IMITATION, INTERPRETATION, AND ASCETIC IMPULSE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH DEVOTIONAL CULTURE

Preceding the single surviving Middle English copy of Bridget of Sweden’s Liber celestis (British Library, Cotton MS Claudius B I) is an early fifteenth-century vita from the Officium Sanctae Birgittae by Birger Gregersson, Archbishop of Uppsala. The text recounts, with particular precision, how Bridget (d. 1373) regularly tortured herself in an act of remembrance for the Passion and death of Christ:

Euirilke Friday was sho wont to take of one birninge taper v hote dropes and drope vpon hir bare fl eshe, so þat of þase v dropes lefte þare v woundes: and if þai helid bi þe next Fridai, sho wald take hir nailes and riue vp þe skin, so þat hir bodi suld neuir be withoute wounde, so þat sho might continuli hafe minde of þe passion of Criste.¹

This behaviour is a symbolic and ritualized imitation of the suffering of Christ. In one respect it is a performance of collective memory which exemplifies the continuing centrality of the Passion to Christian salvation; in another, its formal repetitiveness demonstrates how integral imitation is to Bridget’s own identity: it is a particular marker of her uniqueness. The extremity of Bridget’s devotional practice, which leaves her with permanently open wounds, locates her simultaneously at the heart of Christian tradition yet also separates her from the vast majority of medieval believers who do not undertake such self-mortification. Therefore, while the passage affirms Bridget’s role as a contemporary visualization of the Passion, it also raises significant questions regarding the nature, purpose, and allure of asceticism, as well as the place of imitation and identity construction in medieval devotional culture. These questions include the extent to which Bridget’s imitative performance makes her Christlike and whether she is intended to become an object of imitation herself. If she is to be imitated, what role should that imitation take, and if not, what response is invited from readers and viewers? This essay seeks to explore the ways in which readers are invited to respond to images of suffering, specifically those that depict suffering in imitation of Christ, rather than the suffering of Christ himself.

Imitation has long been considered fundamental to human cognitive development; it is through imitation that individuals are incorporated into particular cultural, familial, social, political, and religious systems. From birth
the individual is defined in relation to those around him and learns human interaction, language, and collective identity in imitation of them. William James claims that imitation is an ‘instinctive’ aspect of childhood development, but imitation does not end when a person reaches adulthood. Carl Jung argues that ‘Human beings have a capacity which is of the utmost use for purposes of collectivism and most prejudicial to individuation, and that is the capacity to imitate. Collective psychology cannot dispense with imitation, without which the organization of the State and Society would be impossible.’ More recently Susan Hurley and Nick Charter have argued that imitation is not only limited to social organization, it is ‘fundamentally linked to characteristically human forms of intelligence, in particular to language, culture, and the ability to understand other minds’. The ability to imitate is a key formative function of human behaviour. It enables individuals to interact, to build knowledge, and to form communities. All individuals are to some extent shaped by imitation.

In the later Middle Ages, asceticism such as Bridget of Sweden’s burning of herself to effect a contemporary representation of the wounds of Christ is a practice thoroughly grounded in imitation. Indeed, the life of Christ as depicted in the Gospels is the source of numerous imitative practices, from the heroic asceticism of the early desert fathers to the isolation and obedience of monks, nuns, and anchorites, and the mortification of the flesh by numerous saints and mystics. An interesting example can be found in the Life of the Low Countries mystic Elizabeth of Spalbeek (d. 1304). When physically imitating Christ’s crucifixion, Elizabeth is specifically said to have ‘expounded that at is written in the gospel’. Notably, Elizabeth’s imitative suffering does not function as a form of participation in biblical events, but as a gloss on them, prompting readers’ collective memory of pivotal moments in Christianity and their significance. For instance, when she imitates, and in the process re-creates the events of the Passion, she specifically ‘figures and expounds’ Christ himself; she offers both an explanation and an interpretation of the events of the Passion as depicted in the Scriptures.

Thus while asceticism is a highly personal endeavour, because it is founded on imitation it also acts as an exponent of the action or event that is imitated, a gloss on the original text, which it both interprets and is authorized by. This raises two related questions regarding the role of imitative ascetic practice in the late Middle Ages. Firstly, to what extent is ascetic autonomy fostered, or even desirable, in a culture grounded in strict religious models; is the role of ascetic imitation simply one of clarification? Secondly, what kinds of responses are invited to examples of imitation and how is (mis)interpretation of those exemplars negotiated? In order to examine these related issues, what follows is an exploration of how medieval English devotional writers negotiate the tensions created by imitation, individual identity, and the impulse to mortify the flesh.
It focuses in particular on texts and translations in the vernacular, such as *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Life of Marie of Oignies*, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and the works of Richard Rolle, and examines how the issues of bodily asceticism, imitative self-mortification, and affective devotion are treated in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

Whilst asceticism is generally understated in late medieval English writing it arguably underpins devotional culture as an affirmative marker of piety and identity, albeit one susceptible to misuse, a further problem this essay will address. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues, asceticism is a formative element in both individual and collective experience: ‘In the tight sense asceticism is the product of early Christian ethics and spirituality’, but in a wider sense there is an ‘ascetic imperative’ common to all cultures, practices, and institutions which is directly related to ‘practices of representation and imitation’.7 Significantly, Harpham also notes that ‘as nobody can be another person, the obstacles to perfect imitation are absolute; but again virtue resides in the effort’.8 Here, Harpham could be describing the situation encountered in Bridget of Sweden’s imitation of the Passion in which imitation is not transformation because it does not serve to unite the imitator with the imitated as one being. In fact, imitation actually emphasizes their difference by focusing on Bridget’s memories of Christ as other to her. Nevertheless, Bridget’s impulse to imitate, to never be without Christ’s wounds, is palpable and that impulse, Harpham asserts, has culturally been perceived as laudable.

