

# Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe<sup>1</sup>

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## MYSTICS AND DEMONIACS

In the late thirteenth century, Ida of Louvain scandalized her community. The daughter of a prosperous wine merchant, Ida already had refused marriage and become a recluse in a small cell within her parents' home. One day, however, it seemed that she went mad. Casting aside even the simple clothes she now wore, Ida wrapped herself in a dirty rag and draped a mat over her shoulders for warmth. Aggressively seeking out the most crowded plazas and market places, she preened and "strutted about if mad or a fool, offering a monstrous spectacle of herself to the people."<sup>2</sup> Townspeople murmured that Ida was in a frenzy, out of her mind; eventually she was tied up to prevent her from harming herself or others.

What compelled Ida to act in this way? If we believe her hagiographer's testimony, it was a divine revelation. According to Ida's *vita*, her radical behavior was traceable to a vision she had just received, the first of many to come. In Ida's vision, a pauper approached her recluse's cell and stood before her face; he then reached out his hands and peeled back the skin of her chest, revealing her heart. The pauper climbed inside Ida's heart and took up residence there, enjoying her "hospitality." This is why Ida suddenly conceived a frenzy for such an abject—and visible—kind of poverty: she was divinely possessed, inhabited by the poor Christ.

The tale unveils a profound tension in the history of religious laywomen in the later Middle Ages. Whereas Ida and her hagiographer considered her state to be one of internal possession by the divine spirit, outside observers considered her "insane and frenetic," a malady that was frequently attributed to demonic possession.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, her external symptoms of dementia, frenzy, trances, convulsions, and episodes of strange bleeding precisely mirrored the behaviors characteristically reported of demoniacs at this time. Nor was Ida alone in being the object of such suspicions: accusations of demonic possession were quite a common response to women claiming divine inspiration in the later Middle

Ages. Medieval communities struggled mightily over how to decide whether an inspired woman was possessed by the Holy Spirit or an unclean spirit. Although (as I shall argue below) Ida's vision of the pauper entering her heart might have suggested a beneficent interpretation of her behaviors to a medieval audience, ultimately this vision was internal and private, hence unverifiable. From the external vantage point of the observer, Ida's behavior appeared pointless and disordered. Parading through the plazas while proudly modeling rags was taken as an "in-your-face" gesture by Ida's contemporaries, an indication that something was deeply wrong with her, rather than a sign of divine illumination. As I will demonstrate, this very same ambivalence of reception characterizes the careers of many women whose names populate the pages of recent monographs and articles about medieval feminine piety. Such women were frequently viewed with deep suspicion, even repugnance, by their surrounding community, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or both.

The responses of an audience to a mystic's public performances are thus intricately bound up with the question of how external behaviors were thought to mirror internal, spiritual states. This internal/external dichotomy may also be discerned in the approaches of modern scholars to medieval women mystics. Modern American scholarship on feminine devotion in the Middle Ages has tended to approach the topic from a predominantly "internal" vantage point—exploring the subjective meanings of ascetic practices, devotional motifs and symbolisms, the intimate relationship between the putative saint and her confessor, or the affective content of typically female visions.<sup>4</sup> This "internal" analysis may be contrasted with an "external" approach—exploring perceptions of the mystic within her community context, the formation of cults of veneration, or the process of canonization—which has received less attention, particularly in the English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> While I cannot do justice to the subtleties of the entire field in the present context, there are two aspects of what I shall call the "dominant scholarly narrative" that I would like to highlight here. First, research on the internal affective piety of female mystics, culled largely from mystical *vitae*, has resulted in a profile of the "typical" woman saint as deeply ascetic, highly ecstatic, and devoted to meditation upon the events of Jesus' life on earth. The result of such devotional practices, as Caroline Bynum has compellingly demonstrated in a series of influential publications, was an experience of identification with the suffering body of the human Christ so intense that it often was said to be somatically manifested in the mystic's own body. Paramystical transformations such as the onset of immobile and insensible trances, of uncontrollable fits and crying (the "gift of tears"), or the reception of the stigmata, are all commonly reported of women mystics, and were understood by them as the physical side-effects of their spiritual union with the divine. The career of Ida of Louvain conforms closely to such a pattern. If we turn to "external" issues of community response, however, we see that these features of women mystics' careers have received less attention. This is the sec-

ond aspect of the dominant narrative that I would like to discuss. When the question of response has been raised, the dominant narrative holds that a significant number of religious laywomen gained prestige and empowerment through their ecstasies and austerities, and ultimately became the focus of cults of veneration.<sup>6</sup> Viewed as vessels of the Holy Spirit, as the intimates of God, women mystics like Ida were held in awe and veneration by their contemporaries. André Vauchez's statistics regarding female lay saints have been widely cited as proof of this fact, particularly the figure of 55.5 percent of women among the laity canonized during the Middle Ages, and an even more startling 71.4 percent percent of women among lay saints after the year 1305.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the picture of a broad movement of mystical béguines and ascetic recluses gaining veneration is an appealing one. However, Vauchez's statistics regarding the growth of lay feminine sanctity, and the rising degree of veneration for these women, lose some of their lustre when we examine the absolute numbers upon which they are based.<sup>8</sup> In fact, only four laywomen were canonized in the period between 1198, when the processes studied by Vauchez were begun, and 1500.<sup>9</sup> Of these four, only two were also mystics who fit the ascetic-visionary profile outlined above: hardly a figure that suggests an institutionalization of feminine mystical piety.<sup>10</sup> Though it is customary, in the dominant narrative, to designate any woman who was the subject of a hagiography by the title "saint," this practice conceals the fact that very few actually attained this status canonically.<sup>11</sup> But even if we move away from strictly formal definitions of sainthood, it also seems that very few local communities instituted *informal* cults of veneration for their local recluses, béguines, or tertiaries. Some women, like the Dominican Catherine of Siena, were promoted by the elite among their religious orders, but only a few seem to have had deeply-rooted cults within their communities, as I will demonstrate in further detail below.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of Ida of Louvain, the evidence suggests that women claiming divine gifts were as likely to be outcasts as to attract widespread devotion.

The main group of individuals that can definitively be identified as offering veneration to women mystics is their hagiographers. It is undeniably true that we have an increased number of women's vitae from the later Middle Ages, a point that *does* testify to the growing willingness of some high status males—such as Thomas of Cantimpré, Jacques de Vitry, Raymond of Capua, and a number of others—to offer veneration to female figures. In addition, the growing number of such texts *may* testify to a growth in the number of women aspiring to the saintly life: while not entirely self-evident, this is a reasonable interpretation. But the existence of a hagiography does *not*, in and of itself, testify to the existence of a cult of veneration. The key word here is, of course, "cult." The term, as deployed within medievalist historiographical literature, fits loosely within the conceptual field opened up by Weber's characterization of the phenomenon as "a continuing association of men, a community for which [the saint] has special significance."<sup>13</sup> My point in offering this definition is that

"cult" as a collective noun is commonly taken to imply a group of more than two or three people. It may technically be accurate to state, as do many authors, that "women mystics were venerated by contemporaries"; each could count on at least her hagiographer for veneration, and some attracted broader circles of devotees. But do these situations—particularly those on the lower end of the scale—always constitute a cult? The passive verbal construction and nonspecific agent of the formula, "women mystics were venerated by contemporaries," begs the important question of just how broadly such veneration extended into the community.

The vitae of women mystics are elite and often tendentious texts requiring intense critical scrutiny. Valuable as they are in many respects, they do not necessarily provide probative evidence for a broader cultural transformation of ideas of sanctity on the ground. In brief, the composition of a vita as an isolated artifact only proves that a single, literate man, most likely the confessor of the hagiographic subject, was impressed with the woman whom he described.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, we can discern the shadowy presences of a few others in the mystic's inner circle. But only in exceptional cases can we move beyond this point with certainty. Indeed, if we look for corroborating evidence, beyond hagiographies, of a cult of veneration for specific women mystics, we find that it is absent in most cases. Few of these women were the subjects of attempted canonization proceedings; few were represented in devotional paintings or art; few seem to have had important communal festivities on their feast days; few were designated as the patrons of confraternities; few were noted in multiple sources. There are exceptions, but they are just that: exceptions.<sup>15</sup>

In what follows, I would like to adopt a fresh approach to the question of religious women in the Middle Ages: one that attempts to bridge the gap between the internal devotions and self-representations of mystics on the one hand, and the external evaluations of their careers on the part of their communities and representatives of the Church on the other. I see this approach as engaged in dialogue with the dominant narrative outlined above. For example, the general profile of feminine internal devotion that scholars have elaborated so compellingly—ecstatic, visionary, unitive, somatic—is not at all in dispute. Indeed, I am deeply indebted to these scholars for the elucidating the characteristics of this profile, which will become an important precondition of my own analysis in the final pages of this article. My interpretation differs from the dominant narrative, however, in regard to external observers' reactions to, and categorizations of, women mystics. As the reader by now suspects, I do not detect a positive consensus about lay women mystics in the later Middle Ages, nor do I believe that many of them gained a significant degree of social prestige, or became the focus of cults of veneration. Rather, I will argue that there was a profound degree of confusion among local communities and ecclesiastics alike over how to interpret the expanding numbers of women seeking a religious vocation in the period between 1200 and 1500. While some observers found these

women to be startling exemplars of spirituality, another significant group of their contemporaries, from all strata of society, openly doubted them. The claims of such women to divine inspiration were so hotly contested, in fact, that many were accused by family, neighbors, and/or clerics of being possessed by the devil, rather than joined to God.<sup>16</sup>

The logic behind such accusations is clear when we examine the external “symptoms” of both feminine mysticism and demonic possession, for these two phenomena were constructed in surprisingly similar ways within medieval culture. The unitive, indwelling quality of feminine mysticism, with its emphasis upon penetration by the spirit of God, was an apt parallel to possession by an unclean spirit. Demoniacs, like unitive mystics, were usually represented as female in texts, iconography, and exorcists’ rituals, and both states were thought to produce similar physical and intellectual effects. Demoniacs, as well as mystics, were reported to levitate, bloat, prophesy, speak in tongues, enter immobile trance states, acquire unusual bodily marks, perform miracles, and so forth. We can, then, legitimately speak of two kinds of spirit possession existing in the Middle Ages—one malign and one benign—that were outwardly indistinguishable from one another. This juxtaposition led to an epistemological conundrum for the medieval Church on both the local and the institutional level.<sup>17</sup> When deciding whether to venerate a woman credited with supernatural powers, observers had to wonder: is she divinely inspired or demonically possessed?

This article explores the ramifications of this question and its answers, proceeding in four stages. In the first part, I chart the rising number of accusations that women’s inspiration was demonic, rather than divine, in nature. The subtext of this presentation is that we should perhaps re-think our notion of the “feminization of sanctity,”<sup>18</sup> since it is clear that women’s claims to divine illumination elicited highly ambivalent responses. This evidence leads into the second part, which explores how medieval intellectuals sought to legitimate decisions about spiritual inspiration. There was a name for the process of distinguishing between mystics and demoniacs: the “discernment of spirits.” Yet the actual practice of discerning spirits was fraught with difficulties. What could serve as an external, observable basis for judging the internal, spiritual identity of an individual? In seeking medieval answers to this question, my analysis necessarily shifts its gaze, to examine a different set of texts and authors. Here I explore how medieval intellectuals attempted to naturalize the discernment process by elaborating a physiological theory that differentiated the precise, internal mechanisms of divine from demonic possession. In so doing, theologians made use of contemporary medical knowledge to answer complex questions about the nexus of flesh/spirit, the interior/exterior of the body, and community/individual constructions of identity. (Ida’s vision of the pauper entering her heart will take on an added significance in this context). The third section takes a step back from the historical context to analyze, from a modern theoretical

perspective, the social dynamics involved in the discernment of spirits and the production of a particular “possessed identity.” I examine these questions through the application of contemporary performance theory to medieval conceptions of spirit possession. Such an analysis may help us understand the practices of identity-formation that were at stake when medieval people decided that an individual was inhabited by a particular spirit. The conclusion weaves together the earlier strands of my presentation, arguing that the practical implications of the physiology of spirit possession were inadequate to the task of discernment in real life cases. Thus I shall analyze the debate, but not its final resolution, for ultimately the traditions of interpretation that I am about to discuss failed.

#### “A PROTRACTED DISPUTATION”

The first claim I wish to make is that aspiring medieval women mystics were not universally regarded as channels of divine grace. Indeed, women claiming divine inspiration and supernatural powers elicited as much repugnance as they did reverence. In order to recover evidence of these ambivalent attitudes, however, we must approach the evidence with a fresh eye. Thus, before laying out my examples, I would like to offer three guidelines for interpretation. The first concerns how to read hagiographical evidence; the second addresses what should count as evidence beyond hagiographies; and the third involves the proper use of categories in historical writing about religious identities.

