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Alicia Spencer-Hall

Medieval Saints and Modern Screens

Divine Visions as
Cinematic Experience

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Medieval Saints and Modern Screens

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Introduction: Ecstatic Cinema, Cinematic Ecstasy

At the age of six, I took a vow of silence. I had witnessed something so exquisite, so evanescent that I had to memorialize it. I had to sacrifice my words on the altar of something greater than myself. What engendered this act? The impossible purity of love shared by a singing bibliophile and a bestial curmudgeon. I had just seen *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) at the cinema. In the dark embrace of a nondescript multiplex on an otherwise forgotten afternoon, I had seen – and felt – the truth of the universe, or so it seemed. It was, for want of a better word, mystical. Sure, the singing teapot didn't hurt my complete and overwrought devotion to the film. And I had to abandon my silence a few hours later, so as to stop annoying my Mum. But still. For those brief few hours, I ascended the lofty heights of knowledge of how to be human, how to be in the world, and perhaps most importantly how, eventually, I would be an adult. I was in the film; the film was in me.

The principal contentions formulated in this book lie in the crux of that experience, and are threaded through the analyses in the pages that follow. I maintain that medieval mystical episodes are made intelligible to modern audiences through reference to the filmic – the language, form, and lived experience of cinema. Similarly, reference to the realm of the mystical affords a means to express the disconcerting physical and emotional effects of watching cinema. Moreover, cinematic spectatorship affords, at times, a (more or less) secular experience of visionary transcendence: an 'agape-ic encounter'. This transcendent experience is functionally identical to the episodes of ecstasy which are the mainstay of medieval hagiography. This is not to say that all moviegoers are, actually, Catholic mystics, if only they knew it. Rather, I attest that our use, enjoyment, and conceptualization of cinema – and more recently, three-dimensional virtual environments online – reflect our enduring preoccupation with those topics which were previously the domain of religion, and thus hagiography.¹ This includes: our fear and anxiety of mortality; our quest to understand the intersection of body and soul (with the latter reconstituted now as the dissatisfyingly secularized 'mind'); the need to know what 'lies beyond' our present reality, and

1 On this, see also: Spencer-Hall, 'Horror'.

even peer into others' lives; the desire for a 'user's manual' to the universe, an explanation for why things happen to us.

The cinema functions as an arena for these deeply human topics to be brought to light, discussed, and potentially resolved, at least until the film's credits roll and we are delivered back into the messy reality of our lives. The apparent a-religiosity of the cinema – a technological invention that mystics surely did not have! – serves to neutralize the existential bite of these investigations. It also obfuscates the umbilical connection between medieval and modern subjects. In the past as in the present moment, we scan our respective visual horizons in the hope of ontological answers. As Nicholas Watson remarks, the past 'remains inseparably entangled with the present and will continue to be so however much this fact is forgotten or its relevance denied. [...] Only the mode of that continued existence is in question.'² This book stakes the claim that mysticism, or at least a desire for mysticism and the kind of reassurance mystical insight may bring, continues to exist in and as cinema.

Hagiographical scholarship has long struggled with the issue of mediation inherent to the genre. We can never view the hagiographical subject 'face to face'. We set eyes only on the figuration of the holy person provided by the biographer, compelled to author the work by a variety of ideological aims.³ In short: the existence of a medieval *vita* typically 'only proves that a single, literate man [...] was impressed by the woman he described'.⁴ I suggest a change of methodological focus. Instead of grappling with the 'problem' of mediation, I propose that we embrace the full weight of the proposition's heuristic possibility: consideration of hagiography *as media*. In particular, I consider hagiography as *cinematic media*, in light of the relationship between cinema and mysticism outlined above. Each of the chapters in this book pivot on this understanding of hagiography, and investigate hagiography in terms of different kinds of cinematic media: photography, film, celebrity (as embodied image), and three-dimensional digital environments online.

In the categorization of hagiography as media, I draw on Birgit Meyer's definition of 'media': 'those artifacts and cultural forms that make possible communication, bridging temporal and spatial distance between people as well as between them and the realm of the divine or spiritual'.⁵ In this

2 'Phantasmal Past', p. 5.

3 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', p. 5. See also Flory.

4 Caciola, p. 271.

5 Meyer, 'Media', p. 126.

light, it becomes clear that media are, and always have been, ‘intrinsic to religion’ as a means of making divinity visible, tangible, and intelligible to believers.⁶ The medieval hagiographic media under study in this book, then, are examples of a temporally pervasive, and ongoing, phenomenon. My formulation of hagiography as media relies also on W.J.T. Mitchell’s theories of media, with particular emphasis on two key tenets.⁷ Firstly: media are ‘environments where images live, or personas and avatars that address us and can be addressed in turn.’⁸ Hagiographic media are immersive and communicative. They solicit interactions with readers, and open up spaces of virtuality in which their hagiographic personas live and into which the reader can project themselves.⁹

Secondly, I concur with Mitchell’s pronouncement that ‘media purity’ is a fallacy.¹⁰ All media are multimedia in the sense that they are fabricated from an assemblage of mixed media. A film, for example, is an admixture of image, text, sound, and so on. Consequently, engagement with media is always a multisensuous and multimodal process. Even in the most superficially two-dimensional interaction between reader and book, for instance, we find the visual (the words on the page), the haptic (turning the page), the imaginative and intellectual (processing the words’ meaning), and even the olfactory (the smell of the book). *Vitae* are fundamentally synaesthetic and interactive. Hagiographic media fuse the textual, visual, and the haptic both in the diegesis and in their receptive modes.

The paragraphs above set out the assumptions and contentions which fundamentally inform this book. In the sections below, I add finer detail to this methodological sketch. Firstly, I examine the interconnection of cinema and mystical visionary experience, in terms of the ‘agape-ic encounter’ and the tendency to speak of cinematic experience in terms of the mystical and vice versa. I introduce the corpus of primary sources for the present study,

6 Ibid., p. 127. On this, see also: ‘Medium’, in which the citation appears verbatim on p. 60.

7 *Lives and Loves*, pp. 201-21.

8 Ibid., p. 203.

9 This associates hagiography with other medieval media which aim at engendering authentic yet virtual experiences. This includes, for example, guided meditational manuals in the tradition of affective piety which place the reader-cum-seer in the thick of biblical history, such as Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De institutione inclusarum* and the *Meditaciones vite Christi* (dubiously ascribed to John of Caulibus). I refer to the latter briefly in Chapter 4, pp. 193-94. Virtuality was equally central in medieval pilgrimage guides to, and images of, Jerusalem for the imaginative use of those for whom travel to the holy site in person was impossible. For details and analyses of such works, see: Rudy, ‘Cityscape’; ‘Guide’; ‘Fragments’; *Virtual Pilgrimages*.

10 *Lives and Loves*, p. 215. Mitchell writes extensively on this topic, see in particular: *Iconology*, pp.7-46; *Image Science*, pp. 13-21; 125-35.

and my rationale in selecting the medieval and modern works. Following a discussion of the potential limiting factors of the present study, I provide a summary of each chapter.

The Agape-ic Encounter

Writing in 1975, Margaret A. Farley developed a radically egalitarian feminist ethics of Christian agape (perfect, transcendent or divine love; charity). The role of women in the practice of agape had long been determined according to the sexist logic of theology, in which women were 'by nature' inferior to men.¹¹ Agape for women, then, obliged self-sacrifice and self-effacement. Men reaped the rewards of these loving martyrdoms, whilst also asserting themselves in the practice of agape, as befitting their status as the active sex. In the prevailing theology of the early twentieth century, agape was dependent on, and indeed expressed as, 'other regard'.¹² This amounts to an all-encompassing appreciation of and dedication to the other, brought out by the relinquishing of all 'self regard' (or 'self love'). Farley challenged this definition of Christian love, arguing for a recognition of agape instead as 'active receptivity and receptive activity', founded on open-ended mutuality between persons.¹³

The basis of Farley's agape is the 'equal regard' between all humans, and between humanity and divinity.¹⁴ If radically and fully applied, this 'equal regard' enacts agape as: 'the meeting between lover and beloved (whether God or a human person) which is utterly receptive but utterly active, a communion in which the beloved is received and affirmed, in which receiving and giving are but two sides of one reality which is other-centred love.'¹⁵ My intense experience with(in) *Beauty and the Beast* was an 'agape-ic encounter' of this kind. My insistent gaze towards the screen, my beloved, was reciprocated by a look emanating from the screen, from the film itself. In the confluence of these two 'equal regards', I emptied myself out actively as much as I was filled up passively by the movie onscreen. It

11 Farley, pp. 634-40.

12 On this background, see: Andolsen, pp. 146-50.

13 Farley, p. 638.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 633. Farley leverages Gene Outka's work in which agape is defined as 'equal regard', though without attention to the feminist potentiality of this: Outka, pp. 7-54, 260-91. Agape as 'equal regard' has come to be accepted as one of the most dominant interpretations of the concept. On this, see: Pope.

15 Farley, p. 639.

was transcendent, a flickering existence both beyond myself and entirely of myself. The 'act of looking' became 'a way of relating', structuring the relation to myself and to the world.¹⁶

By literalizing the 'equal regard' of Farleyian agape, I stake the claim that the scopic act can be an experience of complete mutuality between the individual who looks and that which is looked at. Moreover, I contend that this spectatorial mutuality is rendered most fully intelligible in two domains: cinematic visions in the modern movie theatre, and divine visions as detailed in medieval hagiographical texts. In each, the reciprocal literalized sightlines at play (moviegoer to/from screen; saint to/from God) produce an 'agape-ic encounter'. The lived experience of this exchange of 'equal regards' is characterized by a sense of transcendence, both for the modern cinema-goer and the medieval visionary saint. The sense of transcendence – an intellectualized apprehension of what is happening in the scopic instant – is conjoined with the *sensation* of transcendence. For the evanescent glory of the 'agape-ic encounter' is also, paradoxically, felt intensely in the viewer's body. This is due to the inherently synaesthetic nature of the scopic act, in which looking opens out into multisensory experience across the viewer's entire body. The agape-ic spectatorial experience is *functionally* identical in ecstatic episodes of divine visions that are the mainstay of medieval hagiography and in the transcendent episodes felt and lived in the cinema.

The framework of the 'agape-ic encounter' offers a counterpoint, and means to move beyond, earlier theories of film spectatorship which pivoted on the notion of film spectatorship as ineluctably objectifying, particularly to women. The most famous of such theories is found in the work of Laura Mulvey, with an insistence on the 'male gaze' of the camera and an attestation of the female spectator as perpetually passive.¹⁷ The 'agape-ic encounter' foregrounds that scopic mutuality is possible, and can be experienced.¹⁸ However, this is not the default viewing position for either the modern cinema-goer or the medieval saint. Whilst they might feel like an eternity or mere seconds, ecstasies (cinematic and otherwise) are transitory states, extra-ordinary in their nature as beyond the ordinary spectatorial regimes that enfold us, yet dependent on those regimes for their socio-cultural signification(s).

16 Vollmer, p. 41.

17 Mulvey, 'Pleasure', 'Afterthoughts'; Mulvey and Sassatelli, 'Interview'. For a useful summary of critical responses to the Mulveyian 'male gaze', see: Chaudhuri, pp. 31-44.

18 Vollmer, pp. 50-52.

The 'agape-ic encounter' is produced by and in the act of genuinely reciprocal spectatorship: by looking at an object which exerts itself simultaneously as a subject, that returns a look that makes plain one's own object-hood. In the cinema, I meet the film's gaze; in hagiography, a holy woman meets God's gaze. So doing, we perceive (feel and see) ourselves being seen, and thus we are looked and felt into being. Functionally speaking, film *is* divinity in the re-staging of the mystical vision into the cinema theatre. Nevertheless, I favour the term 'agape-ic encounter' as a means of undercutting any simplistic one-to-one identification of this experience as a definitive encounter *with* or *of* agape. The signification of this momentary transcendence, engendered by the visual act, is bound up with the macro socio-cultural frameworks to which the viewer is subject, and their own individual beliefs and ethics. Yet, the notion of the 'agape-ic encounter' cuts to the heart of what is so unsettling about experiences in which we seem, however briefly, to find communion in the cinema theatre. They feel religious-ish, or mystical-ish. Not completely religious, certainly, but not *not* of that ilk either.

Ecstatic Cinema

I am not alone with my 'agape-ic encounter' in the cinema. Such encounters correspond to episodes of cinematic vision(s) that evince, as Vivian Carol Sobchack puts it, '*transcendence in immanence*'.¹⁹ That is: the intensely felt apprehension of the mutual imbrication of mind and body, the ontological and the ontic, brought about by cinema spectatorship. Sat in the cinema theatre, we are tethered, as ever, to the material fact of our bodies. Yet this radical materiality carries within itself the capacity to transcend its physical borders. As an anchor to a "here" and "now", the body also points towards an "elsewhere" and "otherwise". In the movie theatre, the body literally points towards that "elsewhere" and "otherwise": directly facing the screen into which we immerse ourselves. We experience transcendence in the movement of our gaze – a metonymy for our entire being – towards the screen. This movement 'relocates us "beyond" the *presentness* of our flesh to dwell in the on-screen world'. For Sobchack, this movement is properly termed an '*ek-stasis*', drawing on the Greek definition of the word as literally to be "put out of place".²⁰ Dynamically propelled away from ourselves and

19 Emphases in original. 'Embodying Transcendence', p. 197.

20 Emphases in original. Sobchack uses the term in 'Embodying Transcendence' (pp. 197-98, p. 202) and in *Carnal Thoughts* (pp. 297-98, p. 301). She glosses it in the latter, p. 297, n. 24.

our lived reality, we accede to 'a unique extoriority of being'.²¹ However, this '*ek-stasis*' is also a movement inwards, as we inhabit 'our own fleshly *presence*' with an intensity equal to the velocity of our '*ek-static*' trajectory outwards.²² What results is 'a porous experience that transcends not only any single sense perception but also traditional subject-object, here-there, inside-outside dichotomies.'²³

According to Sobchack, episodes of '*transcendence in immanence*' fill the cinema spectator with 'grace' and a sense of 'the sublime'.²⁴ These reactions do not depend on the spectator's faith, or indeed the subject matter of the viewed film. For Sobchack, an avowed atheist, they are instead instances of a transcendence divested from religion, located in the movie theatre and produced by the act of cinematic spectatorship itself.²⁵ This is a secular form of transcendence, ontologically inflected 'in [the] egological recognition that we are some "thing" more (and less) than egological beings'.²⁶ Sobchack's insistence on the secularity of the experience is telling, and not entirely persuasive. It is emblematic of the pervasive sense of unease generated by experiences which *should be* secular but feel like something else, something 'more'. Indeed, Sobchack explicitly connects the movie theatre and the church as two spaces in which '*ek-static* transcendence is not only purposefully solicited but also formally shaped and experientially heightened'. Apart from the differing significations accorded to the spectatorial experience itself after the fact – we either saw God (church) or saw the very extent of ourselves (cinema) – what is there really to differentiate the two modalities of spectatorship? They are both, ultimately, 'agape-ic encounters'.