That imitation involving the ascetic suppression of the self should be so praised is perhaps perplexing when it involves bodily mortification, but within mysticism and devotional culture more broadly ideas of self usually exist in order that they might be transcended. Indeed, Harpham remarks that Christian (unlike pagan) asceticism ‘concentrates exclusively on the self, which is predicated to be corrupt in body and deceitful in thought’, and coenobitic living (in an ascetic community) exposes the individual to temptation in order to test the ‘limits of human capacity to achieve self-transcendence … so that the self would grow indistinct in its outlines, and would ideally, simply cease to be’.9 This denial of self is amplified in the Middle Ages by the desire for imitation. For instance, even a simple statement such as that found in the fifteenth-century English translation of Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, which makes mention of the use of saintly exemplars in devotional practice, downplays present experience: ‘Biholde þe queke ensaumples of olde fathers, in þe whiche shone verey perfeccion, and þou shalt see howe litel hit is and allemoste þat we doo. Alas, what is oure lyve compared to hem?’10 Such a statement is a comment on the inferiority of the late medieval self in comparison to the perfection of past models of piety. It stresses the imperfection of contemporary Christians and insists that even through the most careful imitation it is impossible that the flawed copy could live up to
the perfection of the model. Again, we might draw on Harpham who argues that ‘In imitating Christ the ascetic diverges decisively from him … For the ascetic, self-discipline was a way of “mortifying,” or making dead the flesh. He could not seek this death as an end, but only as a means, a middle that could never end.’¹¹ Thus ascetic imitation of Christ does not enable one to become Christlike; in fact it serves to emphasize just how un-Christlike like the ascetic is by exaggerating the sinfulness of the flesh. Even the saints, perfect exemplars of Christ’s living, must fight against their intrinsically un-Christlike natures. The Imitation of Christ further insists that ‘Holy men and þe frendes of God hath served oure Lorde in hunger and thurste, in colde and nakednesse, in laboure and werynesse, in wakynges and fastynges, in praiers and holy meditacions, in persecucions and many repreves.’¹² While this exemplifies the prevalent idea that true devotion in the Middle Ages means sharing Christ’s suffering, shared experience can actually foster difference as well as similarity. Here, imitation is figured as ‘service’ rather than as transformation into a Christlike state. By suffering like Christ, one does not and cannot become Christ, and although the best life is still said to be lived by ‘he þat may suffer anybinge for Goddes sake’,¹³ he nevertheless suffers ‘for’ God rather than ‘as’ God.

This idea is furthered by the increasing tendency in the late Middle Ages to assert that Christian suffering and even imitation could take place in the imagination. Michelle Karnes argues that the ‘participatory imperative’ of writers like the Franciscan thinker Bonaventure (d. 1274), in which the imagination takes a central role in performing suffering in front of the mind’s eye, means that meditation ‘fulfils the requirement that the individual engage actively with Christ’s life’.¹⁴ Indeed, texts like the thirteenth-century Stimulus amoris by James of Milan (who was also a Franciscan) insist on the power of meditation to engender compassionate mental suffering, for ‘The soul, wounded by meditation on the wounds, attaches itself to Christ’s innermost being.’¹⁵ In Nicholas Love’s vernacular translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran Meditationes vitae Christi, The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ (c.1400), Christ himself makes clear, with reference to the Virgin, that his suffering is enough for the whole world: ‘Mi fadere þhe knawen how my modere is tormented for me. I sholde onely be crucifiede & not shee. But loo now she hangeþ on þe crosse with me; Mine owne crucifynge suffi ce, for I bere þe synnes of alle þe peple.’¹⁶ Here salvation has come from the fact that Christ suffered physically; imitation of that suffering will not contribute a deeper meaning. It is meditation on the significance of that salvific suffering which Love seeks to engender. For instance, he poses a series of rhetorical questions designed to shape the reader’s response to visualizing Christ’s wounds during the flagellation: ‘Oo, my lorde god, what is alle þis? Loo þenke þe not here a fulle harde & continuele bitter bataile? Ʒitte abide a litel while & þou salt se hardere.’¹⁷ Love enquires of his readers whether they have
ever witnessed such suffering and challenges them to cope with witnessing the crucifixion which is still to come. He clearly invites readers not to imitate the crucifixion but to wonder at it. Here, the object of meditation and marvel is the body of Christ and the expected response to it is clearly delineated; however, in texts where the object of meditation is someone acting in imitation of Christ’s suffering, the expected response is problematized.

In the example cited from Bridget of Sweden’s vita, the saint specifically does not imitate Christ in order to become like him. The purpose of her performance is to ‘have mind of him’. Her actions are an act of memorialization and a bodily meditation on that memory. The language employed by Bridget’s biographer directly echoes that of texts like Love’s Mirror in which the meditant should ‘make present in þi mynde’ the suffering of Jesus and behold the Cross with ‘þe innere eye of þi soule’. Bridget’s biographer specifically notes ‘þat it was wondir þat euer so tendir a bodi might suffi er so grete penance’. Here readers are called to imagine and marvel at the imitator’s capacity for suffering; they are not called to imitate that suffering themselves. As in Love’s Mirror, the act of imagining the Passion specifically counters the impulse to imitate it. Just as we are reminded of Christ’s pain in Bridget’s ever wounded body, which glosses his, Love calls directly for us to read the body of Christ as he helps us to imagine it: ‘Þ[ou] also if þou beholde wele þi lorde; þou meiht haue here matire ynough of hye compassion, seynge him so tormentede, þat fro þe sole of þe fote in to þe hiest of þe hede; þer was in him none hole place nor membre without passion.’

Images of Christ’s suffering body of course played an increasingly prominent role in personal affective relationships with God in the later Middle Ages, but writers appear to have taken particular care to discourage physical imitation of them. In the Mirror, for instance, Nicholas Love appears to have added an emphasis on the role of the imagination in meditating on the events of Christ’s life which was not present in the original Meditationes vitae Christi specifically in order to preserve a distance between reader and object and to discourage misguided imitation. Indeed, Martin Thornton suggests that wider access to examples of affectivity and asceticism were ‘certain to be misunderstood’. Although misunderstanding is by no means guaranteed, fears of misinterpretation and of misguided imitation resound clearly in the work of English writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

