The Moral Sense of Touch: Teaching Tactile Values in Late Medieval England

by

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ABSTRACT

“The Moral Sense of Touch: Teaching Tactile Values in Late Medieval England” investigates the intersections of popular science and religious education in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the project draws together a range of textual artifacts, from scientific manuals to private prayerbooks, to reconstruct the vast network of touch supporting the late medieval moral syllabus. I argue that new scientific understandings of the five senses, and specifically the sense of touch, had a great impact on the processes, procedures, and parlances of vernacular religious instruction in late medieval England. The study is organized around a set of object lessons that realize the materiality of devotional reading practices. Over the course of investigation, I explore how the tactile values reinforcing medieval conceptions of pleasure and pain were cultivated to educate and, in effect, socialize popular reading audiences. Writing techniques and technologies—literary forms, manuscript designs, illustration programs—shaped the reception and user-experience of devotional texts. Focusing on the cultural life of the sense of touch, “The Moral Sense of Touch” provides a new context for a sense based study of historical literatures, one that recovers the centrality of touch in cognitive, aesthetic, and moral discourses.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 MEDIEVAL SENSES OF TOUCH</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy Lessons</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archives of Feeling</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purely Physical</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Physical, Partly Spiritual</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Spiritual</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch Points</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 EDUCATING THE SENSES</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientations</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Configuring the Medieval Senses</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows of The Heart</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing the Senses</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense Investment: A Working Model</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 MAGDALENE MISHANDLED</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noli Me Tangere: A Pictorial Primmer</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Þe Gospel of Mari Mawdelene”</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the Comforts of Hell</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lechery in the Garden</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lechery in the Tavern</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Noli Me Tangere: A Poetic Intervention</em></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 TOUCHING THOMAS</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Necessary Touch?</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unless I Touch</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put Your Finger Here</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: On Making Wounds</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation: A Model for Touching</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The “religious turn” in Medieval Studies has afforded students of the period considerable insights into the diverse theological landscape of the age. Over the last few decades, following the lead of pioneering works including Gail McMurray Gibson’s *Theatre of Devotion* and Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars*, numerous studies have detailed the emergence of vernacular devotional cultures in late medieval and early modern England. Such studies have yielded much fruit, particularly in their handling of affective piety in the production, translation, and dissemination of materials treating devotion to the Passion of Jesus. Through interdisciplinary investigations into Passion devotion in late medieval England, scholars have come to learn a great deal about regional devotional habits, pressing theological debates (including those concerned with the role of the sacraments and the status of the vernacular), and more recently the history of emotions.

Miri Rubin’s sweeping study, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, foregrounds the significance of Eucharistic practice. Her work examines the development of Eucharistic theology and the rise of a corporate desire to focus on the bodily suffering of Jesus. Rachel Fulton extends Rubin’s interests in *From Judgment to Passion*, offering a comprehensive overview of the rise of “imitative devotion” to the Passion in mid- to late-medieval Europe. And more recently, building on the theological and liturgical developments outlined by Rubin and Fulton, Sarah McNamer’s work in *Affective Mediation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* details the development of affective
devotional practices in late-medieval England. Of particular interest here, noting the influence of Barbra Rosenwein’s work on the medieval history of emotions, is McNamer’s engaging study of Latin and Middle English materials designed to provide lay readers with what she terms the “intimate scripts” of compassion to facilitate more affective modes of Passion devotion. Anthony Bale also looks at Passion devotion through the lens of emotionology in *Feeling Persecuted*. Bale’s study is less interested in compassion, however, and more with the cultivation of emotional pain through the development of a kind of Christian persecution complex.

The study of late medieval devotional cultures has effectively demonstrated the centrality of the ideals of spiritual suffering and sacred violence to medieval theologies and religious practices. Work in the medieval moral tradition, following the successive studies of Morton Bloomfield, Siegfried Wenzel, and Richard Newhauser, to name a few, have opened up the potential (as well as previously unavailable Latin and vernacular sources) of penitential and pastoral materials. Drawing on such work, for example, Holly Johnson’s *The Grammar of Good Friday* shows how late medieval preachers worked to forge connections between the imperatives of moral education and popular devotional practices. Similarly, Nicole Rice’s *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* demonstrates the influence of penitential culture on the plan, purpose, and vocabulary of vernacular devotional materials produced in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. Beyond affect, devotion to the suffering body of Jesus was meant to translate into moral action, which is to say, the obligations of the individual in forging a way of being in the world. In a concentrated effort to understand the “body in pain,”
however, the field has yet to adequately account for the more pleasurable facets of medieval religious culture in general.

“The Moral Sense of Touch: Teaching Tactile Values in Late Medieval England” seeks to close these gaps in understanding the pleasures of touch and the moral dimensions of Passion devotion. Taking an interdisciplinary and cultural-specific approach, this dissertation draws together a range of textual artifacts, from scientific manuals to private prayerbooks, to reconstruct the vast network of touch supporting the late medieval moral syllabus. I argue that new scientific understandings of the five senses, and specifically the sense of touch, had a great impact on the processes, procedures, and parlances of vernacular religious instruction in late medieval England. The project is organized around a set of object lessons that realize the materiality of devotional cultural. Over its course of study, the dissertation explores how the “tactile values” reinforcing medieval conceptions of pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort were cultivated to educate and, in effect, socialize popular audiences. The development of new devotional techniques and technologies—literary forms, manuscript designs, illustration programs—shaped the reception and user-experience of devotional images and texts.¹ Focusing on the cultural life of the sense of touch, this dissertation project provides a new context for a sense based study of historical literatures, one that recovers the centrality of touch in cognitive, aesthetic, and moral discourses.

Why the sense of touch? To grasp the medieval sense of touch is, in one sense, to grasp the interworkings of the medieval sensorium. As C.M. Woolgar reminds us, touch

¹ The term “tactile values” is borrowed from Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
“underpinned” all of the other senses and was thought to be “present” in all parts of the medieval body.² John Trevisa (1342-1402), for example, underscores the tactility of sense perception in his Middle English translation of Bartholomew the Englishman’s *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, noting that the sense of touch “inprentiþ his felinge” (imprints its feeling) on the organs of the other senses.³ Medieval thinkers also imagined touch as a conduit through which “moral and other intangible qualities” could pass between beings, and between beings and objects.⁴ Since touch was, generally speaking, perceived as a conduit of sensory experience, and since touch was also thought to hold a capacity to transmit moral qualities, authors in the moral tradition found themselves in need of strategies to train and assist the populace in mastering not only this sense, but all the senses. The moral potential ascribed to touch raises some significant questions, namely, how did one learn to touch morally in late medieval England? If we also accept that touch is not only an active sense, as in the act of touching, but also a passive sense, as in being touched, then how does one learn to discern between purposeful and accidental touch? How might one control his or her touch, or guard against the touches of others? And what about the absence of touch? How might issues related to proximity and exclusion also inform the moral education of the senses?

Following Constance Classen (*Deepest Sense*) and Esther Cohen (*Modulated Scream*), the present project intends to show how attention to “touch” and “feeling” can


reveal previously unexplored and/or undervalued dimensions of medieval religious culture. Both Classen and Cohen stress that “feeling” is a cultural phenomenon, and expressions and responses to pain, in particular, are deeply coded behaviors. Through a study of the visual and literary vocabulary of pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort, I intend to show how a handful of late medieval authors and artists pressed “feeling” into service to both persuade and assist parishioners to examine their consciences.

The project is divided into two parts. Part one introduces the medieval sense of touch as a physical, emotional, spiritual phenomenon (chapter 2) and the principles of moral sensory education (chapter 3). Through an analysis of touch in the medieval moral tradition, especially as it is related to practices of self-care, the dissertation brings together new critical approaches from studies of the senses and the history of emotions in order to theorize the moral utility of touch as it was applied in both pastoral and devotional contexts in late medieval England. Part two comprises case studies of two figures whose iconic engagements with the suffering body of Jesus were frequently held up as examples of moral “feeling”: Mary Magdalene (chapter 4) and Doubting Thomas (chapter 5). Drawing on literary analysis and manuscript research, these case studies investigate how the figures of Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas were employed by pastorally minded writers and artists in late-medieval England in homiletic and hagiographic materials. Through an interdisciplinary study of these texts and images and their material presentation and dissemination, these case studies mean to clarify the devotional and moral value of the education of the senses, the social utility of a theology of suffering, and the cultural impact of the textual, visual, and performative traditions employing these figures in late-medieval England.
Chapter 2 maps the network of touch detailed in *The Fyve Wyttes*, a fifteenth-century Middle English manual on the moral education of the senses. The manual begins its section on touch by identifying three kinds of *felynge* (feeling): physical and not spiritual, a mix of physical and spiritual, and mostly spiritual and very little physical. The list implies a hierarchy, one that privileges the spiritual over the somatic, but as the tract continues something more akin to a network of feeling is advanced. Nearly all acts and apprehensions of touch are said to involve a series of interrelated body-mind-soul operations wherein each feeling activates and responds to the others. Accordingly, all three categories of feeling must be regularly exercised if one hopes to cultivate moral discernment. In other words, one must train this network of feeling to apprehend the moral meaning and spiritual utility of things felt.

Chapter 3 turns to a sociolinguistic history of the imagery used to describe sensory management throughout *The Fyve Wyttes* in order to recover the tactile values of the medieval religious experience. The economic language and architectural imagery deployed in the prolog, and throughout *The Fyve Wyttes*, recall well-worn conceptualizations of the five senses frequently found in medieval works of religious instruction. This chapter traces the development and reception of the senses-as-windows and the senses-as-currency *topoi*. The study of these two models provides the context necessary to understand how the economic and architectural imagery spread across *The Fyve Wyttes* was adapted to suit the specific instructional aims of its moral program. A broad and interdisciplinary investigation of the window and currency models promise to reveal a great deal about the sensory worlds these conceptualizations both reflected and inspired, as well as the social values they embodied and elevated.
Chapter 3 begins with an examination of the more ascetically oriented applications of the senses-as-windows topos in Ancrene Wisse, a thirteenth-century Middle English rule for anchoresses. The anonymous author of Ancrene Wisse puts the window topos to a very particular use when he likens the five sense gates—sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch—to the physical windows of the anchorhold, the cell-like enclosure of an anchoress. This section investigates the theoretical impact of the sense values built into and around the anchoress’s windows from three vantage points. The first vantage point considers the anchorhold through the liturgical lens of the rites of enclosure—the service performed when the anchoress is walled into her cell—preserved in the Clifford Pontifical, a fifteenth-century liturgical book of rites. The second vantage point looks at the material construction of anchorholds, particularly the design and placement of their windows, and sensory worlds they created. And, finally, to get a better sense of what the anchorhold came to signify in late medieval England, the third vantage point considers lay translations of the sensory practices of the anchorhold. Looking at and through the anchoress’s windows from these multiple perspectives, I argue, promotes new ways of viewing the senses-as-windows topos in Ancrene Wisse and, by extension, the Fyve Wittes.

The chapter then moves into a discussion of the senses-as-currency topos. This model of the senses is built around the principles of investment drawn from the Parable of the Talents found in the Gospel of Matthew (25:14-30). Using the fourteenth-century Middle English Commentary on Matthew (British Library, Egerton 842) as a touchstone, this section traces the development of this investment model through the medieval moral tradition. The commentary usefully records the various interpretations of the biblical
passage, including those of Gregory the Great (d. 604) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), and the ways in which these authorities used this parable to formulate a moral economy of the senses. This section then considers how these ideas were further developed and disseminated in medieval sermons and other religious texts to teach lay audiences how to invest their senses morally.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the figure of Mary Magdalene. The saint’s most famous tactile encounter with Jesus, the iconic Noli me tangere, involves a refusal of touch. This chapter is interested in her many other tactile encounters, moral and immoral, and how her prior handling may have shaped a medieval understanding of her refused hand. As recent work on the popularity of Mary Magdalene in late medieval England has shown, the volumes of Middle English legends, lyrics, and plays treating the iconic figure rely upon a number of continental analogs. Accordingly, taking a comparative approach to the saint is the best way to discover the innovations made by the English authors and artists to appeal to the interests of their local audiences.

This chapter is inspired by a previously unedited Middle English poem on Mary Magdalene. The poem begins with a paraphrase of the biblical account of the anointing of Jesus’ feet by Mary Magdalene and ends with a moralization of Mary as a figure of true penitence. This Magdalene poem foregrounds the biblical imperative to repent and exemplifies the kind of proactive penitential response promoted by contemporaneous manuals on pastoral care and moral instruction. The chapter is inspired by this poem, in part, because it is a careful distillation of a hermeneutic tradition that drew on Mary Magdalene, or more precisely, her acts of contrition and penance as models for the would-be penitent. From her embrace of Jesus’ feet, to her repurposing of her own tears
and hair into instruments of cleansing, the episode comprises a series of transformative acts involving the moral and spiritual realignment of the sinner-turned-convert’s sense of touch. In one sense, the Magdalene’s experiences of worldly pleasure are transformed with each act of humble contrition; the sinful pleasures in which she indulged her body are here replaced with the spiritual pleasures afforded by the forgiveness of sins.

The chapter relates and compares various readings of the washing episode to the hagiographic accounts of Mary’s pre-conversion life as a prostitute and the more famous depictions of her encounter with the post-Resurrection body of Jesus in the garden (*Noli me tangere*). Numerous hagiographic, homiletic, and dramatic materials produced for the moral edification of the laity in late medieval England draw on these iconic scenes to illustrate the ideal arc of Christian life. The significance of touching and not touching in these scenes, just as the washing episode, provides moral practitioners an occasion to articulate what constitutes moral and immoral, bodily and spiritual touch. Accounting for the saint’s prior life of sin, for example, *The Digby Mary Magdalene* dramatizes the Magdalene’s fall into a life of prostitution through a demonstration of the stages of lust: immodest looking, immodest touching, immodest kissing, and, finally, the immodest “deed” itself. The *Digby* play maps out immoral acts of touch and misuses of one’s body. Through close readings of the *Digby* performance of the saint’s fall, the chapter details not only medieval anxieties over a misapplied touch, but also strategies to redirect and redeem one’s feelings. Working through these and other treatments of Mary Magdalene in Middle English literature, the chapter attempts to show the extent to which the saint was employed as an example of one who learned to morally touch and spiritually feel her way to God and to enjoy the pleasures of the moral life.
Chapter 5 examines tactile experience and the cultivation of “firm” faith. The chapter begins with a comparative analysis of iconographic juxtapositions of Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas. These two figures are commonly set together in illuminated narrative cycles, as their personal encounters with the post-Resurrection body of Jesus represent divergent attitudes and assumptions regarding gender, the body, and the nature of faith. In the visual and dramatic traditions, Jesus is often shown opening, quite literally, his body to Thomas. The Incredulity of Thomas represents the divine’s willingness to accommodate humanity’s disbelief through an appeal to the senses, specifically the sense of touch. Drawing visual representations of the Incredulity of Thomas into conversation with dramatic enactments of the motif, including scenes from the York, N-Town, and Chester cycle plays, this chapter explores the more material components of late medieval religious practices.

Examining portrayals of Thomas in Crucifixion and Incredulity scenes, the chapter considers how the figure was adopted to support innovations in the manufacturing and ritual handling of sacred objects, and why pastorally minded artists and authors found it useful, or even necessary, to accommodate the senses when addressing matters of faith. The final section of this chapter means to be a sort of hands-on demonstration of how such devotional objects worked. Through a slow-reading of a single fifteenth-century devotional manuscript—Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 1—the chapter ends with a simulation of what devotion reading practices may have felt like to medieval users.

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5 For example, see chapter 5, n38.
“The Moral Sense of Touch: Teaching Tactile Values in Late Medieval England”
investigates the intersections of popular science and religious education in the late
fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to reconstruct the network of touch supporting the late
medieval moral syllabus. On the one hand, the uses of pain in devotional-pastoral
materials suggest a preoccupation with what moral practitioners called *hard*, as opposed
to *soft*, tactile experiences, those feelings that make both the body and mind
uncomfortable. In the images of pricking, poking, penetrating we can see the moral value
of discomfort, the inducement to reject the corporeal body and natural reason in the
Christian pursuit of spiritual perfection. On the other hand, these same motifs reveal the
intimacy of touch, the desire to reach out and confirm, to embrace and hold dear objects
of affection. The images and narratives explored in this study reveal that, despite its
privileging of the spiritual senses, the medieval religious experience relied on tangible
surrogates, be they imaginative narratives or palpable objects, to facilitate meaningful
contact with the divine. As advancements in modern neurological sciences reveal the
biology of the networks of sensory perception and cognitive development, and as the
cultural history of the senses is still being written, this study offers a transdisciplinary
approach to the study of touch as social and religious phenomenon. Attention to historical
artifacts preserving the experiences of, responses to, and uses of pain and pleasure
promises to yield considerable insight into a culture’s moral values and spiritual
aspirations.
CHAPTER 2
MEDIEVAL SENSES OF TOUCH

If a history could be written of touch, what would it embrace?¹

—Constance Classen

Anatomy Lessons

The sense of touch is like a spider. The nature of a spider is to weave a web and wait at the center of its self-spun snare. At the center of its web, a spider feels everything. A spider feels with alacrity all that touches its web from without and from within. Like a spider, the sense of touch feels everything. At the heart of the sensorium, touch empowers individuals to know the world from without and to know themselves from within.²

The spider may be a curious choice for a haptic analogy. For one thing, we tend to associate the sense of touch with our hands, and a spider does not have hands. If not our hands, then our skin. And if pressed to think more scientifically, then maybe nerves, or C-tactile fibers, or the somatosensory cortex, and on down our encyclopedic lists we go. Pressed further, we might even acknowledge our other feelings: we feel anxiety, hope, lovesickness, devastation. For some, perhaps this is just a game of words. But for others, this linguistic slippage remains significant. As recent advancements in neuroscience and


social theory are finding, there may be more to the psychological and physiological nexus of human emotion than previously thought—our emotions may be tangible after all.  

In a way, we are not that unlike our medieval counterparts. We still have difficulty pinpointing touch because it can sometimes feel like it is everywhere. So why not take our medieval sources at their word and ask with them: What can the spider teach us about the history of touch? What is gained through this haptic analogy?

In one sense, the spider feels with more alacrity than humans do. This opening analogy is an adaptation of passages common to works in the so-called “bestiary of the five senses” tradition. Such medieval projects linked the legendary properties of certain animals to each of the five senses. The idea was to collect animals with superior powers in a particular sense, to express the limitations or, in more positive applications, the potential of the human senses. Consider this early example from Thomas of Cantimpré’s (1201-1272) Liber de Natura Rerum: “In the five senses a human being is surpassed by many animals: eagles and lynxes see more clearly, vultures smell more acutely, a monkey

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has a more exacting sense of taste, a spider feels with more alacrity, moles or the wild boar hear more distinctly."⁵ Later authors and artists would draw upon and amend these pairings to various effects, but always with an eye toward the moral edification of the senses. The natural world affords individuals examples to improve and, in some cases, models to perfect their individual senses. In terms of touch, the spider’s lessons appear to press the limits of the tactile mode. To accept that “the spider feels with more alacrity” is one thing; to make anatomical or moral sense of this statement is another. How did the medieval imagination feel about the spider? How did the spider feel? And what do all these feelings do for a medieval sense of touch?

A small spider sits at the center of a web atop a spoke in a so-called “wheel of the senses.”⁶ This fourteenth-century wall-painting at Longthorpe Tower combines the wheel motif and bestiary motif to produce a stunning representation of the medieval sensorium.⁷ You can recognize most of the super-sensing animals described by Thomas of Cantimpré—a boar for hearing, a monkey smell, a vulture taste, a spider touch⁸—with the


⁸ Longthorpe’s wheel of super-sensing animals recalls Thomas of Cantimpré’s in Liber de Natura Rerum. As others have noted, the contemporaneous bestiary of the senses in Richard de Fournival’s Bestiaire d’amours (c. 1240) is another potential inspiration; see Bee Yun, “A Visual Mirror of Princes,” 2; Richard
exception of the cockerel that has been substituted for the sense of sight. Our spider is somewhat difficult to spot in its place in the upper left field, but its encompassing web signals its presence. As it is the nature of the medieval spider to spin and sit and sense within its web, that the spider web and not the spider remains most visible is intriguing. The spider web is an essential extension of this spinner’s sensitive self, insofar as the spider cannot feel with more alacrity without it. The representation here gives shape to the mechanics of the tactile mode in the spider and, to a certain degree, in the medieval imagination.

Medieval English thinkers on touch recognized in the spider web a versatile model for human touch. Consider the anatomy of medieval touch. The “nerve-man” featured in the pictured thirteenth-century medical manual, to give just one example, is a conceptual diagram of the central nervous system. Blue trace lines map the neural pathways along the spinal column and throughout the body, head to toe. This intricate and interconnected network of feeling certainly resembles the spider’s web, but their shared connections go deeper still. Notice that all five senses are hooked into this weblike system: sight, smell, and taste receptors share two lines, with hearing looped in on a third connecting line, and lines of touch extending to the extremities. As the spider web is a

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9 Early scholarship suggested that sense of sight was a cockatrice (or basilisk), a mythical hybrid creature with a cock’s head and a dragon’s tail. Key to this identification was the legendary creature’s deadly stare. On the historical problems of identification, see Casagrande and Kleinheinz, “Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on the Wheel of the Five Senses in Longthorpe Tower,” esp. 312-16.

network that allows the spider to feel with more alacrity, here the sense of touch appears as a network that enables the human subject to feel with more connectivity.

The spider and the spider web speak to the centrality of touch in the medieval sensorium as a whole. Looking again at the wall-painting, we can see that the spider web is structurally and symbolically aligned with the spoked wheel. The crowned figure standing at the center of the wheel—perhaps Common Sense?—stares intently at the spider to his left. Seated at the center of its web, remember, the spider is well positioned to sense everything from without and from within. It follows that the crowned figure may also be well positioned to utilize all five of his senses in measure. Bee Yun has shown that these connections harken back to early thinking about the sensorium popularized by the immensely influential *Secretum secretorum*, an apocryphal letter from Aristotle to his pupil Alexander the Great.11 The *Secretum*-master informs his student that each of his five senses has been appointed to serve his intellect. The five senses, he continues, are connected and communicate through a bundle of nerves much like a spider’s web: “sicut tele aranearum.”12 Where the spider implicitly stands for the mind (or the intellect, or the common sense) in this analogy, the spider web means to define the multiple functions of the tactile mode. Like the spider, the human subject must rely on a complex network of feeling to experience and to comprehend the sensory world. Like a spider web, the sense of touch both ties the other senses together and transmits their impressions to the mind.


The real takeaway here is that every sensory experience seems to require something of touch.

Thinking with the spider opens multiple pathways for apprehending these medieval senses of touch. The above arachnid analogies begin to articulate the limitations of human touch, as biological difference alone prevents equation: the spider will always feel better than the human being. Yet these same analogies find potential in human touch. The external networks of spider webs make visible, again by haptic analogy, the inner-workings of human feeling. And through appreciation of the spider and its web, the medieval observer is positioned to better understand her own senses of touch—*senses* because the spider has also shown us that there are many ways to feel. The aim of this introductory chapter is to follow the example of the spider and to map out networks of touch connecting the people, places, and things of late medieval England. But first, we need to establish our archives of feeling.13

*Archives of Feeling*

To better sense what it meant to touch and be touched in late medieval England, the terms of touch must be defined. Touch is no simple thing, nor is it ever just one action or approach, only one encounter or experience. A touch is many things, and often many things at once. Our methods must therefore recognize the many textures of a medieval touch. And though medieval archives are stacked with statements and studies speaking of

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13 The phrase is inspired by Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Though the present project is not directly related to that of *An Archive of Feeling*, the work has influenced my own thinking about the connections between the physical and emotional trauma of individuals, which more often than not involve tactile modes of relating, and the historical documentation.
and to the senses, there are very few systematic treatments of the tactile mode that survive. The task at hand is to pull from these records the terms and definitions, theories and practices, that best capture the historic senses of touch, that best speak to all the ways the later middle ages felt. In other words, we are searching for a baseline to register our case studies against.

One such treatment, The Fyve Wytees will serve as our handbook to the vernacular archives of late medieval feeling. This unique and underutilized tract is of critical importance to the present project.\textsuperscript{14} To begin with, The Fyve Wytees is the only known surviving manual on the senses in Middle English. Preserving the most explicit treatment of the sense of touch from the period, the tract affords us our theoretical baseline for pursuing the tactile values of late medieval England. The Fyve Wytees may be the most comprehensive in its coverage of the physical and emotional and spiritual valences of touch. Even so, the inherent value of this tract is magnified by its diversity of influences.

Pulling from a range of materials, from works in natural history to mystical theology, from Latin and vernacular traditions, The Fyve Wytees constructs a network of feeling that

reaches beyond its pages. Accordingly, if we follow its leads, the tract will prove a significant register of late medieval tactility.

The manuscript setting of The Fyve Wyttes affirms its connections to the moral tradition generally, and its place among the materials of pastoral care particularly. The Fyve Wyttes survives in a single fifteenth-century manuscript copy: London, British Library, MS Harley 2398. The Harley miscellany reads like a compendium of religious instruction. Among its collected texts are: the Memoriale Credencium, a manual of moral theology (fols. 1r-69r); a commentary on the Ten Commandments (fols. 73r-106r); Redde racionem villiacionis tue, Thomas Wimbledon’s sermon on the three estates (fols. 140r-153r); Visitation of the Sick (fols. 156r-160v); two commentaries on the Pater Noster (fols. 153r-155v and 166v-174r); and A Short Rule of Life (fols. 188v-190v).15 This sampling of texts speaks to popular trends in later medieval religious cultures, especially where interest in personal devotion is balanced by instruction in the fundamentals of the faith.16

Though the occasion and readership of this manuscript is unknown (was it conceived as a parish priest’s handbook? or a layperson’s devotional?) the collection’s

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overarching commitment to the active and mixed forms of life is clear enough. The forms of living advocated and advanced across the collection are emblematic of what Nicole Rice terms the “penitential nexus” supporting institutional Christianity. The moral education of the senses, as this project aims to demonstrate, was fundamental to any understanding of the processes and procedures of penitential devotion in the later middle ages—the senses were to be examined and exercised routinely. All this is to say: when approaching the moral senses of touch through The Fyve Wyttes we must remember that care for the body, care for the senses, was always meant to translate into care for the soul.

17 The contents of Harley 2398 are emblematic of the educational reforms first outlined in the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215-16), and later implemented in England by John Pecham (d. 1292) and John Thoresby (d. 1373). As the details are beyond the scope of the present study, and as they have been treated at length elsewhere, a rough sketch should suffice: The objectives of religious instruction, as it stood in fifteenth-century England, was the outcome of two major injunctions, beginning with Lambeth Constitutions (1281). The Lambeth Constitutions required parish priests to instruct the laity on the articles of faith, the Ten Commandments, the seven works of mercy, the seven virtues, and the seven deadly sins four times a year in the English vernacular. Pecham’s injunctions are broadly understood as an attempt to address inadequate educations of both parish priests and parishioners in fundamental matters of Christian doctrine; thus, the injunctions are read as an extension of the religious obligations established by the Fourth Lateran Council. John Thoresby, Archbishop of York, issued a series of injunctions in 1357 in what is now known as the Lay Folks Catechism. Pecham’s injunctions are printed in William Lyndwood, Provinciale seu constitutiones angliae (Oxford, 1679), 26-33; Thoresby’s injunctions are reprinted from the Archbishop’s register at York in The Lay Folks Catechism, ed. Henry Nolleth and Thomas Simmons, EETS 118 (London, 1901). For an overview of the impact of Fourth Lateran Council in England, see Leonard E. Boyle, O.P., “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” in The Popular Literature of Medieval England, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30-43; Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,”; and E. A. Jones, “Literature of Religious Instruction,” in A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-c. 1500, ed. Peter Brown (Blackwell, 2007), 406-22. On the Lay Folks Catechism, see Anne Hudson, “A New Look at the Lay Folks Catechism,” Viator 16 (1985): 243-58; Sue Powell, “The Transmission and Circulation of the Lay Folks Catechism,” in Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A.J. Doyle, ed. Alastair Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 67-84; and Susan Wabuda, Preaching During the English Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

18 Nicole Rice, Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14.

Turning to the terms of touch, *The Fyve Wyttes* parses three distinct kinds of *felynge* (touch/feeling). Its section on touch begins:

Þou schalt vnderstande þat þer be þre manere of felynge: þe fyrste al bodyly and nou3t gostly; þe secunde muche bodyly and in parte gostly; þe secunde [sic] muche gostly and lytel or nou3t bodyly.\(^{20}\)

(You should know that there are three kinds of touch: the first is entirely physical and not at all spiritual; the second, mostly physical and partially spiritual; the [third], a great deal spiritual and a little or not at all physical.)

At first glance, the list implies a hierarchy of tactile experience that privileges the spiritual senses over the corporeal senses. But as the text continues it becomes clear that our anonymous medieval author has something more like a network of feeling in mind. Nearly all acts and apprehensions of touch, we learn, involve a series of complex body-mind-soul operations: each category of feeling activates and informs the others. The objectives for readers of this medieval self-help manual are (1) to discover how the three senses of touch function and (2) to discern best practices for putting these three touches to good use. Accordingly, each *felynge* is treated in three parts, focusing: (1) on biological mechanics (2) on immoral applications, and (3) on moral applications. The object of this manual is to teach readers to better govern their collective sense of touch, to train readers to better apprehend the moral meaning and spiritual utility of things felt.

Though each kind of touch differs, and though each is drawn from different traditions, their interconnectivity is stressed throughout *The Fyve Wyttes*. So where the

definitions of a purely physical sense of touch draw upon natural sciences, for instance, these are not to the mutual exclusion of the definitions of a mostly spiritual sense of touch drawn from mystical theology. To read into these connections, we might also think about how such discourses of medieval feeling could provide us strategies for connecting traditions that we, as specialists, too often hold apart. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Following the lead of our handbook, the following sections treat the three individual senses of touch independently, but always with their interrelations in mind.

**Purely Physical**

*The Fyve Wyttes* begins its examination of feeling with a purely physical sense of touch. In what seems a surprising omission, there is no explicit discussion of where this sense of touch resides: what makes it physical, precisely? and where do its receptors reside? To be fair, we could accept the leading phrase of the section—“be fryste felynge is withinto þe flesch”—as an apt enough descriptor, noting that a physical touch is something internal with respect to the flesh.\(^\text{21}\) Even so, is the text talking about flesh as the mortal body, as muscle, or what? We can safely assume that the text means “skin” here, as skin is both a surface receptor and initiator for touch, but this is still only one of the many possible sites alluded to later in this section. Perhaps the more pressing question is why start here in the first place?

To begin, the very next clause transitions away from the *what* and *where* of touch to lead readers in an exploration of the *how* and *why* the regulation of physical touch matters. The moral logic of feeling is as follows: If a feeling is too pleasing (*plesaunte*) or

\(^{21}\) *The Fyve Wyttes*, 28.
too pleasurable (*lusty*), it will penetrate (*entre*) the imagination. If this sort of feeling remains (*reste*) in the imagination (*imaginacioun*), to the delight of the heart, then it is sin.\(^{22}\) If it is not permitted to enter, it cannot do harm. But if this feeling does enter the heart, readers are informed, then they must not give in (*consenteþ*) to the feeling. An expediently dismissed feeling may do some harm, but careful management can prevent it from leading to or itself becoming sin.

Note how the experience of physical touch is treated as a given, as something that just happens. Feelings will assault the body, besiege the imagination, and threaten the heart. Touch is something individuals endure (*suffre*), and not always with their consent (*pough pou consente nou3t*).\(^{23}\) That the purely physical experience of touch is first treated as an involuntary contact, as an unintended and unavoidable connection, may sound alarmist (readers beware!). And to end here would be to accept an entirely passive haptic model. Yet the sense of touch is also said to be manageable. Feelings will come and go freely, but the sensing subjects are equipped to handle them.\(^{24}\) For one thing, to permit a “too pleasing” or “too pleasurable” impression to “remain” is a choice: if it remains, then it is a sin. For another, a capacity to feel too much suggests that individuals can measure and weigh a feeling. So while physical touch just happens, there is something inherent to the tactile mode that enables subjects to process the everyday barrage of feelings. And

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22 *The Fyve Wyttes*, 28-29: “Pe fryste felynge is withinto þe flesch which, yf it be muche plesaunte and lusty, it wol ly3tly entre into imaginacioun, yf it reste þer wiþ delyt of herte, it is synne. Yf it entre nou3t, it harmeþ nou3t. Yf it entre in herte, consenteþ nou3t. It harmeþ, bot þou synnest nou3t.” Note that “imagination” is the name given to the second form of feeling, a blend of physical and spiritual modes of touch, and is often used as a technical term within the tract to mean something similar to the “inner senses,” a philosophical concept devised to map the stages of cognition; see the *Mostly Physical, Partly Spiritual* section below.

