. R. for W. L., 1602), p. 66. 'Love's Servile Lot', in *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S. J.*, ed. James H. McDonald and Nancy Pollard Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 60-62. All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

Southwell's writing; he urges us to use our own water, our own tears, in the right ways and not to be distracted by the seductive waters of earthly love.

In Southwell's most famous poem, 'The Burning Babe', images of making the soul clean, melting into God's love, the redemptive power of water and the potent pairing of blood and water all cluster together as the narrative voice looks into the sky and sees a vision of a burning babe, later revealed to be the Christ child: 'The metall in this furnace wrought, are men's defiled soules: / For which, as now on fire I am to worke them to their good, / So will I melt into a bath, to wash them in my blood'.⁴⁴ There are some revealing variations here with regard to late-medieval devotional prose. Rather than imagining a melting with Christ, a union in which the boundaries between earthly and divine are temporarily blurred through the figure of water, the poetic voice must watch Christ himself 'melt' from a distance. Although the promise of contact and proximity, of being bathed and washed in Christ's blood, is gestured towards, it is never actually fulfilled in the space of the poem. Moreover, it is Christ whose 'floods of teares' feed the flames of the burning fire, rather than the tears of the onlooker. In this way, the sense of interaction between Christ and devoted Christian human, which can be found in devotional prose and medieval Passion lyric, is more limited and the participatory relationship minimised.

A similar cluster of water-inclusive imagery can be found in Southwell's prose, particularly resonant in this passage from *Marie Magdalen's Funeral Teares*:

⁴⁴ 'The Burning Babe', in *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S. J.*, ed. McDonald and Brown, pp. 15-16 (ll. 23-28). All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the text.

Yea this onelie water hath quenched Gods anger, qualified his iustice, recouered his mercy, merited his loue, purchased his pardon, & brought forth the spring of all thy fauours. Thy teares were the proctours for thy brothers life, the inuiters of those Angells for thy comfort, and the suters that shall be rewarded with the first sight of thy reuiued Sauour. Rewarded they shall be, but not refrained, altered in their course, but their course continued. Heauen would weepe at the losse of so pretious a water, and earth lament the absence of so fruitfull showers. No, no, the Angels must still bathe themselves in the pure streames of they eyes, and thy face shall still be set with this liquid pearle, that as out of thy teares, were stroken the first sparkes of thy Lordes loue, so thy teares may bee the oyle, to nourishe and feede his flame. Till death dam vp the springs, they shall neuer cease running: and then shal thy soule be ferried in them to the harbour of life, that as by the, it was first passed from sinne to grace, so in them it may be wasted from grace to glorie.⁴⁵

The concept of earthly, female tears which become a gift for the angels – like the tears of Margery Kempe discussed in the final chapter of this thesis – is central to Southwell’s reflections on Mary Magdalene’s tears in this passage, as they become a metaphorical bath in which angels can bathe. The word ‘purchased’ recalls the reciprocal relationship between Christ’s blood and the water of his devoted identified in this thesis; the sometimes troubling excess of female water is transformed into a pure and ceaseless flow which cannot be dammed up until the end of life. The female figure in this passage is carried safely on the sea of her tears but unlike in *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, there is no alternative and potentially superior spiritual experience vying for attention in these lines. The spotlight is on the feminine figure’s safe passage. Just as baptism cleanses original sin, so the water of tears can bring an individual from ‘grace to glorie’; the various stages of

⁴⁵ Southwell, *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares*, p. 66. This version has ‘fame’ instead of ‘flame’ in the line ‘so thy teares may bee the oyle, to nourishe and feede his fame’. However, a slightly later version (printed in 1620) amends this to ‘flame’. The amendment is adhered to here, as ‘flame’ seems to make the most sense in terms of the development of Southwell’s imagery; Southwell, *S. Peters Complaint and Saint Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares: with sundry other selected and deuout poems* (London, 1621), p. 139.

water mark spiritual progress in Southwell's writing, just as they do in many works of devotional prose. However, the ambivalences and complications concerning gender in late-medieval devotional references to water are less prominent in Southwell's writings. Water can help to represent the feminine evils of earthly love or the purity of Mary Magdalene, but there is less of an ambiguous in-between.⁴⁶