One such English writer is Richard Rolle (d. 1349), who specifically explores the affective potential of corporeal suffering in his writings, but in a way that makes the reader aware of the constructed nature of the suffering he depicts as well as the constructed way in which they are invited to respond to it. For example, Rolle famously employs the idea of Christ’s textualized body in his description of the crucifixion: ‘swete Ihesu, þy body is lyke a boke written al with rede ynke: so is þy body al written with rede woundes.’ It is the specific
imagery of wounds as text and body as book which marks Christ as an object of meditation and it is meditation as opposed to imitation which for Rolle leads to union. He pledges to remain at the foot of the Cross ‘till I be with y³ precious blode becomyn al rede; till I be mad with y³ blode as of þyn owne’.24 Here Rolle specifically emphasizes that he is a reader and meditant, not an imitator or a sufferer. Christ’s blood mingles with his own in compassionate, and imagined, union, not through shared or imitated pain. The union that occurs here does not originate from imitation of Christ but from compassionate association with him. Moreover, Rolle portrays his response as a model for his own readers; through imitation of Rolle the reader is guided through the text of Christ’s body. It is not Christ the reader should imitate, it is Rolle himself. The reader is invited to experience affective affiliation with Christ through imagined participation in his suffering, in imitation of Rolle’s own imaginative practice. Indeed, Jessica Barr has recently argued that Rolle’s Meditations take a ‘narrative perspective that is capable of being inhabited by any reader’.25 This is markedly different from Bridget of Sweden’s experience in which she responds to the text of Christ’s body by textualizing her own. While Rolle’s response is that of a reader, Bridget’s response is that of a writer, wounding her own body as a commentary that expounds the meaning of the original text. As a commentator Bridget does not simply read the text of Christ’s body; she glosses it, and thus authors a new text for the reader to employ imaginatively alongside consideration of the original Passion narrative.

Bridget of Sweden’s behaviour is therefore a physical interpretation of teachings such as Hugh of St Victor’s on ascetic imitation. Hugh (d. 1141) writes that Christ himself was a commentary on the Book of Wisdom, a book which not only showed but illuminated God’s Wisdom (‘quoniam non solum demonstravit sed illuminavit’): ‘Assumpsit carnem non amittens divinitatem, et positus est liber scriptus intus et foris; in humanitate foris, intus in divinate, ut foris legeretur per imitationem, intus per contemplationem.’26 For Hugh reading is a form of imitation and Christ himself is a glossator on the nature of God. However, with the concept of wounded body as text comes the problem that the text might be misread, a problem which medieval writers were acutely aware of.

The issue of misinterpretation is one that Rolle, in particular, is keen to address. Rolle is inherently sceptical of the transformative power of physical suffering and is concerned about the effects of misguided imitation. Occasionally he recommends moderate penitence as a means to prevent spiritual regression, warning that if one thinks ‘I may nat despise þe world [and] I may nat fynd in myn hert to pyne my body’ one should then recall ‘whare þe worldes louers ben now, and whar þe louers ben of God’.27 However, his usual stance on self-mortification is profoundly negative. His concern that ascetic exempla might be interpreted too literally is very clear in The Form of Living (1348–9), written for
the anchoress Margaret Kirkeby, where he warns that extreme asceticism brings on delusions and makes one too weak to fulfil the requirements of the religious life.28 This is developed further in the deeply mystical *Incendium amoris* where he comments on his experience of the incompatibility of asceticism with mystical *fervor*, *dulcor*, and *canor*. He writes that one should neither be too abstemious nor too excessive; moderation in all things is best:

> Melius tamen esset pro se si in modico nesciens excederet mensuram, dummodo bona intencione ad sustentandam naturam illud agat, quam si nimirum ieiunio deficere inceperet et pre imbecilitate corporis canere non ualeret. Sed sine dubio qui ad hoc eligitur fraibili diaboli nec in comedendo nec in abstinendo superatur … Comedero et bibi de his que meliora uideantur; non quia delicias amavi sed ut natura sustentaretur in servitio Dei et in iubilo Ihesu Christi, conformans me illis cum quibus morabar bono modo propter Christum, et ne sanctitatem fingerem ubi nulla est, et ne homines me nimis laudarent ubi minus esse laudabilis.29

Here, Rolle conveys a practical and unpretentious approach to the spiritual harmony which promotes the need for corporeal as well as spiritual nourishment. Significantly, Rolle stresses that penitence does not always stem from pure intentions; it can equally be inspired by the devil as by God, leading to a false and hypocritical appearance or semblance of holiness (‘sanctitatem fingerem’) and offering a misleading example to others. Indeed, misguided, insincere, and excessive penance is a major concern. Rolle goes on to argue that the devil actually possesses many people who outwardly appear good, merciful, chaste, and humble, and who undertake bodily penance: ‘Possidet itaque diabolus plures quos bonos putamus. Habet enim elesmosinarios, castos, humiles, scilicet peccatores se fatentes, ciliais indutos, penitencia afflictos.’30 Rolle’s spirituality might itself seem excessive, but he reminds the reader that excessive simplicity and humility can sometimes conceal far greater corruption.

Rolle’s concerns are echoed in the treatment of penance in *The Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* (c.1400), a text that also advocates moderation. Nicole Rice observes that ‘The essence of proper self-discipline, for the guide’s inscribed readers, lies in the balance between the work of the active life and moderate penitential discipline’:

> Yif þou take for þe loue of God so muche abstinence, waking, oþer bodiliche penaunce, þat þou may not for feblenes to continue to trauaile in þe seruice of God, þan is þi wil to feruent. For be þi loue neuer so gret, God is not pleased whan þou reulest þe in suche maner þat þou mowe not abide in his seruice þoru þi mysreule. Therfore be war and reule þe upon reson; take no more uppon þe þan þou maist bere, besie not þe to folwe oþer strong men or women of old time in doynge penaunce oþerwise þan þi streynþe wol aske.31

The text reveals a deep concern about the imitation (or ‘following’) of ascetic
exemplars. It offers a stark warning here against the ‘weak’ (or ordinary) Christian imitating the ‘strong’. It suggests that while the competitive impulse to perform acts of extraordinary asceticism existed in ordinary readers of the lives of saints and mystics, heroic asceticism is more than the average person can bear. The text does not deny that ‘bodiliche penaunce’ may form part of the active life, but, as Rice articulates, *Contemplations* insists that ‘love resides not in extreme shows of piety but in the commitment to spiritual moderation in the active life’.32 The key here is the idea that excessive asceticism might lead to a hypocritical feeling of pride in one’s ascetic achievements, a fear that Giles Constable traces throughout the history of ascetic behaviour, and one that Rolle finds particularly troubling.33 As Michelle Karnes notes, ‘God gives few the grace to suffer for him physically, but he gives many the desire to suffer,’34 and that impulsive desire to suffer required specific regulation.