23 *The Fyve Wyttes*, 29, esp. ll. 7-8 and 13-14.

24 On the five senses and the creation story, see chapter 3, 54-56.
while the study at hand concentrates on touch, we should also acknowledge that this same point is true of all five senses: the moral edification of the senses is about sensory management.

An ability to assess the quality or degree of a feeling requires agency, a measure of moral responsibility, on the part of subjects. Consider, for instance, where the section first turns to analogy. The passage proceeds:

It harmęþ as a þorn þat is prykked into þy fot and abydeþ nou3t, bot peryscheþ þe skyn and goþ out. þis prykkynge byhynde is a maner payne and also makeþ an hole wher may entre erþe or fylþehede and ly3tly may make it rote wypynne.25

([Physical touch] harms like a thorn that has pricked your foot and does not remain, but pierces the skin and then falls out. This pricking is a kind of physical pain and [it] also makes a wound where dirt or [other] impurities can enter easily and perhaps cause [the wound] to fester from within.)

This analogy recalls a familiar feeling, a shared sensation, to illustrate the moral mechanics of touch. The faintest memory of being pricked or poked or pinched is enough to give the reader a purchase on the text. The double insistence upon the retreat of the thorn is instructive. The skin, and more precisely the skin of the foot, is established as the sensory receptor where the prick of the thorn is first registered. The thorn may have punctured flesh, but it is the withdrawal of the thorn that poses the most harm. The open wound is not only a breach in the

25 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
protective barrier covering the body, but also a gateway to more harm. The two appeals to pain stress this point. The initial prick of the thorn is a temporary discomfort, but the oncoming sting of infection would bring a persistent affliction.

The success of this rhetorical device is in its ability to communicate multiple truths. In learning to use touch to care for the body, readers are at the same time learning to manage their sense of touch in care of their souls. At the literal level, the basis of the above analogy is a clear articulation of the importance of touch to physical wellbeing. Both instances of pain effectively demonstrate the capacity of touch to communicate injury and call for remedy. The first sensation of pain is a warning, a call to clean and cover a wound. The second sensation, however, is a failure to heed the call of the first: an unwashed and uncovered wound will fester. In the same way, the moral sense of touch needs to be calibrated. No one should blame victims of such accidents, but how victims respond to their treatments is another matter. Thorns prick, and touch happens. To prevent unwanted and unclean feelings from festering, as the moral of this lesson suggests, first impressions must be managed.

The anatomy of touch is assumed in the moral program of The Fyve Wythes. The above analogy appeals to common experience—in this case, a shared memory of minor pain—to then shift into a discourse of medical treatment. A biological awareness of touch guides this procedure. Evoking the how and why of haptic care, the thorn analogy

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presumes knowledge of the *what* and *where* of haptic operations. This care for the body, simply put, enacts late medieval thinking about the body.\(^{27}\) The analogy puts into practice understandings of touch common to medieval works in the natural sciences. *On the Properties of Things* is one such work. An encyclopedic compilation, this monumental work was composed in Latin early in the thirteenth century by Bartholomew the Englishman and translated into Middle English late in the fourteenth century by John Trevisa. Trevisa’s translation brings into the vernacular the first scientific work of its kind just one generation prior to *The Fyve Wyttes*. Attention to the period- and discipline-specific terminology of *On the Properties of Things* will help fill in what is otherwise assumed in our principal handbook.

*On the Properties of Things* opens its description of touch with an operational note:

Gropinge is þe wit of knowinge diuers þinges þat ben igropid. For [by] þe vertu of gropinge þe soule knowiþ hoot and weet, coolde and drye, neissche and hard, smoþe and rowh. And as Auycenne sieþ, þe gopinge is a vertu ordeyned in þe senewes of al þe body to knowe what he gopipþ. Þei3 his wit be in alle þe parties of þe body he is principalliche in þe palmes of þe hondes and in þe soles of þe feet.\(^{28}\)

(Touch is the sense by which diverse things that have been touched are perceived. For it is through the power of touch that the soul perceives hot

\(^{27}\) A quick Google search of the phrase “how to treat a paper cut,” searched as a kind of thought experiment, calls up a number of websites that adopt a similar rhetoric to our medieval sources, specifically where rhetorical moves are made to moralize medical advice.

\(^{28}\) Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 1.118.
and wet, cold and dry, soft and hard, smooth and rough. And as Avicenna notes, the sense of touch is a power ordered in the nerves throughout the entire body in order to perceive what it touches. Even though this sense is present in all parts of the body, it is principally in the palms of the hands and in the soles of the feet.  

Straightaway, touch is presented in terms of proximity. Touch is everywhere connecting the physical body to its surroundings. Touch is also said to be most sensitive in the feet and hands. Perhaps this distinction owes something to their instrumentality, their capacity to traverse and grasp, to approach and draw near. On the one hand, touch confirms our place in the world. On the other hand, touch reinforces that we are not of this world. And to jump ahead for a moment, this emphasis on hands and feet is important to the moral education of touch, as they are treated as the means of labor and transit, instruments of spacial and vocational practices. This point in particular is an example of where medieval natural sciences are not only working alongside, but in direct conversation with, the moral tradition.

It is the “vertu” of touch to measure the medieval experience of the world in degrees of temperature and texture. Biologically speaking, feelings are measured in terms of self-preservation, as we saw in the literal reading of the example of the thorn from The Fyve Wyttes. Morally speaking, feelings are

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29 The Middle English sineu, here a translation of the Latin nervus, refers to any fibrous cord in the body (i.e. tendons or ligaments), but is sometimes used as a technical term to indicate a “part of the body that transmits the capacity to feel or move” or simply a nerve; MED, s.v. sineu (n) 2.

30 See also the discussion of hands and feet in a poem on the five senses by John Audelay in chapter 3, 90.
measured in terms of self-regulation, as we found in an applied reading of the same example. In both cases, touch is treated as an instrument of self-care. *On the Properties of Things* offers:

In þe vöttirmest hereof þe witte of gropinge is igreuëd and ihurt, as in þing þat is to hoot oþir to coole. In mene, as in þinge þat is nou3t to hote noþir to coole, kynde haþ likinge.  

(The sense of touch is afflicted and harmed by the extremes [of temperature], as in a thing that is too hot or too cold. Nature takes pleasure in moderation, as in a thing that is not too hot or too cold.)

The passage speaks to some basic, but no less significant, truths of self-preservation. Through touch we learn to keep our hand from a fire, to find shelter in a snowstorm, to cultivate a healthy balance in our environment.  

But the connections go further still. Up to this point our sources have focused more on *being touched* and not on what it meant *to touch*. Where *The Fyve Wyttes* picks up again, we find a better developed sense in the tactile mode. A purely physical touch, readers are instructed, can take two forms: the first, “in doynge” (in acting); the second, “in suffrynge” (in being acted upon).  

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32 On the value of warmth in relation to physical touch, see Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 7-8; see also, Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 39.

33 *The Fyve Wyttes*, 30.
reintroduces the physical sense of touch here as a vital instrument of moral
inquiry and moral action. Touch is more than something that just happens: it is
something that can be activated, utilized, and controlled.

More specifically, an ability to perceive and measure temperature and texture
through the tactile mode is here made an essential part in learning how to think
and act morally.

The sense of touch is tied to the morality of comfort. Key to this discourse
is the ideal of measure advocated in *On the Properties of Things*. When a feeling
causes pain or pleasure in excess it can no longer be profitable to the body, the
mind, or the soul. A morality of comfort, as articulated in *The Fyve Wyttes*, is
about maintaining physical and spiritual health: it’s practical, it’s balanced, it’s
holistic. And as we will see, there is no one way to achieve or maintain this
healthful ideal: some occasions may call for comfort, while others require
discomfort. It is necessary, therefore, to approach comfort and health on sliding
scales, as situational, where these tactile theories are put into practice. This is
made clear where *The Fyve Wyttes* turns to discussing specific examples of haptic
regulation. There readers are shown scenarios modeling the moral values of
physical touch: on how to handle objects and others, on how feelings matter
differently under different circumstances, and for different people. There are very
few hard and fast rules governing physical touch, which is perhaps why this
section opened with warnings to the reader to be on guard.

In the spirit of advice literature, *The Fyve Wyttes* shows theory in practice
through a series of practical scenarios. From physical intimacy to devotional
postures, the text models how readers may reach for the moral senses in their daily lives. To get a handle on how the physical sense of touch factors into a morality of comfort, the example of clothing found in *The Fyve Wyttes* is especially instructive: discussion of clothing in relation to physical touch illustrates the flexibility of late medieval tactile values. Our case studies in the following chapters will speak to these values at length, though from different vantage points. The figure of Mary Magdalene, in chapter 4, works out the very tangible connections between luxury goods and physical intimacy in both her fall into sin and her conversion. Doubting Thomas, in chapter 5, works through the benefits and drawbacks of object oriented, tactile devotions. In both cases, the figures must reorient their understandings of comfort—physical and spiritual—before they are able to find resolution in their relationships with the divine. All this is to say, our present focus on the tactile values of clothing is just one theoretical way into the many systems and practices driving the moral education of physical touch in late medieval England.

On the moral value of clothing and comfort, *The Fyve Wyttes* reiterates the necessity of measure in haptic engagement.34 The example begins: “For to go warm closed in clopynge þy body to kepe it fro colde, in as muche as colde is contrarie to þy kyndely hele, it is no synne. But for to fede þyn herte to wiþ [sic] deylt þerof, it nedeþ nou3t; therfore þat deylt is synne” (If to travel warmly [you]

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wrap your body in clothing to keep it from the cold, insofar as cold is contrary to your natural health, then it is not sin. But if it is for the purpose of comforting your heart with the [sensuous] delight thereof, it is unnecessary; in this way, that delight is sin).\textsuperscript{35} The concept of clothing itself is not under scrutiny here; rather, it is the potential for excessive care and attention on the part of clothing makers and wearers that demands moral reflection.\textsuperscript{36} Care for clothing is a neutral activity as long as makers and wearers fabricate and use garments in the most utilitarian ways imaginable. Excessive care for clothing is another matter altogether, and one that appears to have been a particular concern for the anonymous author of \textit{The Fyve Wyttes}. Adopting an uncharacteristically direct tone, the author interjects: “Hoyse tendur cloþynge in plesynge þy flesch wiþ diligence and bussynesse þeraboute, I can nou3t excuse it yf þou vse it wiþ gret delit of herte” (To wear soft-textured clothing in order to gratify your flesh, with diligence and care, I cannot excuse it if you wear [garments] with great delight of the heart).\textsuperscript{37}

Sin in clothing is about misplaced values. Taking pleasure in the touch and feel of cotton, to evoke a more contemporary jingle, for example, would signal a moral misunderstanding in the minds of some medievalists. To enjoy a garment beyond its most utilitarian functions is to misplace one’s values in leisure or fashion or whatever else clothing may have represented in late medieval popular culture. When a garment, or any other tangible good for that matter, is used to feel

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{The Fyve Wyttes}, 30.

\textsuperscript{36} Woolgar, \textit{The Senses in Late Medieval England}, 39; Classen, \textit{The Deepest Sense}, 8-9; and Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1573-74.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Fyve Wyttes}, 30.
an excess of comfort, a medieval believer risks compromising her sensory gates. Remember, one foul touch almost always leads to another.

There were other ways for believers to use clothing in service of their souls, of course. Medieval penitential manuals, for instance, routinely recommend the wearing of rough-textured garments, often what are sometimes called hairshirts, as penance for particular sins or even as a general spiritual practice. The Fyve Wyttes follows this tradition in listing the wearing of “hard cloþinge” (rough/uncomfortable clothing) as its first way to “vse” (make use of) the physical sense of touch in ways “profytable” (profitable/beneficial) to the soul. Readers are advised to wear uncomfortable clothing that they might “fele wylfully scharpnesse of penaunce in conuenient tyme” (willingly feel the sharpness of penance at an appropriate time).

Yet even this and other simple practices of discomfort in spiritual exercises are offered with a caveat. As the tract warns, it is “not goed” (ineffective/undesirable) to pursue “ouerhard” (too severe/too strict) penances. And this goes for all forms of physical and moral and spiritual care. Feelings of pain and pleasure, comfort and discomfort each have a place and purpose in the moral education of touch. Again, the ideal is measure. But measure is also

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38 Woolgar, The Senses in Late Medieval England, 38.

39 The Fyve Wyttes, 30.

40 The Fyve Wyttes, 30.

41 On moderation in penitential practices, and especially against extreme practices of mortification, see Giles Constable, Attitudes Toward Self-inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages, (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1982).

42 The Fyve Wyttes, 30.
subjective, as our forthcoming case studies will illustrate: what is profitable for one, may be harmful for another. As we move ahead in our study of touch, we must keep in mind that there is no right way to touch and to be touched in late medieval England. Instead, there are only guidelines for instructing believers how best to understand and operate their own senses of touch to preserve their physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Mostly Physical, Partly Spiritual

The second kind of touch treated in The Fyve Wyttes is a mostly physical and partly spiritual blend of feelings termed the “ymaginacioun” (imagination). We should hold this usage of “imagination” loosely, as the term can often mean very specific things in some very technical medieval discourses, some of which will be discussed below. The term is applied here as a sort of catchall for a site of sensory related cognitive processes. For now, we can understand that the late medieval imagination simply represents where physical sensations go and what can be done to them. Most importantly, for The Fyve Wyttes, the imagination is where the real work of sensory management and moral discernment begins and ends: “yf þis be wel kept fro byholdynge of bodily lustes and wordely vanytees, þou schalt ful ly3tly kepe þyn herte clene fro foulynge of synne” (if [the imagination] is carefully kept from contemplating physical pleasures and worldly vanities, you will most easily keep your heart clean from the corruption of sin).

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43 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.

44 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
The Fyve Wyttes compresses generations of thinking about the imagination into a user-friendly digest.\textsuperscript{45} True to form, this manual is less interested in the what or where imagination is, and more invested in what and how it can perform. As with the purely physical touch, the mechanics of this mixed sense are worked out, first, by analogy and, second, through practical application. And just as with the purely physical, the narratives framing the imagination reveal a great deal about the cultural values and discourses informing the medieval senses of touch. The Fyve Wyttes first likens an unregulated imagination to a merchant come to a seasonal market:

\begin{quote}
And yf [it] be nouȝt diligently take heed to, forsoþe, he wol schende al þyn herte, for he fareþ lyk a merchant þat bryngeþ into feyre al maner þyng þat may drawe mannes desyr to lust and lykyng. So wol he make in þyn herte a feyre of al maner vnþryft, so þat, when þou scholdest in þyn herte fynde or fele eny sauour in God, þou schalt anon be called and caryed to byholdynge of þes lustes þat þou schalt nouȝt passe by hem.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

(And if [the imagination] is not diligently guarded, truly, it will corrupt your heart completely. For [the imagination] acts like a merchant who brings to a fair all kinds of goods to entice people into desire and delight. Likewise, [the imagination] will turn your heart into a fair of all manners of vice in such a way that, when you should find or feel a degree of pleasure for God in your heart, you


\textsuperscript{46} The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
will soon be called and carried away by thoughts of these delights that you will not be able to ignore.)

The economy of this analogy is brilliant. An unregulated imagination acts as an enterprising merchant, a veritable middleman, trafficking only the most sinful sensory delights to the moral detriment of the heart (i.e. the seat of the soul), which pass by in as ephemeral a fashion as at a fair. The imagination is positioned somewhere between sensory receptors and the heart, not as a component, but as an itinerant agent working within a greater system. There is, for better or worse, a freedom in imagination to come and go, give and take, help and hinder as it pleases. Which is why, of course, the tract then proceeds to teach believers how to monitor its inventory of sense impressions and to restrict its access to the heart.

Before going into how best to curb a wayward imagination, a quick overview of what is assumed by our medieval manual is once again in order. What The Fyve Wytes terms *ymaginacioun* is, technically speaking, one of several stages in a cognitive process. To recall the crowned figure at the center of the wheel of the senses, what we are after is an internal concept connected to, but also distinct from, the physical senses.\(^7\) Medieval theologians sometimes used the category of the “inner senses” as a designation for the operations our manual has ascribed to the mostly physical and partly spiritual sense of touch. The category of inner senses, first developed in classical antiquity, is a general philosophical concept devised to denote “the stages that were considered to be involved in the process leading from physical sensation by the external senses through perception

\(^7\) See n6.
to cognition.” While the inner senses was an evolving concept in the middle ages, worked and reworked to advancements in natural philosophy, we can point to two later medieval configurations, one textual and one pictorial, in support of The Fyve Wyttes.

The first configuration comes from Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) by way of his commentary on Aristotle’s De anima, a project greatly influenced by the Arabic commentaries produced by Avicenna (c. 980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198). According to Albert, the five inner senses represent five steps in the cognitive process: (1) common sense, (2) imagination, (3) estimation, (4) fantasy, and (5) memory. Richard Newhauser has effectively summarized Albert’s schema as follows: the common sense receives the form of an object from the external senses; the imagination accepts the form of an object and stores it for future reference; estimation receives intentions, not sensible forms, in order to move the individual toward a particular action; fantasy combines the forms of imagination and the intentions of estimation to produce “fantasies,” as in “a man with two heads,” and artistic works; and memory apprehends an object from a stored form, that is, not by means of the external senses.

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48 Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1568.


50 Tellkamp, “Albert the Great on Structure and Function of The Inner Senses,” 309.

51 Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1568.
The second configuration is a late medieval diagram of the human brain. The figure is preserved in a trilingual manuscript miscellany, Cambridge University Library, MS Gg 1.1, produced in England for an aristocratic household in the first half of the fourteenth century. The diagram is a visual representation of the cognitive processes described in an accompanying text, *Qualiter caput hominis situatur*, a summary of Aristotelian doctrine of the brain. In her ground-breaking study of medieval memory cultures, *The Book of Memory*, Mary Carruthers expertly describes the structural and operational values of the schema. Carruthers is careful to note that the manuscript image is a “diagrammatic representation, not an anatomical drawing.” The diagram is drawn in such a way, she continues, “to make clear the relationships of activities involved in the process of thinking.”

Within this diagram, the five inner senses take a symbolic shape, as their interrelations with the five external senses, as well as each other, are strategically fleshed out. The five inner senses appear as five cells (cellae) connected by channels (nervi). Working from left to right, the five inner senses described above appear in comparable order: the common or imaging sense, imagination or the power of shaping, estimation, cogitation or the power of imaging (fantasy), and memory. Note the addition of

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52 Cambridge University Library, MS Gg 1.1, fol. 409v. The manuscript has been digitized and made publically available: http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-GG-00001-00001/.


55 See Carruthers and Ziolkowski, *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, 122, 123.
channels connecting the eyes to the common sense and imagination, a visual shorthand for the connections shared by the other four sense organs as well. Following Carruthers lead, I want to focus attention on the tiny creature set between cogitation and memory. This *vermis* is imagined as kind of gatekeeper charged with opening and closing the pathways between memory and thinking. The *vermis* opens pathways as needed for recollection, and closes pathways after the necessary “materials” for critical thinking are received. Without this gatekeeper, Carruthers notes, it was believed that “memories could crowd unbidden into the mind, overwhelming and distracting rational thought.”

In these two late medieval configurations of the inner senses, we can begin to appreciate the complexities of medieval perception and cognition. And though we have only scratched the surface of these related topics, our quick tour of their systematic renderings of the inner senses yields significant takeaways for our understanding *The Fyve Wyttes*. The medieval imagination, as described by *The Fyve Wyttes*, is an intricate and haptic-forward concept: the sense of touch transmits and impresses sensory information in the mind. A mindful regulation of touch is, therefore, necessary to the cultivation of a healthy, which is to say, a morally and spiritually clean, inner thought life. The stages of cognition described and illustrated in the above examples should, at the very least, illustrate the difficulty of the task at hand. The depiction of a *vermis* gatekeeper, in particular, reminds us that while each sense and each stage are connected, they must also be cared for individually. Thinking back to the merchant analogy of *The Fyve Wyttes*, we might also think about the *vermis* as kind of fair grounds warden. While

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56 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 68.
the vermis traditionally stands as the gatekeeper between cogitation and memory, its regulatory duties are suggestive of other possible mechanisms for thought management.

*The Fyve Wytttes* recommends three disciplines for believers learning to “proyte” (profit/benefit) by imagination. Each of these disciplines—education, penance, and devotion—affords readers customizable strategies for putting their respective imaginations to moral use. These disciplines are also, I want to suggest, occasions to cultivate and exercise one’s inner gatekeepers. The latter disciplines of penance and devotion are given cursory treatments in the tract. On penance, *The Fyve Wytttes* advises readers to not focus too long on the sinful conditions of their souls, as this leads to a kind of self-obsession, but to instead meditate on the brilliance of God. Meditation on the divine, we learn, will induce more profitable feelings of unworthiness, the necessary feelings for true contrition and penance. And on devotion, the manual simply recommends reading and meditating on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, common practices of affective piety. In many ways, the present project is itself an attempt to understand these late medieval ideals through contemporary critical practices. Each chapter handles materials made and used for the moral edification of touch in the specific contexts of penitential and devotional cultures. In working out these exercises in imagination through critical practice, we may better yet sense the many sensory and cognitive pleasures gained by touching and thinking with our medieval subjects.

On the discipline of education, *The Fyve Wytttes* has more to offer. Forms of religious education are treated implicitly throughout the study, and most often in connection with penitential and devotional instruction. But the kind of education

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57 *The Fyve Wytttes*, 29.
recommended in *The Fyve Wyttes* takes a very specific form that requires some unpacking to ensure its practical importance is not overlooked. The object of this educational exercise is to teach readers the art of comparison. Simple acts of comparison may be the foundation of moral discernment, but how exactly does one learn to compare and choose the better of two things? Comparison, according *The Fyve Wyttes*, begins with experience. More specifically, comparison requires the proactive use of the external senses to collect as much sensory data as possible. Sense experiences and sense memories are said to provide individuals with necessary points of comparison. Beyond a catalog of experiences and memories, individuals are also encouraged to cultivate a personal aesthetic of pleasure. Knowing what looks or feels good in one sense, allows them to know what looks or feels better and best in another. So how does this translate into moral action?

*The Fyve Wyttes* offers the following scenario (I paraphrase): By chance, you catch sight of an exceptionally attractive being. You are free to choose not to dwell upon your delight of this vision and instead choose to think about how this beautiful being resembles your creator. Now hold this created being up to its creator in comparison. Reason would suggest that its creator is more beautiful, favorable, and delightful than the created being. By comparison, then, you should now feel inspired to love the creator who created your being.\(^{58}\) With every sense the moral move is to “reduce” (recall and

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\(^{58}\) *The Fyve Wyttes*, 31: “þou seyst paraunter a fayr creature, what it be, which is delitable to þy sy3t. Þou my3t nou3t abyde in byhaldyne of þat delyt, bot þenk þer is in itself assimilitude of þe makere. Þenne reduce þat creature by comparacioun vp to him þat formede it and þer lat resoun deme, and he schal telle þe þat he ys fayr[er], betere and more delicious, excellent wiþoute proporcioun, þan þat oþer is. And þenne schalt þou fele þyself styred in herte for to loue þat Lord þat so worchep in his creatures.”
diminish) a feeling with “comparacioun” (comparison).\(^\text{59}\) When one hears a delightful melody, smells a savory spice, tastes a delicious dish, touches a pleasing surface she should imagine, by comparison, a more heavenly and eternal sense of pleasure.

\textit{Mostly Spiritual}

The final touch described in \textit{The Fyve Wyttes} is a mostly spiritual kind of feeling. Right away, readers are instructed on what this sense is not: spiritual touch has little to nothing to do with physical touch.\(^\text{60}\) As readers delve deeper into the taxonomy of spiritual feeling, however, it becomes clear that something of the physical almost always remains. The caveats reflect a relative uncertainty over what constitutes a spiritual sense of touch. We can read about what it is like, what it is not, what it has already done in some, and what it could possibly do for others—just not what it \textit{is}. The fact of the matter is that very few have or will experience this kind of feeling, or at least that is what our medieval sources would lead us to believe, that spiritual touch is truly extraordinary. And perhaps this is why the section begins as it does, outlining what spiritual touch is definitely not, in hopes of protecting the sanctity of this feeling, a move characteristic of negative theology(-ies).

Concern for what this feeling is \textit{not} translates into concern for its proper care and handling. As \textit{The Fyve Wyttes} continues, readers are warned that their

\(^{59}\) \textit{The Fyve Wyttes}, 31.

\(^{60}\) \textit{The Fyve Wyttes}, 29: “Pe þridde felynge is muche gostly and lytel or nouȝt bodyly, for it is pricipaly in þe syȝt of þe soule in byhaldynge of gostly þynges.”
spiritual sense of touch is most frequently “mysgouerned” (misguided/misused) by “dyuers vice” (various kinds of vice). These diverse vices arise from a form of pride said to be rooted in “presumptuos conceytes vngronded in oure feyþ” (arrogant imaginings unfounded in our faith). The list of misconceptions that follows includes overestimating one’s social standing, skill, strength, physical appearance, and wealth. Each of these misconceptions is tied to a “curioste” (an idle interest) in mostly physical matters. Put another way, one might say that inordinate care for any natural resource is the enemy of spiritual discernment. In overvaluing the importance of the above natural gifts—all physical resources that could have been better managed toward moral and spiritual improvement—misguided subjects risk generating false impressions in their minds. Aspiring readers must reach higher if they hope to activate their spiritual senses of touch.

Spiritual feeling is difficult to articulate, more difficult to achieve, but always a possibility. While The Fyve Wyttes begins its discussion of spiritual touch in negatives and caveats, readers are still given access to this rare sense. The above preconditions could just as easily be translated into a set of practical steps for achieving, if not the fullness of this feeling, at least some small measure of it. More to our point, if we read between the lines, spiritual touch is almost always predicated by the proper moral governance of the physical and combined senses of touch. To press this point further still, the moral education of touch is by

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61 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
62 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
63 The Fyve Wyttes, 29.
virtue a socio-theological project for preparing all believers to feel the love of God more completely, more closely, more intensely. Where the spiritual sense touch is most desirable, it is always-already conditioned by the physical sense of touch.

Spiritual touch is not the end of feeling. Its purpose is not to supplant physical or combined modes of touch, but rather to help perfect them. For one thing, physical and combined and spiritual senses of touch are equally destined for the afterlife—all forms of touch aim for Heaven. For another, the activation and experience of the purely spiritual sense of touch is exceedingly rare and always temporary. So when the spiritual sense of touch is finally realized, its secondary function is to refine the collective forms of touch. Refine is the operative term here, as this spiritual sensation is often likened to a consuming, purifying fire. The nature of this burning sensation is also quite difficult to pin down because it is at once literal and symbolic, within and without the body.

Consider the manifestation of fire described in *The Fyve Wyttes*:

And somtyme it falleþ þat þis gostly felynge bersteþ out into þe body ryßt as fyr enflammynge þe herte and rauyschynge it vp wiþ himself fro fleschnesse of felynge, wastep and destrueþ al maner of obstacles of heuynesse þat was in þe soule before by fleschly corrupcion.\(^{64}\)

(And on occasion it happens that this spiritual feeling bursts forth into one’s body just as a fire burning the heart and ravishing it up with itself from the sensuality of

\(^{64}\) *The Fyve Wyttes*, 32-33
feeling, [it] burns up and ravages all manner of oppressive obstructions that were once in the soul because of sensual corruption.)

This supernatural burning sensation consumes all obstacles to spiritual union brought about by and through “fleschly corrupted.” These accumulated impurities are without question the residue of a mismanaged physical touch. We should expect that this spiritual encounter means to purify the physical. What we might not expect, however, are all the ways the physical persists. Even as the soul feels “above” the body or the world in the event of spiritual rapture, it never does escape them.\textsuperscript{65} Something of the physical appears to remain, even when only by analogy. That is to say, when the fire of love bursts forth, it does so in the body—the spiritual is made tangible by the physical.

The section on spiritual touch is relatively short, but its careful referencing calls up well-studied fourteenth- and fifteenth-century debates in mystical theology. While the focus of the present project is on the tactile modes of the so-called active and mixed lives, it is important to consider the place of touch across all types of medieval religious life—including in the contemplative life. Attempts to cultivate a more spiritual sense of touch within the contexts of late medieval contemplative thought sparked serious questions over the precise nature of feeling: Does physical touch persist in the mystical experience? And if so, could it then be perfected in the achievement of spiritual union? Richard Rolle (d. 1349) and his followers would answer these questions in the affirmative in what amounts to a highly technical understanding of the place of the body and the role

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{The Fyve Wytes}, 33: “\textipa{pat him schal seme \textipa{pat be erpe berep nou3t his body, bot \textipa{pat it stande\textipa{p himself fre, ra\textipa{p er felynge himself drawen opward more \textipa{pan eny\textipa{ng synkynge to \textipa{be erpe dounward.”}
of senses in mystical experience. In fact, Rolle’s many theological works attest to his very personal efforts to elevate feeling, to his attempts to combine affective registers of devotion (affectus) with intellectual modes of high contemplation (intellectus).

What follows speaks to traditions thinking past the immediacy of the here and now in everyday medieval devotion. If the true object of touch rests in the afterlife, then it makes sense to posit the more spiritual and less practical goals of the tactile mode found in mystic vocations and practices as well. Within the mystic tradition, we find the beginnings of what the perfected senses of touch could feel like. Most medieval mystics held perfect union with the divine as their primary objective of their vocations, but what this perfect union would feel like was of great debate. Was it possible to touch or feel God? While many late medieval mystics thought it improbable, a very few insisted that it was, in fact, possible to touch the divine—because they had.

Richard Rolle was one such mystic. Rolle’s early career was devoted to producing academic commentaries on the Psalms, Song of Songs, the Apocalypse, and Office of the Dead among others. But his Incendium Amoris, composed in Latin around 1343 and translated into Middle English by Richard Misyn in 1435, was something of a watershed work for Rolle. Incendium

66 Emphasizing its significance, Nicholas Watson writes: “As Incendium Amoris opens, by announcing as its subject the elucidation of its own passionate, and highly original, description of its author’s experientia, it is immediately clear that the struggle to find a personal voice and a personal auctoritas has begun in earnest”; Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113. Rolle’s appeal to experientia is not completely unfounded; as Bernard McGinn has shown, twelfth-century mystics, most notably Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), raised the status of “personal meaning” in theological discourse, making lived experience a formidable, even essential, exegetical tool; The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 185-89.
Amoris is the first of Rolle’s more formal works that does not derive the majority of its content, or its form, from canonical sources. Moreover, the Incendium is unique in that it is structured around the lived experience of our hermit. In fact, the subject matter of Incendium Amoris never strays far from the opening lines of the prolog. The subsequent forty-two chapters function, first, to justify the validity of this strange happening and, second, to direct would-be contemplatives to follow in the hermit’s footsteps. To this end, Incendium Amoris presents its readers with a semi-systematic mystical theology that, while at times supported by Scripture and Tradition, is wholly subject to the assumed authority of the hermit’s personal experience.67 It begins:

I was more greatly amazed than I can tell when for the first time I truly felt my heart growing hot and blazing in a real not imaginary way, as if with a palpable flame. I was truly astonished by the way burning burst out in my soul, and also by the unusual sense of comfort. Because of my lack of experience of this fullness, I had to pat my chest a lot just in case the heat was the result of some outside agency.68

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67 Well into the twelfth century, intellectual authority in Christian thought was theoretically limited to two books: the book of creation (prelapsarian revelation) and the book of Scripture (postlapsarian revelation). Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) famously adds to this collection a third book, the book of experience (liber experientiae). While Bernard elevates the importance of experience, he is careful to point out that it is not equal to Scripture, nor the rule of faith: “Ergo iudicium fidei sequere, et non experimentum tuum, quoniam fides quidem verax, sed et experimentum fallax.” (Therefore, follow the rule of faith, and not your own experience, since faith is of the truth, but experience can be misleading): Sermones in Quadragesima 5.5, Jean LeClercq and H.M. Rochais, Sancti Bernardi Opera, 9 vols. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-1977), 4.374; translation is my own. Rolle, some generations later, takes the authority of experience to its veritable limits, at times inverting the abbot’s cautionary advice, subjecting the rule of faith to his own personal experience of the divine. See also, McGinn, The Growth of Mysticisim, 185-89.

68 Admirabat magis quam enuncio quando siguidem sentiui cor meum primitus incalescere, et uere non imaginari, quasi sensibile igne estuare. Eram equidem attonitus quemadmodum eruperat ardor in animo et de insolito solacio propter inexperienciam huius abundancie, sepius pectus meum si forte esset fervor ex
These opening lines recall the first time Rolle felt the fire of love burning in his heart. Rolle goes to great lengths here, and throughout the text, to emphasize that this burning sensation is, in fact, a physical manifestation of God’s love for him: it is a “real not imaginary” fire. That this burning in Rolle’s heart is literal and not merely symbolic, will prompt both medieval and modern critics to question the legitimacy of this experience in particular, and the soundness of his theology overall. To be sure, Rolle’s writings may have been considered suspect, but they were not necessarily viewed as heretical. At most, Rolle seems to rely too heavily on his own bodily experience, as David Knowles describes it, “to reckon with the higher degrees of the mystical life.”