One other intriguing difference between devotional prose and the writings of Robert Southwell, which the above examples illustrate, is the addition of the element of fire. Almost every reference to water in 'The Burning Babe' and the above passage from *Marie Magdalen's Funeral Teares* is interlaced with burning flames. In the poem, Christ's tears feed the fire of love which consumes him. Southwell explores an apparent paradox through this image: 'As though his floods should quench his flames, which with his teares were fed' (ll. 5-6). Similarly, in a reflection on Christ's bloody sweat, Southwell asks, '[h]ow burneth bloud, how bleedeth burning love, / Can one in flame and streame both bathe and frie?'⁴⁷ In the passage from *Marie Magdalen's Funeral Teares* the relationship between these opposite elements, one of which (according to natural laws) should extinguish the other, is more straightforward but no less central. The tears of Mary strike the first sparks of Christ's love; they become the oil which nourishes and feeds the flames of his love, rather than the water which dampens them. The 'fire of love' is also a

⁴⁶ Gary Kuchar argues that in *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares*, Southwell 'oscillates between excess and temperance, silence and speech, grief and joy', seeking both to license and regulate images of female power whilst doing so'. However, where tropes and figures of water are concerned, the association between women and water is less ambivalent than when it appears in late medieval devotional prose; 'Gender and Recusant Melancholia in *Mary Magdalene's Funeral Tears*', in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Ronald Corthell et al. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press), pp. 135-151 (p. 151).

⁴⁷ 'Christ's Bloody Sweat', in *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S. J.*, ed. McDonald and Brown, pp. 18-19, ll. 9-10.

significant image in late medieval devotional literature and we have seen how *The Doctrine of the Hert*, for example, imagines the boiling hot water of Christ's love.⁴⁸ However, Southwell's recurring emphasis on the paradoxical relationship of the fire *and* water of love is more distinctive.⁴⁹ Why, in Southwell's writing, does fire become such a significant element of literary allusions to water? Sadia Abbas, writing on Southwell, has argued for the centrality of paradox in his various writings and it is tempting to view Southwell's use of fire in this context, as a reflection of his interest in the relationship between two elements which should naturally be at odds.⁵⁰ But is there something more to this evocation of two elements? Both fire and water can represent spiritual longing and desire and, when paired in Southwell's writings, they seem to express the tensions involved in such spiritual longing, as well as the miraculous nature of Christ's redemptive love. Whilst striking and arresting, do these intermingled elements of fire and water draw readers closer to visions of Christ or do the hot, untouchable flames keep them at a certain distance?

Water runs through many Christian writings. However, different kinds of historical, religious and cultural contexts all serve to transform its significance and implications over time. The writings of Southwell reveal that the productive 'ableness' of water persists into the early modern period, but in the historical climate of the sixteenth century his exploration of the relationship between women and water results in effects different from those claimed for the medieval

⁴⁸ *The Doctrine of the Hert*, ed. Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, p. 37.

⁴⁹ For Rolle's fire of love, see footnote 34 above.

⁵⁰ Sadia Abbas, 'Polemic and Paradox in Robert Southwell's Lyric Poems', *Criticism*, 45 (2003), 453-482.

texts considered here. This thesis has shown how the references to water in late medieval devotional prose, especially those works written by men for female audiences, are informed and problematised by a wider cultural understanding of the slipperiness of water. Studying water in all its variety reveals how the references devotional authors make to water are influenced by biblical, scientific and medical beliefs specific to the later Middle Ages, as well as by the realities of water in everyday medieval life. The outpouring of vernacular literature, the fine line between access and regulation in the spiritual climate of the late Middle Ages, and the ambivalent attitudes towards women explored in this thesis all contribute to a very specific literary language of water. This stock of recurrent and complex images allows late medieval authors to create tropes which promise access to God. However, they also contribute to the formation of narratives and imagery which are used to *regulate* this access. Water functions to express the boundaries between human and divine but also to hint at the permeation of such boundaries. This thesis has conducted a search for a clearer understanding of water, its meanings and its resonances, in devotional writings. The scope and multifaceted nature of the search has been emphasised, but so too have the profits of such an approach. The search can, and should, flow on.

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