Sobchack posits that the spectator's movement towards the screen involves their removal 'imaginatively, intellectually, or spiritually' from their bodily instant.²⁷ This fabricates an unnecessarily rigid distinction between the three modes of relation with the screen. In fact, an initial imaginative or intellectual engagement with the screen opens up a space for a spiritual liaison with the film in the act of spectatorship itself. I use the term 'spiritual' here in explicit counterpoint to the term 'religious'.

21 Sobchack, 'Embodying Transcendence', p. 197.

22 Ibid. Emphases in original.

23 Ibid., p. 198.

24 *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 303.

25 On Sobchack's atheism, see: *ibid.*, pp. 296-8, 302. On the systematic suppression of religious themes in Sobchack's theories, see Cooper, pp. 108-17.

26 *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 298.

27 'Embodying Transcendence', p. 197.

Whilst the latter connotes organized institutional religion, the former hinges upon a considerably more diffuse awareness of the sacred stuff of life, encountered primarily in individualistic encounters to which the spiritual individual assigns their own meaning. This distinction is captured well in the ever more common identification of being 'spiritual, but not religious'.²⁸ A spiritual attitude is secular, 'but in a very special, soul-filled way'.²⁹

Nevertheless, a spiritual-cinematic encounter may be overlaid with a religious meaning by a devout believer and thus the experience may *become* religious. The point is not that the state of filmic '*transcendence in immanence*' (or the 'agape-ic encounter') is unequivocally spiritual (or indeed religious), though it may be for some cinema spectators. Rather, its character cannot be adequately expressed in an entirely secular framework: it forces a return to the lexical domain of mystical religiosity as a way of making sense of the experience. Hence, Sobchack turns to '*ek-stasis*' to express the fundamental character of the cinematic visions she analyses, and she herself has experienced. The retention of the (transliterated) Greek orthography and hyphenation in the term '*ek-stasis*' operates as a distancing mechanism from the mystical and religious baggage of the term 'ecstasy'.

Cinematic Ecstasy

In a post-Enlightenment context, the spectre of Sobchack's ecstatic cinema is a deeply troubling destabilization of rationality's claims. What's more, such experiences operate as an emphatic and empiricist avowal of the interconnection of mind and body. The dictum 'mind over matter' falls by the wayside: mind *is* matter, and thus matter *matters* very much. The situation is not necessarily much better for staunch Christian believers. The ecstatic capacity embedded in cinematic spectatorship threatens the mystical monopoly in which the Church has trafficked for centuries.³⁰ The experience of '*transcendence in immanence*' shortcuts the established route to a communicative encounter with divinity which depends upon obedience to doctrine and submission to clerical hierarchies. Equally, it suggests divinity is as much 'out there', outside the Church (and the church), as it is contained and preserved within the fibre of its being. If you can see

28 Kripal, 'Secrets', p. 300-01. On this, see also: Drescher, *Religion*, in particular pp. 53-88; Mercadante; Parsons; Strieber and Kripal, pp. 54-56.

29 Strieber and Kripal, p. 55.

30 On this, see in particular: Kripal, 'Secrets', p. 296.

God in the movies, who needs to go to church? As a self-defence mechanism, the religious establishment must deny at all costs the mystical potential (or resonance) of the cinema. Or, at the very least, negotiate on the form and extent of that extra-ecclesiastical ecstatic experience, try to broker a good deal on the resulting spiritual sentiments and access to divinity. This is a central conundrum for the medieval Church when dealing with visionary holy women, and an issue which I explore from various angles in the rest of this book.

Much as some might find it surprising, our contemporary moment is not devoid of mysticism understood as such, with or without the stamp of approval from religious authorities. Whitley Strieber and Jeffrey J. Kripal, for example, present numerous contemporary paramystical visions which bear the hallmarks of the 'agape-ic encounter' sketched above, a mutuality enacted by a reciprocal gaze which radically implicates the body. Strieber, for instance, recounts a paranormal vision he received in 2014, featuring an entity appearing initially as seven glowing balls:

When I asked to see him as he really was, he appeared as a little star hanging over the front yard. It was radiant, and the rays were like living light. They penetrated my skin, bringing with them the most intimate sense of human touch I have ever known. It was a moment of transcendent beauty and joy.³¹

Another modern visionary, Paul Marshall, receives a vision of small, moving circular life-forms that 'were simultaneously both in him [...] and yet also exactly the same as he was, all-knowing and all-inclusive, the recognition of which triggered universal love.'³² Strieber and Kripal characterize such paranormal visions as modern eruptions of mysticism, which in other times and locations may be understood as divine visions in the Christian context.³³

Mysticism renders the invisible visible, but the nature of that visible entity shifts according to social mores. Whatever form the vision takes, all mystical and paranormal episodes are moments in which a visionary communicates with, according to Strieber and Kripal, a 'soul-of-the-world' or 'cosmic mind'.³⁴ This entity, envisioned as a kind of mind separate from

31 Strieber and Kripal, p. 280.

32 Ibid., pp. 276-77. For another similar vision from Kripal's student, see also: p. 272

33 On this, see in particular: *ibid.*, pp. 22-23, 222-26.

34 Ibid., pp. 50-51. See also: pp. 34, 37-38.

biology or free-floating consciousness, is not separate from us: it is ‘us and not us *at the same time*’.³⁵ When perceived by humans, this ‘deeper consciousness [...] beyond the ego’ appears in the form of the ‘Other or Alien’, the divine or the paranormal.³⁶ Staring this ‘Other’ in the eye, we see ‘*both our own humanity and our own divinity*’.³⁷ This is an ‘agape-ic encounter’, a parallel to Sobchack’s realization as to the enmeshment of the ontological and the ontic. However, such an encounter is transcendent, according to Strieber and Kripal, only if the viewing subject is capable of ceding their egological sovereignty.³⁸ If the ego can ‘let go of itself’, then it may merge with the fabric of the world itself: a communion leading to ecstasy following the logic of Sobchack’s cinematic ‘*ek-stasis*’.

Strieber and Kripal repeatedly turn to metaphors of cinematic spectatorship to elucidate their hypotheses. Visionary encounters with the cosmic consciousness are like watching movies with one’s ‘own private movie screen’.³⁹ By watching this movie screen, individuals can – paradoxically – “wake up” out of the social and sensory movie that they are caught in as characters. They peel themselves as perceptions off the screen, turn around, and come to know something of the projecting light streaming in from behind or above them.’⁴⁰ This luminescence is the ‘cosmic mind’ itself, which operates ‘much like the lights dancing on the movie screen’, capable of taking on ‘*any cultural narrative (or myth), any subjective form (or ego)*’.⁴¹ In the context of prophetic visions, the human mind works ‘like a camera *and* a video projector’.⁴² The multifunctional apparatus “sees” and then projects what is happening at some distance along the space-time continuum within a mini-movie in the mind of the visionary.’ Sobchack’s cinema is ecstatic; Strieber and Kripal’s ecstasies are cinematic.

Strieber and Kripal’s recourse to the filmic to explain contemporary mystical phenomena is mirrored in a noteworthy amount of medievalist scholarship in which hagiography is situated in terms of cinema. Catherine Innes-Parker, for example, suggests that the typical narrative of the female martyr is ‘like a script for the worst kind of pornographic film’.⁴³ Discussing

35 Emphases in original. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

41 Emphases in original. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

42 Emphases in original. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

43 P. 205.

the potent orality of Margery Kempe's *Book*, Barbara Newman suggests that if more medievalists were filmmakers, the book would 'yield an excellent screenplay'.⁴⁴ Bernard McGinn proclaims that *vitae* 'may perhaps be seen as something like modern film'.⁴⁵ Such comments are frustratingly vague. This book seeks to rectify this limitation, fleshing out more fully the interplay of the medieval hagiographic with the modern cinematic. Nevertheless, McGinn offers the most fulsome explanation of the cinematic nature of hagiography, which I detail in a section below.

The 'Holy Women of Liège'

McGinn's critique is fruitful also in terms of formulating a corpus of medieval material for study of the cinematic quality of hagiography. The volume in which McGinn sets forth his hypothesis specifically examines the 'new mysticism' that emerged in the period 1200-1350. He characterizes the religiosity of this pan-European movement as 'visionary, ecstatic, excessive'.⁴⁶ Some of the earliest traces of the lifestyle, or one specific form of it, are found in the textual corpus of the 'Holy Women of Liège'. With few exceptions, this corpus provides the medieval material for this book. The corpus comprises a collection of Latin prose biographies, either with an avowed male author or from an unknown hand. This book examines twelve *vitae* in particular: Alice of Schaerbeek (the Leper) (c. 1220-1250), Beatrice of Nazareth (1200-1268), Christina *Mirabilis* (the Astonishing) (1150-1224), Elisabeth of Spalbeek (c. 1246-after 1248), Ida of Léau (c. 1200-1266), Ida of Louvain (c. 1212-c. 1261), Ida of Nivelles (1199-1231), Juliana of Mont-Cornillon (c.1192-1258), Lutgard of Aywières (1182-1246), Margaret of Ypres (1216-1237), Marie of Oignies (c. 1177-1213), and Yvette of Huy (1158-1228). See Table 1 for a summary of the holy women's vital statistics.⁴⁷

The Liégeoise *vitae* are apposite objects of enquiry in the present study for several intersecting reasons. Firstly, the texts are replete with ecstatic visionary experiences. Such episodes reveal the form, content, and function of divine visions in the period. Again and again, the visions reveal the problematic division of body and soul, Christ and human. They also emphasize

44 'Clash', p. 29.

45 P. 20.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

47 Data in Table 1 are adapted from those provided in primary sources, and in: Carpenter, 'New Heaven', pp. 5-6; Delle Stelle, pp. 432-518; Simons, 'Survey', pp. 647-62.

Table 1 Corpus summary data

<u>Holy Woman</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Alternative Moniker(s)</u>	<u>Biographer</u>	<u>Composition Date of Vita</u>	<u>Social Status</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Home Diocese</u>	<u>Primary Religious Affiliation or Occupation</u>	<u>BHL Number</u>
<i>Alice of Schaerbeek</i>	c. 1220-1250	Alice the Leper	Arnulf II of Ghisteltes (?)	c. 1260	unknown	virgin	Cambrai	Cistercian	264
<i>Beatrice of Nazareth</i>	1200-1268	Beatrice of Tienen	Anonymous	shortly after death	wealthy urban	virgin	Liège then Cambrai	Cistercian	1062
<i>Christina Mirabilis</i>	1150-1224	Christina of Sint-Truiden Christina the Astonishing	Thomas of Cantimpré	c. 1232	low born	virgin	Liège	beguine/recluse	1746-1747
<i>Elisabeth of Spalbeek</i>	c. 1246- after 1278	Elisabeth of Herkenrode	Philip of Clairvaux	c. 1268-1272	noble	virgin	Liège	beguine/ Cistercian	2484
<i>Ida of Léau</i>	c. 1200- c. 1266	Ida the Gentle of Léau Ida of Gorsleeuw Ida of Leeuw Ida of Lewis	Anonymous	c. 1260-1280	noble	virgin	Liège	Cistercian	4144
<i>Ida of Louvain</i>	c. 1212- c. 1261	Ida the Eager of Louvain	Anonymous	end of thirteenth century	wealthy urban	virgin	Cambrai	Cistercian	4145
<i>Ida of Nivelles</i>	1199-1231	Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles	Goswin of Bossut	shortly after death	burgher	virgin	Liège	Cistercian	4146-4147

<u>Holy Woman</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Alternative Moniker(s)</u>	<u>Biographer</u>	<u>Composition Date of Vita</u>	<u>Social Status</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Home Diocese</u>	<u>Primary Religious Affiliation or Occupation</u>	<u>BHL Number</u>
<i>Juliana of Mont-Cornillon</i>	c. 1192-1258	Juliana of Liège	Anonymous	c. 1261-1264	noble	virgin	Liège	hospital sister/ anchoress	4521
<i>Lutgard of Aywières</i>	1182-1246	Lutgard of Sint-Truiden Lutgard of Tongeren Lutgard of Tongres	Thomas of Cantimpré	c. 1246-1249	noble/ burgher	virgin	Liège	Benedictine, then Cistercian	4950
<i>Margaret of Ypres</i>	1216-1237	-	Thomas of Cantimpré	c. 1240	wealthy urban	virgin	Thérouanne	beguine	5319
<i>Marie of Oignies</i>	c. 1177-1213	Marie of Nivelles	Jacques of Vitry (main text); Thomas of Cantimpré (supplement)	1215 (main text); c. 1231 (supplement)	wealthy urban	chaste wife	Liège	beguine/recluse	5516-5517
<i>Yvette of Huy</i>	1158-1228	Ivetta of Huy Juetta of Huy Jutta of Huy	Hugh of Floreffe	before 1239	wealthy ministerial	widow, mother	Liège	anchoress	4620

that the viewer's body is central to the scopic act itself, as the visionary experiences intensely physical mystical unions with Christ. Secondly, this content demonstrates the ways in which text can transmit experiences of the visual, the haptic, and the virtual to the reader. In this, then, they are excellent examples by which to elucidate a theory of hagiography as media. Finally, as visionaries in the mould of the 'new mysticism' of the thirteenth century, the holy women of Liège throw into stark relief the shifting power dynamics between laity and clergy. Their holiness, founded upon their mystical visionary capacity, permit their involvement in social, political, and religious spheres. Yet, they can never exist wholly independent of the clergy. The Liégeoises are neither fully of the profane nor the sacred world. In this, they share the character of the modern cinematic experience as neither outright mystical (sacred), nor completely rationalize-able (profane).

In his prologue to Marie of Oignies' (d. 1213) *vita*, Jacques of Vitry (d. 1240) summarizes the key features of the new lifestyle evident in the diocese of Liège in the early thirteenth century:

They had scorned carnal enticements for Christ, despised the riches of this world for the love of the heavenly kingdom, clung to their heavenly Bridegroom in poverty and humility, and earned a sparse meal with their hands, although their families abounded in great riches. Forgetful of their people and the home of their father, they preferred to endure distress and poverty than to abound in riches that had been wrongly acquired or to remain in danger among worldly pomps. You saw holy women serving God and you rejoiced. With what zeal did they preserve their youthful chastity, arming themselves in their honourable resolve by salutary warnings, so that their only desire was the heavenly Bridegroom. [...] Frequently they recalled to memory the words of the Apostle that the widow 'that lives in pleasure is dead' [I Timothy 5.6] and, because holy widows 'share with any of the saints who are in need', they washed the feet of the poor, 'made hospitality their special care' [Romans 12.13], applied themselves to works of mercy, and promised to bear fruit sixty-fold [cf. Matthew 13. 18].⁴⁸

48 *VMOEng*, prol. 3.42-43. '[...], quae spretis pro Christo carnalibus illecebris, contemptis etiam amore regni caelestis hujus mundi divitiis, in paupertate & humilitate Sponso caelesti adhaerentes, labore manuum tenuem victum quarebant, licet parentes earum multis divitiis abundarent. Ipsae tamen obliviscentes populum suum & domum patris sui, malebant angustias & paupertatem sustinere, quam male acquisitis divitiis abundare, vel inter pomposos seculares cum periculo remanere. Vidisti (& gavisus es) sanctas & Deo servientes matronas, quanto zelo juvenclaram pudicitiam conservarent, & eas in honesto proposito, ut solum caelestem Sponsum

These medieval Liégeoises develop their piety outside of enclosure, and thus are known commonly but not necessarily accurately as 'beguines'. The women embrace work in society, such as tending the sick and the poor and even work in textile production, whilst simultaneously devoting themselves to God. Equally, they undertake a life of holy poverty. As shown in Jacques' description, chastity, poverty, humiliating and merciful service to the poor and the sick, with a constant remembrance of the Lord's munificence, are essential elements of the beguine way of life. Such a lifestyle exemplifies the *vita mixta*, the combination of active and contemplative religious practice.

