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Experience, Epistemology, and Women's Writing in the Late Middle Ages

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Leona Catherine Fisher

August 2010

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. John M. Ganim, Chairperson
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This Dissertation of Leona Catherine Fisher is approved:

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To my grandfather, Stuart Patton, who led the way.

*To my grandmothers, Marjorie Fisher and Colleen Patton, and to Grandpa Milo, who
believed in me.*

To my wonderful parents, who expected the best from me always.

To my siblings, William, Amy, and Abby, who mean the world to me.

And to Willie, my best friend.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Experience, Epistemology, and Women's Writing in the Late Middle Ages

by

Leona Catherine Fisher

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, August 2010
Dr. John M. Ganim, Chairperson

This dissertation examines the moment in the late Middle Ages when, for the first time in history, women began to gain access to literacy in comparatively large numbers. Because these women had little or no access to the long scholarly tradition in Latin upon which male authors were trained and relied for their authority, these female authors needed another way to authorize their writing, their experience. This dissertation is an exploration of the genesis of experience as an authoritative epistemology: how it came about and was articulated in writing as well as the legacy of this epistemology.

This study explores several examples of experience in writing from antiquity and the classical period before turning to the twelfth century where I argue we see the first signs of a formalized rhetoric of experience developing to suit the needs of twelfth

century female writers who relied upon their experiences to justify and authorize their writing. Whereas a man like Hugh of St. Victor considers his life as worthy of autobiographical narration, he justifies this agenda by an appeal to authority. Hildegard and other female contemporaries such as Elisabeth of Schönau meditate on their experience and in that meditation find an independent authorization. This reliance on experience and the rhetorical conventions surrounding mystical experience became so entrenched that by the fourteenth century, writers like Margery Kempe were able to resist certain genre conventions to suit their own purposes.

Experience as an authorizing epistemology, though it may have developed in large part out of women's mystical writing, was not confined to it. We can see the influence of experience in the writing of Marie de France; by the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, men such as Dom Dinis of Portugal, and more famously, Geoffrey Chaucer, invoked the authority of experience in their own writing.

In the span of a few short centuries, experience and observation had come to be privileged above ancient and canonical sources. This radical epistemological shift continues to shape how we think about knowledge and what constitutes it and owes a clear debt to the women writers of late Middle Ages.

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Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is experience. This as a term that may at first appear to be somewhat problematic as it can be defined in many different ways and has broad applications. Part of the work of Chapter 1 will be to narrow the definition of experience for the purposes of this study. The word experience can be used describe Cicero's musings on the application and function of the senses; indeed, many translators do use "experience" when rendering "sentiatur." "Sentiatur" implies the importance of the body and its senses as part of the process through which those like Cicero understood meaning to be constructed. This emphasis on the body and its senses is an important facet of experience as I define it in this study. The term experience could also be used to describe the autobiographical details Hugh of St. Victor occasionally slips into his writing; however, when I use the word "experience" in this dissertation, I mean to invoke an epistemological process undergone by a subject who on some level recognizes his or her own subjectivity and the potential of the experiential process itself to create meaning for him or her.

One of the difficulties in a study that seeks to interrogate the idea of experience is that doing so seems to imply a certain amount of essentialism; in other words, in discussing the "authority" of experience, and in looking at the ways subjects derive meaning from their experiences, there may arise the perception that I am implying a kind of absolute truth. I wish to dispel this notion at the outset. Experience as I define it throughout this dissertation is a subjective occurrence utterly contingent on social constructs; whether or not these constructs have any bearing on Reality, whether or not

one could identify such a Reality, and/or whether or not such a Reality even exists are not questions that this dissertation attempts to answer. Nor am I directly concerned with the history of the self, which has been a recurrent debate among medieval scholars. Of course, as experience and selfhood are related concepts, I do include a brief overview on ideas of medieval selfhood in my first chapter. And while I do speak of “interior” and “exterior” and the “self” in relation to “community,” I do not imply anywhere in this dissertation that interiority or selfhood is prior. Indeed, part of my argument is that experience, which I will claim is very much a social process, can help to heighten the subject’s awareness of the self, and by so doing actually creates a space for interiority; nonetheless, I would argue with Caroline Walker-Bynum and more recently Jennifer Bryan that this interiority does not necessarily mean a modern self in every sense. In that regard, while this dissertation does touch lightly on ideas of selfhood, its primary focus is experience: what constitutes it, how experience came to be seen as authoritative textual evidence, and how the legacy of experience as authoritative evidence shaped writing and epistemology throughout the medieval period.

This dissertation treats authors and works that range over a large period of time. The first chapter briefly considers classical and scriptural antecedents to experience as an epistemological process as well as exploring the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. The time period that is the primary focus of this dissertation, however, is the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. Because the use and development of experiential authority in writing is a phenomenon that progressed and spread over time, narrowing the scope of this dissertation to a few decades seemed insufficient. Nor do I attempt to cover all of the

important literary events of nearly three hundred years of rich medieval literary and textual history. Rather, I have selected several authors at the beginning of the period and several at the end of the period in order to interrogate the emergence of this epistemology and its development at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of the Early Modern Period, the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. That many, though not all, of the authors and the works I discuss are well-known is was a conscious choice as I wish to emphasize the prolific and far-reaching nature of this epistemological revolution as it unfolded during the final centuries of the medieval period. I will also, however, discuss less canonical works.

Not only is this scope of this dissertation broad in terms of the time period it covers, it comprehends quite a bit of European geography. While my primary focus is Britain and France, certain examples hail from Germany, Spain, and Portugal. Literarily speaking, the Europe of the Middle Ages was a relatively small world; however, I acknowledge that reading thirteenth and fourteenth century Portuguese *cantigas* against the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is a bit unorthodox. My goal in doing so is twofold. Firstly, and most importantly, I wish to impress on the reader the wide proliferation of experience as I define it in this dissertation; secondly, I hope to demonstrate, with such scholars as Christine Chism and Geraldine Heng that traditionally marginalized literatures have a tremendous amount of potential to illuminate texts that have been regarded as canonical.

Theories of performance and practice as well as speech and language informed my understanding of experience. The orality of women's writing in the Middle Ages has long been a subject of scholarly discussion, from Walter Ong who noted the "learned

Latin” that marked the prose of male writers in the Middle Ages, to those like Alexandra Barratt and Elizabeth Petroff, whose anthologies of medieval women’s writing focus extensively on the oral nature of women’s writing. It was clear to me in attempting to uncover a textually-based epistemology, the words and the style that the writers use matter, and thus I have tried, wherever possible, to include both the original language and a translation as a basis for my reading. Because I was working in the majority of cases with prolific authors, acquiring original language editions of the texts was a fairly straightforward matter. However, in the case of some of the lesser-known works and authors, most notably Elisabeth of Schönau, tracking down editions in the original language proved difficult.

The first chapter of my dissertation will be devoted, in large part, to defining what experience means in the context of medieval writing. Before such a definition could be undertaken, however, I felt it necessary to speak briefly about related concepts of selfhood and identity. I see experience as a process which can, among other things, shape notions of identity and selfhood. Many scholars of the medieval period such as M.D. Chenu, Georges Duby, and A.J. Minnis point to the twelfth century as a time when modern notions of the self begin to emerge. However, other scholars, such as Caroline Walker Bynum argue that while some attributes of modern selfhood may be traceable to the twelfth century, ultimately because only the male self was interrogated as part of the literate and textual culture of the twelfth century, no complete notion of modern selfhood can be traced to the twelfth century. Although at a later point in the dissertation, I will argue that in fact women were asserting their identities, albeit in a limited context, in the

twelfth century, I find Bynum's point well-taken. Nonetheless, while the origins of the modern self do appear to be a topic of contention in recent scholarship, there does seem to be consensus that the twelfth century marks an important shift in medieval representations of selfhood and identity; thus, I will argue, the twelfth century is an ideal place to begin my interrogation of experience as represented in medieval literature.

Having briefly treated the concept of selfhood as it appears in scholarship on the medieval period, I will set to work defining experience. This is a process that I continue throughout each subsequent chapter of the dissertation through a close reading of selected texts. I will devote some time to exploring the etymology of the word, which comes to the English language via French and first comes to be used in the late fourteenth century. While the term may be a relatively late addition to the language, I argue that the experiential process predates the name given to it by such authors as Geoffrey Chaucer, whose *Wife of Bath* famously begins her prologue by claiming that while others may question it, experience is a good enough authority for her. Indeed, the OED credits Chaucer as one of the first people to use the term experience in the sense of meaning "the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event." This idea of conscious subjectivity will be a key criterion for experience as I will define it throughout the rest of the dissertation. Comprehended in modern definitions of experience, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography*, is the notion that experience is "an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present" (22). This idea of

experience as an interpretation of the past and its relationship to the present is also an important facet of experience in the medieval writings in my study.

I argue that women writers, because they lacked access to traditionally recognized means of claiming textual authority, developed an alternative epistemology which endowed their writing with an alternative authority, experience. While this is not necessarily a new claim, this dissertation is unique in the ways that it interrogates the process of experience itself. In the first chapter I also try to look for the antecedents of this epistemology. Because women, in general, lacked the kind of access to the books that men during the medieval period did, I have mostly confined my exploration to sources that would have almost certainly been familiar to women such as Hildegard of Bingen or Elisabeth of Schönau in one form or another: the Bible and *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. I also take some time to explore some classical antecedents to experience as I have defined it. Though I doubt that women in the medieval period read Cicero, my goal is to demonstrate that notions of something akin to what I label experience were available to medieval readers, and that writers like Cicero asserted their authority.

In the final pages of my first chapter, I introduce theories that have informed and influenced my definition of experience as I articulate it in this dissertation: Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, Judith Butler's theories of performativity and gender, and Julia Kristeva's *genotext*. Each of these theories articulate processes that these philosophers see as an active, generative processes; therefore, these theories lend themselves well to an understanding of the hermeneutic sense of experience I am seeking to locate.

The goal of Chapter 2 is to explore the development of experience and to further define the term through a close reading several twelfth century works, with a particular focus on the ways speech and orality inform experience, a theme that I continue to discuss in Chapter 3. The chapter begins by setting some of the authorial rhetoric of Hugh of St. Victor alongside the rhetoric of Hildegard of Bingen. Although both authors were prolific twelfth century writers whose careers overlapped, Hugh was a generation earlier than Hildegard. He was, of course, also a man, trained in the scholarly tradition. While Hugh often refers to his own authorial presence in the text, he tends to rely on conventional modes for establishing his authority. There is also, however, in his writing, an emphasis on a certain sense of authorial individuality. From time to time, Hugh includes autobiographical details to underscore points. For example, when Hugh of St. Victor in the mid twelfth century wanted to make the point that isolation is an important condition for learning and study, in addition to citing the classical and canonical sources that medieval texts so relied on for their authority. While Hugh does from time to time mention the events of his own life, I argue that the term “experience” as I have defined it in the first chapter cannot be applied to the inclusion of such autobiographical details for at least two reasons. The first is because Hugh does not use these events as the basis of his authority; these events are included almost as footnotes. The second related reason is that experience as an authoritative textually-based epistemology requires the subject to see him or herself as subject to the events he or she describes to the degree that these events cause him or her to interpret and reflect on these events, imbuing them with meaning and authority. This interpretation and reflection is largely absent from the

writing of Hugh of St. Victor; instead, we see a writer who, for the most part, conforms to traditional medieval rhetorical practices.

Hildegard of Bingen, on the other hand, represents a shift that writers like Alexandra Barratt and Elizabeth Petroff note of other writers in the twelfth century. Unlike Hugh, who seldom mentions the events of his own life and gives them very little importance, much of Hildegard's writing is entirely devoted to chronicling and interpreting events in her life, that is to say her visions. This chapter will further define the process of conscious subjectivity, interpretation, and reflection, experience, which constitutes the basis of Hildegard's epistemology and her authority, is the fundamental point of my argument.

To understand this particular notion of experience, a process that Hildegard of Bingen's writing helped to develop, the chapter will rely heavily on Julia Kristeva's theories of speech, particularly her concept of *genotext* and her related writings on the notion of constraint. For Kristeva, *genotext* was a way of understanding the moment when the unexpressed begins to be articulated through speech; as this happens, the expression naturally runs into the constraints of language. Because Hildegard of Bingen is among the first to articulate the process of experience in writing, I argue that Hildegard runs into certain rhetorical constraints, and part of the work of the chapter is an exploration of the way she negotiates these constraints. Hildegard's rhetoric was imitated in the works of women writers in the Middle Ages who lived centuries later, like Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Even in the writing of Christine de Pisan, who was writing in the context of early humanism, we see echoes of the techniques first employed

in the writing of Hildegard and her female contemporaries. A certain silence or sense of limits runs almost until the end of the period.

Kristeva's discussion of the abject and her articulation of the *sujet-en-procès* are also helpful ways, I argue, to understand and interpret Hildegard's rhetoric; however, by invoking Kristeva's theories, I realize that I run the risk I alluded to earlier in this introduction. Kristeva's theories appear essentialist because they imply a metaphysical absolute beneath the constraining layers of speech and abjection. In order to overcome this problem, the chapter draws on Michel Foucault's discussion of the *énoncé*; for Foucault, this process appears at first essential; however, he demonstrates in *L'archéologie du savoir* how even this speech act is finally, totally and utterly constructed. I argue that Kristeva's theories: her *genotext* and *sujet-en-procès* can be similarly regarded.

I also argue that in Hildegard's writing we begin to see evidence of how necessary community was to the process of making meaning through experience. While Hildegard's allusions to the importance of the women around her are not especially frequent, her correspondence emphasizes the importance of community in meaning-making. This regard for community is also clear in the writing of Marie de France, another twelfth century author. While little is known about Marie the author, her work, I argue, demonstrates the importance of communities, particularly female communities, as a system of experience and action. In Marie's lays, women who are alone, cut off from their communities, are the women who are the most powerless. Only through experience, a process that often involves improvising a community in the case of the solitary woman,

can her characters transcend their circumstances. Women who find themselves isolated in Marie's lays forge communities through memory, and sometimes, provocatively, through reading. Such textual communities are in part the subject of Catherine Sanok's *Her Life Historical*, which treats hagiographical writing, but in Marie de France's work, we seem to find evidence that secular writing, too, encouraged women to incorporate texts into their communities and structures of meaning making. In Marie de France we see clear evidence that not only was the text a site for articulating experience, the text could become a site of experience in and of itself.

Although Marie's writing gives a glimpse of the ways that secular writing simultaneously developed and relied upon experience, mystical writing lends itself well to a study of experience because, as Michel Foucault argues in *The Hermeneutic of the Subject*, spirituality itself is a process that forces the subject to change, to displace itself, to become other than itself to have access to the truth. The change, this transformation of the subject, is a crucial pattern of experience as it appears in medieval writing. According to Foucault, only when the subject is transformed into something that is nearly other than itself can truth (or knowledge) be accessed. This transformation would often be articulated, I argue in Chapter 3, in very bodily terms.

My specific aim is to understand the female body as site for experience and the rhetoric created and invoked to articulate this experience. This will involve an exploration of the ways women situated their bodies rhetorically in order to render them epistemological tools. Here I refer to the writing of Elisabeth of Schönau, a twelfth century writer and a younger contemporary of Hildegard of Bingen. The chapter will then

move forward into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to explore the ways in which this rhetoric continued and developed throughout the period. The hermeneutics of the medieval female body and its relationship to authority is, in part, the subject of Liz Herbert MacAvoy's *Authority and the Female Body in the Writing s of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, whose scholarship I refer to throughout the chapter. In figuring the body as a site not merely of authority but of authority vis-à-vis experience, I also invoke the work of Elaine Scarry, whose *The Body in Pain* explores the making and unmaking of the self through bodily suffering. The epistemology of suffering is a subject which the medieval mystical writers frequently treated, and Scarry's theories shed light on the way this epistemology functioned. In addition to Scarry's work, I revisit the work of Judith Butler, particularly her *Bodies that Matter*, which is especially helpful because in it, Butler figures the physical body as a social construct and explores the process through which this construction occurs. I then return to the connection between rhetoric and the body in Julia Kristeva's work.

In interpreting the texts of women like Hildegard, Elisabeth of Schönau, or Margery Kempe, one also faces the problem that these women often worked through scribes. This raises issues of authenticity as well as issues of translation. The question of the authenticity of Margery Kempe's textual voice, and indeed of female textual voices in general, has long been a matter of scholarly interest to those like Caroline Walker Bynum, Liz Herbert McAvoy, and Lynn Staley. This chapter devotes some time to this particular problem of female authorship in the Middle Ages. We know Hildegard had some proficiency with Latin, and there is even better evidence to support Elisabeth's

proficiency; we also know that Hildegard relied on a male secretary, Vulmar; and we know that Elisabeth worked with her brother, Egbert, who had also taken orders. In fact, Egbert would later allege that Elisabeth would often “borrow” his voice to allow her to make a point, and Egbert firmly claimed that every word he wrote was dictated to him by his sister, and that more often than not, the language of dictation was Latin (Petroff). Still, of course, we have to take Egbert’s word on the matter. In the case of Hildegard, she was such a celebrity over the course of her long life that it seems unlikely that she would allow her all-important authorial persona to be managed or controlled through an intermediary. In fact, Hildegard herself treats the issue of working through a scribe in her own work, a point that I will discuss further in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

In addition to exploring the way Elisabeth invokes her body as a site of experience, this chapter also explores several other rhetorical tools Elisabeth employs. In Elisabeth’s writing, we occasionally see a variation on a traditional medieval convention: Elisabeth cites a specific set of canonical sources to help establish not the authority of any claim, but her authority to speak. She points to women in the Hebrew Bible. However, it is not to statements in the Bible itself to which Elisabeth appeals, nor is it to the women themselves; she cites the actual experience of these women for her authority. Here we have a very early indication of a woman writer appropriating and incorporating the experience of other women as a means of endowing her own writing with authority. This is a trend that continues throughout the medieval period; eventually, the recorded lives of other women would come to be seen not merely as references writers could make to cement their own authority, but as sites of communal experiences for medieval readers

and writers alike. While Catherine Sanok sees these constructed communities at least in part as a way for male authors to control such communities of female readers through prescribing ideal behavior, I argue that such hagiographical texts, in addition to texts in other genres, eventually came to serve as sources and sites of agency, empowering their readers.

In the writing of Julian of Norwich, we can see an even more heightened sense of the importance of shared experience and the ways in which texts can contribute to communal experience. Julian's writing is overtly didactic; she encourages her readers to reflect on her experience as a means of gaining experience of their own. In Julian's writing, we also see a more developed rhetoric surrounding the body. The hermeneutic and rhetorical trends that were beginning to develop in the writing of the twelfth century in the work of writers like Elisabeth of Schönau appear almost as conventions in the writings of Julian of Norwich. Margery Kempe also relies on these conventions; however, her writing alters and adapts some of them in interesting ways. I argue that because Margery was a layperson, some of the conventions that had served women in the ecclesiastical establishment would not have worked for Margery, who was, after all, a married woman. Her body could not function as a site of experience in the same way, and I explore the way Margery adapts and negotiates the set of conventions governing experience and body, expanding the power of the body to create meaning.

Although I argue that experience as an authoritative epistemology developed first in the writing of women, Chapter 4 explores the ways that men, beginning as early as the late thirteenth century, appropriated this epistemology. I argue that as men first began to

rely on experience in texts for their authority, they often did so through the voices of women. This technique afforded male writers access to themes and subjects they might not otherwise be able to explore. Through rooting their texts in experience, male authors too inhabited a space where a sense of pathos could be heightened, and where their sense of audience could be expanded and re-imagined. By the end of the fourteenth century, Chaucer explicitly identifies experience as an epistemology through the Wife of Bath. While the Wife's first words undercut the authority of her experience, her claim that it is "right ynogh" is an acknowledgement that experience has already been providing "auctoritee" for many speakers in writers.(2)

Although the Oxford English Dictionary credits Chaucer as among the first writers in English to use the term "experience," I will argue that he is merely giving a name to a process that women had been invoking as a means of textual authority for over two centuries. Elaine Tuttle Hansen explores the ways that feminization allowed Chaucer to treat subjects that might have otherwise been barred; however, Hansen's writing tends to focus more on the effects of this technique of writing in women's voices rather than the process through which the effects are achieved. Moreover, I argue that Chaucer was not the first "man in drag" to use experience as a means of lending authority to his words. Here I will point to the poetic form that enjoyed tremendous popularity in the thirteenth century in Iberia, the *cantiga*, specifically, the *cantiga de amigo*, a poetic form written by men in women's voices. From this discussion of medieval men in drag, I will move to discussing the ways that women in the fourteenth century invoked their experience in writing. Thus the fourth chapter of the dissertation's primary focus will be an exploration

of the unfolding legacy of experiential writing in two of the work of two of the most prolific writers of the late fourteenth century, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Christine de Pisan whose work, of course, continued into the first decades of the fifteenth century. A reading of experiential epistemology as voiced through Chaucer's female characters (the Wife and several of the characters in *Legend of Good Women*) and the female speakers of the *cantigas* will provide an opportunity to see the ways men appropriate the authority of experience in the text. In the work of Christine de Pisan, we have a very early example of a woman who is, by virtue of her education, capable of grounding her texts in learned sources but often eschews that strategy in favor of citing experience. And so by the early fifteenth century, we see a writer who, in many cases, privileged experience over classical authority. We also see a female author who wrote prolifically on subjects that would have previously been seen as appropriate only for discussion among men: the education of princes, warfare, and matters of state. That her work was, for the most part, not only accepted but popular points to the tremendous currency afforded to what this dissertation terms experience.

Not only does the early fifteenth century provide us with evidence that writers thought differently about writing, experience, and authority, but there is also evidence that readers were considering questions of authority and experience as well. The *Mirror of Our Lady*, a book written for a primary audience of Bridgettine nuns, but probably intended for an even wider secondary audience, asks the readers to simultaneously bring their own experience to the text as well as to use the text as a site for further building their own experience.

Thus by the end of the medieval period, writers and readers alike had a fairly systematized yet radical new way to make meaning and to consider not only authority, but the ways in which knowledge could and should be constructed, as well as the relationship between such knowledge and authority. The primacy of experience, whether the author's experience, the readers' experience, or the interaction of these experiences borne out through textual engagement, dramatically changed the ways that people would understand knowledge in the decades and centuries that followed.

The final pages of this dissertation turn to a brief consideration of the legacies of experience in modern epistemologies, both in theory and in writing, including expressivist pedagogy, which encourages students to write about "truths that matter to them" (Macrorie 7), and social-epistemic pedagogy, with its emphasis on collective experience and realization of one's own subjectivity and distrust of monolithic authorities, in the mode Paulo Freire's *consciencização*. Much of our understanding of expression in speech and writing, indeed of what constitutes knowledge and how we know it, owes an ontological debt to the writers of the later Middle Ages, particularly those who both wrote from and emphasized what this dissertation terms experience. I argue that without the rhetoric of twelfth century writers like Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau, a rhetoric that was carried on and developed by writers like Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Christine de Pisan, our modern theories of writing and expression would be very different.

The goal of this dissertation, in short, is to understand how women writers made knowledge, and how the making of such knowledge enabled them to write with authority.

The application of such a project as wide-sweeping ramifications as, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, “the theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to impose the principles of the construction of reality—in particular, social reality—is a major dimension of political power” (165). Through wielding their experience, their knowledge, I will argue that the authors of the texts I will discuss in this dissertation did shape and reconstruct their social realities, changing over time the perceptions of textual authority and what constituted knowledge itself.

This construction of this social reality, which valued experience, especially the experience of individuals, and encouraged reflection upon it and the sharing of it, was a vital precursor to values and ideas we commonly associate with early modern and modern periods such as empiricism, a practice which privileges above all else personal experience and observation. Far from beginning in the Early Modern Period, I will argue that these traditions have their ideological genesis in the Middle Ages, in the writings of women who were attempting to justify themselves and their ideas and could rely only on the events of their lives and the lives of others to do so. While we as modern readers immediately associate the word “experience” with many of definitions I have mentioned in this introduction, the process through which medieval female writers thought about, wrote about and encouraged others to think and write about the events of their lives was, in fact, a radical new way of considering their lives.

The aim of this dissertation is in part a genealogy of our modern concept of experience, and it is an attempt to understand the process as it developed in women’s writing in the Middle Ages. My hope is that doing so will demonstrate the importance

and relevance of women's writing in the Middle Ages to modern notions of authorship, authority, and epistemology.

Chapter 1: Experience, Identity, and the Self in Antiquity Through the Middle Ages

As this dissertation is concerned with personal experience and its ability to create meaning and shape identity, some exploration of the related ideas of identity and of selfhood are appropriate. Notions of experience and selfhood have changed dramatically over the centuries, and the differences between the medieval and modern notions of these terms have been the topic of much scholarly debate in recent decades.¹ While there are many different, competing notions of selfhood and identity, the self in the Middle Ages tends to be defined as the way individual agents relate to their communities; identity often refers to how these agents define their own places within communities. In time, the self would come to be viewed as an entity that though created through its community was distinct from it; in other words, identity continues to be defined as a phenomenon articulated through communities.