The misinterpretation of asceticism and the need to regulate it have been acknowledged problems since antiquity. For instance, John Cassian (d. 435) felt that anchoretic withdrawal from the world had been severely misinterpreted in fourth-century France. Cassian feared that practitioners were embracing solitude for its own sake and refusing to submit to the judgement and direction of others; that is, they did not practise obedience, which, he asserts in the *Institutes*, is the fundamental basis of asceticism.35 Moreover, ascetical theologies which stress the re-modelling of self in response to God continually assert that penance should always be accompanied by the knowledge that bodily mortifications endured without spiritual, interior repentance are worthless. Cassian emphasizes that asceticism is morally, not substantially, transformative; it is not merely a bodily practice but an intellectual activity in which the practitioner should not be satisfied that ascetic exercises are an end in and of themselves.36 The outward and apparently achievable bodily transformation made possible by asceticism is particularly vulnerable to physical imitation, because of its visibility, while the unseen inner transformation of mind which is its actual purpose is forgotten. Thus while imitation is the necessary basis of asceticism, as Harpham stresses,37 it is also its inherently problematic weakness.

Confusion over the inner and outer elements of asceticism was by no means restricted to early Christian or lay audiences. The allure of the outward tropes of asceticism seems to have been so accepted that emphasis on its external performance rather than its inner transformation was common. For example, even late medieval monastic writers such as the Benedictine John Lydgate (d. c.1451) fall prey to misreading. In his prayer to St Ositha Lydgate describes how ‘in thy hand thee heeld a litil stoon / To bete thy brest of hool affeccioun’.38 Sarah Salih observes that this does not correspond to anything in the saint’s legend, but instead might represent Lydgate’s misrecognition of the bunch of flowers that she commonly holds in fifteenth-century sculptures.39 This suggests how prevalent
the ideas of self-inflicted pain and asceticism were in late medieval England. Self-mortification was apparently viewed as a typical saintly activity and Lydgate’s praise of St Ositha reveals contemporary fascination with the subject. That one had to undertake bodily self-mortification to achieve the status of a saint is an opinion propagated by many hagiographers and perpetuated by later writers.

Two testaments to the propagation of asceticism as a saintly ideal and to the misunderstanding of that asceticism are the *Life of Marie of Oignies* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Marie of Oignies (d. 1213) was a visionary and an accomplished ascetic who flagellated and starved herself, walked barefoot through the snow, and cut off pieces of her own flesh. Margery Kempe (d. c.1438) was also a visionary, whose self-authored life imitates the example of holy women like Marie and their often physical performance of devotion. In Marie’s Middle English life ascetic behaviour is directly related to her mystical capacity, a correlation which raises significant questions about the motives of those who imitate her. In Margery’s text, asceticism is undertaken for the very reasons writers like Cassian and Rolle fear, because it appears to offer an accelerated route to union with the divine, as a performative and visible trope of saintly piety. An examination of these two texts will allow us to rethink the nature of medieval *imitatio* and the perceived dangers involved in reading ascetic exemplars.

*The Life of Marie of Oignies* appears in English in the early fifteenth century. Originally written by Jacques de Vitry in 1215, Marie’s *Life* details her works of mercy, chastity, charity, fasting, Eucharistic devotion, and prayer. She was born around 1177 to a wealthy family in Nivelles (in the Liège region of Belgium), led a celibate life with her husband, and ultimately became a *conversa* at the Augustinian priory of Oignies. Barbara Newman has suggested that Marie’s life was the standard upon which accounts of other Low Countries holy women were modelled. For example, Thomas de Cantimpré essentially normalized the extreme sufferings of Christina Mirabilis (d. 1224) by assimilating the purpose of her self-mortifications to those offered for the benefit of souls by women like Marie of Oignies. Christina’s torments are authorized and given meaning through affiliation with Marie’s. Thus it is not surprising that Margery Kempe should also directly employ Marie as an advocate for her own devotional practice.

Marie is an ideal choice for a model upon which to base other devotional lives. Her extravagant, but orthodox, piety found favour with Bishop Fulk of Toulouse (who visited her personally) and Pope Honorius III (to whom Jacques de Vitry applied for approval of the continued existence of the beguines in 1216). It was also utilized by Vincent of Beauvais, who inserted an abbreviated version of the *Life* into the fourth part of his *Speculum maius* (the *Speculum historiale*, written between 1244 and 1259), and later by Arnold of Liège who made use of the vita for exempla in his *Alphabetum narrationum* (c.1307, once attributed to Etienne de Besançon). The Latin vita itself was also very popular. There are forty-two
known copies of de Vitry’s *vita* and Thomas de Cantimpré’s supplement, six excerpts of Vincent of Beauvais’s *Speculum historiale* which reference Marie, and a further fourteen manuscripts containing vernacular translations of the *Life*.\(^{45}\) In England, vernacular material about Marie is also to be found in the fifteenth-century English translation of Arnold’s *Alphabetum* in which numerous tales are concerned with her life. Marie’s *Life* was also employed by Ulrich Pinder in his *Speculum Passionis* (1507 and 1519), a text translated into English by John Fewterer, Confessor General at Syon Abbey, and published in 1534 as *The Myrrour or Glasse of Christes Passion*. Pinder specifically references Vincent’s *Speculum historiale* as his source and the English translation makes no reference to any other version of Marie’s *Life*.\(^{46}\)

Marie’s devotional life is underpinned by largely conventional ascetic practices, which appear to have their origin in her marriage at the age of 14, when she, ‘remeued fro fadir and modir, was kyndelyd into soo passynge feruour, and with so grete fightynge chastysed hir body’.\(^{47}\) Jacques de Vitry describes how Marie ‘slepte but litel’ and because ‘she hadde not openly power of hir owne body, she bare priuely vndir hir smok a fulle sharpe corde, with the whiche she was girded ful harde’.\(^{48}\) This is a fairly typical pattern of sleep deprivation and bodily self-mortification. However, two instances of extreme self-wounding do stand apart; firstly, Marie’s attempt to remove corrupted skin from her feet and secondly, her cutting off and burying pieces of her own flesh. While the rest of her *Life* is very much presented as an inspirational model for devotional practice, one must wonder whether the potential imitation of Marie’s idiosyncratic behaviour raised significant problems for those disseminating and reading it. Because of this Jacques de Vitry is concerned to make absolutely clear that self-mortification is an activity which should be the preserve of unique individuals. The English translator renders Jacques’s justification of Marie’s exemplary behaviour as follows:

> I seye not this preisyng the exces, but tellynge the feruoure. In this, and many other that she wroghte by priuelege of grace, lat þe discrete reder take hede that priuilege of a fewe makith not not a commun lawe. Folowe wee hir virtues; withouten specyal priuilege, folowe maye wee not [þe werkes of hir vertues] … necessaries are not to be withdrawn fro the pore fleshe, but vices are to be refreyned. And therfore that atte wee rede sum seyntes haue done by famylyer and homly counseyle of the Holy Gost, wee shalle rathere meruaile thanne folowe.\(^{49}\)