Visionary experience is also essential to the Liégeoise lifestyle: all the holy women have divine visions. This outbreak of visionary acuity is not due to some biological cause, a genetic mutation or mystical spider bite. Rather, the women's mystical capacity is constituted, legislated, and shaped by the precise socio-cultural context(s) in which they are situated. As such, the divine visions are both a product of and response to the forces which governed life as a woman in thirteenth-century Brabant-Liège. The chapters in this book consider in depth 'how' and 'what' the holy women see. Such analyses are grounded in an acknowledgment of the ways in which the 'when' and 'where' directly impact the 'why', the rationale and very possibility of the Liégeoise's mystical visions. This is the work to which I devote the rest of this section. Put otherwise: before turning our attention fully to the cinema screen in later chapters, we must now briefly switch our attention to the projectionist, the hidden hand which makes the film appear before our eyes. This switch permits a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural ground in which the Liégeoise's visions are anchored. It also enables us to consider the impact of our own role as scholarly projectionists, i.e. the ways in which modern scholars project upon the holy women certain subject positions, primarily with the problematic label of 'beguine'.

The beguine movement was formed at the turn of the thirteenth century in the Low Countries, shaped by the dense urban environment of its major cities such as Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, and Liège (see Figs. 1-4 for maps). The area saw impressive economic development and had an established literary culture, operating in both Dutch and French vernaculars.

desiderarent, salutaribus monitis instruerent. [...] frequenter ad memoriam revocantes illud Apostoli: Vidua, quae in deliciis vivit, mortua est: & quod sanctae viduae, quae Sanctorum necessitatibus communicant, quae pedes pauperum lavant, quae hospitalitatem fectantur, quae operibus misericordiae insistunt, fructum sexagesimum promerentur.' *VMO*, prol. 3.636-37. The 'you' to whom Jacques directs these remarks is Fulk, bishop of Toulouse. For more references to the significant number of pious female religious in Liège, see: *VILéau*, 1.4.109; *VIH*, 44.113.884; *VIN*, 22.253-56; *VMO*, 2.6.57.651; 2.11.101.663.

Figure 1 Map of the Low Countries, c. 1100-c. 1500



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Urban development provoked the disintegration of rigid social barriers and the emergence of a new middle class. The borders between spiritual and secular became more porous than ever. Preachers roamed the urban centres, spreading religious devotion, whilst work guilds embraced patron saints, and the lay public became informed about purgatory and the fate of the soul after death via popular spiritual tracts.

Alongside such increased interaction between the religious and profane worlds, women were facing specific changes and challenges to their conventional social roles, which provoked the development of new forms of

Figure 2 Map of the southern Low Countries in the thirteenth century, showing principal towns and regions



Reprinted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press, from Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 2

religion. The so-called *Frauenfrage* – the surplus of unmarried women due to a variety of factors inhibiting the ability or proclivity of men to marry – precipitated a significant demand for space in nunneries, leading to higher prices for entry. A notable portion of the growing ranks of the middle classes could not afford to send their daughters to monastic institutions which demanded large dowries, and the foundations themselves simply could not house all those wishing to enter their walls. Certain orders would not accept new female religious, such as the Premonstratensians from 1170.⁴⁹ The Premonstratensians were the beguines' 'precursors', as the Order's founder Norbert of Xanten (d. 1134) permitted female religious to actively engage in the world by doing acts of charity.⁵⁰ Foreclosure of the Premonstratensian option, then, severely curtailed women's choices for an active religious lifestyle. Beguinages, the communities which typically housed a group

49 M. Brown, p. 204.

50 Stoner, n.p.

Figure 3 Dioceses in the southern Low Countries, 1146-1559

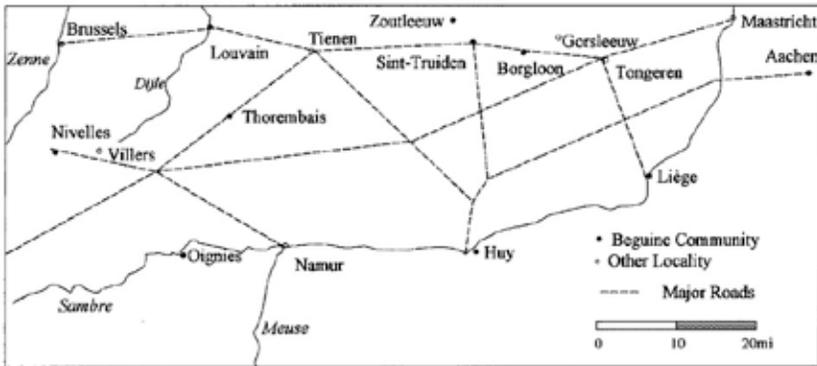
Reprinted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press, from Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 13

of beguines, also increased in number over the thirteenth century.⁵¹ By 1350, it is estimated that there were perhaps as many as three hundred beguine communities in the Low Countries, two thirds of these in what is now Belgium.⁵² Although afforded limited freedom from clerical control as they remained in the world, the women availed themselves of the spiritual services of the clergy, such as the performance of Eucharistic rites. However, they were not affiliated with a specific monastic order.

Beguines and beguinages gained legitimacy in the eyes of the Church by dint of significant support from a group of powerful religious men such as Jacques of Vitry (Augustinian canon regular at the church of Saint-Nicholas-of-Oignies in Liège 1210-1216; bishop of Acre 1216-1226; cardinal-bishop of Frascati (also known as Tusculum) from 1229; d. 1240), John of Nivelles (canon of collegiate church of Saint-John at Liège; joined Augustinian priory of Oignies before 1219; d. 1233), John of Liroux (probably a canon at

51 Simons, 'Margins', p. 320.

52 Simons, 'Survey', p. 627. For a summary of the development of the beguine lifestyle from isolated women to institutional living, see: McDonnell, *Beguines*, pp. 4-7. For a study of the beguinages in Oignies, Nivelles, and Namur, see: *ibid.*, pp. 59-70. For a study of the Parisian beguinage, see: Miller, *Gender*. For a quantitative overview of beguine communities 1200-1565 in the Low Countries, see: Simons, *Cities*, pp. 253-313.

Figure 4 The first beguine communities in Brabant-Liège (c. 1200-c. 1230)

Reprinted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press, from Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 45

Saint-Denis, collegiate church of Liège; d. 1233), Guido of Nivelles (chaplain at Willambroux *leprosarium* until c. 1207; minister at Saint-Sepulchre hospital's chapel and serving nearby beguines until his death; brother-in-law of Marie of Oignies; d. 1227), and Thomas of Cantimpré (Augustinian canon regular at Cantimpré, 1217-1232; Dominican friar; subprior at the Dominican house in Louvain c. 1246; d. c. 1272).⁵³ The support offered by such men came in the form of acting as clerical advisers to beguinages, and/or writing laudatory and essentially propagandistic *vitae* chronicling the exemplary lives of certain virtuous beguines. Additionally, many beguinages were the recipients of support from ecclesiastical authorities in the form of episcopal charters.⁵⁴

In October 1216, Jacques of Vitry reports in a letter to friends a conversation with Honorius III on the topic of beguines. The Pope gives his blessing to beguines, Jacques witnesses, permitting these women 'not only in the diocese of Liège but also in France and the Empire, to live in the same house and to incite each other toward the good by mutual exhortations'.⁵⁵ This was a crucial turning point in the acceptance of these religious women living

53 Simons, *Cities*, pp. 38-48. Guido of Nivelles should not be confused with Giles, one of the founders of Oignies' priory, or John of Nivelles: *ibid.*, p. 47; *VMOSuppEng*, p. 137, n. 1.

54 Simons, 'Margins', p. 321.

55 Translation from *ibid.*, p. 321, n. 30. 'ut liceret mulieribus religiosis non solum in episcopatu Leodi[n]ensi, sed tam in regno quam in imperio in eadem domo simul manere et sese invicem mutuis exhortationibus ad bonum invitare'. Huygens (ed.), letter I, p. 74, ll. 78-81. The news is not altogether positive, however: see below, Chapter 3, p. 156.

without monastic affiliation, and thus of central importance to the acceptance of this way of life as an authorized form of female piety.⁵⁶ This proved to be the high point of the beguine phenomenon. In response to the growing numbers of women adopting the new lifestyle and thereby attaining 'a spiritual freedom' ('une liberté spirituelle'), the Church imposed sanctions for greater control in the early fourteenth century.⁵⁷ The beguines were conflated with the Free Spirit heretics and accused of antinomianism.⁵⁸ Marguerite Porete, a beguine from Hainaut and author of *Le Mirouer des simples ames*, was executed in 1310 as authorities perceived her vernacular text to be promulgating the Free Spirit heterodoxy.⁵⁹ The decree *Ad nostrum qui* from the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) listed eight characteristics of the beguine lifestyle which corresponded to the fundamental elements of the Free Spirit heresy.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the Council condemned the beguines in a special decree, *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus*.⁶¹ The decree's oppositional stance was repeated in another bull, *Ratio recta*, disseminated on 13 August 1318 by John XXII.⁶² Though the Church acknowledged that there *could* be pious uncloistered religious women, remaining beguines were constantly subject to interrogations for heretical behaviour. The dynamic piety exemplified by the holy Liégeoises became, for the most part, a thing of the past.

There is scant historical documentation for early communities of beguines in the Low Countries. The vast majority of our knowledge about the movement is derived from study of the biographies, though the texts are not necessarily authentic representations of the beguine lifestyle. Scholars tend to group the biographies together as a group of beguinal *vitae*, which is technically inaccurate, as Walter Simons observes: 'most of these women were beguines only for a short while before their conversion to a traditional monastic life and ended their lives as nuns, following a rule in a monastic setting'.⁶³ I contend that the term 'beguine' is not an official status per se, but operates instead as a shifting discursive grouping, characterized by a variety of motifs which can be interpreted negatively or positively depending on

56 Wogan-Browne and Henneau, p. 5.

57 My translation; Bartoli, p. 61.

58 Simons, *Cities*, pp. 120-21. On the Free Spirit heresy, including its intersection with beguinal piety, see in particular: Lerner.

59 On Marguerite, see in particular: M. Brown, pp. 191-216; Hollywood, pp. 87-119.

60 Fredericq (ed.), I, pp. 168-69, no. 172 (Latin); Denzinger (ed.), pp. 288-89, DS 891-99 (English translation). Flory, pp. 63-64.

61 Fredericq (ed.), I, pp. 167-68, no. 171 (Latin); McDonnell, *Beguines*, p. 524 (English translation).

62 Fredericq (ed.), II, pp. 72-74, no. 44. Simons, *Cities*, p. 133.

63 *Cities*, p. 37.

particular biases. In this sense, all the Liégeoises under discussion in the present study are beguines.

Five of the *vitae* explicitly refer to beguines, allowing for insight into the circulating meaning of the term in the period.⁶⁴ The texts repeatedly portray contact with the uncloistered groups as foundational to the spiritual life and development of the female protagonist, though clearly positioning the holy Liégeoises as ‘not beguine’. Aged seven, Beatrice of Nazareth temporarily joins a group of beguines in Léau to develop her pious education.⁶⁵ Similarly, Ida of Léau frequently and eagerly visits local beguines for instructive conversation.⁶⁶ After being forced out of three Cistercian institutions, Juliana of Mont-Cornillon finds temporary sanctuary with a group of destitute beguines in Namur during her second exile from home in 1248.⁶⁷ Notably, such episodes of contact with identified beguines are transitional and transitory. Juliana’s beguine lifestyle does not last long. By 1252, Juliana and her last remaining companion, Isabelle of Huy (herself a former beguine), transfer to Salzennes Abbey as they are too frail to live in the world.⁶⁸ Beatrice spends only a year with the beguines, a period in which she is mercilessly mocked by fellow students for her zealous self-discipline.⁶⁹ The beguine community, though educational, is not a site in which Beatrice can become spiritually perfect: she joins the Cistercian Order in Florival the following year.⁷⁰ This transferral is categorized by Bartholomew, Beatrice’s father, as her ‘total conversion’ (*omnimoda sui conuersione*), suggesting that the beguine lifestyle, at least in his eyes, is only a partial uptake of the religious life.⁷¹ Ida of Léau also eschews the beguine life in favour of becoming a Cistercian nun in La Ramée.⁷²

Jennifer N. Brown asserts that the term ‘beguine’ is often used in modern scholarship as an ‘umbrella term’, encompassing any medieval woman

64 *VBN*, 1.3.20.24; *VILéau*, 1.11.110; *VILov*, 1.5.27-28.165; 1.5.31-35.166-67; 1.6.39.168; 2.2.6.172; *VJC*, 1.4.17.450; 1.6.36.455; 1.6.38.455-56; 1.6.41.456; 2.2.8.460; 2.6.32.469-70; 2.9.53.476-77. Though there is no evidence of direct contact with beguines in her *vita*, Marie of Oignies also refers positively to beguines in the Liège diocese: *VMO*, 2.6.57.651; 2.11.101.663.

65 *VBN*, 1.3.20-22.24-26.

66 *VILéau*, 1.11.110.

67 *VJC*, 2.3.32.469-70.

68 *Ibid.*, 2.6.33.470.

69 *VBN*, 1.3.21.26.

70 *Ibid.*, 1.4.23.28.

71 Beguines are repeatedly depicted as witnesses of the holy women’s extraordinary piety rather than as particularly holy women themselves. See: *VILov*, 1.5.27-28.165; 1.5.31-35.166-67; 1.6.39.168; *VJC*, 1.6.36.455; 1.6.38.455-56; 1.6.41.456; 2.2.8.460.

72 *VILéau*, 2.13.112.

devoting herself to religion, whether or not the woman herself – or those in her community – would necessarily have used this label.⁷³ It is clear that the Liégeoises viewed themselves as distinct from beguines, or at least their biographies depict them in this manner. The women themselves, and their clerical supporters, shun this label, preferring instead more positive descriptors, including ‘religious women’ (‘mulieres religiosae’, ‘religiosae feminae’), ‘sacred virgins’ (‘sanctae virgines’), ‘sacred women’ (‘mulieres sanctae’), and ‘chaste virgins’ (‘virgines continentes’).⁷⁴ Jacques of Vitry, for example, rejects the term ‘beguine’ when describing Marie of Oignies, opting for ‘mulier religiosa’ instead.⁷⁵ Marie of Oignies is repeatedly referred to as ‘benigna’ (‘good’, ‘kind’) in her liturgical office, which Daniel Misonne and Hugh Feiss take to be a simple replacement for the word ‘beguine’.⁷⁶ The word replacement, however transparent, skirts a definitive identification of Marie as a beguine. Nevertheless, the correlation between many characteristics of Marie’s lifestyle and those of the women explicitly named as beguines remains.