The moment at which modern notions of selfhood begin to emerge is hotly contested. Contemporary scholarship in general tends to accept what Lee Patterson has described as

the gigantic master narrative by which modernity identifies itself with the Renaissance and rejects the Middle Ages as by definition premodern. According to this universal scheme, the Renaissance is the point at which the modern world begins: humanism, nationalism, the proliferation of competing value systems, the secure grasp of a historical consciousness, aesthetic production as an end in itself, the conception of the natural world as a site of scientific investigation and colonial exploitation, the secularization of politics, the idea of the state, and, perhaps above all, the emergence of the

¹ Indeed, it is difficult to think of a recent scholar of medieval literature who has not, in one way or another, entered the debate on the nature of the self in the medieval period. Caroline Walker Bynum, Carolyn Dinshaw, Karma Lochrie, Liz Herbert MacAvoy and A.J. Minnis, among others are among the scholars whose work on the self and selfhood in the Middle Ages I cite in this chapter alone.

idea of the individual - all of these characteristics and many others are thought both to set the Renaissance apart from the Middle Ages and to align it definitively with the modern world. As the name with which the Renaissance endowed it declares, the Middle Ages is a millennium of middleness, a space that serves simply to hold apart the first beginning of antiquity and the Renaissance “rebeginning.” (Patterson 92)

While, as Patterson indicates, scholars of the Early Modern Period contend that modern selfhood is largely a phenomenon and product of the Early Modern Period,² in this dissertation I will take and defend the view shared by M.D. Chenu, Georges Duby, A.J. Minnis and others, that the self as we understand it has its origins in the twelfth century, or in Ivan Illich’s words, “That which we mean today when, in ordinary conversation, we speak of the ‘self’ or the ‘individual,’ is one of the great discoveries of the twelfth century” (22).

Although other medievalists, such as Caroline Walker Bynum, do acknowledge that the twelfth century “did in some sense discover—or rediscover—the self, the inner mystery, the inner man, the inner landscaper,” she disputes the idea of the development of a sense of individuality emerging in the twelfth century (Bynum, *Twelfth Century*, 15). One of her reasons for doubt is that much of the focus on interiority and individuality has been from the male perspective. Indeed, according to Liz Herbert McAvoy, “There is no doubt that within most explicit analyses of selfhood in the Middle Ages it has been the male experience rather than the female which has been represented and favored as definitive” (12). Another view of selfhood in the Middle Ages, recently posited by

² This idea is at least as old as Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) in which Burckhardt claims that “man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, or corporation—only through some general category” (81). For a more recent example see Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. New York: U of Chicago P: 1980.

Jennifer Bryan in her book, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self*, is that while a sense of individuality in the way that we understand it today may not have existed, by the late Middle Ages due, in part, she argues to devotional writing, the medievals did have some sense of interiority, of a space for reflection. This space for reflection will play an important role in my discussion of experience.

Whether or not we see the genesis of the modern self in the twelfth century, it is clear that most scholars agree that the twelfth century marked an important turning point. M.D. Chenu notes that term “renaissance in the twelfth century” has been popularized in scholarship on the Middle Ages, but it is a term that he finds problematic. Chenu does concede, however, that among other changes occurring during the twelfth century, medievals began rediscovering classical authors. And, as Chenu puts it, a “return to the ancients always begets a historically oriented humanism” (3-4), which in turn often leads to a re-examining of the self, however it happens to be conceptualized. I would add that other important shifts, such as changes in the practice of confession, were beginning to occur in the twelfth century, changes that allowed authors to begin to cite events of their lives as justification for their ideas in writing.

As I indicated above, this development of experience is not unrelated to developing notions of selfhood. The consensus among scholars is that these notions of selfhood evolved slowly through the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, solidifying in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In other words, the emergence of the modern self is concurrent with and I will argue tied to the emergence of experience. Thus

an exploration of experience would be incomplete without at least a brief exploration of selfhood as defined earlier in the medieval period: what constituted it and when.

Not unrelated to developing notions of experience and selfhood in the Middle Ages are works that may be called autobiographical but predate the medieval period, as these texts by their very nature must, on some level, stake their authority in the life of author and attempt some exploration of that life.

Before such any such explorations can be undertaken, however, a definition of the term experience as I will use it in this dissertation is necessary. The word “experience” first entered the written record in English in the last decades of the fourteenth century. The word came to English through French, but its Latin root, “*expiriri*” means “to try” or “to put to the test” (Oxford English Dictionary). John Wycliffe was among the first to use the word, and the word appears prominently in other Lollard writings; given the importance John Wycliffe placed upon the authority of the individual, this is not surprising. Experience, I argue, endowed authority to speak and write on those individuals traditionally barred from authoritative positions; thus experience would have appealed to Wycliffe and the Lollards. It is, Langland, however, who is first credited with using the word in 1377. Gower uses the term twice in *Confessio Amantis*; Chaucer uses it once in the *House of Fame* and once in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*. In the last decade or so of the fourteenth century, the OED notes a new meaning for the word experience, “the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event.” The dictionary cites the Wife of Bath’s Prologue as an example. “Experience” says the Wife of Bath, “though noon auctorite / were in this world is ryght

ynough for me” (1-2). To view oneself as subject, and to see oneself as affected by events or circumstances is an important facet of my definition of “experience” as I will define it. Awareness is crucially important to this definition. It is not enough to be affected by an event, the subject must on some level be aware of his or her subjectivity, must recognize himself or herself affected, and then there must be some kind of reflection upon the event which occasioned the subject’s awareness.

As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson say in *Reading Autobiography*, “Experience is an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (22). Thus a person’s experience does not necessarily include everything that happens to that person; subjectivity, reflection, and awareness are all parts of what I will define as experience. Experience is an interpretive reflection on events of the past that leads to a new understanding or awareness of oneself and/or the world around one. This reflection becomes part of the experience itself. In other words, experience, as I define it, becomes an epistemology. This epistemology can and does contribute to the development of a “self,” but I am more concerned with the way that medieval writers used this process to be able to make authoritative pronouncements about the world around them.

Although the word “experience” does not appear in the written record in English until the fourteenth century, the beginning of this epistemological shift occurs in the twelfth century. References to the writer’s life, in the form of personal details, begin to appear in commentary on “authoritative” sources. In general, when writers include such personal details, they function only as nothing more than trivial footnotes to underscore a point that has already been realized and demonstrated through the more authoritative

sources; reflecting on these details is not the process through which he came to realize his points.

The interpretive power of experience has the ability to shape identity and informs concepts of the self; in fact, it could certainly be argued that the genesis of the modern self occurred at least in part through this experiential epistemology. What of the medieval self, then? The notions of selfhood and experience in the Middle Ages, according to Timothy Reiss, are saturated with the ideas dating from late antiquity as found in scriptural and classical literature transmitted to the Middle Ages. Thus even if, as I argue, the authorizing role of experience is a fairly late development, it depends upon a long history of the self as it emerged from late antiquity.

As Olivia Holmes writes, “Creations for the possibility of the change [in the view of selfhood] may go back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries” (Reiss 1). And while I agree that first indications of a shift in the way the medieval self was perceived are visible in the late twelfth century, the groundwork for such changes, I will argue with M.D. Chenu, existed beforehand. The late medieval writer and reader needed to rely on some kind of a precedent, however oblique, to make the leap from a textual epistemology relying nearly exclusively on canonized authority to an epistemology of experience. Many scholars, among them Holmes and Reiss, have noted the importance of Augustine’s *Confessions* on later medieval notions of selfhood; also noted in contemporary scholarship are the effects of Plato and Aristotle on medieval notions of

selfhood.³ According to Timothy Reiss, medieval notions of selfhood were “rooted in Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch as well as Plato and Aristotle...[yet] grounded in a sensibility deriving from Augustine” (1). This classical notion of selfhood as defined by Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch consisted of various spheres (society, family, rational mind, etc.), and the self was identified by these spheres. For the medievals, “they [the various spheres] *were* what a person was: integral to my very substance. At the same time they were public and collective, common to everyone *qua* human” (Reiss 2). Selfhood was thus defined by exterior factors; in some ways, this idea is not so very far from modern constituted notions of the self, which is seen very much as a product of the society in which it functions.⁴ The self, as defined in the classical period, consisted of the spheres of society in which a person was born, “embedding” themselves on the individual, “working in complicated ways from the ‘outside’” (Reiss 2). The classical, and by extension, the medieval self was created by a process that was entirely exterior, and thus the nature of the self was nearly entirely determined from the circumstances of one’s birth. This emphasis on the importance of personal circumstances would play a role in the later emergence of experience as an epistemology.

³ Indeed, to some extent, our understanding of the self, particularly of the self in writing, is still formed through Aristotelian and Platonic ideas. In 1984, Nan Johnson published her landmark article, “Ethos and the Aims of Rhetoric,” arguing that a pragmatic, Aristotelian view of the self as variable depending on the rhetorical situation was a practical way to teach writing students to think of and construct themselves on paper. This led to some sharp criticism from expressivists who argued that the Platonic view of the self as a transcendent entity, existing simultaneously apart from and within the written work, was a far more accurate way to consider the self and would lead to more authentic, powerful writing.

⁴ The self, as constructed by twentieth century theorists is, to borrow a phrase from Pierre Bourdieu, “utterly sociologically contingent,” created through processes that rely on the observation and, in some cases, the imitation of others.

While elsewhere in his writing, Cicero does seem to regard many parts of identity as largely static, in *Lucullus* we see Cicero acknowledging the large role subjectivity and individual perception through the senses may play in meaning-making. He claims that much escapes our sense of sight or hearing. Those such as painters who are trained to see, or musicians who are trained to hear, perceive much of what the rest of us do not. He then turns his thoughts toward touch: “quid de tacto et eo quidem quem philosophi interiorem vocant aut doloris et voluptatis, in quo Cyrencai solo putant veri esse iudicium, quia sentiatur” (“What about touch, and especially the kind philosophers call the “inner touch” of pleasure or pain? The Cyrenaics think this the only criterion of truth because it is what we experience”; Cicero, *Lucullus*, 37; Brittain 14). Cicero is speaking here to the power and authority of individual perception; he is also acknowledging some sense of interiority, and one’s ability to interpret the senses in an individual way. In fact, as Cicero’s translator notes, “Elsewhere the Cyrenaic criterion is said to be the subject’s internal experience of affection (*pathos*), which covers perceptual and other sensations in addition to pleasure and pain” (Brittain 37). And while Cicero’s argument is for the reliability of the senses, he does acknowledge that there will be differences in the ways that two people perceive a given thing through their senses, and he even seems to indicate a subjective and qualitative difference between the senses themselves, touch being the most trustworthy because it is the most immediate. Clearly then, neither the interiority of the self nor the idea of the body and its senses as a site for authority would have been new to medieval audiences. Elaine Scarry describes the body and voice as “almost primary” “explanatory rubrics.” These descriptions resonate with Cicero’s discussion of

the senses as well as the way female writers of the late medieval period presented their bodies in the text.⁵

From his discussion of the senses, Cicero moves into what he provocatively calls “conprehensa non sensibus” (literally, “understanding not from the senses”), by which Cicero means the leap from merely perceiving something through the senses to positively identifying it and linking it with a set of more abstract constructions. There is then a process by which individuals turn what their senses have encountered into a more profound kind of knowledge; Cicero, as we have seen above, allows a degree of subjectivity: sensation may vary from individual to individual. However, he does not believe that such subjectivity can lead individuals to “false conceptions” (“falsae notitiae”) because such conceptions would be incompatible with the other sensory impressions the individual would receive. This becomes a common medieval pattern: the aberrant is overridden and obliterated by the power of the majority, the communal, the norm. However, Cicero’s conclusion to this discussion allows for individual interpretation. If false conceptions were possible he says,

Memoriae quidem certe, quae non modo philosophiam sed omnis vitae usum omnesque artes una maxime continet, nihil ominio loci relinquitur. quae potest enim esse memoria falsorum, aut quid quisquam meminit quod non animo comprehendit et tenet? (38)

There’s no room at all for memory, which is our only storehouse not just of philosophy but also of the experience we derive from life and of all the arts. What sort of memory can there be of false contents? Can anyone remember anything he hasn’t apprehended and doesn’t retain in his mind? (Brittain 15)

⁵ This subject too has been a topic of much recent scholarly interest. I owe a special debt to the work of Liz Herbert MacAvoy and Karma Lochrie especially.

Cicero goes on to explain that all art and indeed all knowledge are entirely reliant on these sets of conceptions combined with (and built upon) the perceptions of the senses. In other words, according to Cicero, individual perception is the fundamental epistemology and basis for authority and remains fairly constant from individual to individual, though perception may vary (albeit slightly) from individual to individual.

This rigidly exterior or public view of selfhood derived from classical antiquity was tempered somewhat by Augustine's musings on the interiority of selfhood. Although Augustine's general conception of the self tended to be "*essentially* tied to the universal...divine 'intellectus agens'" (Reiss 243), he does, however, question the nature of this tie in the beginning of his *Confessions*, and wonders what part of himself, if any, exists outside of an omnipotent, omnipresent God, since he is supposed to ask God to dwell within him: "quoniam utique in me ipsum eum vocabo, cum invocabe eum? et quis locus in me quo veniat in me dues meus?" ("Since I call Him into myself, how shall I call him? And what place is there in me into which my God can come?"; Augustine 3). Here, at least, Augustine appears to acknowledge the possibility of some interior, private space. He does, however, seem to dismiss that idea relatively quickly as impossible:

Quoniam itaque et ego sum, quid peto ut venias in me, qui non essem nisi eses in me?...non ergo essem, dues meus, non omino essem, nisi eses in me. an potius non essem nisi essem in te....quo te invoco, cum in te sim? (Augustine 3)

For unless you were in me, I could not exist...I could not exist therefore, my God, were it not for your existence in me. Or would it be truer to say that I could not exist unless I existed in you...How can I call you when I am already in you? (Warner 18)

Indeed the self portrayed here is utterly reliant and dependent on God (as indeed, in Augustine's view, all selves are); the self cannot exist without Him, but the need to understand God—and therefore to understand his own self is deeply personal and independent, “How can *I* call *you*...?” This is a self whose existence is dependent, yes, but that very dependence is causing the kind of awareness of the self's own subjectivity necessary for the experiential process. That recognition of subjectivity is especially clear in Augustine's question “et quis locus in me quo veniat in me dues meus?”

Like Cicero, Augustine's own writings on the subject of memory and reflection seem to indicate the possibility of a concept of selfhood that is at least in part internal or interior. For example, in his discussion of how he acquired speech as a boy, Augustine said that he wanted make himself understood so that people would obey him and do what he wanted him to do, but he couldn't form the words. Then Augustine says,

prensabam memoria. cum ipsi appellabant rem aliquam et cum secudum eam vocem corups as aliquid movebant, videbam et tenebam hoc ab eis vocari rem illam quod sonabant cum eam vellent ostendere. hoc autem eos velle ex motu corporis aperiebatur tamquam verbis naturalibus omnium gentium, quae fiunt vulu et nutu oculorum, ceterorumque, membrorum

actu et sonitu vocis indicante affectionem animi in petendis, habendis, reiciendis fugiendisve rebus. (Augustine 7-8)

I turned things over in my memory. When other people gave a particular name to some object and, as they spoke turned toward this object, I saw and grasped the fact that the sound they uttered was the name given by them to this object and no other one was clear from the movements of their bodies, a kind of universal language, expressed by the face, the direction of the eye, gestures of the limbs and tones of the voice, all indicating the state of feeling in the mind as it seeks, enjoys, rejects, or avoids various objects. (Warner 25-26)

Augustine describes the process of speech-acquisition in terms of as akin to experience as I define it in this study. First, he became aware of his own subjectivity: he became aware that he was subject to his inability to communicate despite the fact that he wished to express himself. He wants to communicate “*sensa cordis mei*” (“the feelings of my heart”), but he finds that he is unable to do so. Here it is interesting to note the language that Augustine uses, “*sensa cordis mei*,” implies a kind of interiority if not outright individuality. He realizes that he is, at least in some sense, separate from those around him. Next, he reflected on or interpreted this situation: He had to “turn things over in [his] memory” before he could wrest any meaning from them. Finally, he was able to recognize what would eventually allow him to speak.

Moreover, in this passage of Augustine’s we have a later, Christian parallel to Cicero. Augustine also highlights the importance of individual perception in making meaning. It was only through his own observations that he was able to learn. While his perceptions were his own, community was imperative to help him to build meaning. He had to observe others to gain his knowledge. More broadly, the importance of community, highlighted in this passage of *Confessions*, in the making of meaning is helpful because modern notions of the self as they would develop in the late Middle Ages are as reliant on the social as the earlier public, medieval model of the self was; in fact, one could argue that the early medieval self, patterned on a prescribed norm, is in fact far less reliant on communal feedback than the modern self.⁶

Finally, this passage of Augustine’s once again sheds light on the vehicle that

⁶ Such as, for example, Charles Horton Cooley’s “Looking-glass self,” or Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*, discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

would become so essential for experience and meaning making to the women writers of the late middle ages: the body. Once again we see what the medievals would have recognized as an authoritative source, Augustine, discussing the primal, “universal language” of the body. In fact, it is impossible to discuss experience and to stake one’s claim to authority in experience without the body. This would prove a challenge to many women writers, particularly earlier on the period I discuss (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) because the body, particularly the female body, was seen as so suspect, despite canonical and classical references to its value and necessity in making certain kinds of meaning.⁷

Augustine believed that one could discover the divine through personal reflection although for Augustine this was because, in fact, one’s own identity was so linked with the “illectus agens” that one needed only to reflect deeply to find, or, more properly, to retrieve the connection. Augustine’s own authority for *Confessions* hinges not so much on his status as the bishop of an obscure North African city, but on the strength of his own observations and reflections, in other words, on the strength of his experience. For later writers, such as Hildegard of Bingen or Julian of Norwich, their authority would be similarly established by experience.

From the writers of the classical period, the medievals had inherited the idea that outside world and its influence shaped identity, and Augustine reiterated that idea and demonstrated that reflection was an essential component of meaning-making; thus two of

⁷ There is a long tradition of casting the female body as suspect, beginning with Aristotle and later Galen who reflected on the medical inferiority of the female body. Later medieval works, such as the *Acrene Wisse*, would refer to the female body, and in particular the female face as an uncovered pit to which an unwary man may fall victim.

the most crucial factors for fashioning modern selfhood were clearly and firmly in place in late antiquity. By the medieval period, there were already further substantial developments toward the idea of individual identity. As St. Bonaventure wrote in *Collations*, “Being can exist in only two ways: either as subsistent, self-modeled, and self-intended; or as contingent, modeled on another, and tending to another” (1). While John Alford points out that to the medievals, “only God [was] subsistent” (1), it is interesting to note that as early as the thirteenth century, the idea of an individual being, “self-modeled” and “subsistent,” was not outside of the medieval imagination. Thus well before the twelfth century, indeed, from the inception of the medieval period, the ideas of modern individuality and the power and importance of personal reflection have been identified by scholars.

Most scholars who study the medieval self are in agreement that the institution of mandatory yearly confession in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was a crucial moment in the evolution of the medieval self. All through the late twelfth century various religious orders had been placing more and more emphasis on confession as a private act of personal disclosure between the penitent and his or her priest. This change in the attitude toward and performance of confession put a new emphasis on the individual. Manuals instructing priests in the new guidelines toward confession tend to reflect this. For example, although John Mirck’s and Robert Mannyng’s manuals on sin and confession tend to talk about groups of sinners (adulterers, liars, etc.), the focus is notably on helping the *individual* sinner. Priests and laypeople alike had to think of society not in terms of a fairly homogenous whole but as individuals with individual problems that had

to be articulated and properly diagnosed. The consequences of this change in ecclesiastical policy were far reaching.

Beyond these oft cited influences on medieval conceptions of selfhood, I believe there is a scriptural precedent as or more significant than any of the other texts I have cited to the development of personal experience as epistemology, namely the Pauline texts and epistles. Because so many of the writers that I argue shaped the way we think of selfhood were women who had limited access to literacy, biblical text, through sermons, would have been the most available texts and would have thus profoundly shaped the way these women thought about experience and selfhood. As the author of more texts than any other in the New Testament, Paul's writings were, of course, extremely important throughout the Middle Ages: in his essay "The Scriptural Self," John A. Alford discusses the Bible as "a pattern book." Alford credits the idea of forming the self after the pattern of someone else to Paul, "Be ye imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11.1); yet although many scholars recognize the tremendous influence of Paul's doctrinal writings in the Middle Ages, the importance of what I will call his personal writing is less acknowledged.

The story of Paul's conversion is recounted four times in scripture. The first time is in the beginning of Acts, in Chapter 9. And although three accounts, two of them first-person, appear in the book, the Book of Acts is not written by Paul but, according to the opening words of the book, Luke. The first time Paul's story is recounted it is as a third person narration. A detailed account of Paul's conversion appears in Acts 22, when Paul is permitted to speak in front of the centurion after he is taken to answer for the crime of

blasphemy. Luke records this account in first person. Luke records a second, more detailed recounting of Paul's conversion story to Agrippa in Chapter 26. Although, like much of Luke's treatment of Paul, these accounts are in first person—Paul is the speaker—and ostensibly are a recording of Paul's own words, I recognize that they are not autobiographical in the strictest sense. Nonetheless, as they are first-person accounts of events that speaker experienced, I believe they are valuable. It is also interesting to note that this first-person narration is a departure for Luke, who treats the acts of all of the other apostles almost exclusively in third person. This could lead one to conclude that the words may in fact be Paul's, but of course, that is speculation. The one and only place in scripture in which Paul himself recounts his conversion with his own pen, in the first chapter of Galatians, is quite brief:

11 Notum enim vobis facio, fraeres, evangelium quod evangelizatum est a me, quia non est secundum hominem;
12 neque enim ego ab homine accepi illud, neque didici, sed per revelationem Jesu Christi.
13 Audistis enim conversaionem meam aliquando in Iudaismo, quoniam supra modum persequabar ecclesiam Dei, et expugnabam illam.
14 Et proficiebam in Iudaismo supra multos coetanos meos in genere meo, abundatius aemulator existens paternarum mearum traditionum.
15 Cum autem placuit ei qui me segregavit ex utero matris meae, et vocavit per gratiam suam,
16 ut revelaret Filium suum in me, ut evangelizarem illum in gentibus, continuo non acquevi carni et sanguini,
17 neque veni Jerosolymam ad antecessores meos apostolos; sed abii in Arabiam, et iterum reversus sum Damascum.
18 Deinde post annos tres, veni Jerosolymam videre Petrum, et mansi apud eum diebus quindecim;
19 alium autem apostolorum vidi neminem, nisi Jacobum, fratrem Domini.
20 Quae autem scribo vobis, ecce coram Deo quia non mentior.

11. For I give you to understand, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12. For neither did I receive it of man, nor did I learn it; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13. For you

have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion: how that, beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it. 14. And I made progress in the Jews' religion above many of my equals in my own nation, being more abundantly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15. But when it pleased him, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

16. To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I condescended not to flesh and blood. 17. Neither went I to Jerusalem, to the apostles who were before me: but I went into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus. 18. Then, after three years, I went to Jerusalem, to see Peter, and I tarried with him fifteen days. 19. But other of the apostles I saw none, saving James the brother of the Lord. 20. Now the things which I write to you, behold, before God, I lie not.⁸

In this recounting he alludes to the fact that his audience already knows his story, and yet I find it remarkable that Paul's writing about his own experience ignores so many of the details that Luke includes in all three of the accounts of the same events in Acts. The paucity of detail could be attributed to many factors: expediency, the difficulty in obtaining writing materials, or, as Paul himself acknowledges, the fact that his story is already well-known to his audience. Yet what is remarkable about Paul's account is that, for him, his experience carries ultimate authority. He can assert that what he is saying is true because of his experience. Unlike the old Saul, who relied on "the traditions of [his] fathers," in other words, texts, for his authority, his vision, his experience, trumps any other authority, including that of the apostles. While the medieval scholarly tradition certainly acknowledged the significance of Paul's vision, it was not a model that the adherents to that tradition used to ground their own authority. Authority for the medievals, as in the older "tradition" mentioned by Paul, relied on textual authority. However, when women like Hildegard and Margery began recording their visions, and

⁸ The Douay-Rheims translation is used here and throughout this dissertation.

staking the authority of their claims in their experience, I argue that Paul became an invaluable model, becoming not only a pattern on which to model one's life, but a rhetorical pattern as well. Paul, with his frequent allusions to his own frailty, further provided for these women a model for the rhetoric of humility and weakness on which nearly all of the female mystics from Hildegard to Margery would rely.

Perhaps because of his remarkable, life-altering vision and subsequent repentance, perhaps because of the depth to which Paul's writing is shaped by this experience, or perhaps because of the relative accessibility of scripture stories, particularly in the New Testament, to illiterate or less-literate audiences, Paul is a potential model used by many female mystics.

As is evident in the availability and popularity of classical sources, Augustine, and even in scripture, personal experience as an epistemology was an idea that was incipient throughout the Middle Ages. The texts that were held up as canonical through the majority of the Middle Ages were predicated on the very classical and scriptural sources that often relied on and promoted the value of personal experience and reflection, providing an unstable foundation for the tradition of medieval textual authority. And there are other evidences throughout the Middle Ages that personal experience had some currency. The many travel narratives that were popular during the late thirteenth and through the fourteenth centuries are evidence that personal experience counted for something even fairly early; many travel narratives, however, were dismissed as lies. From Marco Polo to Mandeville, travel narratives were received with a high level of skepticism.

So while from the authoritative texts, the medieval scholars understood that reflection was important, and that the impact of one's circumstances could shape identity as argued by Cicero, Augustine and others, and as clearly demonstrated in scripture through Paul's conversion, in general, as A.J. Minnis points out, the authority of the medieval text depended on credible sources, not individual experience. The idea of age and authority were integrally connected during the Middle Ages, "ancient" being almost a synonym for "good" (Minnis 12). Not only were works known to be old considered valuable, but texts that were good were often presumed to be older than they actually were. Yet through Minnis's exploration of textual authority from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, a clear trend emerges. Whereas in the eleventh century, medieval literary theory is more concerned with abstraction and allegories, with time it becomes more concerned with the human element; it becomes more readerly. Still, scholars like Jennifer Summit question whether or not a modern notion of authorship can be applied to the medieval period at all; she prefers to view authorship in the Middle Ages as the product of multiple individuals across time in conversation with each other. Nonetheless, she concedes that the theory of authorship itself changed at some point, and, moreover, that there was a "high degree of consistency with which medieval scholars treated the subject and employed its characteristic vocabulary" (2).