Rolle’s impact on the rendering of spiritual touch in The Fyve Wyttes is, nevertheless, evident and worth our careful consideration. Again, the very technical aspects of the hermit’s mysticism, and even more so his critics, are not an immediate concern of the many materials handled in this present project. That said, the reverberations of the hermit’s revaluing of physical touch within his spiritual project are felt at all levels of the medieval religious experience. As we will see, critics and devotees alike found themselves contending with the applications and aspirations of the hermit’s “real not imaginary” sense of spiritual touch.

aliqua exterior causa [palpavi]. Richard Rolle, Incendium Amoris, ed. Margaret Deansly (Manchester: The University Press, 1915), 145. All Latin quotations of the text are from Deansly’s edition, hereafter cited as Incendium. Translation is from Watson, Authority, 114.

Walter Hilton and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* are among the most prominent and outspoken of Rolle’s fourteenth-century critics. Though neither mention the hermit by name, both seem to have taken issue with the inherent physicality of his brand of mysticism. The *Cloud*-author, for example, warns his disciple against “fantasie” (fantasy, false impression) in the “goostly wittes” (spiritual senses). Those claiming to experience a “fleschly chaufyng” (fleshly burning) in their “bodily brestis” (bodily breast), such as Rolle had, are said to have confused a “beestly” (bestial) feeling for a “goostly” (spiritual) feeling: “for to have theire brestes outher enflaumid with an unkyndely hete of compleccion” (for they rightly have their breasts inflamed with an unnatural physical heat).

Walter Hilton makes a similar complaint, but is perhaps more generous than the *Cloud*-author, demoting the nature of Rolle’s experience from the realm of high contemplation to that of affective meditation. When one “feelith fervour of love” (feels the fire of love), according to Hilton, the experience is “withoute undirstondyng of gosteli thynges” (without the understanding of spiritual matters). For Hilton, while such experiences may be authentic, those who feel

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the fire of love are engaged in a “lower” degree of devotion. Speaking directly to the kind of experience claimed by Rolle, Hilton adds:

[The] felable heete as it were fier glowand and warmand the breest, or ony othere partie of the bodi, or onythinge that mai be feelyd bi bodili wit, though it be never so comfortable and lykande, aren not verili contemplacion; ne thei aren but symple and secundarie though thei be good. (The perceivable heat as if it were fire radiating and warming the breast, or any other part of the body, or anything that may be felt by the bodily senses, though it may be comforting or pleasing, it is not truly contemplation; no, it is but simple and secondary, even though it may be good.)

Here, the instructor cannot stress enough that a “feeling” devotion is in no way contemplation. Feeling devotion may be comforting, but no special insight is given, and no revelation is granted.

Rolle appears to have anticipated his critics, relating that he himself initially questioned the origin and nature of the felt heat: “I had to pat my chest a lot just in case the heat was the result of some outside agency.” Despite his initial uncertainty, however, Rolle maintains that the fire of love was indeed a spiritual reward from God made manifest in his physical body. The carnality of this mystical encounter certainly challenges the conventions of the contemplative life,

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73 “The secunde partie of contemplacion lieth principali in affeccioun, withoute undirstondlynge of gosteli thynges, and this is comonli of simple and unlettrid men which gyven hem hooli to devocion” (The second part of contemplation concerns the principle of affection, an experience without the understanding of spiritual matters, and this is common for simple and uneducated individuals who give themselves fully in devotion); Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, 35.

as the expressed goal of medieval contemplation is to transcend materiality, the
*this world* of moral theology, and to achieve spiritual union with God. This
critical detail is not lost on our hermit.\textsuperscript{75}

When stripped down, it is only in Rolle’s insistence upon the physicality
of the fire of love, because it is perceived by his bodily senses, that he differs
from his near contemporary critics. So what exactly is the problem with Rolle’s
felt fire? Returning to Hilton’s definition of contemplative prayer, we might note
that he is careful to describe such experiences as being above “affeccioun.”\textsuperscript{76} The
Middle English term *affeccioun* is used here to designate a host of impediments to
true contemplation, all related to physical, perceivable reality. These impediments
should not necessarily be interpreted as sinful, as *affeccioun* can simply refer to
those lesser modes of religious devotion, namely what we often refer to as
affective piety.\textsuperscript{77} In this way, Hilton, with many before him, is making a
distinction between prayer that is guided by the senses and/or the emotions, or
*affectus* in the Latin tradition, and prayer that is guided by the intellect, or
*intellectus*. While both modes were thought beneficial, intellectual contemplation

\textsuperscript{75} In fact, Rolle consistently presents a fairly conservative vision of the contemplative life that is, in many
ways, compatible with those of Hilton and the *Cloud*-author. *The Commandment and Ego Dormio*,
contemplative manuals Rolle composed in Middle English for women religious, speak to this very point;

\textsuperscript{76} See n72.

\textsuperscript{77} On translating *affeccioun* in Hilton’s work, Thomas Bestul notes: “Among the most important terms in
*The Scale of Perfection* are those that describe the non-intellectual, non-rational aspects of the soul, or
broadly speaking, the emotions. *Affeccioun* (‘affection’) is used often, and is the technical term derived
from the *affectio* of Latin writing on the psychology of the soul; in Hilton, however, the word also
sometimes assumes its modern meaning of affection or love”; “Introduction,” *The Scale of Perfection*, 6.
was without question the highest, and was more often than not regarded as the only viable path to mystical union.

So what is at stake here? Rolle’s unapologetic elevation of affective experience in *Incendium Amoris*, marked by his sensual appeals to human emotion and his invitation to literally feel the love of God, possesses something of a challenge to the more conventional conceptions of contemplation. In particular, Rolle’s sensual mysticism runs counter to particular strands of medieval theology that: (1) were deeply suspicious of emotional and physical experience and (2) frequently, but not always or consistently, considered affectivity an inferior mode of spirituality.78 While Rolle’s mystical ascent claims to leave behind all “material things,” in the moment of mystical union there is a notable reiteration, and perhaps even a reaffirmation, of physicality: the body is literally prepared to receive (*suscipiat*), to experience (*senciat*), and to physically sense the fire of love. What is truly remarkable about Rolle’s contemplative program is that he is attempting to marry affective and intellectual registers. And in doing so, I would argue, he is also attempting to revalue the place of the body and the role of bodily senses in the mystic experience.

Unlike more traditional configurations of mystical union, Rolle is venturing into uncharted theological territory. For some, the hermit’s rapture of love is a failed union. The “unitive way” of medieval mysticism, as Evelyn

78 Honorius of Autun (fl. 1106-1135), for example, states that the feminine *anima* (soul) is the affective part of the soul and is the *vis inferior* (inferior way). In contrast to affective meditation, the intellectual life is located in *ratio* (reason), and is characterized as the masculine *interioris hominis spiritus* (inner spirit of man); *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, PL 172 (Minge, 1854), 349A-350A. For more on these distinctions in Rolle’s work, see Ann Astell, “Feminine Figurae in the Writing of Richard Rolle: A Register of Growth,” *Mystics Quarterly* 15.3 (1989): 117-24.
Underhill describes it, is achieved through the annihilation of the self: the self does not “perceive” or “enjoy” the divine, but is made “one” with it.\textsuperscript{79} The legitimacy of Rolle’s experience then, seems to lie beyond the narrowly prescribed theo-linguistic constraints of both medieval and modern definitions of spiritual rapture. Retaining his corporeal capacity to feel, the hermit negates the necessity of annihilation. Rolle’s experience embodies a union of mutual consent, of mutual satisfaction, of mutual feeling between lover and beloved, believer and divine.

\textit{Touch Points}

The network of feeling constructed in \textit{The Fyve Wyttes} maps what and how it meant to touch in late medieval England. The subsequent chapters aim to test and expand the reach of this network in popular religious culture. This is not to say, however, that \textit{The Fyve Wyttes} was a direct influence on the many materials studied, but that each haptic image, text, and practice treated represents the expansion of our archives of feeling. Beginning with an analysis of popular motifs developed as strategies for educating the medieval sensorium, and ending with studies of the haptic lives of Saints Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas, what follows is a guided examination of the social and material conditions informing a late medieval sense of touch. The case studies offered focus on the tactile values of the active and mixed forms of life, which is to say non-contemplative forms of spirituality. In handling objects of devotion designed and disseminated by and

for the laity, we stand to better sense how sensations of pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort were coded to cultivate a moral sense of touch.
CHAPTER 3

EDUCATING THE SENSES

Orientations

How we orient our senses depends on what we value. And what we value, as cultural anthropologists are quick to point out, is more often than not shaped by our social environments. Understanding the reciprocal influence between the senses and society is key to any historical project seeking to understand the ways in which past cultures saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched their worlds. Constance Classen and David Howes underscore the critical significance of this reciprocal relationship, writing that, “The ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world, are shaped by culture. Perception is informed not only by the personal meaning a particular sensation has for us, but also by the social values it carries.”\(^1\) Two key points emerge from this short passage that are important to keep in mind as we turn our attention to medieval models of the senses. First, historical studies of the senses need to carefully consider the sensory worlds that cultures created for themselves: the things manufactured to entice and/or regulate the senses matter. Second, because perception is both personal and social, individual acts of sensation will always occur within the broader context of culture: perception is socially constructed and socially constrained. Programs intending to guide the senses, medieval and modern, must therefore appeal to the sensibilities of individuals in ways that will compel them to adhere to a set of moral values and to inhabit the sensory worlds of their social groups.

Where the previous chapter examined late medieval networks of touch, the present chapter explores the social conditioning of these feelings. Thinking through popular conceptualizations of the medieval sensorium, specifically the senses-as-windows and senses-as-currency, we stand to better perceive the far-reaching aims and applications of sensory education in late medieval England. The social conditions of feeling were rarely conceived of or practiced in isolation from the other corporeal senses. And since the models under consideration comprise all five corporeal senses, it follows that we must also think multi-sensorially while extracting the moral lessons specific to a medieval sense touch. A broad and interdisciplinary investigation of these two models promises to reveal a great deal about the sensory worlds they reflected and inspired, as well as the social values they embodied and elevated.

Configuring the Medieval Senses

The Fyve Wyttès\(^2\) opens with an edenic snapshot of the creation story that features an altogether positive assessment of the sensorium:

As it is byfore seyd, so much diligence n[e] so grete bysynesse dyde oure Lord God neuere for no creature as for mannys soule. And for to styre and excite him hom to his loue, he made him a reyal paleys for to dwelle þerynne, þat is þis wide worlde, wherynne he hāþ ordeyned him dyuers delyte and dalyaunce for to desporte him wþ, laste he enyed of þe tymes abydyng þerynne. And [a] pryve dwelling he hāþ ymad him in þis paleys which he may carye into what place him

\(^2\) For the textual history of The Fyve Wyttès, see chapter 2, 18-20.
lyste, þat ys þys fleshly body; and þerwþynne a lytel pryue closed for to reste him ynne, þat is þe herte.³

(As was previously mentioned, Our Lord God, never worked with so much diligence, nor such great industry, for the sake of any created being as He did for a human being’s soul. And to stir and excite him home to his love, God made man a royal palace to dwell in, that is this wide world, wherein he has provided diverse delights and entertainment to amuse man, lest he grow bored while abiding therein. And in this palace he made man a private dwelling which he can carry wherever he desires, this is the fleshly body; and there, within the body, he made a private chamber for him to rest in, that is the heart.⁴)

This architectural blueprint imagines creation as a rather pleasurable playscape, a “reyal paleys” stocked with “dyuers delyte” and “dalyaunce,” all of which is intended to “styre” and “excite” humankind toward the love of God. Within the royal palace, the divine architect has provided private mobile dwellings—a unique portrayal of human bodies—which are themselves outfitted with even more private interior chambers, human hearts, to house human souls. These mobile bodies seem to have a singular function: to transport souls from one pleasure to the next. The physical body empowers the soul to play, which is to say, it enables the soul to inhabit the world fully and to partake of its delights wholeheartedly. Pleasure appears to be the first order of business in this edenic schema.⁵


⁴ I have supplied proper nouns and capitalized pronouns referring to God, where appropriate, for clarity.

⁵ We find a similar sentiment in Cleanness, for example, where the poet reflects upon the prelapsarian state of Adam: “To wham God hade geuen alle þat gayn were, / Alle þe blysse boute blame þat bodi myȝt haue.”
As the prolog of *The Fyve Wyntes* continues, however, medieval readers are snapped back to their postlapsarian reality and returned to a world where not everything should be enjoyed:

Bot for cause þat he scholde be more war and wys of pereles þat myȝte falle, he haþ ordeyned in þis dwellyng-place oþer in þis halle fyue sotel wyndowes by þe whiche he may yknowe and aspye what ys to him profytable for to receyue it; and [what] noyous þat he may refuse it.6

(But so that a human being should be more alert and aware of dangers that can occur, [God] provided in this dwelling place, or in this hall, five intricate windows through which a human being can perceive and discover what is profitable to him in order to receive it, and what is harmful so he can refuse it.)

The text has introduced some basic controls, a set of moral parameters that are intended to govern the operations of the sensate body in the world and to regulate its utilitarian function as a vehicle in service of the soul. The five senses, as “fyue sotel wyndowes,” are said to have been given in order to assist individuals in navigating creation, to seek out what is spiritually beneficial, and to steer clear of what is spiritually detrimental. In this way, the senses are conceived of as intricate instruments through which individuals are able to discover and discern what is morally profitable to their souls.

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6 *The Fyve Wyntes*, 1.
To further understand this idea of discernment, specifically as it relates to the place of the five senses on the moral plane, we can look to a short passage from a near contemporary Middle English religious treatise, *Pride, Wrath, and Envy*:

[T]o kepe my3tiliche and wilfulliche his holy hestis he freliche of his grete goodnesse and noþinge of thi desseruyng. haþ 3eue to þe fyue witt wiþ outen forth. as heringe seynge. smelling and tastynge and felynge. and fyue wittes wiþ Inforþ as wille and mynde vnderstondynge ymagnacioun and resoun. And by þes Is knoen boþe good and Iuel.  

(To keep effectively and deliberately His holy commandments He generously, in His great goodness and not at all because of your own merit, has given to you five outward senses (these are: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling) and five inward senses (these are: will, mind, understanding, imagination, and reason), and by these both good and evil are understood.)

Similar to *The Fyve Wyttys*, the above passage describes the outer senses as instruments integral to the operations of discernment. A key distinction here is the addition of the five inner senses. The category of inner senses, first developed in classical antiquity, is a general philosophical concept to denote “the stages that were considered to be involved in the process leading from physical sensation by the external senses through perception to cognition.”  

The inner senses receive and process, catalog and interpret the raw

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7 Transcribed from Glasgow, University Library, MS. Hunter 472, fol. 76v-80v, at 78v. I have expanded all abbreviations silently.

sensory data gathered by the outer senses. With respect to the moral program of *The Fyve Wyttes*, what is important here is that the outer senses, functioning as information gathering tools and diagnostic instruments, are inextricably involved in the processes and procedures of cognitive development—the five outer senses are the beginning of medieval epistemology.

The moral development of the individual, as it is synthesized in *The Fyve Wyttes*, relies on what Richard Newhauser has termed the “edification of the senses.” The edification of the senses involves practices of not only guarding, but even more guiding the senses toward more “profitable” ends. Returning to the prolog of *The Fyve Wyttes*, we find in the author’s select terminology the beginnings of his/her own practical edification program. Building on the imagery of the senses as windows, for example, readers are encouraged to keep their windows “wysly gouerned” (judiciously controlled) in order to keep out the “eyr of dedly pestylence” (air of deadly pestilence) that otherwise “infecteþ þe soule” (infects the soul). The verb *governen* functions as something of a technical term in *The Fyve Wyttes*. Taken to mean “to control” when speaking of bodily parts or functions, *governen* underscores the moral obligation of the individual to guard his or her senses. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, *governen* reflects the very

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9 See chapter 2, 35-37.

10 Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1561.


12 *The Fyve Wyttes*, 1.
active nature of the medieval sensorium: individuals must exercise forms of sensory control.

That the senses are to be governed implies that they are to be used and enjoyed, not simply suppressed. The pastoral project of *The Fyve Wyttes*, after all, is built on the potential of the senses to be used for good, which is to say, for pleasure and the moral edification of the soul. The five outer senses, to recall an earlier passage, were designed to help the soul “yknowe” and “aspye” what is “profytable.” And in using the term *profitable*, the author of *The Fyve Wyttes* is defining the operation of the senses in decidedly economic terms. Just as with *governen*, the definitional thrust *profitable* demands the proactive involvement of the individual in his or her moral education.

Thinking about the senses in economic terms emphasizes the future stakes of personal sense management. Consider, for example, the use of the verb “despendeþ” (from *dispenden*) found toward the end of the prolog. In a generic diatribe, the author of the *Fyve Wyttes* admonishes wayward young men who “despendeþ here strengthe in fleschly lykynges” (spend their strength on fleshly pleasures) and “hydede nou3t þe kepyng of here wyndowes” (have been unconcerned with guarding their windows).13 Linking the verb *dispenden* to the operation of the senses, the agents of “here strengthe,” the above passage casts the five senses as investable commodities.14 In this particular example, the youth in question have misspent their senses on sinful delights and, according to our author-turned-analyst, they can expect a negative return on their ill-

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13 *The Fyve Wyttes*, 1.

14 Note also the forms *misspenden* (14, l. 15) and *spenden* (25, l. 3) in *The Fyve Wyttes*. The first definition listed in the *MED* for the negative *misspenden*, interestingly enough, applies to the senses, as in to use one’s senses improperly; *MED*, s.v. *misspenden*, l.a.
advised investments. In the moral economy of *The Fyve Wyttes*, the five senses are the start-up capital of spiritual investment and their careful management promises to yield the profit of a moral life in the short term and ultimately the reward of everlasting life.

The economic language and architectural imagery deployed in the prolog, and throughout *The Fyve Wyttes*, recall well-worn conceptualizations of the five senses frequently found in medieval works of religious instruction. The following sections take a closer look at the development and reception of the senses-as-windows and the senses-as-currency as models used for the moral edification of the senses. A study of these two models will provide the broader historical and intellectual context necessary to understand the economic and architectural imagery spread across *The Fyve Wyttes* in particular, while also laying the theoretical foundations for the case studies comprising chapters 4 and 5 more generally.

*Windows of The Heart*

The senses-as-windows topos adopted in *The Fyve Wyttes* carries with it some pretty heavy cultural baggage. To get a better handle on how the image informs *The Fyve Wyttes* program, and to unpack the relevant social values the image held, this section examines the more ascetic uses of the windows topos from late medieval England. In

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particular, this section considers the application of the windows topos found in Ancrene Wisse, and then explores the sensory worlds this monumental work not only reflected, but also inspired. Ancrene Wisse is a rule of living, a religious guide written for a group of three laywomen (perhaps three sisters of noble birth) who had taken vows of stability and had themselves enclosed in anchorholds. I focus on Ancrene Wisse for two reasons: first, this spiritual rule enjoyed considerable popularity in England throughout the later Middle Ages. Originally composed in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, this Middle English text was translated into French and Latin, circulated in a variety of formats, and enjoyed considerable popularity well into the sixteenth century.\[^{16}\] Second, modern academic investigations of the medieval sensorium have perpetuated the popularity of Ancrene Wisse by taking the model of the senses found in part two of the work as the principle paradigm of the period.\[^{17}\] Looking into the ascetically aligned windows of Ancrene Wisse, I contend, will not only allow us to test the ideological networks informing The Fyve Wyttes, but will also enable us to identify the specific ways in which the religious manual, and other works like it, has adapted the more ascetic applications of the popular topos.

The anonymous author of Ancrene Wisse puts the window topos to a very particular use when, in part two, he maps the bodies of the anchoresses over “the


architecture of the anchorhold.”\textsuperscript{18} The “various apertures” of their bodies— their eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin—are likened to the physical windows of their cells.\textsuperscript{19} These sense windows, they are told, stand as the “wardeins” (wardens) of their heart and, therefore, they need to love them “lutle” (little) and to keep them as “lutle” (subdued) as possible.\textsuperscript{20} The text recommends a complete restructuring of the anchoresses’ biological and spiritual architectures. They must minimize their corporeal senses in order to heighten their spiritual senses. The Ancrene-author continues:

\begin{quote}
Nurð ne kimeð in heorte bute of sum þing þet me haueð oðer isehen oðer iherd, ismaht oðer ismeallet, ant utewið ifelet. Ant þet witeð to soðe, þet eauer se þes wittes beoð mare isprengde utward, se ha leasse wendeð inward. Eauer se recluse toteð mare utward, se ha haueð leasse leome of ure Lauerd inward, ant alswa of the othre.\textsuperscript{21}
( Disturbance comes only into the heart from something that one has either seen or heard, tasted or smelled, or felt outwardly. And know it to be true that the more the senses spring outward, the less they turn inward. The more the recluse stares
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{19} Hasenfratz, “The Anchorhold as Symbolic Space in Ancrene Wisse,” 1.

\textsuperscript{20} “For-þi, mine leove sustren, þe leaste þet 3e eaver mahen lúuieð ower þurles. Alle beon ha lutle, the parlurs least ant nearewest.” (Therefore, my dear sisters, love your windows as little as you possibly can. Let them be little, the parlor’s smallest and narrowest). All quotations of the Middle English text of Ancrene Wisse are taken from Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts, ed. Bella Millet, vol. 1, EETS 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), here 20; translations of Ancrene Wisse from, Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, Anchorite Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), here 66. I have amended Savage and Watson’s translations slightly in some places.

\textsuperscript{21} Ancrene Wisse, 36-37; Savage and Watson, 82.
out, the less inner light she has from our Lord—and the same is true of the other [senses].

The precise aim of this ascetic remodeling project, as the above passage shows, is to insulate the recluse against the “nurth” (literally, “noise”) of outward sensation. To refocus her desire inward, to give herself over to her spiritual calling completely, the anchoress must somehow retrain herself to sense less.

The ascetic values of Ancrene Wisse advocate a specific kind of sensory education, as the syllabus is fashioned after a traditional model of guarding the senses. Following the “astoundingly stringent ideals of early desert monasticism,” the sense-less syllabus of Ancrene Wisse was designed to assist would-be anchoresses in their efforts to wall out the physical world, both literally and metaphorically. In this context, the senses-as-windows topos is as tangible as it is applicable. The Ancrene-author masterfully knits the physical reality of the anchorhold, as well as the everyday practices of anchorites, into the fabric of the topos. The result is a culturally specific model of the senses that is inextricably tied to the architectural and artifactual remnants of a past world.

The architecture of the anchorhold had its own sense appeal. Modeled after a tomb, its structural purpose was to manufacture a sensory world that not only exemplified


postmortem ideals, but also encouraged (if not enforced) a dead-to-the-world existence.\textsuperscript{24} And this makes sense, given that the anchoritic occupation was regarded as a voluntary death. As an early annotator defines the “dead” woman of \textit{Ancrene Wisse}: “\textit{þet is, ancre þet is dead ant ase deat ielet ant iput, as i þruh, inwi hire ancre wahes}” (that is to say, an anchoress who is dead and, like the dead, is hidden away and buried, as in a tomb, within her anchor-walls).\textsuperscript{25} The built-in ascetic values of anchorholds concretize the \textit{habitus} of a specialized, not to mention highly exclusive, religious vocation. A working knowledge of these physical structures, therefore, is critical to understanding how the principle metaphor for the senses in \textit{Ancrene Wisse} means to work. To fill out what the anchorhold came to signify in late medieval England, we need to view the anchorhold from various vantage points. Looking \textit{at} and \textit{through} an anchoress’s windows from multiple perspectives, moreover, promotes new ways of viewing the senses-as-windows topos in \textit{Ancrene Wisse} and by extension \textit{The Fyve Wittes}.

Our first vantage point considers the anchorhold through the liturgical lens of the rites of enclosure preserved in the Clifford Pontifical, a fifteenth-century liturgical book of rites traditionally performed by bishops.\textsuperscript{26} The text of the enclosure rite begins with a


\textsuperscript{25} The complete marginal gloss from British Library, Cotton MS Cleopatra C.vi reads: “\textit{þet is, ancre þet is dead ant ase deat ielet ant iput, as i þruh, inwi hire ancre wahes. Sulli wunder is þet heo shal adotien ant wi cwike worlmen weden purh sunne}”; quoted from Millet, \textit{Ancrene Wisse}, 21 n3. For a reading of the annotation in connection with rites for enclosure, see E.A. Jones, “Rites of Enclosure: the English \textit{Ordines} for the Enclosing of Anchorites, s. XII-s. XVI,” \textit{Traditio} 67 (2012): 145-243, at 159.

miniature depicting a bishop blessing a newly “entombed” anchoress. The miniature presents an idealized view of the anchorhold as a minimalist structure with limited access points and restricted channels. There is no door and only one or two windows—the obvious window from which the anchoress peers out, and the less obvious squint-like cruciform set in the gable. The absence of doors, coupled with the brick-by-brick details of the masonry—perhaps motivated by concern for realism, but nevertheless participating in the symbolic valences of the image—perfectly capture the medieval practice of walling off recluses from the world. The visual rhetoric of the image conveys the permanence of the anchoress’s profession, the extreme otherness of her occupation, and the high stakes of her dead-to-the-world status.

With this image of the anchorhold in mind, let us now turn to the text of the enclosure rite itself. The rite appears under the rubric “ordo ad recludendum reclusum” and begins with a few procedural instructions. We should briefly note that this version of the rite employs the generic masculine forms of recludendus throughout, though the liturgical script could easily be adapted to address a female recluse. The Clifford rite closely follows a version of the office developed in twelfth-century England that survives in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D.xv. The Vespasian office is the

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27 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS Parker 79, fol. 96r. The manuscript has been digitized and thumbnails are viewable at: http://dms.stanford.edu/catalog/CCC079_keywords <accessed 22 September 2016>.

28 While a few gender specific rites for female anchorites survive from late medieval England, the general order and operations of these rites parallel their male counterparts; Jones, “Rites of Enclosure,” 168-69.

earliest recorded example of a pontifical enclosure rite in England and, according to E. A. Jones, this particular version appears to have provided the framework for later English versions of the office. Following the celebration of a Mass for the Holy Spirit, the candidate is led out of the church, through the cemetery, and into his or her cell in a procession that recalls the liturgy of burial. Once in the cell, the candidate is directed to step into a shallow grave and then the attending bishop is to sprinkle his or her head with dust. The bishop then offers the candidate a few words of exhortation and, after some final prayers and a blessing, the door of the cell is permanently shut: “obstruatur hostium domus eius.”

The enclosure rite is much more than an elaborate commissioning of the anchorite’s career—it is the very foundation of the rule she is expected to adhere to. Numerous evocations and allusions to the enclosure rite, particularly those portions drawn from the burial liturgy and Mass for the Dead, populate the pages of the many spiritual guides produced in the Middle Ages, and Ancrene Wisse is no exception. In a passage addressing the dangers of touch, for example, the Ancrene-author writes:

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30 Jones, “Rites of Enclosure,” 159.

31 For a detailed description of the performance of the rite, see Jones, “Ceremonies of Enclosure: Rite, Rhetoric and Reality.”

32 Jones, “Rites of Enclosure,” 160.

Nawt ane monglin hoden, ah putten hond ut-ward bute hit beo for nede, is wohnunge efter Godes grome ant tollunge of his eorre. Hire-seolf bihalden hire ahne hwite honden deth hearm moni ancre, the haveth ham to feire as theo the beoth for-idlet. Ha schulden schrapien euche dei the eorthe up of hare put thet ha schulen rotien in. Godd hit wat, thet put deth muche god moni ancre.

(Not only joining hands but putting your hand out, unless it is necessary, is courting God’s wrath and asking for his anger. Looking at her own white hands does harm to many anchoresses, who have such beautiful hands because they are idle. They should be scraping the earth up every day out of the pit they must rot in! God knows that this pit does much good to many an anchoress.)

Other commentators, noting the strong allusions to the grave, have used this passage to link Ancrene Wisse to the enclosure rites. What I find most compelling about the above passage, beyond its shared allusions, is how it encourages the anchoresses to utilize the harsh textures of their assumed graves to realign their senses. The physical act of “scraping the earth” is offered as an occupational remedy against the moral dangers of touch: “scraping” hands work to overcome idle “white” hands. The success of this prescribed hand gesture relies on sense memories, that is, the ability of individual anchoresses to recall the tactile experiences of their enclosure rites and, then, their willingness to relive these memories through the haptic performance of “scraping” their hands.

Through the highly ritualized act of (re)digging her grave, the anchoress is in a position to (re)inscribe her ascetic vows on both her body and her anchorhold. Her hands,

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34 Ancrene Wisse, 46; Savage and Watson, 91-92.
in one sense, become the instruments of her symbolic death and burial. When her hand scrapes the floor, the anchoress feels the floor in a way that makes the anchorhold her grave. Her touch is an intentional touch, one that impresses her personal ascetic values into the foundation of her anchorhold. As we will see, anchorholds were designed to impose a specific style of worship on the bodies of their inhabitants that pressed the entombed to apprehend an ascetically tuned sensory world. But the capacity of these structures to affect their inhabitants, we should remember, depends on how prepared the anchorites themselves were to access, activate, and accept their built-in sensorial values.

Our second vantage point considers the material construction of anchorholds, particularly the design and placement of their windows. Archeological surveys show considerable variation in the sizes, shapes, and sitings of cells erected in England between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. From what can be pieced together from the limited archeological and documentary evidence, we know that anchorholds were typically single-occupant constructions attached to the outer walls of parish churches. The anchorage attached to St. Nicholas’s Church in Compton, Surrey, is among the few extant examples of these sorts of cells. The Compton anchorhold, built in the twelfth century and occupied well into the fourteenth century, gives modern visitors a sense of what medieval anchorholds looked and felt like. The floor plan measures 2.04 x 1.31


meters (about 6.6 x 4.3 feet), which, as Jones aptly notes, is roughly the same size as an average modern-day elevator.\textsuperscript{37} The Compton anchorhold, an example of what Roberta Gilchrist terms a “purpose-built” cell, is positioned along the south side of the chancel in order to provide its occupant with an unobstructed view of the high altar.\textsuperscript{38} “For the enclosed recluse,” Gilchrist notes, “visibility of the high altar was fundamental, allowing sight of the elevation of the Host.”\textsuperscript{39} The occupant of the cell could watch Mass through the cruciform “squint” window located on the north wall.\textsuperscript{40} On the south wall of the cell, there is a walled-off door and second window, perhaps a “conversation” window for communicating with confessors and/or a portal to receive daily sustenance from servants.\textsuperscript{41} This cell was, in every sense of the term, utilitarian.

The windows of anchorhold carried the potential to both facilitate and complicate the ascetic ideals of the anchorhold in some very real ways. On the one hand, as Bob Hasenfratz notes, the windows of the anchorhold were “points of dangerous permeability” that allowed anchoresses access to the world, and the world access to them.\textsuperscript{42} The \textit{Ancrene}-author addresses the precariousness of this two-way access, for example, in another warning against the dangers of touch: “Hwen-se moten to eani mon

\textsuperscript{37} Jones, “Anchorites and Hermits in Historical Context,” 12-13; see also, Warren, \textit{Anchorites and their Patrons}, 29-32.

\textsuperscript{38} Gilchrist, \textit{Contemplation and Action}, 185.

\textsuperscript{39} Gilchrist, \textit{Contemplation and Action}, 185.

\textsuperscript{40} Edwards, “Solitude and Sociability,” includes two images of the Compton squint.

\textsuperscript{41} Jones, “Anchorites and Hermits in Historical Context,” 10; Roberta Gilchrist, \textit{Gender and Material Culture: The Archeology of Religious Women} (New York: Routledge, 1993), 178. \textit{Ancrene Wisse} envisions a third window, adding to the squint and conversation windows a portal to receive provisions from servants through.

\textsuperscript{42} Hasenfratz, “The Anchorhold as Symbolic Space in \textit{Ancrene Wisse},” 1.
eawiht biteachen, þe hond ne cume nawt ut—ne ower ut ne his in. And 3ef hit mot cumen in, ne rine nowðer oþer” (Whenever you have to give something to anyone, let your hand not go out nor his in; but if it has to come in, neither one must touch the other). On the other hand, these same windows allowed anchoresses to participate in a variety of multi-sensual practices, including confession and the celebration of Mass, which were meant to edify and sustain the entombed spiritually. It follows, then, that a critical component to the anchoritic occupation, at least as it is imagined in Ancrene Wisse, was the ritualized maintenance of one’s windows—and this is precisely why the sense-as-windows topos is such a powerful and persistent feature of the text.