I begin with a few words about interpreting hagiographies. Although these texts are, as I have noted, conventional and even tendentious in nature, they are not monolithic. In fact, there often are clear indications of dissonant opinions about a particular individual included within her vita. For example, there is the “patience in adversity” topos, wherein a hagiographer reports accusations and insults hurled at the heroine, emphasizing her meekness in response. Although the ostensible purpose of these accounts is to demonstrate the charity and patience of the putative “saint,” they also tell us something vitally significant about responses to her. To wit, we have abundant and circumstantially specific evidence of women who claim divine inspiration but were instead accused of demonic possession, sometimes on several occasions. Furthermore, we should be sensitive to the frequency with which hagiographers argue *against* the possibility that their subjects are demonically inspired. Reading between the lines of such defenses, we see a proactive campaign intended to dispel doubts about claims to supernatural powers, doubts that must have seemed natural or inevitable. A close reading “against the grain” can elicit much previously unnoticed information about the reception of women’s claims to divine inspiration.

Second, what other kinds of evidence are available about women who avowed supernatural powers or revelations? We should not read hagiographies alone, but should instead supplement them with a variety of other texts that

inform us about responses to women claiming miraculous powers or mystical revelations in this time period. Thus, inquisitorial proceedings, preaching handbooks, encyclopedias, and even some scholastic treatises can offer us alternative views of inspired or possessed women. Not only does this approach elicit more information, but a juxtaposition of hostile and laudatory sources also enables a broader perspective on the questions at hand, for it effectively de-essentializes the received categories of “mystic” and “demoniac.” Indeed, I would suggest that it is precisely these categories that require investigation, for in accepting them, we implicitly accept the values and judgements of medieval ecclesiastics. We need to move beyond ossified judgements and instead examine all the available evidence about inspired women as a group, whether they ultimately were deemed divinely or demonically influenced.

If we abandon received categories, however, we are immediately presented with a problem of vocabulary. My third and final caveat therefore concerns the proper use of categories in discussions of religious identities. Whereas “mystic” and “demoniac” are useful general categories, their application to specific individuals uncritically reproduces the judgements of medieval churchmen. As historians, we should recognize these categories as discursive and so analyze their social production, rather than continuing to designate particular historical individuals by the categories medieval ecclesiastics applied to them.<sup>19</sup> In line with this insight, I attempt to situate my analysis in a prediscursive moment, by examining the initial confusion between identity categories that prevailed when an observer was confronted with a woman like Ida. I thus prefer to employ a more neutral terminology, which admits the ambiguities and interpretive obscurity of women’s religious roles and supernatural identities. In what follows, I speak more of “inspired women”—leaving open the question of inspired *by whom*—rather than of “mystics” and “demoniacs,” terms which already define the source of inspiration. In short, I wish to offer an ethnographic, rather than a theological, history of medieval spirit possession.

Now for the evidence. If benign and malign forms of spirit possession were twinned within late medieval culture, then we should expect to find that interpretive disputes in regard to women’s inspiration were widespread. And indeed, this is exactly what we do find in regard to many women living roughly between 1200 and 1500. Jacques de Vitry, in his *Life of Marie of Oignies*, immediately followed his introduction of Marie (d. 1213) and other religious women living in the Liège area with a chapter about their numerous detractors. While he excoriates such critics as “impudent men, complete enemies of religion, who were maliciously defaming the religion of these women,”<sup>20</sup> the need for such an early and spirited defense of this circle of béguines is provocative. The extensive hagiographical documentation we have about other women confirms Jacques’ defensive hunch: in fact, a large proportion of those women whom recent scholarship has placed at the forefront of the feminine piety movement in the later Middle Ages were accused by their surrounding communities of being

possessed by the Devil. These cases may be supplemented with little-known or unnamed examples drawn from other, often more hostile, sources.

As a preliminary study we can look to the *Life* of Christina Mirabilis, a béguine from the Low Countries who died in 1224. Christina first attracted attention locally when she was resurrected from the dead during her funeral service: after that she was never quite the same. Several times she ran out of town and tried to live alone in the forest, or climbed to the tops of buildings and steeples in order to perch there until forcibly removed. She suddenly claimed to be so offended by human body odor that she could not tolerate any social contacts, though this olfactory sensitivity did not prevent her from frequenting graveyards. As a result of these behaviors the townspeople, “thinking her to be possessed by demons, finally managed to capture her with great effort and to bind her with iron chains.”<sup>21</sup> Christina escaped but was recaptured when her sisters hired a man with a cudgel to find her, break her leg, then bring her home and chain her up again. The text here notes for a second time that Christina was widely thought to be possessed by demons, much to the embarrassment of her family.<sup>22</sup>

The recurrence of the accusations against Christina suggests that there was little local reverence for her as a divinely inspired visionary. The entire community, including (even led by) her sisters, regarded her as a demoniac. Predictably, accusations of demonic possession often clustered around antisocial acts, as well as drastic feats of asceticism and paramystical transformations. Fasting, for example, though seen by some as a sign of sanctity,<sup>23</sup> could also be interpreted in sinister terms. Alpaïs of Cudot (d. 1207), an older contemporary of Christina, was thought to “have a demon” because of her extreme fasting; generations later, Lidwina of Scheidam (d. 1433) was thought to be possessed by demons for precisely the same reason, as was Catherine of Siena (d. 1380).<sup>24</sup> Jean Gerson, in an early fifteenth-century treatise on the discernment of spirits, includes a case study of a woman who fasted strenuously, and whom he considered to be deluded by the Devil on these grounds.<sup>25</sup>

It is striking how often even close supporters had to admit the ambiguity of inspired women’s gifts: clearly, some supernatural spirit was at work within them, but the origin of their spirit possession was difficult to evaluate. Ida of Louvain (d. c. 1300), as noted above, was tied up by her close relatives, who couldn’t think what to make of her aggressive poverty—to say nothing of her succession of bloatings, trances and nosebleeds—other than to consider her a “frenzied and insane woman.”<sup>26</sup> Such responses—binding, accusations of frenzy and insanity—are clear indications of a suspicion of demonic interference. Some cases resulted in even more extreme measures. The béguine Christina of Stommeln (d. 1312) reported demonic torments so intense that she was ritually exorcized by her own confessor, along with some attending priests.<sup>27</sup> Her reputation within the community, far from being that of a holy mystic, was that of a madwoman, a false saint, or a demoniac. She was several times reviled by



crowds to this effect—once even to the point of being stoned, to shouts of “we know for sure that the Devil rules her!”—and the local Franciscans made her the target of acid sermons.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the confessor of Dorothy of Montau (d. 1394), allowed that her frequent dissociative states “could be interpreted as sinister by some.”<sup>29</sup> At her canonization proceeding, intense, skeptical questioning focused on the exact nature of Dorothy’s supernatural gifts, particularly her claim to be physically inhabited by Christ in the form of a fetus. Dorothy interpreted her abdominal swellings as a mystical pregnancy, and she often described feeling the infant Christ move and leap within her body. Yet those in charge of her cause for canonization seem to have feared that this entity might actually be an indwelling demon. Even prophecy or other forms of occult knowledge were not, in themselves, considered proof of divine inspiration. Étienne de Bourbon mentions the case of an abbess who respectfully used to consult “a certain woman recluse, whom she believed to have a spirit of prophecy; but this sorceress [*malefica*] and deceiver [*simulatrix*] was speaking with the Devil.”<sup>30</sup> We know nothing else about this recluse, but Étienne’s statement could easily describe the responses elicited by many inspired women, even some who ultimately became the subjects of hagiographies. An anonymous compilation of exempla preserved in the Dominican monastery in Breslau mentions a similar case of a woman recluse-prophetess deceived by the Devil transfigured into an angel of light, as does Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogue on Miracles*.<sup>31</sup> And Johannes Nider, well-known for his excoriation of Joan of Arc as a witch<sup>32</sup>, is also a fertile source for other tales of inspired women. One of his best is a detailed case history of a “certain recluse of great reputation, a high contemplative, whom many considered to be mighty in sanctity [*sanctitate pollere*].” The incipient cult, hotly promoted by local clerics “some of whom were men of no mean stature,” evaporated after they bruited about a rumor that the recluse would receive the stigmata on a particular day. The resulting debacle, in which eager anticipation turned to cynical disappointment, marked a definitive end to the episode.<sup>33</sup> A parallel case from about 1240 appears in Richer of Sens’ *Chronicle*: An inspired woman named Sibylla, who lived entirely without food and claimed to be rapt to Heaven, began to generate a local cult of veneration. Her merits were preached by the local friars, and a small pilgrimage flow began; at one point, the Bishop of Metz even considered installing her in a special pilgrimage chapel. At the same time, however, the entire course of Sibylla’s career was marked by an unceasing series of tests of her fasting and ecstatic trances, along with an oscillating series of interpretations of her significance, until finally the local authorities decided she was a fraud. She died in prison shortly thereafter.<sup>34</sup>

Thus far, I have concentrated upon examples from Northern Europe, especially the Low Countries, but the inspired women of Italy and Mediterranean France—another epicenter of late medieval feminine piety—were not entirely immune from similar suspicions. The canonization proceedings for Clare of

Montefalco (d. 1308) in 1317, for example, include the deposition of one skeptic who declared that she had associated with heretics, and that the miraculous transformation of Clare's heart—the signs of the Passion were found to be sculpted out of the heart's inner flesh—was an act of "malefice."<sup>35</sup> Readers of the *Vita Maior* of Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) cannot help but notice the bitter contempt in which Catherine was held by a series of women invalids, for whom she cared as an act of charity: they consistently accused her of false sanctity. Despite hagiographer Raymond of Capua's attempt to portray Catherine as meek as a lamb, she was accused countless times of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Catherine's extreme fasting struck some observers as proof of an indwelling demon, rather than a divine gift, and her claims to bear stigmata that were invisible to all but her alone provoked controversy as well.<sup>36</sup> Rumors about the Siennese tertiary were so rampant that on a trip to the papal curia in Avignon, three highly-placed prelates came to examine her. A witness at her canonization proceeding later described the scene:

They asked her very many exceedingly difficult questions, especially about these trances of hers and about her unique way of life and (since the Apostle says that an angel of Satan can transfigure himself into an angel of light) about how she could recognize if she were deceived by the Devil? And they said many other things, and posed other questions: in sum, there was a protracted disputation.<sup>37</sup>

Even after a lengthy discussion, Catherine was unable to allay all their fears. After her death, Jean Gerson ridiculed her "notorious revelations" and wrote of her as "a lunatic."<sup>38</sup>

Yet Catherine's reputation survived more intact than that of another Italian stigmatic whose inspiration was in doubt. The bones of Guglielma of Milan (d. 1279), a laywoman who claimed to speak in God's voice, were exhumed and burned by the Inquisition some twenty-one years after her death, when her followers were discovered to have formulated an elaborate theology concerning her. Although it is unclear whether Guglielma encouraged these ideas during her lifetime, her devotees claimed in 1300 that she was the Holy Spirit incarnate; the Inquisition considered her to embody demonic principles.<sup>39</sup> A somewhat similar set of beliefs was elaborated in 1325 by the inspired béguine Na Prous Boneta in Marseilles, who claimed to the Inquisition that she and the Spiritual Franciscan Peter John Olivi together incarnated the Holy Spirit. Prous, too, was judged to be demonically, rather than divinely, inspired, though we do not know her fate.<sup>40</sup> Even less is known about the final decision made in regard to Constance de Rabastens, imprisoned in 1385 by the Inquisitor of Toulouse for publicizing a series of apocalyptic revelations. Constance notes in a letter that she was accused of "having a demon in her body," though predictably she claimed direct inspiration from God.<sup>41</sup>

The denunciations of inquisitors sometimes even appear in hagiographies. The vita of Columba of Rieti (d. 1501) describes how she was accused of being "a demoniac deluded by a demon because of some misdeed" by an inquisi-

tor passing through Perugia. Columba later underwent a physical exam in order to ascertain whether her supernatural behaviors—again, a combination of trances, fasting, and prophetic gifts—might indicate either that she was an *energumen* (a demonically possessed person) or a *pythoness* (a voluntary demonic medium).<sup>42</sup> Angela of Foligno (d. 1309) must have elicited quite a controversy among observers of her career as an inspired woman. Her confessor Arnaldo opens her hagiography with a protestation that he had sent the book to various authorities, including inquisitors, lecturers, and various other trustworthy people, all of whom (he hastens to add) had approved its contents. Yet, strikingly, Angela was so affected by the accusations against her that she herself began to repeat them: “I saw myself as the house of the Devil, and as an instrument and an adherent of demons. . . . I turned to those friars who are called my sons, and said to them, ‘I don’t want you to believe in me any more. Don’t you see that I am a demoniac? . . . Can’t you see that, if there were no evil in the whole world, I would fill up the whole world with the abundance of my evil?’”<sup>43</sup>

Of course Angela’s words are a typical declamation of humility for an aspiring saint. Yet the pervasiveness of demoniac accusations directed against inspired women should alert us to the fact that Angela’s choice of humility topos is not mere chance. Even in the absence of an explicit accusation, hagiographers implicitly recognized the fact that supernatural powers and paramystical transformations could just as easily be taken as signs of demonic possession. Indeed, a defense of the subject’s divine inspiration had already become *de rigueur* in female hagiographies by the late thirteenth century. Angela’s contemporary Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297) was praised by her confessor for constantly doubting, testing, and retesting her visions: the theme of discernment entirely dominates her *vita*.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, one of the very longest chapters in the *Life of Lukardis of Oberweimar* (d. 1309) is entitled, “On the Truth of the Revelations and Graces Given to Her.” It begins with an acknowledgment of the doubts others held in regard to Lukardis’ actions and way of life, then counters each with sustained arguments for the divine basis of her vocation.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the Middle Ages, some *vitae* frame their entire discussion of their subject’s life as a series of reflections on the discernment of spirits. An extreme example is the hagiography of Osanna Andreasia of Mantua (d. 1505). Osanna’s hagiographer reports that she was accused by neighbors of being demonically possessed on account of her dissociative trances and severe physical asceticism.<sup>46</sup> As a result of these incidents, he adopted the counteroffensive tactic of organizing his text thematically around Osanna’s specific supernatural powers, with each discussion initiated by a lengthy defense of that gift’s divine origin and an explicit rejection of the possibility of any demonic interference.