Through studying the various prologues of medieval exegetes, argues A.J. Minnis, one can track the changes in the medieval theory of authorship because "the prologue provided a scholar with the occasion to reiterate those received interpretations of the text which seemed most appropriate to him and to amplify such traditional doctrine with some

ideas of his own” (42). Eventually these prologues would be a place for scholars and scribes not only to reinforce traditional interpretations, embellishing them with their own ideas, but focusing on the intentions of the “authority,” but also to focus on what Minnis calls the “human auctor” an authority with “limitations and sins” (159). The focus on the individual to draw attention to his or her limitations or sins is very telling and something that writers who cited their personal experience as authority had to work against.

Moreover, in the twelfth century, subtle shifts in the way that the act of writing itself was represented began to alter perceptions of authority and writing. One of the important changes is the view of the writing process. In discussing the work of Gilbert of Glenluce, a late twelfth century Cistercian bishop, Chenu notes Gilbert’s emphasis on “three aspects to the great work of God: the divine creative action, the operations of nature, and the things made by men—all three being parts of the divine ‘governance’ of the world” (40). This observation, according to Chenu, had the effect of elevating the position of the medieval author. “The relationship to God’s creative work conferred a religious significance upon human productive activity; the relationship to the work of nature provided such activity with its earthly standard of truth” (40-41). The idea that an author could participate with God in governing the world, gave the act of writing itself, independent of any sources that the writer might draw on, more intrinsic authority. This view, however, does not necessarily mean that writing for women would have been easier. While seeing writing as, in some ways, intrinsically authoritative, might have made it easier for women like Hildegard and Elisabeth to take up their pens, the perception of writing as a godly, and therefore implicitly male, act might have made it all

the more difficult. Ultimately, however, the idea of creation as an authoritative act does mark an important shift in medieval perceptions of the authority of the writer as well as authority within the text itself.

In the *Collations*, Bonaventure makes it clear that nonconformity, to choose *not* to be “contingent” on God, to choose “singularity,” or individuality, *is* a sin, and in some ways the greatest sin, as it is both blasphemous in that the mortal is trying to make himself like God, and satanic in that the man becomes “like the devil, [who] according to *The Book of Vices and Virtues*...abandon[ed] the divine model, [and] ‘weneþ or tristep more to hymself þan he scholde’” and is, therefore, guilty of “syngulertee, þat is onlyhede” (Alford 1). Thus even early on in the Middle Ages the notion of individuality, though certainly not advisable, was conceived of, and indeed a concern of great importance. This pursuit of “sin” and the resulting “singularity” was indeed, as I am arguing, a form of experiential epistemology. There was great anxiety surrounding this form of self-expression. John Alford eloquently sums up the feelings of establishment toward those who would pursue singularity, “to conform to a pattern is to be somebody. Not to conform is to be nobody. Those who desire to be different, singular, an order unto themselves, are less likely to assert their identity than to lose it altogether” (2). I argue that by the twelfth century that the pursuit of individuality, or singularity did not in fact make a “nobody,” but did in fact allow individuals, “human auctors,” to use Minnis’s term, to pursue and assert their own experiences and identities, and use these assets to gain notoriety, transcendence, and power. The awareness of this pursuit was both

recognized and amplified by and the Fourth Lateran Council in the early thirteenth century.

This focus on the “human auctor” with “limitations and sins” is another way in which we see the importance of individual identity within the process of textual creation. Further evidence for the growing importance of the “human auctor,” suggests Rita Copeland, is in medieval translations, where, she argues, we also begin to see the importance of the author as an individual and wielder of authority. In making her argument she too relies on Cicero who says of the process of translation, “I did not translate...as an interpreter but as an orator” (2). Cicero’s idea of translation (one that was apparently espoused by translators into the vernacular) is the idea that one should “not define the terms of good translation, but rather define the disciplinary status and cultural privilege of rhetoric” (2). According to Copeland, Jerome also had this attitude when producing the Vulgate.

One of the primary arguments of Copeland’s book *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation* is that “translation is a vehicle for vernacular appropriation of academic discourse” (3). One of the ways that this is done, argues Copeland, is through vernacular glosses and especially the commentary on Latin texts. Vernacular commentary, she argues, rewrites and supplants, in many cases, the original Latin text for the purposes of the discipline of the translator. Thus the inherent authority of the writer can trump the authority of even an ancient and revered text. Copeland also differentiates between what she calls “primary” and “secondary” medieval translation. Primary translation, Copeland argues, is exegetical and casts itself in a servile position to the “master”-text. Secondary

translations, although apparently exegetical in nature add the function of rhetorical invention: they provide “discovery” of the translator’s own argument or reading of the text.

I see here the sense in Copeland’s dichotomy, but I think the dichotomy is exaggerated. Any translator, of course, is imposing him or herself whether consciously or unconsciously on the text: Notker III, who Copeland cites in her fourth chapter as a primary translator, is still imposing (if unconsciously) a degree of rhetorical invention on his translation of Ovid. She also discusses the impact of intralingual influence of translations in the Middle Ages, arguing that these extant translation could often affect a new translation rhetorically even more than the Latin source (she cites the Old and Middle French translations of Boethius as an example). While Copeland casts rhetoric (*inventio*) and hermeneutics (which she also terms “grammar” or *ennarratio*) as opposite critical approaches to translation, they can and do intersect in the Middle Ages and become places for authorial “selves” to emerge. Copeland argues that not only Ciceronian notions affected medieval translation, but also historically contextualized discourses affected translation: for example, various disciplines and their own academic goals could shape the nature of the translation. This argument seems contrary to attitudes toward text and textual authority that Minnis describes, and yet both scholars acknowledge a growing awareness and preoccupation with the human “auctor.” This growing awareness of the presence and importance of individual human agents in writing was crucial to the development of experience.

While the authority of personal experience and the notion of selfhood are conceptions often viewed as products of the fourteenth century in Italy, the twelfth century, does, I would argue, also offer the first textual evidence of experience-as-epistemology. By the twelfth century we see evidence of some fluidity within the rigid schema of the spheres to which one's birth irrevocably relegates one. M.D. Chenu notes that the twelfth century was also a time when the notion of the unity of beings, as opposed to their being separated rigidly into their estates, was gaining popularity. "Between each of these beings in their separate ranks," writes Chenu of the twelfth century, "exists an intimate bond: the greater intensity of the superior being exerts an attractive force upon the one next below it..." (24). He does assert, however, "We are far from a discontinuous universe in which each being possesses its dynamism and intelligibility wholly and only within itself" (24). What Chenu describes is not a self-contained individual at all, but one that is utterly reliant on the world around him or her, on his or her community, particularly his or her superiors.

Where we do find the first evidence of experience as epistemology in the twelfth century is in mystical writings, especially women's mystical writing of the twelfth century. Their experiences became the basis for their authority; as Karma Lochrie notes, "the mystical text does not rely on either textual or institutional authorization" (62). The fact that these texts did not need to rely on textual or institutional authority is a direct reflection of the epistemologies formed by these women writers. And although women

were not the only ones to use their experience as their claim to authority,⁹ the ways in which women cite their experience is unique, and evident in secular as well as spiritual writing, ranging from Hildegard of Bingen to Marie de France.

To further understand how experience applies to a broader vernacular tradition of writers, especially women writers, in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and early fifteenth centuries, we might turn to contemporary theories such as those of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu for insight and even an analogue to the process of experience in these medieval works. Butler argues that identity, especially our gender identity, is a performance, and that we take our cues from our observation of others, and especially our observation of others' reactions to us. In other words, our identity, or at least our gendered identity, is a performance that is the product of our observation of and interaction with our communities. Bourdieu also argues that our identities are "utterly sociologically contingent." His apparatus for explaining how our identities are formed is the *habitus*, which he defines as "history turned into nature, denied as such" (78). For Bourdieu, our identities are the product of the generative function of the *habitus*, which views the actions of society and then causes the individual, or "agent," to repeat them as though they were natural. He goes on to explain that the *habitus* is "the universalizing meditation which causes the agent's practices" (79).

⁹ Abelard was taken to task by Bernard of Clairvaux for his "new opinions on his own authority" (Reiss 243) gleaned through his experience and cited in his writing. While men sometimes cite experience in their writing, the ways in which women did so were quite unique as I will argue in Chapter 2. Hildegard, a rough contemporary of both Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux established emphatically the authority of her own experience while carefully avoiding the appearance of having any "new opinions on [her] own authority" whatsoever. If anything, like Paul in 2 Corinthians, she is careful to rhetorically minimize her own significance as I will further discuss in Chapter 2.

Although the process Bourdieu describes through which identity is formed (the *habitus*) is a highly subjective one, Bourdieu's definition of objectivism is useful for exploring these parallels between his own theories and my definition of experience; it also makes it clear where my own notions of experience depart from Bourdieu's.

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a 'point of view' on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges (96).

Bourdieu notes, however, that this process is reserved for those who have "high positions in the social structure" (96). In fact, according to Bourdieu "It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character (*phusei* or *nomos*) of social facts can be raised" (169). However, for Bourdieu, "experience" can hinder this recognition of the subjectivity of the natural world, "Methodological objectivism, a necessary moment in all research, by the break with primary experience and the construction of objective relations which it accomplishes, demands suppression" (72). Bourdieu sees primary experience, insofar as it is mediated by the *habitus*, as an impediment to the "objectivism" that can allow the observer new and authoritative insight, but I hope to demonstrate primary experience may in fact serve as the impetus for such subjective understanding. While Bourdieu may question the value of primary experience, the process of observation and subjectivity he describes parallels the process of experiential epistemology.

Judith Butler describes the materialization of the regulatory norm of biological sex not as a cultural construct of the one in question, but "one of the norms by which the

‘one’ becomes viable at all” (Butler, *Bodies* 2). If one considers experience in the way that I define it, a process similar to Butler’s articulation of the performativity of materialization, then experience becomes another important way for the “one,” the individual, or the “self” to “emerge.” The “true” nature of that self or “one” is less the subject of this dissertation than the process that created it, experience. Unlike Butler’s performativity, or Bourdieu’s habitus, however, there is an element of conscious or near-conscious recognition in experience because, as I have stated earlier, to have an experience requires a degree of subjectivity, and the subject must be aware, on some level, of that subjectivity.

Butler sees performativity “not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains,” but experience as I define it is the *awareness* of power of the discourse and its power, resulting in the subject’s ability to do the very thing that Butler contends performativity does not do: “bring into being” the thing the subject names (2). The term “performance” in this sense may be more apt than “performativity.” Richard Poirier’s definition of performance in his *The Performing Self* is illuminating here: “By performance I mean, in part, any self-discovering, self-watching, finally self-pleasuring response” (xiii). In his definition, there is a degree of awareness that is essential for the process of experience as I define it in this dissertation. This subjective awareness plays a crucial role in the development of authority, textual and otherwise, because it allows the subject to move beyond the self and apply the

authority her experience has given her as a means to understand and shape the world around her.

Both Bourdieu and Butler's theories highlight two points that I believe are key to my own understanding of experience in the formation of meaning and/or identity. First: for both Butler and Bourdieu community is essential in meaning-making. No concept of the self would exist for Butler without our observation and interaction with others. The habitus for Bourdieu is fed by all of the agents of society: it necessarily relies on as well as determines the practices of the community. I think this understanding of community as essential for experience is of particular importance in discussing vernacular writing, especially vernacular women's writing in the late medieval period. I wish to emphasize here the importance of performance and practice as a part of experience. The performed component of experience is especially crucial in understanding the ways that men would appropriate and "perform" female voices in order to access the authority provided by experience within the text. This practice of male authors accessing experience via performing through female characters or female voices is apparent throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Elaine Tuttle Hansen in *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* argues that male authors employed this technique to allow themselves access to a range of emotions and subjects they might not otherwise have been able to treat. I argue that in addition to gaining access to feminized emotions and subject matter, male authors also used this technique to access experiential epistemology, which even as late as the fourteenth century was a clearly feminine-gendered means of claiming authority.

For much of the last two decades, academics have tended to define the self in Lacanian and or Foucaultian terms, and so my choice not to rely heavily on either theorist in favor of Bourdieu and Butler may at first appear unorthodox. My goal in doing so is not to set aside their theories of the self; indeed, I am indebted to their theories. Both Bourdieu and Butler absorb the theories of Lacan and Foucault; however, they also develop them. Because the focus of this dissertation is not selfhood but experience, which I define as a very active and generative process, such mechanisms as Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, and Judith Butler's interpretation of the way the body is constructed as it relates to sex (both of which theories owe clear debts to both Lacan and Foucault) lend themselves well to this project. Both Boudieu and Butler offer more direct insight into agency and experience that are implicit but not developed in the theories of Lacan and Foucault. For example, Lacan's *méconnaissance*, though a compelling way to understand subjectivity, is less reciprocal than Bourdieu's *habitus*, and seems a bit static compared to Butler's theories of performativity, which "must be understood not as a singular... 'act,' but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, *Bodies* 2).

Lacan describes the mirror stage fundamentally "as an identification" (2), or rather a misidentification (*méconnaissance*). The identification and subsequent transformation that occur do not, Lacan stresses, necessarily reflect reality. It is "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (2). While experience does involve a transformation of the subject, this mechanism of the mirror stage is an inadequate tool for understanding the epistemological process in a very

significant way: the primary act of transformation that begins the process of creating the self is a solitary one; Lacan does speak to a social dialectic that can serve as a kind of mirror: but the metaphor of the mirror itself involves what Lacan terms the “specular *I*.” This *I* is aware of nothing of the world around him except and insofar as it reflects his own image, and is therefore, in a sense, aware of nothing outside himself. Because the epistemological process of experience requires the subject to be aware of him or herself as the subject of external events or circumstances, to see himself, to once again borrow Bourdieu’s words, as “utterly sociologically contingent” (78). Nonetheless, Lacan was among the first to theorize the *I*, the self, as a mediating apparatus, and that through its creation “the very normalization of [its] maturation being...dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation” (5-6). Both Bourdieu and Butler, whose theories I explore at length in this dissertation in an interrogation of experience, owe a clear debt to Lacan here.

Foucault’s discussion of the subject in *L’hermeneutique du sujet* provides more emphasis on the transformative process, which is a crucial part of experience. Moreover, in his *L’archéologie du savoir*, Foucault negotiates the challenge of reconciling the perceived rigidity of the speech act (*énoncé*) with a more fluid epistemology, a challenge which this dissertation also presents. In doing so, Foucault provides a way to work through the implicit essentialism inherent in the work of some other theorists, like Kristeva.

In order to explore the ways in which the female body may have helped to shape the ways in which experience was generated, I will, as I have mentioned, turn to the writings of Julia Kristeva, whose writings “have consistently sought to articulate—

without completely departing from language—the force of the body and its drives” (Leitch, et al 2165). The medieval female mystics’ emphases on their wombs as sites of what I term creative annihilation find echoes in Kristeva’s emphasis on the *chora*, or womb as the site of all meaning-making, the place which “precedes and underlies all figuration” (2166). The *chora* functions as the place of figuration, the site at which meaning is ultimately generated. However, the way that this meaning is expressed, language, imposes what Kristeva terms “constraint.” Language formation occurs in two stages, the more primordial *genotext* when language is in its infancy, followed by *phenotext*, the rigid, codified and fully formed language. Because of language’s constraint, its inability to express the full meaning of what is figured in the *chora*, the *chora* becomes a place that is both subject and object; subject to the language which it helped to create, and object in the sense that it must be disregarded, for language cannot fully understand or interpret it. For Kristeva, only *genotext*, language that is in its infancy, can allow for moments of “thetic rupture,” moments that allow a view of that which is prior to the symbolic or arbitrary; it is the moment at which a new text at once emerges and becomes aware of its own subjectivity.

Because I argue that experience functioned much as a new textual language for female writers establishing their authority, Kristeva’s notions of *chora*, *genotext*, and thetic rupture are particularly helpful. Experience comprehends not only Kristeva’s *chora*, as experience is the source of meaning, but it also functions as *genotext*, in that experience also requires an articulation of itself through reflection. Experience also requires interpretation, a moment of “thetic rupture,” connecting the event that was the

impetus of the experience with the subject's reflection upon it. Here I must qualify my inclusion of Kristeva's theories by asserting that dissertation is not an attempt to challenge deconstruction or postmodernism, reverting to older Freudian ideas of the "primary," espoused by Kristeva, and implicit in the notions of the *chora* or even *genotext*. I am not necessarily arguing that what women were communicating anything through text in the Middle Ages was primary in any absolute sense; however, the process or mechanism that Kristeva outlines in *Revolution of Poetic Language*, is, I believe a useful tool in understanding the way that women's authorship in the Middle Ages was, in a sense, revolutionary, conveying meaning that appears, to use Elaine Scarry's phrase, "almost primary."

Both Scarry and Kristeva both look to the body or bodily metaphors as a site for the creation of meaning, and no discussion of women's experience could be complete with at least some mention of the way women's bodies inform their experiences. Even an early figure like Hildegard, reluctant under most circumstances to call any attention to her authorial persona within the text, is most willing to draw attention to herself when she discusses her body. I argue that she, and other mystical writers, such as Julian of Norwich, rely heavily on their bodies as sites of experience. The medieval world tended to take the Aristotelian view of women's bodies as deformed male bodies. The fourteenth century surgeon, Henri de Mondeville described the body as fortress, and the porous fortress of the female body with its vague boundaries made it especially suspect. According to Jerome, female bodies were more excitable, sensible (or sensual), and dangerous to men. Conversely, because their bodies were so sensible (subject to

sensation), women had the potential, through physical or spiritual acts of affliction or pain, to transcend their bodies. Because they are able to feel such pain, they are also capable of ecstatic moments which they depict as moments of bodily annihilation, situations in which their bodies and attendant sensations become negated. Hildegard describes during one of her visions how her “womb convulsed.” Both she and her contemporary, Elisabeth of Schönau, called frequent attention to the weakening, transformative force of their visions. Julian of Norwich talks about her own bodily annihilation before her vision of Christ’s Passion, the annihilation of Christ’s own mortal body.

Other women, however, rely on their bodies to more positively affirm their experiences. The body and the voice, Elaine Scarry points out, are “almost primary” “explanatory rubrics” in the making of knowledge. Women like Margery Kempe used their bodies to experience the divine (practices that made each of them suspect to their contemporaries.) Even women who described bodily annihilation ultimately relied on their bodies very definitely as sites for their experience. While the importance of bodily sensations in the formation of experience was well established in classical philosophy, the idea of staking one’s textual authority in the experience of the body was radical.

Even as women wrote from their experience, they also encouraged others to read from it. Catherine Sanok has argued that certain texts, especially female saint’s lives, created their audiences, and became in a very real way, part of women’s communities. Jocelyn Wogan-Brown has also explored the ways in which women interacted with texts,

especially the Katherine Group of Saint's Lives. To some extent, these women incorporated and responded to these texts as part of their communities.

So prevalent had such writings and reading become by the fourteenth century that the first use of the word that links the word to subjectivity in the written record in the late fourteenth century, was not recorded by a true woman at all. Although the Wife of Bath is ventriloquized through Chaucer, if we accept Carolyn Dinshaw's argument in *Sexual Poetics* that the Wife is Chaucer's space to inhabit the place of the "Other" and view patriarchy from that perspective, then we must also accept that experience, though perhaps lacking a certain kind of canonical auctoritas, was in fact a very appealing and authority to Chaucer the author. By the fourteenth century the idea of experience as a textual epistemology had spread to writing by men and would continue to inform ideas of what constitutes authority in writing for centuries to come.

The contribution of women writers of the Middle Ages to modern notions of authorship is also an emerging topic of scholarly conversation. Jennifer Summit's *Lost Property* discusses how women, through their absence in the literary canon shaped and created our notions of authorship; however, I argue even more than creating authority through their absence, our modern notions of authorship and authority trace their genealogy directly to medieval women's writing itself: from their presence, and from the claims they stake, we have shaped our own modern notions of what it means to wield textual authority.

I wish to conclude this chapter with a return to a discussion of experience as it will be defined in the rest of this dissertation. My definition of experience requires a

person to see him or herself as the subject of or affected by events or circumstances; it is then a reflection or interpretation of those circumstances which causes him or her to arrive at a new understanding, or new sense of self. In this way, one of the primary functions of experience is to shape and construct identity. Community is essential in the formation of experience, especially women's experience, and the body is an important site of any experience, but especially the medieval woman's.

What counts as experience to whom, what kinds of experiences translate into knowledge that can be communicated through text, and what individuals stand to gain or lose through communicating these experiences textually are all issues I hope to raise and respond to throughout each of the subsequent chapters of this dissertation. This dissertation seeks to establish that women's writing, writing for women and about women, but especially writing by women, creates its own epistemology based on the process of experience. This epistemology of experience as I have outlined it here was the ground on which female writers staked their authority, on which they interpreted other texts, and on which other writers and readers in the years and centuries that followed would accept as the most convincing way to write and read a text.

Chapter 2: Inward Understanding: Experience in Twelfth Century Writing

Introduction

The goal of the previous chapter was to provide a definition of experience and to discuss antecedents to the twelfth century that may have contributed to the phenomenon that I hope to identify in this chapter, the development of the experience as an epistemology and writers' citing of experience as grounds for their textual authority. Having done so, I will leave off the study of the genesis of experiential epistemology and we begin to look ahead for evidence of the ways that this epistemology took root and developed.

In her anthology, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, Elizabeth Petroff identifies the twelfth century as time when "heroic individuality" marked some of the female mystics of the twelfth century (142). This makes an interesting counterpoint to M.D. Chenu's description of the period. Chenu singles out the twelfth century as a time when scholars, who were always male, were especially awakened to "an active awareness of human history" (162). In this chapter, I will look at two prolific writers of the twelfth century, one of them, Hildegard of Bingen, a woman who displays some of the "heroic individuality" that Petroff mentions. The other, Hugh of St. Victor, is typical of the writers described by Chenu; he is very concerned with history and his place in it. Indeed, Hugh constantly references human history in his writings. It appears that at least in the cases of these two writers, men cited history; women cited personal experience. While male writers' approaches to history, ultimately, I will argue, led them in different directions than the women writers who cited the events of their lives, they each display a

kind of reflection which, according to Chenu, was also characteristic of the period, “even if its religious experience” (162). I will argue that this reflection, especially the reflection on religious experience, contributed in a very material way to the development of experience and the changes in what constituted textual authority.

Both A.J. Minnis and Georges Duby note that in the twelfth centuries, writers, especially male writers, begin slipping in personal details, “almost as though they could not resist,” says Duby (38). For example, when Hugh of St. Victor in the mid twelfth century wanted to make the point that isolation is an important condition for learning and study, in addition to citing the classical and canonical sources that medieval texts so relied on for their authority, Hugh also mentions his own “exile” when he was “just a lad” (“ego a puero exsulavi”; Squire 14; *Didascalion* 3.19). These personal details begin to emerge as part of a matrix of authority, experience, and identity.

Certainly this association between personal narrative and textual authority had been recognized in its broadest outlines. In her collection, *Women’s Writing in Middle English*, Alexandra Barratt notes, “the Church could not deny women direct access to the divine, through mystical experience unmediated by a human priesthood...in this way...they could validate their activity as writers” (6). While Barratt and others note that “experience” was a way for women writers to claim authority, how experience was developed by these writers and how it functions within a written work is not interrogated nor even clearly defined. When Barratt, Petroff, and other scholars of medieval women’s writing use the word “experience” they tend to use it as a synonym of “event” or “events.” For them, it does appear to imply a process but rather a static event. While

Barratt acknowledges that “mystical experience” validated women writer’s activity, she does not clearly define the term, nor does she not explore the process through which this validation occurred nor does she explore the ramifications on other writers and genres of this process; that is not, after all, the aim of her book.

In her own scholarship on women, writing, and authority, Barratt explains that “much medieval women’s writing...is hagioautobiographical” (6). This, Barratt implies, is because the events of these women’s lives gave them the authority to speak. As Elizabeth Petroff notes in her anthology, *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*, these visions gave women their authority. Others, such as Sabina Flanagan, have noted that the strategy of citing visionary experience worked well for writers like Hildegard of Bingen. My aim is to interrogate this strategy and the mechanism or process through which experience is formed and articulated. In Chapter 4, I will also look at the legacy of this strategy, and the ways that this strategy was appropriated by other writers later in the period.

Hildegard provides one of the first, earliest examples of a female writer writing not only about the events that happened to her, which is usually what writers like Barratt mean when they use the term “experience,” but the process through which she wrested meaning and authority from these events. While it is true that much of women’s writing in the Middle Ages was hagioautobiographical, not all of it was, and this chapter is not confined to the hagioautobiographical genre. This chapter will also attempt to trace the same experiential mechanisms at work in the secular writings of another popular author of the twelfth century, Marie de France. Through a close reading of two of her *lais*,

Guigemar and *Yonec*, it will become apparent that even within secular texts, the process of interpreting experience was at work, and that experience provided authority for the characters within the story to act. In other words, not only does experience provide Marie her authority to write, but experience is also depicted as an impetus and a means for her otherwise powerless female (and sometimes male) characters to act with authority.

As I have acknowledged in my first chapter, a woman writing in the Middle Ages would face any number of difficulties, but one of the primary difficulties she faced would be the question of establishing textual authority without recourse to revered, canonical sources. And these sources were nearly exclusively in Latin, a language to which most women in the Middle Ages had limited or no access. Walter Ong's comments on "Learned Latin" are helpful in explaining this phenomenon:

For well over a thousand years, it was sex-linked, a language written and spoken only by males, learned outside the home....Learned Latin was a striking exemplification of the power of writing for isolating discourse....Learned Latin effects even greater objectivity by establishing knowledge in a medium isolated from the emotion-charged depths of one's mother tongue, thus reducing interference from the human lifeworld and making possible the exquisitely abstract world of medieval scholasticism. (Ong 113-114)

Women, even women raised in the Church as Hildegard was, did not have the kind of access to Latin that their male counterparts did. Hildegard may have had some Latin, but she relied on a male secretary to help her draft her Latin works¹⁰. Many have noted that

¹⁰ For an excellent discussion of the relationship between Hildegard and her scribe, Volmar, see Staley, Lynn. "The Trope of the Scribe," *Speculum*. 66 (1991): 820-838. Through Staley's analysis of Hildegard's own description of her scribe, Staley convincingly argues that Hildegard was able to frame the trope of writer-and-scribe as a husband-and-wife relationship, conferring authority upon the writer, but casting the scribe as the helpmate.

women's writing distinguishes itself for its orality, a point I discuss later in this chapter, and I argue with others such as Ong and Petroff that this was as much or more a matter of necessity as it was a matter of style.