The windows of the anchorhold were highly regulated thresholds with a special set of sensory practices attached to them. Addressing appropriate conduct around squint windows, for example, the Ancrene-author writes: “Vt þurh þe chirche þurl ne halde 3e tale wið na mon, ah beoreð þer-to wurðmunt for þe hali sacrement þet 3e seoð þer-þurh” (Do not talk to anyone through the church window, but understand it as a matter of honor because of the holy sacrament that you see through it). What is notable about this passage is how the author treats these windows as if, by virtue if their instrumentality, they were themselves liturgical vessels carrying the sacrament. The sensory practices assigned to the squint by the Ancrene-author serve to establish and maintain a measure of ceremonial sacredness around the window. The squint window served, in theory and in

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43 Ancrene Wisse, 26; Savage and Watson, 72.

44 Ancrene Wisse, 29; Savage and Watson, 74.

practice, as a restricted channel of sight through which the body of Jesus was conveyed to a prayerfully gazing anchoress. Through its restricted and ritualized uses, the squint was transformed into a sort of consecrated vessel in the service of an “ocular communion.”

In the Compton cell, we can see the functionally specific design of the squint and are able to theorize how this window, and others like it, capture the sense values of the anchorhold. The window is a narrow cruciform opening positioned, as previously noted, to give the anchoress an unobstructed view of the church altar. The narrowness of the window is engineered to limit the viewer’s field of vision and its angle is set to fix her gaze on the sacred object of her devotion. To be sure, this particular squint was not designed to control the sense of sight alone. Notice, in figure 2.3, how the squint window is set within a recess in the cell wall. The recess sits roughly three feet above the floor, which means one would have to kneel down and lean in to peer out the window and to gain ocular access to the Host. At the base of the recess, there is a shallow sill where the prayerfully positioned anchoress might rest her arms. The architectural features around the squint form a “prayer-desk” that imposes a posture of humility on the prospective viewer. The functionally specific design of the squint pushes the body into a position of worship that recalls the aforementioned grave-making pose prescribed by the Anchorene-author. The configuration of the windowsill adds to the optical experience of communion.

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47 For images, see Edwards, “Solitude and Sociability.”


a rather significant tactile dimension. The harsh textures of the anchorhold, as we have seen, were coded to impress a decidedly ascetic sense of humility on the anchoritic body. It is significant, then, that for the anchoress to witness the elevation of the Host, if she is to catch sight of her beloved bridegroom, she must first subject her body to the rough touch of her cell.

Our final vantage point takes a more speculative look at anchorhold from the lay perspective. First, let us return to the idealized image of the anchorhold found in the Clifford Pontifical. If, as I previously suggested, we are able to accept this image as representative of the ascetic ideals of the anchorhold, as they stood in the popular medieval imagination, then we can also accept the anchoress’s entombment as her defining characteristic. To take our reading of the Clifford image one speculative step further, we might also liken the structure of the anchorhold to that of a reliquary. Consider, by way of comparison, the form of the reliquary shown in an image depicting the attempted translation of St. Edmond’s relics. The shared structural features between the anchorhold and the reliquary—their elongated sidewalls, pitched roofs capped with crosses, and cruciform windows—appear to elevate the spiritual value of the anchoress’s symbolic death in the Clifford image.

Likening the anchorhold to a reliquary allows us to begin to view the anchorhold from a lay perspective, which is to say, as a shrine to spiritual discipline. The anchorhold,

50 See n27.

from an outsiders point of view, appears to house something holy, something desirable, something to be emulated. The anchorhold not only reinforced the occupational otherness of the anchoress, but it also enshrined her dead-to-the-world existence. Add to this picture the archeological evidence showing that anchorholds were frequently sited within parish cemeteries.\textsuperscript{52} Symbolically situated between the altar and the grave, the anchorhold occupied, as Gilchrist notes, “a liminal space between the living and the dead.”\textsuperscript{53} And in this way, the anchoress was ensconced in the devotional landscape of the parish church as a sort of contact relic, a “living corpse” channeling the divine.\textsuperscript{54} But how would the medieval layperson have perceived the ascetic values enshrined in the anchorhold?

We know that many of anchoritic manuals circulating in late medieval England, including \textit{Ancrene Wisse}, were written and rewritten with “wider-than-anchoritic” audiences in mind.\textsuperscript{55} We also know that these manuals were frequently adapted, abridged, and/or added to for the express purpose of accommodating the tastes of lay audiences hungry for new devotional modes and materials. With these materials in hand, we can assume that the motivated layperson was in a position to practice and perform anchoritic ideals outside the anchorhold in ways that made sense to her or him. We should also

\textsuperscript{52} Clay, \textit{Hermits and Anchorites}, 80-81.

\textsuperscript{53} Gilchrist, \textit{Contemplation and Action}, 190.

\textsuperscript{54} Paulette L’Hermite-Leclercq makes a similar comparison in “Anchoritism in medieval France,” in \textit{Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe}, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 112-30, here 128.

expect that the laity would translate and adapt the structural aids developed in and around the anchorhold. The implementation of “elevation squints” in English parish churches during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries appears to reflect, in part, the sort of structural translation I have in mind here.

Elevation squints are a late addition to the furniture of the medieval parish church. They are small holes that were cut into the dado of the rood-screen that divided the nave from the chancel to provide parishioners with a better view of the high altar. The solid “fence-like” dado, as Paul Binski notes, thwarted the late-medieval “need to see” the elevation of the Host. By the late-medieval period, Eamon Duffey reminds us, lay reception of the elements of the Eucharist occurred primarily in the visual mode: “The Host was something to be seen, not consumed.” The informal installation of elevation squints was very much a do-it-yourself solution to the lay problem of ocular obstruction. And while their implementation was informal, and piecemeal at best, their presence points to the development of a set of sensory practices that very much reflect those of the neighboring anchorholds.

Kneeling before the elevation squint, the layperson would assume the same humble position as the anchoress of the Compton cell. Their knees pressed against the hard floor, and their eyes fixed on the sight of the altar. In their introductory essay to *Women’s Space: Patronage, Place and Gender in the Medieval Church*, Sarah Stanbury

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and Virginia Raguin engage in provocative meditation over the practical and aesthetic values of the elevation squints carved into the rood screen of the parish at Lavenham. Their reflections are worth quoting at length:

On a recent tour of East Anglian churches, we kneeled before small keyhole squints that pierced the dado of the parish church at Lavenham. The positioning created a curious feeling of both exposure and voyeuristic pleasure, for we could only see through the openings while pressed up against the screen, in effect “being first” and leading the (imaginary) congregation in our proximity to the chancel. At the same time, however, everything in the nave space was at our back, out of sight and temporarily out of mind. The viewer projects visually into the space beyond; squints work something like binoculars, and though they do not magnify, they give you the sense of being an intimate participant. The fifteenth-century viewer, peering through the squints into the chancel, would have the sense of a private viewing of the Mass. The show would unfold for the viewer alone.58

Stanbury and Raguin’s reenactment is a compelling exploration of the kinds of sensory experiences these elevation squints facilitated. What is most significant about their experience, for our purposes, is the simultaneous feelings of isolation and intimacy brought on by their use of the squints. While the elevation squints were cut to allow for increased visual access, they are also narrow enough to control the viewer’s horizon of expectation. The sensorial perimeters set by the squints focus the gaze in a way that quiets the “noise” of sensory distractions. The elevation squint, a restricted channel of

sight, permits the viewer to see only what is necessary to their spiritual health. Peering through the squint, the viewer is, as Stanbury and Raguin express, alone in private viewing of the Mass.

While the influence of anchoritic traditions upon lay devotion was no doubt significant, its ascetic forms needed to be adapted to accommodate the everyday lives of the laity. The average layperson may have enjoyed the ascetic qualities of the squint, for instance, but her experience was only ever going be a momentary spiritual reprieve from the demands of the so-called active life. The ideal of the anchorhold may have inspired laity, but they were in no way bound to its extreme obligations: anchoritism was a full-time occupation. Where the windows of the anchorhold made for useful models, their lessons were nevertheless limited by the dead-to-the-world ideals behind them. So what about those living in the world, but not of the world? How were they meant to spend their senses?

*Investing the Senses*

The senses-as-currency topos is a sense-based model of moral investment drawn from the Parable of the Talents, as told in the Gospel of Matthew (25:14-30). The Parable of the Talents is, at its core, an economic representation of eschatological time and of the moral obligations of believers. A masterful illustration of the narrative found in an illuminated copy of William of Nottingham’s *Commentary on the Gospels* (c. 1375-90) provides us with a visual point of access into how the economic framework of the parable
was read and applied in late medieval England. The illumination, a visual gloss of the contiguous Latin commentary, shows a lord dividing his wealth among three servants. To the first he gave five talents, to the second three, and to the last one. As the story goes, this landlord was bound for pilgrimage and, in his absence, his servants were charged with handling his fiscal affairs. The artist’s rendering captures the rather ambiguous terms of the lord’s principle investment. While his left hand freely dispenses talents, his right hand, palm-up and cupped, seemingly anticipates returns. Consequently, upon his homecoming, the lord promptly summoned his servants to settle accounts. The first servant had doubled his investment, and so had the second. The last servant, however, had earned nothing. Motivated by fear, he claimed, he thought it best to bury his talent.

In the end, the two profitable servants were further rewarded, but the third servant was banished. The risk-averse third servant, unable to appreciate the terms attached to the lord’s principle investment, stands as a negative exemplum. His inability to turn even the slightest profit stems, in part, from his apparent misjudgment of the lending lord’s character. Nevertheless, according to the lord, this servant should have known better. “Wicked and slothful servant,” he said, “you know that I reap where I do not sow.”

While the initial terms of the loan seemed vague, the lord’s rebuke reveals that he

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60 Matt. 25:26: “Serve male, et piger, sciebas quia meto ubi non semino, et congrego ubi non sparsi.”

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expected his three servants to have a working knowledge of his economic enterprise. The third servant’s fear appears to have been misapplied.

Of the possible lessons to be drawn from the parable, the fourteenth-century illumination focuses contemplation on the interpersonal dimensions of the economic exchanges between the lending lord and his three servants. As previously suggested, the obligations attached to the talents in the biblical narrative were, from a reader’s point of view, vague at best. It is only after the scene of reckoning that the terms and conditions of the loan are made clear. In this way, the squandering third servant figuratively works to bring the fine print of the master’s loan to light. In the exchanges figured in the above illumination, viewers are shown the exact moment when the third servant falters. Notice how his left hand willingly accepts a single talent while his right hand obstructs his sight from the interchange between the second servant and his lord. The third servant’s raised hand short-circuits the network of exchange that means to sustain him, in so far as his unwillingness to see and to grasp the lord’s right hand of reckoning results in his own banishment. The third servant is here again painted as a negative example. Unlike the squandering servant, it is for the moral viewer to look to the lord’s right hand and to grasp its meaning: that which is given, is given to turn and return profits.

The Parable of the Talents presents a high-risk, high-reward moral economy in which only the most proactive investors stand to benefit. In the hands of the first servant, suggestively drawn front and center and ahead of the rest, the talents on loan find their greatest expression as investible commodities. In contrast to the third servant, the first servant figures as a model of moral investment. But if medieval readers hoped to profit from the moral lessons made available in and through this most successful investor, they
would first need to decipher the symbolic terms of the talents themselves. One interpretation developed by medieval exegetes suggests that the five talents given to the first servant represented the five bodily senses.

The discussion of the five bodily senses in *Vices and Virtues* presents an imaginative reworking of the Parable of the Talents to advance a unique model of sense investment. *Vices and Virtues* survives in a single manuscript copied in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, now London, British Library, MS Stowe 34. This is an important text in the English moral tradition since, as Cate Gunn argues, the text bridges pre- and post-Lateran IV (1215 – 1216) initiatives. Written in an early form of Middle English, *Vices and Virtues* draws on the rich tradition of Anglo-Saxon homiletics and anticipates a boom of vernacular pastoral literature in late medieval England.61 *Vices and Virtues* begins its sermon-like discussion of the senses with an explicit reference to the Parable of the Talents:

*Giet me wrecið min herte of ða fif wittes ðe god me (be)tahte to lokin of mine wrecche lichame ðat is, visus, auditus, gustus, odoratus, et tactus, ðat is, 3esihte, 3eherhþe, smac, and smell, and tactþe. Ðas fif wittes, hie tancið ða fif gildenene besantes ðe ðe hlauerd betahte his þrall (for) to biþeten ðar mide. Swa dede ðe gode ðoral ðe biþatt oðer fif. For ði his hlauerd him sede: “Wel ðe, gode ðorall!*
Ouer litel þing ðu ware trewe; ouer michel þing ic ðe scal setten. Ga in to ðine lauerdes bliss!”

(Again, my heart convicts me of the five senses which God entrusted to me in order to look after my wretched body; these are: *visus, auditus*, *gustus, odoratus*, *et tactus*; these are: sight, hearing, taste and smell, and touch. The five senses represent the five golden talents that the Lord entrusted to his servant to profit with, just as the good servant who earned five more. For this his lord said to him: “Well done, good servant! You were faithful over little, over much I shall set you. Go into your Lord’s bliss!”)

In the long history of gloss commentaries, from which this reading is certainly drawn, the servant entrusted with five talents is set above the rest as an example of an individual who invested his senses wisely. And, for the most part, the analogy ends here: the five talents equals the five senses. But following this line of interpretation, we can reasonably ask: what would it mean to bury your senses, so to speak, like the servant who buried his talent?

As the passage from *Vices and Virtues* continues, readers encounter a dramatic shift in perspective when the speaker suddenly breaks from the third-person narrative to adopt a more intimate first-person voice. Adopting a subject position resembling that of the squandering third servant, the text takes the sense-themed exegesis of the parable to its logical conclusion. This not only dramatizes the high moral stakes of sense

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investment, but it also provides readers with the beginnings of their own confessional script. The squandering speaker laments:

Þis ne habbe ic nauht ofearned, ðe no god habbe idon mid ðo ilke besants of ðe fif wittes, ac ðurh hem and þurh mine 3emeleaste ic habbe mines lauerdes eihte forloren. Ælche dai me cumedð sonden on min þohtes þat ic scall neuliche cumen te-foren him, and 3iuen him and-sware, hwat ic habbe mid his eihte 3edon. He wile hes habben wel imotet, and bi rihte wæi3e wel -wæi3en and wel imered gold; and bute ich þis habbe, ðas dai3es ðe he after me sant.63

(These [talents] I have not earned. I have done no good with the very same talents of the five senses, but through them, and through my carelessness, I have lost my Lord’s treasure. Every day I am reminded that I shall soon appear before Him to give an account of what I have done with his treasure. He will have [my talents] properly appraised and expertly weighed with an accurate scale.)

This provocative image of God as a scrupulous money lender, a veritable loan shark, underscores the moral and spiritual obligations attached to his loan of the five senses—servants will be held to the terms of his loan! With this image in place, the text then continues to engage in what we might term a moment of performative exegesis:

[I]c scal iheren reuliche tidinge. “Andswere me nu, þu un-3esælie saule,’ he wile seggen, ‘hwat hafst þu swa lange idon on ðare woreld? Langne first ic ðe 3af wel to donne 3if þu woldest, and litel god þu hafst bi3eten mid ða fif besantes of ðe fif gewitges ðe ic þe betahte. Mo ðanne fif ðusende besantes of gode þohtes, and of gode wordes, and of gode woerkes, þu mihtest habben bi3eten, 3if þu woldest,

63 Vices and Virtues, 17.
on ða lange firste ðe ic ðe 3af; ac ðu, earme saule, noldest þenchen of ðine for(ð)siðe, þat tu fram ðine lichame scoldest skelien, and tefore me cumen, and me andwerien of alle ðine dades.”

(I will hear this woeful tiding: “Answer me now, you poor soul,” he will say, “what have you done for so long in the world? I gave you a long grace period to live well, if you so desired, and you have earned little good with the five talents of the five senses that I entrusted to you. You might have earned more than five thousand talents of good thoughts, of good words, and of good works during the long grace period I gave you.”)

Here, the speaker projects a scene of reckoning where he or she will answer for misspending his or her senses. Note how the text playfully recasts the authoritative voice of the parable’s lending lord to construct a counter voice to the speaker’s prior confession. Just as in the original parable, the authoritative rebuke throws the fine print of the loan into high relief. It is not enough to bury your talents, to simply suppress your senses. Where the obligations attached to the loan of the senses are made explicit in above passages, the how-to of moral sense investment still remains unclear. The final lines of the scripted rebuke point to a possible solution with the promotion of good works. Motivated readers are expected to learn to invest their talents, which is to say, they must put their senses to good work if they hope to yield spiritual profits. But how?

The commentary tradition brings us one step closer to a medieval investment plan. The Middle English commentary on Matthew extends a now familiar line of interpretation in the plainest of terms: “be þis fyue talentis is vndirstande þe knowynge of

64 Vices and Virtues, 17.
“Quinque etenim sunt corporis sensus, uidelicet usus, auditus, gustus, odoratus et tactus. Quinque igitur talentis donum quinque sensuum, id est exteriorum scientia exprimitur”; “Homilia 9,” in Homiliae in Evangelia, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 57-64, at 59; cf. Thomas Aquinas, “In Mattheum” 25.2, Catena Aurea in Quattuor Evangelia, ed. A. Guarienti, 2 vols. (Turin: Marietti, 1953), 1.366. For a complete Modern English translation of Gregory’s Homily 9, see “Homily 18,” in Forty Gospel Homilies, trans. David Hurst, Monastic Studies Series 6 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 126-33; note that the Modern English translation follows an exemplar with an alternative ordering of the sermon collection than the Latin edition. We find comparable readings of the parable throughout the Latin tradition as well. Some generations earlier, for example, St Jerome (d. 420) notes: “By using the earthly senses that he had received, he doubled the knowledge of heavenly things for himself. He understood the creator from the creatures, incorporeal things from those with bodies, invisible things from visible ones, eternal things from things that are ephemeral”; Commentary on Matthew, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Fathers of the Church 117 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 286. And some generations later, Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141) also alludes to the Parable of the Talents in his preface to the Didascalicon: “There is another sort of man whom nature has enriched with the full measure of ability and to whom she shows an easy way to come to truth. Among these, even granting inequality in the strength of their ability, there is nevertheless not the same virtue or will in all for cultivation of their natural sense through practice or learning. Many of this sort, caught up in the affairs and cares of the world beyond what is needful or given over to the vices and sensual indulgences of the body, bury the talent of God in earth, seeking from it neither the fruit of wisdom nor the profit of good work”; The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 45.
Matthew survives in two manuscripts: London, British Library, MS Egerton 842, fols. 1r-244v and Cambridge, University Library Ii.2.12, fols. 1r-167v. The Cambridge quire that would have included Matthew 25 is missing, which makes the Egerton manuscript our default witness. The Egerton copy, most likely completed in Nottinghamshire around 1400, is an important example of the non-Wycliffite vernacular translation projects in production at the turn of the century. On the Egerton page, we find a generically predictable, but no less complex, matrix of interpretive acts that simple transcription cannot completely convey. Each unit of biblical material, marked by a rubricated paraph, features a complete transcription of the Latin verse followed by a Middle English translation and then an interpretive gloss. The following transcription captures a measure of the intricacies of the commentarial procedures at work on the manuscript page:

¶Abiit autem qui quinque talenta acceperat. And he 3ede forþe þat toke fyue talentis. For þof he my3t parte [ne]69 þe grete priuetes. neuer þe lesse he usid hym siilfe in þe science of þingis outeforþe. ¶ Et operatus [est] in eis et lucratus est70 alia quinke. And he wrou3te in hem and he wan oþer fyue. For whiles he kepis hym verrayly fro luste of þinngis þat ben visible, fro þes also oþer of þe same kynde þat hau knowynge of þingis withowten he constreynys þorow his

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67 For a comprehensive introduction, see Andrew B. Kraebel, “Middle English Gospel Glosses and the Translation of Exegetical Authority,” *Traditio* 69 (2014): 87-123.

68 Kraebel, “Middle English Gospel Glosses,” *passim*.

69 For the Middle English to follow Gregory a negative particle is needed so that “my3t parte” corresponds to “penetrare nesciunt” (see n72 below). The negative particle may have been lost when the scribe did not complete the verb “parte,” writing “p-” at the end of one line and then failing to complete the word on the next; the scribe did return to complete the word, but with an uncharacteristic (for him) single-compartment a. Thanks to Professor Richard Newhauser for his help with this transcription.

70 The scribe has copied and then expuncted “in eis” here.
amonestynge and enformynge wiþ ensaumples als myche as he may of goode wirkyng.

([Now he who had received five talents left]. And he who received five talents went forth. For even if he could [not] have a share in the deep mysteries, he still devoted himself to the knowledge of things externally. [And he put them to work and he made a profit of another five]. And he conducted business with them and he made a profit of five more. For as long as he truly keeps himself from the enjoyment of visible things, by his warnings and instruction using examples as far as he can of good deeds he restrains from these [visible things] also others with the same nature [as himself] who have knowledge of things externally.)

A key feature of this Middle English commentary, as Andrew Kraebel remarks, is the very active role the vernacular commentator has taken in emending and embellishing the textual fabric of his authoritative sources, namely the Catena Aurea. The above passage is no exception. In his glossing of the five talents, the vernacular commentator offers a slightly updated reading of his source material that reflects more contemporary thinking on the potential pastoral applications of the biblical text.

The above gloss, as aforementioned, is based on a key passage from Gregory the Great’s Homily 9. According to Gregory, the five talents represented the “natural gifts” that have been given to some in order to teach others how to “strive for their heavenly home.” The ability to manage the five senses, the foremost of the “natural gifts,” was a

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71 Kraebel, “Middle English Gospel Glosses,” 97-98.

72 “Sed is qui quinque talenta acceperat, alia quinque lucratus est, quia sunt nonnulli qui etsi interna ac mystica penetrare nesciunt, pro intentione tamen supernae patriae docent recta quos possunt de ipsis exterioribus quae acceperunt, dum que se a carnis petulantia, a terrenarum rerum ambitu atque a uisibilium
critical component of Gregory’s instructional program, especially where he advised religious leaders to teach by example. “While guarding themselves from physical wantonness, from striving after earthly things, and from taking pleasure in things they can see,” Gregory writes, “they restrain others too from these things by their counsel.”

Gregory’s exegesis of the parable is tailored for members of the priesthood whom he expected to, in so many words, practice what they preached. Gregory concludes his explication of the parable by highlighting the terms of the talents, which now symbolize the eschatological conditions tied to the gift of the senses and the promise of a reckoning: “Consider then, dearly beloved, that you will pay interest on this money you have received, on these words.” The moral and spiritual obligations attached to God’s loan of the senses are made explicit enough, but how one is to go about investing his or her senses still remains unclear.

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73 Gregory the Great, Homiliae in Evangelia, 59; Forty Gospel Homilies, 128.

74 Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care 1: “Nam dum rerum necessitas exposcit, pensandum ulde est, ad culmen quisque regiminis qualiter uniat; atque ad hoc rite perueniens, qualiter uiuat; et bene uiuens, qualiter doceat; et recte docens, infirmitatem suam cotidie quanta consideratione cognoscat, ne aut humilitas accessum fugiat, aut peruentionem uiua contradicat, aut uitam doctrina destitutam, aut doctrinam praesumptio exstollat.” (For, as the necessity of things requires, we we must especially consider after what manner every one should come to supreme rule; and, duly arriving at it, after what manner he should live; and, living well, after what manner he should teach; and, teaching aright, with how great consideration every day he should become aware of his own infirmity; lest either humility fly from the approach, or life be at variance with the arrival, or teaching be wanting to the life, or presumption unduly exalt the teaching.); Grégoire le Grand, Règle pastorale, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Charles More, Sources Chrétiennes 381-382, 2 vols. (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1992). 1. English transition from The Book of Pastoral Rule, trans. George E. Demacopoulos, Popular Patristics Series Volume 34 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007).

75 Gregory the Great, Forty Gospel Homilies, 130. “Pensate ergo, fratres carissimi, quia de accepta hac uerbi pecunia usuras soluitis, ut ex eo quod audistis etiam alia studeatis intelligere quae non audistis”; Homiliae in Evangelia, 62.
The Middle English commentary on Matthew likewise stresses the various epistemological functions of the five senses, but with a few suggestive flourishes. As the cultural-turn in translation studies continues to demonstrate, the act of translation is as much a linguistic event as it is a manifestation of culture and ideology. Even in the most literal practices of word-for-word translation, we will inevitably betray our allegiances when reaching for the “right” word. All this to say, where our vernacular translator has labored to communicate linguistic meaning, we should expect to find traces of a culturally attuned appreciation of his sources. This work of vernacular translation, with its charged word choices and phrasings, becomes an especially useful lexicon of sense investment. Reading into its inflected meaning of the translated passage, we find clues pointing to what a proactive program of sense investment could have embraced.

The commentary offers an operational definition that should remind us of the opening lines of The Fyve Wyttes: “he usid hymsulfe in þe science of þingis outeforþe.” In my own translation of the Middle English, I had previously rendered the line to reflect the Latin of Gregory’s homily: “he still devoted himself to the knowledge of things externally.” But to take the line at its word, and admittedly somewhat anachronistically, think about what it would mean for the good servant to use himself in the science of outside things. Is it theoretically beneficial to read the line so literally? This physically active reflexive phrasing certainly intensifies the instrumentality of the sensate body. To say that the good servant used himself to apprehend what was morally profitable may be a rather utilitarian view of the senses, but one we have become familiar with nonetheless.

Now take the line “þorow his amonestynge and enformynge wiþ ensaamples als myche as he may of goode wirkynge.” Again, my former rendering follows my source’s source closely: “by his warnings and instruction using examples as far as he can of good deeds.” The vernacular commentary has effectively, and very economically, conveyed Gregory’s concerns over proper religious instruction and pastoral care. It was the responsibility of the shepherds to warn and to instruct their flocks with exempla and, above all, through living a moral life themselves. All the same, we could just as easily apply these lines to the laity. The so motivated layperson had access to models of instruction, as there was no shortage of fitting exempla in medieval religious art and literature. The lives of the saints, as we will see in the case studies of Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas in the chapters that follow, were especially apt for teaching good deeds. My question is: how might a layperson use herself to embody the moral lessons of such ensaamples? Or perhaps the better question is: could this hypothetical layperson herself be a model of goode wirkynge?

*Sense Investment: A Working Model*

We have seen how the windows of the anchorhold communicated the value of a sense deprivation. Learning how not to feel, for instance, was just as critical as learning how to feel with spiritual purpose in the Middle Ages. We have also seen where medieval exegetes read the five senses into the Parable of the Talents. Just as the good servant who spent his five talents wisely, medieval believers were encouraged to use their physical senses to reap spiritual rewards. Thinking about the senses as windows and as currency, the above examples reflect distinctly medieval concerns over sensory management. The
five senses were more than passive receptors. To the contrary, they were vital instruments in the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of a moral self. And it is because the senses were active by design that they need to be governed or, as our sources suggest, need to be invested. What we have yet to encounter, however, are the how-tos of sense investment. The commentaries considered above may have advocated the proactive investment of the senses, though even these directed their readers to external examples (ensaamples) and concepts (goode wirkynge). Those in search of practical models must look elsewhere. The subjects of chapters 4 and 5, Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas respectively, are among the more popular examples employed to teach medieval audiences the moral valence of touch. But to appreciate fully how these ensaamples were effectively made to touch, we still need to get to the bottom of what is assumed by these many passing references to good works.

One way to conceive the moral application of a mostly physical sense of touch is to think about the performance of the corporeal works of mercy. The work of hands in

77 See Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” especially 1559-60.

78 We might also look to medieval conceptions of caritas to understand the potential applications of a moral sense of physical touch. Writing on the role of caritas in the medieval sensorium, for instance, Newhauser quotes an instructive passage from Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sententiae (3.73): “Through the five senses of the body, during one’s lifetime, the body is joined to the soul; through the five spiritual senses, with the intervention of caritas, the soul is joined with God. The love of parents is comparable to touch, since this feeling, exposed to all and in a certain sense coarse and palpable, shows and offers itself to all in the course of nature so that you could not flee from it even if you wanted to” (1567). As Newhauser explains, “The soul gives sense to the body, distributed in five bodily members; likewise, the soul gives a corresponding spiritual value to the senses distributed in five kinds of love: sight is related to the holy love (amor sanctus) of God; hearing to dilectio at a remove from the flesh; smell to the general love (amor generalis) of all human beings; taste to a pleasant or social love (amor iucundus, amor socialis) of one’s companions; and touch to the pious love (amor pius) of parents for their young (both humans and animals)”; Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1567.
feeding, clothing, comforting, and the rest puts individuals in direct contact, in physical touch, with their communities. In one sense, how individuals choose to invest their labors, resources, and time could determine where they will stand on Judgment Day: with the first servant who invested his talents wisely or with the third servant who buried his talent in fear?

What I am advocating for is a “working” theory of sense investment. The fifteenth-century preacher-poet John “The Blind” Audelay advances a remarkably practical “working” theory in his collection of catechismal poems that will prove useful when we press the terms of touch informing our case studies. In one of his two poems dedicated to the five senses, for instance, Audelay offers readers a crash course in moral sense investment. The poem opens with a two-line admonition that frames the senses in economic terms similar to the model of the talents described above: “Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spende,/ And thanke that Lord that ham thee sende” (Look that you spend your five senses well, / and give thanks to the Lord who sent them to you). The line is repeated in the refrain of each of the five stanzas that follow, one for each sense. Take, as a principle example, Audelay’s treatment of touch:

    The third, hit is thi towchyng:

    Worche no worke unlawfully;

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Goveren thi fete in thi walkyng
Toward heven, and fle foly —
Lest thou be chent!
Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spende,
And thonke that Lord that ham thee sende.81
(The third, it is your touching: / Carry out no deed unlawfully; / Govern your feet in your walking / Toward heaven, and flee folly — / Lest you be ruined! / Look that you spend your five senses well, / and give thanks to the Lord who sent them to you.)

Audelay’s seemingly basic advice importantly ties touch to medieval notions of labor and location, what we might theorize as vocational and spacial practices.82 Audelay’s poem brings us another step closer to a medieval strategy for thinking through how and what it meant to invest the senses morally. To work well and to go well was part of what it meant to touch well and to invest well in late medieval England.

81 Audelay, “Five Wits,” 179.

82 Audelay’s haptic terms likewise recall the figures of touch, Sir-Take-Action-Well-With-Your-Hand and Sir Godfrey Walk-Well, of William Langland’s fourteenth-century allegorical poem, Piers Plowman; The Vision of Piers Plowman. A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (London: 1997), 131. Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s early fourteenth-century Handlyng Synne imagines a “loan of limbs” in its estimation of an individual’s obligations to use his or her hands and feet morally: “3yf god haue lent þe handys and fete, / Armês, leggês, feyre and swete — / Be nat ouer proude of þys, / Þey are nat þyne, but þey ben hys”; Robert of Brunne’s Handlyng Synne. A.D. 1303. With those Parts of the Anglo-French Treatise on which it was Founded, William of Wadington’s Manuel des Pechiez, re-ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, 2 vols., EETS o.s. 119, 123 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901-1903) 1.115, ll. 3311-14. We might even think about how the physical occupation of anchorholds fit into this scheme; though their spiritual vocations advocated the deprivation of the senses, as we have seen, anchorites constructed and occupied coded sensory environments both to restrict their movement and to guide their corporeal senses toward spiritual ends.
CHAPTER 4
MAGDALENE MISHANDLED

Noli Me Tangere: A Pictorial Primmer

In terms of touch, Mary Magdalene is read prohibitively. The saint’s firsthand experience of the resurrected body of Jesus, after all, is defined by a refusal: a refusal of her groping hand voiced in the command “Noli me tangere!” (Do not touch me!).¹ According to the gospel record, Jesus issues the forbidding phrase noli me tangere to preserve the exceptionally precarious quality of his resurrected flesh that had “not yet ascended” to heaven.² Mary Magdalene’s desire to touch in this moment threatens to compromise, contaminate, or corrupt the divine’s flesh in its liminal state between resurrection and ascension, or so it seems. What can, has, and is made theologically viable by this refusal and its justification is manifold, especially given that Jesus will later invite Doubting Thomas to poke, prod, and penetrate the very same flesh refused to the Magdalene.³ How exegetes choose to handle this glaring double standard consequently inflects a set of culturally conditioned tactile values. And how they choose to interpret

¹ John 20:17.

² John 20:17. In rendering the original Greek me mou haptou (do not hold on to me) as noli me tangere, even as tangere has a comparable lexical range as haptomai, the Latin translation appears to narrow the connotations of the command “along tactile lines” with significant impact on its reception and application as a “prohibition of touching” in the Western tradition; see Barbra Baert, “The Pact Between Space and Gaze: The Narrative and the Iconic in Noli me tangere,” in Fiction sacrée: Spiritualité et esthétique durant le premier âge moderne, ed. Ralph Deconinck, Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, and Émilie Granjon (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 245-70, at 246-47. And for more on the history of translation, see Reimund Bieringer, “Noli me tangere and the New Testament: An Exegetical Approach,” in Noli me tangere: Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images, Documenta Libraría 32, ed. B. Baert, R. Bieringer, K. Demasure, and S. Van Den Eynde (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 13-27.