As the contents of the Holy Fathers’ texts offer endless examples for the pious, Jacques affirms that Marie’s life is a text to be read for pious inspiration: ‘Then you belched forth many and wondrous readings from a wondrous and unheard of fullness and, had we been able to understand, you read to us from the book of life [de libro Vitae], suddenly changing from a disciple into a master.’⁷⁷ Drawing from this passage, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker proposes a new label for the corpus biographies: ‘libri vitae’ (‘books of life’).⁷⁸ She argues persuasively that the Brabant-Liège biographies are not, *sensu stricto*, hagiographies. Rather, they are ‘books of life’, with living saintly protagonists. The Bollandist Hippolyte Delehayé formulates the traditional definition of hagiographical works as: ‘any written monument inspired by the cult of saints and aimed at its promotion’ (‘tout monument écrit inspiré par le culte

73 ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

74 Simons, *Cities*, p. 36.

75 J. N. Brown, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

76 *VMOOL*, pp. 181-82, 187. For Misonne and Feiss’ comments, see *VMOOL*, p. 178; *VMOOLEng*, p. 185, n. 1.

77 *VMOEng*, 2.5.48.84. ‘tunc demum à [corde] puro & ebrío extorque batur veritas; tunc mira & inaudita de plenitudine eructans de libro Vitae, si possemus capere, multas & mirabiles lectiones, de discipula in magistram subito conversa, nobis legebatur.’ *VMO*, 2.5.48.649. See also reference to the book of life in Revelations 20.12, and Ida of Nivelles’ vision of a similar book: *VIN*, 18.241-43.

78 ‘Laywomen’, pp. 32-33. On this, see also: *Anchoresses*, pp. 194-99; ‘Experience’, pp. 94-101. On the ‘book of life’ as Christ and in visions in the corpus, see below: pp. 138 and 206 respectively.

des saints, et destiné à le promouvoir').⁷⁹ Hagiographic documents aim at veneration of their protagonists, a process which could solidify after their death by canonization. Yet, none of the Liégeoises were ever considered for canonization, nor did they secure a lasting, significant cult.⁸⁰ Furthermore, several scholars point out that Elisabeth of Spalbeek's biography is not a *vita* per se but instead a *probatio* – a document that typically records tests of an individual's holiness – more an interrogation of piety than a laudatory hagiographic text.⁸¹ It is with Mulder-Bakker's specific nuance that I use the terms '*vita*' and 'hagiography' throughout this book: relating to texts detailing the spiritual adventures of living (non-canonized) saints.

In response to the conflation of 'beguine' with 'mulier religiosa' evident in much scholarship, Mulder-Bakker unpacks the latter term, generating three broad subsets: (1) holy virgins and beguines; (2) holy matrons, widows (and holy knights); (3) anchoresses and hermits.⁸² This framework allows for a recognition of the lifestyle differences in the corpus, and offers a taxonomy which deals well with the mobility on display in the *vitae*. For example, Marie of Oignies and Yvette of Huy were both widows and entered anchorholds – thereby variously positioned in sets (2) and (3).⁸³ Mulder-Bakker's scheme consciously focuses on holy laywomen, and thus excludes the nuns Alice of Schaerbeek, Beatrice of Nazareth, the three Idas, and Lutgard of Aywières.⁸⁴ These nuns exhibit the same type of religious activities as their unenclosed counterparts. The similarity of worship practices between the cloistered and non-cloistered women is noteworthy, and must be taken into account. Thus, I expand Mulder-Bakker's framework to add a fourth category for monastics, and use the term 'mulier religiosa' or 'holy woman' for all the women in the corpus. A further nuance must be added to Mulder-Bakker's typology. In set (1), no distinction is made between 'institutionalized' beguines (those living in beguinages) and beguines who live alone, or in less formalized groups.⁸⁵ The latter most often appear in the corpus of Netherlandish *Lives*. Whilst the holy Liégeoises are taken to be archetypes of the beguine lifestyle, they are in fact explicitly extraordinary. Not every beguine can become a living saint, after all.

79 P. 2; my translation.

80 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', pp. 30-33; 'Invention', pp. 10-11. On the medieval canonization process, see in particular: Mulder-Bakker, 'Invention'; Vauchez, *Sainthood*, pp. 22-84.

81 Elliott, *Woman*, pp. 186-89; Njus, pp. 297-300.

82 'Laywomen', pp. 10-27; Spencer-Hall, 'Review of *Living Saints*', pp. 55-56.

83 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', pp. 19, 21.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

85 Galloway; Ziegler, pp. 113, 118-23.

Beguinage regulations 'bonded all [residents] together', despite differences relating to social class, age, or personal experiences.⁸⁶ Such rules created a cohesive community, less threatening to the Church due to its supervision by clergymen and a rigid hierarchy. Moreover, women could finally be identified as beguines just by looking at them, in theory at least.⁸⁷ As beguinages became more commonplace in the thirteenth century, clerics increasingly viewed their female residents as the 'better kind' of beguine.⁸⁸ The beguinage minimizes the inherent problem of classification posed by the lay female religious. By contrast, a significant hallmark in the lives of all the Liégeoises is resistance to integration into a coherent group. This is most often testified by significant tension between the Liégeoises and the rest of the community, be that monastic or lay. Jacques of Vitry conjures an atmosphere of bitter enmity towards the women in his prologue to Marie of Oignies' *vita*: 'You have seen and marvelled at those shameless men [...] who, hostile to all religion, maliciously slandered the religious life of these women and, like mad dogs, railed against customs which were contrary to theirs'.⁸⁹ The texts provide many detailed elaborations of such hostility. Some women, for example, are reprimanded by spiritual superiors for excessive asceticism or urged strenuously to reduce their mortifications, including Beatrice of Nazareth, Juliana of Mont-Cornillon, Margaret of Ypres, and Yvette of Huy.⁹⁰

Unlike the figure of the institutionalized beguine, a devout woman who enthusiastically obeys the rule of her beguinage, the Liégeoises find the strictures of formalized religious life difficult to bear. Official monastic rules are repeatedly depicted as obstacles to their preferred worship practices. Alice of Schaerbeek is initially overcome with grief when disallowed access to the chalice, and thus ingestion of the Lord's blood, due to her leprosy and the perceived danger of contagion.⁹¹ Ida of Léau's disordered behaviour after reception of the Eucharist leads to a rule imposed on all nuns in the community: no nun who behaves in such a manner can take Communion.⁹² In order to receive Communion when she enters Kerkom monastery, a rite not normally allowed to such junior members of the Order, Ida of Nivelles feigns

86 Ziegler, p. 114.

87 Miller, 'Name', p. 69.

88 McDonnell, *Beguines*, p. 127; Miller, 'Name', pp. 68-69.

89 *VMOEng*, prol. 4.43. 'Vidisti etiam & admiratus es, [...], quosdam impudicos & totius religionis inimicos homines, praedictarum mulierum religionem malitiose infamantes, & canina rabie contra mores sibi contrarios oblatrantes'. *VMO*, prol. 4.637.

90 *VBN*, 1.4.26.30-32; *VMY*, 18.115; *VJC*, 1.1.4.445; 1.2.12.447; 1.3.15.447-48; *VIH*, 17.49.873.

91 *VAS*, 2.15.480.

92 *VILéau*, 2.19-20.113. On this episode, see also below, p. 76.

acedia.⁹³ She is devastated that she cannot take Communion as established nuns do; she would rather have her head cut off a hundred times than endure further delay.⁹⁴ Agnes, abbess of Aywières, prohibits Lutgard from taking the sacrament every Sunday.⁹⁵ Lutgard's prediction of forthcoming divine punishment for denying her such grace comes true: Agnes falls seriously ill, and her sickness is only cured when she relaxes the prohibition. Lutgard's solution emphasizes her disjunction with the monastic community. Though present there, her membership in the choir of God's elect supersedes any association she might have with the foundation.

Members of the religious community are shown to be highly antagonistic to the holy women in their midst. A junior Dominican friar undertakes a diabolical plot against Ida of Louvain, accusing her of pregnancy.⁹⁶ The pernicious gossip spreads far and wide, only halted after a friar's inspection of Ida's eyes to discover the truth of the matter. Ida of Nivelles suffers myriad slanderous attacks from those in La Ramée who disbelieve the authenticity of her displays of exemplary piety.⁹⁷ Jealous nuns in the monastery of Saint-Catherine similarly disparage Lutgard for her devout way of life.⁹⁸ A priest in Ypres mocks Margaret and drives her off when she seeks him out to find spiritual solace when her confessor, Zeger, is unavailable.⁹⁹ Juliana of Mont-Cornillon is constantly beset by attacks from clerical and monastic quarters, including from the wicked prior John I of Mont-Cornillon, countless churchmen, and a faction of envious nuns.¹⁰⁰ The persecution results in her twice being forced into exile from Mont-Cornillon.¹⁰¹

The laity similarly pour scorn on the holy women. Although Christina *Mirabilis'* outlandish behaviours, including three mystical deaths, are explicitly formulated as divinely ordained in her biography, the lay community of Sint-Truiden believe her a demoniac and persecute her.¹⁰²

93 *VIN*, 3.208-09.

94 *Ibid.*, 3.209-10. See also episode in which Ida ingests sacramental wafer intended for a sick woman: *ibid.*, 20.249-50.

95 *VLA*, 2.1.14.246. See also Lutgard's prediction of divine vengeance for nuns who do not worship at canonical Hours: *ibid.*, 3.2.14.259-60; analysed below in Chapter 1, pp. 94-95.

96 *VILov*, 2.4.17-21.175-6. See further persecution in: *ibid.*, 2.6.32.179-80.

97 *VIN*, 31.283; 32.284.

98 *VLA*, 1.1.8.238. See similar examples in: *ibid.*, 1.2.17.240.

99 *VMY*, 24.118.

100 On John, see: *VJC*, 2.5.21-22.466; 2.6.31.469. On churchmen resistant to the institution of the Corpus Christi Feast inspired by Juliana's vision, see: *ibid.*, 2.3.10.461-62. On the nuns, see: *ibid.*, 1.6.40.456.

101 *Ibid.*, 2.5.22.466; 2.6.28-31.468-69.

102 *VCM*, 2.20-21.653.

A chronicle records King Philip III of France's (d. 1285) consultation of an unnamed religious woman, believed to be Elisabeth of Spalbeek, to discover if his wife was responsible for the fatal poisoning of his son. Any favourable gloss on the event as a sign of Elisabeth's good reputation in the region is undermined by the chronicler, who refers to her as a 'pseudo-prophetess' ('pseudoprophetessa').¹⁰³ The holy women's families are likewise often sources of hostility. Margaret of Ypres' biological sisters, for example, harshly upbraid their holy sibling for not following her confessor's command to sleep on one Christmas Eve.¹⁰⁴ Ida of Louvain's kin strap her down three times in a single day, thinking her insane after her humble adoption of wretched garb.¹⁰⁵ Marie of Oignies' parents mock her mercilessly when she eschews fine garments and adornments from early girlhood.¹⁰⁶ Various relatives and worldly people condemn her and her husband for converting to chaste marriage and renouncing earthly possessions.¹⁰⁷

As modern scholars struggle with a precise definition for the pious medieval woman – 'beguine', 'holy woman', and so on – similar strife is evident in clearly defining the limits of the corpus of devout Liégeoises. Critics agree that the biographies constitute a coherent textual collective, indicating a 'critical moment' in female engagement with new forms of spiritual practice.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, there remains little consensus as to the precise contours of the 'Holy Women of Liège' corpus. Particular trouble is caused by the inclusion or exclusion of the *vitae* of Odilia of Liège and Catherine of Louvain amongst the list of the twelve other women that I include in the present study.¹⁰⁹ For example, Barbara Newman and Wybren Scheepisma include all fourteen women, but Michel Lauwers, and Margot

103 Guillaume of Nangis, p. 502. For details of Elisabeth's involvement in the affair, see Njus, pp. 310-16.

104 *VMY*, 18.115.

105 *VILov*, 1.3.19.163. See also her sister's verbal attacks: *ibid.*, 1.6.36-37.167-68.

106 *VMO*, 1.1.11.639.

107 *Ibid.*, 1.1.15.640. On chaste marriage, see in particular: Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*; Karras, pp. 45-52.

108 Wogan-Browne and Henneau, p. 8.

109 The three books of Odilia's *Life* are split across two publications: *Vitae B. Odiliae; Vitae Odiliae liber III*. For Catherine, see: *De venerabili Catharina*. This edition incorporates two versions of Catherine's life: Caesarius of Heisterbach, II, pp. 95-98; Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus*, pp. 295-98. For analyses of Catherine's life, and analyses, see: Goodich (ed.), *Other Middle Ages*, pp. 26-31; Kleinberg. She is also widely known as Catherine of Parc-aux-Dames, though she belonged not to the monastery of Parc-aux-Dames in northern France, but instead to Parc-les-Dames in Brabant, near Louvain.

H. King with Ludo Jongen count only thirteen, eliding Odilia.¹¹⁰ Jennifer Carpenter and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne writing with Marie-Elisabeth Henneau concentrate only on the twelve Liégeoises included in this book.¹¹¹

The criteria for inclusion in the corpus for the present study are: holy women resident in Brabant-Liège in the thirteenth century; shared narrative tropes and spiritual practices; evidence of contact between the women; interconnection of biographers; and medieval manuscript holdings grouping the collection. I disregard Catherine (née Rachel) of Louvain as anomalous: she is the only convert to Christianity in the group. Further, her biography is exceedingly brief, focusing on the custody battle between Catherine's Jewish family and the Cistercian community of Louvain (also known as Vrouwenpark), to which the virgin flees. The text contains only one vision, provided with scant details, in which the young girl is visited by the Virgin Mary and told to leave her family home. With regards to Odilia, as Simons notes, her *vita* has far more emphasis on the ecclesiastical politics of the Liège diocese than attention to the specificities of religious life.¹¹² Moreover, her text is 'far from exceptional'.¹¹³ The contours of Odilia's spirituality are very similar to that of Yvette of Huy, and she is thus excluded.

The twelve women in this book's corpus are expressly, and repeatedly, depicted as acting as spiritual advisers to one another in the *vitae*. For instance, Ida of Nivelles mentors a young Beatrice of Nazareth upon the latter's arrival at La Ramée, with Beatrice eventually considering Ida as her mother.¹¹⁴ Lutgard and Marie are also close spiritual allies. On her deathbed, Marie covers her head with Lutgard's veil and is touched by the spirit of prophecy.¹¹⁵ She predicts Lutgard's performance of copious bodily and spiritual miracles. After her death, Marie appears to her friend in a vision, asking for a favour.¹¹⁶ Christina *Mirabilis* also visits Lutgard in spirit to advise her to follow God and His desire for the saint to transfer to the Cistercian monastery of Aywières, instead of transferring to her preferred choice, Herkenrode.¹¹⁷

110 B. Newman, 'Preface', pp. xviii-xlix; Scheepsma, p. 85; Lauwers, p. 63, n. 7; King and Jongen, n.p.

111 Carpenter, 'New Heaven'; Wogan-Browne and Henneau, pp. 7-8.

112 *Cities*, p. 38.