Thus even those hagiographies that do not include explicit demoniac accusations are concerned to make a preemptive strike against any such suspicions. Supernatural incidents are introduced and immediately defended as divine in origin, lest anyone think them a product of diabolic inspiration. These measures

were not always successful. Lingering doubts about the good or evil nature of some women's spirit possessions, even after their deaths, occasionally prompted book-length treatises by supporters defending their divine illumination. It is startling to be reminded that some of the best-known inspired women of this period elicited hundreds of pages arguing against the possibility of demonic fraud in their careers. Such texts include Alphonse of Jaén's anxious apologetic for Brigit of Sweden, insisting upon her orthodoxy and docility, and Thomas Caffarini's lengthy, sustained argument for the holiness of Catherine of Siena's supernatural gifts, with particular attention paid to her invisible stigmata.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, these two women were to be at the center of the stormy debate over discernment in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In sum, although recent interpretations of medieval feminine piety often assume that many women achieved public cults of veneration, in fact many were quite controversial during their lifetimes, eliciting as much contempt, anger, and distrust from their communities as they did awe and respect. There were several reasons for this skepticism. The efflorescence of feminine mysticism was largely a lay, urban phenomenon that attracted women who could not, or would not, enter convents. Since they lived among the laity, their lives of ascetic denial and claims of supernatural visitations were exquisitely public, and therefore closely scrutinized by their neighbors. As women pursuing a new and unconventional form of life they became anomalous, defiant of easy categorization. In sum, we must adjust our view of the "typical" inspired woman of the later Middle Ages. She may be described as an urban laywoman, pursuing a life of harsh penitential asceticism, claiming mystical gifts, such as divine revelations, as well as the ability to perform miracles . . . and considered highly suspect by her community precisely because of these characteristics.

#### THE PHYSIOLOGY OF POSSESSION

If the discernment of spirits was perceived as an increasingly urgent imperative in the later Middle Ages, then how did medieval writers frame their discussions of this issue? In essence, the discernment of spirits is a question about the construction of epistemological categories—how to formulate some basic "cultural facts"<sup>48</sup> about the immanence of good and evil. How did medieval authors grapple with such questions? How did they think possession occurred? Was there a difference in the mechanics of divine and demonic possession, if not always in their expressions? Finally, what politics of knowledge production were involved in the proposed solutions? How did these thinkers—primarily ecclesiastics and theologians—legitimize their conceptions of spiritual identities?

The answers to these questions are found in a complex set of ideas about the relationships between spirits and the human organism. Dominant opinion in the Middle Ages held that spirit possession—whether by an unclean or the Holy spirit—involved a literal entry into the body.<sup>49</sup> Once inside, this foreign spirit

interacted with the body's internal physiology, including the organs, the pathways of sense apprehension, the mind, and the indigenous human spirit of the individual. Although some cultures that have a concept of spirit possession are not particularly concerned to explain precisely how a spirit can enter the human body and assume control over it, medieval Europeans were rather interested in this problem. With the rapid growth of medical treatises in the twelfth century, spurred in part by the introduction of Arab learning,<sup>50</sup> a physiological model for spirit possession must have seemed an excellent way to explain the somatic and perceptual changes endemic to both demoniacs and mystics; as well as offering a tangible basis for discerning between them.

Before I continue, a note on language. I have argued that the categories of mystic and demoniac were both represented as female in medieval texts: males could be possessed by spirits, but females were far more likely to be the protagonists in reports of such incidents. However, medieval discussions of the precise physiological mechanisms of possession focus upon "the body" rather than "the female body." This fact should not mislead us. Although these writers were speaking theoretically, and therefore in sex-neutral terms, the fact remains that the case histories that fueled concern with this topic most frequently involved women. Thus while the gendered nature of medieval spirit possession will temporarily be muted in the next few pages, I shall return to this theme in my conclusion.

In order to understand how the physiological model of spirit possession and discernment developed, we must first understand how medieval medicine conceived of the human spirit and its operations. The human spirit, far from being conceived as an abstract or numinous entity, actually was seen as having a concrete material existence within the human body. According to medieval medical thought, the human body in a healthy state was pervaded by its own spirit or *spiritus*, a refined liquid substance produced in the left ventricle of the heart from inspired air.<sup>51</sup> Although the heart was the main seat of the spiritual system, the spirit pervaded the entire body by moving through the arteries. Medical theorists further subdivided the human spirit into three different categories according to function and placement within the body. The "vital spirit," (sometimes also called the "windy spirit") regulated the vital signs from the heart, maintaining heartbeat, pulse, and respiration. In fact, the vital spirit was the basic principle of life itself; and the heart was the physiological seat of life, being both the first part of the fetus to develop, and the first part of the body to resurrect. After leaving the heart, the vital spirit could be transformed into either the "natural spirit," which was based in the liver and controlled a variety of involuntary activities, including digestion and sexual response; or could be purified into the "animal spirit" as it ascended to the head through a sort of fine sieve at the base of the brain known as the *retus mirabilis*. Named for the soul, *anima*, the animal spirit resided in the brain, regulating the nervous system and intellectual responses to sensory stimuli.

Medically speaking, the spirit was distinct from the soul by virtue of its material nature; in fact it provided a refined intermediary between the grossness of the body and the immateriality of the soul. However, spirit and soul frequently were conflated, particularly since the soul, too, was said by many to find its seat within the heart.<sup>52</sup> This was particularly true in theological discourse, which increasingly tended to obscure the difference between spirit and soul after the twelfth century. Thus the Latin *anima*, *spiritus*, and *cor* are best understood as a multivalent group of terms that, though sometimes sharply differentiated, also often overlap. Texts referring to anatomy tended to use "spirit" in a restricted, technical sense, while religious documents adopted a looser convention that used spirit and soul in similar, sometimes interchangeable, ways. To add to the confusion, *cor* (heart) was often used metonymically to refer to either the spirit or the soul, as I shall demonstrate.

Since the spirit was understood to be engaged with nearly every aspect of human physiology, it could be used to explain a wide variety of physical effects and symptoms. Fevers and chills, for example, were said to be caused by a fault in the functioning of the vital spirit, since it was responsible for body temperature. Vision was accomplished through the animal spirit, which transmitted the species of the perceived object to the brain, traveling along the optic nerve. The physical symptoms of strong emotions were caused by a constriction of the heart, as spirit fled from this central organ and flooded the body. Moreover, spirit could sometimes be seen as tears, held to be an effusion of spirit itself. At death the spirit was exhaled, a tradition that was represented in medieval iconography by showing a small person emanating from the corpse's mouth.

How, then, did a possessing spirit interact with the indigenous human spirit of its host body? An apparent clue to the medieval understanding of demonic possession, at least, is provided by portrayals of exorcism, which exactly parallel the death scene just described. Here, too, the spirit (usually in the form of a small black imp) leaps out from the sufferer's mouth as a saint or priest performs the exorcism. Similarly, exorcisms described in texts often are considered successful only when the victim vomits forth some object from the mouth: A toad, a lump of coal, a red rock together with a leaf, and a hairy worm are among the things mentioned in various miracle accounts.<sup>53</sup> Given this parallelism of exit through the mouth, we might formulate the hypothesis that demonic possession was seen as the replacement of the human spirit by an invasive, unclean spirit, which then controls the behavior and personality of the individual. Unfortunately, we would be wrong: The seeming iconographic elision actually masks a complex system of difference. For the mouth was, of course, the entrance to *two* distinct physiological systems: the spiritual system, centered in the heart; and the digestive system, with all its gross impurities. Although the iconographic similarity undoubtedly expressed a basic parallel for the unlettered, in learned circles there was consensus that divine possession by the Holy Spirit and demonic possession by an unclean spirit took place within

different parts of the body. To wit, demonic spirits entered the viscera, while only the Holy Spirit could enter the heart, seat of the human spirit and soul. Suddenly, Ida's vision of the pauper entering her heart acquires new resonance.

The differences between divine and demonic possession were most explicitly laid forth by the thirteenth-century encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Naturale*. His treatment is worth quoting at some length:

God, angels and the devil are said to be in the soul, but in different ways. God is there as a [principle of] life, that is, he vivifies the soul; an angel is like a comrade, exhorting the soul. An angel, therefore, is in [the soul] such that it does not bring good things inside it, but suggests them. God, however, is inside [the soul], for he is united with it and poured into it. God, therefore, is inside; an angel is outside. However, [an angel] is said to be inside [the soul] to the extent that it performs operations in it, such as counseling it, instructing it, warning it, and so forth. The devil must be understood in the same way: it is not inside the soul substantially, but it can be said to enter into [the soul] on account of the operations it performs within it: that is, seducing it by means of images and suggestions.<sup>54</sup>

This is a rich and fascinating passage. Although all three kinds of spirits are said to be within the soul, Vincent wishes to clarify this terminology by means of some theological hair-splitting. He argues that in the case of angels and the devil, the phrase "inside the soul" is used loosely. In actuality such spirits always remain strictly outside the soul, but since their effects may penetrate within through counsel and suggestion, it is customary to refer to them as "inside." In reality, only God can fully pour Himself into the soul and unite with it. Moreover, in so doing, God actually replaces the human principle of life, the "vital spirit" of medieval medicine, which is based in the heart. Through divine possession, God Himself becomes the vivifying principle of the soul and, by extension, the body. The prerogative of actually replacing the human spirit with a supernatural spirit is reserved to God alone.

This series of symbolic linkages and physiological differentiations was present in a multitude of other texts, particularly preaching exempla. Through such didactic anecdotes we learn the further detail that, since demons cannot enter the soul inside the heart, they often made a home for themselves in the digestive tract instead. Indeed, medieval sources occasionally add the prefix *caco*, derived from *cacus* (shit), to the word "demon," in order to better underline their connection with digestion and the impure regions of the body. A charming exemplum from an anonymous preaching manual addresses the connection between possessing demons and digestion pointedly, by relating the results of a theological experiment:

When the Eucharist was given to a certain woman in whom there was a demon, and the demon was then asked where it was, and whether it was with Christ, it answered, "No, the Lord is in her soul and I live in her intestines."<sup>55</sup>

This was a popular tale that made its way into more than one preaching compilation. The distinction between the locations of the two spirits is an important

one. On the one hand, the story asserts the inviolability of the soul to the depredations of demons: the soul remains intact even when the body is possessed. On the other hand, the tale asserts an equally important principle about the Eucharist and the incorporation of Christ's body. The Host does not undergo a normal digestive process, with all the impurities that this might entail, but instead miraculously enters into the heart, seat of both soul and spirit. Indeed, this understanding of communion as a form of possession, in which the spirit of Christ enters into the heart and joins with the human spirit, lends depth to the widely noted phenomenon of eucharistic devotion among religious women, a point to which I will return.<sup>56</sup> The significance of the act is more than a potent physical ingestion and absorption: it is also a means of voluntary spirit possession, since Christ thereby enters the heart.

Other authors were to concur in this basic contrast between the ways in which a divine spirit and a demon might dwell within a human body. Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example, addressed this question directly in his *Dialogue on Miracles*, one of the earliest exempla compilations:

*How Demons can Live Inside People* [Novice:] Some people assert that demons do not live inside people but outside, just as a fortification is besieged from outside . . .