Nowhere is it suggested that the reader should imitate Marie’s behaviour; rather the virtue of her actions is that they can be marvelled at, internalized, and meditated upon as a step towards greater compassion for Christ’s suffering, as Bridget’s should be. Compassion, or ‘suffering with’, as Sarah McNamer asserts, is distinct from imitation, or ‘suffering as’.\(^{50}\) However, while Marie’s outward ascetic behaviour is specifically symbolic of her inner spiritual condition it is not
always imitative. For example, it is not through a desire to imitate Christ that she cuts contaminated flesh from her feet, it is the fear of moral corruption. This kind of behaviour is not a direct imitation of any biblical event, nor does it gloss the significance of Christ’s suffering for contemporary readers. This makes its interpretation more problematic than Bridget of Sweden’s behaviour.

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The most graphic episode of self-wounding in Marie’s Life, in which she cuts off and buries pieces of her own flesh, is also a reaction to perceived bodily pollution and it essentially completes her earlier, unsuccessful, attempt to remove corrupted skin. This behaviour is the antithesis of Rolle’s moderate approach to asceticism, but it is fundamental to Marie’s spiritual life, for immediately afterwards she has a visionary experience. The English text makes clear that her vision stems directly from her penitential behaviour and that her mystical understanding of the divine, in excessus mentis, has grown deeper through it. Marie has physically cut away the fleshly barrier to knowledge of the divine. The fragmentation of her body is intricately bound to the wholeness of her soul. There are, however, significant distinctions between the Latin and the Middle English renditions of this event, which lead to rather different interpretations. The Latin text reads:

Fervore enim spiritus quasi inebriata, pre dulcedine carnium agni paschal carnes suas fastidiens frustra non modica cum cultello resecavit, que pre verecundia in terram abscondit, et quia nimio amoris incendio inflammata carnis dolorem superavit, unum de seraphim in hoc mentis excessu sibi assistentem aspeixt.  

While the less expansive English is rendered:

For with feruour of spirite she, lothinge hir fl  eshe, cutte awey grete gobettis and for shame hidde hem in the erthe. And for she was enfl  aumed with houge heet of loue, she sawe on of Seraphyn – that is a brennyne aungel – standynge by hir in this excesse of mynde.  

In the Latin text, not only does Marie begin to loathe her flesh when she compares it to the sweetness of the Paschal Lamb (a detail which is not translated into English), but the point at which she cuts herself reads ‘frustra non modica cum cultello resecavit’. Marie did not merely cut her flesh, she cut it ‘in vain’, ‘for nothing’. Jacques makes it very clear that he sees no purpose to her extreme self-mutilation. However, his interpretation of Marie’s actions is not present in the Middle English version. Moreover, the English implies that Marie’s mystical trance occurred immediately after the cutting away of her flesh. The fact that ‘she was enflaummed with houge hethe of loue’ is not related to her self-mutilation, it is presented separately in relation to her subsequent vision, giving the impression that the first act of cutting her flesh led to the subsequent visionary state, while
in the Latin they are concurrent. It lacks the explicit warning of the Latin text which states that Marie cut herself while already in her state of mystical ecstasy and, indeed, it was only because of this trance state that she could endure the pain of the wound: ‘et quia nimio amoris incendio inflammata carnis dolorem superavit.’

Notably, this episode seems to have received different treatment depending on its intended audience. For example, in Sweden it was excluded from the vernacular version of Marie’s Life altogether, perhaps because it was considered too dangerous for its new audience. The Swedish translation survives in one early sixteenth-century manuscript, a collection of saints’ lives made for the Bridgittine community at Vadstena (Linköping, Cod. XXXIX.2).\(^55\) It describes how she underwent penance but does not indicate what that penance was.\(^56\) The Swedish translator’s censorship may indicate his preconceptions concerning his intended female audience and its vulnerability to misguided interpretation. In contrast, the English translator inadvertently makes Marie’s violent behaviour even more appealing by implying that mystical experience is its outcome.

The Life also makes public the essentially private nature of Marie’s devotion. For instance, it is only after her death that the extent of Marie’s wounds is fully discovered. When her body was prepared for burial the ‘wymmen founde the places of woundes and hadde mykel maruaile. But they that knew hir confessyone wiste what it was.’\(^57\) There is something private and mysterious about Marie’s pain which when publicly revealed generates awe in others. This mysteriousness adds to its potential for emulation, especially as suffering appears to be the key to mystic experience. As a model for emulation Marie is perfect. Jacques de Vitry even asks why it is that men who worship and marvel at St Simeon’s wounds, or at St Anthony’s burnt feet, do not marvel at what Marie has done to herself.\(^58\) Despite Jacques’s emphasis on admiration rather than imitation, his portrayal of Marie as en par with the saints authorizes and promotes the spiritual authenticity of her lifestyle.

Indeed, Marie of Oignies was specifically constructed as a model, a potential saint who could lend authority to the beguine cause. Pierre Delooz argues that sanctity itself is a problematic concept; while ‘real’ saints (that is, historical individuals) can be distinguished from ‘constructed’ saints, ‘all saints are more or less constructed in that, being necessarily saints, for other people, they are remodelled in the collective representation which is made of them’.\(^59\) Therefore audiences read the constructed individual as text divorced from the physical experience of the text’s subject. In England, Marie found an audience for her body-text in the physical devotion of Margery Kempe. However, Roger Ellis suggests that this impact was mediated through Vincent of Beauvais’s Speculum historiale (1244–59) or the writings of Arnold of Liége, who made use of the vita for exempla in his Alphabetum narratorium (c.1307), rather than through
her *Life* itself, either in Latin or in Middle English. In fact, where accounts of Marie appear elsewhere in the vernacular there is little reference to her asceticism and none to her extreme self-wounding. Chapter 145 of the fifteenth-century English translation of the *Alphabet* does laud Marie’s ability to subsist on the Sacrament, but in chapter 21 there is a direct example of reversing self-denial in order to triumph over evil. Marie, who ‘oft sithes punysshid hur selfe with grete abstinence’, is tempted to think that all consumption of food is ‘gluttony’ by the devil who ‘wulde sho had dyed for defawte’. Here, Marie’s discernment echoes Rolle’s teaching on the temptation to undertake excessive asceticism and she recognizes the source of her desire for self-denial, reverses her usual abstinence, and eats specifically to torment the devil. She is clearly able to recognize that the impulse towards asceticism does not always have divine origins.