113 Mulder-Bakker, *Anchoresses*, p. 126.

114 *VBN*, 1.10.58-66; 1.11.57.70-72; 1.14.67.84; 3.1.188.218. See also the unnamed holy woman in Ida's *vita*, whom Martinus Cawley suggests could be Beatrice: *VIN*, 25.261; *VINEng*, p. 70, n. 117. For reference to Ida as mother, see: *VBN*, 1.10.60.

115 *VLA*, 2.1.9.245. See also *ibid.*, 3.3.18.261.

116 *Ibid.*, 3.1.8.257-58.

117 *Ibid.*, 1.2.22.242.

The primary sources also reveal a network of contact between the women, mediated by individual figures.¹¹⁸ For example, Christina is also connected with Lutgard via the recluse Jutta of Borgloon (then known as Loon). Jutta receives Lutgard for a fortnight at some point before 1200, and later welcomes Christina in her home for a period of nine years, c. 1210-1218.¹¹⁹ St. Boniface (d. c. 1266) spends the last eighteen years of his life in La Cambre, Alice of Schaerbeek's home.¹²⁰ For two years, both were resident in La Cambre at the same time (1248-1250). Boniface also acts as patron to Juliana of Mont-Cornillon and her spiritual sister Eve of Saint-Martin.¹²¹ His relics are transferred behind the high altar at Villers with those of Juliana and others in 1269.¹²² Venerable cleric Guiard of Laon (d. 1248) – archdeacon of Troyes (1215-1221); chancellor at Paris university (1237-1238); bishop of Cambrai (1238-1247) – connects Juliana, Lutgard, and Margaret. John of Lausanne (d. c. 1258-1263), a canon of Saint-Martin, discusses Juliana of Mont-Cornillon's momentous vision revealing the necessity of the institution of the Corpus Christi Feast with Guiard.¹²³ In 1242, Guiard visits Juliana himself.¹²⁴ He later advises Juliana and her companions, then living unenclosed in exile from Mont-Cornillon at Namur (from c. 1247-1248).¹²⁵ Guiard also visits Lutgard in Aywières, and is miraculously able to communicate with the holy woman despite a language barrier, as he speaks only French and she only Flemish.¹²⁶ Margaret's confessor, Zeger of Lille, receives a summons from Guiard, though Zeger does not comply due to Margaret's ill health.¹²⁷

There are also clear links between the *vitae*'s authors. Thomas of Cantimpré writes three biographies (Christina, Lutgard, and Margaret), alongside a supplement to Jacques of Vitry's earlier *Life* of Marie. Thomas refers repeatedly to Jacques' biography of Marie in his *vita* of Lutgard.¹²⁸ I analyse the connections between Thomas and Jacques in Chapter 3.¹²⁹ The

118 Wogan-Browne and Henneau, p. 14.

119 *VLA*, 1.2.16.240; *VLAEng*, p. 231 n. 86; *VCM*, 4.38.657. Jeay and Garay misidentify the 'Ivetta' in the text here as Yvette of Huy: 'Strategies', p. 33. The explicit reference to Loon (approximately forty kilometres from Huy) directs us to identify the woman as Jutta instead, as in *VCMEng*, p. 125.

120 Smet and Tiron, p. 62.

121 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', p. 39.

122 *VJCEng*, p. 292, n. 462.

123 *VJC*, 2.2.7.459.

124 *Ibid.*, *VJC*, 2.5.25.467; *VJCEng*, p. 264, n. 350.

125 *VJC*, 2.6.33.470.

126 *VLA*, 2.3.40.252.

127 *VMY*, 14.113.

128 *VLA*, 1.2.22.242; 3.1.5.257; 3.1.8.257-58.

129 See in particular pp. 160-61.

composer of Ida of Nivelles' *vita*, Goswin of Bossut (d. after 1260) – cantor of Villers abbey, c. 1230-1260 – also wrote Marie of Oignies' liturgical office.¹³⁰ Ida's *vita* was written at the request of her patron, William of Dongelbert (or Dongebert; Dongelberg) (d. 1242), abbot of Villers 1221-1237, later abbot of Clairvaux 1238-1239.¹³¹ William's governance of Villers coincides with Alice's early life, with her posited entry to the community of La Cambre, which was under Villers' paternity, occurring in 1227, at the end of his tenure.¹³² William was also Elisabeth of Spalbeek's patron.¹³³ Elisabeth's relative, William of Ryckel, abbot of Sint-Truiden, acted as her confessor.¹³⁴ He also translated Lutgard's Latin text into Middle Dutch.¹³⁵

The Liège biographies were certainly viewed as a corpus in the medieval era, with no distinction made between the lives of women who were enclosed and those who lived in the world. Manuscript collections show the perceived interconnection of the texts. For example, a library catalogue dating to the seventeenth century reveals that the Abbey of Sint-Truiden housed the biographies of Christina *Mirabilis*, Ida of Léau, Ida of Nivelles, Lutgard of Aywières, Marie of Oignies, Margaret of Ypres, and Yvette of Huy.¹³⁶ A seventeenth-century codex, now lost, contained the biographies of Yvette, and the Idas of Nivelles and Léau.¹³⁷ From the same period, the lives of Christina, Elisabeth, Lutgard, and Yvette were bundled together into a manuscript, still extant.¹³⁸

130 *VMOOL*; *VMOOLEng*; Cawley, 'Introduction [to *SMG*]', pp. 6-8). Goswin's dates of birth and death are unknown, and the date of his accession to cantor is uncertain. However, records testify that he was replaced as cantor in 1260, hence the likely death date.

131 *VINApp*, prol. 222; *VINEng*, prol. B.29; Cawley, 'Introduction [to *SMG*]', pp. 3-4, 26. The prologue is absent from *VIN*, but is extant in two MSS in divergent forms: Brussels, BRB, MSS 8609-8620, fols. 146^r-178^v (A) and MSS 8895-8896, fols. 1^r-35^v (B). Prologues A and B are reproduced in *VINApp*.

132 Cawley, 'Introduction [in *VAS*]', p. xiii.

133 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', p. 39.

134 *VES*, 18.373; 21.375; 23.376. Njus, pp. 286-90. It is unclear as to how Elisabeth and William are related – the relevant text reads 'secundum carnem cognatæ', which Ziegler and Vodoklyš translate loosely as 'uncle': *VES*, 18.373; *VESEng*, 18.3, n. 119. As *VESEng* is in the form of an unpublished MS Word document with unstable pagination, all references to this work relate to numbering of chapters and subsections (respectively) established by the translators.

135 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', pp. 39-40.

136 *Sint-Truiden Abbey Library Catalogue*, Brussels, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes, MS 98, fol. 345^v; Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', 39; *VIHEng*, p. 72, n. 1. None of the indicated manuscripts are extant.

137 This codex was the source of the first edition of *VIH* by Chrysostomus Henriquez in 1633, and the Bollandists' edition from 1642.

138 *Collection of Latin Hagiographies*, Trier, Stadtbibliothek, MS 1179.

A Collective Audience

Mulder-Bakker's canon of thirteenth-century southern Netherlandish female *vitae* includes the urban anchoress Margaret of Magdeburg (c. 1210-1250), clearly not resident in the Brabant-Liège region.¹³⁹ As with some of the more commonly referenced 'core' holy women, Margaret's biographer refers to beguines and uses the reference in a similar way: Margaret's superior piety is highlighted.¹⁴⁰ There is also evidence the work had an audience in the medieval Southern Netherlands.¹⁴¹ Mulder-Bakker thus argues for an appreciation of the dynamic interchange between Brabant-Liège and farther afield, in this instance Saxony.¹⁴² The thematic – as opposed to geographic – grouping is strengthened by an appreciation of the mobility of the religious lifestyle in the period. In a sermon to virgins and young girls from his *Sermones ad status* collection (edited 1229-1240), Jacques of Vitry observes similarities between groups of religious women across thirteenth-century Europe: 'This [beguine] is what they are called in Flanders and Brabant, or *Papelarda*, just as they are called in France, or *Humiliata* as they say in Lombardy, or *Bizoke* just as they say in Italy, or *Coquennunne* as they say in Germany.'¹⁴³ Jacques views the women as a collective, united in the practice of a particular kind of religious worship across linguistic and geographic divides. This is opposed to the predominant approach in modern scholarship: consideration of texts from a single geographic or language area. As Anke Gilleir and Alicia C. Montoya remark, such modern studies thus 'follow the lines of thought that were set out in the nineteenth century, when the nation-state became the dominant framework for the study of modern literatures'.¹⁴⁴ A medieval perspective would be different. For example, the English Benedictine chronicler Matthew Paris (d. 1259) commented that a multitude of women were undertaking a new form of uncloistered religious

139 'Laywomen', p. 6.

140 Johannes of Magdeburg, *The Life of Margaret the Lame*, 66.388; *Die Vita der Margareta contracta*, 66.88-92 On Margaret, see in particular: Mulder-Bakker, *Anchoresses*, pp. 148-73.

141 Mulder-Bakker, 'Laywomen', pp. 6, 33.

142 *Anchoresses*, p. 157.

143 Muessig, *Faces*, 'Second Sermon to Virgins and Young Girls', section 4, p. 89. 'sic enim nominantur in Flandria et Brabancia, – vel *Papelarda* – sic enim appellantur in Francia –, vel *Humiliata* – sicut dicitur in Lumbardia, – uel *Bizoke* – secundum quod dicitur in Ytalia –, vel *Coquennunne* – ut dicitur in Theotonia'. Muessig, *Faces*, p. 143, n. 242. On the *bizzoche* (also known as *pinzochere*), see in particular: Guarnieri; Mazzonis, pp. 2-9; Papi; Sensi. On German beguines, see in particular: Deane; Weiß. For a discussion of fourteenth-century Swedish beguines, see: Morris, pp. 161-70.

144 P. 2.

life 'mostly in Germany' ('in Alemannia praecipue'), an area which appears to include the imperial regions of the Low Countries.¹⁴⁵

What's more, bracketing off the 'beguine phenomenon' exclusively, or primarily, to the period c. 1200-1350 obfuscates the importance of these holy women as models for later non-traditional female religious.¹⁴⁶ For example, in a study of a sixteenth-century Dominican tertiary and visionary from Castile, María de Santo Domingo (c. 1480/86-1524), Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida underscores the parallels between María's religiosity and those of her spiritual forebears, including the holy Liégeoises.¹⁴⁷ Lay female religious in modern-day Italy and Spain rose to prominence in the fifteenth century, and were particularly active in their communities until the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁸ Simply put, these women – known as 'beatas' – are beguines by yet another name. Their spiritual and visionary practices broadly mirror their Northern European counterparts. In Chapter 3, I analyse the ways in which fifteenth-century Englishwoman Margery Kempe (d. after 1438) explicitly drew on Marie of Oignies as a spiritual model.

The above remarks trace, all too briefly, the ways in which the 'beguine' movement must be understood as a pan-European phenomenon, with lasting resonance for women even outside of Brabant-Liège and beyond the thirteenth century. My point is not that all medieval holy women are the same, or that their practices are identical. Context is key. Each woman's religiosity is inflected by her circumstances, both at the micro-level (the specificities of her life) and at the macro-level (the socio-political and cultural framework that she inhabits). Yet, the fact remains: the shared 'visionary, ecstatic, excessive aspects' of the women's religiosity bind them together in a form of community.¹⁴⁹

Through their visions, the holy women form a 'collective audience' for the divine. Membership in this audience does not mean that all women see God in the same place or the same time, or even in the same way. But, crucially, all have access to the source material. For example, I saw *Beauty*

145 Luard (ed.), IV (1877), 278. Cited in Simons, 'Survey', p. 625.

146 Northern European beguines did not vanish after this period, but the lifestyle was certainly in decline and women were ever more subject to institutional constraints. Beguines experienced a relative resurgence in the seventeenth century: Simons, *Cities*, pp. 138-41.

147 *Representación*, pp. 17-82, in particular 21-22, 24, 26, 33, 39-44. On this, see also: 'Construcción'; 'Herencia'. For a depth study of María de Santo Domingo, see: Bastida and Balbás (eds.), pp. 13-88. On Castilian beguines, see also: Cantavella, pp. 69-73; Jiménez.

148 On such women in the Crown of Aragon, see in particular: Pou y Martí; Toro. On the beatas in València, see in particular: Perarnau i Espelt; Vela and Lizondo. On the beatas in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, see: Giordano; Keitt, pp. 91-113.

149 McGinn, p. 30.

and the Beast as a child in a movie theatre. A friend watched the film for the first time on DVD as an adult. My goddaughter watches the film as streamed content on an iPad. We have all seen the movie, though we have never seen the film together. Indeed, we have encountered the movie in very different spectatorial contexts which inarguably impact our reception of it. Nevertheless, the three of us are joined together as a 'collective audience', a grouping constituted by the fact that we have all seen the same film. In fact, all those who have ever seen the Disney flick are united in this 'collective audience'.

For the majority of this book, I discuss the Liégeoises' religious visions in terms of cinema spectatorship, i.e. watching a film in a movie theatre. But there is no singular iteration of film viewership. The holy Liégeoises see God in the cinema theatre, but other beguines have different viewing situations. Movie theatres beyond the diocese offer a different viewing experience. Perhaps they have smaller screens, or more comfortable seats. And for various reasons, women beyond thirteenth-century Brabant-Liège may prefer, or be compelled, to view the divine film in a different format. The thirteenth-century Liégeoises were the earliest members of the 'collective audience' of visionary beguinal piety, the first to take their seats in the movie theatre(s) screening God's magnificence. The concept of the 'collective audience' – an assembly of individuals who all see the divine film but with different viewing times and circumstances – permits the analytical insights of the current study to be transferred to other works of medieval hagiography.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Brabant-Liège was the crucible for the beguine lifestyle, or at least the texts present the situation in this manner. In particular, Marie of Oignies is positioned as the original holy Liégeoise, and her biography is identified as the first text representing 'a much wider phenomenon'.¹⁵⁰ She is singled out by Jacques as a 'surpassingly excellent pearl' ('pretiosa & praeexcellente margarita'), a 'jewel among other stones' ('carbunculus inter alios lapides'), and a 'sun' ('sol') amongst the other holy 'stars' ('stellas').¹⁵¹ As the beguinal archetype, Marie of Oignies sits in the front row at the premiere of the divine film. Other Liégeoises may drift into their local theatre alone on a sunny afternoon, or for a late-night screening with friends. Crucially, however, the movie theatres in Brabant-Liège all offer a roughly similar customer experience, as if all part of the same local franchise or chain. We can thus more confidently generalize their

150 Wogan-Browne and Henneau, p. 7. See also Miller, 'Name', p. 66.

151 *VMOEng*, prol. 9.49; *VMO*, prol. 9.638.

spectatorial experiences as forming a coherent set. In the preceding theorization of holy women as a collective audience, I posit God as constituting the film at which they direct their spectatorial attention. I move now to delineate the ways in which McGinn sets out hagiography as a whole as filmic.