[Monk:] When it is said that a Devil is inside a person, we must not understand this to mean the soul, but the body, for [the devil] can live inside [the body's] open spaces and in the guts where the impurities are contained.<sup>57</sup>

Thus demons enter the body, but not the soul. They remain on the loose, as it were, wherever there is room inside. This theory seems to be underlined by another exempla tradition that describes the demon as a visible bump or bulge just under the surface of the skin. When signed with the cross, the demon glides off to another part of the body. In one such tale, the confrontation devolves into an extended game of somatic tag along the surface of the possessed girl's skin until finally the demon is corralled into her mouth and out of her body.<sup>58</sup> Though apparently based within "the guts where the impurities are contained," demons could also move through any "open spaces" inside the body.<sup>59</sup> In sum, demonic possession was understood as concrete and localizable within the body. By contrast, the Holy Spirit was thought to dwell within the individual in a more diffuse way, entering the rarefied realm of the spirit or soul. Many exempla writers insisted upon this distinction. Gerald of Wales' *Gemma Ecclesiastica* includes the tale of a demon who explains that he and his colleagues cannot harm the soul of any human being, unless he or she first sacrifices to demonic idols; Thomas of Cantimpré affirmed, "Let no one have any doubt that [demons] are in the body, not the soul. Only God, not a created being, can enter into human souls through the inhabitation of grace."<sup>60</sup>

If we turn from the preaching genre to theological treatises, we see that the preaching tales directly echo contemporary doctrine. The terms of discussion were already emerging in the twelfth century. Hildegard of Bingen maintained that the soul *strictu sensu* always remained off limits to demons. Unclean spir-



its might, however, confuse the soul through their infestation of the body and control over it. In a letter discussing the case of a woman possessed by spirits, Hildegard explains, “[The devil] overshadows [the soul] and obscures it with shadows and the smoke of his blackness . . . meanwhile the soul is as if sleepy and unaware of what the flesh of its body is doing.”<sup>61</sup> Another twelfth-century theologian, Rupert of Deutz, adduced a similar theory, couching it in the new language of early scholasticism. His treatise on the Holy Spirit noted that demonic spirits can only possess from inside the “caverns of the body,” while “the Holy Spirit can enter the substance of the soul substantially.”<sup>62</sup> Rupert’s strong image evokes an interior landscape to the body, one riddled with fleshly grottoes and concavities that may be populated by demons while the soul remains inviolate. His choice of words may fruitfully be compared with Caesarius’ depiction of demons inhabiting “open spaces and guts.”

The language of bodily transgression and the confusion of the soul remained central to discussions of possession into the thirteenth century. Guillaume d’Auvergne, Bishop of Paris in the early decades of the thirteenth century, expounded a theory of possession quite similar to Hildegard’s. Employing the metaphor of a castle under siege, Guillaume explained that

in the same way an evil spirit prohibits the egress of the customary activities of the besieged soul, as well as the ingression of activity, or impressions on the soul. . . . For truly, the senses are like gates into the body through which ingressions and egressions of this kind are made.<sup>63</sup>

Guillaume’s concern, like Hildegard’s, is to explain how a demon can seem to control a person while not penetrating to the seat of the soul or affecting the individual’s free will. The answer is that an unclean spirit can penetrate the perimeter of the body, but cannot attain the center of being, the soul. However, even though demons remain outside the soul, they still can disrupt two highly important functions of the human spirit: its control over the senses and its role as an informational conduit between the soul and the body. The soul, when bereft of its proper sensory input and control over the body, remains isolated and alone in the heart: inviolate, yet impotent to act. Indeed, the interference of demons with the spiritual system of the body can extend even further, thus explaining the occasional trance-states and sensory confusion of demoniacs. According to the *Summa* of Alexander of Hales, one of the most prominent Franciscan theologians of the thirteenth century, demons can actually use their control over the bodily senses to relay false information to the soul inside the heart. This is how demons can tempt the soul while not entering into it.

An evil spirit cannot be inside our senses by its essence, nor can it unite by its essence, nor fill us essentially. But it can be said to fill us by the effect of its activities, when by a sensory temptation it penetrates to the soul. . . . Satan can be said to fill the heart . . . through his activity . . . while not entering inside.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, all these strands of thought—that only the Holy Spirit can enter into the soul; that demons can only possess the body and control the senses, thus confusing or tempting the soul—were brought together with great clarity by Thomas Aquinas, the great systematizer.

As for the soul, the devil cannot inhabit a human being substantially. . . . The Holy Spirit, indeed, can act from inside, but the devil suggests from outside, either to the senses or to the imagination. . . . As for the body, the devil can inhabit a human being substantially, as in possessed people.<sup>65</sup>

Thus there existed a broad consensus, traceable throughout twelfth- and thirteenth-century theology and natural philosophy, and broadly diffused throughout the major preaching compilations of the age, that divine possession occurred when the Holy Spirit entered the heart and replaced, or joined with, the human spirit; whereas demonic possession occurred when a demon entered the physical body itself—from which vantage point it could disrupt the spiritual system in some ways. The former operation was diffuse and only “lightly” material, while the latter was concentrated and grossly physical. Moreover, this physiological model of spirit possession could, at least in theory, provide a viable basis for the discernment of spirits. If the spirit were located in the heart then it was divine; if in the “caverns” or “open spaces” of the physical body, then it was demonic.<sup>66</sup> Yet however appealing the tidiness of this theory, it remained only partially successful in explaining the similarities between mystics and demoniacs, and in providing pragmatic ways for discerning between them. The final two sections of this article demonstrate why.

#### A THEORETICAL EXCURSUS: SPIRIT POSSESSION AS IDENTITY FORMATION

Thus far I have concentrated upon establishing two points through an examination of medieval texts. First, that women’s claims to divine inspiration frequently were disputed by observers who feared that they were demonically, rather than divinely, possessed. Second, that medieval writers attempted to distinguish between divine and demonic possession by differentiating the precise, internal mechanisms through which the Holy or an unclean spirit occupied the body. Having laid out this preliminary evidence about possession and discernment, I would like to momentarily take a step back from the texts themselves, to examine the cultural dynamics of possession that underlay these textual patterns. For the material I have presented raises several problems in search of a social theory. Why do women predominate so strongly among the possessed? How does a belief in spirit possession influence conceptions of individual identity? Of social roles and communal structuring? How should we understand the role of the body—divided between heart and guts—that plays host to the invasive spirit? These and other fundamental questions of social and religious epistemology are at stake in the history of discernment. For spirit possession,

first and foremost, must be understood as the process of constructing an identity, and discernment as the attempt to define and situate that identity vis-a-vis the broader group and its social and religious values. In the next few pages I discuss two classic approaches to the study of spirit possession, then attempt to synthesize their insights in my own theory of spirit possession as a performative process of identity formation.

Students of spirit possession have long been aware of the predominance of women among the possessed: the gender imbalance is crosscultural as well as transhistorical. There are two principal schools of thought as to why this should be the case.<sup>67</sup> The first, represented in quite divergent ways by anthropologist I. M. Lewis and historian Michel de Certeau, views the phenomenon as a subtle form of transgression or resistance by subordinate (specifically female) sectors of society.<sup>68</sup> Women, lacking access to culturally sanctioned avenues of expression, instead gravitate toward accepted paradigms of alienation, such as possession, that allow them to articulate their desire for increased attention, respect, or social prerogatives. This license is made possible by the adoption of a new identity: that of the possessing spirit, which is supernaturally powerful and thus commands far greater respect than that due a mere human woman. Beyond this point, however, the interpretations of these two authors diverge significantly. Whereas Lewis stresses the possessed woman's enhanced prestige, seen as a desired, functionalist outcome of the possession, de Certeau notes the dramatic displacement of self that occurs in the European model of spirit possession. For de Certeau, the essential otherness of women in male-dominated early modern Europe is both exaggerated and inverted by possession. Exaggerated, because her alterity is magnified from a human to a cosmic scale; and inverted, because her marginality is subsumed by her physical incarnation of a potent supernatural being that speaks through her. Indeed, as de Certeau notes in his challenging and provocative essay, the speech of the possessed woman always exists outside normative fields of discourse: the speaking subject remains unrepresentable, displaced from speech. To the degree that the voice of the possessed woman appears in texts, it does so as a replacement authorized by her demonological interrogators, in a process through which the originary, inchoate "disturbance of discourse" enacted by the possessed woman is classified and named by the exorcist as possession by a specific demon. Yet despite the dramatic tonal differences between these two scholars, for both the possessed woman's experience is an irreducible category dictated by transgressive desires.

An alternate approach is provided by Mary Douglas, who follows Durkheim in regarding society as the ultimate source of religious phenomena and their categorization.<sup>69</sup> For Douglas, the key factor in explaining attitudes towards spirit possession is the issue of bodily control, seen as a function of social control. In a wide-ranging and cohesive theory of culture and its self-reproduction through the imposition of symbolic codes of order, Douglas argues that there is

a direct correlation between the degree of social control of a given group and the valuation of bodily control within that group. Societies that are unstructured and informal tend to regard spirit possession and trance as beneficent states, while those that are more rigid and formal in their social structures find the dissociative elements of spirit possession to be disturbing and dangerous. Moreover, both types of social values can coexist within a single society, distributed among different social groups. Thus women's predominance among the possessed, argues Douglas, is not necessarily due to an internal desire to acquire prestige, but is a reflection of an external, social factor: the lower cultural significance of their activities. Since women's duties tend to be both devalued and confined to domestic spaces, they are less subject to rigorous control in their relationships with others, being effectively left to their own devices within their own sphere. The relative absence of a constant external control or disciplining social force enables a lack of bodily control: trance or possession. Thus possession is only possible in the absence of restrictive social norms that are expressed, in part, as a high level of control over the body and its gestural code.

These are valuable insights. As Lewis and de Certeau point out, women's subordinate status most certainly is linked with their predominance among the possessed. And Douglas' notion of bodily control and comportment as a basic cultural ground that influences perceptions of spirit possession is gracefully formulated and accords rather well with the medieval evidence. However, each theory also has distinct disadvantages, in that neither integrates both external-social and internal-individual factors into the analysis of how possessed identities are constructed. On the one hand, Lewis and de Certeau both focus on the possessed woman's experience—though this experience is seen as transparent and functional by Lewis; and as opaque and unutterable by de Certeau. Yet the use of "experience" as an irreducible category has been carefully critiqued as overly reliant upon an essentialist and self-contained reading of the individual, with little attention given to the cultural constructions of particular social roles.<sup>70</sup> Douglas, on the other hand, would appear to be a cultural determinist, giving little consideration to the self-representations of individual actors within their particular contexts of social control, or lack thereof. Furthermore, the medieval situation is somewhat more complex than those discussed by any of these authors, in that we are dealing here with not one, but two indistinguishable forms of spirit possession: one "good," one "bad."<sup>71</sup>

I would suggest that this particular evidence requires a more dynamic view of possession, one that takes account of both internal-individual, and external-communal factors in the formation of a particular "possessed identity." Thus the most elegant solution to theorizing medieval spirit possession will integrate Lewis and de Certeau's experiential individualism with Douglas' sensitivity to cultural attitudes towards the body and its comportment. In formulating the "performative" view of spirit possession that follows, I have borrowed from theories of ritual in religious studies and anthropology, as well as from recent

feminist critiques of conventional identity politics.<sup>72</sup> Briefly put, a performative view of spirit possession sees the phenomenon as a particular cultural process of identity-formation that subsists upon three interdependent factors. They are: one, the cultural constructions of particular identity “roles”; two, the self-representations of the individual as she “performs” such roles; and three, the collective evaluation of the individual’s actions by observers, or the “audience.” This triad of factors is drawn together by a fourth element: the surface of the body itself, which both contains individual identity and mediates its relationships with outside observers.

The study of identity formation must begin with the embeddedness of the individual within her culture and community. It is the collective culture that constructs individual experience, lending significance to particular memories, actions, conversations, and emotions above others. In terms of performance theory, this principle may be stated as the availability of particular identity “roles,” such as “mystic” or “demoniac,” which are transmitted through texts, legends, conversations, and sermons. These cultural roles serve the epistemological function of mediating experience itself: they represent the cultural idioms through which an inherently chaotic individual level of experience is endowed with broader social meanings.<sup>73</sup> Individuals come to regard certain of their own (and others’) actions and experiences as conforming to a pattern, which is recognizable through association with one of these roles. These privileged experiences are then incorporated into a personal “narrative” that constitutes, for the individual, the basis of identity and self-understanding.<sup>74</sup>

This leads me to the second factor of the triad. Presumably, the inspired women whom I discussed above were aspiring to the roles of saint, mystic, or even demoniac, and structuring their lives through traditional cultural ideals of these roles.<sup>75</sup> Thus the self-representations of an individual, as she engages in various actions associated with a particular role, constitute a “performance” of an identity, a stylization of the visible self (i.e., the body and its gestures, conversation) into a recognizable pattern. It is well known that hagiographies are a highly conventional genre, and I would suggest that this is only partly a reflection of the authors’ biases. Hagiographical subjects, too, attempted to fashion themselves as saints by following conventional patterns of behavior.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, there is the reception of the performance. Thus the third factor is the “audience,” which participates in the performance by scrutinizing the actions of the performer and evaluating them. Ultimately, a saint (and, *mutatis mutandis*, a demoniac) is always a saint *for* others<sup>77</sup>: only the surrounding society can confer sanctity upon the individual. Thus the construction of an identity is an emergent process, one that is negotiated between the idioms of a given culture, the self-representations of an individual performer, and the scrutiny of her society or audience. To quote the anthropologist Edward Scheffelin, performative processes are “socially emergent . . . constructed through the interaction of the performers and participants but not reducible to them.”<sup>78</sup> Or, as Kathleen

Erndl writes of possession in India, "the theological, cultural, and individual dimensions are mutually dependent and must be considered together."<sup>79</sup>

A performative theory of identity formation unveils the complex dynamic at work both in women's claims of divine inspiration, and in the evaluations of these claims through recourse to the physiological model of possession. For example, we can see the appeal that a role of authority—the "mystical saint," or the alienated, yet powerful role of "demoniac"—held for women: this corresponds to the first factor of the performative theory, the availability of particular cultural roles that mediate experience. In the second factor of the performative triad, we can identify the stylization of the self—particularly the body—in ways that are characteristic not only of the "mystical saints" role, but also of the "demoniac" role. The performance of divine possession was conducted in much the same way as the performance of demonic possession. Finally, in the third factor, audience evaluation, we see the discernment of spirits. Within the terms of performance theory, discernment becomes a collective process of reifying, and then projecting into the body a particular identity betokened by the word "spirit," whether unclean, Holy, or simply human. Thus the valuations of the group, in this case ecclesiastics and theologians, were naturalized into the body from without by the physiological explanation of spirit possession.