Marie’s ability to discern when she is being tempted also differentiates her from a young monk whom she counsels in Book II of the *Life*. The contrast between Marie, an ascetic chosen and authorized by God, and the ordinary believer is startingly highlighted here. That Marie is to be a guide to devotion and not a model for emulation is made clear in the example of a Cistercian monk whom she restores to the correct path after a fundamental, but unexplained, spiritual setback. This monk ‘hadde so grete zele and loue of innocens and clennesse – thof not after sciens – that hee enforced and bisyed hym with fervour of spirite to come as to the euenlik state of the firste fadir Adam’. This zeal for innocence and purity accompanied by so little understanding (‘sciens’) is a precarious combination. Indeed, Jacques goes on to describe how the ascetic impulse to perfection actually drives the monk to despair:

> And whanne longe with ful myche laboure (but veyne), turmentynge hymselfe in fastynge, wakynges, and prayers, hee myghte not recuuir the firste state of innocens, he felle firste into an heuynesse and slouthe … and so by entisynge of the myddaye fende, while he desyred impossibil, nor how so mykelle he hadde labored, he myghte on no manere haue hadde that hee wolde. ¶ Atte laste, for sorowe, hee slode in to the dyche of despair. In so myche that hee hopyd to gete saluacyone no wyse in the state of corrupcyone that hee was in.

The monk is unable to conceive that fallen humanity cannot be perfect. Excessive abstinence and vigils do not bring him to a greater understanding of the divine or unity with Christ’s sinlessness. Rather, they reduce him to despair and destroy his hope of salvation. They are the very agents of his corruption. The fact that a professed monk can make such a fundamental misjudgement of pious behaviour suggests the extent to which wider audiences or lay readers would have been considered even more susceptible to mistaken asceticism. The monk’s behaviour is said to be directly inspired by evil in the guise of good: ‘vndir the coloure of gode that olde enmye drowe a symple soule that was sicke and fleddde salue! And
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[he] that onys hadde forsaken his owne wille putte aweye fro hym the yok of obeydens. Thus the Life presents a stark warning against excessive asceticism which, far from fostering closeness to God, can actually alienate the individual from him. Perhaps ironically, given Jacques de Vitry’s praise of Marie’s behaviour, he insists that ‘Exercitacyone of body she sette litil by to regarde of pyte, the whiche, as the Apostil seith, avayles to alle thinges, hauynge beheste of the lyfe that now is and schal be’ (I Timothy iv.8). However, this again emphasizes that inner meditation, and not outward imitation, is the life to which Marie’s readers are called. Imitation is specifically discouraged and Marie’s Life illustrates the numerous dangers of self-mortification. An irony, however, lies in the fact that by her very nature Marie of Oignies was herself vulnerable to the very misinterpretation her Life aimed to suppress.

Such misinterpretation can be seen in The Book of Margery Kempe, which has a number of parallels with events in the life of Marie of Oignies. Just as Margery knew Bridget of Sweden’s Liber celestis (‘Bridis boke’), she knew various episodes from Marie’s experience. Marital chastity and spiritual motherhood are especially prominent correlations between the two women, as are experiences involving the Virgin Mary and the Christ-Child. Carolyne Larrington further argues that Margery’s vision of the Presentation in the Temple at Candlemas ‘was shaped without doubt by the experience of Marie d’Oignies’, and that Margery clearly employs Marie’s ‘plentyuows teerys’ to authorize her own crying in church. Other parallels between the two can also be found in the depiction of spontaneous outbursts of self-wounding.

One of the most prominent instances of violence in the Book of Margery Kempe occurs during the despair which followed the birth of Margery’s first child. In order to dispel suicidal thoughts brought on by demons (for ‘sche wold a forden hirself many a tym’), Margery attacks herself:

sche bot hir owen hand so vyolently that it was seen al hir lyfe aftyr. And also sche roof hire skyn on hir body ayen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon other instrumentys.

Here Margery’s actions are fraught and seemingly uncontrolled. The very choice of language – that she ‘roof’ (tore or scratched) and bit her skin – suggests spontaneous behaviour. It does not have the precision of dropping burning wax carefully onto one’s skin. It also indicates that had she the means to do so, Margery would have inflicted greater injury on herself. Significantly, however, her behaviour seems to act as a preventive to the suicide she contemplates. This might be compared to the biblical miracle of the Gadarene swine in which Christ exorcizes a possessed man who cuts himself with stones, so the spirit entered a herd of pigs causing them to commit suicide (Mark v.1–15). It has been posited that only through harming himself was he able to endure the presence of the
spirit and resist the suicide witnessed in the pigs. Here pain actively counters possession.

Indeed, possession is often cited as an explanation for self-wounding. Christina Mirabilis was at one point believed to be mad and inhabited by demons (‘wode & ful of fendes’) and was restrained ‘with chaynes of yren’ for her own protection. Richard Rolle also warns that some penitential acts themselves are the result of possession, while Bartholomeus (d. 1272) links injuring oneself directly to insanity, observing that some possessed people display various signs of madness: ‘som crieþ, and lepiþ, and hurtiþ hemsilf in priuey place and oþir men’. Likewise, both Margery Kempe and Marie of Oignies use violence to deal with possession. Yet while both outbursts are examples of fervent piety, a significant point differentiates them. Margery succumbs to what Rolle specifically warns his readers against, the demonic temptation to harm oneself, and is directly reprimanded by God for doing so, whereas Marie discerns the origin of her impulse to mortify the flesh and only does so when it will receive approval, which occurs here in the form of an angelic vision. The consequences of each act function as either divine approval or disapproval.