³ For a range of cultural and theological perspectives on the noli me tangere from the patristic era to the present, see the interdisciplinary volumes Noli me tangere: Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images (2006) and To Touch or Not to Touch?: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Noli Me Tangere, Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia 67, ed. R. Bieringer, K. Demasure, and B. Baert (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).
noli me tangere necessarily reflects who or what is deemed worthy to touch, or not. So what is made of the interpretive tensions between the refused and the invited desires to touch—in relation to prohibition and privilege, embodiment and gender, and so on—absolutely matters.

In the medieval visual tradition, we have an active record of such efforts to grasp the theologically palpable tension between Mary Magdalene’s and Doubting Thomas’s competing senses of touch.⁴ Their iconographic pairing in the Barlow psalter, for instance, a product of fourteenth-century East Anglia, renders their manifold tactile considerations visible for theological contemplation and debate.⁵ In the left compartment, Jesus is shown extending his left arm and staff down and across his body. His gesture, the gestural evocation of noli me tangere, not only bars access to his body, but also conceals his sidewound from the Magdalene’s prayerfully extended hands. Compare this to the body language of the adjacent scene, wherein Jesus quite literally opens himself to Thomas. Thomas, with fingers thrust into the now exposed sidewound, is here permitted to probe the once forbidden flesh. The hand-play of this popular pairing presses a rather paradoxical point: what should we make of the resurrected’s shifting stance on the tactile mode?

⁴ On the early history of the iconographic pairing, see Lisa Marie Rafanelli, “To Touch or Not to Touch: The ‘Noli me tangere’ and ‘Incredulity of Thomas’ in Word and Image from Early Christianity to the Ottonian Period,” in To Touch or Not to Touch?: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Noli Me Tangere (2013), 139-79; for an overview of their iconographic corpora, see Gertrud Schiller, Die Auferstehung und Erhöhung Christi, Ikonographie der christlichen Kunste, vol. 3 (Mohn: Gütersloh, 1971), 95-98, 414-25 (Magdalene); 108-14, 446-55 (Thomas).

⁵ The “Barlow Psalter” (c. 1321-41); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Barlow 22, fol. 14r. The pair occupy the two upper compartments of a four compartment full-page miniature that, in addition to representing historical events in the life of Jesus, explores themes of faith and doubt, presence and absence. For an overview of the manuscript, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, The Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and Other Fenland Manuscripts (London: Harvey Miller; New York: Graphic Society, 1974), 121-22. Image available at: http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/s/2jm0pi <accessed September 29, 2016>.
When set against the Incredulity of Thomas, it is difficult not to read the *noli me tangere* motif along strictly gendered lines. More to the point, the contrast raises significant theological questions about the gendering of sense experience. It is easy to imagine how the prohibition of feminine touch in the *noli me tangere* was leveraged in antifeminist rhetoric to restrict the roles and experiences of women in the church, since many medieval and modern theologians have already done so, or how the permissive homoerotic touch of the Incredulity of Thomas could just as easily achieve the same patriarchal ends, as some theorists have recently argued.⁶ But what makes these scenes all the more fascinating, as Lisa Marie Rafanelli suggests, is the ways in which they also complicate expectations about gendered and sensed behaviors.⁷ And here lies the theoretical burden of our study: to make the most sense of these figures, to keep all of their meaningful contradictions intact, we would do well to approach them on their own tactile terms. Temporarily pushing Thomas aside, the present chapter examines a handful of the many ways Mary Magdalene mattered to the formation of tactile values—gendered and otherwise—in late medieval England. To approach Mary Magdalene on her own tactile terms, we will need to expand our horizon of critical expectations to account for the many socio-theological complications and contradictions her figure evokes.

⁶ Robert Mills offers a thoughtful reading of the sexual indeterminacy of Jesus’s sidewound and how late medieval representations (to which I would add many late medieval depictions of the Incredulity of Thomas) asks modern viewers to challenge the “hetero-normative assumptions of certain modes of historical inquiry”; *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 193.

⁷ Rafanelli, “To Touch or Not to Touch,” 145. This is not to say that gendered body politics of the biblical narratives are unimportant, nor the rhetorical harm made possible by certain historical applications of narratives are insignificant. It is my hope that my own treatment of the figures here extends the significant impact feminist and queer assessments have had on my own reading of the narratives.
At hand is the theoretical question of how literally to take the implied refusal of *noli me tangere*. The command is undeniably prohibitive, but might contextualization nurture a more productive sense? Is it possible to locate sanction in this refusal, or to read an authorized sense of touch into the *noli me tangere*? To think more productively about this image-text, with respect to medieval interpretations and applications, asks us to think more comprehensively and creatively about the shared tactile histories of Mary Magdalene and Jesus. This exercise in creative re-contextualization, informed as it is by medieval hermeneutic practices, proactively seeks out interpretive clues in the sense-based patterns of narrative and asks, where have we seen, heard, and felt like this before?\(^8\) The treatment of *noli me tangere* in the *De Lisle* psalter, a fourteenth-century liturgical manuscript, puts these practices to use in its rather suggestive handling of the iconic scene.\(^9\) The detail holds much in common with the Barlow illumination, most notably the closed posturing of Jesus; but our interest here is its subtle distinctions, particularly the addition of an alabaster jar, that appear to complicate the terms of the scene’s tactile refusal.

The Mary Magdalene of the *De Lisle* psalter is a composite figure. With her right hand, she reaches forward with a gesture that invites the rebuke of *noli me tangere*. With her left hand, holding an alabaster jar, she symbolically reaches backward with a totemic

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\(^8\) Here I am thinking about the influence Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching*, and like-minded medieval works, on late medieval reading and compositional practices; on the work’s specific utility to Middle English Studies, see Peggy Knapp, “Wandrynge by the weye: On Alisoun and Augustine,” in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 142-76.

\(^9\) The “*De Lisle* Psalter” (c. c. 1310); London, British Library, MS Arundel 83, fol. 133r. Just as the detail from the Barlow psalter, the *De Lisle* detail comprises one panel of a four-panel full-page miniature; for a detailed description of the miniature program, see Lucy Freemen Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library* (London: Harvey Miller, 1983), 20-31. The entire manuscript has been digitized and is on view at: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Arundel_MS_83 <accessed 4 May 2015>.
gesture that invites greater reflection, as the jar references her first tactile encounter with the body of Jesus. According to medieval tradition, Mary Magdalene was in fact that “certain sinful woman” who washed and anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. The alabaster jar invites viewers to hold, with the Magdalene, the refused and the sanctioned sense of touch in a theoretically productive apposition: one hand informs the other. We would do well to pause and dwell momentarily on what moved the Magdalene to touch the resurrected body of Jesus in the first place. She was not compelled by doubt, but by her tractable desire to apprehend her beloved: she turns to touch to confirm what she knew to be true. In the garden, where she at first failed to identify the “gardener” by sight, she eventually came to recognize Jesus by the sound—“Mary”—of his voice. We might go so far as to say that, in reaching out, Magdalene was moved by a sense memory, a learned and deeply internalized response to positive associations attached to a set of stimuli. Or, to put it in less clinical terms, in moving to add touch to sound, in attempting to amplify aural affirmation with tactile confirmation, she sensibly recalls to affectively recreate her first multi-sensual encounter with her beloved Jesus.

We have yet to decipher the impetus of the refusal from the divine’s point of view, but perhaps his motivation is beside the point, as we need to first reckon with the subject, and not the object, of touch. What appears to matter most, at least to the medieval authors and artists who have grappled with the scene, are the ways in which the refusal affected Mary Magdalene and, by extension, the community of believers. That the refusal

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11 John 20:16.
of *noli me tangere* is preceded by many sanctioned and necessary acts of touch suggests that this scene is but one point in the tactile evolution of Mary Magdalene. In other words, the *noli me tangere* is less a refusal and more a recalibration of her touch. She cannot touch because she does not need to touch, and she does not need to touch because she has already touched. When read along these more permissive lines, the multiple utilities of the tactile mode, specifically the spiritual terms of the Magdalene’s touch, are not so much discounted or dismissed as they are refined and redirected.

Following the example of the *De Lisle* image, the present chapter productively frustrates straight readings of the *noli me tangere* by focusing on a series of other touching episodes from late medieval lives of Mary Magdalene. In sampling a range of the tactile encounters preceding the iconic *noli me tangere* scene, from dramatic performances of her apocryphal fall to poetic treatments of her conversion, this chapter revives the Magdalene corpus as a site to register, revalue, and regulate a developing sense of touch in late medieval England. How medieval authors and artists choose to handle Mary Magdalene mattered: it mattered morally, and it mattered to the formation of tactile values. So, in terms of touch, Mary Magdalene is read prohibitively—but if we expand our critical horizons to account for her complete tactile history, we may find she is better read instructively. Mary Magdalene has much to teach about not touching in the middle ages.

“*Pe Gospel of Mari Mawdelene*”

What makes Mary Magdalene attractive to this study is her allusive past and the medieval impulse to devise her origins. The medieval literary record, from the homiletic
to the hagiographic, reveals an abiding interest not so much in who Mary Magdalene was factually, but rather in what she could do symbolically. While there are some twelve references to Mary Magdalene across the four gospels, all but one occur in the context of the passion and the resurrection narratives. This “Mary who is called Magdalen” first appears in the synoptic gospel narrative, according to Luke, as the woman from whom Jesus expelled the seven demons. The hermeneutic potential of this once-possessed woman, not to mention the numerological appeal of the seven demons, proved too enticing for those working in the moral tradition to ignore. As Gregory the Great once asked, “What is designated by these seven demons if not the universal sins?”

With great creativity and care, medieval authors set about to identify and invent a sinful past for Mary Magdalene that both utilized her demonic possession, to enumerate the effects of the seven deadly sins, and instrumentalized her deliverance, to promulgate the necessity of penitential practices. Mary Magdalene’s undocumented past spurred speculations that would, as we will see, transform her fragmentary corpus into the site of considerable hamartiological experimentation. And this is to our benefit. For all the ways in which Mary Magdalene was made to sin, this particular sinner-turned-saint spurred

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some of the most experimental and productive thinking about the regulation of touch in medieval analyses of sin.

Mary Magdalene’s appearance in the lower margin of the fourteenth-century Middle English commentary on Luke is a fitting introduction to her questionable identity.\(^{16}\) Her figure stands suggestively at the *base-de-page* as kind of visual gloss of the adjacent gospel pericope, Luke 7:36-50. In her left hand, she holds an alabaster ointment jar.\(^{17}\) The prop appears in reference to the defining event of the biblical episode, when “a certain sinful woman” (*peccatrix*) entered the house of Simon the Pharisee, washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with ointments from her alabaster jar (*alabastrum unguentii*).\(^{18}\) With her right hand, the figure unfurls a scroll with the Middle English text “þis is þo expownynge of þe gospel of Mari

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\(^{16}\) Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS Parker 32, fol. 85v. The current manuscript comprises what were two distinct codices, a unique copy of the Middle English commentaries on Mark (fols. 1r-56v) and Luke (fols. 57r-154v) and the Middle English translation of the Pauline Epistles (fols. 155r-208v). The two non-Wycliffite commentaries are copied in a northern dialect, most likely the work of a single scribe, toward the end of the fourteenth century. For descriptions of the manuscript and a complete list of its contents, see The Pauline Epistles Contained in MS. Parker 32, ed. Margaret Joyce Powell, EETS, e.s. 116 (London, 1916), ix-xxi; M. R. James, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Cambridge, 1912), 1:64-65; and Kari Anne Rand, The Index of Middle English Prose: Handlist XX: Manuscripts of the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 4-5. And for a more recent study of the manuscript and its significance to the vernacular commentarial tradition, see A. B. Kraebel, “Middle English Gospel Glosses and the Translation of Exegetical Authority,” *Traditio* 69 (2014): 87-123. The manuscript has been digitized and thumbnails are viewable at: http://dms.stanford.edu/catalog/CCC032_keywords <accessed September 29, 2016>.

\(^{17}\) The image in question is one of ten marginal illuminations that were added by an unknown artist to mark popular gospel lections, specifically passages with strong Marian associations, where they appear in the commentaries; other illuminations appear in the manuscript, but the noted images possess a particular programmatic function. For a more detailed study of the illumination program in Parker 32 See Ann Eljenholm Nichols, “The Illustrations of Corpus Christi College MS 32: ‘Pe Glose in Englissche Tunge,’” in *Image, Text, and Church, 1380-1600: Essays for Margaret Aston*, ed. Linda Clark et al. (Toronto, 2009), 37-67, at 47-50, 56.

Mawdelene” inscribed upon it. Framing the biblical passage as she does, the Magdalene figure lends her good name to the otherwise nameless sinner of Luke’s account. Taking the alabaster jar in hand, our saint picks up the sensuous intimations of the charged vessel and carries its rich symbolic burdens on her person. The ointment filled jar, through the creative handiwork of visual and textual commentators, at once signifies its owner’s allusively scandalous past, as a sign of corporeal opulence and indulgence, and her model conversion, as an instrument of spiritual sacrifice and repentance. This stripped-down image-text, operating in ways similar to the more elaborate De Lisle image, draws Mary Magdalene into the gutters of that certain sinful woman’s salacious past. The image-text signals for us a new beginning to the Magdalene story, opening a point of access to a revised version of her vita most famously popularized by Gregory the Great (d. 604) and forever enshrined in the Legenda Aurea (c. 1260s).

This medieval Magdalene finds her roots in Gregory the Great’s thirty-third homily. Preaching on the theme of Luke 7:36-50, Gregory constructs a hybrid figure out of three distinct biblical women: the nameless sinner who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:37), the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1, 12:3), and the aforementioned witness of the Resurrection from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). Folding these three women together, Gregory manufactures the ideal sinner-saint, a model

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19 The Middle English may be roughly translated as “this is the glossing of the gospel of Mary Magdalene,” though the terms expowynge and gospel possess considerable lexical range.


penitent whose dramatic fall and radical conversion is custom fit to stand for “us” all.22 The “abiding legacy” of Gregory’s formulation, as Theresa Coletti observes, is the Magdalene’s “permanent association with vice.”23 And though Gregory does not dwell on the specifics of her sins, only their totalizing effects, by placing Mary Magdalene in the role of the peccatrix he “secured” for her the identity of a “sexual sinner.”24 Working some six centuries later, Jacobus de Voragine cements the saint’s reputation as a sexual sinner in the Legenda Aurea, a hagiographic collection with unparalleled influence in the late medieval period. The influential account offers a compelling explanation for how it was that Mary Magdalene came to be called peccatrix by name: “Renowned as she was for her beauty and her riches, she was no less known for the way she gave her body to pleasure—so much so that her proper name was forgotten and she was commonly called sinner.”25 Key to this simple formulation is the moral equation of action and identity, how her way of being affects (and, in this case, erases) her human value to the point of complete degradation, relegated as she was to the subcategory sinner. How is this possible? How could one give one’s self over so completely to sin?


24 Coletti, “Sociology of Transgression,” 2. Jansen suggest that Mary Magdalene transgressions were deemed sexual because many medieval thinkers believed “all feminine sin was expressed sexually” (Making of the Magdalen, 34); her suggestion, and the quotation, are drawn from, Ruth Mazo Karras, “Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend,” Journal of the history of Sexuality 1.1 (1990): 3-32, at 30.

Typecast in the role of “sexual sinner,” Mary Magdalene proved a pliable subject for medieval thinkers exploring the moral planes of human sensuality. Placing the Magdalene in compromising positions allowed moralists to express the erotic potentialities of touch, if only to articulate the moral threat of touching or touching like this “certain sinful woman.” This is how, in part, some commentators justified their decidedly misogynic readings of noli me tangere: that this certain sinner’s hand will always carry illicit sexual desire, that her touch will always threaten to corrupt divine, male flesh. To be sure, the refusal of noli me tangere was a gendered speech act, and did preclude erotic contact, if all heterosexual touch must be read erotically. But this is only one of the many possible readings, as our saint’s desire to touch the resurrected body in the garden is no more gendered and no less erotic than her desire to wash the feet of Jesus. My point is that we must remember that this “certain sinful woman” has a history of touching Jesus intimately, affectionately. So where we see Mary Magdalene sinning with her hands and feet, we must keep in mind—as many medieval readers had—that she will also be redeemed by the labor of her hands and feet. The saint’s undocumented past provided fertile ground for moralists to practice their sexual simulations, so to speak, in that medieval authors and artists populated her vacant past(s) to explicate and explore the ethical dimensions of sexuality without ever committing or commending such illicit acts firsthand. Simply put, the Magdalene’s revised vita opened her corpus to continued hamartiological experimentation: she is made to sin to teach “us” how to sin no more.

In the Middle English commentary on Luke, in a passage nearly adjacent to our guiding image-text of Mary Magdalene, we find an illustrative example of this editorializing practice. Reflecting on the tropological meaning of the alabaster jar, the
Middle English commentator offers a paraphrase of an often quoted passage from Gregory the Great’s thirty-third homily:

Seynte gregor seys: it is opyn, he seys, þat whyles þis woman gaf hyr to þo ill and to unlefful dedys, sche vsyd oynement forto make hyr body þo lykande and sweitar to hyr fals lufars; and now, he seys, sche offyrs dewowtely to crystes þat sche byfore vnleoffully vsid for styrryng of hyrsel and of oþer to synne.26

(Saint Gregory says: It is well known, he says, that when this woman gave herself over to these immoral and unlawful acts, she used her ointment to make her body all the more pleasing and sweeter to her false lovers; and now, he says, she offers devoutly for Christ’s use what she before used unlawfully for arousing herself and others to sin).

The immediate significance of this passage is in the density of indiscrete qualifiers framing our saint in sexually explicit terms. In a simple comparison to its sixth-century source, we can see how far the Magdalene has fallen in the medieval imagination, and how narrowly defined her past indiscretions have become in the intervening centuries and sources.27 On the alabaster jar, Gregory preached: “It is evident, my brothers, that the woman, once intent upon illicit deeds, applied the ointment like a scent to her own body. Therefore, what she had once disgracefully applied to herself, she now laudably offered

26 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS Parker 32, fols. 85v-86r.

27 While the passage originates from Gregory’s thirty-third homily, the more likely source for the Middle English commentator would have been Thomas Aquinas’s Catena Aurea (c.1262-64); “In Lucam,” 7.6.32, Catena Aurea in Quattuor Evangelia, ed. A. Guarienti, 2 vols. (Turin: Marietti, 1953), 2.104. On the sources of the Middle English commentary on Luke, see Kraebel, “Middle English Gospel Glosses,” 95.
The vernacular paraphrase certainly captures the moral tone of its source, but the Middle English commentator also interposes critical terminology to strike certain hamartiological notes over others. While Gregory alludes to the use of ointments as a cosmetic means to an immoral end, he leaves the particulars to our imagination. The vernacular commentator, on the other hand, supplements his source with the terms “unlefful” and “vnleoffully” (unlawful/ly), “fals lufars” (false lovers), and even the participial “styrryng” (arousing) to effectually eliminate any doubt: his saint was a prostitute.

The vernacular commentator’s string of terms is suggestive—suggestive because it recalls a version of Mary Magdalene not fully realized in his commentarial sources, but one wholly fleshed out in the late medieval imagination. To begin with, the phrase “fals lufars,” readily implies that Mary Magdalene’s sexual acts were indeed illicit and adulterous, with fals characterizing one “not conforming to the ideal type,” and lover marking one “who loves sexually.” But the phrase also hints at her possible social standing, where lover may also denote a “devotee of courtly love.” Accordingly, the phrase points to a persistent strain of social critique embedded in the Magdalene hagiography that, as we saw in the above excerpt from the Legenda Aurea, attributes her particular form of pride to a disproportionate combination of wealth and beauty (divitiis

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29 The participle “styrryng” carries the sense of “to affect” emotions or feelings, and is used with some frequency between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with the added sense of “to provoke” or “to arouse” the body or flesh to sin, specifically “to lechery” or “bodily temptation”; MED, s.v. stiren (v.), 9c.

30 MED, s.v. fals (adj.), 6a and 9; s.v. lover (n.2), 2a.

31 MED, s.v. lover (n.2), 2d.
The Magdalene’s embarrassment of riches, however, was not the formal cause of her moral decline. Instead, and this is critical to our understating of the moral critique, it was her persistent unwillingness to manage her inherited wealth and beauty that left her open to temptation. How one invests resources and labor, as seen in the example of the five talents from the previous chapter, constitutes what we have been referring to as a moral sense of touch.  

To pursue this line of thought further, consider the possible connections between the saint’s sexual, sensorial sin and what we might term a medieval leisure culture. The *Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalen* (c. 1300), for instance, attributes the saint’s decline to an abiding idleness. Following the generic evocation of pride, the poet sets to scrutinizing the saint’s symptomatic sloth:

Marie heo ne tolde nought bote al of hire pruyde,

Ake tharon was al hire thought, and faire hire to schruyde,

And seththe for to walke aboute to don hire flechses wille,

To gon and eorne feor and neor, bothe loude and stille.

For sothe, heo was riche inough, and so heo moste nede;

Manie riche men hire leighen bi and geven hire gret mede.  

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32 See discussion of the Parable of the Five Talents in chapter 3, 76-87.

33 *Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalen*, in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Sherry L. Reames, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 59-89, at 60-61, ll. 49-54. This account, Reames notes, is not part of the *South English Legendary* itself, though included with an early copy of the collection, Bodleian Library MS Laud Laud Misc. 108 (c. 1300). Reames, quoting Manfred Görlach, suggests this version of the legend is a much earlier poem that was inserted “as an emergency measure” and “adapted the heterogeneous text to the style of the SEL collection” (54); see also, Görlach, *Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs n.s. 6, (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1974), 181-82.
(Mary, she regarded nothing but her pride, / But thereon were all her thoughts, and to adorn herself beautifully, / And thereafter to wander about performing her flesh’s desire, / Going and running near and far, both loudly and quietly. / Indeed, she was rich enough, and so she must have been: / Many rich men have lain with her and given her generous compensation.)

The medieval understanding of sloth, to clarify, is a sin condition characterized not so much by inactivity (i.e. laziness) alone, but by a more general unwillingness to fulfill one’s moral obligations. 34 So while the wayward Magdalene enjoys an active lifestyle—eorne feor and neor, bothe loude and stille—her time, resources, and energies are misapplied: she is misruled by “flechses wille.” The poet reinforces this notion in contrasting our saint’s misspent energies with the well-used resources of her sister. Of Martha, the poet notes:

Martha nam hire brothur lond and hire sustres also,
And dude heom teolien wel inough, ase wys man scholde do;
Tharewith heo fedde alle heore men and clothede heom also,
Povere men and wummen, that weren neodfole and in wo. 35

34 See Siegfried Wenzel, The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 23-46. My working definition is derived from a section of the B-version of the Middle English treatise on the seven deadly sins, Pride, Wrath, and Envy, as copied in Cambridge, Trinity College MS. R.3.21, fols. 6r-7v, at fol. 7r: “When synneth a man in Slewthe? When he ys wery to do well and leueth that he ys bounde to do. And thus vnlusty wyll to do good, vntrusty hope of rewarde vnstablennes, ydylnes rechelesnesse of lernynge of techynge of praying and so vnkunynynge euer dwellyng cometh of thys syn. And the remedy for thys syn ys vertuous and trew occupacion bothe bodily and gostly w’ clene intent groundyd in beleue. De filio prodigo luxurioso . Luce xvmo.”

35 Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalen, 61, ll. 59-62.
(Martha took her bother’s land, and her sister’s too, / And caused them to be plowed perfectly, as any wise person would do; / Therewith she fed all her men, and clothed them also, / Poor men and women, who were in want and woe.)

Here, Martha puts her time, labor, and resources toward good works, most notably corporeal works of mercy. By calling attention to these contrasting labors, I mean to suggest that Mary Magdalene’s inclination toward vain thoughts, cosmetic rituals, and wanton wanderings, in so far as they are imagined by the poet, are symptomatic of the moral failings of an idle class. At issue here, then, is how to govern one’s self and worldly resources for the moral benefit (and even the temporal care) of others.

All of this talk of Mary Magdalene’s sins—from pride to sloth to lechery—is to prepare us for her dramatic conversion. Critical to her conversion is her ability to rehabilitate her bodily sense of touch and to redirect her resources toward more productive spiritual ends. Our understanding of Mary Magdalene’s conversion, then, hinges on her symbolic use and misuse, handling and mishandling, of the perfumed ointments within her token alabaster jar. Returning again to the Middle English commentary on Luke, we can recall the commentator’s heightened concern over Magdalene’s misuse of “oynement” to make herself “þo lykande” and “sweitar.” These sense-modifiers accentuate the aromatic quality of the ointment to stress the sensual allure of her wayward sexuality. Painted as a curator of sensory delights, this Magdalene applies her products seductively, in a cosmetic manipulation of her sensible self, with the explicit intent of “styrryng” her lovers (and herself!) in carnal pleasures. Again, our narrowed understanding of sin as misuse or misrule here means to prepare us for what
Mary Magdalene will eventually get right, as the commentator reminds us: “sche offyrs
dewowtely to crystes þat sche before vnleffully vsid.”

The image and texts of the Middle English commentary on Luke introduce us to
the figure of Mary Magdalene in her most vulnerable state. With her alabaster jar in hand,
we find the Magdalene in process, on the threshold of conversion, at once sinner and
saint. On each side, the sinner-saint carries her jar to different ends and smears her
ointments with different hands. Ointments applied for seduction are poured out to anoint.
Hands offered to lovers are held out for forgiveness. The transformation occurs in terms
of redirected labor, and a notably tactile labor at that. Remember, Mary Magdalene’s
conversion begins when she reaches and grasps Jesus with her controversial touch: “if he
were a prophete, [he] schulde knowe southly what and whatkyns sche is þat touchis hym”
(if he [Jesus] were a prophet, [he] would know surely who and of what sort she is who
touches him).36 To touch and be touched by “a certain sinful woman” risked
contamination, physical and spiritual. So when Jesus permitted this certain sinful woman
to touch him, when she reapplied her ointments to his divine body in devotion, they
together touched in a way that restored her good name—here begins “þe gospel of Mari
Mawdelene.”

And it is through this figure of Mary Magdalene that we have constructed for
study that we are able to probe the moral sense of touch applied to the social conditioning
of feeling in late medieval England. In what follows, we will concentrate on the sinful
side of the Magdalene’s alabaster jar. More specifically, we will examine how her
unregulated sense of touch as a “sexual sinner” informed the social politics of feeling

performed in the *Digby Mary Magdalene* play. The *Digby* dramatization of our sinner-saint’s fall illustrates the impact the moral tradition had on the performance and regulation of tactile values, both on the theatrical stage and in the public marketplace.

*All the Comforts of Hell: Marketplace Morality and the Digby Mary Magdalene*

The *Digby Mary Magdalene* is best described as a “sprawling” theatrical “spectacle,” which is perhaps the most befitting style for a dramatic tribute to our ever-evolving composite saint. The play comprises some fifty loosely linked scenes, with over forty speaking parts, to be performed upon no fewer than nineteen acting sites. The *Digby Mary Magdalene* follows the basic narrative structures set by its biblical and hagiological sources, but the playwright also invents a number of episodes that, much like a modern biopic, embellish critical moments of the saint’s legend for sensational

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affect and psychological effect.\textsuperscript{39} Two episodes in particular, the adjoined Council of Hell and Tavern scenes, find the playwright at his most innovative. In these scenes, drawing “encyclopedically” on the techniques and themes of medieval theater, the playwright blends allegorical and historical modes of representation in a unique attempt to illustrate the diabolical mechanics of Mary Magdalene’s fall and ensuing demonic possession.\textsuperscript{40} This temporary slide into allegory presents forms familiar to medieval theatergoers, namely the Seven Deadly Sins personified, but perhaps with some unexpected alterations. More precisely, the Council and Tavern scenes work to distil the universal lessons of medieval morality plays into a highly localized performance and critique of late medieval consumer culture.\textsuperscript{41}

“Localized” may be a somewhat misleading term here, as we know very little about the textual and performance histories of the Digby play. By “localized” then, I mean to suggest the cultural environments made visible in and through the play text, the local expressions that surface through comparative textual and historical analyses. The Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene} is itself a curious artifact. The unique copy of the text is

\textsuperscript{39} The idea of “sensational affect,” still in the earliest stages of theorization, seeks to recuperate the aesthetic and ethical values of sensationalisms, as appeals to (or encounters with) the senses, in the processes of human understanding and identity (individual and social) formation. For a recent study, see John Jervis, \textit{Sensational Subjects: The Dramatization of Experience in the Modern World}, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).


\textsuperscript{41} “What [morality] plays have in common most obviously is that they offer their audiences moral instruction through dramatic action that is broadly allegorical... The dramatic variety this material offered was a direct product of the details of contemporary belief, particularly regarding the degree of control that the individual had in this world over his fate in the next”; Pamela M. King, “Morality Plays,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Middle English Theater}, ed. Richard Beadle, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 240-64, at. 240.
preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 133, a significant sixteenth-century anthology of late-medieval dramatic texts, including the only other extant Middle English saint’s play, The Conversion of Saint Paul.42 The Digby text was copied around 1515-1525, and its first known owner was Myles Blomefylde (1525-1603), a notable physician, alchemist, and antiquarian hailing from Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk.43 Little else is known for sure about Mary Magdalene’s early history, though linguistic analysis suggests that the play was produced in or around East Anglia near the close of the fifteenth century (c. 1490s).44 Theresa Coletti has convincingly speculated, on more than one occasion, that Mary Magdalene exhibits a certain “social self-awareness” that points to its “probable origins in a prosperous urban venue,” perhaps King’s Lynn or Norwich.45

Despite our lack of documentary evidence, the urban hypothesis is “heuristically useful” to our own thinking about the moral dimensions of the constructed sensory environments of the play text.46 The Digby Mary Magdalene’s thematic interests and material concerns, as we will see, are very much invested in the “idea” of the medieval urban marketplace. We know from the work of economic historians that the import and

42 Baker, Murphy, and Hall, The Late Medieval Religious Plays, xxx-xxxiii.


44 Baker, Murphy, and Hall, The Late Medieval Religious Plays, xxx, xl.

45 Coletti cautiously suggests an origin in either King’s Lynn or Norwich, which “in the early sixteenth century were the major urban centers of East Anglia and two if the wealthiest towns in England”; “Hagiography, Lay Religion, and the Economics of Salvation,” 344. See also, “The Sociology of Transgression in the Digby Mary Magdalene,” “The Design of the Digby Play of Mary Magdalene” and “Social Contexts of the East Anglian Saint Play: The Digby Mary Magdalene and the Late Medieval Hospital?,” in Medieval East Anglia, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 287-301. For more on the cultural context and institutional associations of East Anglian Drama, see Gail McMurray Gibson’s The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

trade of luxury goods (wine, spices, fine cloth, precious metals and rare stones), the very sort of products appearing in and assessed throughout *Mary Magdalene*, constituted the allure of the medieval urban marketplace. And this idea of the urban marketplace will become particularly useful to our understanding of the psychology of seduction governing the many scenes of consumption, from feasting to fornication, set upon the Digby stages. In fact, as Richard Newhauser reminds us, medieval moralists expressed some anxiety over the multisensoriality of the marketplace, finding its “unregulated” sensory environments especially conducive to sins of sensorial curiosity (*curiositas*). The marketplace, and this is especially true for the medieval monastic tradition, was considered a “potentially threatening” site precisely because it “allowed multisensory indulgence.” Moreover, moral commentators were suspicious of the luxury goods


49 Newhauser, “The Senses, the Medieval Sensorium, and Sensing (in) the Middle Ages,” 1572.
brought to market because, as Christopher Dyer puts it, they were not utilitarian. The luxury market traded in nonessential, ornamental distractions to be consumed in a temporary, fleeting sense of enjoyment: pleasures for pleasure’s sake. In pursuing the tactile modes of Mary Magdalene then, thinking conceptually about the play’s theoretical ties to the urban marketplace—as a site of commercial, cultural, and sensorial activity—promotes critical and necessarily creative reflection on the socioeconomic conditions of touch: on how the marketplace multiplies opportunities to touch and be touched, on how interpersonal and inter-objective tactile encounters are shaped by economic discourses, and on how certain acts of touching and being touched are coded to reflect social standing and/or to enforce social stratification.