Yet only the final thread in this model can weave these three strands together into a single, delicate tissue. This element is the surface of the body itself, that which contains a given spirit or identity, or else permits the entrance/construction of a new one. The surface of the body is thus a site of particular significance, as it represents the locus of mediation between the internal-individual and the external-communal realms. Possession subsists upon a dialectic between the interior and the exterior levels of the body, as spirits/identities move from the outside to the inside. Control of the body's surface and its public representation is thus a means of controlling identity itself. If identity is, as Judith Butler asserts, "fabricated as an interior essence," then "that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body . . . [the] border control that differentiates inner from outer and so constitutes the 'integrity' of the subject."<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, this concept of "border control" as central to the integrity of identity is quite explicitly echoed in medieval discussions of spirit possession, which frequently revolve around issues of "open" versus "sealed" bodies and hearts. We might recall William of Paris' description of spirit possession quoted above, with its emphasis upon the senses as "gates into the body," which spirits can manipulate to their advantage. Moreover, female physiology in particular is often defined in medieval texts as more "open" than male, and thus more vulnerable to the depredations of spirits, and the consequent transformation of identity.<sup>81</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, for instance, spoke of women's bodies as punctuated by "windows, openings, and wind-passages."<sup>82</sup> Heloise, in a letter to Abelard, quoted Macrobius Theodosius to the effect that women's bodies are

pierced with more holes, and are generally more porous, than men's.<sup>83</sup> A popular exemplum reprinted in preaching handbooks makes the point even more explicitly. A male saint, exorcizing a female demoniac, invites the possessing demon to leave her body and enter his own instead. The demon attempts to oblige, but cannot, complaining, "Your body is sealed and closed off in all its parts; I cannot enter into this vessel."<sup>84</sup> The body of the girl apparently was not so inviolate, for her surface anatomy permits open entrance to the unclean spirit.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, many practices that are particularly characteristic of feminine piety, such as the cult of virginity or extended fasting, might be read as attempts to "seal" the body against possible incursions by unclean spirits, thus preserving it for divine infusions. There is also evidence that reception of the Eucharist, another characteristically female devotion, was sometimes thought to temporarily seal the body against demonic incursion. A demonic possession tale from Caesarius of Heisterbach makes the point as follows: "The demon, having been conjured by the Abbot to leave, responded, 'Where shall I go?' The Abbot said, 'See, I am opening my mouth, enter if you can.' The demon said, 'I cannot enter, because today the Most High entered.'<sup>86</sup> I shall return to the theme of bodily openness and sealing below, as well as to the role of the body's surface in maintaining identity. For now, it suffices to note that the problems of possession and discernment are problems negotiated between the individual and her culture; and that the question of interior identity-formation can only be mediated or solved through the observable surface of the body. These are crucial points to keep in mind as I return to my historical analysis.

#### CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CATEGORIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In introducing this essay I announced my intention to explore the emergence of categories such as "mystic" or "demoniac," rather than reproducing them, fully formed, at their end point. Yet in studying processes rather than results, one runs the risk of confusing what people say about themselves and their culture with what they actually do. As Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, a people "as observed, need not correspond in fact to their own systematic statements about themselves."<sup>87</sup> In analyzing the construction of social and religious categories, we must move beyond the theory of discernment and discuss its relevance to the actual careers of historical individuals.

While the physiological model of possession was put forth in sex-neutral terms, the actual phenomena of demonic and divine possession were highly sex-specific. On the one hand, we have to do with a discourse about "the body," on the other, with a series of case histories involving *female* bodies. In conclusion, I would like to superimpose these two discursive trends in order to examine three questions, which move outward in focus from the internal to the external, that is, from the self-understandings of inspired women to the judgments and mental attitudes of her community. First, how exactly was divine possession

understood by women aspiring to perform this role? Second, can the medieval conception of the physiological differences between divine and demonic possession aid in explaining the reported behaviors of mystics and demoniacs? If so, then third, how did ideas about the physiology of possession influence the actual social practice of discerning spirits, the ascription of spiritual identities to the interior of the body?

I begin with an observation and a caveat. It is clear that a broad gap existed between the epistemological and the social constructions of possession. Categories of knowledge, as produced by medical and ecclesiastical theorists, failed to correspond to observable social patterns. A good example is provided by the problem of vocabulary. Although the Latin vocabulary for demonic possession and its victims is quite rich—*possessio*, *obsessio*, *arreptio*, *daemoniaci*, *energumeni*, *indaemoniati*, *vexati*—there are no equivalent words for divine possession. Yet according to medieval theologians, it is *only* the Holy Spirit that can truly “unite essentially” with the human essence, the soul. Thus on a conceptual level, the only complete form of spirit possession recognized by medieval theorists was divine possession. On a linguistic level, however, only demonic possession can formally be designated. This slippage between words and ideas compounded the difficulties medieval writers grappled with in discussing possession and discernment. Although divine possession was recognized by medieval theorists, and seen as a direct parallel to demonic possession, the language used to describe it was often vague and circumlocutory.

Despite these linguistic impediments, there can be little doubt that women’s claims to divine inspiration truly were understood (at least by the women themselves and their supporters) as divine spirit possession, including all the reconstruction of identity that such a phrase implies. Indeed, women’s vitae characteristically circle around a series of multivalent images, each of which expresses divine possession from different vantage points. For example, unitive passion sometimes extends into visions of mystical marriage, which often are glossed by hagiographers or the women themselves as a form of joining “two into one heart,” in the same way that earthly marriage is a union of “two into one flesh.”<sup>88</sup> This unitive theme may be complemented by literal Christlike transformations: The inspired woman’s face may fleetingly appear like that of Christ, or she may receive stigmata.<sup>89</sup> Prophecies and other forms of occult knowledge are frequently described in hagiographies and miracle accounts as the Holy Spirit speaking through the mouth of the alleged mystic, in much the same way that a demon was thought to speak through the mouth of a demoniac.

Moreover, a great variety of texts, both hostile and friendly, describe inspired women as strongly attracted to heart themes, a fact that must be read against medieval ideas about spiritual anatomy, and understood as an important part of their performances of divine possession. The most common such motif is the vision of an exchange of hearts between the woman and Jesus, such as Catherine of Siena’s vision in which “her heart was made one with the heart of



Christ.”<sup>90</sup> It is not difficult to parse this symbolism as expressing the suffusion of the body with the Holy Spirit—indeed, as a direct replacement of the human spirit with a conjoined divine spirit that not only acts as the principle of life, but also extends the natural human senses into the realm of the supernatural: prophecy, visions, tears, a healing touch. Perhaps the most striking example of the heart as a seat of divine possession is provided by Ida of Louvain, whose vision may now be discussed in greater detail:

One time a certain pauper, of the most wretched appearance, his form covered with a few tattered clothes, stood before the entrance of the little cell of God’s dear virgin, as if he were going to ask for hospitality. . . . Behold, the pauper . . . respectfully approaching his hostess, stood before her face, and with his own hands, it seemed to her, opened her breast: and entering right into the opening in her breast, she herself taking him in utterly, he disappeared externally as he entered internally. . . . Suddenly the mind of the venerable Ida began to be inflamed from within with such a desire for poverty and abjection, that . . . casting off her own clothing . . . wrapping herself in a certain paltry little rag, and over that a mat in place of a cloak . . . she began to wander through the streets and plazas . . . through the places where great crowds of people were gathered together, so that wherever she formerly used to strut in refined clothing . . . there now she strutted as if mad or a fool, offering a monstrous spectacle of herself to the people.<sup>91</sup>

The entrance of the pauper into Ida’s heart is communicated with an apparently intentional lack of economy. Indeed, the high number of verbs used in the description seems to magnify the moment, giving it an expanding sense of time and of importance: “approaching . . . he stood . . . it seemed . . . he opened . . . entering . . . she taking him in . . . he disappeared . . . as he entered.” The thick linguistic construction of this scene, with its multiple evocations of bodily openness and transgression of the body’s surface integrity, signals that this is a pivotal moment, an important transformation of Ida’s identity, as the spirit enters the seat of her soul. If the surface of her body contains the hidden identity of her heart, it also mediates the expression of that identity to the outside world through the performance of new behaviors. While the hagiographer consciously represents the vision in terms of Christ possessing Ida from within the spiritual system of her body, to the eyes of Ida’s external audience, her performance is peculiar. Lacking access to the vision, unable to peer within Ida’s heart, they scrutinize her body, her clothing, her gestures . . . then evaluate her performance negatively.

Another variant of this theme, which illustrates the graphically physical understanding of divine spirit possession, is found in the fourteenth-century hagiography of Clare of Montefalco. Clare envisioned Christ crucified as physically opening, and then entering into, her heart. As a result, Clare repeatedly told the sisters of her community that she carried Christ crucified within her heart. Not surprisingly, hardly had she expired when the other nuns laid her out in the August heat and cut open her body in order to examine the heart. There they found the crucifix and other symbols of the Passion. The majority of Clare’s canonization process is taken up with explicit testimony regarding this autopsy, how it was conducted, and how these divine signs were found within

the heart itself.<sup>92</sup> Two centuries later, we find a counterexample in the hagiography of Osanna Andreasia. Osanna prayed to God to infuse his Holy Spirit directly into the heart of a sinful friend; Christ responded, "I cannot find any place through which I might enter so hard a heart."<sup>93</sup> Brigit of Sweden asserted that she felt the infant Christ move and leap within her heart in a sort of spiritual pregnancy; and her defender Alphonse of Jaén even claimed to see these movements through Brigit's skin.<sup>94</sup> Other inspired women, like Lukardis of Oberweimar and Margaret of Cortona, interpreted reception of the Eucharist as a form of divine spirit possession that took place in the heart.<sup>95</sup> These sorts of examples could be multiplied: the heart was the seat of the human spirit, and thus the proper receptacle for the spirit of God.

The physiology of divine possession, in turn, can cast significant new light upon the question of why mysticism was so highly gendered in the Later Middle Ages. I argued above that the surfaces of women's bodies were conceived as more porous or open to spiritual transgressions, both divine and demonic, than men's. Now I can extend this observation further. Given medieval ideas about the physiology of the spirit, it is not surprising that an infusion of the Holy Spirit into the fragile human heart would overload all sensory, emotional, and intellectual channels. In turn, this overload would explain the greater emotionalism, visionary focus, prophetic power, and somatic change for which women's mysticism was known. Since the spirit coordinated the emotions, the senses (especially vision), the mind, and the body, the incursion of a divine spirit was thought to jolt all these things to a higher level of intensity and perception. Prophesying, trances, tears, somatic changes, in short the whole complex of supernatural gifts associated with women's mysticism flows from a single source: the unitive, spirit-possessive nature of their religious claims. Johannes Nider hints at this explanation when discussing the gendering of mysticism in a fascinating passage of dialogue from the *Formicarius*. The "Lazy Man" interlocutor explicitly refers to raptures and to Christ's inhabitation of the "breast" or heart; the "Theologian" respondent then goes on to explain the characteristic behaviors of women mystics as due to an overload of divine love within their "weaker" hearts:

[LAZY MAN]: I have sometimes seen, and often heard of women . . . who are rapt . . . from their exterior senses to their interiors, just as they sometimes go into an ecstasy from devotion. Also, I saw a woman who, having heard some pronouncements about Christ's charity during a public sermon, brought forth on high a certain clamor in front of everyone, as if she could not manage to contain the love of her heart [*pectoris*] for Christ, who had formerly been enclosed there; but nevertheless, such things are taken as fictions by many literate men.

[THEOLOGIAN]: The general law is . . . not to believe all spirits, but spirits are to be tested to see whether they are of God. . . . Nevertheless, I do not want you to draw from this a general rule about deception . . . for divine love . . . has not lesser, but greater effects than human love in certain individuals who . . . are rapt to the beloved through meditations. They express this in groaning, sobbing, lamentation, song, and clamors. . . . The fire of devotion is more mobile in the heart of a weaker vessel, and more likely to burst forth in clamors.<sup>96</sup>

The “weaker vessel” of the female body is unable to contain the expansion of the heart when remembering the presence of Christ within. This spiritual overload results, according to Nider, in typically female mystical effusions, such as the “gift of tears,” ecstatic and insensible raptures, or uncontrollable shouting and “clamors.” The gendering of mysticism is therefore explicable in part by the physiological model of discernment, which correlates the internal physiology of divine possession in the heart with external behaviors observable by others.