Another, related impediment to the woman in the Middle Ages seeking to write with authority is elegantly summed up by Barratt, "the concept of authority (*auctoritas*), in its theological, political and literary senses, was thoroughly male" (6). She notes that the original, highest 'auctor' was God, and "without exception, all the written *auctores* of the medieval culture were male" (6). She also notes that female figures in the Middle Ages, however exalted, are never depicted writing.¹¹ Quite simply, according to Barratt, writing was an activity that was completely confined to the male world as was the authority to do so.

While it is certainly true that writing in the Middle Ages was a predominantly male activity, it is equally true that a few women could and did write, and as early as the twelfth century, women were using personal experience in writing quite differently than their male counterparts were. Yet it is also true that the number of women whose works survive from this period is small. While the amount of women's writing surviving from the twelfth century is by no mean capacious, I do acknowledge that I might have chosen to explore other writers in addition to or instead of Hildegard and Marie. However, I chose these writers because they were among the most widely circulated of the period,

¹¹ The famous exception, is of course, is the miniature in the Harley 4431 manuscript in the British Library of Christine de Pisan at her writing desk, working on a manuscript. The image is on the cover of Barratt's book. The manuscript was made for one of Christine's patrons, Isabeau of de Bavière, during Christine de Pisan's lifetime (Christine died in 1429). Thus the depiction is quite late in the period.

and because they are the two women writers of the twelfth century with which readers are most likely to be familiar. I do wish to point out, however, that experience as an authority-endowing epistemology can certainly be seen in the writing of other women writers of the twelfth century such as Elisabeth of Schönau.¹²

In order to validate their writing, these women writers of the twelfth century had to tread very carefully. The process through which their knowledge and therefore their authority came was developed, at least in part, in a very conscious way on the part of these writers, and its consequences were far reaching.

Hildegard and Hugh: Inward Understanding Versus Deep Analysis

Hildegard's letters prove especially helpful in understanding the ways in which she used her experience as both an epistemological process and a means of granting her text (and herself) authority.¹³ Hildegard is especially original in the ways she rhetorically

¹² Although Elisabeth also lived in the twelfth century, I include her in the third chapter which more particularly explores the connection between experience and the body as it developed over the final centuries of the medieval period. Elisabeth's writing is a helpful starting point to begin a discussion that includes the writing of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe.

¹³ Hildegard of Bingen was well known and regarded in her own time, and has been the focus of scholars throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first century. In the late 80s, several books on Hildegard of Bingen, most notably Sabina Flanagan's *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life* sparked the beginnings of a surge in Hildegard scholarship that began in earnest with Lieven Van Acker's 1993 publication of Hildegard's personal correspondence in Latin. These letters were then translated into English by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman and published, like Van Acker's Latin edition, in a series of the three volumes in 1994, 1998, and 2004. Baird's *The Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen*, published in 2006 is a selection of what he deems some of the most important of Hildegard's letters from a biographical standpoint and is a helpful introduction to her writing for scholars and students alike. Anna Silvas's *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (1999), a compilation and translation of Latin sources about the lives of the two women has also contributed much to present scholarship on Hildegard, her mentor Jutta, and their lives and works. Most of the

crafts her experience to present and acquit herself as an author. In order to fully see the ways in which Hildegard is innovative, it is helpful to compare her to a male peer. Hugh of St. Victor, a rough contemporary (though he was perhaps twenty years older), provides an interesting foil to Hildegard. In many ways, the two authors share much in common: both in respected ecclesiastical positions, both writing mostly in Latin (Hildegard, through the help of a male secretary) in the same century at roughly the same time (although Hugh was born over two decades earlier, their authorial careers overlapped); both also enjoyed tremendous popularity. Although, as one might expect when looking at a female writer and a male writer from the twelfth century, it is clear that Hildegard and Hugh were writing in seemingly very different genres, there are places where the purposes of each author overlap: each gives instruction to the sinner. These are the places to which I wish to give special attention, as both authors—albeit in remarkably different ways—invoke their own authority directly.

The genesis of experience as authoritative epistemology can be seen very clearly in the writing of Hildegard of Bingen; however, it will become apparent that this attitude toward the power of experience was not present in the work of her rough contemporary, Hugh of St. Victor. Hildegard is creating a new and unprecedented genre and a means of establishing that genre, which relies on, as she puts in one of her own letters, “an inward understanding” (“interiorem intelligentiam”; Hildegard in Van Acker 1.4) and not what

scholarly books written about Hildegard including Barbara Newman’s *Voice of Living Light* (1998), Fiona Maddocks’s *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age* (2001), Elizabeth Dryer’s *Passionate Spirituality* (2005), and most notably, Bruce Holsinger’s *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (2001) date from the late 90s and early 2000s.

she termed “formal training [or] deep analysis” (“abscisione textus”; Baird 18; Hildegard in Van Acker 1.4). In fact, inventing genre was something Hildegard was quite comfortable with—some argue she “invented” the morality play¹⁴—and in inventing this new kind visionary genre reliant on “inward understanding,” (“interiorem intelligentiam”; Hildegard in Van Acker 1.4) a process she describes in a way very similar to the definition of experience that I have posited in my first chapter, she also had to invent a language with which to articulate this understanding; Hildegard’s struggle with language: to choose the words that will give her authority without appearing to usurp ecclesiastical power constituted a kind of *genotext*, Julia Kristeva’s term for the energies that bring a text about, and the thing which is prior to the *phenotext* which is the actual, rigid structure that results. In describing the force with which sex is used as a regulatory function, Judith Butler describes it as a domain, an “exclusionary matrix,” which, in order to maintain its existence, must disavow material identification that do not conform to its norms, thus it is “construed through the force of exclusion and abjection” (Butler, *Bodies* 3). In Butler’s theory this whole process occurs without the subject’s conscious awareness of it, but experience as I define it requires both the recognition of the excluding force, and entails the process through which the subject challenges that norm. An early example of just such an epiphanic experience is apparent in Hildegard’s writing. Hildegard, aware of the forces that seek to exclude her, uses this awareness to penetrate, if not erode, this matrix. Indeed, Hildegard herself make mention of constraint in the form of the struggle she has

¹⁴ See Flanagan

articulating her “inward understanding” (“interiorem intelligentiam”; Hildegard in Van Acker 1.4) in a letter to another abbess.

For a woman whose own gifts and visions dictate so much of the content of her writing, it is astonishing how relatively little of the events of her own life—apart from her visions themselves—Hildegard of Bingen uses to justify herself and her writing. She seems to be ever downplaying her importance and the value of her day-to-day experience, apart from her visions, where she tries very hard to divorce from Hildegard the woman. This, at first, seems to dispel any notion of personal, biographical experience being the basis of textual epistemology. Hildegard’s infrequent references to personal, autobiographical details (apart from her vision) is all the more interesting considering her remarkable early life and the popularity and controversy surrounding throughout her career. Born in 1098, the youngest of ten children, she was designated for the life of an anchoress, her family’s tithe, at the age of eight, and “entombed for life” with one Jutta of Sponheim, herself a young anchoress. Although her “apprenticeship” with Jutta would not be very long, I believe that it had a profound impact on Hildegard who would go on to serve as a mentor to many other women later in her own life. Indeed, a female community built on friendship and mentoring forms an important part of women’s text-based epistemology. For reasons somewhat obscured by time, Hildegard determined that the life of anchoress was no life for her; it did not take her very long to come to this realization. According to Joseph Baird, Hildegard and Jutta soon came to be very well-known. “The sanctity of these two recluses (presumably Jutta rather than Hildegard, at this early stage) spread abroad very quickly, and other noble ladies began suing for entry

into their community” (Baird 5). This need of other women for the mentorship and advice of her tutor (and perhaps even herself) must have made a very pronounced impression on Hildegard.

As these other ladies came to Jutta and Hildegard, Baird concludes, they would have brought with them dowries, and soon their excessive numbers combined with their wealth would have made the anchoritic life difficult, and it seems that by her twenties, possibly even earlier, Hildegard had left the cell where she had spent her childhood forever. The monks, who were initially entrusted with the care of Hildegard, were certainly not about to part with these dowries, and such a large community of women would completely remove the possibility of the solitary lifestyle of anchoresses for Jutta and Hildegard. Yet although Hildegard clearly left the life of an anchoress behind early, her devotion to the life of the cloth seems to have been unwavering. Baird notes an uncharacteristically “fiery letter to the lapsed nun threatening her with all the pangs of hell if she does not return to her former blessed state” (6).¹⁵

Although in many cases Hildegard’s own biography seems to bear directly on some of the concerns her correspondents, what is so remarkable about the writings of Hildegard is that despite what at times appears to be the overwhelming relevance of her own life to many of the letters she writes, she seldom mentions autobiographical details—apart from her visions—at all. Her motives for doing this are, of course,

¹⁵ Baird muses that this letter might reflect Hildegard’s own austere childhood experiences with Jutta, but if so, the reference is very indirect; all indications seem to be that older anchoress and her young companion got along well. For a thorough exploration of the relationship between the two women, Anna Silvas’s *Jutta and Hildegard* provides excellent commentary.

understandable. God, the ultimate *auctor*, is the person speaking, albeit through Hildegard, and Hildegard, as a mortal woman, in the eyes of the church if not in the eyes of her audience, is many steps removed from God, indeed. Yet Hildegard recognized this fact and saw that it could be used to her advantage; she carefully casts her very weakness as more evidence of God's power because these visions, glimpses into His will, come through her, a weak vessel, and thus are even more convincing evidence of God's greatness; Hildegard may, of herself, have little authority, but the visions have authority because they come from God, and because Hildegard is God's chosen vessel, she is imbued with some of that authority. Rhetorically, however, she must and does negotiate carefully. She is still a woman, and she treads extremely lightly when claiming any kind of authority.

If Hildegard seldom includes autobiographical details, there are some notable exceptions. When she calls readers' attention to the affairs of her own life, it almost always in relation to her visions, and highlights her own weakness (and therefore, paradoxically, as I noted above, her worthiness), and it is at times written in the third person:

A die enim nativitatis suae in doloribus infirmitatum, quasi reti illaqueata est, ita ut in omnibus venis, medullis et carnibus suis, continuis doloribus vexetur, nec dum tamen eam dissolvi Domino placuit, quoniam per cavernam rationalis animae quaedam mystica Dei spiritaliter videt. Haec autem visio venas ejusdem hominis ita pertransivit quoniam per cavernam rationalis animae quaedam mystica Dei spiritaliter videt. Haec autem visio venas ejusdem hominis ita pertransivit, ut ipsa propter eam multa fatigatione saepe commoveatur, aliquo tamen tempore levius, aliquo depressius, in fatigatione infirmitatis laborans. (Hildegard, *Patrologia Latina* 1037-1038)

But from the day of her birth, she was as it were entangles in a net of suffering and illness so that she was vexed with continual pains in all her veins and flesh to the very marrow, nor did it please God that she should be dissolved, because in the interior of her rational soul she saw spiritually certain things of God. But this vision so pierced through all the veins of this woman that she was often agitated with great weariness, sometimes struggling against this fatigue in depression, sometimes in consolation. (Steele 241-42)

Hildegard the writer tries to distance Hildegard the woman (and she uses the more gender-neutral “*homo*,” “being”), from Hildegard the visionary and conduit for the divine, in this case going so far as to refer to herself in the third person.

Indeed, Hildegard appears to have been particularly cautious in her use of the word “I” (ego). It is interesting to note that some of the only times Hildegard seems uses the first person is in direct reference to her visions, as in her letter to Bernard of Clairvaux in which she explains, “Scio enim in textu interiorum intelligentiam expositionis Psalterii et Euangelii et aliorum uoluminum, que monstrantur mihi de hac uisione, que tangit pectus meum et animam sicut flamma comburens, docens me hec profunda epositionis” (“Through this vision which touches my heart and soul like a burning flame, teaching me profundities of meaning, I have an inward understanding of the Psalter, the Gospels, and other volumes”; in Van Acker 1.4; Baird 18). This claim to “an inward understanding” eloquently sums up Hildegard’s epistemological process, but it also draws attention to her own careful construction of her authorial persona. Her “inward understanding” gives her access to the same canon that granted her male counterparts their authority. Another example of her calling attention to her own authorial persona as visionary is in a letter addressed to an abbess, which explains the way she receives her visions, “Ego tibi dico, quod numquam soleo in uisione anime mee nudis

uerbis loqui, sed qualibus in ea doceor” (“I say unto you that never in the vision of my spirit am I wont to speak in undisguised words, but only as I am taught”; in Van Acker 3.18; Baird 72). She goes to repeat the phrase, “In Deo confido” (I trust in God”; in Van Acker 3.19; Baird 73) several times in the letter. This strategy of ceding her own authority to God is an act that validates her own ethos even more; she uses this device frequently in her writing. She often describes herself as “paupercula forma” (“a poor little woman”; in Van Acker 1.7; Baird 21) or “propter pauperem formam, qui edificata est in costa” (“a poor creature formed from a rib”; in Van Acker 1.8; Baird 22) or with similar language. Moreover, she uses minimizing metaphors to describe herself and sometimes her visions, such as “uolans folium contra diabolum” (“a leaf flying in the face of the devil”; in Van Acker; Baird 22).¹⁶

Hildegard’s repeated attempts to minimize her own place rhetorically, to figure herself as unworthy, or unimportant, to be disregarded, tallies in many ways with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject. “The abject, for instance, is as important to the constitution of the ‘subject’ as its ‘object.’ The abject is what the subject’s consciousness has to expel or disregard in order to create the proper separation between subject and object” (2167). Hildegard may be casting part of herself as the “despised ground of infantile dependency and bodily need,” the abject, but in that role she is still necessary. The subject, God’s words, could not exist without out her, and though he is the object, she the abject, her abjectivity reminds readers of her necessity.

¹⁶ In one letter, she even defends the use of metaphors, at least with respect to metaphors as they appear in her recounting of her visions (Baird 72).

In depicting herself as the necessary but despised ground of dependency, Hildegard also illustrates Julia Kristeva's *sujet-en-procès*, "subject-in-proceeds," which can also be translated, perhaps more applicably, "subject-on-trial." For Kristeva, the *sujet-en-procès* is the space between the semiotic and the symbolic, the space in which, according to Kristeva, meaning is made. I argue that Hildegard and many of the female writers who followed her portrayed themselves as the *sujet-en-procès* and functioned in much the same way that Kristeva theorized the theoretical "subject on trial," giving us "a vision of the human venture as a venture of innovation, of creation, of opening, of renewal" (Kristeva 2167). Throughout this dissertation I argue that in a very real sense, women like Hildegard did provide us with a textual epistemological category that allowed themselves and others the pursuit of innovation, opening, and creation that did not previously exist. These writers accomplished this through their reliance on personal experience and the ways in which they situated these experiences textually.

Of particular importance in discussing the idea of the *sujet-en-procès* is the act of speech. Before beginning a discussion of Kristeva's theories of speech and their relationship to experience, I wish to acknowledge what could be viewed as a potential problem with any discussion of such an act, whether oral or recorded in text. One of the problems with the speech act as it relates to experience is its perceived finality, in text and especially in speech. Kristeva herself believed that the moment thought is articulated as language (*phenotext*) it is ultimate and rigid. As Michel Foucault says in his discussion of the *énoncé* (speech act): "Au premier regard l'énoncé apparaît comme un élément dernier, indécomposable, susceptible d'être isolé en lui-même et capable d'entrer dans

jeu de relations avec d'autres elements semblables à lui" ("At first glance, the speech act appears to be a final element, indestructible, susceptible of being isolated unto itself, and capable of entering into such relationships as with other elements similar to itself."; Foucault, *archéologie*, 106). These limitations would make the act of speech incompatible with a process that involves, by its very nature, a kind of transformation of the subject. Yet according to Foucault, it is only at the outset that the speech act appears rigid; in fact, it is not. Speaking of the act of speech which Foucault terms *énoncé*, he says

c'est une fonction d'existence qui appartient en propre aux signes et à partir de laquelle on peut décider, ensuite, par l'analyse s'ils "font sens" ou non, selon quelle règle ils se succèdent ou se juxtaposent, de quoi ils sont signe, et quelle sorte d'acte se trouve effectué par leur formulation (orale ou écrite). (Foucault, *archéologie*, 115)

It [*énoncé*] is a function of existence that belongs to the proper signs through which we can decide, then, through analysis if it "makes sense" or not, depending on how they agree or juxtapose to what they signify, and what sort of act is carried out through their formulation (oral or written).

Because the speech act, by its very nature, draws our attention to the arbitrary signs through which our existence is mediated, the act of speech is itself a mutable, fluid thing, subject to perpetual transformation through interpretation, whether or not the act of utterance is orally or textually based.

Thus the ways in which writers like Hildegard situated their experiences not only resulted in the portrayal of themselves, the authors, as "subjects on trial" but also allowed for new forms of expression. In creating this expression, we get a glimpse of what Kristeva calls "the kenetic functional stage of the semiotic preceeds the sign" (2172). In other words, we catch a glimpse of what Kristeva terms the "thetic rupture," the thing

that allows us to see what is prior to both the semiotic and the symbol. While Kristeva alleges that the thetic rupture allows a glimpse of the “real,” or, more pointedly, we might say, the “prior.” In other words, in the act of creating a vocabulary for and voicing this new epistemology within the text, writers like Hildegard of Bingen created moments of awareness not only for themselves, but their readers as well. Although artistic practice in general is, according to Kristeva, “capable of transgressing the thetic boundary between the symbolic and the semiotic,” Hildegard’s writing and the writing of her contemporaries seems particularly suited to “disrupt established modes of signification so as to retrieve the surmounted semiotic energies and thus create an opening for new, polyvalent cultural meanings” (Leitch et al 2166). One possible reason for this predisposition might be the fact that both Kristeva and medieval women writers figured the act of speech and writing in a highly gendered way. For Kristeva, the semiotic, that which provides a glimpse of prior meaning, that which, in her words, “bears trace of the language user’s own body and of the mother’s protolinguistic presence” (2166), “the mother’s voice prior to the baby’s acquisition of language” (2166) cannot be known except in the moments of thetic rupture, the dialectic between the semiotic and symbolic; Kristeva as evident from the metaphors above, associates the semiotic with the *chora* or womb. It is the space needed for such ruptures, such new awareness to occur.

Thus through Hildegard’s abjection and her constant depiction of herself as the subject(/object) on trial, she is able to furnish readers (and herself) with glimpses of meaning to which they might not otherwise be privy. She is also able to shield herself to some degree from accusations that she is claiming authority to which she had no right.

The need to portray herself as abject, a “poor little woman” is especially apparent in a letter to one of her male superiors,

Ego paupercula feminea forma, que doctrina magistrorum obesio et qui uix litteras scripturarum cognosco, ualde formido ea, que in anima mea sine omni sensibilitate exteriorum sensuum meorum in uero lumine uideo, magistris uirilis persone dicere aut scribere. Dico tamen tibi, quia in uera uisione uidi... (in Van Acker 3.33)

I, a poor little woman, obey the teaching of my superiors, and I am terribly afraid to speak or write to my male superiors about those things which I see in my spirit in the True Light, in my spirit only, unaided by my corporal eyes. Nevertheless, I say unto you—because I have seen in a true vision...” (Baird 124-125)

This passage is an excellent example of the way that Hildegard uses the authorial I to both negate and build her own authority. At the same time as she is only an unoffending “poor little woman”, she is also capable, by God’s grace it is to be understood to “see in [her] spirit in the True Light” (“que in anima mea...in uero lumine uideo”). The abject, Hildegard, and the object, God’s grace, allow for a moment ofthetic rupture, a glimpse (albeit in the spirit) of the True Light. Beyond being an excellent example of Hildegard’s authorial rhetoric, what is also fascinating about this particular passage is the phrase “in anima mea sine omni sensibilitate exteriorum” (“in my spirit only, unaided by my corporal eyes”). Here, she is very anxious to call attention away from her (female) body because she realizes that it will undermine her authority in the eyes of her (male) “superiors.”

The other moments in which she frequently uses the personal pronoun is to call attention to her ignorance, or to make herself appear physically weak or insignificant. In the same letter to Bernard of Clairvaux referenced above, she continues, “quas nescio, sed

tantem scio in simplicitate legere, non in abscisione textus” (“I have no formal training at all, for I know how to read only on the most elementary level, certainly with no deep analysis”; in Van Acker 1.4; Baird 18). The contrast that she draws here between “inward understanding” (“interiorem intelligentiam”) and “deep analysis” (“abscisione textus”) is striking. She and her male colleagues have access, Hildegard argues, to the same text, but she accesses them through inward understanding, they through deep analysis; Hildegard is articulating a fundamental difference in her epistemology from the traditional (male) epistemologies.

There is another interesting exception, however, to this rule of Hildegard’s using the first person pronouns so carefully. Hildegard’s creation of herself as a weak woman who calls attention to herself only to highlight her frailty is a device that Hildegard seldom deviated from. In fact, the sickbed was more than just a rhetorical device; Baird notes that Hildegard often “won out...by taking to her sickbed” (29). There are only a few exceptions to this rhetorical mode, but I think that they are extremely important moments as they represent some of the first moments in text in which a woman claims authority for herself without guise. In this letter, written in 1155, Hildegard is responding to the behavior of the monks of St. Disibod. She herself had broken ties with the monastery in 1150, taking with her a large share of the monastery’s assets. Although she argued that these assets rightfully belonged to her and the women who followed her, the monks, understandably, did not want to lose stewardship over this legacy. Their frosty reception of Hildegard five years on is, perhaps, understandable, but Hildegard was clearly angry, and expressed herself in no uncertain terms to the then-abbot:

Veni in locum illum ubi Deus uirgam uicis seu tibi dedit. Et quidam de turba fratrem tuorum super me sicut super nigerrimam auem et ut super horribilem bestiam fremebant, atque arcus suos contra me intendebant quatenus ab ipsis fugerem. Sed in ueritate scio quod Deus in mysteriis suis me de loco illo mouit, quoniam in uerbis et in miraculis ipsius anima mea ita commota fuisset quasi ante tempus moritura essum, si illic permansissem.

Nunc illis qui ibi in deuotione me susceperunt, salus et benedicto sit, sed aliis qui illic capita sua super me mouerunt, Deus gratiam suam secundum misericordiam suam porrigat. (in Klaes 208)

I returned to the place where God has bequeathed to you the rod of his authority. But a mob of some of your monks rose up and gnashed their teeth at me, as if I were a bird of gloom or a horrid beast, and they bent their bows against me in order to drive me away. But I know for a fact that God moved me from that place for His own inscrutable purposes, for my soul was so agitated by His words and miracles that I believe I would have died before my time if I had remained there.

Now, salvation and blessings upon those who received me there with devotion; as for those others who wagged their heads at me, may God extend his grace to them, as He sees fit in His mercy. (Baird 30)

Gone is the weak and frail Hildegard; instead we have an author who says, “In ueritate scio” (“I know for a fact”). It is, moreover, God’s will that she knows for a fact...and her explanation of how she knows it is equally interesting, ““quoniam in uerbis et in miraculis ipsius anima mea ita commota fuisset quasi ante tempus moritura essum, si illic permansissem” (“my soul was so agitated by His words and miracles that I believe I would have died...had I remained there”). Hildegard’s experience has led to her knowing. And this was not just a spiritual experience: although she refers to her soul, it is her *body* that would have died had she remained at the monastery. Even for Hildegard, who was so mindful of the liabilities that resulted because of her female body to her own claims of authority, her body is also a key to her experience and authority. When discussing her body, Hildegard is usually very rhetorically aware and extremely cautious.

Usually, when she mentions her body, it is in association with its weakness: in emphasizing her bodily frailness, its permeability, she draws herself rhetorically closer to God, lending her more authority; but here, not only is her body a site of weakness, in this letter she reveals, perhaps inadvertently in her anger, her body as an epistemological site in and of itself. This is a rhetorical move that she would criticize in one of her correspondents and admirers, Elizabeth of Schönau.

While she might have expressed her doubts about experience that was explicitly bodily, one kind of experience matters a very great deal to Hildegard: she constructs her textual authority in such a way that her whole ethos relies on a very particular set of her experiences: her visions, the “burning flame” (“*flamma comburens*”) that allowed her the “inward understanding” (“*interiorem intelligentiam*”). To do this, however, it was important for Hildegard to mitigate her womanhood by highlighting her own frailty, proving that it was God, and not she of herself, who was the source of these visions. A good, explicit example of Hildegard’s dismissal of her own experience outside of her visions is apparent in her later letters. In one particular letter, Hildegard addresses an abbot named Gedolphus; the introduction to this letter, most likely written in 1169, was a reply to the abbot’s request for help in treating a woman possessed of the devil. She begins the letter, “*Cum flagellis Dei sim longa et gravi egritudine constricta, vix aliquantulum petitioni vestre respondere valeo. Hec a me non dico se dab illo qui est*” (“Although I have been confined with a long and serious illness through the scourges of God, I have just enough strength to answer your request. What I am about to say does not come from myself, but from the One Who Is”; in Klaes 210; Baird 80). She is using the

personal pronoun I (ego) to refer to herself; however, once again it is to highlight her own weakness: she has been ill, and has only just enough strength to answer the letter; she makes it clear that the words that follow are not hers but God's. What follows is a statement that, rhetorically, is far more similar to Hugh of St. Victor's rhetorical persona than weak, frail Hildegard's. The use of the first person is abundant and authoritative, but, as Hildegard constantly remind the reader, it is God himself who is speaking: "*audi verba hec non per hominem premeditate, sed per illum qui est et qui vivit manifesta*" ("hear these words which do not come from man but from Him Who is and Who lives"; in Klaes 212; Baird 82). The contrast between ailing, weak Hildegard, and the voice of God is striking and help to lend more credibility both to the message and the messenger.