The Digby Mary Magdalene draws upon such discourses of desire to cultivate its own psychology of seduction in its exploration of our sinner-saint’s fall. Mary Magdalene’s troubles arise in the wake of her father’s death. At the close of an emotionally charged funerary scene, we leave Mary Magdalene mired in grief when her lamentations occasion an emergency session of the Council of Hell. In this calculated shift into the allegorical mode, the historical drama unfolding at Magdalene Castle is


52 Dyer notes that while luxury status had economic significance, it was cultural factors made certain goods more desirable than others; social factors determined the forms of “pleasure, taste, and fashion,” meaning that luxury status was fluid over “space and time” and luxury goods were “perceived differently at different social levels”; “Luxury Goods in Medieval England,” 219.
temporarily put on hold to give audiences a behind-the-scenes glimpse into psychological and sociological conditions of our sinner-saints’s impending moral decline. The Council of Hell calls together the Three Enemies of Humankind—The World, The Flesh, and The Devil—along with their retinue, the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride and Avarice in the company of The World; Lechery, Sloth, and Gluttony, The Flesh; Wrath and Envy, The Devil.53 This emergency session is called, we learn, to discuss the iniquitous opportunity Mary Magdalene’s emotional vulnerability presents:

DEVIL. Syrus dyyd þis odyr day—

Now Mary, hys dowctor, þat may,

Of þat castel beryt þe pryse.

WORLD. Sertenly serys, I yow telle,

Yf she in vertu stylle may dwelle,

She xal byn abyll to dystroye helle.54

(The Devil: Cyrus has recently died. / Now Mary, his daughter, that maid, / Possesses the prize of that castle. / The World: Truly, lords, I say, / If she continues to live virtuously, / She shall have the capacity to destroy hell.)

The exchange between The Devil and The World marks important changes in the Digby depiction of our sinner-saint’s fall, in that her beginning is virtuous and her temptation


54 Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy, and Louis B. Hall, ed., The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160, EETS o.s. 283 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 37, ll. 415-420; hereafter cited as Digby Mary Magdalene. I have also regularized the names of characters for ease.
complex. The Digby account moves past the precondition of pride codified in the hagiological record by investing her figure with some emotional depth, expressed through the trauma in the loss of her father, Cyrus, and by further instrumentalizing her economic situation, alluded to in the material of her inherited castle.

The combined impact of emotional loss and economic gain, as hinted at in The Devil’s briefing, leaves the Magdalene unusually vulnerable to temptation. After some deliberation, the peers of the diabolical realm appoint Lady Lechery lead instigator in their take-down mission. That Lady Lechery is selected above the other sins, and that her sinful skill set is especially suited to the task at hand, is rather instructive. First, this strategic attack posits a psychology of sin that isolates, as its principle target, the human desire for emotional and physical comfort. Second, the “labor of lechery” intends to exploit this desire in Mary Magdalene by luring her into a false sense of comfort.55 The “fayer” form of Lady Lechery, here figured as the embodied allure of the marketplace, will offer the saint a spectrum of sensual pleasures to provide temporary relief of her felt pain: but these are shortsighted solutions.56 Put another way, the Digby Mary Magdalene posits a psychology of sin that reads a range of consumer activities, in particular those approaching and touching sexual misconduct, as worldly distractions to the more permanent pleasures made available in and through the moral life.57 So, as we follow

55 Digby Mary Magdalene, 38, l. 432.

56 Digby Mary Magdalene, 35, l. 347; 38, l. 423.

57 Digby’s Lady Lechery (Luxsurya) reprises early medieval understandings of luxuria, before the term was almost exclusively connected to sexual sinfulness. Most of the recorded usages given for the vernacular cognate luxuri in the Middle English Dictionary, for instance, speak to sexual or sensual sins specifically, and only a few of lavish living or consumption generally. The Digby personification resembles older formulations, such as the allegorical figure Luxuria in Prudentius’ Psychomachia (c. 405), in her enjoyment of luxury goods and other forms of self-indulgence; see Prudentius, Psychomachia, trans. H. J. Thomson,
Lady Lechery through the Garden of Flesh and into the Tavern, we encounter a series of moral commentaries on the dangers of misdirected desire: a desire to indulge the senses, a desire to comfort the body, a desire to alleviate suffering through the consumption of products and experiences.

*Lechery in the Garden*

To appreciate how Lady Lechery functions within play’s moral economy, we must first understand her social network, that is, her relations and status in the Court of King Flesh. We first meet King Flesh delighting in his garden, which reads something like a laboratory of luxuries:

I, Kyng of Flesch, florychyd in my flowers,
Of deyntys delycyows I have grett domynacyon!
So ryal a kyg was neuyr borne in bowrys,
Nor hath more delyth, ne more delectation!
For I haue comfortat y wys to my comfortacyon:
Dya galonga, ambra, and also margaretton—
Alle þis is at my lyst, a3ens alle vexacyon!
All wykkyt thyngys I woll sett asyde.
Clary, pepur long, wyth granorum paradysy,
3en3ybyr and synamom at euery tyde—

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Lo, alle swych deyntyys delcyas vse l!
Wyth swyche deyntyys I have my blysse! 58
(I, King of Flesh, adorned with my flowers, / Over sensuous delicacies I hold
high rule! / So royal a king was never born in any bower, / Nor has one had more
delight, nor more pleasure. / For I have certain comfort for my ease: /
pharmaceutical galangal, ambergris, and also marguerite. / All of this is at my
command (will) against all discomfort / All displeasing things I will set aside. /
Clary, long peppers, with grains of paradise, / Ginger and cinnamon, always. /
Lo, I use all such sensuous delicacies. / With such delicacies I have my bliss!)

King Flesh’s inventory goes a long way to foreground the connection between the allure
of the medieval marketplace and the dangers of sensual sin. As Holly Dugan notes, the
above catalog features items that were traded and sold with some regularity throughout
the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by English merchants, including the famed Grocers
Company of London. 59 These same items are also listed in The Comodytes of Englond, a
short document attributed to Sir John Fortescue (d. 1479), among the many “hethyn
goods” sold by English “grocers” and “pottcarys” (apothecaries). 60 Others have pointed
to the prominence of pharmaceutical and perfumery grade sundries of the garden

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58 Digby Mary Magdalene, 35, ll. 334-; 38, l. 423.

59 Holly Dugan, The Ephemeral History of Perfume (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 38
and “Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England,”
Journal of Medieval & Early Modern Studies 38 (2008) 229-52, at 237. And for a comprehensive study of
the Grocers’ Company, see Pamela Nightingale, A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers’

60 John Fortescue, The Comodytes of Englond, in The Works of Sir John Fortescue, Knight..., ed. Thomas
Fortescue Clermont, (London, 1869), 553. On John Fortescue, see E. W. Ives, “Fortescue, Sir John (c.1397-
2015 >.
generally, but we might still benefit from further consideration of the many other cosmetic applications and culinary preparations of its stock.\textsuperscript{61} Long pepper, grains of paradise, and cinnamon are aromatic spices with countless culinary uses, as a cursory survey of any medieval cookery shows.\textsuperscript{62} Galangal and clary are equally exotic aromatics procured for their medicinal qualities, but both were also staple ingredients in spiced wine recipes. “Ambra” is commonly taken by editors of the play text to indicate ambergris, a waxy secretion emitted from the intestines of sperm whales commonly used in perfume manufacture, but it could also stand for yellow amber. While yellow amber was also added to perfumes, it was sometimes ground with pearls (“margaretton”) and prescribed by medieval physicians for “quakinge cardiale,” a heart condition thought to be brought on by excessive emotion.\textsuperscript{63} At bottom, this symbolically rich garden supplies King Flesh with a host of raw materials, the ingredients necessary for the production of delightful goods medicinal, cosmetic, culinary, and otherwise. In the Garden of Flesh natural resources are cultivated, goods engineered, and luxuries manufactured to promote sensual pleasure (“Wyth swyche deyntyys I have my blysse!”) and to ensure bodily comfort (“I haue confortat ywys to my comfortacyon!”). The Garden of Flesh, a perfect


blend of apothecary and pleasure garden, encapsulates the very *not utilitarian* qualities of the late medieval luxury market.

But how does all this affect the medieval sense of touch specifically? On the theoretical level, if we understand labor as an extension of the sense of touch, then we can read the above garden activities as a mismanagement of the tactile mode. Yet this scene goes further, reminding us that the five senses rarely operate in isolation or to the exclusion of one another. What I mean to suggest here is that seduction, the aim of King Flesh’s labor, is a multi-sensual enterprise culminating in the most complete engagement of the many physical and emotional senses of feeling. In the words of King Flesh, “Who woll covett more game and gle /My fayere spowse Lechery to halse and kysse?” (Who could desire more amorous pleasure and play, / My fair spouse Lechery, to caress and kiss?). Here, King Flesh playfully leverages his sensual garden delights for even greater haptic pleasures. His is an immodest invitation, but one Lady Lechery will not refuse:

Oh ye prynse, how I am ful of ardent lowe,
Wyth sparkyllys ful of amerowsnesse!
Wyth yow to rest fayn wold I aprowe,
To shew plesavns to your jentynesse.66

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64 For reflections on touch as labor, see Chapter 3, 89-91.

65 Digby *Mary Magdalene*, 35, l. 347.

66 Digby *Mary Magdalene*, 35, ll. 352-55
(Oh Prince, how I am brimming with burning love, / With sparkles abounding in amorousness! / I would willingly approve lying with you, / to show pleasure to your generosity.)

The response of Lady Lechery channels a discourse of desire teeming with sensorial allusions and evocative euphemisms. Perhaps her seductive “sparlkyllys” reflect her made-up countenance glistening with the “greasy, hot, savory” cosmetics derived from ambergris, as Dugan suggests.67 Or maybe her “sparlkyllys” are suggestive of her costuming, a stunning sequenced spectacle designed to illuminate her allegorical figure and worn to accentuate her seductive nature. In both senses, her figure “ful of ardent lowe” is fashioned to spark desire.68 And Lechery’s efforts succeed where King Flesh, moved by her offer “to shew plesavns,” is compelled to touch: “I must yow kiss! / I am ful of lost to halse yow” (I must kiss you, I am full of desire to embrace you).69

For all the multisensual delights of the garden scene, this flirtatious exchange achieves its climax in and through the sense of touch. It is only when Flesh and Lechery finally embrace, as we must imagine they would have, that the sensorial mechanics of seduction are laid bare. The connections between consumption and desire cultivated in the garden scene preview the conditions of the tavern where, in the Digby version of events, Mary Magdalene gives herself over to a life of sin.


68 The term has an active quality to it, as in “to spark” or “to stoke,” as it is sometimes used to describe embers and hot debris; MED, s.v. sparkle and sparklen. Accordingly, it is rather fitting to think about Lady Lechery as beaming with desire, literary and figuratively.

69 Digby Mary Magdalene, 35, ll. 355-56.
Lechery in the Tavern

The “sins of the tavern” is a category of sin concerned with the interrelationship between lechery and gluttony. Looking to the many manuals of moral instruction circulating in late medieval England, each in their own way indebted to Friar Laurent’s immensely influential Somme le Roi (c. 1279), we can see how these sins evolved and came together over time to provide a theological foundation for moral and social critiques of tavern culture.\(^\text{70}\) In the Book of Vices and Virtues (c. 1375), for example, the tavern sins are introduced in a string of wonderfully mixed metaphors:

> Now 3e haue herde þe synnes of glotonye and lecherie, and for suche synnes bygynneþ most aþ þe tauerne, þer is þe well of synne... þe tauerne is þe deuelve scole hous, for þere studieþ his discipes, and þere lerneþ his scolers, and þere is his owne chapel, and þere men and wommen rede and syngeþ and serueþ hym, and þere he doþ his myracles as longeþ þe deuel to do.\(^\text{71}\)

(Now you have heard of the sins of gluttony and lechery, and these sins usually begin at the tavern . . . the tavern in the devil’s schoolhouse, where his disciples study and...

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\(^{71}\) Book of Vices and Virtues, 53.
his scholars learn; and it is [the devil’s] own chapel, where men and women read and
sing and serve him, and where he does his miracles that belong to the devil to do.)
This schoolhouse analogy encourages us to think about the tavern sins pedagogically:
how could the tavern teach us to sin?

The miseducation of Mary Magdalene afforded medieval audiences a negative
exemplum, for sure, but there remain lessons for modern readers to glean from the
performance of tavern sins as well. In the devil’s schoolhouse, under the tutelage of Lady
Lechery, Mary Magdalene proves herself a model student. She begins with the subject of
gluttony. Of all the capital sins, gluttony proved especially difficult for moralists to
define. For one, eating and drinking are in and of themselves neutral and necessary acts.
Moralists were therefore in need of strategies to distinguish between the acts and the
outcomes of consumption. This is why, following the example of Gregory the Great,
many medieval authors found it useful to divide gluttony into five branches: those who
eat and drink too soon, too much, too avidly, too extravagantly, and too sumptuously.
The discourse of gluttony is, in many ways, a discourse on decorum.

In the numerous manuals of moral education prepared for the laity, for instance,
we find protracted discussions over the quality, occasion, and effect of everyday
consumer habits. Consider the treatment of those who eat “ouerdeliciousliche” (too

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72 Vincent-Casy, “Between Sin and Pleasure,” 393, passim; and for a more contemporary take on the

73 Cf. Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, 30.16.60, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 143 B, (Turnhout: Brepols
Publishers, 1985), 1531-32. F.N.M. Diekstra, commenting on the rubric for Gluttony in Book for A Simple
and Devout Woman, helpfully reminds us that the five branches were often summarized in the mnemonic
“prepopere. laute. nimir. ardenter. studiose.”; Book for A Simple and Devout Woman: A Late Middle
English Adaptation of Peraldus’s Summa de Vitiis et Virtutibus and Friar Laurent’s Some le Roi
(Gronigen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 254, 518 n. 5972.
sumptuously) in *Book for A Simple and Devout Woman*, a fifteenth-century adaptation of *Somme le Roi.* What defines this particular branch of gluttony is disproportionate care: “likynge of þe mete þat saueri was made and of the wyne þat þei dronke þat was so fyne, and seþen of the spicery and of þe blauche poudere þat after mete þey ete wiþ plente of pymente þat þei hadde atte wille” ([They] delight in flavorfully prepared food, and of the choice wine that they had drunk, and after of the spiced delicacies and of the sugar confections they ate with an abundance of spiced wines). The enthusiasm over the preparations, prices, and even the lasting impressions of food and drink picks up on the very social nature of the sense of taste as an instrument of distinction and refinement. The Book’s critique aims to reckon these misspent efforts and misallocated resources of an idle class, a critique resonant to our study of Mary Magdalene’s fall. The true cost of excess, the Book contends, is the social effects of its waste. The labor and resources given to extravagances are misapplied at the expense of the poor, a point powerfully articulated in the Book’s most haunting analogy: “hit is þe flesh of þe poure man alle þat þei ete and hure blode þei drynken when þei wiþ hure gloteny wasteþ” (it is the flesh of all poor men that they eat, and their blood they drink, when they with their gluttony waste).

The connections between excess, comfort, and sensation are critical to the medieval psychology of gluttony informing the Digby *Mary Magdalene*. If we think about gluttony as an inverse relationship between sense stimuli and sense regulation, then

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74 *Book for A Simple and Devout Woman*, 261.

75 *Book for A Simple and Devout Woman*, 261.


77 *Book for A Simple and Devout Woman*, 250.
perhaps we can also begin to see how a culture that overvalues excess and comfort is ethically problematic. It is significant that Lady Lechery’s first offer of comfort comes through an invitation to taste: “pe comfort and pe sokower / Go ner we take a tast” (Let us draw near and taste this comfort, this remedy).  

The more Mary Magdalene indulges her senses, the less control she will have over them. The more comfortable she is made to feel, say with the aid of wine, the more susceptible she is made to sin. The Digby Mary Magdalene is not alone in such considerations. The Fasciculus Morum, a fourteenth-century Latin handbook for preachers, registers a similar concern over the effects of excessive consumption:

> And notice that a Glutton strives to inebriate all his senses. For his sight is charmed by the splendor of the wine and the beautiful sight of other food and drink; his touch, by chilled drinks and hot food; his taste, by their savor, his smell by their aroma. And since there is nothing in a glass that might appeal to his ear, he takes the lyre and tambourine with which he goads his wretched appetite into hot desire.

Gluttony is here defined by an inordinate desire to overstimulate the five senses. While overstimulation may open the self—mind, body, and soul—to heightened experience, this sort of pleasure comes at a cost.

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78 Digby Mary Magdalene, 40, ll. 481-82.


80 While we are primarily interested in the supposedly negative effects of overconsumption, as this is a study invested in the medieval notion of sense-based sins, we should acknowledge the positive effects and views of consumption associated with medieval culinary and pharmaceutical arts. As Vincent-Cassy notes, “The gradual medicalization of urban society in the late Middle Ages spread the belief through a widening array of social classes in the beneficial value of wine for health and in its power to evoke joy or move the passions of the sensitive soul,” in “Between Sin and Pleasure” (402). And in Dietarium de sanitatis custodia, a personal dietary prepared by Gilbert Kymer (d. 1463) for Humphrey Duke of Gloucester (d. 1447), a variety of foodstuffs and physical activities, namely sexual intercourse, were prescribed to
And this is precisely why drunkenness, a subset of gluttony, was of such great concern. Drunkenness is not simply a sin of excess. Its sin is in its effects: inebriated senses and lowered inhibitions, and the very tangible ways it affects individuals and their relationships. The *Omne Bonum*, a Latin encyclopedia completed in England by 1375, includes a remarkable rendering of the very antisocial nature of tavern sins in the spectacle of shame illustrating its entry for *ebrietas* (drunkenness).\(^81\) It is difficult to decipher what each of the drunken figures is up to here. What exactly is that central figure doing to himself? Perhaps the confusion of the image is just the point, and perhaps we are to embrace the collective chaos of the scene as its most defining characteristic.

These are the inebriated of the *Fasciculus Morum*, the wayward drunkards who “make their pilgrimage to the tavern” to lose their senses (*sensum*) and to abandon all reason (*omnia membra racionis*).\(^82\) To overindulge the senses is to relinquish control.

As our sampling of sources suggests, medieval moralists were acutely aware of the potential of foodstuffs and libations to “goad” the body into indulging “hot desire.” There is a certain anatomy of desire that links gluttony to lechery in the medieval imagination. Gregory the Great even went so far as to establish a physiological correlation between the two sins in his *Morals on the Book of Job*: “[I]t is plain to all that

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\(^82\) *Fasciculus Morum*, 637.
lust springs from gluttony, when in the very distribution of the members, the genitals appear placed beneath the belly. And hence when the one is inordinately pampered, the other is doubtless excited to wantonness."\(^{83}\) Again, note the emphasis on comfort, here registered as any desire that has been inordinately refreshed (\textit{inordinate reficitur}). And though his are invitations to imbibe more, it is significant that the Digby taverner describes his wines in terms echoing Gregory’s. Wine is a “repast” (refreshment) and “resoratyff” (restorative) that will “relyff” (relieve) all “stodyys and hevynes” (anxieties and sorrows).\(^{84}\) In other words: wine comforts. But to satisfy one desire, as Gregory warns, is to stoke another. Where inordinate appetites crave inordinate pleasures, gluttony will invariably give rise to lechery (and vice versa).

By way of comparison, let us turn to a related treatment of lechery by the Oxford Carmelite, Richard Lavynham (d. 1395). In \textit{A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins}, Lavynham’s popular contribution to the English moral tradition, sexual temptation is characterized, in unapologetically misogynistic terms, as an “abusyon” (misuse) of the senses.\(^{85}\) Of seductresses, he writes:


\(^{84}\) Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 40, ll. 485-88.

\(^{85}\) While Lavynham describes seduction as a uniquely feminine occupation, and though his misogyny is steeped in longstanding antifeminist and sex-critical traditions, it is important to keep in mind that these same moral abuses could be and were applied to men in the Middle Ages, just not as frequently.
[S]che entyce þe man as he were her lemman owt of kendely menner or passyng skilful manner, moor to performe lust þan for to multepleye froyt & in encresynge þe freelte of flesch to lykyng wt hote metis & drinks. wt spicys & medicynys. wt ydlesnes & esse. towching & kyssyng. & makyng cheer þat is vnchast.  

(She entices the man as though he were her beloved outside of natural relations, or in an exceedingly skillful manner, more to perform lust than to multiply offspring, and by intensifying the weakness of the flesh for pleasure with hot foods and drinks, with spices and medicaments, with idleness and ease, touching and kissing and making unchaste cheer.)

Unsurprisingly, seduction is a multisensual enterprise. Seduction involves enticing the senses, certainly, but before sexual arousal, the first task of seduction is to put the body at ease. Seduction takes a bit of knowhow, too. Lavynham’s seductress, much like King Flesh, manufactures an array of sensory delights with her “passyng skilful manner.” To achieve her desired ends she expertly plies her clients with culinary and cosmetic luxuries. And much like Lady Lechery, she proffers olfactory and gustatory delights in hot pursuit of the touch and feel of another. In a way, if we follow Lavynham’s logic here, we can say that those versed in the arts of seduction practice a kind of professionally unchaste hospitality.

Returning to the Digby play, we can view Mary Magdalene as both a subject and student of Lady Lechery’s unchaste hospitality. As Lady Lechery works to ruin our saint, she is also teaching her how to be a prostitute. This is why the tavern setting is so critical to the Digby recounting of Mary Magdalene’s fall. The unregulated sensory

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environments of medieval taverns were uniquely conducive to sins of sensorial curiosity. While medieval understandings of curiosity (curiositas) were varied and complex, we find in the later middle ages a growing concern over a particular kind of curiosity characterized by misplaced or excessive care (cura) for worldly matters. Such misplaced cares included what some moralists would define as “aimless” applications of the senses. As Richard Newhauser puts it, sins of sensorial curiosity occur when “sensation becomes an end in itself.” The appearance of the figure Curiosity, then, marks the final stages of our saint’s formal miseducation. Cast as “a frysch new galavnt” (a contemporary man of fashion), Curiosity is a figure ruled by inordinate appetites, a perfect tutor in the arts of aimless desire. Through their evocative exchanges, orchestrated as they are by Lady Lechery, Mary Magdalene and Curiosity work together to put the nefarious lessons of lechery into perfect practice.

Their working syllabus comprises a step-by-step program resembling treatments of lechery commonly found in confessional and other late medieval manuals of moral instruction. In *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, for example, the operations of lust are described as a five step process: “þurgh þe folily lokes comeþ a man to speke, and fro speche to touchynge, and fro touchynge to kissynge, and fro þe kissynge to þe foule deede of synne. And thus slyly bryngeþ þe deuel fro on-to another” (through lascivious looks, a man comes to speak; and from speech to touching, and from touching to kissing, 

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87 Newhauser, “Towards a History of Human Curiosity: A Prolegomenon to its Medieval Phase,” 563.
90 Digby *Mary Magdalene*, 40, l. 491
and from kissing to the wicked deed of sin. And in this way, the devil cleverly brings [him] from one [step] to the other.\textsuperscript{91} As a survey of the tavern scene shows, Mary Magdalene’s dalliance with Curiosity follows the five steps of lechery to her ruin. \textit{Look}. Lady Lechery directs our saint’s gaze: “his man is for 3ow, as I se can” (this man is for you, as I do see).\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Listen}. Curiosity flatters the receptive Magdalene: “Your sofreyn colourys set with synseryte!” (Your supreme disposition is beset with honesty!).\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Touch}. Curiosity invites the Magdalene to dance: she assents, and they embrace.\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Kiss}. No kiss is referenced in the script or stage directions, but it is not unreasonable to imagine that the actors would want to elevate the erotic energy of the scene for the pleasure of audiences—not to mention that such an exchange would effectually recall the kiss shared by King Flesh and Lady Lechery. \textit{Sex}. As for the “pe foule dede of synne,” this too is implied. In their final onstage exchange, Curiosity extends his thinly veiled invitation to Mary Magdalene: “wol yow do be my rede? wyll we walk to another stede?” (will you heed my urging? . . . shall we walk to another place?).\textsuperscript{95} To this Mary Magdalene enthusiastically replies, “ewyn” (right away).\textsuperscript{96} Any questions over what they got up to offstage are answered when we next meet our sinner-saint lounging in an arbor—perhaps

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Book of Vices and Virtues}, 43. See also the extended treatment of the five stages of lechery in \textit{Fasciculus Morum}, 648-67.

\textsuperscript{92} Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 40, l. 507.

\textsuperscript{93} Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 41, ll. 516-17

\textsuperscript{94} Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 41, ll. 530-31.

\textsuperscript{95} Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 41, ll.540, 542.

\textsuperscript{96} Digby \textit{Mary Magdalene}, 42, ll. 543.
an allusion to the Garden of Flesh—delighting in memories of her former “valentynys” (lovers). Mary Magdalene has fallen.

**Noli Me Tangere: A Poetic Intervention**

We have gone a long way to stress the connections between bodily comfort and moral susceptibility. In the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, luxuries are offered and accepted as false comforts and always to the moral detriment of our saint. The *not necessary* products of the garden and the *not measured* consumption of the tavern are shown to undermine physical and spiritual wellbeing. She was plied with luxuries not only to impair her senses, but also to affect her sensibilities. Hitting bottom, Mary Magdalene was left feeling unlike her once upright self, and more like Lady Lechery. But all this sinful feeling is just the preamble to our saint’s drama. To the medieval imagination, remember, the Magdalene is made to sin for a reason: her spectacular fall means to amplify her dramatic conversion. We have seen how the Magdalene was made to exemplify the immoral senses of touch, how she was made to feel like a prostitute, but we have yet to consider how she felt her way back to spiritual health.

We began this chapter contemplating visual representations of the *noli me tangere* and its prohibitive sense of our saint’s touch. Dwelling on the details of the *De Lisle* psalter, the addition of the alabaster jar revised our narrow reading of the scene. I suggested that the alabaster jar invited viewers to hold the prohibitive sense of the refused hand—*noli*—in a theoretically productive apposition with the permissive sense of the hand that had touched Jesus—*me tangere*. Close readings of the Digby garden and tavern

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97 Digby *Mary Magdalene*, 43, l. 564.
scenes have shown how the Magdalene lost herself through her many imagined mishandlings, and perhaps why certain men thought she should not have been permitted to touch at all. She was made that certain sinful woman who had too far fallen, who had lost her good name, who had been deemed untouchable. But she did touch Jesus.

On the one hand, the foot washing episode brings a significant corrective to the restrictive readings of the *noli me tangere*. A closer look at the Magdalene’s other tactile associations necessarily frustrates hyper literal readings of the scene—as more than an outright refusal of feminine and/or erotic touch—in that we must also contend with our sinner-saint’s long history of touching and being touched by Jesus. So while her touch (or our reading of her touch) does not overcome the misogyny of the events entirely, the Magdalene does complicate the gendered politics of religious touch ancient, medieval, and beyond. When we pick up again with Doubting Thomas in the next chapter, we will also see that the two saints hold the most in common where their tactile encounters were used to model pro-tactile modes of devotion.

On the other hand, medieval accounts of the foot washing episode (Luke 7:36-50) advanced their own moral senses of touch. A unique Middle English verse paraphrase of the biblical narrative, for instance, reads the story as a rehabilitation of tactile labor. Thinking through the conditions of the sinner-saint’s penitential feelings—the when and where and how she moves to touch—is here made a morally productive exercise. How Mary Magdalene handles the divine body matters.

By way of conclusion, then, I want to revisit the site of her conversion as it was reimagined in this unique medieval paraphrase. The only known copy of this yet united poem survives in an early fifteenth-century religious miscellany: now London, British
Library, MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fols. 103v-107r (Royal).\footnote{The Royal miscellany is a collection of grammatical, catechetical, and penitential texts set together in what appears to be a sort of pastoral handbook; and the themes of the poem exemplify the penitential thinking in many of the collected works, including John Mirk’s Instructions for Parish Priests and Richard Maidstone’s Seven Penitential Psalms. Emily Steiner gives 1425 as the terminus ante quem; Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 218. The early provenance of this manuscript is unknown, though the dialectical features suggest it was produced in Northern England. For descriptions of the manuscript see Gillis Kristensson, John Mirk’s Instructions for Parish Priests, Lund Studies in English 49 (Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri, 1974), and Robert E. Lewis and Angus McIntosh, A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the Prick of Conscience, Medium Ævum Monographs n.s. 12 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1982).} The Royal poem is easy to miss where it has been appended to a version of the South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalene.\footnote{See, for example, George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson, Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King’s Collections, 4 vols (London: British Museum, 1921), 2. 243-45. The work was given its own entry in Index of Middle English Verse, ed. Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), no. 859. Numerous lines of text are illegible on account of severe water damage, which is perhaps another reason the text continues to be overlooked.} Of all the events in her vita, that the Royal scribe/compiler should choose to double back and dwell upon the saint’s conversion is instructive. A near three hundred line addendum to the vita, this poetic intervention seems especially concerned with the tactile conditions of the narrative.\footnote{Comprising a short paraphrase and exposition on the foot washing episode, the poem functions in ways similar to a biblical commentary. In fact, the Royal poem borrows heavily from the medieval commentary tradition where it expands and expounds upon theologically resonate phrases and actions of the biblical narrative to establish the Magdalene as a model penitent.} All told, the Royal poem rehearses the foot washing scene four times: once from each character’s point of view—Mary Magdalene’s, Simon the Pharisee’s, and Jesus’—and once from a commentator’s point of view. With each rehearsal of the scene, a particular set of tactile values is reinforced. The poem returns us to the site of conversion, an underexamined plot point of the vita, for an extended meditation upon our sinner-turned-saint’s penitential feelings.
The first lesson concerns the Magdalene’s tangible goods and services, past and present. Mary Magdalene first voices the terms of her rehabilitation in a reimagined confessional prayer:

To þe þat as now no3t in þi wylle
þat synfull man sall dye 7 spylle,
Bot þat þai þan to penance gyfe,
7 turne þam to gode werkys 7 lufe.101

(To you, whose present will it is not / For the soul of sinful men to waste and perish, / But instead for them to submit to penance /And turn themselves toward good works and love.)

The above lines foreground the tactility of the coming conversion scene, specifically where penitential practices are tied to good works. As we saw in the Middle English commentary on Luke, the reinvestment of material wealth and bodily labor is critical to the success of this certain sinful woman’s physical and spiritual conversions.102 The Royal poem works through intricacies of the Magdalene’s handling in its final rehearsal of her labors:

Scho wasched, scho dryde, scho smerd, sche kyst
Were bote of bale to wyn scho wyst.
Hys fete scho smerd for sothe þat tyde,
Wyt oynementes þat scho had usyd in pride.

101 London, British Library, MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 104v. The scribe has added nogt to the end of the first quote line, just outside the bracket marking the couplet; I have amended the line to preserve the rhyme scheme.

102 See n26.
Þat sumtyme had befor gyfwen\textsuperscript{103} 
Vnto hyre flesche foule to bywen, 
Wyt sorofull hart now scho it profers 
And lawly to god it offers.\textsuperscript{104}

(Šhe washed, she dried, she smeared [i.e. anointed], she kissed / Where she knew she would gain relief from suffering. / Šhe anointed his feet, truly this happened, / With ointments that she once used in pride. / ŠThat which she had formerly applied/ To her skin to cover it fouly / with repentant heart she proffers it now/ 
And humbly offers it to God.)

In a wonderfully haptic line, readers are drawn into a continuously tactile mode: \textit{she washed, she dried, she smeared, she kissed}. The proactive verbiage communicates the industry and urgency of the sinner-saint’s handiwork. The passage then goes on to model what a contrite reinvestment program should look like. The ointments once applied to her own body in pride are reapplied to the divine body in humility. The goods and services once purposed for seduction are repurposed for redemption. The Magdalene’s conversion hinges on how she offers \textit{(profers)} herself, her ointments, and her touch. An auspicious reading of the biblical text, for sure, but one that holds certain tactile values to be true: how one manages and uses resources is critical to cultivating a moral sense of touch.

And this brings us to our final lesson. This chapter has detailed the many ways Magdalene was made to sin: how her former self was shown to misspend her wealth,

\textsuperscript{103} The line reads “Þat sumtyme had gyfwen befor gyfwen”; the scribe has marked the first “gyfwen” for expunction.

\textsuperscript{104} MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 107r.
misgovern her senses, and mishandle others. When compared to Martha in the *South English Legendary*, for instance, her tactile values were shown wanting, and her inordinate care for luxuries proved damning. There is a critical awareness of this tradition found in the Royal poem as well. While the poem does not speak of her past in detail, the very public and very extravagant setting of her conversion does recall her lavish past.

Mary Magdalene is said to have wept in the presence of “ryche fodys” and to have offered “sorofyll teres” before “ryche men of ethely godys.” In fact, each rehearsal of the scene intentionally foregrounds the extravagance of Simon the Pharisee’s feast. What does it mean for the Magdalene to make her offering of tears and touch amidst such luxuries if not to suggest her complete transformation? Line after line, the poet praises the Magdalene for weeping and speaking and touching openly. And we cannot miss that she performs her penitence in the presence of the rich men and the rich goods she once used for seduction.