Yet the physiological model of discernment appears to be less useful in explaining the effects of demonic possession. To begin with, it failed to explain why the reported behaviors of mystics and demoniacs were so similar, if the physiology of their possessions were so different. How could demons produce the same external behaviors from within the guts or “caverns” of a demoniac’s body as the Holy Spirit did from its position, lodged inside the heart of a mystic? The answer to this question is rather complex. Some behaviors, especially physical gestures and actions, can easily be correlated with the physiological theory elaborated in medieval texts. The contortions commonly reported of demoniacs, for example, are perfectly explained by the idea that demons possess the viscera or digestive tract. Similarly, trances may be explained by the insistence of medieval theorists—Guillaume d’Auvergne and Vincent of Beauvais, for example, among others—that demons can “besiege,” “confuse,” or “deceive” the senses. This dampening of the individual’s contact with the outside world would logically result in a dissociative or trancelike state.

But what of the intellectual effects that were commonly reported of those thought demonically possessed, such as occult knowledge or prophesying? These behaviors at first appear to be more difficult to explain, but in fact they, too, “work” within the terms of the physiological theory. Medieval theorists from Hildegard of Bingen, to Guillaume d’Auvergne, to Vincent of Beauvais were insistent upon the ability of demons to interfere with the perceptions relayed by the senses. Thus the gift of occult knowledge may be explained by demonic interference with the flow of sensory information to the soul: demons may “besiege” the sensory “gates” of the body and thereby control the flow of information. Any “planted” information relayed by the possessing demon would penetrate to the intellect along normal physiological channels. Ultimately, the demon might hope to lead observers astray by deceiving them into thinking that it was an “angel of light,” and the possessed victim a saint. Such deceptions were understood to be a basic goal of the demonic hosts. After all, Jesus himself had warned against false Christs and prophets, who would lead astray the faithful (Mk. 13: 22); and Paul had cautioned that “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14–15). Thus even without entering the heart, demons could interfere with the spiritual system of the body and all its operations. In sum, the physiological theory of discernment

could explain the external performances of demoniacs as well as mystics. The contortions, trances, prophecies, and visions attributed to each could be closely correlated with the disruptions of the spiritual system involved in either demonic or divine possession.

Ultimately, however, the physiological approach to the discernment of spirits was of little pragmatic use in actual case histories. Understanding the physiology of possession was no help to someone who had to evaluate a woman's claims to divine inspiration or supernatural gifts. How could one verify the internal disposition of a possessing spirit if one's only basis for judgment was a group of external behaviors—behaviors that were equally characteristic of both mystics and demoniacs? Short of an autopsy revealing a convenient crucifix in the heart, as in the case of Clare of Montefalco, the elaboration of a differential physiology of possession was of limited use in actual case histories. Although the physiological model of discernment succeeded as an explanatory tool that naturalized different spiritual identities into the body, it could never have been applied pragmatically. There was no clear system of correspondences between the different internal mechanisms of divine and demonic possession, and the actual, external signs of each possession. Mystics and demoniacs looked alike on the surface, even if they were different inside.

In the previous section I discussed the importance of the "surface politics of the body" as mediating individual-internal and cultural-external factors in the formation of a particular identity. It is precisely this key element that was lacking in the medieval theory of discernment. Ecclesiastics could observe the external actions of an inspired woman, but they could not interpret them as exclusively divine or demonic. Conversely, they believed they could interpret the inside of a possessed body, but they could not observe an individual's internal physiology.<sup>97</sup> The theory required a connecting link between inside and outside, a way of reading the surface of the body to search for clues to the possessing spirit within. The problem of discerning spirits was not solved by the physiological model because it remained at a purely internal level of analysis. Although medieval "common sense" tended to view the body as a material aggregate of the individual's identity, a clear system of correspondences between interior and exterior was lacking in cases of divine or demonic possession. These two spiritual identities were manifested identically on the surface level of the body, even if the internal mechanisms of possession, and the spirits involved, were radically different from one another.

## EPILOGUE

It may seem anticlimactic to conclude my analysis with a failed initiative. Yet the debate itself is significant, even if it did not lead to a definitive resolution. Indeed, this exploration of the physiology of possession has an important epilogue that I can only hint at here. A later generation of writers such as Henry of Freimar, Henry of Langenstein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson were to bridge

the gap between the internal and external left by the physiological model of discernment. These authors elaborated complex discernment guidelines that highlighted the question of bodily comportment. Since possession by the Holy Spirit took place diffusely within the soul, while possession by demons was bound within strictly physical limits, the discipline of the body, its gestures and presentation, evolved as a paramount criterion in the discernment of spirits in the fifteenth century.<sup>98</sup> Saints were supposed to be calm and controlled, whereas demoniacs either displayed signs of physical upheaval or dissociative behavior. As an early treatise in this idiom states:

Just as we see that a rose, in the presence of gentle dew and the warmth of the sun, opens itself naturally . . . in the same way the human heart expands from the sweetness of calmness and serenity, and is rendered more capable of receiving divine infusions. . . . Calmness opens the heart . . . and arranges things so that God can have free access to the soul.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, externally “calm” and controlled behavior was taken as a sign of internally divine possession, for “calmness opens the heart” and allows God “free access to the soul.” This valuation of calm as a divine sign was to have significant repercussions as it gradually achieved greater importance in the construction of sanctity. Increasingly, it was felt that one could read the body’s surface for clues to the spirit within by scrutinizing its gestural code and level of somatic control. The ultimate outcome of the process was a devaluation of the kinds of ecstatic trances, somatic miracles, and severe asceticism that were most often ascribed to women mystics. Moreover, the fifteenth century also saw the first appearance of a new kind of source bearing on the highly gendered history of spirit possession: manuals of exorcism. These ritual handbooks are fascinating in many respects, not least of which is the unique fact that they often employ feminine pronouns. The swift dissemination of these books testifies to two important assumptions about demonic possession at this time: first, that demoniacs were proliferating; and second, that they were likely to be female.<sup>100</sup> More importantly, however, such rituals increasingly focus upon the body of the female victim as the locus of the indwelling demon, exorcizing each body part in turn. In brief, at the same time that definitions of sanctity were moving away from traditionally feminine forms of supernatural somaticism, definitions of demonic possession were coming to be ever more closely associated with the female body.

Ida of Louvain, considered insane in the thirteenth century, might have been exorcized in the fifteenth. As it is, the two women mystics who did achieve formal canonization in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—Brigit of Sweden and Catherine of Siena—were at the center of contentious debates that necessitated lengthy defenses from supporters. In sum, as the discernment of spirits became a discernment of bodies, the female body increasingly was defined as a habitation for demons, rather than a locus of indwelling divinity. Ultimately, the construction of these social categories fell along gender lines.

## NOTES

1. Portions of this paper were delivered at the Annual Medieval Studies Conference in Leeds, UK, in June 1999; and at the conference "Demons, Spirits, Witches: Popular Mythology and Christian Demonology" Budapest, Hungary, in October 1999. I benefited greatly from conversations with colleagues at these events, especially Joanna Cannon, Gábor Klaniczay, and Moshe Sluhovsky.

2. *Vita Venerabilis Idae Virginis*. In *Acta Sanctorum*. (Paris and Rome, 1865) vol. 11 (13 April): 163. Hereafter cited as AASS.

3. For further exploration of the connections between mental illness and demonic possession, see Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*. 73, 3 (July, 1998): 733–70; Murial Laharie, *La folie au Moyen Age, XI<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. (Paris, 1991).

4. A similar distinction, between a "subjective" approach to internal piety and an "objective" and external viewpoint, has been noted by Richard Kieckhefer, who ascribes these differences, in part, to the different tone of the sources regarding male and female saints. See "Holiness and the Culture of Devotion: Remarks on Some Late Medieval Male Saints." In R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in the Middle Ages*. (Ithaca, 1991). Kieckhefer's remarks are explicitly couched as part of a dialogue with the most important work in the study of medieval women's sanctity: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), hereafter cited as HFHF. Bynum's monograph may be seen as part of a larger *oeuvre* that includes a number of articles, now collected in two editions. See *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High to Late Middle Ages*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981); and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. (New York, 1990). Without belaboring the point, it can safely be said that Bynum's influence upon the field (including the present author) has been enormous. Additional studies of interest include Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom*. (Chicago, 1982), with an important chapter on women saints. See also Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia*. (Chicago, 1985), a book that has much to recommend it. An anachronistic title, combined with the proximate release of HFHF, has worked to overshadow the considerable merits of this particular study. John Nichols and Lillian Shank, eds., *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*. (Kalamazoo, 1984); idem, *Peace Weavers: Medieval Religious Women*. (Kalamazoo, 1987); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*. (Oxford, 1986); idem, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. (Oxford, 1994). Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood*, includes several additional articles of interest on feminine sanctity. See also Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*. (Princeton, 1993); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. (Philadelphia 1995); and JoAnn MacNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia*. (Cambridge, MA, 1996). Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. (Cambridge, UK, 1996), adopts an explicitly religious viewpoint.

5. Interestingly, none of the works in this category (except the Italian, see below) are devoted specifically to female sanctity, though they include significant consideration of the topic from within a broader, "gender-neutral" approach. The most important work from this perspective remains André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident au Derniers Siècles du Moyen Age*. (Rome, 1981), based on canonization processes. Now translated by Jean Birrel, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. (Cambridge, UK, 1997). Vauchez also

has published three supplementary collections of articles, *Les Laïcs au Moyen Age*. (Paris, 1987), which has several important articles on female sanctity and devotion; *Ordini Mendicanti e Società Italiana XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> Secolo*. (Milan, 1990), which focuses more on male saints; and most recently, *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires: Le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Age*. (Paris, 1999). A sociological study that extends beyond the medieval period has been provided by Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations*. (Liège, 1969); idem, *Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church*. In Stephen Wilson, ed., *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*. (Cambridge, UK, 1983): 189–216. Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu*. (Chicago, 1984) explores the “theology of sanctity” implicitly manifested by hagiographical representations of the saints, both male and female. Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sanctity in the Later Middle Ages*. (Chicago, 1992), is a provocative attempt to discuss the “making of sanctity” in close context, but the individual chapters are occasionally inconsistent with the high degree of methodological subtlety expressed in the introduction. For a critique, see N. Caciola, “Through a Glass, Darkly: Recent Work on Sanctity and Society.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 38, 2 (April, 1996): 301–9. The most prolific national historiographical tradition that explicitly discusses the social context of women’s mysticism is the Italian, which has had a limited impact upon scholarship in the English-speaking world. An explicit attempt to introduce this body of scholarship to an Anglo-American audience is Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion in Renaissance Italy*. Trans. Margery Schneider. (Chicago, 1996). I highly recommend the outstanding work of Anna Benvenuti Papi, *In Castro Poenitentiae: Santità e Società Femminile nell’Italia Medievale*. (Rome, 1990). See also Gabriella Zarri, *Le Sante Vive: Cultura e Religiosità Femminile nella Prima Età Moderna*. (Turin, 1990); Sofia Boesch-Gajano and Lucia Sebastiani, *Culto dei Santi, Istituzioni, e Classi Sociali in Età Preindustriale*. (Rome, 1984); and Lucetta Scaraffia, *La Santa degli Impossibili*. (Turin, 1990).

6. For example, see Elliott’s hyperbole in *Spiritual Marriage*, 258, “many of these women . . . were frequently honored as saints after their death, or even in their lifetime,” and 264, “the move to chastity . . . or a higher level of asceticism in general *undoubtedly* had an empowering effect on the women in question” (emphasis added). This seems to me an assertion that requires proof, rather than meriting status as a self-evident fact. Bynum gives a characteristically nuanced and careful dissection of the issue of women mystics’ empowerment in “Women Mystics in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of the Nuns of Helfta.” *Jesus as Mother*, 170–262. In HFHF, Bynum supports an argument about women mystics’ growing prestige by referring to Vauchez’s statistical study, but the significance of these figures can easily be overestimated, as I will argue below.

7. See Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 268–69, with particular attention to table 23. Bynum cites these exact figures in HFHF, 21.

8. Kleinberg, *Prophets*, 10–11, raises similar points about Vauchez’s statistics, noting that the initially impressive 18.2 percent of lay Scandinavian saints canonized between 1305 and 1431 actually represents only one person.

9. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 369. As is well known, there are lies, damned lies, and statistics. Since the latter are subject to such a broad degree of interpretation, I would like to make my own parameters clear. Like Vauchez, I am emphasizing contemporary saints who lived between 1198 and 1500, and leaving out Saint Cunegond (d. 1033, canonized 1200) and Saint Margaret of Scotland (d. 1093, canonized 1249), whose cults had existed since the eleventh century and were merely ratified by the formal process of canonization. The four laywomen who lived in the later Middle Ages and were formally canonized were: Elizabeth of Thuringia (d. 1231, canonized 1234), Hedwig of Silesia (d. 1243, canonized 1267), Briget of Sweden (d. 1373, canonized 1391, 1415, and 1419),

and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380, canonized 1460). Of this number, two—Hedwig of Silesia and Elizabeth of Thuringia—conformed to a non-mystical pattern of sanctity, being known, rather, for their aristocratic charity and dynastic status. This model of female sainthood was particularly associated with Central Europe, as Gábor Klaniczay has shown in a pair of articles: “I Modelli di santità femminile tra i secoli XIII e XIV in Europa Centrale e in Italia.” In S. Graciotti and C. Vasoli, eds., *Spiritualità e lettere nella cultura Italiana e Ungherese de basso Medioevo*. (Florence, 1995): 75–109; and “Miraculum and Maleficium: Reflections Concerning Late Medieval Female Sainthood.” In R. Po-Chia Hsia and R. W. Scribner, eds., *Problems in the Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe*. (Harrassowitz, 1997): 49–73. The remaining two women, Catherine of Siena and Brigit of Sweden, are the only laywomen mystics canonized in the Middle Ages. It is noteworthy that Brigit’s case was so very controversial that she had to be canonized repeatedly. Although it is true that this group constitutes more than half of the statistical sample of lay saints studied by Vauchez, the absolute numbers of such women still remained too low to undergird a strong argument about their presence in the celestial court. Moreover, as I have noted, only two of these examples conform to our picture of the “typical” mystical lay béguine or tertiary. The only additional woman to be successfully canonized during this period was Clare of Assisi (d. 1253, canonized 1255), founder of the Poor Clares, or order of Franciscan nuns.

10. They are Brigit of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, whose vocations were yet extremely controversial.

11. Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, seem to have been the originators of this practice. See “A Note on Terminology,” 14–15.

12. This was especially true in the Low Countries, which produced no local cults for the numerous béguines and recluses that are known to modern scholars. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 129, notes this absence. Catherine’s cult first began in Venice, with the preaching of Dominican supporters there, rather than in her home town of Siena. See M. H. Laurent, “Il Processo Castellano.” *Fontes Vitae S. Catharinae Senensis Historicae*. vol. 9 (Milan, 1942). On the careful control of Catherine’s image, see Sofia Boesch-Gajano and Odile Rédon, “La *Legenda Major* di Raimondo da Capua: Costruzione di una Santa.” In D. Maffei and P. Nardi, eds., *Atti del Simposio Internazionale Cateriano-Bernardiniano*. (Siena, 1982). In Italy, women mystics were apt to acquire a greater degree of local influence than in the Low Countries. This is perhaps due both to the greater prestige of the mendicant orders in this area, as well as to the strong desire of Italian towns to have a homegrown patron in the celestial court. Two interesting examples are Fina of San Gimignano and Verdiana of Castelfiorentino, who were both objects of lively local cults that received little attention from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Margaret of Cortona was venerated as a saint within the city of Cortona, but the commune’s request for a canonization inquiry was rejected by the Papal curia: *Sainthood*, 72; and André Vauchez and Joanna Cannon, *Margherita of Cortona and the Lorenzetti*. (University Park, PA, 1999). However, many Italian religious women also encountered strong local opposition to their claims of divine inspiration, as I shall demonstrate.

13. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Trans. Ephraim Fischhoff. (Boston, 1922): 10. Two excellent works explicitly dealing with aspects of cult formation are Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. (Chicago, 1981), and the collection of essays by Wilson, *Saints and their Cults*.

14. On the dynamics of this relationship, see John Coakley, “Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography.” In Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood*, 222–46.

15. There are of course exceptions to each of these clauses. The issue of canonization proceedings has been dealt with above. Margaret of Cortona and Fina of San-



Gimignano both inspired iconographical representations, including fresco cycles, and Cortona attempted (unsuccessfully) to open a canonization proceeding for Margaret. Verdiana of Castelfiorentino was patron of a confraternity and also is represented in some lay devotional art, such as a household chest and an embroidery. See n. 12 above for a brief discussion of these same examples and some bibliographical references. As for multiple appearances in sources, the best example is Marie of Oignies, who appears in several sources composed by male admirers of the Low Countries béguine movement. Alpaïs of Cudot was mentioned by Caesarius of Heisterbach.

16. There has been some previous work that notes the juxtaposition of women mystics and “demonic women” of various kinds: witches, heretics, false saints, and demoniacs. For example, Bynum did not miss these intimations: she notes suspicions directed against female mystics at several points in *HFHF*, but does not expand upon the theme. (See pages 8, 21, 84–86 for examples.) For works explicitly devoted to exploring the juxtaposition, two publications in Italian focus mainly on the Early Modern period, though with some medieval evidence: Marcello Craveri, *Sante e Streghe: Biografie e Documenti dal XIV al XVII Secolo*. (Milan, 1980), gives several case studies; Gabriella Zarri, ed., *Finzione e Santità tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*. (Turin, 1991), is a collection of short articles. Richard Kieckhefer, “The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe.” *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. 24 (1994): 355–85, despite a title that seems to address this theme, actually argues at the outset that the duality of “holy and unholy” is *not* a particularly fruitful comparison in regard to the careers of saints and witches. Kieckhefer suggests instead that this duality is manifested more provocatively in the rituals of necromancers, and goes on to give a fascinating and provocative analysis of learned magic. Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen im Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit*. (Zürich, 1995), an expansion of his earlier article in *Finzione e Santità*, adopts a structuralist approach, comparing basic elements of the witches’ sabbath with elements in the careers of specific women mystics. The perceptive recent article by Barbara Newman, “Possessed by the Spirit,” argues (among other things) for the enhanced prestige of both women mystics and women demoniacs (see especially pages 753–62). Rosalynn Voaden has recently published a study of the theme of the discernment of spirits with special attention to the writings of Brigit of Sweden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*. (York, 1999). My own interest in the topic began as dissertation research: Nancy Caciola, “Discerning Spirits: Sanctity and Possession in the Later Middle Ages.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994), but my thinking has evolved substantially since then.

17. A useful corrective to overly reified views of the institution is articulated by Gary Macy, “Was there a ‘The Church’ in the Middle Ages?” In R. N. Swanson, ed., *Unity and Diversity in the Church*. (Cambridge, UK, 1996), 107–16.

18. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 207–12.

19. Herbert Grundmann was an exception to this rule. In examining “religious movements,” Grundmann examined both “heretical” and “orthodox” groups as merely different branches of a single spiritual movement. Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*. (Hildesheim, 1961). English translation by Steven Rowan, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame, 1995).

20. Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oignacensis*. AASS vol. 25 (23 June): 548. The phrase is repeated verbatim by Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*. (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 1240.

21. Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Christinae Mirabilis*. AASS vol. 32 (24 July). An excellent English translation is Margot King, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*. (Kalamazoo, 1986), 6.

22. King, *Life of Christina*, 11.

23. This, of course, is the central topic of HFHF.
24. *De Beata Alpaide Virgine*. AASS vol. 64, pars priori (3 Nov.): 180; Joannis Brugman, *De S. Lidwina Virgine*. AASS vol. 11 (14 April): 334. For Catherine, see the longer discussion below.
25. Jean Gerson, *De Distinctione Verarum Visionum a Falsis*. Ed. Ellies du Pin, *Opera Omnia Joannis Gersonii*. I: 48. See also Paschal Boland, *The Concept of Discretio Spirituum in John Gerson's "De Probatione Spirituum" and "De Distinctione Verarum Visionum a Falsis"*. (Washington, DC, 1959). This incident appears on p. 87–88 of Boland's translation; Boland's commentary, however, must be used with caution.
26. *Vita Venerabilis Idae Virginis*. AASS vol. 11 (13 April): 164; cf. also 172.
27. Peter of Dacia, *Acta B. Christinae Stumblensis*. AASS vol. 25 (22 June): 251.
28. Peter of Dacia, *Acta B. Christinae*, 302 (stoning); 318 (sermons). There also is an element of competition between the mendicant orders here, since Christina moved within Dominican circles. For further reviling of Christina see pages 237; 255; 295–96.
29. John Marienwerder, *Vita Dorotheae Montoviensis*. Ed. H. Westpfahl. (Bóhlau, 1964), 43.
30. Étienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues, tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon, Dominicain du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche. (Paris, 1878): 113.
31. Joseph Klapper, ed., *Erzählungen des Mittelalters, In deutscher Übersetzung und lateinischen Urtext*. (Hildesheim, 1978): 348–49. The manuscript is the product of two different hands, both probably dating from the second half of the fourteenth century. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*. Ed. Joseph Strange. 2 vols. (Cologne, 1851), I, 332.
32. Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*. (Douai, 1602), 386–88.
33. Nider, *Formicarius*, 249–50.
34. Richer of Sens, *Chronici senoniensis*, Liber IV, cap. xviii. In L. d'Achery, ed., *Spicilegium sive Collectio Veterum Aliquot Scriptorum qui in Galliae Bibliothecis Delinuerunt*. (Paris, 1723), 634–36.
35. The canonization process has been partially edited, see Enrico Menesto, ed., *Il Processo di Canonizzazione di Chiara di Montefalco*. (Florence, 1984). The full process may be found in *Antica Processo della Beata Chiara da Montefalco*. (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, ms. Riti 2929, 1<sup>r</sup>–1028<sup>r</sup>.) For the accusations of malefice and of associating with heretics, see ff. 877<sup>v</sup>–881<sup>r</sup>. It should be noted that the word “malefice” in this context probably does not refer to magic or witchcraft, but to falsification, “evildoing” in a more natural sense.
36. “How many times . . . !” was she accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons: Raymond of Capua, *Vita Maior*, 882. Her fasting is questioned on page 904. Painters were forbidden to represent Catherine with the stigmata by a 1472 bull of Sixtus IV.
37. Laurent, “Processo Castellano,” 269.
38. Gerson, *De Distinctione*, 54; Boland, *Concept of Discretio Spirituum*, 97.
39. The text of the Inquisitorial proceedings is edited by F. Tocco, “Il Processo dei Guglielmiti.” *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche, e Filologiche*. ser. 4, vol. VII (Rome, 1899): 309–384; 407–69. Scholarly treatments of Guglielma are few: See Luisa Muraro, *Guglielma e Maifreda: Storia di un'Eresia Femminista*. (Milan, 1985); Stephen Wessley, “The Thirteenth-Century Guglielmites: Salvation Through Women.” In Derek Baker, ed. *Medieval Women*. (Oxford, 1978), 289–304; Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages*. (New York, 1955), vol. III, 90–102. See also the following note.
40. The inquisitorial process has been edited by William May, “The Confession of Prous Boneta, Heretic and Heresiarch.” In J. Mundy et al., eds., *Essays in Medieval Life*

and *Thought*. (New York, 1965), 3–30. A translation is available by David Burr, “Confession of Na Prous Boneta.” In Paul Halsall, ed., *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>. Caesarius of Heisterbach likewise mentions a man who publicly preached that he was the Holy Spirit, demonstrating that the idea was not unique to women, though I am primarily concerned with women here. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, I: 307. An interesting discussion of both Guglielma of Milan and Na Prous Boneta may be found in Newman, *Virile Woman*, 182–223.

41. The text of her revelations has been translated into modern French, see Jean-Pierre Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Febus*. (Toulouse, 1984). The demoniac accusation is on page 194. Her case is discussed by Vauchez, *Laics*, 239–49.

42. Sebastian of Perugia, *Vita B. Columbae Reatinae*. AASS vol. 18 (20 May). Columba accused: 180; physical exam: 180; 187.

43. Arnaldo of Foligno, *Vita B. Angelae de Fulgino*, AASS, vol. 1 (4 Jan.). Arnaldo sends book: 188; Angela complains: 191.

44. Juncta Bevnagante, *Vita Margaritae de Cortona*. AASS vol. 6 (22 Feb).

45. *Vita Venerabilis Lukardis*, ed. C. de Smedt et al., *Analecta Bollandia* XVIII (1899): 330–32.

46. Francesco Silvestris, *Vita B. Osannae*, 564. Osanna’s case is discussed by Gabriella Zarri, “Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century.” In Bornstein and Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion*, 219–304. See also Zarri, *Le Sante Vive*.

47. Arne Jönsson, ed. *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works; With Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones, and the Epistola Servi Christi*. (Lund, 1989). A discussion may be found in Eric Colledge, “*Epistola solitarii ad reges*: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda.” *Mediaeval Studies* XVIII (1956): 19–49. See also R. Voaden, *God’s Words*; and Thomasso Caffarini, *Libellus de Supplemento Legende Prolixe Viginis Beate Catharine de Senis*. (Rome: 1974). This is quite a lengthy work, running to 417 pages in the modern printed edition.

48. For a further gloss on my meaning, see N. Caciola, “Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture.” *Past and Present* 152 (August, 1996): 3–45, especially pages 10–11.