Although Hildegard often adopted a textual persona of weakness and submissiveness, we do get glimpses of such as in the letter to the Abbot of Disibod, of a woman who appears to have quite a bit of confidence in herself; she had carefully crafted, through a rhetoric of frailty, submission, and significance, quite a reputation. And it appears, judging from her break with the monastery, that she wasn't afraid to use that reputation when it suited her purposes. Her "inward understanding" ("*interiorem intelligentiam*") appeared to have been powerful persuasion for the powers that be at the time. Yet it is hard to determine to what extent Hildegard herself entirely trusted her "inward understanding" as an epistemology.

For Hildegard, it is ultimately her visions that imbue her ethos with power. In fact, she was careful to renounce any claims to authority except to invoke God's authority (as He was the source of her visions). She was careful to acknowledge her inferiority and

the inferiority of women in general, “Deus enim construit, ut femineus sexus per fideles magistros regeretur, unde tibi melius est, u teas fideliter cum timore et amore Dei procurando ipsis et tibi candelabrum lucis sis, quam aliter laborares” (“God established that the female sex is to be governed by teachers. Therefore, it is better for you to be a candle lit for them, and for yourself, and to watch over them (the women in this man’s care) faithfully in the fear and love of God than for you to toil in some other way”; in Van Acker 3.13 Baird 71). This is a stark contrast with later female writers such as Christine de Pisan, or her near contemporary Marie de France. And yet, there can be no question that Hildegard was innovative: she painstakingly carved out a place of authority for herself that was simultaneously based on her own weakness juxtaposed against the authority of her visions and their divine source. These visions were a kind of experienced-based epistemology, certainly, and were important in the development of further experience-based epistemologies, but her authority came because the visions pertained to a wisdom and experience, an “inward understanding” (“interiorem intelligentiam”), which her audience paradoxically perceived as coming from a completely exterior source.

In other words, Hildegard’s experience combined with her subjective rhetorical rehearsal gave her authority. Her visions: events in her life that caused her to view herself (and, perhaps of more material importance, caused her audience to view her) as the subject of God’s will and blessings, were the experiences on which her authorial persona is reliant. She reflected on and interpreted these events (minimizing her own place as interpreter) and came to new understandings: about herself, about God’s love, and often,

understanding of the lives of others, especially souls in purgatory, or God's feelings toward penitent sinners.

If Hildegard of Bingen described her own epistemological methods as "inward understanding...with no formal training" ("interiorem intelligentiam...tantum scio in simplicitate legere") the term that she set in opposition to her own means of knowing, "deep analysis" ("abscisione textus") seems to fit Hugh of St. Victor quite well.¹⁷

Although Ivan Illich has described Hugh as "an extremely sensitive person, [who] experiences the new mode of selfhood characteristic of his generation" (22-23), his writing differs pointedly from Hildegard's. Illich goes on, "As a reader who is well read in 'all the literature there is,' he finds ways to interpret traditional *auctoritas* and mentalities in such a way that his new selfhood could express itself within them" (Illich 23). Unlike Hildegard, Hugh has complete access to traditional modes of authority. And

¹⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, enjoyed, to borrow Aelred Squire's phrase, an "immense reputation...during his lifetime [which he] has ever since enjoyed" (13). A published edition of Hugh's complete works in the original Latin appeared in 1648, and although it was reprinted in 1854 and 1879, the Rouen edition of 1648 remains the standard. Hugh continued to enjoy his immense reputation through the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, given his long residence just outside of Paris, throughout much of the twentieth century the most important scholarship on Hugh of St. Victor was conducted in French, including M.D. Chenu's *La théologie au douzième siècle* (1957), which I have already cited in this study, H. Lubac's *Exégèse Médiévale* (1961). Other important twentieth century contributions to scholarship on Hugh of St. Victor include an English translation of selected works of Hugh of St. Victor by an anonymous member of The Community of St. Mary the Virgin, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, with an introduction by Aelred Squire. A popular trend in more recent scholarship has been to emphasize the ways in which Hugh developed emerging notions of selfhood and authorship. Ivan Illich's *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1996), is a commentary on the *Didascalion*, and it focuses on the ways in which Hugh contributed to the phenomenon that has been called the renaissance of the twelfth century, particularly with regard to the development of the self in writing. Other studies have focused on the visual images and metaphors in Hugh's writing, including Patrice Sicard's *Diagrammes médiévaux et exégèse visuelle: le Libellus de formatione arche de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (1993).

while Hugh of St. Victor, like Hildegard, frequently refers to himself, he seldom makes any attempt to hide the fact that his opinions and his didactic goals are his own: “Hujus vero spiritualis aedificii exemplar tibi dabo arcam Noe” (“Now the figure of this spiritual building which I am going to present to you is Noah’s ark”; *Patrologia Latina* 622C; Squire 52). He also assumes the source of his authority is clear: even as he is referring to himself, he uses virtually no autobiographical detail in support of his arguments while Hildegard, who seldom refers to herself except to belittle herself, relies almost entirely on her experience for her authority. Thus Hugh is showing the awareness of “the new mode of selfhood characteristic of his generation,” (Illich 24) it is a self that is still contingent on traditional modes of authority. In his introduction to a translation of selected texts by Hugh of St. Victor, Alfred Squire makes the point that, “Among Hugh’s own writing autobiographical references are rare, and the few instances which occur are difficult to evaluate” (14). Hugh does, however, seem to include autobiographical detail to reinforce the points that he’s making. For example, Squire notes that Hugh uses the detail, “I have been an exile since I was a lad,” (“ego a puero exsulavi”; *Didascalion* 3.19) to help underscore his (Hugh’s) point at the time: detachment makes for a good student (Squire 14). This is not experience in the sense that I define it in Chapter 1: Hugh is not using this event to come to any new understanding; he is using this event to support a point he has already made and grounded in more conventional sources. However, it is provocative that he considers his own experience, at least in this case, further support for a point he is trying to make. Yet for Hugh, and for most writers in the twelfth century, these cases are few and far between.

While personal experience does not figure prominently in Hugh of St. Victor's writing, he does acknowledge the value of certain kinds of experience, showing an awareness of the importance of the experience of his readers. Although he acknowledges this value of certain kinds of experience in a narrow way, in *De Arca Noe Morali*, I contend that it does mark an important formulation indicative of the kinds of shifts in the twelfth century that Minnis and Duby discuss.

Et sicut saepe cadendo discit homo qualiter gressum figere, et caute ambulare debeat, et in conflictu belli qui frequenter plagatus est, cautius venientem ictum excipit, sic qui a diabolo saepe decipitur, subtilius post modum versutias ejus deprehendit, et machinationes subvertit. (*Patrologia Latina* 658D)

And just as a man learns by falling often how to tread firmly and walk warily, or as the man who has often been wounded in battle is on the lookout for the coming blow, so he who has been frequently deluded by the devil presently perceives his wiles more readily, and overthrows his tricks. (Squire 113-14)

Here a subject's repeating of certain activities can be epistemological in a very limited sense: these things must and can be learned and improved through repetition, even if the learning is unconscious. We see also, in this passage, as we do in the entire work, Hugh's recognition that reflection on history can be a valuable teacher. While the first two examples given by Hugh are more reflexes than conscious processes as I argue true authoritative experience must on some level be, there is, especially in the last example, a hint of what I have termed in my first chapter "interpretive reflection," which I argue must be a part of any authoritative experience. He is advocating a process that may require subjectivity, awareness and reflection that results in a deeper understanding about the world. However, this kind of experience is being used quite differently than

Hildegard uses her own experience. Hugh is merely articulating a process which he believes is an inevitability, to be taken for granted, like a reflex. Clearly then for Hugh, although subjectivity, reflection, and awareness in particular may be implied, the value of these “experiences” is not contingent upon them. This marks a notable difference from twelfth century writers like Hildegard or Marie de France for whom the value of experience was *entirely* contingent upon subjectivity, reflection, and awareness.

That these writers, Hugh included, though to a much lesser degree, do mention their own lives does mark an important shift that is made mention by both Duby and Minnis; however, his experience is not helping him to make meaning, only to reinforce a point he has already made. Furthermore, for the most part, Hugh tends to avoid writing about his own experience. He quotes scripture and ecclesiastical authority frequently. More often than not, however, his writing is based on the scriptures and founded on his own thoughts and opinions—learned opinions. When he does refer to experience, whether his own, or experience in general, it is usually merely to support or clarify a point that he has already made on other, more traditional, grounds.

The different values that Hildegard and Hugh placed on personal experience as an index of textual authority are apparent in the rhetorical styles of each author. Hugh will often speak in the first person—he doesn’t seem nearly as shy of it as Hildegard—but in such cases, he uses the first person in statements that directly reveal his own thoughts or opinions, such as at the beginning of *De Arca Noe Moralis*: “ea potissimum stylo commendare volui, non tantum ideo quod ea digna scribi existimem, sed quia quaedam ibi prius inaudita quodammodo magis grata esse cognovi” (“I felt impelled to commit

those to writing, not so much because I thought them worthy to be written down as because I knew that some people had not previously heard these ideas” *Patrologia Latina* 617; Squire 65). Moreover, he begins the work by stating that his arguments are “ex auctoritate quam ex ratione firmamentis” (“derived both from reason and from authority”; *Patrologia Latina* 617; Squire 45). It is from a venerated, traditional foundation, then, that Hugh constructs his text, and his rhetoric leaves little room to doubt that he, at least, considers his work absolutely authoritative. In Chapter 8 of Book II of *De Arca Noe Morali*, Hugh undertakes a lengthy explanation of his taxonomy of thoughts, using himself as an example for how the understanding of this taxonomy might be beneficial. Although he frames this example as hypothetical: “Si ego diligere coepero meditationem Scripturarum...jam in arcae mansionem prima esse coepi” (“If, therefore, I have begun to love to meditate upon the scriptures...then I have already begun to be in the first storey of the ark”; *Patrologia Latina* 639D; Squire 81). It is striking how authoritative the personal pronoun is here. This stylistic choice is telling because Hildegard would have never, nor could ever have said anything like it; she seldom calls attention to her authorial persona in text unless it was to highlight her weakness. She realized that as a “frail woman,” she did not wield sufficient authority. It is apparent that Hugh is very confident in his own authority, and Hildegard is terrified of over-stepping her place. The contrast between these two figures who ultimately did dispense wisdom on matters of ecclesiastical weight is tremendous. Hugh obviously feels very comfortable expressing his opinions with little to no explicit justification for doing so, and Hildegard is always extremely careful to insist on her unworthiness before expressing

her opinions, which she often attributed to God anyway. This is what one would expect to find, but the extent of the difference is very striking. It also becomes even more clear that Hildegard's visions (or experiences) are authorizing her to write, and that Hugh as a literate monk needs, in his mind, no further authorization.

Hugh and Hildegard's rhetorical styles when treating their own textual personas not only reveal a gap between Hugh's own sense of his textual authority and Hildegard's, but also that Hildegard was keenly aware of it and had to struggle to bridge it. For Hildegard, experience was everything. Without her experience, she was nothing but a "frail woman."

Hugh's perceptions of the value of experience are summed up eloquently in his discussion of Noah's ark, which he sees as a metaphor for spiritually building the soul. While he discusses meditation, we would tend to view as an exclusively personal form of meaning-making, Hugh does not seem to be encouraging his readers to make their own meaning at all. Meditation for Hugh is a process that requires direction from a higher authority; thus he will present the building of the ark to the reader, and his reader's "eye shall see outwardly, so that your soul may be fashioned into its likeness inwardly" ("quam foris videbit oculus tuus, ut ad ejus similitudinem intus fabricetur animus tuus"; Squire 52; *Patrologia Latina* 622C). It is not, however, any "inward understanding" on the part of the reader that will cause this to happen, however; the reader does not make the change in his own soul. That is to say, this is not an exclusively personal process. The reader needs Hugh to perform this fashioning process, "I want to show you," ("tibi demonstrare volo"; Squire 52; *Patrologia Latina* 622D) says Hugh, "in a form you can

see” (“in forma visibili depinxi”; Squire 52; *Patrologia Latina* 622D)]. In fact, it is Hugh’s own wisdom, *his* authority and not the readers’ that is absolutely essential for learning to take place; the personal observations of the reader alone are not enough, do not even begin to be adequate. Unlike Hildegard, who created and championed an epistemology that was rooted in individual “inward understanding” and not “formal learning [or] deep analysis” (“interiorem intelligentiam...tantum scio in simplicitate legere”), Hugh clearly subscribes to the idea that knowledge proceeds from [his own] authority gleaned from his much formal learning and his highly structured analysis. For him, textual authority conforms to an earlier medieval model.

Hugh provides a clear contrast to Hildegard. His rhetoric demonstrates that he feels his authority is self-evident; he need hardly mention his own life’s experience to give credibility to his point (though on very, very rare occasions he does). On the other hand, for Hildegard, her experience, especially her visions, were the only authority she had and she relies on them constantly, trying to deflect, wherever she can, attention to Hildegard the woman. Hugh, on the other hand, is never reluctant to mention himself as a figure of authority within the text, but seldom references his own experience.

Some of the differences between Hildegard and Hugh could be attributed to the audiences for whom they were writing. Although in Hildegard’s case she usually addresses a specific individual, and Hugh speaks to a more general audience, despite the differences in their audiences, the similarities and especially the differences in Hugh’s and Hildegard’s prose and attitudes toward textual authority and what constitutes it are remarkable. Where Hugh is not shy of using the personal pronoun in his writing, his

writing is highly impersonal. Though nearly all of Hildegard's writing is in some way personal—she is relating her visions, very intense personal experiences—she often avoids calling attention to herself through the authorial “I” so common to Hugh's writing. Hugh's discourse is, to use Kristeva's term, highly symbolic. It conforms very neatly to established genres and has bought heavily into the symbolic structures that allow meaning to be made; he has no need to question his place, to portray himself as one who ought to be disregarded. On the other hand, Hildegard is working a new genre, fashioning a new discourse; and abjection, in Kristeva's terms, is an essential part of that process. Hildegard is careful to minimize herself because the very survival of her writing demands it. She becomes rhetorically what Kristeva terms the *chora*, the despised, abject space necessary for creation.

Although Hildegard did not and in fact could not claim the same textual authority that Hugh did, or at least in the same ways Hugh did, it is obvious that Hildegard had a powerful reputation. She was well known in her lifetime, and many people sought her help and advice; she was even referred to as a prophet. She was so revered that she was able to break with the monks with whom she had lived (and for whom she was a considerable source of income) and to found her own abbey. Yet in her text, she avoids almost any mention of herself, unless it is to minimize her own person, to draw attention away from her selfhood and especially her womanhood. Her visions are events in her life that caused her to view herself (and, perhaps of more material importance, caused her audience to view her) as the subject of God's will and blessings. She reflected on and interpreted these events (minimizing her own place as interpreter) and came to new

understandings about herself, about God's love, and often, understanding of the lives of others, especially souls in purgatory, or God's feelings toward penitent sinners. The vernacular tradition of experience as a vehicle of epistemology and as an authorizing process owes a tremendous debt to mystical writers like Hildegard. In other words, Hildegard's experience helped her to craft her identity. This is one of the main ways that I think experience and identity are related: among the new understandings and awareness that this new reflection upon experience can provide, a self-conscious understanding of one's identity is perhaps one of the most important.

But can experience occur through a process that is entirely, to use Smith and Watson's word, "interior"? So far I have explored the ways that Hildegard constructed her textual ethos on an experience-based epistemology that seems, upon first view, to be an interior process. While she makes it clear throughout her writing that her community of women was important to her, it is difficult to find evidence of these women, influencing the way Hildegard constructs here experience.¹⁸ In contemporary identity theory, as found in, Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu, community is absolutely necessary for the formation of self, or indeed of any kind of knowledge. The process through which this formation occurs, according to Bourdieu is the *habitus*, or "the universalizing meditation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable'" (79). Though the agent's action are mediated through the *habitus*, his or her actions may also impact the

¹⁸ For more on the influence of the Hildegard's female community see Ulrike Wiethus's "In Search of Medieval Women's Friendships: Hildegard of Bingen's Letters to her Female Contemporaries." In Ulrike Wiethus, ed., *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*. Syracuse University Press, 1993. 93-111.

habitus; thus for Bourdieu, all formation of self is entirely and utterly contingent on one's community, and an individual agent or group of agents cannot have any goal, aim or purpose that is not powerfully shaped through this community.

For without the context of a larger social rhetoric, there can be no individual awareness. In Hildegard's writing, we have only limited views of the way her community might have informed her experience; nonetheless, her reliance on these women is clear. In her writing she often mentions her daughters and the impact of her visions on them.¹⁹ Clearly, she valued these connections, and there are textual traces of their influence.

In her recent book, *Her Life Historical*, Catherine Sanok argues that writings for women, specifically female saint's lives, "construct a feminine audience." The texts themselves construct their audience, but in the process of this creation also provide the reader "an occasion for thinking about...aspects of gender identity and religious ideals" (ix). Sanok locates "a constructed feminine audience," a community which was used by men and women alike as an alternative space to consider complicated political and social realities as well as create equally complicated national and personal identities. In fact,

¹⁹ Hildegard seems particularly inclined to mention her "daughters" in moments when her physical body gives way to the exhaustion that is caused by her visions. In *The Life of Hildegard (Vita Sanctae Hildegardis)*, Hildegard makes this connection especially clear:

My body was so changed that I was laid out over a hair-mat on the ground, but my end was not yet in sight, though my superiors, my daughters, and my neighbours came in great morning to watch my end...But God did give me much help in two of my daughters in particular and also in certain others, who being strong in wisdom and charity tended me in my sufferings and did not grow weary of them. (Hildegard qtd. in Silvas 229)

While Hildegard depicts her body in what I argue is a very different way than the mystical writers who would come after her (an argument that I make in my third chapter), Hildegard does seem to be emphasizing the importance of her community through her body.

“late medieval writers used this imagined community to think about the structure and priorities of other social communities” (Sanok 48). I argue that this process that created not only an audience, but as Sanok claims a community. This community could not only be the site of “thinking about” identity, politics, and so forth, but also a site for experience.

I am not exclusively concerned with proving that texts created feminine communities or exploring the ways in which this happened—Sanok’s book does an admirable job of this—rather, I am concerned with exploring the ways in which those feminine textual communities created or resulted in new and different ideas of experience that women could use to authorize their own texts. Even in the twelfth century there is evidence of the idea of feminine textual communities of the kind Sanok discusses producing self-authorizing experience. One of the most striking examples is the work of Marie de France.²⁰

²⁰ Howard Bloch’s *The Anonymous Marie de France* (2004) is probably the most influential recent work on Marie de France. His focus on memory and orality is borne out in other contemporary scholarship, including, most notably Logan Whalen’s *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (2008). Gender and gender identity have understandably been of considerable interest in recent scholarship on Marie de France. See, for example, Michelle Freeman’s “Marie de France’s Poetics of Silence: the Implications for a Feminine *translatio*.” *PMLA* 99 (1984): 860-863, or Miranda Griffin’s “Gender and Authority in the Medieval French Lai.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35 (1999), 42-56. As I indicate in this chapter, the question of Marie’s authenticity as an author continues to be debated; Richard Baum’s *Recherches sur les oeuvres attribuées à Marie de France* (1968), is perhaps one of the fine examples. Marie’s fables have also received a fair amount of scholarly interest, beginning with Karen Jambeck’s 1980 critical edition. The body as it appears in Marie’s *lais* has received some attention as well—see Rupert Picken’s “Marie de France and the Body Poetic.” in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages* (1996) as an example.

So frequent are Marie's allusions to her own persona that Glyn Burgess and Keith Busby ask, "Who is this author who sprinkles the prologues and epilogues [of the *lais*] so liberally with verbs in the first person and even intervenes on occasion to make comments on the tales? Marie," they say, "is anxious to make herself known to her audience..." (Burgess and Busby 9) In fact, Marie, who wrote in the latter half of the twelfth century, has a habit of using the first person in a way that is not at all unlike Hugh's use of it, except that Marie calls attention to herself even more frequently. And she is not as careful as Hildegard; rather, as Burgess and Busby assert, "we have the strong impression of dealing with an author proud of her reputation (*pris*) and of her literary talents;" moreover, she seems anxious to "stress that she does not intend to squander her talents" (9). She has talent, and she uses it well.

Marie seems to present a contrast to Hildegard and the female mystics of this period and later periods. Marie seems eager to comment on her own text and to remind readers of her presence and importance whenever possible. In this way, she is not unlike the translator-orators Rita Copeland discusses in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*. Hildegard, as we have seen, did call attention to herself and her importance, but in very oblique and subtle ways. Yet I would argue that underpinning Marie's authority, like Hildegard's, is Marie's understanding of and reliance on experience. Not only does experience underpin Marie's authority as an author, experience also plays a vital part in her stories themselves. Like Marie the writer, Marie's characters use their experience—sometimes experience gained from textual encounters—to inform and justify their actions and to confer authority on themselves.

Before discussing Marie the author, it is important to acknowledge our uncertainty about Marie the person. Even the question of her womanhood is sometimes raised. It is true that the author identifies herself as “Marie” in two places: the prologue of *Guigemar*, “Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie, / Ki en sun tense pas ne s’blie” (“Hear, lords, the words of Marie who in her times does not neglect her obligations”; 3-4; Burgess and Busby) and at the end of the fables included in the Harley (978) manuscript,

Al finement de cest escrit
Qu’en Romanz ai traitié e dit,
Me numerai pur remembrance:
Marie ai num, si sui de France. (1-4)

(“At the close of this text, which I have written and composed in French, I shall name myself for posterity: My name is Marie and I come from France”; Burgess and Busby 15)

The evidence of this Marie who wrote and composed *lais* and fables is corroborated by Denis Piramus, who lamenting the excesses and follies of fables—he was more overtly didactic in his own writing—mentions a Dame Marie who wrote “les vers de *lais*, / Ke ne sunt pas de tut verais” (“*lais* in verse which are not at all true”; Burgess and Busby 11).

Burgess and Busby note that the subjects and themes in the *lais* seem to be those that would concern a woman writer. “The welfare of infants” and “the sexual frustration of young women who had been married off to older men” are among the examples they name. Moreover, they point to a line in the prologue of *Guigemar*, “But where there is a man *or a woman* of great reputation, those who are jealous of his or her talents (*sun bien*) often say spiteful things” (Burgess and Busby 10). Burgess and Busby think it unlikely that a male author would go out of his way to mention women as well as men. This is certainly possible.

Since most scholars believe there is little reason to doubt that Marie the author was a woman, it seems safe to question what a woman would have been doing calling so much attention to herself throughout her texts. There are several answers to that question that I wish to explore, but I do wish to briefly treat the idea that many of the tales treat events and situations that Marie herself may have related to on an autobiographical level. Burgess and Busby speculate that Marie might herself have been familiar with the kind of May-December political marriage in which the young women in her lays so often find themselves. They also suggest that she might have left France for Britain at some point—perhaps, they suggest, because of her marriage—and they propose that she might have felt the loneliness and isolation that seems so common to so many of her heroines. While this is all speculation, this speculation highlights the great value that we as modern readers place on the relation of the experience of the author to the text: the authority we grant to writers when we feel that they are “writing what they know.” This, I argue, is a legacy of the epistemology that Marie, Hildegard, and the other writers discussed here helped to create.

Whether or not Marie’s personal experience influenced the lays is, ultimately, however, a matter of conjecture, albeit an interesting one. Whether or not the life history of the author of the *Lais* directly influenced them in the ways that Burgess and Busby suggest, the author of the *Lais*, whoever or whatever she might have been, does demonstrate an understanding of experience and its power in the *Lais* themselves. For example, Howard Bloch points out that in the Prologue to Marie’s *Lais*, she contemplates

translating a Latin text into French, in Bloch's words a "written" source, but "she thinks instead of that 'which she has heard'" (Bloch 25).

Des lais pensei, k'oï aveie;
Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
Ke pur remembrance les firent
Des aventures k'il oïrent
Cil ki primes les comencerient
E ki avant les enveierent. (in Bloch 33)

I thought of lays which I had heard and did not doubt, for I knew it full well, that they were composed by those who first began them and put them into circulation to perpetuate the memory of adventures they had heard.

It is interesting that Marie consciously chooses to eschew the written, Latin tradition in favor of the oral, vernacular one. In choosing to share tales that have been communicated orally, she is relying on a tradition that many more of her readers, her female readers, will have had access to. Her justification for choosing the lays over a Latin text is most interesting. These tales recount individuals' experiences, their "aventures" and were literally made, authored, to be remembered, "pur remembrance." The phrase "pur remembrance" here may indicate not just the idea of perpetuating memory, as the Burgess and Busby translation renders it, but a more active engagement with the text: indeed, Marie's frequent commentary and asides seem to indicate that she sees these lays as part of a very living memory that can, with her guidance, allow readers to consciously observe what unfolds in the text, to see the characters and by extension themselves as subjects to some of the forces described, and to gain new understanding from their observations and reflections: in other words, the texts become a site for experience for the readers themselves, not merely a site for perpetuating dead memories. In that sense, she

is drawing on a textual tradition far more powerful than any “written” text. This oral text lives: it is or can be a part of the living memory or experience of her readers.