The poem ends with a final comparison that finds Mary Magdalene fully restored. At issue is Simon the Pharisee’s inability to recognize the appropriateness of the Magdalene’s touch, both physically and spiritually speaking. If Jesus was a prophet, the Pharisee thinks to himself, he would know the kind (*quae et qualis*) of woman who touched him (*quae tangit eum*): “she is a sinner” (*peccatrix est*). The vernacular paraphrase adds to these private murmurings in ways that emphasize just how controversial this certain sinful woman’s touch was for the Pharisee and his guests:

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105 MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 107v.


136
And [she] touches hym þus wít here handes:
Wedyr he ne wyte ne vndyrstndes
 þat scho es synfull and vnclene?
 þe synfull þat men mow sene,
Yf he wyst how scho has hyre borne,
He sofurd hyre not euer hym beforne.107
(And she touches him with her hands: / Does he not grasp or understand / That she is sinful and unclean? / This sinner who men can see, / If he knew [firsthand] how she had behaved, / He would never permit her before him.)
The above lines ring with self-righteous disgust. Simon the Pharisee knows this woman: who she is and what she does. What Simon does not know, however, is himself.

What distinguishes Mary Magdalene from Simon is her keen self-awareness in the moment: “Scho knew hyre self, he knew hym noght (She knew herself, he knew himself not).108 And if this moral lesson were not clear enough, the poem ends with a resounding condemnation of the Pharisee:

þis pharesen, so proude of mod,
Hys proud langoure noght wide-stode.
Of elatyôn no-thyng he stynt,
And knowyng of hym-selfe he tynt.
So of god warkys þat he ne wyst,
For þi of gostly hele he myst.

107 MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 105r.
108 MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 107v.
Falsly he held hym selffe reghtwyse
he warkys of mercy to dyspyce.¹⁰⁹

(This pharisee, so proud of spirit, / Could not resist his proud disease. / There was
no end to his arrogance, / And he refused to know himself. / Indeed, he knew
nothing of good works; / Therefore, he lacked spiritual health. / Wrongly he
regarded himself righteous / So as to despise the works of mercy.)

Note where his refusal to know himself is tied to his disdain for the works of mercy: he
knows nothing of good works! Set against the Pharisee, whose misjudgments occasion
his own mishandling of his guests, Mary Magdalene is made a model of moral touch.
Within the poem, our sinner-saint is said to perform the prescribed steps of penance—
compunction of heart, confession of mouth, and satisfaction—perfectly.¹¹⁰ Feelings of
remorse move our sinner-saint to touch with purpose. The Magdalene’s own
understanding of her sinful condition, how she mishandled herself and others, makes her
hands-on performance of satisfaction all the more pressing: she washed, she dried, she
smeared, she kissed.

¹⁰⁹ MS Royal 17.C.xvii, fol. 107v.

¹¹⁰ Consider, as just one example, the following recounting of her penance: “Wyt here wyll scho in syght
set aute, / To compunctyon of harte and mouthe, / Oure lordes fete scho dryed and wape”; MS Royal
17.C.xvii, fol. 107r. On the three aspects of penance, see Peter Lombard, The Sentences, Book 4: On the
Doctrine of Signs, trans. Giulio Silano, Mediaeval Sources in Translation 48, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute
CHAPTER 5

TOUCHING THOMAS

A Necessary Touch?

Doubting Thomas’s demand for palpable proof, as recorded in the Gospel of John, occasions the first and only tactile verification of Jesus’ bodily resurrection: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger where the nails were located, and place my hand into his side, I will not believe.”¹ Thomas’s impossible imposition was issued to refute the equally impossible claim of the other disciples—“We have seen the Lord”—or so he thought.² The audacious demand was a rhetorical proposition, but through hyperbole the doubting disciple nevertheless laid value on the more intimate and concrete connections the sense of touch affords. Adding touch to sight, Thomas prioritizes the intersubjectivity of the tactile mode. Where sight permits distance, touch necessitates proximity, a real presence.³ Thomas’s conditions for belief not only require the physical proximity of the sensible object, in this case the resurrected body of Jesus, but they also rely upon the sensible object’s own capacity for touch. In other words, the kind of epistemic confirmation the disciple demands is achievable only through the feeling of being touched back. What is truly remarkable about Doubting Thomas’s conditions then, is that they were met: “Put your finger in here, and look at my hands;

¹ John 20:25b. “Nisi videro in manibus ejus fixuram clavorum, et mittam digitum meum in locum clavorum, et mittam manum meam in latus eius, non credam.”


³ While some medieval (and modern) thinking about the sense of sight regarded its operations as a form of touch—sometimes analogously, but sometimes more literally—Thomas is after a specific kind of hand-to-hand, or hand-to-sidewound, corporeal contact: the kind of touch afforded by sight is insufficient.
and stretch out your hand, and place it in my side.”

It is tempting in a study on the sense of touch to read the pronouncement and subsequent fulfillment of the doubting disciple’s conditions as an elevation of the tactile over the visual. But touch does not supplant sight; rather, touch compliments both sight and sound in the divine’s multisensorial demonstration of his real presence. Just as Mary Magdalene, Thomas first recognized Jesus by the sound of his voice. The apostle was not called by name, however, but by commands to see and to touch. Further, as Glen W. Most has shown, a strict reading of the gospel account suggests that Jesus’ audiovisual invitation was in and of itself enough to convert the disciple: it was the possibility to touch and not an actual experience of touch that turned him.5 We know that Jesus made his wounded body available for tactile inspection through the imperative “put your finger here.” Beyond this, all we can glean from the gospel account is that the resurrected’s directive prompts his disciple’s confession of faith: “My Lord and my God!”6 And yet, the possibility of touch persists in the narrative lacuna between the divine’s invitation and his disciple’s confession. And this is all medieval believers really needed: the space to touch. Because if not Thomas, then who?

Thomas’s touch feels like a necessary proposition. Perhaps it is because (un)believers also need to touch the (un)believable. Or perhaps it is that Thomas’s touch makes present what is otherwise absent. Thomas points to humanity’s material conditions: its embodiment, its environment, its experience is matter. Thomas also points

to the divine’s material commitments: as the creator, as the incarnate, as the crucified, as the resurrected, as the “word made flesh.” Thomas’s touch feels like a necessary proposition because it affirms the material in the matter of faith. The present chapter considers how this one unbeliever’s proposition—*unless I touch*—and the divine’s accommodation—*put your finger here*—came to matter in the late medieval imagination. More specifically, this project is invested in how the doubting disciple’s experience of touch was replicated and remounted in the material of late medieval devotion. But first: how do the phrases *unless I touch* and *put your finger here* focus the methodologies of the study at hand?

Unless I Touch

Our looming subject is an absent body. The present study deals with the crucified and resurrected body, but through material approximations. Our subjects are simulacra, the many artifactual remnants of a late medieval desire to experience an embodied god in every sense. It is fitting that this study should share in the labors of the medieval artifacts it examines. Our need to produce bodies of textual and visual evidence resurrects the very medieval surrogates fashioned in simulation of an absent divine body. Thomas’s provisional *unless I touch* affects a kind of materializing agency where it unintentionally succeeds in conjuring its desired corpus. In this incredulous moment, a once absent body is made material, legible, and available to the tactile imagination. The conditional *unless I touch* is in many ways emblematic of the material-turn in late medieval devotion, as more sensorially attuned and motivated medieval audiences found inspiration in the doubting

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7 John 1:14. “Et Verbum caro factum est.”
disciple’s tactile conditions.

The depiction of the Incredulity of Thomas preserved in the Gough psalter (c. 1300-1310), for instance, provides a possible solution to the conundrum of how best to gain access to that which is physically unavailable.8 This full-page miniature engages in a visual exegesis of the biblical narrative that is governed by what we will term the medieval need to touch. Our interest in this particular image lies in the figures surrounding the centrally positioned Doubting Thomas. On the far right, Jesus strikes an accommodating pose, the visual equivalent of “put your finger here.” With his right arm almost overextended, Jesus reaches toward his disciples with a radically hospitable gesture that both welcomes and protects the attending doubter. On the far left, four disciples are positioned behind Doubting Thomas. Three of the bystanders gaze intently upon the wound in Jesus’ right hand, most likely an allusion to their prior visual claim, “We have seen the Lord.” The fourth onlooker, John the Evangelist, appears more interested in a point of contact. Book in hand, John watches Thomas probe Jesus’ sidewound. The Evangelist is here made the witness of record, in that what he sees is translated into what the user knows. The miniature reads authorial intent back into the biblical text by insisting the evangelist see the doubter touch the sidewound.

The immediate lesson of the Gough miniature is that medieval (un)believers have greater recourse to touch through the figure of Thomas. First, the miniature allows users to share the Evangelist’s perspective. Manuscript in hand, users are made witness to the

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142
spectacle of touch by virtue of their own physical proximity. Accordingly, users are integrated into the multisensorial operations working to make the scene feel authentic. Second, the spectacle of touch at the center of the Gough miniature affords users the illusion of tangibility. The doubting disciple’s hand reaches out, in one sense, for the benefit of viewing subjects. The effects of the disciple’s physical touch are made available to viewers through their apprehension of this haptic image. Functionally, Thomas is a tactile surrogate for medieval (un)believers.

The N-Town Appearance to Thomas, a fifteenth-century dramatization of the biblical episode, provides us with a second instructive model for understating how unless I touch came to matter in late medieval England:

The prechynge of Petir myght not converte me
Tyll I felyd the wound that the spere dyde cleve.
I trustyd nevr he leyvd that deed was on a tre
Tyll that his herte blood dede renne in my sleve.
Thus be my grett dowte, oure feyth may we preve—
Behold my blody hand, to feyth that me avexit;
Be syght of this myrrroure from feyth not remeve.⁹

(Peter’s preaching could not convert me / until I felt the wound that spear did cut.
/ I could not believe that he who died on the tree lived / until his heart’s blood did flow down my sleeve. / And so, through my great doubt, our faith we can prove: /
Behold my bloody hand that provoked me to belief, / By looking in this mirror,

be not swayed from faith.)

Thomas’s concluding lines provide a performative gloss of his tactile encounter. The disciple offers his bloodstained hand as a visual synecdoche, a powerful point of reference for audiences to access and reflect upon the moral lessons of this staged “myrroure.” The above speech act functionally scales down the entirety of the enacted scene (Thomas’s incredulity, Jesus’ accommodation, their shared touch) into a replicable haptic image: “Behold my blody hand.” This haptic image is not static, but active in the sense of its continued capacity to provoke (avexit) viewers to reflect upon the material conditions of their faith. And while the disciple’s bloody hand points back to a wounded and resurrected body, it does so in a way that anticipates an ascended body: audiences are being prepared for their reentry into a present post-Ascension time. What the haptic scene offers, then, is a program for coping with corporeal absence. The disciple’s hand is a kind of multisensorial mechanism for replicating, through a variety of devotional strategies, the material of a now distant divine body.

Both the N-Town and Gough treatments of Doubting Thomas recommend the disciple’s functional surrogacy. They offer a means of access, and they are not alone. In a fifteenth-century Middle English homily, for example, we find an authorization for


11 Thomas’s bloody hand, not Jesus’s wounded body, is the symbolic takeaway here. To be sure, the N-Town plays include many spectacles of suffering, as its treatments of Jesus’s torture and crucifixion are especially brutal. On violence in N-Town plays, see Kerstin Pfeiffer, “Feeling the Passion: Neuropsychological Perspectives on Audience Response,” postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies 3 (2012): 328-40.

12 The next play in the cycle is The Ascension.
similar devotional uses of the disciple’s touch. The homily instructs:

Take we now hede to þis gospell, and þe may see þat Seynt Thomas dud us more
good þorowe is mysbeleue þan did all all þe apostels þat beleued anoon. For be
hym is putt awey all þe dowtes of oure feyth, and are made stabull in þe
beleue.14

(Let us now pay attention to this gospel passage, and you will see Saint Thomas
did us more good through his lack of belief than did all the apostles who believed
at once. For through him all doubts about our faith are set aside and made
trustworthy in the [i.e. Christian] faith).

The significance of the above passage, itself an adaptation of Gregory the Great’s twenty-
sixth homily, is twofold.15 First, Thomas’s doubt has a moralizing utility. The sermon
does not condemn, but instead celebrates the disciple’s doubt. The hidden virtue of doubt
is what it makes possible, namely a demonstration of divine compassion. But the
disciple’s doubt is only useful in so far as it is temporary and amenable. The divine acts
through the disciple’s disbelief to displace said disbelief. Second, Thomas’s touch is

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13 The sermon may have been preached at an earlier date, perhaps as early as the mid-fourteenth century,
but the manuscript in which the text is copied, London, British Library, MS Royal 18.B.xxiii, dates to the
first half of the fifteenth century; “Introduction,” in Middle English Sermons, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, EETS
o.s. 209 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), xxxiv-xl.

14 “Sermon 23,” in Middle English Sermons, 134. See also, Gibson, Theater of Devotion, 18.

15 The passage is taken from a more developed point in the Gregory the Great’s homily: “Do you believe
that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent then? And that on coming later he heard, that on
hearing he doubted, that after doubting he touched Jesus, and after touching him he believed? This did not
happen by chance, but by divine providence. Divine compassion brought it about in a wonderful way that
when the doubting disciple touched the wounds of his master’s body, he cured the wounds of our unbelief.
Thomas’ unbelief was more advantage to our faith than the faith of the believing disciples, because when
he was led back to faith by touching Jesus, our minds were relieved of all doubt and made firm in faith”;
“Homily 26,” in Forty Gospel Homilies, trans. David Hurst, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990),
206-07. For the Latin, see “Homilia 26,” in Homiliae in Evangelia, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141
(Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 224.
totalizing and universally available. Thomas is permitted to touch so that others may also touch through him. The disciple’s hand is uniquely instrumental, a surrogate through which the divine acts to displace all disbelief.

The visual, dramatic, and homiletic examples treated above each, in their own way, draw upon Thomas’s corporeal engagement in support of material-centric devotional practices. In their individual efforts to provide haptic resources for lay audiences, these sources take full advantage of their own multisensual functionality as visual, oral, and aural productions to fabricate haptic analogies. Importantly, these examples also register awareness of their material limitations as painted images, dramatic performances, and oral narratives where they point beyond themselves and toward other tangible things. As Kerstin Pfeiffer has demonstrated, quoting a study on automatic neural mechanisms, the medieval religious imagination intuits what present psychological and neurobiological studies maintain: “when we witness touch, we do not only just see touch but also understand touch through an automatic link with our own experience of touch.”16 In other words, we cognitively transform sights and sounds of touch into “inner representation[s] of touch.”17 The above quoted lines from the N-Town play hint at this phenomenon, where the “prechynge of Petir” could not “converte” until after Thomas “felyd” the wound for himself. Belief is not found in didactic sermons, images, or plays alone, but within a complex network of conceptual teachings and embodied experiences. And finally, all these examples have been copied into manuscripts. That is, thinking


17 Pfeiffer, “Feeling the Passion,” 330.
about medieval manuscripts as tangible commodities goes one step further to support the
material claims of the works: users must have held these haptic portals closely. Put
another way, the material conditions and limitations of these examples worked in concert
to replicate the feeling of the doubting disciple’s touch.

*Put Your Finger Here*

The present study interrogates a variety of late medieval surrogates designed to
stand in place of an absent divine body. My interest lies in the material remains, mostly in
manuscript form, of late medieval efforts to produce tangible bodies of worship. While
the so-called material-turn has afforded students of the Middle Ages new strategies for
handling such matter, it is as complex and conflicted a field as the networks and
repositories of artifactual things it means to touch. 18 A number of recent studies have
emphasized the reciprocal influence of emergent theologies (incarnational, eucharistic,
creational, etc.) and developing material-centric religious practices in late medieval
England. 19 These approaches tend to the sociocultural factors supporting the materiality

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18 See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*
(New York: Zone Books, 2011). For a general introduction, see Beth Williamson, “Material Cultural and
Medieval Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John Arnold (Oxford:
Oxford University Press), 60-75. On the material-turn in Middle English studies, see Jessica Brantley,
“Material Culture,” in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester: Wiley-
Blackwell, 2013), 187-305. For recent applications of these methods, see the various approaches in *Arma
Christi: Objects, Representation, and Devotional Practice in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. L.
Elina Gertsman, a special issue of *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural 4.1*

19 Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theater of Devotion* is foundational, as is Miri Rubin’s *Corpus Christi: The
Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Eamon Duffy’s
*The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, Yale University
Press, 1992). For work on incarnational aesthetics, see Nicholas Watson, “Conceptions of the Word: The
Mother Tongue and The Incarnation of God,” *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 85-125 and, more
recently, Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love*
of medieval devotion, the innovative artistic and intellectual labors of human makers and users. Other interventions, drawing on the methodologies of actor-network theory and object-oriented ontology, have instead concentrated on the “agentic potential” of later medieval devotional objects themselves.20 Such studies theorize an autonomy of things in their efforts to reveal the capacity of devotional objects to act upon and, in many cases, apart from human subjects. Carolyn Walker Bynum offers a third way, positing that Christian materiality is necessarily a paradoxical understanding of matter: that matter “both threatened and offered salvation,” that matter is “God’s creation—that through and in which he acts.”21 Bynum’s critical intervention, in many ways acknowledging the compatible merits of the medieval and postmodern projects, invites us to think “more deeply” about medieval matter as the “stuff” supporting the human experience.22

Thinking alongside these debates affords new theoretical methodologies for

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21 Bynum, Christian Materiality, 35.

22 Bynum, Christian Materiality, 36.
accessing and understanding the material conditions of a past sense of touch.\(^{23}\) My own claim is that we should hold medieval objects loosely, but carefully. If we hope to discover the multiple forms, functions, and fluencies of medieval religious objects, we must be open to their trebled status as things made, things used, and things that (sometimes) act out. Above all, it is important to note that our selected objects of study, the various surrogates extending Thomas’s touch, have always pointed beyond themselves: they point backward to their biblical antecedents, and forward in anticipation of divine contact.\(^{24}\) And, as we will see, where our surrogates were intentionally made, with prescribed forms and functions, their utility as devotional objects also allowed them to operate inadvertently, in unanticipated environments and encounters.\(^{25}\) What we are after then, is the full range of possible agents and outcomes touching our medieval surrogates. To provide a working model, let us engage in a thought experiment that will press both the theoretical possibilities and limitations of our contemporary purchase on medieval materiality.

\(^{23}\) My goal is not to resolve this debate, but to prolong it. I am indebted to the many critical, sometimes contentious, and ultimately constructive conversations happening in and around the present material-turn of medieval studies.

\(^{24}\) Here we might note that where the figure of Thomas comes to support the materiality of late medieval devotion, we see the limits of the reception of earlier Latin theology, or at least one specific aspect of Augustinian thought. Doubting Thomas figures in Augustine’s notion of *curiositas* and his differentiation between belief and knowledge; the sinful *curiosi* who say they cannot believe in the resurrection unless they see the empty tomb and touch it are likened to the disciple and multisensory demands (*Sermones*, 112.3.3-5.5). For more on Augustine’s understanding of *curiositas*, see Richard Newhauser, “Augustinian *vitium curiositatis* and its Reception,” in *Saint Augustine and his Influence in the Middle Ages*, ed. E. B. King and J. T. Schaefer, Sewanee Mediaeval Studies 3 (Sewanee: The Press of the University of the South, 1988), 99-124, here 114; reprint in *Sin. Essays on the Moral Tradition in the Western Middle Ages* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), essay XIV.

This experiment thinks through the conceptual work of Michael Landy’s *Doubting Thomas.* In May 2013, Landy unveiled seven large-scale kinetic sculptures in an exhibition at the National Gallery, London titled “Saints Alive.” Sarah Salih has neatly described the scale and scope of the exhibit: “Landy reproduced fragments of saints from medieval and early modern paintings in the National Gallery’s collection, realized them in three-dimensional fiberglass, combined these with scavenged machinery, and invited visitors to set these over-life-size composite figures in motion.” Crucial are the ways in which these assemblages negotiate new relationships between their historic visual sources and a present viewing public. Landy’s *Doubting Thomas*, while based on Giovanni Battista Cima’s *The Incredulity of Thomas*, excises and repurposes only those details necessary to the operations of touch. The viewer is given the disciple’s pointing finger mounted to a mechanical arm and the divine’s exposed torso and wounded hands set atop an industrial-sized spring. In this way, the mechanized re-assemblage at once closes in on and scales up the point of contact for reexamination and, I want to suggest, the motivated viewer’s continued experimentation.

Notice that the torso is marred, but not punctured. There is yet no sideward. Notice too the space between the pointing hand and suspended torso. When at rest, the

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27 For an overview, which includes an interview with Michael Landy, see *Saints Alive*, 15-52.


29 *Saints Alive*, 47.
two components do not touch. Points of contact are made when, and only when, a viewing subject activates the sculpture by stepping on a foot pedal. The willing viewer is made an integral piece of the sculpture’s mechanical operations and, by extension, an integrated participant in the narrative scene it depicts. Once activated, the pointed hand violently strikes the suspended torso in rapid succession of clumsy, ultra-violent jabs until the viewer-turned-user steps away. The activated hand marks the body with each blow: every scuff, dent, and gash, a record of a violent engagement. In time, the fiberglass will break down and the torso will become wounded. By design, users are made culpable in the wounding, answerable for their part in the object’s destruction.

The mechanics of this kinetic sculpture are instructive: the interplay between makers and machines and users not only animates the art object, but also drives its production of new meaning. Landy’s *Doubting Thomas* promotes a phenomenology of interdependence, one that does not necessarily elide subjects and objects, but instead incites their collaboration. The sculpture is itself a careful study of medieval religious objects and practices: reading the lessons of this sculpture back onto medieval works is also to read recursively.

What I am proposing is this: we take *Doubting Thomas* as a working theoretical model for examining late medieval engagements with the doubting disciple’s experience of touch. Above all, the takeaway is that religious objects rarely act independently. By

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31 This aspect of the user experience recalls the more affective modes of late medieval devotion that urged the faithful to “imagine” themselves as Jesus’s torturers. *Doubting Thomas* likewise impresses the violent means of the salvation and proof-of-salvation narratives upon the user. The disciple’s pointing hand, the user’s activating foot are at once the instruments and beneficiaries of sacrificial violence. And in activating the doubting disciple’s hand, in completing his act of touch, the motivated user is also made part of this saint’s and her own sanctification processes.
design, religious objects work collaboratively. The late medieval materials I consider here—be they written, painted, or performed—were functional parts of an elaborate sociocultural machinery, one devised and driven by a medieval collective longing for sacred contact. Organized around the concepts of (1) manufacture and (2) manipulation, the following movements examine a handful of medieval artifacts that were designed to stimulate, in the many senses of the term, the late medieval need to touch. The following sections pursue these three categories through the lens of Landy’s *Doubting Thomas*, though often silently, as a strategy for thinking critically about various cognitive and material collaborations, those that gave us what we have thus far been calling medieval tactile surrogates their agency.

*Manufacture: On Making Wounds*

Thomas’s conditions were explicit. He required a particular kind of body. He called for a wounded body: marked hands and a punctured side. Thomas’s conditions addressed the unlikelihood of a bodily resurrection, certainly. Even so, they also speak of a personal trauma. The doubting disciple’s demands effectually recall the brutal execution of his teacher, of his friend. While Thomas was seeking tangible proof of the Resurrection, he was also still coming to terms with the Crucifixion. Before one can touch a wounded body, a wounded body must first be made.

At least, this is how the York Scriveners presented it. The York Scriveners’s *Doubting Thomas* is one of a handful of “appearance” plays preserved in the fifteenth-
century register of the York Corpus Christi cycle. The Scriveners cast a rather sympathetic Thomas: more than a brazen cynic, theirs is a disciple in despair. In fact, our first impression comes through an overheard lamentation. Thomas’s opening monolog, delivered just before he rejoins his fellow disciples, mourns the loss of his “maistir” (teacher) and “frende” (friend). About halfway through his thirty-line eulogy, the disciple recounts the grisly details of the Crucifixion:

Wan was his wondis and wonderus wette,
With skelpis sore was he swongen, that swette,
All naked nailed thurgh hande and feete.
Allas, for pyne,
That bliste, that beste my bale myght bete,
His liffe schulde tyne.34

(His wounds were dark and terrifyingly fresh, / With bitter blows he, the beloved, was beaten, / stripped entirely naked, nailed through hands and feet. / Alas, by

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32 Other York appearance plays include The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene and The Travelers to Emmaus.


34 Doubting Thomas, 347, ll. 109-114.
torments, / the blessed one, who could best soothe my pain,\textsuperscript{35} / that his life should end.)

Thematically, the disciple’s lines are delivered in anticipation of this infamous demand to touch nail-pierced hands and a spear-pierced side. Psychologically, his graphic reporting reads more like a remembered trauma. Even Thomas’s counter-demand is equally, uneasily vivid:

What, leve felawes, late be youre fare.
Till that I see his body bare
And sithen my fyngir putte in thare
Within his hyde
And fele the wounde the spere did schere
Right in his syde,
Are schalle I trowe no tales betwene.\textsuperscript{36}

(No matter, friends! Let your bustling be. / Until I see his bare body / and then put my finger into it, / inside his skin, / and feel the wound that spear did cut, / right into his side, / before this, in the meantime, I will believe no claims.)

Notice where the doubter’s conditions have been amended and amplified by the York dramatists. Thomas makes no mention of nail-marked hands here, his focus is instead on the sidewound. Speaking hypothetically, Thomas envisions himself retracing the instrumental violence of the spear with his own finger. When the opportunity does finally

\textsuperscript{35} Davidson glosses bete as “defeat” and bale as “misery.” While correct, the MED also lists beten bale, “to soothe pain, relieve suffering,” and bote of bale, “relief from suffering” as common phrases; s.v., bale (n. 1), 3. I have opted for a more colloquial translation.

\textsuperscript{36} Doubting Thomas, 349, ll. 157-163.
present itself, his finger will indeed probe divine flesh—*putte in thare within his hyde*—just as the spear had pierced and penetrated. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Thomas’s impassioned commentaries, here and above, affectively recapture his own Crucifixion trauma. For Thomas, the wounds are fresh (*wette*). He acts in an arrested present. He speaks like a witness.

Thomas’s speech acts conjure a stripped (*naked*), scourged (*swongen*), punctured (*nailed*), and pierced (*schere*) body. As expected, the disciple’s incredulity will produce a resurrected and wounded body to touch: Jesus will appear and answer his conditions in a few short lines. Equally important, however, is how the disciple has already reproduced a wounded body for contemplation. The near-ekphrastic qualities of the above quoted lines paint a vivid picture of the Crucifixion. More than passing allusions, these lines thematically and theologically tie the disciple’s sense of touch to the greater violence of the Passion. Where the doubting disciple voices contemporaneous devotional scripts, specifically those belonging to more popular modes of affective piety, he does so with a haunting immediacy. Thomas speaks and acts as a witness, in part, because he is speaking and acting on behalf of audiences who have themselves recently witnessed a crucifixion trauma.

So what exactly did Thomas witness? Or perhaps the better question is: how does what he *sees* impact what he *feels*? To begin to address these questions, we turn again to the Gough Psalter. The Crucifixion miniature found in the Gough Psalter is an early

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37 The figure of Thomas acts in arrested present by rehearsing the events of Crucifixion as if he were a firsthand witness. The four gospels are not clear about where all the disciples were at the time of the Crucifixion, and only Luke suggests the disciples (*omnes not eius*) might have witnessed the events (Luke 23:49). The Towneley *Thomas of India* claims a similar perspective: “Nalyd with nales thre, / And with a spere thay spylt his blood; / Gret sorow it was to see” (376).
example of the kind of image the disciple’s near-ekphrastic lines call to mind.38 The Gough Crucifixion sets its spectacle of suffering front and center. With his elongated legs and laterally extended arms, a crucified Jesus neatly partitions the viewing field. In the lower quadrants, the attending actors and agents conduct their symbolic handiwork under the cover of the crossbeam: the Virgin Mary and Longinus (spear-bearer) on the viewer’s left, John the Evangelist and Stephaton (sponge-bearer) on the right.39

The four depicted encounters each, in their own way, rely on the gory details applied to Jesus. Rivulets of blood, the slightly faded and downward-flowing red trace lines, appear to hold the crucified body in suspended animation.40 Jesus is not dead, only dying. The illusion of bleeding keeps the wounds fresh, available and accessible to the devotional gaze. This bleeding also holds the attending figures in their own recursive pattern as they, similar to Thomas in the York play, replay their parts in the crucifixion trauma for the benefit of the viewing subject. And to push the connections further still, the streams of painted blood enable users to lay hold of the same kind of wounds as Doubting Thomas, those “wonderus wette” wounds he so painfully recalls in the York play. Of course, the Gough Crucifixion itself was most likely not a model known to the

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39 Stephaton is the name traditionally assigned to the anonymous soldier who offered Jesus a sponge soaked in sour wine at the Crucifixion; in the York Mortification play, he is designated “Garcio,” as in boy or churl; see Davidson, Doubting Thomas, 471 n. 222-25. In the visual tradition, Stephaton is often depicted holding a cup or sponge affixed to a staff.

York dramatists, but they would have been familiar with any number of depictions just like it. My interest in this particular image, then, has more to do with its relationship to the Gough Incredulity of Thomas described above and what the figures of Thomas and Longinus can together teach us about the moral utility of feeling pain.

Longinus’s part in the salvation history is played out in the bottom left corner of the Gough miniature. The visual lines of narrative action guide the viewer’s eye across the soldier’s right arm, along the length of his spear, and into the side of Jesus. Longinus’s left hand completes the narrative circuit, as his dramatic gesture then redirects the viewer’s gaze toward his one open eye. On the one hand, Longinus is implicated in the violence of the scene, as he holds the spear still stuck in the sidewound. On the other hand, the once blind soldier reminds viewers that his sight was restored through direct contact with the sacred blood he has so violently drawn. Longinus is instrumental to the founding of sacramental systems, specifically baptismal and eucharistic practices, where he stands as the first to be washed in the water and bathed in the blood that poured from Jesus’s sidewound. Importantly, Longinus stands as both the final instrument and first beneficiary of the Crucifixion.

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41 One could, for instance, point to the image of the Crucifixion preserved in a fifteenth-century Yorkshire prayerbook, Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Lit. 5, fol. 15r.


43 Longinus is a composite of two unnamed soldiers from the gospel narratives: the first, the soldier who pierced Jesus’ side (John 19:24); the second, the centurion who confessed faith in “God’s Son” (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39). While depictions and allusions to Longinus abound, few works are devoted exclusively to the figure and his supporting role in the Passion drama. Longinus is first named in the fifth-century *Evangelium Nichodemi*, though his legend is not given an extensive literary treatment until twelfth-century, primarily through Iacopo da Varazze’s (Jacobus de Voragine) *Legenda Aurea* and its many vernacular translations and adaptions. For a more complete account, see Rose Jeffries Peebles, *The Legend of Longinus in Ecclesiastical Tradition and in English Literature, and its connection with the Grail* (Baltimore: J.H. Furst Company, 1911).
Without being too reductive, we should acknowledge the series of pain-pleasure paradoxes at work here. Most clearly, spiritual pleasure depends on physical pain. While Longinus’s physical sight is restored through contact with sacred blood, his spiritual sight is made whole through his own recognition of the crucified body: “Truly this was the Son of God.”44 The first lesson of Longinus, then, is that there are theological advantages in taking pleasure from pain.

But there are other, less obvious lessons to be drawn from the pleasure-pain paradoxes. When considering the devotional design of the image, we can ask the following questions: First, what sort of pleasure is found through the pain of sacred violence? Second, what kinds of pain support the pleasure of sacred violence? We have seen through Longinus that making wounds has spiritual benefits. From the perspective of medieval users, we can only imagine how important it was not only to see a crucifixion, but also to revel in the extreme violence that atoned for their sins. To take pleasure in the sight of blood flowing from nail-pierced hands and feet, to take pleasure in seeing the spear still stuck in the sidewound, is to take pleasure in the more sadistic mechanisms of Christian salvation. Because the salvation story depends on the veracity of divine suffering, we should expect that medieval believers would have sought more meaningful engagements with the suffering body of Jesus.45 Further still, this pain-

44 Matt. 27:54, “Vere Filius Dei erat iste.”

45 Decades of work, commonly categorized under the aegis of the affective-turn of Medieval Studies, has documented the numerous literary, visual and other sources supporting affective piety and similar “private” devotional practices in late medieval England; for recent work on this topic, see Jessica Brantley, Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Nicole Rice, Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jennifer Bryan, Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Sarah McNamer, Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval
specific imagery affords users certain haptic assurances that the divine body did in fact suffer. Which brings us to the importance of tactile values shared between the Gough depictions of Longinus and Thomas. We can see through a comparative viewing how these two figures collectively open multiple points of access to the absent divine body of Jesus. Both figures prod to confirm his humanity. Both figures penetrate to affirm his divinity. Both figures operate to extend his mercy. What Longinus makes, Thomas remakes. Importantly, medieval users are given access to this absent body through the circuity of haptic analogies that connects these figures. Their collective appeal to the experience of exacting and enduring pain, of touching and being touched, gives users a sense of inclusion. The pleasure of pain is here found in making wounds to touch.