Cinematic Hagiography

McGinn's first assertion as to the filmic nature of hagiography is founded upon the fusion of 'communication and entertainment' in both media.¹⁵² He sounds a note of caution, though: 'If films intend primarily to entertain, *vitae* may at times entertain but always in the service of instruction.' The latter is emphasized in Marie of Oignies' *vita*. Jacques of Vitry gives Hugolino of Segni – bishop of Ostia and future pontiff Gregory IX – Marie's *vita* specifically because it contains 'most telling examples' ('*exemplis evidentissimis*').¹⁵³ Those plagued by an overweening spirit of blasphemy, such as the bishop himself, can more easily be (re)inspired to faith with the many striking miraculous episodes from Marie's life than reasoned theological counsel. In the prologue to Marie's *vita*, Jacques explains the educative, exemplary value of hagiography as follows:

They [the holy Fathers] therefore put down in writing the virtues and the works of the saints who went before them for the use of those coming afterwards in order to strengthen the faith of the weak, instruct the unlearned, incite the sluggish, stir up the devout to imitation, and confute the rebellious and the unfaithful. [...] In this way, many who are not moved by commands are stirred to action by examples.¹⁵⁴

Readers and listeners of hagiography should be moved to greater piety because of the example of the saint's life and works transmitted in such texts. Such examples, conveyed by vivid and rich imagery, are more effective than a dry theological sermon in attracting the attention of the lay community to religious matters. Jacques is motivated to write the *vita*, we are

¹⁵² P. 20.

¹⁵³ *VMO Supp Eng*, 3.16.154; *VMO Supp*, 3.16.672.

¹⁵⁴ *VMO Eng*, prol. 1.40-41. 'ad utilitatem sequentium, virtutes & opera Sanctorum praecedentium redegerunt in scriptum, ut infirmorum fidem roborarent, indoctos instruerent, pigros incitarent, devotos ad imitationem provocarent, rebelles & infideles confutarent. [...] Multi enim incitantur exemplis, qui non moventur praeceptis.' *VMO*, prol. 1.636.

told, because of its 'utility to the many people who will read it' (*multorum etiam legentium utilitate incitatus*'),¹⁵⁵

Hagiographic texts function as vehicles to instruct their audiences as to how to become better Christians by modelling their behaviour on the pious devotion of saints, if not going quite as far as saints in terms of asceticism and so on. Similarly, films – as with all forms of address – instruct spectators how to behave, think, and feel, albeit often implicitly.¹⁵⁶ The link between films and hagiography as ways to impart social/cultural/religious mores is significant as both fictional film and hagiography are designed to be entertaining, and often contain fantastical elements. Although cinema may not be presented to its consumers as a means to learn how to fit in with society, to adopt the correct moral code and even cultural mores, it nevertheless can – and does – function in this way. An entertaining narrative acts as a spoonful, or bucketful, of sugar to make the ideological medicine go down. Hagiography and cinema are both educative: hagiography avowedly so, and cinema in a more tacit fashion. Whilst literary texts may function ideologically, the reader can look away from the page, away from the propagandistic narrative. Cinema spectatorship, by comparison, is immersive; in the cinema, one is captive to the projector's unstoppable whirr. Moreover, cinema-going is often coded as an ideologically neutral event of pure escapism or shared entertainment, a family-friendly activity or good option for a date night. As such, cinema – outside of academia – seems less freighted with the need to parse ideological messaging, to resist propaganda, and to engage our higher levels of analytical judgement. As with hagiography, the privileging of entertainment at the cinema allows for deeply persuasive socio-cultural 'education'.

The same patterns of behaviour, forms of devotion, and even personalities occur again and again in hagiography. There is a model of holiness to which one must conform. As McGinn says, 'certain modes of representation remain characteristic of the whole'.¹⁵⁷ In thirteenth-century female saints' lives, certain components of sanctity repeat. These include visions, miracles, spiritual meditation, asceticism, and dynamic community service. The frequency of such behaviours across the Liégeoise corpus is central to the capacity for us to group the holy women together at all.¹⁵⁸ An individual hagiographer tailored the precise manifestation of such components to suit his task at

¹⁵⁵ *VMOEng*, prol. 10.49; *VMO*, prol. 10.638.

¹⁵⁶ Hughes.

¹⁵⁷ P. 20.

¹⁵⁸ Petroff, *Body*, p. 162.

hand, what needed to be said and proved about the subject of his text. Biblical texts, models from earlier spiritual biographies, and even chunks of previous hagiographies were regularly incorporated into the 'new' *vita*. Explicit signposting of the similarities between the saint in the 'new' *vita* and her devout forbears, recognized as holy, encouraged an acknowledgment of her own sanctity. Detailing Ida of Louvain's miraculous ability to summon flocks of poultry to attend a religious service to keep her company, her biographer exclaims: 'Wondrous thing! A thing scarce belonging to our times! A thing fit to be grouped with Saints' tales of old!'¹⁵⁹ Ida's connection with the saints of years gone by legitimizes her own saintly classification.

Cinema spectators are similarly adept at recognizing the conventional tropes and patterns of the genre or character configuration of a given film and thereby anticipating its theme, mood, and message. Elements of filmmaking, such as lighting, editing, music, and so on, also all contribute to the creation of a distinctive style to a genre. Additionally, actors are often typecast, or perhaps simply choose a certain type of role to play again and again. A crucial difference between the static convention of character in some literary genres and in fiction film is the role of the reader/viewer's imagination. Despite the fact that the character in question may behave in exactly the same manner as every other character in the genre, the reader is allowed to imagine a plethora of specificities, most notably outward appearance. In comparison, the moviegoer is stuck with an individual who is identifiable across films and in different parts. Indeed, it is fundamental to the sense of surprise if an actor chooses to break out of their given mould. Hagiographic tropes operate according to the schema of recognisability in film, as opposed to literature: the hand of God is eternally present in saints' lives, and the saint is always identifiable.

McGinn maintains that there is a significant correlation between the relationship of reality and illusion in cinema and in saints' lives. He develops his hypothesis, stating:

Some pieces of hagiography, like *cinéma vérité*, do their best to imitate the appearance of reality, though the modern reader should not confuse this form of representation with real life, any more than we would do in the case of films that pretend to imitate everyday occurrences. Most saints' lives, however, involve a heightening of the presentation of the events according to certain conventions that were as well understood by

159 *VILovEng*, 1.13.30d.26. 'Res mira, nostrisque temporibus quanto magis inusitata, tato dignius inter antiqua Sanctorum miracula recitanda.' *VILov*, 1.5.30.166.

their medieval audience as the adaptations of reality that contemporary viewers accept in film.¹⁶⁰

Conventionally stylized depictions of saintly behaviour, as discussed above, allow for saints to be recognized as holy. However, such conventionality does not necessarily preclude that such behaviour is authentic, or at least supposed to be perceived to be authentic. Saints' *vitae* are presented to their audience as factual accounts of extraordinary things.

Hagiographers strenuously emphasize the reliability of their sources and the eye-witness accounts they have used. Ida of Léau's biographer, for instance, shores up his tale from attacks impugning the veracity of his text by foregrounding his exemplary and numerous sources.¹⁶¹ Thomas of Cantimpré details the selection process he undertook when gathering source material for his biography of Lutgard of Aywières.¹⁶² He has excluded material for which he could not find sufficient substantiation, we are told, and even events which are so miraculous that only the highly cultivated would be able to comprehend them. The very need for such insistence on direct testimony and factual evidence demonstrates the necessity for hagiographers to defend their texts from claims of fanciful confabulation and to justify extraordinary and implausible miracles. Nevertheless, claims of authenticity direct the reader on how they *should* interpret the text: as fact.

The status of the women as 'living saints' is a significant indicator of a discernable agenda, or at least one possible agenda, underpinning this insistence on factuality in the *vitae*. The women literally incarnate Catholic doctrine, vividly portraying in their lives the rectitude of theology.¹⁶³ Philip of Clairvaux expounds at the end of Elisabeth of Spalbeek's text: 'How inexcusable you are, O humanity, if arguments so dynamic and manifest do not excite you to a robust strengthening of [your] faith and a feeling

160 McGinn, p. 20. Elsewhere, McGinn spares two sentences to liken *vitae* featuring particularly odd paramystical phenomena to horror and/or science fiction film: *ibid.*, pp. 161, 178. This comparison is based on the allegorical or dream-like nature of these genres, which allow for the exploration of spectators' pressing contemporary concerns in a safe filmic space. He refers specifically to the texts of Christina *Mirabilis* and the German beguine Christina of Stommeln (d. 1312). The latter's hagiographic corpus is somewhat complex; for details see: *ibid.*, p. 407, n. 99-100; Coakley, pp. 90-92. For a reading of Christina *Mirabilis'* *vita* in connection to horror films (in the zombie genre), see: Spencer-Hall, 'Horror'.

161 *VILéau*, prol. 2-3.107-08.

162 *VLA*, prol. 234.

163 Mulder-Bakker, *Anchoresses*, p. 198. On this, see discussion in the Conclusion below, pp. 243-54.

for charity and a zealous devotion!¹⁶⁴ This book interprets the ‘dynamic and manifest’ visionary episodes from the corpus, seeking to tease out ‘authorized’ readings, along with more subversive strands identifiable by reading against the grain.

In 2002, Mulder-Bakker made an urgent call for the revalorization of hagiography as a rich source of medievalist material: “The message seems to be that “true medievalists” do not concern themselves with hagiographic sources, or if they do, it is only because they wish to study the earliest texts in the vernacular or are interested in folk beliefs and popular mentality.”¹⁶⁵ I maintain that hagiography is important precisely because it reflects the ‘popular mentality’ of medieval Catholics. Moreover, I contend that this ‘popular mentality’ is not reducible to an inherent medieval-ness. Medieval hagiography is certainly a product of its historical context. Nevertheless, it expresses and discusses many of the issues with which our contemporary popular culture grapples. Medieval hagiography’s ‘popular mentality’ is constituted by altogether human, trans-chronological pre-occupations, as we shall see.

Mysticism and Popular Culture

It is entirely logical for the mystical to be expressed in, and exert itself as, cinema, at least according to Strieber and Kripal. The enduring force underlying mystical visions (the ‘cosmic mind’) has not changed over time, nor has its communicative desire diminished. It is a savvy interlocutor. It appears to us according to the ‘visual grammar’ which best ‘fits our imagination’ at a given socio-historical moment:

If a form of mind wanted to really influence, shape, or direct a culture, it would not bother with the culture’s public arguments or politics. It would choose to work on the culture’s deepest operating system. It would go to the place of dreams and visions. It would choose to work on the cultural imagination.¹⁶⁶

In the medieval era, the Church and its theology were the ‘place of dreams and visions’ into which the mystical entity inserted itself to most effectively

¹⁶⁴ *VESEng*, 30.3. ‘Quam inexcusabilis es, o homo, si te ad robur fidei et caritatis affectum et devotionis studium tam viva et tam manifesta non excitant argumenta!’ *VES*, 30.378.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Invention’, p. 5. See similar comments in Ogden, p. 15.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 222-23.

make contact. In the modern era, cinema dominates our formulation of the visionary, and the kinds of visual experience possible. Strieber himself turns to successive historically inflected 'visual grammars' to de-code his first paranormal visitations in December 1985. The preternatural events unfolded 'at once as a horror movie, a grim fairy tale, a nightmare, and a viscerally real, physically painful experience.¹⁶⁷ Frantically struggling to understand what he is witnessing, and what is being done to him, the quality of Strieber's gaze shifts between 'visual grammars'. In the retelling, he lists these in a reverse chronological trajectory: moving from the cinematic (horror movie), to the folkloric (childish fairytale), to the psychological (nightmare), and finally to the pre-linguistic (the body itself). The divine mystical does not figure here, as Strieber is not inculcated in any institutional religion's cultural-spectatorial regime. He is not himself religious, nor does he live in a predominantly religious society which immerses him in its tenets. After the visitations, Strieber still refers to himself as 'secular', though this is, as Kripal remarks, inflected clearly by a notion of a soul-ful aspect to nature and the universe (i.e. the spiritual).¹⁶⁸

It is striking that Strieber particularizes the filmic character of the visitations: they are not like any movie, but a 'horror movie'. This reflects, of course, the immense terror he felt during his deeply unpleasant encounter with the paranormal. But it also speaks to another important facet of the mystical as perceived in the filmic, at least from Kripal's perspective. Kripal maintains that the mystical today manifests itself in 'the form in which the imagination (and so the image) are given the freest and boldest reign: popular culture.'¹⁶⁹ The filmic horror genre is most often taken as an extension of popular tastes, a vulgar appetite for carnage onscreen.¹⁷⁰ Most horror flicks achieve limited critical praise in terms of artistic value. Strieber's reference to the horror genre, then, reveals the way in which mystical concerns and forms are embedded in pop-cultural artefacts. Moreover, it exposes the ways in which we turn to pop culture in order to express our contemporary mystical, paranormal, and otherwise visionary experiences.¹⁷¹

167 Ibid., p. 27.

168 Ibid., p. 55.

169 Kripal, *Mutants*, p. 5. See also: 'Secrets', p. 296.

170 On this, see: Williams; below, p. 112.

171 For a relevant, though potentially out-of date, case study, see: Meyer, 'Popular Cinema'. It is a widely held belief in Ghana that the supernatural can deleteriously influence the world of the living. The supernatural is the most favoured subject in Ghanaian popular cinema, or at least this was the case when Meyer published her study in 2003. Thanks to the technology of

Peter H. Aykroyd develops the premise of ‘mystical pop culture’ even further. He suggests that the materialization of the mystical depends on pop culture itself, on the very fact of its popularity:

Whether they were believers or skeptics or somewhere in between, those who have experienced psychical phenomena have been entertained. Frightened, amused, touched, moved. And aren’t these precisely the emotions we want to experience when we attend a play, or see a movie, or go to a ballet?¹⁷²

Pop culture is above all *entertaining*, or at least taken as such by a wide swathe of consumers. We immerse ourselves in such pop-culture media, allowing ourselves to be taken in by the latest blockbuster movie. We live in the filmic world for the movie’s running time, and also drop our egological guard, suspending belief and investing ourselves in the filmic diegesis. This state actualizes, or liberates, moviegoers’ latent psychical powers. Paranormal apparitions are thus ‘a kind of spontaneous, unconscious projection of the psyches present’.¹⁷³

Regardless of the actual validity of Aykroyd’s theory, it is compelling, to a scholar of hagiography at least, given its insistence on entertainment as a foundation to mystical experience. It is taken for granted in scholarship that a typical work of medieval hagiography is both entertaining and educative.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the entertaining character of a tale is central to its spiritually instructive utility, as discussed in the preceding section. For medieval hagiographers, audiences needed to be entertained in order to grasp the core religious message of a text. So doing, the text becomes transformative as an entertained and attentive audience will be moved to implement its religious lessons in their own lives. Aykroyd theorizes that being entertained unleashes the dormant parapsychological powers of an audience, leading to an exteriorization of their spiritual energy. In medieval hagiography, the entertainment factor produces deeper understanding of divinity. This effects in the reader both an interiorized and exteriorized

film and special effects, the invisible which haunts Ghanaian society can be made visible. The films Meyer analyses are wildly popular as they provide a space in which the supernatural can be evoked, confronted, and ultimately worked through.

172 Aykroyd and Narth, p. 183; cited in Kripal, *Mutants*, p. 5.

173 Kripal, *Mutants*, p. 5.

174 See, for example: Campbell, *Lives*, p. 12; Cazelles, *Lady*, pp. 4, 7; Herrick, p. 7; Petroff, *Body*, p. 162; Salih, p. 15.

manifestation of the text's 'spiritual energy' (central religious message) as the reader changes their spiritual-mental attitudes and their behaviour.