Indeed, Bloch’s own deconstruction of the term *aventure* indicates the importance of experience in Marie’s work. “*Aventure*,” he says, is “the story of an experience” (27). Bloch also makes a crucial connection between lai, aventure, and the body. “As that which lies outside the lai, but of which the lai is made, ‘aventure’ refers to an event, an *eventure*, that supposedly happened, rooted in the body, the fantasy of the body to present itself, at its outer limits, the imagined wholeness of voice and body joined” (Bloch 27). And then, significantly, he says, “‘Aventure’ not only refers to the source of a tale, to the past from which the tale comes, and to the tale in its present form; ‘aventure’—from the Latin *ad + venire*—also relates prospectively to that which will come or will happen” (28). And while Bloch argues that this is what allows characters in the world of the lays like Muldumarec to predict that his unborn son Yonec will be his avenger, I argue that this sense of “aventure” was key not only to understanding the way a lai was written and the characters behave, it also shapes the way that a lai would have appealed to its twelfth century readers. The events, the experiences in these texts are not confined to the past, but also live in the present and future. Through reading a lai, Marie’s reader could share in the *aventure* and gain valuable experience of her own.

There are many places in Marie’s work when one can see how experience is the foundation for both the action of the lai itself and Marie’s authority as an author. In *Le Fresne*, it is the mother’s reflection on the slight that she has made on another woman’s character that causes her to abandon Le Fresne, giving rise to the narrative action; it is the

wife's horror at the realization that her husband, Bisclavret, is a werewolf that occasions that narrative; in fact, the theme of reflection leading to realization is common to most of Marie's *Lais*. Two lays that provide particularly fertile ground for analysis are also two of Marie's most popular, *Guigemar* and *Yonec*.

One of the most interesting lays, illustrating both the self-conscious author who wishes to impress upon her readers the value of her experience and the ways that the characters' experiences shape the lay itself, is *Guigemar*. *Guigemar* is the first lay in both the Harley manuscript and the MSS manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, the manuscripts regarded as the most substantial and complete of Marie's lays. Of the other three known manuscripts, only *Yonec* and *Lanval* appear more frequently. Thus *Guigemar* seems to have been a well-regarded, or at least a popular tale. And while there is some question as to whether or not *Guigemar* was the first lay to be composed by Marie, there is a certain sense in placing it first in a collection of lays, for in *Guigemar* we have both the experience of the author and her characters asserted as incontrovertible authorities.

From the beginning of the *Guigemar*, Marie makes her authority clear through implication.

Ki de bone mateire traite,
Mult li peise si bien n'est faite.
Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie,
Ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie.
Mais quant il ad en un païs
Hummë u femme de grant pris,
Cil ki de sun bien unt envie
Sovent en dïent vileinie :
Sun pris li volent abeisser (*Guigemar* 1-9)

Whoever has good material for a story is grieved if the tale is not well-told. Hear, my lords, the words of Marie, who, when she has the opportunity, does not squander her talents. Those who gain good reputation should be commended, but when there exists in a country a man or a woman of great renown, people who are envious of their abilities frequently speak insultingly of them in order to damage this reputation. (Burgess and Busby 43)

As has been noted by others, she is clever in the way she proclaims her talent. She implies that she is so good that her talents are bound to make others envious, a clever way of preemptively defending herself and cementing her talent without directly claiming it. This establishes her talent and protects her reputation, while preserving some semblance of modesty. Burgess and Busby note that Marie is “anxious to make herself known to her audience and stress that she does not intend to squander her talents” (9), but I argue that she is doing more than merely informing her audience of her identity and her intentions. Burgess and Busby render the line “Ki en sun tens pas ne s’oblie” “who, when she has the opportunity, does not squander her talents” in their full translation. They also provide a more literal translation in the introduction, “Hear, lords, the words of Marie who in her time dos not neglect her obligations” (9). The words “squander and neglect” do not quite capture the meaning of “oblie,” which can also, of course, be translated “forget.” Memory and reflection play an important role in experience, and Marie constantly emphasizes throughout her writing the important role that memory and reflection upon memories play, a fact that is not lost in more recent scholarship of Marie.²¹ If her authority as an author rests on what I am terming “experience,” then memory is crucial.

²¹ Howard Bloch’s *Anonymous Marie de France* touches on this theme, as does Logan E. Whalen’s *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (2008).

Thus it seems fitting in the lays that opens her collection that she insists that as an author she does not forget. She knows that her tales must be well-told, and she is up to the task.

Les contes ke jo sai verrais,
Dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
Vos conterai assez briefment.
El chief de cest comencement,
Sulunc la lettre e l'escriture,
Vos mosterai une aventure
Ki en Bretaigne la Menur
Avint al tens ancïenur. (19-26)

I shall relate briefly to you stories which I know to be true and from which the Bretons have composed their lays. After these opening words I shall recount to you, just as it has been set down in writing, an adventure which happened in Brittany long ago. (Burgess and Busby 43)

Much has been made of Marie's conscious decision to choose lays, an oral/aural text, as her literary project.²² And yet in this passage we see that although Marie first speaks of the lays as having been "fait" or "composed," she then tells readers that she will "recount" this lay "Sulunc la lettre e l'escriture," ("just as it has been set down in writing"). This may be Marie's attempt to ground this, the first of her lays, in a literate tradition, a recognition that textual authority rested in citing a long, written tradition. While a Breton Lai would have fallen outside of that tradition, because of its orality and its existing outside of the traditional scriptural and patristic canon, this may have been Marie's effort to conjure in the minds of her readers an alternative canon, authoritative written tradition populated by people with similar values to those of her readers. This fusion of "letter e l'escriture" with the oral tradition of the lais created a framework which would have been inviting to readers who both recognized written tradition as

²² See my discussion of Bloch.

authoritative but would find an oral tradition perhaps more accessible and appealing. It is interesting that after this first lay, Marie seems to abandon mention of “écriture,” and speaks almost exclusively of lays being “fait.” For example, in the beginning of the opening lines of *Equitan*, Marie claims that the Bretons, “Fere les lais pur remembrance, / Que [hum] new meïst en ubliance” (“[Bretons] composed lais for posterity and thus preserved them from oblivion”; 7-8). Marie’s phrase “ke o sai verrais” (“that I know are true”) once again establishes her voice as authoritative. Indeed, Marie often interrupts her narration with first person statements, reminding readers of her authority to speak on matters related (and sometimes not so related) to the text.

Having gone to some pains to establish her authority in the first lines of *Guigemar*, Marie continues to remind readers of her presence throughout the text. Characteristic of Marie’s style, she interrupts the narrative to remind us of her presence, as early on in the tale when describing Guigemar’s return home to his family, Marie writes, “Ensemble od eus ad sujerné, / Ceo m'est avis, un meis entier” (62-63). These interruptions are typical of Marie’s style and call attention to her textual persona, marking herself as an informed and reliable narrator. While we do see this kind of interruption occasionally from writers like Hugh, Marie seems remarkable for the number of times she draws attention to herself. This may be because, as Busby and Burgess point out, we are seeing evidence of an author who is proud of her “pris.” However, I find the phrasing of Marie’s interruption here and elsewhere provocative. Busby and Burgess translate the phrase, “Ceo m’est avis” “I think.” Once again, the translation loses something of the original sense of the phrase in French, which also has the senses of “it is my information”

or, more provocatively, “it is my opinion.” In either case, the judgment of the author becomes much more important. It is not that she merely thinks the information she is giving the reader is true: it is her opinion; she has received this information: the phrasing reminds readers not only of her presence but also of her authority over the content of the text; she makes the decisions, and her opinion is what counts. This claim to authority is possible only because of the material that Marie has chosen as her subject. She could not, as Hugh did, write so authoritatively on scripture; but here, in recounting a lay, her authority matters, and it matters because of her experience: she has heard or read the *lais*, but more importantly, she has formed opinions about them. In some cases, those opinions exist entirely in the world of the text. In other cases, however, she relates what is happening in the text to her knowledge of the world as it exists outside of it.

For example, in lines 161-186, Marie discusses the way that the ship which would carry Guigemar to his lady was accoutered. In the middle of this passage, Marie interjects the following information

Les altres dras ne sai preisier;
 Mes tant vos di de l'oreillier:
 Ki sus eüst sun chief tenu
 Jamais le peil n'avreit chanu; (177-180)

I could not set a price on the bedclothes, but I can tell you this much about the pillow: no one who had lain his head on it would ever have white hair. (Burgess and Busby 45)

In this passage we see Marie interrupting the text once again; however, in this case it is not merely to draw attention to what she knows about the story. At first she tells us what she does *not* know: the price of the bedclothes (“Las alters dras ne sai preisier”). But she then provides us with a much more interesting about the pillow. Apart from re-

establishing herself as an authority on the subject at hand, Marie also invokes a world outside of the text. Nothing in her experience has taught what she needs to know to judge the price of the bedclothes, but she does know something about the pillow. In this passage Marie connects the text to the world of her readers, blurring the boundaries between lay, *aventure*, and her readers' realities. At this moment we can see the merging of the world of the text the readers are invited to inhabit and the world of material culture with which her readers would also have been familiar: each informs the other.

This idea of text as part of a continuum of the realities in which women based their lives, behavior and identities is explored, for example, by Catherine Sanok in her study of the exemplarity of female saints' lives for both women readers and women readers as imagined by the authors of such hagiographies. However, here we can plainly see Marie making an open invitation for her audience to impose the practical reality of the price of bedclothes on the text that is neither explicitly religious nor implicitly didactic. Marie seems to be demonstrating an understanding that the lives of readers and the world of the text touch, intersect, and overlap each other in many different ways. Not only do readers bring their questions about behavior and identity to the text, but also the more quotidian matters of life, and even in something so seemingly mundane as exquisite bedclothes can serve as an intersection between what the reader brings to a text and what he or she may ultimately take from it. The text for Marie can in fact be a site of experience, even in matters which may seem trivial but may have been interesting or important to her readers. This ability of the text, in the hands of Marie, to speak to her readers on multiple levels of their lives is evidence to the great degree to which

audiences' perceptions of their own identities and realities may have been shaped by the texts with which they interacted. The text unquestionably becomes the site of experience in many of the different areas of the readers' lives.

Not only do the audiences' perceptions and reflections come to bear on the text to produce experience, but so do the perceptions and reflections of the characters themselves. In other words, experience often drives the *aventure* itself. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the lady's imprisonment by her husband once he discovers her love for Guigemar. Marie describes the lady's imprisonment as an extended period of torment:

Le jur ad mal e la nuit pis:
Nul humme el mund ne purreit dire
Sa grant peine ne le martire
Ne l'anguisse ne la dolur
Que la dame seofre en la tur.
Deus anz i fu e plus, ceo quit;
Unc n'oït joie ne deduit. (660-666)

She suffered during the day and at night it was worse. No man on earth could describe the great pain, agony, anguish, and grief which the lady experienced in the tower, where she spent, I think, over two years. She knew no joy or pleasure. (Burgess and Busby 52)

While we read that this lady spent over two years there, the end of her imprisonment appears, at first, perplexingly abrupt. After reading that she has been imprisoned for two years, we read the following lines:

Sovent regrete sun ami:
"guigemar, sire, mar vus vi!
Meuz voil hastivement murir
Que lungement cest mal souffrir.
Amis, si jeo puis eschaper,
La u vus fustes mis en mer
Me neierai!" dunc lieve sus;

Tut esbaïe vient a l'hus,
Ne treve cleif ne sereüre;
Fors s'en eissi par aventure. (667-676)

[She] frequently mourned for her beloved : "Guigemar, lord, how sad that I met you ! I prefer to die a speedy death rather than suffer this misfortune too long. Beloved, if I could escape, I would drown myself where you were put to sea." Then she rose: distraught, she went to the door to escape and found no key or bolt. Thus she had the chance to escape. (Burgess and Busby 52)

The text abruptly shifts from describing a habitual occurrence to grounding this habitual occurrence very much in a specific moment: the moment of her escape over two years after she had been "imprisoned" in the tower. At first, this odd transition seems like a mistake on the part of the author. It appears that Marie has made an inadvertent temporal shift and that her heroine has been very foolish indeed: how could she fail to try the door in two years time? I argue however that this is a deliberate move on the part of Marie. It is her reflection on Guigemar and on past events, the aggregate consideration of her suffering, the resolution that she would rather die in the place where she lost Guigemar than to continue to live that ultimately liberates her. The doors of her metaphorical prison are thus unlocked and the physical prison reflects this psychological shift. Thus it is her experience that liberates her and allows her to her *aventure*. Marie's use of the term *aventure* here is crucial. If *aventure* is indeed not only the text on the page but everything that is comprehended in the world of the story: the material of which it is made, then it seems especially appropriate that until the lady can make sense of the events of her past, can truly experience them in the epistemological sense, the story cannot continue.

This process of reflection, especially the reflection of female characters seems to drive the movement of the plot in many of the lays of Marie. Several of Marie's tales

include a retelling of all or part of the tale within the tale itself. In *Guigemar*, the knight is asked to recount for both the lady and her companion what has happened to him, and the female characters seem to place a lot of value on this recounting. In fact, the lady's response to Guigemar's arrival is quite telling.

Respunt la dame: "or i alums!
S'il est mort, nus l'enfuürums;
Nostre prestre nus aidera.
Si vif le truis, il parlera." (287-90)

The lady replied: "Let us go together, and if he is dead, we shall bury him. Our priest will help us. But if I find him alive, he will speak to us."
(Burgess and Busby 47)

The importance of speech here is clear. The act of speech seems to be necessary for life itself. If he cannot speak, he is fit to be buried, but if he is alive, he will speak ("il parlera"). Like the enclosed garden with its walls that Guigemar has just penetrated, the speech act seems to serve as both the foundation and the borders for female communities; text is valuable only insofar as it performs the functions of speech. And Guigemar is unable to become a part of the women's community unless he speaks. Nor will any act of speech do. The lady asks Guigemar whether he has been exiled, and Guigemar, in answering her question prefaces his speech to the lady by telling her,

"dame," fet il, "ceo n'i ad mie;
Mes si vus plest que jeo vus die
La verité, vus cunterai;
Nient ne vus en celerai. (311-314)

"My lady," he said, "that is not the case. But if you wish me to tell you the truth I will do so and withhold nothing from you." (Busby and Burgess 47)

Guigemar recognizes he must tell the lady the absolute truth and withhold nothing from her. She must be in his complete confidence in order for Guigemar to be wholly accepted.

Not only does Guigemar relate his troubles, but the lady shares hers as well. Almost immediately after this interchange, we read of Guigemar, the knight whose affections were unwinnable, that

amur l'ot feru al vif;/
Ja ert sis quors en grant estrif,”
Kar la dame l'ad si nafré,
Tut ad sun païs ublié. (385-88)

love had now pierced him to the quick and his heart was greatly disturbed. He felt no pain from the wound in his thigh, yet he sighed in great anguish and asked the maiden serving him to let him sleep. (Burgess and Busby 48)

We continue to learn about the lady as well in the next lines, “As he had dismissed her, she returned to her mistress, who was, like Guigemar, affected by the ardour which had kindled within her heart.” While Guigemar, save for his inability to love, is the picture of chivalric masculinity outside the world of walled garden, once he enters the garden, he becomes feminized in very telling ways. Apart from the clearly feminizing wound to his thigh, he is also subject to the wishes and advances of the lady: “If only he had known her feelings, and how love was afflicting her, he would, I think, have been happy.” Not only do we see Marie, characteristically reminding the reader of her own authorial presence and authority, we also see Guigemar as very much the subject of events outside of his control. In the world of this walled garden, Guigemar is able to reflect on his situation—an action that is often reserved for the female characters in Marie’s lays—and see himself as subject. He undergoes a sort of temporary re-gendering. Only then is he able to fall in love. True love, Marie may be arguing, requires a kind of feminized epistemology of experience.

Another example of the way the reflection of female characters seems to drive the movement of the plot in many of the *lais* is apparent in *Yonec*, the tale begins with another nameless woman who is imprisoned in a tower. Provocatively, Marie's women in towers are so frequently nameless. While nameless damsels in distress are indeed common enough figures in medieval literature (as well as literature from other periods), Marie goes to some pains to name other characters, some of them female, in these particular lays, and is nearly as likely to omit the name of a male character as to omit the name of a female character. For example, we know the name of Guigemar's sister, Noguent, but we do not know the name of the jealous husband in the story. Yet these women trapped in towers remain nameless. I argue that is because Marie means them to be archetypes that her female readers in particular will recognize. For women of Marie's time and presumably aristocratic station, feeling trapped by jealous husbands for whom they had little affection was probably a situation to which they could relate or at least imagine. Thus these women trapped in towers may represent a sort of aristocratic "everywoman," and are meant, in just the way that Sanok argues the stories of female saints were to serve as examples for women seeking a life of pious devotion, to serve as exemplars. But examples in what way? What the lady of *Guigemar* and the lady of *Yonec* have in common is that it was their reflections, their view of themselves as subjects and their "interpretation of...[their] place in...[a] specific present" that lead to their reprieve.

Community proves to be a consistently important part of the way meaning is made through experience, and Marie emphasizes the lack of community of the woman trapped in the tower in *Yonec*. Several of Marie de France's *Lais* provide excellent

examples of women gaining experience through community association and then using that experience to authorize their behavior. Throughout her writing, she emphasizes the importance of female communities; so often her characters are isolated from an extensive feminine community by jealous husbands. It is usually only after an interaction with a community of some sort that the action of the story is able to progress. For example, in *Yonec*, the heroine must first speak with the old woman keeping watch over her (who, we are told in the text, seldom has much interaction with her), and also reflect on the scriptures. To some extent, this character incorporated and responded to these texts as part of their communities. Thus, through “conversing” with the text of the Psalms, the heroine is able to, in a sense, summon Yonec to her.

The idea of community simultaneously invokes associations of sameness and otherness. In order for a community to exist, its members must perceive certain commonalities between each other, and yet a community demands difference as well, as each member of the community is, of course, distinct from the others. This otherness appears to be necessary for female experience in the writing of Marie de France. Thus Marie de France seems to often admit men into women’s social groups: Guigemar is an excellent example. These men often tend to enter women’s groups as sexless, or at least sexually unavailable entities,²³ and end up as objects of women’s sexual desire.

Thus it is fitting that early in *Yonec*, the focus is on the isolation of the lady from community of any kind. “There were other women, I believe, in a separate room, but the

²³ In these two lays, Guigemar is wounded in the thigh, and Yonec appears first as a bird. In Chapter 4, I revisit the idea of men becoming a part of female communities, and the pattern continues: Jankyn is the Wife of Bath’s husband’s apprentice; John/Eleanor comes to Elizabeth to learn to be a woman.

lady would never have spoken to them without the old woman's permission" (34-36).

The lady is prevented from speaking to other women because the old man perceives this as a danger. As is evident from the theories of Bourdieu and Butler, community is an essential part of the epistemological process of experience, and in Marie's *aventures*, time and again it is experience that proves the impetus for the lady's escape. Thus the jealous old husband isolates his wife from a community that might help her to understand and thus enable her to escape her circumstances. Nonetheless, he does provide her with one companion, his widowed sister, and on seeing the old woman one morning with her psalter, the lady makes this rather lengthy speech, a speech which goes to further pains to emphasize her isolation:

«lasse,» fait ele, «mar fui nee!
mut est dure ma destinee!
en ceste tur sui en prisun,
ja n'en istrai si par mort nun.
cist viel gelus, de quei se crient,
quë en si grant prisun me tient?
mut par est fous e esbaïz,
il crient tuz jurs estre trahiz.
jeo ne puis al muster venir
ne le servise Deu oïr.
si jo pûisse od gent parler
e en deduit od eus aler,
jo li mustrasse beu semblant,
tut n'en eüsse jeo talant.
malëeit seient mi parent
e li autre communalment
ki a cest gelus me donerent
e a sun cors me marïerent!
a forte corde trai e tir!
il ne purrat jamés murir.
quant il dut estre baptiziez,
si fu al flum d'enfern plungiez:
dur sunt li nerf, dures les veines,
que de vif sanc sunt tutes pleines.

mut ai sovent oï cunter
 que l'em suleit jadis trover
 aventures en cest païs,
 ki rechatouent les pensis:
 chevalers trovoënt puceles
 a lur talent gentes e beles,
 e dames truvoënt amanz
 beaus e curteis, (pruz) e vaillanz,
 si que blamees n'en esteient,
 ne nul fors eles nes veeient.
 si ceo peot estrë e ceo fu,
 si unc a nul est avenu,
 deu, ki de tut ad poësté,
 il en face ma volenté!» (71-108)

“Alas...that ever I was born! My destiny is hard indeed. I am a prisoner in this tower and death alone will free me. What is this jealous old man afraid of, to keep me so securely imprisoned? He is extremely stupid and foolish, always fearing that he will be betrayed. I can neither go to church nor hear God’s service. I could put on a friendly mien for him, even without any desire to do so, if I could talk to people and join them in amusement. Cursed be my parents and all those who gave me to this jealous man and married me to his person! I pull and tug on a strong rope! He will never die. When he should have been baptized, he was plunged into the river of Hell, for his sinews are hard, and so are his veins which are full of living blood. I have often heard tell that in this country one used to encounter adventures which relieved those afflicted by care: knights discovered maidens to their liking, noble and fair, and ladies found handsome and courtly lovers, worthy and valiant men. There was no fear of reproach and they alone could see them. If this can be and ever was, if it ever did happen to anyone, may almighty God grant my wish!” (Burgess and Busby 87)

One of the most striking features of this speech is its parallels with the reflections of Guigemar’s lady in the tower. Each of them declare the nature of their suffering to be unbearable. Guigemar’s lady wishes she was dead, and Yonec’s mother wishes she were never born. After reflection on her situation, each lady also proposes a plan. Guigemar’s lady, who wishes she was dead, proposes to drown herself in the place Guigemar was put to sea. The lady in this story, who laments her very existence, wishes for a chance to live

an alternative reality. But it is only after the process of viewing themselves as subject, and reflecting on their place in the present that each lady is given her chance for escape. In other words, it is the process of recognizing her experience that ultimately sets each lady free. In *Yonec*, however, we are given a more specific moment and more detail into what may have occasioned this lady's reflection on her experience, it is her isolation from the other women, and her glimpse of the Psalter, a painful reminder to her that she cannot even have part in the communal rites of the Church.

Such examples of details that give rise to reflection are plentiful in Marie's writing and cover a spectrum of experience from the significant to the seemingly mundane, and many examples are meant especially for the readers. For example, in *Yonec*, the author interrupts her narration to comment on the way that the lady in the story has let herself go.

Mult ert al dame en grant tristur,
od lermes, od suspir e plur
sa belté pert en tel mesure
cum sele ki n'en a cure (44-47).

The woman was in great distress, and she wept and sighed so much that she lost her beauty, as happens to any woman who fails to take care of herself. (Burgess and Busby 86)

The main character's sadness, surely an emotion that readers could have related to causes her to lose her beauty. Marie wishes the audience to be aware of the parallel, so she consciously connects the experience of the character to her readers, "as happens to *any* woman..." The prologue of Guigemar invokes the readers' experience of slander in an attempt to allow the readers to see things from Marie's point of view. Not only do we see

conscious attempts by the author to allow readers to experience the text, we also see characters in the text themselves having similar experiences.

I want to conclude this chapter by looking at the beginning of *Yonec*. *Yonec* begins with an invocation of what the writer knows.

Puis que des lais ai comencé,
ja n'iert par mun travail laissé;
les aventures que j'en sai
tut par rime les cunterai. (1-4)

Now that I have begun to compose lais, I shall not cease my effort but
shall relate fully in rhyme the adventures I know. (Burgess and Busby 86)

The emphasis here on the author as the purveyor of knowledge is not unique. Marie's choice of words and the way she frames them, however, is provocative. "Now that I have begun..." as it is with Hildegard is on not only personal knowledge but the transmission of that knowledge that matters. The process that Hildegard and Marie articulated in their text did not exist as an end unto itself. It served a pedagogical function as well. Catherine Sanok has argued that certain texts, especially female saint's lives, created their audiences, and became in a very real way, part of women's communities. Jocelyn Wogan-Brown has also explored the ways in which women interacted with texts, especially the Katherine Group of Saint's Lives. I believe the fact that women appropriated texts as part of their communities was a fact that both Marie and Hildegard recognized, and they invited their readers to use the experiences they articulated, the experiences that endowed their words with authority, to make their own meaning. In this sense, the process of experience was a shared, reciprocal process. Writing in isolation from a community would have been futile.

While this connection to a community of readers and a desire, even a need, for shared participation in the process of experience appears prominently (albeit differently) in the writing of both Marie and Hildegard, it is noticeably absent in the writing of Hugh of St. Victor. For Hugh, it is ultimately what he, as a scholar versed in the canonical texts, brings to the text that is important. His readers may benefit from it, but the text stands independent of them: his authority is the only authority that matters, and access to this authority is tightly controlled. While Hugh's presence as an author does reflect the shift in views toward authorship that both Chenu and Illich note as part of the twelfth century: Hugh calls much more attention to this authorial persona and we see evidence that he feels his life is worthy of autobiographical narration, it is ultimately on more conventional modes of authority that he grounds his work.

I have also demonstrated in this chapter how theories of speech inform the creation of experiential epistemology. The next chapter will further explore the speech-body connection, exploring the ways that the body, the female body in particular, proves the essential site of experience.

Chapter 3: Experience and the Medieval Female Body

Introduction

One of the ways Hildegard of Bingen reminded readers of her authority was to constantly call attention to her weakness, often through references to her female body. Through calling attention to her body, she underscored the power of God vis-à-vis His ability to work through such a “poor little woman,” but she also reminded her readers that her authority came from God; this fact trumped all other considerations, including her femaleness. Historically, the female body has been regarded with suspicion and contempt. Galen, the second century physician, whose writing was familiar to learned medieval audiences, noted that “the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he...for the [genitalia] were formed within her when she was still a foetus, but could not because of the defect in heat emerge and project on the outside.” However, concludes Galen, “you ought not to think that our Creator would purposely make half the whole race imperfect and, as it were, mutilated, unless there was to be some great advantage in such a mutilation” (42). This chapter is in part an exploration of the great advantage women took of their perceived bodily imperfections.