In the York cycle, the Butchers’ Mortificatio Christi amplifies these haptic connections through its intentionally interactive presentation of the Crucifixion. Covering the death and burial of Jesus, the Mortification quite literally revolves around the divine’s crucified body. The staging of the scene conceivably resembled popular visual representations, similar to the Gough Crucifixion, wherein Jesus is centrally hung, with the supporting cast performing beside and below him.\(^46\) The first half of the play comprises a series of dramatic interchanges between onlookers and Jesus. Borrowing from contemporaneous devotional texts, specifically those treating the Virgin Mary’s lament (Planctus Mariae) and Jesus’s seven last words, the script models a range of

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\(^{46}\) On the connections between visual representations of the Crucifixion and dramatic staging, see Clifford Davidson, “Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage,” *Comparative Drama* 31 (1997): 436-58; and on the visual realism of the play see, “The Realism of the York Realist,” in *Creation to Doom* (New York: AMS Press, 1984), 117-34, esp. 123-29
emotional responses to the spectacle of violence. The second half of the play, with its focus on the burial of Jesus, employs similar affective strategies, though with an emphasis on coping with after effects of the staged trauma.

At the heart of the play, of course, is the much anticipated deathblow delivered by Longinus. Given the outpouring of emotion leading up to and following this culminating violence, the Mortificatio is as much a course in pain management as it is in salvation history. Further, as Clifford Davidson reminds us, the primary aim of this play was not necessarily to teach doctrine, but to facilitate emotional and existential engagements with the Passion. When approaching the Mortification, then, we must allow that medieval audiences were prepared to engage its brutalities proactively, its agonies sympathetically, and its catharses wholeheartedly.

Longinus appears only briefly in the Mortification, yet his performance constitutes one of the most powerful scenes of the play cycle. Following the high priest’s request to expedite the executions, Pilate summons the blind soldier to perform his handiwork:

Ser Longeus, steppe forthe in þis steede.

This spere, loo, have halde in thy hande,

To Jesu þou rake fourthe I rede,

And sted nought but stiffely thou stande

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A stounde.

In Jesu side

Schoffe it this tyde;

No lenger bide,

But grathely thou go to the grounde.49

(Sir Longinus, step forward to this place; / Behold this spear, take it in your hand; /
Now, go forth to Jesus, I advise you, / And do not tarry, but be steadfast / for a while.
/ Now into Jesus’s side / Thrust [this spear]; / Delay no longer / But go directly to that
place.)

The above lines are the only direct acknowledgment of the fatal spearing in a play text;
neither Longinus, nor any other character, speaks to the matter at hand. Accordingly,
Pilate’s lines are the voiced stage directions commanding both the actions of actors and
the attention of audiences. Pilate’s string of imperatives—step (steppe), behold (lo), take
(have halde), go (rake/go), thrust (schoffe)—though they may sound superfluous or feel
heavy-handed, are not without effect. The use of lo is our first clue as to how these
commanding lines may have functioned if delivered verbatim, at least as they have been
recorded in the manuscript register. And while lo is a fairly common intensifier, with a
considerable lexical range, it is nevertheless a curious choice: how should the blind
soldier “behold” the spear? To unlock the interactive qualities of late medieval religious
theater, consider how and what a simple lo begins to accomplish in the sight and hearing
of audiences. We can imagine Pilate holding the spear at arms length, slowly raising it
above his head, then presenting the instrument to audiences in a panoramic display, all

before handing it over to Longinus: lo this spear! This lo is aimed at the viewing (reading) audience: it signals the intentional inclusivity of the lines, suggesting how audiences might also take the remaining imperatives personally.

So what exactly does all this imperative talk accomplish? Pilate’s string of commands protracts and punctuates the violent operations of the scene. What we overhear, even as readers of the play text, is one figure arming and operating another for our viewing pleasure. In many ways, these rhetorical imperatives are analogous to the machinery of Michael Landy’s kinetic sculptures. Pilate’s commands, like the sculptor’s foot-petals, are designed to trigger violent acts in the immediate context of the play and, I would argue, in the long-term memory of viewers. We can safely assume that a medieval staging of the scene would have been both spectacular and sensational. Historical records suggest graphic stage effects, including bladders filled with artificial blood, were employed to make the scenes of torture look and feel as real possible.50 While such gruesome effects are themselves enough to make a lasting impression, Pilate’s lines ensure their moral value is not easily forgotten. The overt narration of the scene intends not only to incite violence, but also to implicate audiences in both the cause and effects of this ritual sacrifice. By virtue of even the most pious desire to witness a crucifixion then,

50 Clifford Davidson speculates: “The theatrical practice seems to have been to hide a small bladder of blood or other red liquid in Jesus’ costume where it might be pierced to simulate this effect, which included the sight of blood running down the spear and of Longinus touching his eye with it, whereupon he proclaims the healing of his blindness”; “Suffering and the York Plays,” 16. Elsewhere, Davidson notes that the Canterbury dramatic records (Canterbury City Accounts FA2, fol. 411) reference “leather bags of blood” that were used in the Thomas Becket pageant; “Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage,” 442. The Chester Judgment also includes where Jesus produces fresh blood from his side (l. 428); Meg Twycross, “The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays,” in The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37-84, at 53. Claire Spensler notes that the Smiths’ expenditures at Coventry for 1451 list ‘vj skynnys of whit ledder,’ which may have fashioned and painted to simulate torn and bleeding flesh; Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 147. See also, Pfeiffer, “Feeling the Passion,” 332-33.
the script ensures that attentive viewers are made culpable. More than onlookers, more than bystanders, they are participants. And participation does not necessarily end at the close of this play, or the play cycle for that matter, as audiences take with them a fresh set of sensory impressions. Armed with a step-by-step narrative and the perception of violence, audiences are thus prepared to relive the traumatic event again and again, a crucial point we will pick up again in the following section.

Participation in this sacred wounding cuts two ways, or at least it might have. As previously suggested, imagined interactions with the suffering body of Jesus allowed medieval users to enjoy both the cause and effects of ritual sacrifice. And while imagining oneself as the perpetrator of crucifixion violence had its own sadistic pleasures, such corporate exercises were designed to turn toward moral self-examination, reflection on pains of sin and the pleasures of salvation. When Longinus does finally speak, for instance, he does so as the beneficiary of his wounding:

O, Jesu so jentill and jente,
That sodenly has lente me my sight.
Lorde, louyng to thee be it lente.
On rode arte thou ragged and rente
Mankynde for to mende of his mys.
Full spitously spilte is and spente
Thi bloode, Lorde, to bringe us to blis

…………….Thi mercy be markid in me.51

51 *Mortificatio Christi*, 309, II. 301-7, 312.
(Oh, Jesus, so noble and fair, / Who suddenly has granted me my sight. / Lord, praise be given to you. / On this cross, you have been stabbed and severed, / To save humankind from its sin. / Most savagely spilt and shed was / Your blood, Lord, to bring us into bliss [i.e. Heaven] /… Let your mercy be marked on me.)

Longinus concludes his testimony with a critical inversion, suggesting that he too has been markid by this violent experience. This provocative turn of phrase neatly encapsulates the moral pleasures of pain we have been after. There is something about the experience of pain—inflicting and enduring—that requires justification, even to the point where a wounding subject is compelled to make sense of its wounded object. Put another way, pain calls for remediation.

I want to suggest that we consider Thomas’s demand both to see and to touch a wounded body as a kind of pain remediation. I began this section by suggesting we treat the disciple’s doubt as a symptom of a personal trauma. Where the disciple speaks and acts like a witness of trauma, he does so by recounting only the most graphic details of Crucifixion. What is more, his conditions for belief are equally explicit. As the York Scriveners’s present it, Thomas is really asking to replicate the violence of the spear. Until he sticks his finger inside skin—within his hyde—until he touches the sidewound—fele the wonde the spere did schere—he cannot believe. And when Thomas does finally touch Jesus, we can see how his finger follows Pilate’s commands, how it retraces Longinus’s operations:

Mi Lorde, my God, full wele is me,
A, blode of price, blessid mote thou be.
Mankynd in erth, behold and see
This blessid blode.

Mercy nowe, Lorde, ax I thee,

With mayne and mode.  

(My Lord, my God, I am set right, / Oh, blood of great worth, you must be blessed! / Humankind on earth, behold and see, / This blessed blood. / I now beg mercy of you, Lord, / With might and main.)

Thomas’s confession of faith does not praise the wounded body, but the blood that continues to flow from it. Here, the point of contact is drawing blood. With blood on his hands, Thomas can believe that Jesus had truly suffered, that he had actually died, that he is presently resurrected.

Manipulation: A Model for Touching

At the outset of the chapter, I suggested that Doubting Thomas’s touch felt like a necessary proposition. I claimed that medieval (un)believers wanted to touch the (un)believable with him, and that they needed to touch the intangible through him. Thomas’s hand was made instrumental; his unless I touch, instructional; and his feeling, effectual. Through a sampling of haptic materials—written, painted, and performed—we have seen how the disciple’s sense of touch came to matter in the late medieval imagination. Thomas’s experience of touch underwrote the production of tactile surrogates, the many material things made and used to accommodate a medieval desire to touch divine matter. But we have only scratched the surfaces of our materials. If our aim is to apprehend the materiality of medieval devotion, then it makes sense to pursue the

52 Doubting Thomas, 349. ll. 181-86.
physicility of devotional artifacts with greater intimacy. Where physicality infers tangible material forms, let us also allow for a more conceptual touch—through material associations and sensed relations. And where intimacy implies closeness, allow for an embodied practice of physical proximity that affects emotional and spiritual vulnerability. What follows is an object lesson in devotional touching.

The kind of physical intimacy we are after begins with the affective potential of our devotional object. All along, we have been hinting at the capacity of haptic images to affect their users, without reflecting upon the broader implications and traditions of so-called medieval affective piety, what it was and what it means. The trouble with affective piety is that it means different things to different writers. At best, “affective piety” is a shorthand for any emotion-based or emotion-driven mode of religious devotion. The imprecision of the term, however, does not stem from a lack of scholarly will. For over six decades now, there has been a steady stream of articles, essay collections, monographs, and critical editions dedicated to medieval affect, beginning with Richard W. Southern’s early identification of a new “theme of tenderness and compassion” in eleventh-century monastic spirituality in Making of The Middle Ages (1953), and revitalized by the magisterial efforts of Caroline Walker Bynum’s Jesus as Mother (1982) and Rachel Fulton’s From Judgment to Passion (2002), to name just a few.53

We are interested in a specific brand of affective piety, one rooted in the imaginative narratives and interactive practices popularized by the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (Meditations on the Life of Christ). Composed around the middle of the fourteenth century, probably by Johannes de Caulibus, a Franciscan friar of San Gimignano in Tuscany, the *Meditationes* comprises a series of devotions organized around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.54 Of course, the *Meditationes* was not the first of its kind, as similar devotional works were being copied and circulated as early as the eleventh century.55 That said, the *Meditationes* did enjoy unprecedented popularity and considerable influence: its Latin text survives in over a hundred manuscript copies, it

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54 From an early date, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* was attributed to Bonaventure (c. 1217-74), perhaps owing to the relative popularity of his known meditations on the Passion, *The Tree of Life and The Mystical Vine. Meditationes* is now thought to be the work of Johannes de Caulibus; see Johannis de Caulibus *Meditaciones vite Christi: olim S. Bonaventuro attributa*, ed. M. Stallings-Taney, CCCM 153 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), ix-xi. For an alternative view, in which the base-text is ascribed to an fourteenth-century Italian nun, see McNamer, “Further evidence for the date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*,” *Franciscan Studies* 50 (1990): 235-61 and Affective Meditation, 86-115. See also, Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

55 In general, see Southern, *Making of The Middle Ages*; Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*; McNamer, *Affective Meditation*. In particular, see Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, which traces the earliest traditions of affective piety, beginning as early as the ninth century.
was translated into nearly every major European vernacular, and it inspired countless adaptations and companion works.\(^{56}\) We know of at least ten separate Middle English translations, including Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* (c. 1410), which is itself preserved in an impressive sixty plus manuscripts.\(^{57}\)

As Sarah McNamer notes, the “emotional scripts” in the *Meditationes* tradition take a two-step approach: they ask their readers to (1) “imagine themselves present at scenes of [Jesus’s] suffering” and (2) “perform compassion for that suffering victim in a private drama of the heart.”\(^{58}\) These scripts were not meant as halfhearted devotions, but were intended for rigorous meditational exercise. Nicholas Love, for instance, reminds readers of his vernacular adaptation that they must make every effort to remain as “present” as possible:

> And fort gete þis astat of þe soul: I trowe [–] as he þat is unkenynge & blaberinge [–] þat it behoueth to sette thereto all the sharpnesse of mynde, wyth wakynge eyen of herte, puttynge awaye & leuynge all other cures & besynes for þe tyme, & makynge him self as present in alle þat aboute þat passion and crucifixione, affectuesly, bisily, ausily and perseuerantly and not passing liȝtly,

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\(^{58}\) McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 12, 1.
or with tediouse heuynes, but with alle þe herte and gostly gladnes.  
(And in order to achieve this state of the soul, I believe – as someone [does] who is ignorant and incoherent – that it is necessary to turn the sharpness of the mind to [this task], with an awakening of the heart’s eyes [i.e. understanding], setting aside and dropping all other cares and obligations for the time being, making himself as it were affectionately, attentively, intentionally, and perseveringly present to all aspects of the Passion and Crucifixion, and not proceeding carelessly or with drawn-out displeasure, but with his complete heart and spiritual joy).

Thinking back to our previous examples, the many haptic images under investigation, we can imagine how the affective strategies popularized through the Meditationes tradition might have also informed their designs and use. More to our point, these and other affective tools engaged the many senses of touch—physical, emotional, and spiritual—simultaneously in their stated efforts to make their users feel present to the divine’s suffering.

So how does one make herself “present” to such violence? Analogy. The medieval imagination, as Mary Carruthers has demonstrated, is a storehouse of memory-images. Memory-images, Carruthers notes, are combinations of likenesses (sense impressions) and intentions (emotional reactions), things remembered as they “appeared

to and affected us.”60 We might suggest that more affective modes of devotion rely upon perceived familiarities—memory-images of what nails looks like, what hammering sounds like, what puncturing feels like, etc.—to enliven user experience. Along these lines, Esther Cohen has suggested that the one sensation medieval users could certainly connect with was pain, that is, how it feels to hurt and be hurt.61 The “emotional scripts” of affective piety might also play upon memory-images of pain through depictions of sensationalized violence, wherein wounds are made and blood is drawn in painstaking detail. In this way, the ultra-realism of affective devotion works by a kind of pain-oriented analogy. But such affective programs do not end here, as their graphic depictions also intend to engender new memory-images: readily available, easily accessible remembrances of the Passion. In other words, affective devotion intends not only to make users “present” to sacred violence, but also to make sacred violence “present” in users. Our object lesson then, considers how medieval makers and users put these affective theories into devotional practice. Through a slow-reading of a single fifteenth-century devotional manuscript—Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 1 (Douce)—my hope is that our study simulates what hands-on devotion may have felt like to medieval users.

The Douce miscellany is a small specimen. At roughly 3 inches tall and 2 3/8 inches wide, the manuscript is about half the size of a modern “pocket” book, as in a


volume from the Loeb Classical Library or Oxford’s Very Short Introduction series.\(^{62}\) This portable, palm-sized prayer book comprises an assortment of multilingual and multimodal devotional aids. The first half of the manuscript includes some forty-eight paraliturgical Latin prayers to Jesus, the Virgin, and a host of saints. The second half of the manuscript is primarily a collection of Middle English devotional poems, including two fully illustrated meditations on the Passion, “O Vernicle” and “The Five Wounds of Our Lord,” both of special interest here.\(^{63}\) Douce does not constitute a set devotional program per se, though its thematic “make-up” does resemble what John C. Hirsh terms an “occasional prayer book.”\(^{64}\) We might even approach the Douce miscellany as a kind of on-demand compendium of popular religious media. Douce’s compact size and diverse contents support a spectrum of late medieval religious practices—personal or communal, organized or impromptu—that could easily accommodate a range of devotional needs and interests. Simply put, Douce conveniently places the materials of popular medieval devotion in the hands of its users.

The Middle English portion of Douce opens with an illustrated verse meditation


\(^{63}\) Latin prayers span fols. 4r-54r, the Middle English fols. 54v-82r, respectively. Transcriptions of the Middle English material, minus a few appended prose and verse prayers to saints, are printed in: “O Vernicle” (fols. 54v-69v) and “The Number of the Wounds” (fols. 70v-71) in Hirsh, “Two English Devotional Poems”; Gray, Douglas, “The Five Wounds of Our Lord,” Notes and Queries 10 (1963): 50-51, with commentary appearing at 82-89, 127-34, 163-8; “Blessed Mary Mother Virginal” (fols. 77-77v), Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 73-74.

\(^{64}\) Hirsh, “Two English Devotional Poems,” 7.
on the *arma Christi*, commonly known by its opening salvo “O Vernicle.”65 The Douce “O Vernicle” is itself a multimedia devotional work consisting of twenty-three imagetexts treating the instruments of the Passion. These imagetexts present an instrument-by-instrument accounting of the suffering and death of Jesus, with each combination of words and pictures offering up-close and in-depth access to the bloody tools of sacred violence. This equally affective and penitential program is as straightforward as it is systematic. For each instrument users are given a schematic line drawing, followed by a mechanical description of its function, followed by some devotional application. The imagetext dedicated to the nails, for instance, opens with a pen and ink rendering of three nails set within a rough frame. Two rhyming couplets of explanatory verse are set immediately below:

The nayles through foote and hand also.

Lorde, kepe [me] from synne and wo,

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That I haue in all my lyfe done,
With handis handiled and fete mysgone.66

(These nails through feet and hands, too, / Lord, may they deliver me from the
sin and sorrow, / Which I have committed throughout my life, / with hands
handled and feet strayed.)

The verse begins by reminding users of the historical and operational significance of the
three nails, though not because your average medieval user would have been unfamiliar
with what they represented or meant. Rather, working in collaboration with its
companion image, the first line slowly shifts and refocuses attention onto the placement
of the nails: through the hands and feet of Jesus. Engaged users are affectively focused on
the three nails and the four wounds which they had made. It is important that the
manuscript’s compact format places these three nails comfortably in the palms of its
users’s hands, too. Simple acts of apprehension—holding the manuscript, seeing the
imagetext, recalling the perceived properties of a nail—provides users with sensible
points of access to then prime their imaginations for a moral application. Holding the
form and function of these three nails in hand and in mind, users are better prepared to
receive the moral lessons to be drawn from the pierced hands and feet of Jesus.

The second couplet offers reflection upon the nails as a potential remedy against
any and all immoral acts of touch. This imagetext promotes a kind of self-reflexive
engagement with the nails wherein users are meant to, first, identify with the physical
pain they inflicted and, second, translate that pain into a soul searching penitential

66 MS Douce 1, 65r. Hirsh, “Two English Devotional Poems,” 5. All transcriptions of the Douce “O
Vernicle” are quoted from Hirsh, who has converted the prose form of manuscript lines into poetic lines.
The Douce records notable variants; for comparison, see Nichols, “O Vernicle,” 368.
activity: what have we mishandled? where have we misstepped? And though its moral lessons are incomplete, as we never quite learn how to touch and go morally, it is important that we recognize the many ways in which “O Vernicle” does engage the sense of touch pedagogically.

The tactile lessons of the nails are carried over into the imagetext of the hammer. Under the pictorial rubric of two crossed hammers, the accompanying text reads:

The hamers bothe strong and grete
That perced the holes in hond and fete:
Lord, be my socoure in all my lyfe,
And kepe me harmeles fro swerde and knyfe.67

(The hammer both strong and mighty, / That pierced the holes in [your] hands and feet, / Lord, may they be a defense in the course of my life, / And keep me unharmed from sword or knife.)

The takeaway is strangely specific, as the hammers are given a kind of talismanic power to protect users from random acts of physical violence.68 Even so, the tangible concerns of both the hammer and nails do reflect the thinking of medieval moralists who were likewise invested in using the instruments of the Passion to educate and to edify their five senses. Speaking on touch, for instance, one fifteenth-century sermon reminds


68 The final couplet is a notable variant, in that most other versions do not solicit protection, but instead seem to coerce a confession from its readers: “Pe hamer both sterne and grete / Pat drofe pe nayles þoru hand & fete / Hit be my socour þat in my life / If ony I man smot wip staf or kniue”; Nichols, “O Vernicle,” 368, emphasis added.
parishioners that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). What this means, we eventually learn, is that best practices involve keeping your hands to yourself and your feet off the path of evil. We find further clarification over what constitutes immoral touching in a passage from a companion sermon, in which parishioners are instructed not to harm others through violence or robbery, and not to “uncleanly” touch others or themselves. And for those who find such practices difficult, to these the sermon recommends they “look” on the nails that pierced the hands and feet of Jesus.

We can reasonably suggest that all of this affective wielding of hammers and nails was meant to square the sense of touch socially, and to align it spiritually. What makes “O Vernicle” work, so to speak, is the ways in which it taps into popular practices of affective mediation to encourage the beginnings of penitential action. The idea is not to dwell too long in the affective moment, but just long enough to feel something useful, which is to say, long enough to feel contrite. Consider the operations of the spear:

Lorde, the spere so sharpe ygrounde,
That in thy hert made a wounde.
It quench the synnes I haue wrought,

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70 Sermon 10, for the Fourth Sunday after the Octave of Epiphany, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 95, fols. 19v-22r; see O’Mara and Paul, Repertorium, 3.1640-42.

71 Sermon 28, Bodley 95, fols. 53r-55v; O’Mara and Paul, Repertorium, 3.1665-68. As Holly Johnson has demonstrated, relating the instruments of the Passion to specific sins is a common feature of Good Friday preaching in medieval England, in both Latin and vernacular sermons; see “‘The Hard Bed of the Cross’: Good Friday Preaching and the Seven Deadly Sins,” in The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals, ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129-44 and, for a more extensive study, The Grammar of Good Friday: Macaronic Sermons of Late Medieval England (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012). On Good Friday preaching and “O Vernicle,” see Newhauser and Russell, “Mapping Virtual Pilgrimage,” 92-95.
With\textsuperscript{72} herte in ylnes thoute,  
And with my pryde and boost therto  
And myn vnbumnnesse also.\textsuperscript{73} 

(Lord, this spear so sharply sharpened / That made a wound in your heart, / May it quench the sins I have committed / With my heart through wicked thought, / And through my pride, and arrogance as well, / And through my disobedience, too.)

The verse establishes a double wounding, playing on the delightful imprecision of a feeling-based discourse. Jesus’ biological, physically wounded heart is tied to the metaphorical, spiritually wounded hearts of users: hearts infected by wicked thoughts, pride, arrogance, and disobedience.

As we saw with the nails and hammer, the first lines of the verse mean to focus attention on the spear’s placement: \textit{in} the heart of Jesus. These lines also ascribe a measure of operational agency: this is the sharply-sharpened spear that \textit{made} the sidewound. And the following line adds a wonderfully suggestive use of \textit{quenche}. Through this subtle appeal to the senses, targeting a perceived familiarity with what it feels like to satisfy thirst, the line floods the affectively-tuned imagination with a rush blood and water from Jesus’ sidewound. We might recall, with our conceptual medieval users, the various depictions and dramatizations of Longinus’s fateful wounding, such as the Gough Crucifixion

\textsuperscript{72} The manuscript reads: “And with herte in ylnes thoute, / With my pryde and boost therto.” Here, \textit{and} has most likely been miscopied and should appear before \textit{with} on the following line (fol. 67r); cf. Nichols, “O Vernicle,” 370.

\textsuperscript{73} MS Douce 1, fols. 66v-67r. Hirsh, “Two English Devotional Poems,” 7.
(n38) and the *Mortificacio Christi* described above. We might also remember that the saint was healed physically and spiritually by means of his spear, through contact with the blood and water he so violently drew.

But the program does not end with this outside connection, as the affective moment quickly gives way to penitential action. After all, the bulk of the stanza is the beginning of a confessional script. The so motivated user may take the “I” of the stanza as an invitation to reflect upon and confess his or her sins. And the general heart conditions listed in this confessional script—the sins of pride, arrogance, and disobedience—could easily trigger a more thorough set of self-examinations and self-diagnoses. The idea, then, is for users to turn the spear on themselves, to prick their own consciences, and to self-start their penances.

Before we can touch a wounded body, a wounded body must first be made. The Douce “O Vernicle” impresses the various traumas of wound making on the hands, heads, and hearts of its users. Through a physical, emotional, and spiritual network of feeling, “O Vernicle” allows users to feel the Crucifixion trauma. Similar to Landy’s *Doubting Thomas*, Douce users are made witness, as virtual spectators and perpetrators, to acts of sacred violence by virtue of their own senses of touch. Consequently, Douce users must contend with their part in the production of a dead body.

Let us momentarily imagine ourselves as medieval users. The Douce “O Vernicle” closes with an imagetext of a sepulcher. At the bottom of the program’s penultimate page, lies an image of a dead Jesus entomb.  

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74 MS Douce 1, 69r.
supporting text, we must turn the page. Now we are brought to a deadened, imageless textual field. With the turn of a page, we have symbolically put a divine body to rest.\textsuperscript{75}

Whether by design or happenstance, the impact of this visual lacuna is no less significant. These imageless pages punctuate the absence of the divine body. Though the wounded form is out of sight, it may still pierce the mind. The imageless pages are replete with remembrances of bloodshed that speak to the enduring traumas of violence and, to some extent, a form of separation anxiety. Here, users are given the space to suffer the divine’s physical absence. As the verse on the sepulcher suggests, the entombed body of Jesus means to prepare users for their own inevitable deaths: “Lorde, graunte me or that I dye, / Sorow for synne with teeres of eye” (Lord, allow me to confess before I die, / Sorrow for sins with tears from my eyes).\textsuperscript{76} To feel the absence of Jesus is to feel the alienating effects of one’s own sin.

Yet these same feelings of alienation appear to remedy our separation anxiety: to grieve his absence affectively is also to pursue reconciliation penitentially. Our staged trauma will not go untreated should we choose to turn the page and push past the grave. When we do, we return to an illustrated field, reunited with a familiar face. With a turn of the page, we have symbolically


\textsuperscript{76} Hirsh, “Two English Devotional Poems,” 6.
resurrected the once absent body.\textsuperscript{77}

The appearance of a resurrected Jesus marks a shift in the devotional program. Just above the pen and ink miniature, the text announces this transition clearly: “Thus endeth the prayers of the passion ofoure lorde. Of the V wounds of our lorde […].”\textsuperscript{78} The incipit to the “Five Wounds” appears to break off, importantly in a way that allows us to read the imaged body like an ellipsis. Before users begin their contemplation of the five wounds, they must first take pause: how does this body matter? This is a specific kind of body. Here, we are tasked with beholding and holding a resurrected body.

How does this body matter? Recall Doubting Thomas’s conditions for belief. The disciple’s demand to see and to feel divine wounds revalued the more intimate and concrete connections touch adds to sight. What touch affords (un)believers is the feeling of being touched back. We find certain comforts in touch because its operations are fundamentally interconnected—soma\textit{tically} interconnected. When touching others, we are also confirming ourselves. I want to suggest that this handheld image is the beginning of a new tactile surrogate. The resurrected body is here replicated and remounted in a material form to be touched, as both a physical and conceptual body of devotion. But Thomas required a specific kind of body to touch: a resurrected and wounded body. Notice that the resurrected’s wounds are yet hidden: out of sight, out of reach. For wounds, you must turn the page. As you proceed—and this is most critical to the

\textsuperscript{77} MS Douce 1, 71r.

\textsuperscript{78} MS Douce 1, fol. 71r.
success of the “Five Wounds” program—you do so with a firsthand knowledge of the resurrected, that is, the five wounds are living wounds.

The “Five Wounds” follows a similar devotional logic to “O Vernicle,” specifically where its shared compositional strategies encourage slow reading and intentional viewing practices. The “Five Wounds” offers up Jesus’s broken body for close inspection and careful contemplation through a series of five imagetexts, one for each wound.79 After the resurrected body is dismembered and his wounds divided, his bleedings are neatly distributed across the manuscript pages. The affective and penitential aims of this program are made clear from the outset: users are to reflect upon how their sins have made these wounds and to learn how they as sinners might now use these wounds to procure their salvation. The meditations, fragmented across the pages, allow users to simulate more intimate encounters with the wounded body. Importantly, this particular collection of handheld wounds permits users to feel like Thomas, if only though the material surrogacy of the manuscript.

The Douce “Five Wounds” begins its focused meditation with an imagetext of a wounded right hand.80 Four elongated globs of blood are drawn

79 The Douce “Five Wounds” participates in a broader tradition of moralized devotions pairing wounds and sins, in which the five wounds are believed to counteract or remedy sin in general, and sometimes the seven capital vices in particular; see Duffy, Stripping the Altars, 243-44. For another example of devotion to the five wounds of Jesus, see the Middle English poem “Wounds and Sins,” in Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007) 385, and Shuffelton’s “Introduction,” 575-79. For recent perspectives on wounding and wound repair in medieval literature and culture, and their relation to late medieval devotional culture, see Wounds in the Middle Ages, ed. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2014) and Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

80 MS Douce 1, fol. 71v.
just below a large circular wound set in the palm. The gaping hole and the illusion of bleeding appears to preserve the puncture wound in an always-already fresh state for users.\textsuperscript{81} We can imagine how holding this surrogate wound in one hand, and perhaps retracing the lines of blood with the other, might affect medieval users. The bleeding image should trigger flashbacks, which is to say, recollections of wound making witnessed through paintings, plays, and other public performances of sacred violence. This same ever-flowing blood should also remind users of its life-giving and faith-healing powers. After all, users are holding the wounded hand of the resurrected body. And here, I mean to suggest, users are finally beginning to touch like Doubting Thomas: touching to remediate their witnessed traumas, touching to confirm their belief.

At the center of the “Five Wounds” program rests an emblematic depiction of Jesus’s sidewound.\textsuperscript{82} The imagetext is a composite of the most popular metaphorical and metonymic representations of the wound: a well, a garden, a refuge, a heart.\textsuperscript{83} The sidewound, the very object of our (un)believer’s touch, has been anatomically transposed, rotated and reconfigured into mouth-like gash at the center of the heart. And this rendering is pregnant with meaning: blood flows and flowers grow out of the wound, while just enough space is left for

\textsuperscript{81} See n38.

\textsuperscript{82} MS Douce 1, fol. 73v.

prodding fingers to find their way inside the wound. Compared to the moderate
realism of the right hand, not to mention the remaining three nail-wounds, the
rather symbolist representation of the heart may not be the most obvious
surrogates for the devotional touch. To be sure, there are a number of more
inviting “life-size” depictions of the sidewound found in contemporaneous books
of hours and prayerbooks.\(^84\) The more abstract features of the “Five Wounds”
imagetext still support a broad range of religious feelings, however, given the
popular medieval belief that the sidewound was the portal to Jesus’s heart—itself
the bedchamber of mystical union.\(^85\) Even so, we are still after a specific kind of
touch: the feeling of being touched back.

Throughout the present chapter, we have been operating under the
assumption that the divine body was a physically absent body. But this is not
exactly true, not for medieval believers anyway. If we acknowledge claims of
eucharistic theology, specifically late medieval conceptions of real presence, then
we must also acknowledge that medieval believers were apprehending the divine
body in a physical sense. Even in forms of ocular communion, as we saw in
chapter 3, medieval believers witnessed the real body being broken and the real
blood being poured out.\(^86\) So when the Douce prayer reopens the sidewound, the
stanza, significantly, ends with visceral outpouring: “both blode and water therout

\(^84\) Cf. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. liturg. f.2, fol. 4v: http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/s/etdl1x <accessed 1 February 2016>. And for an even
the more comparable sidewound cut into the sacred heart, see Bodleian Library, MS Lat. misc. c. 66, fol. 129v: http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/s/7c0b4s <accessed 1 February 2016>.


\(^86\) See also, Beckwith, Chirst’s Body, 34-36.
gan poure” (where both blood and water *begin to pour*). And when the prayer then addresses this sacred blood as a more “helthfull fode” (saving sustenance), it does so to recall the haptic performances of transubstantiation. Holding this bloody imagery in mind, conclude finally this point: the most powerful tactile surrogates will always be trans-substantial. The many haptic images, texts, and performances of late medieval devotion allowed (un)believers to touch the (un)believable. Through material approximations, through tactile surrogates, medieval makers and users had collectively shared in Thomas’s experience of touch. And just as Thomas, all they really needed to believe was a little blood on their hands.

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