49. There were learned exceptions to this opinion, however. Certain scientific writers of the time considered various forms of mental unbalance and dissociation to be due to natural causes (such as an imbalance of the humors, or an exceptional “subtlety” to their spirits), rather than possession by demons. Cf. Bert Hansen, *Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature: The De Causis Mirabilium*. (Toronto, 1985), 287. For a discussion of Oresme, see E. Paschetto, ed. *Demoni e Prodigii: Note su Alcuni Scritti di Witelo e di Oresme*. (Turin, 1978), 59–60; and Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*. (New York, 1934): Vol. III, 398–471.

50. There has been a proliferation of modern works dealing with medieval medicine as well. A classic and exhaustive study is the multivolume work of Thorndike, *History of Magic*, esp. vols. II–III. Excellent recent studies include Nancy Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti and his Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning*. (Princeton, 1981); idem, *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. (Chicago, 1990); Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*. Trans. R. Morris (New Brunswick, 1990); and Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani, *Les Consilia Médicaux*. (Louvain, 1994). Much recent work has focused on sexuality, see Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*. Trans. M. Anderson (Princeton, 1988); and M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception*. (London, 1975). Particularly outstanding is Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages*. (Cambridge, UK, 1993).

51. My discussion of the physiology of the spirit is based on the works cited in the previous footnote and, in addition, on James Bono, "Medical Spirits and the Medieval Language of Life," *Traditio* xl (1984): 91–130; M. D. Chenu, "*Spiritus*: Vocabulaire de l'Âme au XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* xli (1957): 209–32; G. Verbeke, *L'Évolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma du Stoicisme à S. Augustin*. (New York, 1987); and Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*. (London, 1975). I have discussed this material in a somewhat different context in "Wraiths, Revenants."

52. Bono, "Medical Spirits," 98–99. On the heart as the seat of selfhood and subjectivity, see Eric Jager, "The Book of the Heart: Reading and Writing the Medieval Subject," *Speculum* 71 (1996): 1–26.

53. The toad: *Miracula B. Idesbaldi Abbatis*, AASS vol. 11 (18 April): 587. Coal: *Vita S. Bernardini Senensis*, AASS vol. 18 (20 May): 106. Red rock and leaf: *Vita B. Placidi Eremitae*, AASS vol. 23 (12 June): 110. Hairy worm: Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum Universale de Apibus*, (Douai, 1597) II: xxxvi; iiiii.

54. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck u.-Verlagsanstalt, 1965), col. 1881.

55. A. G. Little, *Liber Exemplorum ad Usus Pradicantium*. (Aberdeen, 1907), 9. An earlier version may be found in Gerald of Wales' *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. S. Brewer, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*. (London 1862) vol. II: 54. I have excerpted the *Liber Exemplorum* because of its pithier phrasing.

56. See Bynum, *Fragmentation*, 119–50; Vauchez, *Les Laïcs*, 259–64; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 120–21; 316–19.

57. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, I: 293.

58. This is the story in which the demon appears as a hairy worm, Thomas of Cantimpré, *De Apibus*, II: xxxvi; iiiii.

59. An echo of this idea seems to be found in medieval texts or paintings that represent the deaths of evil figures—Judas or the heretic Arius are common examples—with demons bursting from their guts, rather than breathing out the human spirit through the mouth. The fact that demons were believed to live within the abdomen also lends depth to the suspicions directed at Dorothy of Montau's "mystical pregnancy."

60. Gerald of Wales, *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, II, 71. In J. S. Brewer, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*. (London, 1862), vol. 2; Thomas of Cantimpré, *De Apibus*, II: lviii; lxiii; lxxxix.

61. *Vita S. Hildegardis Virgine*, AASS vol. 45 (17 Sept.), 693.

62. Rupert of Deutz, *De Sancto Spiritu*. Ed. In J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*. (Paris, 1844–1864). vol. 167: 1597–98.

63. Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De Universo* II, 3, 13. *Guillelmi Alverni Episcopi Parisiensis . . . Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1674, repr. Frankfurt-am-Main, 1963).

64. Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologiae*. III: 175. (Florence, 1930).

65. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibeta*. q. II, art. 8.

66. This consensus about the physiology of possession was also reflected in exorcists' manuals. Although these manuals date from a slightly later time period (nearly all are from the fifteenth century), they betray a similar preoccupation with the physical inhabitation of the demon within the body. Some exorcisms include extensive lists of body parts from which the demon is cast forth: these lists are repeatedly invoked throughout the ritual. Another, simpler formula, exclaims to the demon, "The three-hundred seventy veins have long been filled with you! And so have all two hundred forty bones!" (Münich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ms. Clm. 10085, 2<sup>v</sup>). The latest examples have longer individual formulae for each important part of the body. The goal of these rituals is to reclaim the physical "territory" of the body, and then to close or seal the body against further demonic incursions.

67. A third school of thought, which relies upon the diagnosis of psychological disorders underlying possession, has produced work of varying quality. For a rather misogynistic version, see William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York, 1958), especially pages 267–71; 314–17. A more balanced and historically contextualized example of this interpretive school is Moshe Sluhovsky, "A Divine Apparition or Demonic Possession? Female Agency and Church Authority in Sixteenth-century France." *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 27, 4 (1995): 1036–52. Also recommended is Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and its Healing Traditions*. (Delhi, 1990), which combines a subtle psychoanalytic approach with a social-deprivation analysis similar to that of the authors enumerated in the following note. See as well J. H. Chajes, "Judgements Sweetened: Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern Jewish Culture." *Journal of Early Modern History*. 1 (1997): 124–69.

68. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. (New York, 1971). Idem, "A Structural Approach to Witchcraft and Possession." In Mary Douglas, ed., *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. (London, 1970). Michel de Certeau, "La Parole de la Possesée," unaccountably translated as, "Discourse Disturbed: The Sorcerer's Speech," by Tom Conley in *The Writing of History*. (New York, 1988). Such a translation obscures the significant gender implications of the original title. Idem, *La Possession de Loudon*. (Paris, 1980). The dominant scholarly narrative about female mysticism, with its focus upon the enhanced prestige and cultic veneration of women mystics, is infected by this interpretation.

69. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*. (London, 1970). Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Joseph Swain. (London, 1915). See also Lyndal Roper, "Exorcism and the Theology of the Body." In L. Roper, ed., *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe*. (New York, 1994), 171–98.

70. See in particular Joan Wallach Scott, "Experience." In Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (New York, 1992), 22–40.

71. Though de Certeau notes the "structural homology between problems raised by sorcery, possession, and mysticism." Unfortunately, his elaboration of this point remains tantalizingly brief. "Discourse Disturbed," 249–50.

72. The literature on performance theory is extensive. A helpful, though somewhat out of date overview is in Lawrence Sullivan, "Sound and Senses: Toward a Hermeneutics of Performance." *History of Religions* 26, 1 (August, 1986), 1–33. See also Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. (New York, 1992), for a discussion of the history of ritual theory. Helpful specific examples include the essays of S. J. Tambiah in *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*. (Cambridge, MA, 1985); Roy Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual." In R. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. (Berkeley, 1979), 173–222; Edward Schieffelin, "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality." *American Ethnologist* (1985): 707–24; and Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. (Chicago, 1987). A collection of classic articles on the topic may be found in Ronald L. Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1996). Discussion of a performative theory of identity formation in relation to medieval women saints is found in Kathleen Biddick's critique of Caroline Bynum: "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible." *Speculum* 68 (April, 1993): 389–418. For a brilliant application of performance theory to the realm of gender formation, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York, 1990). I myself have gone over some of this ground before in "Through a Glass, Darkly."

73. Scott, "Experience."

74. Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. XXXIX: 3 (Sept. 1971): 291–311.

75. See the incisive comments of Barbara Newman in regard to the attractions of the demoniac role in "Possessed by the Spirit," especially pages 755–62. Also bearing on this point, Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches." *Past and Present*. 140 (August 1993): 45–78.

76. See, in this connection, Gabor Klaniczay, "Legends as Life-strategies for Aspirant Saints in the Later Middle Ages," *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. (Princeton, 1990), 95–110.

77. Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations*.

78. Schieffelin, "Performance and Cultural Construction," 722.

79. Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*. (Oxford, 1993), 134.

80. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 136.

81. Two recent works that approach the question of female physiology and the demonic may be of interest here: Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani, "Savoir médical et anthropologie religieuse. Les représentations et les fonctions de la *vetula* (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)." *Annales E. S. C.* 48, 5 (September/October 1993): 1281–308. Nicole Jacques-Chaquin, "Représentations du corps sorcier à l'âge classique." In Jean Céard, ed., *La Folie et le corps*. (Paris, 1985), 201–22.

82. Quoted in Pouchelle, *Body and Surgery*, 148.

83. Betty Radice, trans., *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. (London, 1974), 166. Heloise may have been joking in this passage (it occurs as a justification for asking Abelard to allow a greater measure of wine to her community of nuns), but the physiological conception itself is not necessarily satirical.

84. Jean de Mailly, *Abrégé des Gestes et Miracles des Saints*. ed. A. Dondaine. (Paris, 1947), 316. A variant is found in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*. Trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 1993) vol. II: 62.

85. Clearly, there is more than one agenda here. Besides the opposition of male and female invoked in the *exemplum*, there is also one of sanctity and sinfulness, for the girl is a Pagan. I would argue, however, that these two overlapping agendas are meant to mutually reinforce, not mutually exclude, one another.

86. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, I: 314.

87. J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, 40.

88. See Raymond of Capua, *Vita Maior*, 908.

89. For facial transfigurations see Raymond of Capua, *Vita Maior*, 884; Peter of Dacia, *Vita Christinae Stumblensis*, 256. Stigmatics include Ida of Louvain, Gertrude ab Oosten, Guglielma of Milan; Christina of Stommeln; Catherine of Siena; Dorothy of Montau, and Lidwina of Scheidam. For a history of the theme, see Pierre Debongnie, "Essai Critique sur l'Histoire des Stigmatisations au Moyen Age." *Études Carmelitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*. 20e Année: vol. II (October 1936): 22–59; and Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*. (Chicago, 1952).

90. Raymond of Capua, *Vita Major*, 908. This precise theme is also found in the hagiographies of Dorothy of Montau, Osanna Andreasia of Mantua, and Lutgard of Aywières; for other variants, keep reading.

91. See n. 1 above.

92. The autopsy is described in nauseating detail by several witnesses throughout the saint's canonization process. See Menestò, ed. *Il Processo . . . di Chiara da Montefalco; Antica Processo della Beata Chiara da Montefalco*. (Vatican City: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, ms. Riti, 2929: 1<sup>r</sup>–1028<sup>c</sup>.)

93. Francesco Silvestris, *Vita B. Osannae*, 624.

94. Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén*, 251.

95. Lukardis communicated another nun by breathing her spirit into the nun's mouth, thus making an equivalence between Lukardis' spirit, joined to God, and the Eucharist:

*Vita Venerabilis Lukardis*, 337–38. Margaret of Cortona described Christ as speaking from “near her heart” after receiving communion; in the next breath, we are told God is “in her soul.” Juncta Bevnate, *Vita Margaritae*, 338. For further discussion of the theme of eucharistic reception as a form of union with God see Bynum, *Fragmentation*, 119–50; Vauchez, *Les Laïcs*, 259–64. See also *De B. Alpaide*, 182; *Vita Bonae Virginis*, 145; May, “Confession of Na Prou Boneta,” for instances of heart themes. Also of interest in this regard is the recent book by Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997).

96. Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, 185–87.

97. Here I respectfully differ with the conclusions drawn by Walter Simons in an excellent article: “Reading a Saint’s Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the *Vitae* of Thirteenth-Century Béguines.” In Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, *Framing Medieval Bodies*. (Manchester, 1994), 10–23.

98. This fact accords well with Mary Douglas’ analysis of attitudes towards bodily comportment as the basic ground upon which cultures decide whether trance is beneficent or dangerous. Cf. *Natural Symbols*, passim. A discussion of the increasing regulation of gesture may be found in Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La Raison des Gestes*. (Paris, 1990); and idem, “The Ethic of Gesture,” in M. Feher, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*. Vol 2. (New York, 1989). The trend has earlier roots, but becomes an increasingly dominant criterion beginning in the late fourteenth century.

99. Henry of Freimar, *Der Traktat Heinrichs von Freimar über die Unterscheidung der Geister*. ed. R. Warnock & A. Zumkeller. (Würzburg: 1977), 158. The text dates from the first quarter of the fourteenth century.

100. Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm. 10085 begins with both masculine and feminine endings—itself an unusual instance of gender inclusiveness in a medieval text—then switches to exclusively feminine pronouns from folio 15<sup>r</sup> onward. Clm. 23325 makes the same transition on folio 12<sup>v</sup>. Vatican City: Biblioteca Vaticana Pal. Lat. 794 consistently uses feminine pronouns after the prologue, but Vat. Lat. 10812 uses the masculine pronoun. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. Lat. 3501 begins with both male and female pronouns, uses only the masculine ending on 131<sup>v</sup>, then switches to feminine endings on 132<sup>v</sup>.