So much of a woman’s experience in the Middle Ages was characterized as bodily; this chapter will review some of the medieval medical literature and thoughts about women’s bodies, demonstrating that in the Middle Ages women’s bodies were perceived as eminently permeable objects, and thus capable—in some ways—of a wider range of experience and interaction with environment around it. Indeed, women such as Elizabeth of Schönau, and later Margery Kempe would rely, in some cases almost

entirely, on bodily experience as a means of knowing. Julian of Norwich, whose writing I also discuss, is more problematic. For Julian, it is only at the brink of death, the moment of leaving her body that her most profound visions begin. Like Hildegard's visions and Elisabeth's later visions, Julian describes her visions as out-of-body experiences, and yet these women seem unable to leave their bodies out of the narrative. In fact, Julian's body is the key to her mystical experience. It is Julian's attempt to transcend her body that she is given her visions; she is still reading her experience through her body, in this case, through her body's absence.

Female writers, from as early as the twelfth century, were aware of these depictions of their bodies and used them, I will argue, to their advantage. Hildegard of Bingen does to a limited extent. Her younger contemporary, Elisabeth of Schönau, does to an even greater degree. In Elisabeth's writing we see a clear focus on the female body as conduit for divine experience. In fact, Hildegard had cautioned Elisabeth early on in Elisabeth's career about the bodily nature of her visions, warning her that such showy, bodily displays might arouse skepticism in the ecclesiastical establishment.²⁴ And while Hildegard certainly used her body to achieve her ends (taking deathly ill when she was not getting her way, and miraculously recovering afterward), in her writing, she always cast her body as an impediment. In Elisabeth's writing we begin to see a shift; indeed,

²⁴ Hildegard apparently felt some unease with the ways in which Elisabeth was representing her visions. In particular, Hildegard seemed concerned with the physical nature of Elisabeth's visions. Hildegard's visions were unaccompanied by any physical side-effects, but Elisabeth's visions were accompanied by violent seizure-like symptoms. The immediate effect of these seizures was an increase in Elisabeth's renown. However, in a letter to Elisabeth, Hildegard warned her to remember that she was a "fragile, earthen vessel..." and to "be humble and poor" (in Lagorio 165). Hildegard seems to indicate that drawing attention to oneself through bodily displays is unwise.

some of her earlier visions read like precursors to the bodily hysterics of Margery Kempe.

Although I do believe that women like Elisabeth of Schönau would ultimately radically change the way her readers perceived the body as an epistemological tool, I acknowledge the role medieval bodily theory played in the way writers like Elisabeth figured their bodies. As we have seen in the writings of Cicero and Augustine in Chapter 1, the idea of the body as important for making meaning was not new to a medieval audience of readers. Some of the scholarship on women's writing in the Middle Ages is eager to renounce the influence that these canonical sources may have had²⁵; and while it is certain that most women writing or dictating in the vernacular would not have been as familiar with these sources as their male counterparts, I argue that these canonical works were important in shaping the ways that women crafted their authority albeit they accessed and used these sources very differently than the male authors of the period. Instead of becoming the authoritative bedrock of their texts, women writers often incorporated these textual voices into their writing via a process similar to the one highlighted by Catherine Sanok in *Her Life Historical*; in other words, these ideas were gradually incorporated into a communal bas of knowledge. Women writers were often familiar with *ideas* contained in canonical writing, even though they might not have been

²⁵ This is largely due to the fact that women did not learn Latin; indeed, most women were not literate at all. It seems reasonable to assert, therefore, that women's access to the ideas contained in such sources would be limited. However, others, like Caroline Walker Bynum have argued that certain women, particularly those following a religious life, may in fact have had access to these ideas, if not the texts themselves; she argues convincingly that the religious life presented an alternative culture with a different discourse than a woman in the secular society during the Middle Ages might have experienced.

able to attribute the idea to its source or even read the language in which the text containing it was available. For these female writers the sources from which their ideas came were immaterial because their authority did not come from identification of the *auctor* or the source; their textual authority came through experience, and experience could be shared and then appropriated by others who did not participate in the event which was the original impetus for the experience. Once recorded and shared, experience becomes part of the communal base of knowledge. For authors who relied on the authority of experience in their writing, the identity of the individual person who encountered the original experience, whether she be the woman down the street, or a man who lived centuries earlier, is usually, though not always, immaterial; unlike the clerical tradition, the originator of the idea is unimportant; it is the idea, the transmitted experience, that matters.

Although these early women writers may have, on some level been aware of canonical notions of the body, I argue that the ways in which women situated their bodies as uniquely qualified sites of experience was radical. Here I must acknowledge the work of Liz Herbert McAvoy, whose *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* explored the ways in which invoking their bodies lent these writers power. While McAvoy's writing tends to focus more on the ends of textual invocations of the body, authority, I am more interested in interrogating the means, experience.

I conclude by moving from the twelfth century, where I argue bodily experience as textual authority began, to the end of the medieval period, the late fourteenth and early

fifteenth centuries, briefly exploring bodily experience in the writing of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Not only did the act of writing allow these women to transmit their experience to her readers for their benefit and learning, the act of writing itself worked to refine the perceptions of the event in the mind of the writer, helping her to better understand the emerging experience. As Petroff puts it, in her introduction to her anthology, “A positive experience could be reexperienced and developed by unrolling it before the mind’s eye; a negative one could be explored and dealt with in the same way, so that one could solve the problem it presented and thus grow beyond it” (30). This development and growth that Petroff speaks of are not merely the products of a positive or negative experience; I argue that they *are* the experience and the thing which imbues the text with authority. Petroff notes that Julian recounts “a similar process of reliving and exploring visionary experience” elsewhere in her writings (Petroff 31). In fact, throughout mystical or devotional writing, especially the writing done by women, we see repeated emphasis on reflection, interpretation, and the idea of revisiting repeatedly past events.

Just as I am not the first to recognize that women used the events of their lives or their bodies to corroborate and validate their texts, I am also not the first to recognize that interpretation and reflection were important themes in writing by women and writing for women. Petroff speaks of the medieval female visionary’s “deep need for introspection” (19). Works written to aid women in their devotion encourage reflection, such as *The Mirror of Our Lady*, are an excellent example of this. According to Jennifer Bryan, the mirror trope itself reveals that the reflective process was individualized; the mirror was

the same for each reader, but what it revealed was unique to the individual. This in part explains why writers like Elisabeth of Schönau were so anxious to involve their communities in their texts. Each reader could share a different interpretation of the text, adding to the base of communal experience. Other scholars have treated the ways that community, interpretation and reflection were important epistemological tools. Where my project diverges from these writings is that it argues that these tools are not only a consequence of “experience” as most scholars define it (the event that precipitated the reflection), but a vital and necessary part of the epistemological process of experience. This dissertation is also an attempt to find this process at work in women’s writing and to understand how the process works and to demonstrate that the process itself, rather than merely the event which precipitated it, is the seat of authority.

The authors of devotional and didactic literature give us remarkable insight into their own estimation of the power of experience. So clear was the importance of this process to them that women writers and those writing for women sought to prompt their readers to engage in similar reflection. In describing the way Julian of Norwich crafted a narrative, Petroff says

With the purpose of interpretation in mind, Julian has constructed the narrative of her vision with great care; she clearly intends her readers to learn not just the content of her revelation but also her method of reading and interpreting it as well. For these purposes, she has give primacy to neither the visual nor the auditory; both senses are initially engaged simultaneously, as in film, but, on reflection, they can be analyzed and understood separately. (32)

According to Petroff, Julian’s writing is not merely devotional; it is also on some levels didactic. Julian’s writing is actually encouraging women to seek out experience and to

view their own experience as authoritative. Not only is Julian encouraging women to direct this process toward the events of their own lives, she is encouraging them to invoke this process as they read her experiences. The experience, in this sense, belongs just as much to the reader of Julian of Norwich as it does to Julian herself. Through this chapter I hope that an understanding of the communal nature of experience as perceived by the writers of the late Middle Ages will emerge. Community continues to be recognized as one of the most important means through which we fashion our identity and create meaning, and I will argue that the genesis of our modern perceptions of the power of community to make knowledge and shape identity develops in the women's writing of the late Middle Ages.

The Female Body in the Middle Ages

As is evident in the quote from Galen at the beginning of this chapter, the female body was seen as inferior. These notions of the inferiority of the female body in the west date at least to Aristotle, who famously declared, "we should look upon the female state of being as it were a deformity" (41). Aristotle cast the womb as an essentially barren place in-and-of-itself, awaiting "the principle of Soul," the organizing, genitive force, contributed by the male. Females, with their "deformed," "mutilated" bodies were regarded by such writers as Isidore of Seville as "softer." At the same time as women were regarded as softer and colder than males, notes Isidore, they are also noted for "the intensity of [their] desire. For females are more lustful than males, among women, as much as among animals" (41).

This combination of weakness, softness, and lust produced creatures and bodies,

that were, to the mind of the literate, medieval male, dangerous. “For,” in the words of thirteenth century writer, Guido delle Colonne, “we know the heart of a woman always seeks a husband, just as matter always seeks form” (48). And, according to St. Bonaventure, “the imperfect nature of woman seeks man as matter seeks form” (428). Henri de Mondeville, comparing the body to a house or a fortress, noted that women’s bodies were far more permeable, and therefore, liable than men’s bodies to diseases and maladies of every kind.

Thus, according to the male scholars of the era, the female body of the Middle Ages was figured as a permeable, soft place, a place on which impressions could more easily be made. Although depicted as cold, that very coldness caused the female body to be more inclined to seek for form, and to seek it with a kind of single-minded zeal. In other words, the medieval female body was on some level aware of a lack, and therefore more inclined to seek out a means of fulfilling a lack. While all of these traits caused medieval writers such as Guido and Bonaventure to regard the female body, and indeed the female creature, with suspicion, women writers would, to borrow Galen’s words, use these very “mutilations” to “great advantage” in their development of the epistemology of experience.

Elisabeth of Schönau

According to Elizabeth Petroff, “The goal of the visionary—and the purpose of devotional literature written by her—was a continually deepening relationship with the divine, and the corollary of that ever-deepening self-knowledge” (19). She continues,

visionary experience does not end at the stage of unitive visions. For the female visionary, with deep need for introspection, there is a final

experience still to come: the vision of divine or cosmic order. And this ultimate experience presents the feminine as the operative principle in the cosmos... the women have long had hints of the power of Mary in heaven; because of their devout meditations of the life of the Virgin, many, like Elisabeth of Schönau, had been granted detailed revelations concerning the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven and had witnessed her being crowned by her son. (Petroff 19)

Elisabeth of Schönau was indeed a woman who sought ever-deepening self-knowledge.

Through her revelations, she was not only granted knowledge of herself, but was also granted information “concerning the bodily assumption of Mary.” The body figures prominently in Elisabeth’s writing. Elisabeth is fascinated with recording not merely the feelings of her own body, but also with bodies of the beings who people her visions. This makes her writing an ideal place to interrogate the body as a site of experience.

Elisabeth of Schönau was a correspondent of Hildegard of Bingen and a fellow visionary. Elisabeth, the younger of the two women by over thirty years no doubt viewed Hildegard as a kind of role model and mentor, and Hildegard was free with her advice to the younger woman. Elisabeth of Schönau’s early visions are remarkable for the degree to which they involve her body; each of her visions is characterized by physical seizure-like manifestations. So violent were her bodily reactions to her visionary experiences that Hildegard, her correspondent and a kind of mentor, warned her against such outward displays, cautioning her that such displays might cause others to misinterpret them, and see them as evidence that Elisabeth thought herself important. Hildegard’s advice to Elisabeth is telling: “Qui opera Dei perfice desiderant simpliciter attendant quod fictilia uasa sunt...Sed et lorica fidei induant, mites, mansueti, pauperes ac miseri existents...O filia, Deus faciat te speculum uite” (“Those who long to complete God’s works must always

bear in mind that they are fragile, earthen vessels...but let them put on the breast-plate of Faith, those who are mild, gentle, poor, and afflicted....O my daughter, May God make you a mirror of life”; in Van Acker 2.457; Baird 104-105).

Hildegard often showed no outward bodily indication that she was having a vision, but Elisabeth’s early visions seemed to have been dramatic affairs. According to Elizabeth Petroff, “Illness was a central fact in her life, and in her written works it always precedes visionary attacks” (141). The following account of the events preceding one of Elisabeth’s visions is typical of such an “attack”:

During the night before...such an extreme faintness afflicted all my senses that the sisters who were attending me with the greatest concern, we waiting for me to die. But the angel of the Lord stood by me the whole night, and the prince of the apostles appeared to me in great brilliance of his beauty. And I experienced such delight in gazing upon him that I was compelled to forget the violent seizures that racked my whole body.... And I remained in that state of violent bodily agitation until about the sixth hour of the following day.... Finally I went into ecstasy and thus I was able to be at peace. (Schönaue 42)²⁶

Petroff uses this passage in Schönaue’s writing to highlight her “physical struggle to reach the peace of ecstasy,” and I find it remarkable for the extent to which Elisabeth describes her body’s suffering as a part of this event, almost as though her body were a necessary part of the visionary experience. When Hildegard describes her body, it is to describe the constraints of her body. Hildegard discusses her body in terms of its limitations; it is clear, however, that Elisabeth’s body does not hold her back. It is a necessary part of the experience. It is true that when she sees the “prince of apostles” she is able to forget her

²⁶ Only one published edition of Elisabeth’s work in Latin exists, Roth, F.W.E. *Die Visionen und Briefe der heiligen Elisabeth*. Brunn: Verlag der “Studien aus dem Benedictiner- und Cistercienser-Orden,” 1884. Unfortunately, I could not obtain a copy for this study.

suffering. However, later on in her account of the vision she recounts that,

Looking at me, the price of the apostles said, “What is more pleasing to you, to be tormented thus and delight in gazing upon us, or to do without both the pain and the vision?” And I said to him, “My Lord, if it can be, with God’s grace and yours, I desire to endure these sufferings rather than to be deprived of your sweet consolation.” (Schönau 42)

Thus, for Elisabeth, the bodily pain and the vision appear to be intimately connected. And while later St. Peter promises Elisabeth that her pain will be lessened in future visions, he does not promise that it will be removed from her. The vision could not occur without the pain in the body. As Petroff notes, “[Elisabeth] describes the combination of illness and visionary experience as a martyrdom” (141). The body and the vision combine to produce the entire experience for Elisabeth. Thus, for Elisabeth, the body seems to play a very important role in her experience, and she calls frequent attention to this fact.

This importance of the role of the body in visionary experience is highlighted even more clearly in section V. of Book 2 of Elisabeth’s visions. She described how, after the Feast of St. John, “after the most painful suffering of my flesh,” the Lord appeared to her. “I entreated him strenuously that he might help me see the countenance of our Lady,” she continues. Apparently, it had been some time since she had received such a vision. However, as soon as she utters the petition, the Lord disappears, and “returning to myself,” she says, she, “burst out in his praise” (160). What follows afterward highlights the connection between the body and visionary experience:

And again I began to struggle more painfully than before, and I heard the angel, who was by my side helping me, respond: “You will remain longer in this crucifixion pain unless you receive indulgence from your spiritual father.” But I was in no way strong enough to make known these words to my sisters, who were around me. So they, thinking that my death was imminent, used their own judgment and sent word to the Lord abbot and

he came and recited litanies and prayers over me. But finally, with great difficulty I formed these words, "Forgive me, father." And I had received indulgence from him, I immediately felt at peace and entered into ecstasy. And lo, our most glorious Lady with that blessed Precursor appeared walking forth from on high, and she deigned to turn her lovely countenance toward her handmaid. (160)

The account includes several striking features. The first is the angel-helper; there is also deference to (male) priesthood. Another interesting feature is the fact that, once again, the intensity of the pain Elisabeth's body must suffer appears to be in direct proportion to the intensity and importance of the vision, highlighting the connection between body and visionary experience. Elisabeth, with her deformed, female body, casts herself always as seeking completion, form, and healing from the ultimate father-figure, God. This depiction of her body must have resonated with medieval readers. God, being merciful, always provides help to Elisabeth to lessen the pain or shorten the length of time that she must feel it, but it appears to be a necessary part of the vision, and once again, although it is not a pleasant experience, we do not see Elisabeth berating or belittling her body as was so common with Hildegard. Indeed, she had other women around her to witness the pains of her body during this vision. Finally, it is speech, cast here as a very bodily act, requiring all of the physical strength that she can muster, that ultimately allows her body to enter the ecstatic state in which she is able to fully appreciate the majesty of the vision. In this sense, she is not transcending her body; she is using it as a vital tool to help her reach the ecstatic state in which she is able to behold the body, or at least the form, of Mary. The evidence here of the link between the word and the body is a motif that is common to much of visionary literature, especially women's visionary literature.

The importance placed on speech as a function of the body is also emphasized later in another vision when Elisabeth's sufferings once again bring her to the brink of death. She asks St. Peter why she has been permitted to suffer so, and he replies, "for no other reason have you been made so ill, but that the miracle of your sudden recovery might glorify God all the more." Then St. Peter gives Elisabeth the charge, "Rise up, therefore, and be healed. Speak, and guard your tongue from idle boasting, and Lord will give wisdom and understanding" (162). Her healing and her charge to speak to testify of her experience appear to be interconnected. Furthermore, this charged to speak is coupled with the promise that if she does so, she will gain wisdom and understanding. Sharing the experience, in other words, becomes epistemological.

Elisabeth responds to this charge by praising St. Peter; then she concludes, "And I added, 'the Lord put forth his hand touched my mouth and filled it with the spirit of wisdom and understanding.' And immediately I rose up from my bed and went off, healed, with all my strength completely restored" (Elisabeth 162). Here Elisabeth is alluding to prophetic callings. The speech bears a striking resemblance to the callings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, most particularly to the calling of Jeremiah: "Et misit Dominus manum suam, et tetigit os meum, et dixit Dominus ad me: Ecce dedi verba mea in ore tuo" ("And the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth: and the Lord said to me: Behold I have given my words in thy mouth" 1.9). The prophetic callings of both Isaiah and Jeremiah are mediated through the body, and in very intimate terms: God's hand to the prophet's lips. In this case the touch of God not only heals Elisabeth's body, but it also endows her with the prophetic mandate and authority to speak: a fine example of

experience mediated through the body as a means of claiming authority, and an example and experience that had highest kind of authoritative precedent, the Bible. Indeed, Elisabeth invoked the Bible frequently, not to justify her writing, but as we see here, to justify her experience.

The kind of spiritual event Elisabeth describes here always signals a kind of transformation of the subject undergoing these events, a transformation that I argue is a vital part of the experiential process. We see it in the account of Jeremiah, and even, as noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, in the writing of Paul. To understand the nature of this transformation, Michel Foucault's discussion of spirituality in *The Hermeneutic of the Subject* is particularly helpful in exploring the way that mystical experience may have given female authors access to knowledge, what Foucault terms "vérité" (truth); it also sheds some light into the process of gaining this experience.

La spiritualité postule que la vérité n'est jamais donnée au sujet de plein droit. La spiritualité postule que le sujet en tant que tel n'a pas droit, n'a pas la capacité d'avoir accès à la vérité. Elle postule que la vérité n'est pas donnée au sujet par un simple acte de connaissance, qui serait fondé et légitimé parce qu'il est le sujet et parce qu'il a telle ou telle structure de sujet. Elle postule qu'il faut que le sujet se modifie, se transforme, se déplace, devienne, dans une certaine mesure et jusqu'à un certain point, autre que lui-même pour avoir droit à la accès a la vérité. (Foucault, *Hereméneutique* 17)

Spirituality assumes that the truth is never given to the subject by right. Spirituality assumes that the subject as such is not entitled, nor has the capacity for access to the truth. It postulates that the truth is not given to the subject through a simple act of knowing, which would be founded and legitimized because it is the subject and has the structure of a subject. It assumes that it makes the subject change itself, transform itself, displace itself, become, to a certain measure and up to a certain point, other than itself to have the right to access to the truth.

As Foucault articulates it, spirituality itself is a process that forces the subject to change, to displace itself, to become other to have access to the truth. Only when the subject is transformed into something that is nearly other than itself can truth (or knowledge) be accessed. Foucault does provide a distinction, however, between the individual, the subject, and the truth:

Enbref, je crois qu'on peut dire ceci: pour la spiritualité, jamais un acte de connaissance, ne lui-même et par lui-même, ne pourrait parvenir à donner accès à la vérité s'il n'était préparé, accompagné doublé, achevé par une certaine transformation du sujet, non pas de l'individu, mais du sujet lui-même dans son être de sujet. (Foucault, *Heréméneutique* 17)

In brief, I believe one could say this: spirituality, never an act of knowing by and of itself, is not able to give access to the truth unless it is prepared, accompanied, doubled and completed by a certain transformation of the subject, not the individual, but of the subject itself in its being the subject.

Although Foucault claims that it is not the individual seeker of truth who must change, it is the subject that he or she is pursuing, in the epistemology of experience that I have articulated in this study, the individual is simultaneously the seeker and the subject.

Experience requires that the individual see himself or herself as subject. Only through such an awareness can the “vérité” which Foucault speaks of be accessed. Such a process, as Foucault claims, alters the very nature of the subject. Such changes are markedly present in accounts of spiritual experience, particularly medieval accounts, as is apparent in Elisabeth’s writing. This kind of a change, a transformation also tallies very well with medieval perceptions of the function of the female body. It would have been natural for Elisabeth to zealously seek this transformation, and equally natural that it should occur. The product or offspring of this transformation is knowledge that endows Elisabeth with the authority to speak. In this sense, Elisabeth’s body is functioning very much in the way

Kristeva's *chora* (womb) works to generate meaning. In her book on female bodies and authority in the work of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, Liz Herbert MacAvoy says of this process,

According to Kristeva, [the] process of 'becoming' has been misrepresented by phallocentric discourses...which have tended to reify the mother as the embodiment of the phenomenon taking place within her. Thus...maternity is the location of a fissure in the symbolic order because the unborn child lies ultimately out of reach of the law of the father. (24)

Elisabeth uses this fact to her advantage. She works to undo the misrepresentation of the conception of her "vérité," at the same time realizing that her "accès à la vérité" is a privileged position, made possible only through her female body, and so she figures her body, within in her writing, in a way that her readers will recognize.

While Elisabeth does assert this change and the authority to have what Foucault would call "accès à la vérité," it is important to note here that Elisabeth claims the authority only to speak and does not directly claim the authority to write. While the emphasis on the spoken word here is not surprising given the orality of women's writing in the Middle Ages, it was a command of written language and not spoken language, that granted the medieval writer authority, and though, like Hildegard, Elisabeth had some knowledge of Latin, she required a scribe to put her works into writing; in her case, she used her brother, Ekbert, as scribe. The following passage is written in his voice, but he claimed that he merely took dictation from Elisabeth who spoke to him in both German and Latin. Elisabeth, like Hildegard, recognized her lack of authority and felt compelled to treat the subject at the beginning of Book 2 of her *Visions*. The way she acquits herself is quite compelling:

Because in these times the Lord deigns to show His mercy most gloriously in the weak sex...men are offended and led into sin. But why do they not remember that something similar happened in the days of our fathers? While the men were give over to sluggishness, holy women were filled with the spirit of God that they might prophesy, govern God's people forcefully, and indeed triumph gloriously over the foes of Israel: so it happened with Olda, Deborah, Judith, Jahel, and other women of this sort. (159)

At the face of it, Elisabeth appears to be employing a standard authorial practice: acquitting herself as an author by referring back to the ultimate canonical source, the Bible. "The Bible occupies a central place in the Middle Ages," says John Alford. "It is the great storehouse of exemplars. It is a record of the historical manifestations of divine Being in the lives of numerous men and women, lives that may serve as patterns of identity" (Alford 2). But the way Elisabeth invokes these lives is unorthodox. Rather than merely citing the women themselves as examples, she is drawing particular focus to the "happenings" of their lives. These women were "filled by the spirit of God" and as a result they were able to prophesy, triumph, and govern. Elisabeth is not relying on these women themselves for her authority; she is relying explicitly on their experiences. Even at this early stage in the development of experiential epistemology, we see a woman citing the experience of other women—not their writing or merely their existence—as a source for her own authority. It is a combination of the recognized medieval authorial convention with the emerging notion of experience-as-textual-authority. This strategy can also be seen at work in her allusion to the Jeremiah's calling as discussed above.

Another trend that we see emerging in the writing of Elisabeth is the importance of reflection upon the visions. Reflection and interpretation were an important part of the visionary experience. This is highlighted by the fact that during one of her visions,

Elisabeth is actually counseled by an angel to reflect on the vision while in the visionary state itself: “And I as I was marveling at this vision, the angel spoke unto me: ‘Contemplate carefully what you see’” (160). Elisabeth’s senses, what she sees, and what Cicero might call the “inner touch,” are invoked. Her mental faculties are involved in interpreting this vision within the vision itself. The angel then functions as her guide, helping her to understand the significance of the things she has just witnessed. Elisabeth in turn becomes a guide for others as she shares her vision. It appears then, that Elisabeth’s purpose as a visionary writer was at least in part didactic. Elisabeth frequently concludes her visions by telling readers that she communicated what she saw to her sisters, and she often mentions the reactions of her sisters to the visions. Not only did they write to instruct others about the visions themselves; they wrote to teach others how to interpret visionary experience, to allow them to “contemplate.” As the angel guides Elisabeth, so Elisabeth will guide her readers. This sharing and transmuting knowledge is an important facet of experiential epistemology.

In Elisabeth of Schönau’s writing, we see evidence of some important characteristics of visionary experience as described in mystical writing that continue to develop in such writing throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through Elisabeth we can see as early as the twelfth century, a woman writer laying claim to textual authority by virtue not only of her own experience, but the experience of others. While she does rely on scripture to establish her authority, it is the experience of those in scripture she cites and often incorporates and appropriates to suit her own needs. We see a woman who feels that part of the mystical experience requires that she share what she

has received with community around her, and we see that she welcomed and encouraged the feedback and interpretation of that community. Finally, we see a woman whose body was an essential part of her visionary experience, helping her to make meaning out of the visionary events she endured.