While Marie is able to discern the difference between pragmatic suffering and apparently demonically inspired self-destruction, Margery’s behaviour is the antithesis of the self-control which is central to penitential asceticism. Elsewhere self-control is presented as fundamental to ascetic activity. For example, the early thirteenth-century Ancrene Wisse warns its anchoretic readers against uncontrolled behaviour, recommending moderated fasts, vigils, hair-shirts, hard work, and disciplines as valid means of controlling and subjecting the body but warning that they must be employed wisely, according to the rules laid down by one’s confessor. By implication, the sanctioning of these activities extends ideological control over anchoresses’ minds and bodies. It is possible that this kind of limited penitential asceticism was approved precisely because it was controllable. It is with individuals such as Margery Kempe where exaggerated behaviour falls outside that prescribed and controlled by ecclesiastical authorities that a threat to established order can be perceived. For example, just after it is described that Margery ‘hatyd the joys of the world’ and ‘felt no rebellyon in hyr flesch … for sche dede so gret bodlye penawnce’, the ideal of obedience to which asceticism aspires, she is subjected to three years of temptation. These temptations lead her to pride, lust, and despair, all of which she confesses to her priest as the Church teaches, ‘and dede hir penawns whatsoeyr hir confessowr wold injoyne hir to do, and was governd aftyr the rewelys of the Chirch’. These church-prescribed penances, however, have no lasting effect, and her torments only increase. Thus she complements them with penance drawn from the example of continental female ascetics: weeping, fasting, wearing hair-shirts, and self-flagellation.

Margery’s un-prescribed behaviours were clearly seen as transcending the
spiritual authority of God and Church because although warnings about inappropriate self-mortification in Margery’s *Book* come directly from God, Margery does not cease to desire them. God speaks clearly, saying that contemplation:

pleyth me mor than weryng of the haburion or of the hayr, or fastyng of bred and watyr. For yyf thu seydest every day a thousand Pater Noster, thu schuldist not plesyn me so wel as thu dost whan thu art in silens and sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle … thei that arn gret fastarys and gret doers of penawnce, thei wold that it schuld ben holdyn the best lyfe … I have oftyntymes, dowyr, teld the that thynkyng, wepyng, and hy contemplacyon is the best lyfe in erthe."82

Despite this divine emphasis on interior devotion Margery still appears to act under the influence of holy women whose own bodily devotion was authorized by their hagiographers as orthodox; in essence, she promotes human exempla of piety over direct divine instruction and the imitation of the human over the authority of the divine in order to fulfil her impulse to asceticism. In one extreme instance she declares her desire to be dragged naked from town to town having mud thrown at her in the style of Angela of Foligno.83 Also, while Marie of Oignies personally nursed ‘mesellis’ and Angela drinks the water with which she washed their sores, swallowing a scab as if it were the Host, Margery laments her inability to kiss such lepers.84 Such comparative imagery of extreme devotional practice reveals much about how Margery conceives her relationship with God to be based on suffering and self-subjection. Not only does she authorize her interior visionary capacity in relation to esteemed mystics such as Catherine of Siena, Dorothy of Montau, and Bridget of Sweden, but she also adopts a physical devotion based on their example, a devotion that perhaps represents a misconception of these mystics’ responses to Christ and a misinterpretation of their hagiographer’s intentions.

The physicality of Margery’s imitation continually emphasizes the bodily over the spiritual. Wolfgang Riehle stresses that ‘the “detour” via the idea of the incarnation of God becomes almost an end in itself for Margery’ and her physical experience lacks ‘spiritual reference’.85 This does not negate her experience but Riehle’s view echoes precisely the derogatory perceptions of medieval devotional writers and theologians who are concerned that when the physical performance of asceticism is desired for its own sake, its spiritual referent will be lost. As we have seen, this is a fear that has long been vocalized, and as Athanasius wrote in his fourth-century *Life of Antony*, ‘some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment and so they are far from God’.86 Indeed, Margery’s actions are undertaken on the authority of existing human models of devotion. Marie’s are performed under the ‘counseyle of the Holy Gost’.87 Furthermore, Margery makes no distinction between her inner emotion and her
outward behaviour, and it is in this, Jennifer Bryan asserts, that she also gets the spiritual message of devotional texts, such as *The Prickynge of Love* (c.1380), ‘most insistently wrong’.\(^8\) She does not read privately, she executes her imitative reading publicly ‘by rhetorical performance’.\(^9\) Indeed, Bryan argues that while contemporary devotional texts seek to stir real feelings in their readers, Margery’s theatrical behaviour seeks affirmation through imitation of asceticism.

In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, it is not Margery’s extreme behaviour which brings her into direct contact with the divine in the manner that Marie of Oignies’s English *Life* suggests is possible, rather it is emotional and imaginative engagement of the kind advocated by writers like Bonaventure that provides her access to the divine. For example, in response to an image of the pietà Margery is enrapt: ‘hir mende was al holy ocuppyed in the Passyon of owr Lord Jhesu Crist and in the compassyon of owr Lady.’\(^10\) This is very much a mental response and it allows her to feel that ‘hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyd this same day’ and to weep for it appropriately.\(^11\) Here it is imitation ‘in mind’ that fosters understanding and compassion, not in body. Margery is able to read and respond to the emotive language of pious images in a way that makes present the person of Christ. She reads and understands the pietà without needing to imitate those who imitate Christ. In chapter 79, Margery again sees Christ internally: ‘sche beheld in the syght of hir sowle owr blisful Lord Crist Jhesu comyng to-hys-Passyon-ward’; he embraces Mary who cries ‘sone, that I myth suffir deth for the, so that thu schuldist not deyin, yyf mannys sowle myth so be savyd’.\(^12\) This of course cannot be. Mary cannot take the place of Christ, nor can Margery Kempe. Neither woman can effect the salvation of souls and therefore acting in imitation of the one who can will only result in an imperfect copy. The irony of Margery Kempe’s life lies, therefore, in the fact that she perfectly understands the significance of the original text of salvation, Christ’s body, but misinterprets and physically imitates the commentators on that text, the saints and mystics who seek to preserve and gloss the memory of the Passion by imitating it.

Christian asceticism is built on models that stem from the transformative events of the Passion. However, it is vitally important to remember that the distinction between the actual suffering of Christ and medieval representations of that suffering in textual form created numerous anxieties regarding interpretation and reader response. Vincent Gillespie points out that due to a desire for spiritual experience some lay readers were perceived to be ‘vulnerable to self-delusion and in danger of error and spiritual pride’ and we have seen that a number of late medieval devotional texts are expressly concerned with such readers’ desire to express that experience in ascetic terms.\(^9\) *The Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, for instance, reminds the reader to ‘take no more uppon þe þan þou maist bere, besie not þe to folewe oþer strong men or women of old time
in doynge penaunce oþerwise þan þi streynþe wol aske. And gouerne þi liuinge bi good counseil, þat þou faile not þoru þyn owne folie.” Medieval devotional writers seek therefore to traverse a fine line between depicting imitators of Christ who can function as glossators of scriptural events and thereby reinforce the significance of those events for their audience whilst offering them new imaginative models for meditation, and the fear that such depictions will foster further acts of imitative interpretation. The evidence found in texts like *The Book of Margery Kempe* reveals that it was possible to simultaneously succeed and fail at this task.