An appreciation for the interplay between pop culture and mysticism, or the perception of such an interplay in the public imagination, grounds the selection criteria for modern primary sources in the present study. Sources consulted in this book – including photography, film, TV, and digital content – are drawn, almost exclusively, from popular culture. By and large, this is media that has entertained the masses, problematically designated as 'low culture'. In sum, I am concerned with media favoured by the 'cultural laity'. Some works under discussion may *also* have been met with significant critical recognition, but their inclusion in my analyses rests on their broad popularity with 'ordinary' moviegoers and content consumers. Chapter 1, for example, features an extended discussion of *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008). Nominated for eight Academy Awards, the movie was lauded by critics, including being widely hailed as one of the top ten films of the decade (2000-2009).¹⁷⁵ More importantly, though, it was an immense commercial success with audiences, earning over a billion dollars in box offices worldwide.¹⁷⁶

By comparison to today's media market, media consumers of days gone by had very little choice. Before the advent of the internet and digital streaming, for example, TV-viewers were subject to the whims of broadcast networks in terms of the shows to which they had access, and the time at which they could watch a given show. You tuned into a channel to be served with whatever product the 'televisual gods' decided to air at that slot. Moreover, these 'gods' had privileged access to the technologies of media production, with few consumers being able to lay hands on requisite equipment to produce media themselves. This has significantly changed, as such technologies, such as video recording and editing, have become significantly less costly and much more readily available. Every smartphone owner walks around with a camera, video recorder, and editing suite in their back pocket. The internet functions as a vast free distribution network for media produced by industry outsiders or amateurs. Technological development has led to a narrowing of the traditional gap between media consumers and media producers, and a tension between the two forms of cultural production. I conceive of this as a tension between the 'cultural laity' and the 'cultural clergy'.

¹⁷⁵ Dietz, n.p.

¹⁷⁶ Box Office Mojo, n.p.

In our current moment, the 'cultural laity' is playing an ever more active role in the production of media content. The control of the 'cultural clergy' over the means of media production has been progressively weakened, and as a result more 'low-brow' content is streaming out to the masses. The 'cultural clergy', then, comprises both traditional content producers and the critical elite, those who rule on matters of taste. The 'cultural clergy' is dependent for its existence on the 'cultural laity', and vice versa. Content producers need audiences, and cultural critics need someone to instruct, alongside a baseline of popular consumption from which they can extrapolate a hierarchy of cultural taste. Lay media producers depend on established modes of production to model their own processes and forms. What's more, the 'big players' of media production still control the rules of the game, by and large, thanks to their size and incredible reach across the global media marketplace. I consider this situation as analogous to the circumstances in which the medieval Liégeoises find themselves. The holy women are developers of a new kind of religious content for popular consumption, their *vitae* are pop-cultural devotional media. Nevertheless, the Liégeoises cannot escape clerical control entirely; their *vitae* are made to the model of religious figurations of how and in what ways women could be holy in the era.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I draw upon modern sources that cut to the heart of this shifting power dynamic between the 'cultural laity' and the 'cultural clergy'. Celebrities, especially in the Classic Hollywood model, are productions of the latter. A movie studio takes the raw potential of an individual and then processes, repackages that individual into a 'star'. People submit to this factory-style celebrification because of the immense pay-offs, fame and fortune. This model is being radically disrupted in the age of social media, and in the popularity of reality TV. Now, wannabe stars may package themselves, drum up a fanbase on social media, and gain significant airtime for just 'being themselves' on pseudo-documentary shows. In Chapter 3, I consider hagiography in terms of these modes of celebrity production, contrasting the successful celebrification of some holy women in hagiography to Margery Kempe's failed bid for holy recognition. In terms of modern celebrity, I am interested primarily in women whose careers and public personas reflect the different models of celebrification on offer, specifically Jessica Simpson and Kim Kardashian West. The former has been canonized, whilst the latter remains a lay saint. Simpson is not an A-list celebrity, but is certainly popular enough with the general public and viewed as a 'legitimate' star. Kardashian West is one of the most polarizing female figures in today's pop-culture ecosystem, subject to defamatory

ridicule by detractors and breathless adoration by fans. I unpack the celebrification mechanics which underlie these very different expressions of modern celebrity, aligning them with the ways in which female identities are processed and produced in medieval hagiography.

In Chapter 4, I consider the ways in which media consumers produce themselves in and as media from a different angle. If Chapter 3 considers the 'macro-level' of mediatized identity production (celebrity writ large), then Chapter 4 scrutinizes its 'micro-level' (individualized representations for private consumption). I explore the ways in which contemporary Christians practise their religion in the online virtual world of Second Life (SL), with particular attention to the manner in which users choose to represent themselves with their avatar (a three-dimensional digital character). Much of the material in this chapter is derived from my own observations from spending time in SL, including details of interviews I conducted with SL Christians and examination of particularly arresting in-World religious imagery.

Beyond the Frame

William Germano observes that books 'are like photographs, possible only because the camera and the eye were fortunate to be somewhere at the very moment when the clouds held their shape just long enough.'¹⁷⁷ The photograph only records one version of the reality which lays beyond the lens, of the epistemological narrative which the photograph itself attempts to convey. The photographer's choices decisively impact the image with which a viewer is later presented. They control the focus and determine the frames of the final shot. The analyses in this book similarly bear the mark of my own perspective. In the chapters that follow, I offer my snapshot of the holy women of Liège, an image that emerged when the 'clouds' of medieval religion and modern film 'held their shape' before my eyes for 'just long enough' to be captured in writing. Two significant choices determine what lies 'beyond the frame' of the present study, and thus necessarily impact the broader signification of its findings. Firstly, I privilege *textual* representations of visual experience in the medieval corpus. Secondly, the *vitae* of holy *men* from thirteenth-century Brabant-Liège are explicitly excluded from this study.

The focus on literary sources of medieval visuality in this book is both a practical and personal choice. The vast majority of scholarly work undertaken on the Liégeoises to date relates to their textual corpus. The Latin corpus has been edited to a high standard, and is relatively easily available in libraries. By contrast, it is difficult to identify a body of relevant images of the Liégeoises. In addition, it is challenging to discern a cohesive suite of images which were particularly popular with the holy women, with the notable exception of the Veronica icon. I discuss the vernicle at length in the Conclusion. Some insight has been shed on the artwork typically on display in beguinages, however. Joanna E. Ziegler demonstrates that these institutions favoured sculptural pieces with which women could enact publicly their intimate personal spiritual experiences. For example, small freestanding models of the Christ-child, known as the *Christuskindje* or *Infant Jesus*, were especially popular amongst beguines in Louvain and Mechelen in the early fifteenth century.¹⁷⁸ Women interacted with the statue, tending to it as if it were their own divine child. This pattern of engagement offered an externalized form of affective response, replacing the fairly commonplace visionary motif of tending to the infant Christ found in *vitae*. Whilst ecstatic visionary experiences are a hallmark in the lives of Marie of Oignies et al., evidence suggests that ravishment was a rare occurrence for the vast majority of 'ordinary' women in beguinages.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, institutionalized beguines were specifically encouraged to look outside themselves for devotional images, thereby dampening down the ecstatic potential of their religious practices. Whilst insight into the visual landscape of institutionalized beguines is certainly welcome, it is thus of limited utility as a means to reconstruct a bank of contemporary artwork to which the Liégeoises may have had particular attachment.

Little systematic study has yet been undertaken of manuscripts belonging to the Liégeoise corpus in terms of their illustrative content. It is my sincere hope that this project advances as rapidly as possible, thereby opening up new avenues of study into the holy women's visual processes, and the ways in which they themselves were visualized. In my own investigations into manuscript witnesses and accompanying pictorial content, I have been frustrated by the dearth of images. Admittedly, these investigations were superficial in terms of their limited scope: I have consulted a handful of manuscripts, and only those available digitized online. My initial frustration at the lack of illustrated content, however, ultimately gave way to an

178 Ziegler, pp. 125-26.

179 *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21.

appreciation for its effects. The *vitae* operate according to an impressive mechanics of virtuality.

Without recourse to a flat image (re)presenting a given scene from a saint's life, the reader turns more fully to the text itself. This necessitates an attentive and lingering gaze into the text, bringing about an immersive engagement in the *vita*'s events which seem to be projected out from the manuscript to penetrate the reader's scopic horizon. This outward scopic propulsion into the panoramas conjured by the text entails a simultaneous inward movement, into the reader/viewer's own imaginative meditative capacity. The material form of the manuscript, then, acts as an agent for another kind of 'agape-ic encounter'. In some instances, the manuscript operates as the body of an other that textually meets the reader's probing gaze, with each 'looking' the other into more affirmative subject-hood. At other times, the manuscript works as a material proxy for the characters encased in its pages, the former's latent ontological capacity dissolving into the latter's explicit liveliness. The discussions of medieval art and artistic objects in Chapters 2 and 3 foreground the deeply interactive, intimate, and somatized nature of engaging with texts in and as manuscript forms.¹⁸⁰ In Chapter 2 in particular, I pay attention to the way in which scholars have found themselves, and others, in their lived experience of interactive interplay with manuscripts.

This sketch of manuscript's potential to act as body raises the question of the body more generally in this book. The bodies upon which I concentrate my attention are, almost exclusively, female. I examine Jacques of Vitry, and to a lesser extent Thomas of Cantimpré, in Chapter 3. However, my examinations occur in the explicit context of dissecting the ways in which these clerics shaped their identities based on their relationships with holy women. But the women whom I study here were not the only people to strive to develop a new form of religiosity in the thirteenth century in Brabant-Liège. Barbara Newman and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, for instance, list twelve extant biographies of holy laymen, monks, and monastic lay brothers.¹⁸¹ The male counterparts to the Liégeoises are: Gerlach of Houthem (d. 1165); Bernard the Penitent (d. 1184); Godfrey the Sacristan (of Villers) (d. c. 1200); John of Cantimpré (d. c. 1210); Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228); Simon of Aulne (d. 1229); Franco of Archennes (d. after 1230); Abundus of Huy (d. 1239); Godfrey Pachomius (d. 1262); Gobert of Asprenmont (d. 1263); and Peter of Villers (d. ?). Beyond similarities in piety,

180 See in particular: Chapter 2, pp. 136-45; Chapter 3, pp. 187-92.

181 'Canon'. See also: Delle Stelle, pp. 88-92.

there is authorial overlap between the male and female corpus. Goswin of Bossut, author of Marie of Oignies' liturgical office and Ida of Nivelles' *vita*, composed the biographies of Arnulf of Villers and Abundus of Huy. Alongside writing the biography of John of Cantimpré, the prolific Thomas of Cantimpré produced the *vitae* of Margaret of Ypres, Christina *Mirabilis*, Lutgard of Awyières, and the supplement to Marie of Oignies' *vita*.

There is a lamentable paucity of scholarship on the holy men of Liège, though in the recent past some scholars have begun to fill the gap. This scholarship, which I will briefly delineate below, bears witness to the fecundity of an intersectional, kyriarchal methodology in working with hagiographic texts. At any given time, an individual is defined by multiple categories of difference. One is never just 'woman', but also of a given social status, race, sexuality, and so on. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coins the term 'kyriarchy' to describe the 'sociocultural and religious system of dominations by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression' which are present in all societies in historically and culturally specific iterations.¹⁸² In Fiorenza's view, patriarchy rests upon the notion that gender and sex difference is the 'primary oppression,' rendering gender the '*essential* difference of humanity'.¹⁸³ This suggests that patriarchy has been omnipresent and omnipotent throughout history, and continues to be the principal means of female subjugation. However, women are not only disfavoured by gender-based discrimination, but by other categories of difference too.¹⁸⁴ Such oppressions do not act in parallel, but instead are '*multiplicative*,' constantly interacting and thereby constructing 'the pyramidal hierarchical structures of ruling which affect women in different social locations differently,' the kyriarchy.¹⁸⁵ Every individual, man or woman, is defined by various other categories of difference at any given time. If a particular identity marker is accorded a more privileged social position, it becomes 'a nodal point' through which all other markers are filtered: 'While in any particular historical moment class may be the primary modality through which one experiences gender and race, in other circumstances gender may be the privileged position through which one experiences sexuality, race, and class'.¹⁸⁶

182 'Introduction', 9. Fiorenza first elaborates the concept elsewhere: *But She Said*, pp. 101-32.

183 Emphasis in original. *But She Said*, p. 105.

184 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

185 Emphasis in original. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

186 Fiorenza, 'Introduction', p. 10.

Hagiographic scholarship is dominated, by and large, by investigations that focus only on one gender or the other, male or female saints. Comparative studies are relatively rare, reflecting the tendency for scholars to pursue work in which gender is defined, more or less explicitly, as the determining 'nodal point' for saintly subjects under investigation. In these studies, patriarchy is taken as the primary oppressive category. Attention to the specific character of women's religious experience, and the ways in which patriarchy moulded and inflected that experience, is important feminist work. First begun over forty years ago, this work – as represented in the outputs of scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum, Barbara Newman, and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker – remains a worthy, and depressingly necessary, endeavour for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, a kyriarchal methodology develops our heuristic toolkit, facilitating even sharper deconstruction of essentialist concepts of gender difference in terms of medieval religious expression. If we adopt holiness as the primary kyriarchal 'node' for hagiographic scholarship, we open up the scope of our enquiries to incorporate complementary interrogation of holy men and women as a collective. What emerges, then, is that patriarchal-ist methodologies may have over-estimated the essential(ist) differences between saintly men and women and their experiences.¹⁸⁷ This is borne out by recent work on the holy men of Liège.¹⁸⁸

Jeroen Deplouge, for example, presents the anonymous biography of Simon of Aulne, a Cistercian lay brother, in dialogue with several of the Liégeois *vitae*.¹⁸⁹ This shows the interconnection of the holy men and women, and

187 On this, see in particular Biddick: pp. 136-38; Hollywood, pp. 26-56. Biddick critiques Bynum's insistence in *Holy Feast* that gender alone is that which defines medieval women's lives, excluding other significant factors which impact their subjective experiences. Hollywood challenges Bynum's findings in another book, *Fragmentation*, which evinces that the corporeal paramystical phenomena which became a common motif of twelfth- and thirteenth-century hagiography reflected a specifically female religious praxis of the body. Hollywood shows, for example, that *female-authored* hagiographies do not feature such graphic somatisation in the lives of holy women in the period. Both Biddick and Hollywood's criticism are founded, albeit implicitly, on a need for a kyriarchal methodology.

188 See: Deplouge; More, 'Convergence'; M.G. Newman. For a kyriarchal approach to relevant gender history, see: Sautman. In this study of the reigns of two thirteenth-century countesses of Flanders, Joan (r. 1214-1244) and Margaret (r. 1244-1278), Sautman demonstrates that the 'general political context, rather than sex and gender' caused trouble in the sisters' governance (p. 49). Joan and Margaret were defined more by their status as high-ranking women of prestigious ruling lineage than the biological fact of their sex (see in particular pp. 51-53, 60).