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NOTES


5 Matthew viii.20 is paralleled in the following: ‘sche hath bytokenyd in her laste standynge in the liknesse of a crosse the ende of oure lorde Jhesu, than she is alle pale and bloodles and bowith hir heed now before hir, now to the righte syde, now to the lefte, as if sche expounyd that at is writen in the gospel: “*Filius hominis non habet vbi caput suum reclinet.*” That is to mene, “Cryste hath not wher to lene his heed vppon,”’ ‘The Middle English Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek’, in *Three Women of Liège: The Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d’Oignies*, ed. Jennifer Brown (Turnhout, 2008), p. 40, lines 275–80.

6 ‘Life of Elizabeth’, p. 50, line 522.


8 Ibid., p. 5.

9 Ibid., p. 28.


11 *Ascetic Imperative*, p. 59.

12 *Imitation*, 1.18.1, p. 21.

13 Ibid., 1.22.1, p. 29.


15 Ibid., p. 156.

17 Ibid., p. 176, lines 1f.
18 Ibid., p. 174, lines 7–9.
19 Liber celestis, p. 3, lines 18f.
20 Mirror, p. 179, lines 4–7.
21 Karnes, Imagination, Meditation and Cognition, pp. 22f.
24 Ibid., p. 81, lines 498–500.
28 The Form of Living, in Prose and Verse, ed. Ogilvie-Thomson, p. 4, lines 62f.
29 The Incendium amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole, ed. Margaret Deanesly (Manchester, 1915), p. 175. ‘However, it would be better for him if, unknowingly, he went a little beyond measure – since he would do so with the good intention of sustaining nature – than if he should begin to fade through too much fasting and be unable to sing through physical weakness … Thus I have eaten and drunk things which seemed lavish: not because I loved delicacies, but so that I could sustain nature in service of God and in rejoicing in Jesus Christ; conforming myself, in a good sense, to those with whom I was living – for the sake of Christ, and so that I should not invent a holiness where none was, and so that people should not praise me too much where I was not praiseworthy’, trans. Nicholas Watson, Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 45f.
30 Incendium amoris, p. 150.
32 Nicole Rice, Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 33f.
33 Giles Constable, Attitudes Towards Self-Inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages (Brookline, Mass., 1982), p. 21; Rolle, Form of Living, p. 11, line 341.
34 Imagination, Meditation and Cognition, p. 150 (emphasis in original).
37 Ascetic Imperative, p. xiv.
40 The single surviving English translation (in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114) can be dated to between 1420 and 1450, but appears to have been copied from a lost English version not from a Latin model; Three Women, ed. Brown, p. 15.
48 Ibid., p. 88, lines 62–5.
49 Ibid., p. 88f., lines 66–76.
50 Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion (Philadelphia, Pa, 2010), p. 242 n. 54.
51 ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 146, lines 577–81.
52 ‘[T]he skin began through the medieval period to be thought of more and more as an organ of interchange, or permeable membrane, traversable in two directions,’ Steven Connor, The Book of Skin (London, 2004), p. 21.
53 Vita Marie de Oegnies, I.7, p. 66, lines 241–6.
54 ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 97, lines 238–41.
58 Ibid., pp. 97f., lines 245–9.
60 Ellis, ‘Margery Kempe’s scribe’, pp. 168–70.
63 ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 141, lines 448–51.
64 Ibid., p. 141, lines 452–62.
65 Ibid., p. 141, lines 467–9.
66 Ibid., p. 130, lines 186–8.
68 The Virgin and Child, the pietà, and the Christ-Child were the three central affective tropes of beguine devotional imagery, Joanna Ziegler, ‘Reality as imitation: the dynamics of imagery among the beguines’, in Maps of Flesh and Light: New Perspectives on the Religious Experience of Late Medieval Women, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY, 1993), pp. 112–26 (p. 113 and p. 116); ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 165, lines 1000–2; Book of Margery Kempe, pp. 177f., lines 2532f. and p. 164, lines 2227f.
71 Book of Margery Kempe, p. 292, lines 5107f., pp. 292f., lines 5125–34. See also ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 93, lines 135–7. Like the surviving manuscript of The Book of Margery Kempe, all the English manuscripts of the Life of Marie of Oignies have clear Carthusian links or origins, but it is likely that a Dominican source, Vincent of Beauvais’s Speculum maius, or a text deriving from it, provided Margery Kempe’s scribe with knowledge of Marie of Oignies. The chapters to which the scribe refers (p. 293, lines 5135–41) correspond to Vincent’s Speculum, not to Marie’s Latin vita, the Middle English translation, or Arnold’s Alphabetum narrationum. See Ellis, ‘Margery Kempe’s scribe’, pp. 168–70. The exact example of Marie’s tears in church is found in the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of the Speculum historiale, entitled ‘De gratia lachymarum cuius’ and ‘Qualiter cuidam sacerdori obtinuit copiam lachymarum’ respectively. See Facsimile of Douai, 1624 edition, Speculum quadruplex; sive Speculum maius, 4 vols (Graz, 1965), IV, Historiale, p. 1242.
72 Book of Margery Kempe, p. 55, lines 214–19.
74 ‘Life of Christina Mirabilis’, p. 57, lines 115f.
75 Incendium amoris, ed. Deanesly, p. 150.
77 Book of Margery Kempe, p. 195, lines 2919–34.
78 ‘Temie ful wel hire flesch, sone se ha iefeð þet hit awilged to swiðe, mid feasten, mid
wecchen, wið here, wið [heui] swine, wið hearde discipelines – wisliche þah ant wearliche’,
Ancrene Wisse, p. 54, lines 270–3.
79 Book of Margery Kempe, p. 66, lines 409–11.
80 Ibid., p. 70, lines 475–7.
81 Ibid., p. 67, lines 425–33.
82 Ibid., p. 195, lines 2919–34.
87 ‘Life of Marie d’Oignies’, p. 89, line 75.
89 Ibid., p. 140.
90 Book of Margery Kempe, p. 286, lines 4958–60.
91 Ibid., p. 286, line 4965.
92 Ibid., pp. 340f., lines 6285–95.
94 Contemplations, p. 20, lines 9–12.