189 At present, there is no standard edition of Simon's *vita*. The original manuscript of Simon's 1229 *vita* has been lost. However, a seventeenth-century copy remains: *Vita Simonis Alnensis*, Brussels, BRB, MS 8965-66, fols. 209^r-223^r. Deplouge notes that he is preparing an edition of this

their supporters, in the period. Simon appears as a powerful spiritual colleague in Lutgard of Awyrières' biography as the pair band together to save a nun from diabolical attack with their prayers.¹⁹⁰ In his *Historia occidentalis* (*Occidental History*) Jacques of Vitry recounts his knowledge of a certain Cistercian brother to whom God endows the knowledge of all concealed sins, plausibly an allusion to Simon.¹⁹¹ Simon's mystical ability to decipher any mortal's hidden sins is the hallmark of his holiness. He shares this trait and several others – including the ability to exorcise demons, reception of visions of heaven and hell, and hostility towards him from his community – with many of the Liégeoises.¹⁹²

Another shared aspect of piety evident in the co-ed corpus is the reversal of gender norms as a motif. Alison More asserts that the Liégeois(e) biographies portray the fluidity of gender, with holy women taking on typically masculine ideals from which the holy men are shown to retreat.¹⁹³ Holy men, for example, engage in acts of highly physical asceticism which is often characterized as feminine, or at least predominately present in hagiographies of holy women.¹⁹⁴ Goswin of Bossut relates how Arnulf of Villers, a Cistercian lay brother of Villers, mortifies his flesh by binding his body tightly with a rope for numerous days. Eventually, the rope became 'so firmly embedded that the flesh began to rot and wriggle with worms', and his putrefying skin gave a foul odour.¹⁹⁵ Arnulf's extreme penitence is not sanctioned by his monastic superiors, who had in fact ordered him to remove two other ropes moments before he donned this particularly tight longer cord. His gender does not protect him from the kind of criticism holy women face when attempting to push their ascetic acts to the limit.¹⁹⁶

manuscript, though it is not yet available (p. 102, n. 34). The earliest account of Simon's piety occurs in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*: I, 3.33.150-55. The seventeenth century witnessed a resurgence of interest in Simon, with a concomitant expansion of his corpus: his *vita* was rewritten in Latin, translated into French, and also transformed into an illustrated narrative. For full details, see: Deploige, pp. 101-02.

190 *VLA*, 2.1.10.245-46; Deploige, pp. 101, 113-14. Simon is also mentioned in Odilia of Liège's biography: *Vitae B. Odiliae viduae Leodiensis libri duo priores*, pp. 255-57.

191 Hinnebusch (ed.), 14.115; Deploige, pp. 111-12.

192 Deploige, pp. 106, 111, 116.

193 'Convergence', in particular p. 34. On masculinized female saints, see also: Easton.

194 More, 'Convergence', p. 36. See also n. 187 above regarding the potential pitfalls of categorizing intense somatization as a particularly female expression of piety.

195 *Life of Arnulf*, 1.1.10.132. 'carni ejus tam valide immersus est, ut de carne ejus putrefacta vermes ebuillerent'. *De B. Arnulfo*, 1.1.10.560. On Arnulf's asceticism, see also: M.G. Newman, pp. 190-92.

196 See, for example: *VBN*, 1.4.26.30-32; *VJC*, 1.1.4.445.

In contrast to feminized portrayals of holy men, holy Liégeoises are masculinized in various ways. For example, Ida of Louvain's conversion to Christ, in conflict with her parents' wishes, is characterized as '[n]either womanish nor knavish' ('non muliebriter aut ignave') but 'marked rather by bravery and manly constancy' ('sed forti virilique constantia propulsaret').¹⁹⁷ Moreover, Goswin of Bossut's *vita* of Ida of Nivelles does not contain any examples of the excessive 'feminine' self-mortification evident in Arnulf's biography.¹⁹⁸ In many other ways, however, Ida and Arnulf's religious experiences run parallel: both work hard to save souls and rescue people from purgatory, compassionately consider Christ's Passion, and receive visions revealing the truth of the divine. Gendered imagery functions as a useful tool to showcase the saintly transformation from a life entrenched in earthly concerns towards the divine: 'a journey away from any expression of sexual identity'.¹⁹⁹ By the end of their lives holy men and women 'become genderless saints,' though they continue to inhabit biologically gendered bodies.²⁰⁰

In a study of male and female Cistercian hagiographies produced by Villers monastery in the thirteenth century, Martha G. Newman contends that social class and literacy differentiate holy individuals more than gender. She asserts that there are three 'explicitly gendered positions' evident in the Villers corpus.²⁰¹ Firstly, monks are portrayed as adopting a feminine role in relation to God, underpinned by nuptial imagery. Lay brothers are characterized in explicitly masculine terms, shown to mortify the flesh in forms of *imitatio Christi*. Religious women occupy a third position, in earlier texts being described with nuptial motifs similar to the monks. In later works, the women tend to be depicted in the mode of the lay brothers, with imagery of intensely corporeal asceticism and masculine virility. As Newman points out, this shift testifies the fact that 'Cistercian authors were more concerned about maintaining differences based on literacy and monastic status than about emphasizing distinctions based on sex,' at least initially.²⁰² Illiteracy fundamentally differentiated lay brothers from monks. This difference was strictly enforced: lay brothers were forbidden from learning to read. The deficiency severely impacted lay brothers' influence within the Order, as they could not participate fully in clerical life. Lay brothers also lived apart from monks, wore a different habit, and followed

197 *VILovEng*, 1.1.4a.5; *VILov*, 1.1.4.159.

198 M.G. Newman, pp. 198-99.

199 L'Estrange and More, pp. 7-8.

200 More, 'Convergence', p. 42.

201 P. 185.

202 *Ibid.*

a shortened liturgy. They were, in essence, ‘second class’ monks. Indeed, the lay brotherhood had been founded by the Order as a pool of agricultural labour which could work land holdings and lay brothers were often, though not always, peasants. For the monks of Villers, it was more important to discriminate between men’s social status than on the basis of gender, at least for a time. It is unclear what precisely induced the shift from social status to gender as the primary kyriarchal node of differentiation in the hagiographies.²⁰³

I affirm that holiness, expressed as an extreme (divine) visual acuity, is the primary kyriarchal node through which the Liégeoises inhabit all other structural positions. However, this remains a hypothesis, given the lack of explicit comparative study of the male corpus. Nevertheless, this book is deeply inflected by a kyriarchal methodology. Whilst gender politics are acknowledged and taken account of throughout, the focus remains on the Liégeoises as holy individuals gifted with divine sight first, with their femininity a complicating secondary factor. As articulated in my elucidation of the ‘agape-ic’ encounter above, I privilege the holistic *bodily* spectatorial experience, particularly in terms of Sobchackian film theory. This is in conscious opposition to the expressly gendered spectatorial frameworks derived from Mulveyian cinematic scholarship. Within my analyses, the function of the *saintly* body is highlighted, a function which could well apply similarly to a masculine saintly body, albeit with an expression modulated by gender. It is for this reason that I use inclusive language whenever possible throughout this book. Whilst I preserve female pronouns for the medieval holy women under investigation, I deploy the gender-neutral singular ‘they’ (‘them’, ‘themselves’, ‘their’) for all other references to generalized readers, viewers, and so on.

Overview of Chapters

Bruno Latour elaborates a theory of the ‘polytemporal’ in which events are organized according to a helical, as opposed to linear, schema:

We do have a future and a past, but the future takes the form of a circle expanding in all directions and the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled. Elements that appear remote if we follow the spiral may turn out to

²⁰³ Ibid., 200-01.

be quite nearby if we compare loops. Conversely, elements that are quite contemporary, if we judge by the line, become quite remote if we traverse a spoke. Such temporality does not oblige us to use the labels 'archaic' or 'advanced', since every cohort of contemporary elements may bring together elements from all times.²⁰⁴

It is in this 'polytemporal' context that this book operates. Throughout, I eschew the 'spiral' paths in order to grasp the 'loops' which appear to intimately connect the cinematic and hagiographic in the shared co-occurrence of 'agape-ic encounters'. In my analytical peregrinations, I use metaphor, analogy, and simile to blur the bounds of these 'loops' to their fullest extent, and ultimately to excavate to their fullest depth the gaps which stubbornly persist between them.

Chapters in this volume focus on different strands of modern cinema theory: the relationship of film to time and mortality, embodied spectatorship, celebrity studies, and digital environments. I argue for a spectrum of visual experiences from the medieval to modern period, a non-hierarchical and interconnected series of possible viewing positions which inform both the medieval and modern experience.²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, a coherent organizational structure is necessary to get to grips with the particularities of these 'polytemporal' neomedievalist encounters. The chapters thus unfold according to the trajectory of the technological development of cinema: from the nineteenth-century invention of the photographic process in Chapter 1 to twenty-first century digital media and virtual environments in Chapter 4.

Chapter 1 considers the interconnection of the visual and the temporal, specifically the ways in which photographic technologies and divine visions confuse our understanding of linear time. Sainly visionaries and photographic subjects exist in a temporal framework outside of 'normal' linear time. Still-living, long-dead and yet-to-be-born individuals populate the vision realm of medieval saints. Mere moments spent in vision-space may be felt as hours by witnesses to the visionary episode, trapped in a different timeline. A photograph records a moment in time: figuratively in the narrative implied by the picture, and literally inasmuch as it chemically fixes the rays of light reflected from the photographed object(s). Film, composed of still photographic frames run together, resuscitates such frozen tableaux, offering spectators access to an alternate temporality which runs

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ P. 75.

alongside our own. Specific acts of looking, however, allow those enmeshed in linear time to momentarily experience this alternative temporality – be that moments in which a Christian witnesses a saint's miracles, or a cinema spectator identifies overwhelmingly with the narratives onscreen.

In Chapter 2, I explore the medieval understanding of the process of visual perception alongside the field of embodied film spectatorship. Medieval optical theories emphasized the necessity of the viewing subject to be touched, quite literally, by the viewed object in order for the transmission of an image to the eye of the beholder. To see an object, the viewer had to touch, or be touched by, the object's *species*, its intangible, imperfect, yet authentic representation. The *species* left an imprint of the object on the viewer's eye, either actively expelled by the object itself (intromission) or transmitted via an actualising beam emitted by the viewer (extromission). Recent film scholarship similarly posits a dialogic and haptic interplay between the moviegoer and the bodies onscreen.²⁰⁶ The sight of an onscreen body opens the spectator to becoming the body onscreen, feeling both the bodies portrayed onscreen and their offscreen body as their own. Similarly, medieval saints are shown literally to fuse with the object of their divine visions: God. This chapter interrogates how far theories of embodied spectatorship, particularly those developed by Sobchack, can be applied to medieval spiritual texts, and the limitations of such an approach.

In Chapter 3, I investigate the shaping of female saints as 'stars', focusing on the production of a palatable form of female sanctity authorised by the Church. When analysing celebrity, Richard Dyer maintains that 'we are dealing with the stars in terms of their signification, not with them as real people'.²⁰⁷ Similarly, the saints depicted in hagiographic texts are manufactured by their editors and hagiographers for specific ideological and sociological functions. As a case study, I dissect the textual representation of Marie of Oignies, cast as a celebrity-saint by her hagiographer Jacques of Vitry. Jacques' textual manipulation of Marie and her life allows him to promote his own anti-heretical causes and fast-track his ecclesiastical career. By casting himself as Marie's number-one fan, Jacques becomes a celebrity in his own right, with a following of his own. Thomas of Cantimpré, author of several of the Liégeoises *vitae*, self-identifies as one of Jacques' most ardent fans. I consider the ways in which Thomas attempts, ultimately unsuccessfully, to leverage Jacques' fame to build his own celebrity identity. Finally, I examine the ways in which another holy woman, fifteenth-century

206 Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, pp. 53–84.

207 *Stars*, p. 2.

English mystic Margery Kempe, utilized Marie of Oignies as a role model in her bid for spiritual fame.

From Chapter 3's exploration of the construction of saintly identity by hagiographers, I move in Chapter 4 to examine a saint's self-fashioning via meditative visions. The medieval saint sees, hears, touches, and interacts with God in her mind – yet these mental experiences are figured as having meaningful corporeal consequences and significant tangible outcomes. The online environment of Second Life (SL) offers parallels of modern Christian worship to meditative medieval piety. SL is a three-dimensional online virtual environment designed to allow users to live out a simulated version of life via their avatar. The avatar is a visible version of the self whose appearance and behaviour is wholly controlled by the offline user. SL Christians attend services, pray, and participate in recognizable religious rites in the intangible ('meditative') space of the internet, and these rites significantly affect the user's offline body. SL Christians' modern worship experiences can shed light on the experiences of medieval mystics, and vice versa.

In my conclusion, I posit a new way of interpreting the Liégeoises as animated visual objects and active icons. As such, the women are not solely defined by their status as spectatorial objects but also dynamic agents who are capable of 'looking back'.

The terms 'technology' and 'technological' are used above, and throughout this book, in the context of the 'medieval identification of technology with transcendence', which gained particular currency from the twelfth century onwards.²⁰⁸ Cistercian and Benedictine monastics pioneered innovations, including the windmill and the mechanical clock, with an explicit acknowledgment of the spiritual value of such devices. Technological development became a crucial means to (re)capture a state of perfection that was lost after the Fall. Additionally, in the thirteenth century, a period in which millenarianism flourished, technology became 'a means of anticipating and preparing for the kingdom to come' and simultaneously 'a sure sign in and of itself that that kingdom was at hand'.²⁰⁹ Our contemporary 'secular' technological mode is ineluctably dependent on the religious tenor of all preceding technological innovation.

The modern attitude to technology, as Bronizlaw Szerszynski observes, is 'not really secular at all, in the sense of being independent of any particular

208 Noble, p. 53. On the religiosity of technology in the period, see in particular: *ibid.*, pp. 9-29, 48-56, 211-17; Szerszynski, pp. 53, 67-73; White Jr, especially pp. 93-103, 235-53, pp. 320-38.

209 Noble, p. 26.

religious or sacral beliefs.²¹⁰ For example, the internet's capacity to function as a form of 'digital heaven', into which all users could upload their consciousness and live on for eternity, was repeatedly seized upon by the technology's earliest pioneers.²¹¹ In the twenty-first century, Silicon Valley's software engineers and computer programmers are 'taking over from the priests and the rabbis and the shamans', including in promising to consumer-believers the chance of immortality.²¹² Technology has not nullified potent religious belief. Instead, technology has become the language for expressing concerns and desires that were previously in the domain of the religious. Cinema's embedded mysticism, then, is an indicator of a considerably wider phenomenon. As Yuval Harari remarks: 'We are really witnessing the rise of technoreligion, a movement that makes all the traditional religious promises, but they promise to accomplish them not with the aim of supernatural beings living in the sky, but with the aid of technology.'²¹³ This ever-present interconnection of technology and religion underpins this book's analyses. I turn now to examine photography's 'miraculous' genesis, and the way in which the revolutionary new technology was immediately turned to spiritual matters.

210 Pp. 23-24. See also Noble, p. 5; further remarks on this topic below, Chapter 4, pp. 194-95 and 220-21.

211 See in particular: Casey, 'Examination', pp. 197-201; Noble, pp. 158-60; Spadaro, *Cybergrace*, loc. 35-48; *Cybertheology*, pp. 10-11; Wertheim, pp. 15-21, pp. 38-40, pp. 253-66.

212 Azeem and Harari, n.p.

213 *Ibid.*, n.p.