Theories of the Body

Because so much of the experience in the texts that I will focus on in the rest of this study must be read through the body, a theoretical framework for understanding how the body functions as an epistemological tool in the larger epistemological process of experience must be undertaken. The subject of the experience must undergo a fundamental transformation, becoming something, to use Foucault's words, "almost other than itself" in order to have the access to knowledge that ultimately grants the writer (or speaker) authority. That the body and its senses are indispensable epistemological medium for this transformation to occur seems a well-established point, even in the medieval period. Cicero wrote, as we have seen, about the power of the senses to help make meaning. However, as I have also noted, there was also a deep distrust in the Middle Ages of the body, particularly the female body. Women's bodies were seen as "eminently permeable," in other words, too sensitive, and were therefore seen as suspect. This would appear at first to be a disadvantage to these women, but they were able to use this disadvantage to establish authority through means that Pierre Bourdieu summarizes elegantly in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*,

Social categories disadvantaged by the symbolic order, such as women and the young, cannot but recognize the legitimacy of the dominant classification in the very fact that their only chance of neutralizing those of

its effects most contrary to their own interests lies in submitting to them in order to make use of them. (164-165)

This concept of the medieval female body, as permeable, sensitive, and frail was a notion that mystical writers like Elisabeth and Hildegard took advantage of: Hildegard's constant references to herself as "weak" or "frail" actually served to remind readers of God's power in working through such a fragile vessel, and thus worked to remind readers that to question Hildegard's visions was to question God Himself. Elisabeth, on the other hand, implied that without the depth of bodily suffering made possible only through her weak, female body, she would not have been able to achieve her most sublime visions. These two approaches to overcoming the negative perceptions of the female body would be employed frequently by women visionaries of later centuries.

Yet while it is important to understand the perceptions of the medieval body's abilities and limitations, I believe that modern theory on the subject of the body can shed light into the ways that women writers invoked their bodies as sites for their experience. Bourdieu claims that the *habitus*, which he defines as "history turned into nature, denied as such" (78), is the process through which we make meaning.

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. (78)

Thus, meaning is made through a series of "regulated improvisations." These improvisations tend to reinforce previous improvisations and help individuals reinforce "demands inscribed as objective potentialities" (78). In other words, the process

reinforces itself. However, because the *habitus* must adapt to new “potentialities” in a given situation, innovation must and does occur. This innovation can be facilitated through several means, but one site with the potential to alter improvisations, according to Bourdieu appears to be what he terms “the language of the body”: “The language of the body, whether articulated in gestures or, *a fortiori*, in what psychosomatic medicine calls ‘the language of the organs,’ is incomparably more ambiguous and more overdetermined than the most overdetermined uses of ordinary language” (120). When Bourdieu calls the language of the body “overdetermined,” what is implied is that because the language of the body is “overdetermined,” it is a rich site for meaning to be generated. Because of the “ambiguity” of this language of the body, what the medievals might have termed its “eminently permeable nature,” the body, especially the female body, is an ideal generative site. Bourdieu goes on to explain that, “Words, however charged with connotation, limit the range of choices and render difficult or impossible, and in any explicit and therefore ‘falsifiable,’ the relations which the language of the body suggests” (Bourdieu 120). Thus the connection I have noted between Elisabeth’s words and her body becomes all the more understandable; the act of speech can occur only after it has been explicitly mediated through Elisabeth’s body.

Women’s visionary writing in particular often depicts the act of speech as a bodily and sometimes primal action. This is especially true in moments when, like Elisabeth’s vision, God charges visionaries with communicating their visions, with speaking His words. They, often describe this process, as Elisabeth did, in terms that parallel Kristeva’s theories on language formation: “Discrete qualities of energy move

through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body” (2170). The process of language formation is bodily, but with the acquisition of this godly language, come constraints. We have seen how these constraints operate very clearly in the case of Hildegard, who had authority and power only insofar as she makes it clear that God’s word is coming through her. In her rhetorical strategy she went so far as to routinely and emphatically highlight her own weakness so as to highlight God’s power (and by association her own) all the more.

Is the process of translating women’s epistemological experience into a mode dominated by men imposing constraints on it? In translating her bodily experience onto the page, is something being taken away from Elizabeth of Schönau? What about Margery Kempe, who, because she was illiterate, is even further removed from the process of writing? What effect, if any, does this have on the way women’s writing is/was viewed, and might it be responsible to the idea of conceiving of women’s writing, as Jennifer Summit does, as a place of loss? These are particularly interesting questions to ask when discussing Kristeva, as, in the process she outlines for the establishment of genotexts, she writes about the role of “the social organism and family structures which convey the constraints imposed by the mode of production,” and “the matricises of enunciation” (2177). Elisabeth’s constraints, in addition to being social, appear to have been more literally bodily. Her visions are so powerful that they routinely deprive her of her health, and often push her to the brink of bodily extinction. Yet it is this very connection between her words and her body from which she draws her authority.

Other helpful theories for understanding the ways in which meaning can be created and mediated through the body are Judith Butler's theories of performativity. Because my definition of experience requires a subject to be, on at least some level aware of the forces to which he or she is subject, Butler's theories at first appear to present some problems as so many of the processes she describes appear to take place at an unconscious, and at times unindividualized level. I would argue, however, that throughout her discussion of bodies and genders, Butler hints at moments of the subject's consciousness. For example, in her discussion of the ways that gender, and specifically the gendered body can create meaning, Butler, in *Gender Trouble* turns to the subject of grief and melancholy. While grief implies, according to Butler, a loss that is somehow "magically sustained 'in the body'," the melancholic structure is the way that this loss can be incorporated into the subject's identity (Butler, *Trouble* 93). This melancholic structure, by virtue of the fact that it must recognize the loss in order to incorporate it, hints at the kind of reflection so necessary for experience. In some of her discussions of the body's performance, particularly her discussion of "realness," this consciousness is even more apparent.

Butler's theories of gender and body are so helpful because, according to Butler, gender and sex should not be considered "natural" but rather a series of performances mediated through the body. In no place is the unnatural character of the body more apparent than when it is depicted in text, already removed, to a degree from the material processes through which we locate it. Butler's discussion of the perceived materiality of the body is highly useful: "I want to ask how and why 'materiality' has become a sign of

irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions, and therefore, cannot be a construction?” (Butler, *Bodies* 29). Materiality was the hallmark of the female medieval body, and as we have seen in the writing of Elisabeth of Schönau, Elisabeth figured her body in a very material way. And yet, it is also clear, through the ways that Elisabeth was able to transcend and transform that very materiality, albeit with divine, paternal assistance, that she did not figure the material as necessarily natural or irreducible. Rather, her body became a site for her divine experience.

Rather than being rigidly material, Elisabeth negotiates what Judith Butler calls, “the various cultural constructions” that shape her body in the minds of her audience, and uses these very cultural constructions to reshape her body as a tool for her experience. She recognizes that the weak, frail, material way her cultural constructed her body allows her more sensitivity, not less, to the power of godliness, and yet she also sets her body at odds with those cultural constructions as she transfigures her body in her writing into a site of ecstasy. This invocation, or perceived invocation of the medieval norm, is a necessary part of a process by which a subject can achieve what Butler calls “realness.” For Butler, “realness” is a standard use to judge categories of performance, but its effect is to “compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect” that would have been so necessary for writers like Elisabeth to have their bodies accepted as sites of experience (129).

This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of...norm, a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates. (Butler, *Bodies* 129)

Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on the nature of social formation are also of use here, "In a determinate social formation [such as the female body], the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agents' dispositions, the greater the extent of the field of *doxa*, of that which is taken for granted" (165-66). Certainly, Elisabeth's depiction of her own body does reflect a reiteration of the medieval norm, and yet it is that very norm that allows her to transform her body into site of ecstatic, visionary knowledge. This idea of the body as unstable and transient does seem to conflict with medieval notions of the materiality of the body, and would, perhaps, expose the artifice of this performance. And yet, according to Butler, this depiction of the body, too, would not have been outside the limits of the medieval imagination: In discussing Plato's notions of the body, Butler convincingly argues that he did not and could not define it and that at least parts of the body for Plato remained, "radically unthinkable" (*Bodies* 54).

Medieval women excelled in depicting their bodies in texts in ways that invoked the "realness" that Butler described. And through that depiction, that textual performance, located the substance of their bodily experience in a place of unassailable authority: the "real":

Significantly, this is a performance that works, that affects realness, to the extent that it *cannot* be read. For "reading" means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone. For a performance to work, then, means that a reading is no longer possible, or that a reading, an interpretation appears to be a kind of transparent seeing, where what appears and what it means coincide. (Butler, *Bodies* 129)

Another writer whose work provides ample opportunity to view this phenomenon at work is Julian of Norwich. Nicholas Watson characterizes Julian of Norwich's work as "straining the resources of the vernacular in which it was written" (210). She also, as we will see, strains the limits of experience, and the ways through which the body could act as a site for that experience. According to Liz Herbert McAvoy, "In Julian's extensive use of the female body as hermeneutic tool for the explication of her unique experience of God we find yet another example of a woman writer using a malleable and manoeuvrable definition of gender" (23). It is this malleable, manoeuvrable body that Julian is careful to cast in the trappings of materiality that forms her experience and ultimately, as McAvoy contends, her authority.

Julian of Norwich

Julian's visions, of course, famously begin with her sickness. In fact, at the beginning of her text, she describes that she sought after bodily experience: "I desyred thre graces be the gyfte of god. The fyrst was to have mynde of Cryste es passion. The seconnde was bodelye syeknes, and the thryd was to haue goddys gyfte thre wonndys" (6-8). These gifts were, scholars have observed, fairly routine desires for those who sought the devotional life. The rest of her account is a description of the way that God granted her those very three gifts. That we should see Julian express these requests as "desires" and that these desires should be so bodily in nature would have resonated with her audience of medieval readers who would have recognized the intensity of women's

desires as a standard trope.²⁷ That each of these requests is, in some way a bodily experience, would also have come as no surprise to the medieval reader. While Julian in this opening passage speaks of having in “mynde” Christ’s passion, it’s evident in Passus 7 that her vision of Christ’s passion was, in fact, a very bodily one. Her remaining two desires, sickness and to have the three wounds, are overtly bodily in nature and are expressed as such. These three desires at the beginning of the text resonate with another list of three things at the end of the text:

It longyth to vs to haue thre manner of knowing. The furst is þat we know oure lorde god. The seconde is that we know oure selfe, what we ar by him in kinde and grace. The thryde is þat we know mekely þat oure selfe is a gaynst oure synne and against oure febylnes. And for these thre was alle this shewyng made, as to my vnderstandyng. (665)

Each of the bodily desires, conscious awareness of her lack of understanding, has caused Julian to reflect, to have powerful mystical experiences, and to learn what three things are necessary for those seeking to Christ. Thus, she can see, with a kind of authority that, by the fourteenth century she need make no apology for, that “it longyth” to her readers to pursue these things that she has discovered. Her repeated reference to her own understanding, establishes just how far experience as authoritative epistemology in women’s writing had developed. Moreover, the tacit encouragement here for readers to

²⁷ This notion of woman as a creature of desire dates at least as far back as the classical period and is apparent in a variety of genres. Aristotle, of course, credited women’s desires to female body’s lack of heat, and its constant desire for the relative heat of the male body. Tertullian’s *The Appearance of Women*, from the early third century would be another example of a work cautioning readers about the strength of women’s desire. In medieval times, such documents were often circulated among the clergy. Of course, there were many medieval sources that also treated this subject, among them the works of Marbod of Rennes’ *The Femme Fatale*, Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, and Gautier Le Leu’s *The Widow*, to name a few.

seek these things out for themselves is striking. Unlike Hugh of St. Victor, and far more clearly than Hildegard or Elisabeth, she is encouraging readers to seek their own experience. She shares what she has learned, but she also encourages them to know it for themselves.

Of course, near the very end of her writing, Julian invokes another list of three²⁸: “thre manner of longyng in god, and alle to one ende” (679), the end, of course, being love. The conclusion of Julian’s writing is powerful and provocative. To conclude after fifteen years of pondering the meaning of her visions that the message of all of it is love echoes, of course, 1 John, a canonical source. However, it is also interesting to note that God explicitly tells Julian that she would never be able to wring any more meaning from pondering her visions than that. If experience is about interpretation, it’s provocative that Julian claims the possibility of only one interpretation of this vision. It’s also interesting that time and its passage can’t seem to change the meaning of the vision as she constructs it: “Wytt it wele, loue was his menyng. Who shewyth it the? Loue. (What shewid he the? Love.) Wherefore shewyth he it the? For loue. Hold the therin, thou shalt wytt more in the same. But thou schalt nevyr witt therin other withoutyn ende” (733. 16-19). Ultimately, Julian cedes her own “understanding” to God’s authority. She may have gained “thre manner of knowynng” but ultimately, God overrules her to tell her that the only thing she need learn from all of her experience is love. This overruling in the last lines of her work and Julian’s re-establishment of God and his knowledge, rather than her experience, as the ultimate authority, was perhaps rhetorically necessary. And yet she does appear to

²⁸ Julian uses lists throughout her writing, a common medieval rhetorical practice. She often relies on lists of three, but in other places, we see lists of four (696).

make some attempt to recover that authority elsewhere: “For yf I looke syngulery to my selfe, I am ryght nought; but in gnerall I am, I hope, in onehede of cheryte with alle my evyn cristen” (322). Like Hildegard before her, Julian’s authority, though contingent upon God’s, by virtue of that very contingency is unassailable.

In other places near the end of the text, however, Julian does not seem at all reluctant to call attention her authorial persona:

Iff any such lyver be in erth, which is contynually kepte fro falling, I know it nott, for it was nott shewde me. but thys was shewde, that in falling and in rysyng we are evyr preciously kepte in o(ne) loue. For I the beholding of god we falle nott, and in þe beholding of oure selfe we stoned nott” (720)

While she does call attention to her authorial persona, she is also calling attention to what she and we, her readers, do not know. What she does know is what was “shewyde” her. Throughout her writings, Julian refers frequently to the senses, particularly the eyes and sight. Touch, the most immediate of the senses, according to Cicero, is also invoked frequently: both in the sense of Julian’s own pain, and in her description of the proximity with which she encourages reader to draw unto God. “Touch we hym, and we shalle be made cleene. Celve we to hym, and we shalle be suer and safe from alle manner of perylls” (694 49-51). Likewise, at the end of the vision, ““I had in perty touchyng, syght, and feelyng in thre propertees of god, in which the and þe revelacion stondeth” (722.1-2). Clearly, then, Julian emphasizes throughout her writing the importance of her body and its senses and the role that her body played in helping her to shape meaning from the text. Without her medieval female body with its senses and desires, experience would have been impossible.

In her three desires, Julian was not disappointed. When Julian describes the Passion in Passus 7, the very bodily imagery is again apparent; she claims that she wants to understand Christ's suffering in Chapter 3—however, that desire comes only after she feels as though she has transcended her own bodily pain. This wish to experience the pain of Christ is not uncommon in visionary writing. As Karma Lochrie, Catherine Sanok, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, Liz Herbert MacAvoy, and others have written, the idea of suffering bodily, perhaps especially for women, was seen as a way to experience the divine. Elaine Scarry, in arguing for the absolute reality of bodily pain, also convincingly argues that pain provides a kind of unrivaled authority. Like Cicero, Scarry notes that sensation, and especially, for Scarry, the sensation of pain is the “primary physical act” (28). Because of its immediacy and its perceived “realness” it authenticates experience in a way, Scarry argues, that no other sensation or experience can. This helps to explain why bodily suffering figures so prominently in the writing of medieval women.

Julian's second desire was also fulfilled. Julian indeed fell very ill. Like Elisabeth, she was so ill, that her priest had to be summoned. This emphasis on male authority bringing spiritual, paternal relief, to a female, material body in pain, is one way through which these narratives preserve the normative appearance, the “realness” that Butler claims is so important for any text or performance to be accepted. Her priest performed the last rights, and she describes what happens next thus:

After this the over part of my bodie began to die so farforth that vnneth I had anie feeling. My most payne was shortnes of breth and faielyng of life. Then went I verily to haue passed. And in the sodenly all my paine was taken from me., and I was as hole, and amely in þe part over parte of my bodie, as ever I was befor. (25)

Although this passage does serve as a reminder of the necessity of the intercession of male ecclesiastical authority, what is striking in this description is, once again, its focus on pain, in this case, the pain, Julian says, of dying. The clerical authority mediates her access to this pain as well as her deliverance from it. And it is this experience which (ostensibly) is contingent upon her priest's authority to perform the last rites that ultimately permits, and to a degree validates, her visionary experiences.

Her third wish, too, is marked by pain, a desire to experience the wounds of Christ. The connection between wounding and Julian's second desire, the desire to experience death (or at least, illness to the point of death) is a connection that Scarry explores in depth in *The Body in Pain*. "The 'unmaking' of the human being...is equally a characteristic of dying or being wounded, for the in part naturally 'given' and in part 'made' body is deconstructed" (Scarry 122). When we see the body in death, or more especially, when we see the body wounded, we see not, according to Scarry, a body marked by its national origin, or even the body marked by sex or gender. The wound in its ability to unmake such "given" characteristics is universalizing. Thus to experience the wounds of Christ can be read not as Julian's becoming one with Christ, but becoming one with her readers. The wounds unmake Julian as a woman; they divorce Julian the author from her female body even though it is her body which allows this experience to occur. The wounds also explicitly allow Julian to identify her body with the body of Christ, a trend that Caroline Walker Bynum explores at length in *Jesus as Mother*, and one that Karma Lochrie writes about at length in her book *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*: "Devotion to the Passion, particularly to Christ's suffering

humanity, and bodily imitations of Christ's suffering...characterize saints' vitae and mysticism from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries" (13). Bynum argues that this emphasis on the pain of the Passion underscores "the humanness of Christ," and argues convincingly that by the fourteenth century, Christ comes to be depicted as so human that his regality is sometimes set aside in the later centuries of the Middle Ages (185).

Clearly, then, Julian's body played an absolutely critical role in her visionary experience and in the making of her authority in the minds of her readers. The impetus of experience, desires that were bodily in nature, would have been a trope recognized and accepted by medieval readers, yet Julian is able to use this trope and use it to unmark, or to use Scarry's word "unmake" her female body, universalizing her bodily experience, and by so doing simultaneously underscoring her authority and reaching out to a broader group of readers.

Margery Kempe

One of the problems with performing too close a reading of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, especially as an example of women's writing, is the fact that Margery had a scribe and (presumably) an editor who was a man.²⁹ Although this is true of many of the

²⁹ Margery Kempe has been the subject of much scholarship in the past two decades. The amount of interest Margery Kempe's work has generated is remarkable in that her work was only rediscovered in modern times in 1934, and, as Carolyn Dinshaw notes, "it remained an eccentricity, and a relatively obscure one, until about twenty years ago" ("Margery" 222). Margery Kempe has received much attention as it depicts, in English "the life and self-fashioning of a woman" (222). Among the works that might fit this description are Kathleen Ashley's "Historicizing Margery: the Book of Margery Kempe as Social Text" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 371-388, Anthony Goodman's *Margery Kempe and Her World* (2002), and Karma Lochrie's *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (1991). Clarissa Atkinson's *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe* (1983) would also fall under that

other women writers treated in this dissertation, such as Hildegard and Elisabeth of Schönau, the question of authenticity is especially complicated in the case of Margery Kempe, as she was completely illiterate. In what ways might the scribe be altering her voice? If Margery was literate, how would/could the text be different? Carolyn Dinshaw attributes the many similarities we see in *The Book of Margery Kempe* to other stories of female piety less to the idea of a an entrenched community of female readers and hagiographical texts, as Sanok does in her interpretation on Margery's behavior and text as "index[ing] the moral profile of [that] community" (142), and more to the pragmatic notion that "canonization was perhaps not absent from the minds of the men wrote down her book as she dictated it, shaping her reminiscences to fit into a long line of holy women" (Dinshaw, *Margery*, 222). Nevertheless, each of these scholars navigates the difficulty imposed by the question of the authenticity of Margery the author by viewing her *Book* as a product of the society that made it, and, in part, that is how I will read *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a work that I see not so much as the work of a female author, but a work that purports to be such at a time when the genre of women's experiential

category. Margery's gender identity has also been the focus of scholars in the past twenty years, Dinshaw among them; Clare Bradford's "Mother, Maiden, Child: Gender as Performance in *The Book of Margery Kempe*." In Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden, eds. *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred: Creative Suspicions* (2001) is another example. The role of the scribe and the ways that these men shaped Margery's narrative is another area of interest; see, for example, Roger Ellis's "Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books." In H. Phillips, ed., *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honor of S.S. Hussey*. (1990); see also Lynn Staley Johnson's "The Trope of Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe" *Speculum* 66 (1991): 820-838. There has also been much inquiry into the rhetoric of Margery Kempe more generally, including Cheryl Glen's "Author, Audience, and Autobiography: Rhetorical Technique in the Book of Margery Kempe." *College English* 54 (1992): 540-553 and Lyn Staley's *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (1996).

writing was already established. By the early fifteenth century, when the book was probably written, the idea of women writing from their mystical experience was so well entrenched that both Dinshaw and Sanok point to the idea of a set of genre and communal conventions that the makers of Margery's *Book* could rely upon. Not only, I will argue, does the text rely upon these conventions, it also challenges them in innovative and provocative ways.

Another helpful perspective on the role of the scribe in conferring or divesting women writer's texts with authority comes from Lynn Staley, whose book *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, has been so instrumental to scholarship of Margery Kempe. Staley argues that for the medieval female writer, the scribe, and the attendant scribal metaphor that could be invoked in the text, were not necessarily a liability to her authority, but a boon to it, "women writers such as Hildegard and Christine de Pisan exploited those same metaphors to signal both their sense of authority and their awareness of the social constraints placed upon it" (820). Staley goes on to argue that Margery Kempe seems to show a special awareness and sensitivity toward the trope of scribe "as a means of obtaining control over [the] text" while professing the wish not to control it (820). Thus Staley attributes a very high degree of control, in terms of the content of the text, to Margery the author.

Ultimately, the degree to which Margery's *Book* is a product of her individual effort is unknowable, and to a degree, irrelevant to this project. In fact, the very idea of the individual author is a notion that scholars of the period have long called into

question.³⁰ The production of a text in the medieval period, or any other, is a complex process that involves the interplay of many different actors directly and indirectly associated with the writing process. In her discussion of authority in women's writing, Kathleen Biddick cites Miri Rubin who

aply remarked of thirteenth-century mystics in her excellent study of the politics of the formation of the feast of Corpus Christ: 'we know little that comes directly from these women, and yet the material is rich; we should, therefore talk not of experience but of the relation between representations of such experience'. (413)

In the words of Biddick herself, "Authenticity relied on this relay between physicality and textuality" (Biddick 413). It is this relay between the physical, social world and the text on which I intend to focus here; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, as a product of its time, place and society, demonstrates nearly all of the rhetorical conventions present in the other women's mystical writing I have reviewed in this study. There are the insistent claims that the ostensible author, Margery, does not wish for authority and the constant attempts to downplay any notion that Margery may have a high opinion of herself. We see Margery referring to herself dismissively as a "creature" throughout the text.

As in the writing of Hildegard, Elisabeth, and Julian, we also have a recounting of the suffering endured by Margery before her series of divine experiences took place; however, unlike the writing of Hildegard, Elisabeth, or Julian, we have a much more explicit explanation for the source of her suffering. In the case of Hildegard and Elisabeth

³⁰ This is a notion that Jennifer Summit, referring to Foucault's discussion of Roland Barthes in "What Is an Author?" introduces at the beginning of her book *Lost Property*. The dislocation of the author as the originator of a text certainly troubles the idea of studying "women's writing." Summit's solution to this problem is to focus on these writings as being attributed to women writers without exploring too deeply the question of authorship itself.

particularly, we see their suffering represented as a consequence of their frail bodies. Margery, on the other hand, describes devils literally pulling her one way and the other. While the idea of devils tormenting a human soul is by no means uncommon in medieval literature,³¹ the description of Margery's suffering and temptation and her subsequent *yielding* to the temptation is an unorthodox way to begin a work chronicling the life of a visionary. This description early in Margery's *Book* of her yielding to temptation signals a weakness in Margery that is a departure from the conventions of the genre, from the kinds of weakness experience by other female visionaries. Not only is Margery a woman weak in body, but she is also depicted, at first, as a woman of weakened will. It is only after this moment of recognition of her total and complete weakness, that Margery is able to encounter the divine. So rich is this account, that I reproduce it here at length:

And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd with brenny[n]g lowys of fyr, as thei schuld a swalwyd hir in, sumtyme rampyng at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullynge hyr and haling hir bothe nygt and day during the forseyd tyme. And also the develys cryed upon hir with greet thretyngys, and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntys in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle food vertues, hyr fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys. And so sche dede. Sche slawndred hir husband, hir frendys, and her own self; sche spak many a reprevows worde and many a schreqyd worde; she knew no virtue ne goodnesse; sche desyryd all wykkydnesse; lych as the spyrytys temptyd hir to sey and do so sche seyde and dede. Sche wold a fordon hirself many a tym at her steryngys and a ben damnyed with hem in helle, and into wytnesse therof sche bot hir owen hand so violently that it was seen al hir lyfe after. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body ayen hir hert with hir nayles spetowsly,

³¹ Indeed devils and their interactions with men and women seemed to be a particularly popular trope, and it surfaces in many medieval stories. These stories seemed particularly popular in sermons. Joan Young Gregg's *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* is an admirable collection of such stories. Medieval collections of stories for priests, such as Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* also contain many fine examples.

for sche had noon other instrumentys, and wers sche wold a don, saf sche was bowndyn and kept with strength bothe day and nygth that sche mygth not have hir wyll.

And whan she had long ben labowrd in thes and many other temptacyons, that men wend sche schuld nevyr a skapyd ne levyd than on a tym, as sche lay alone and hir kepars wer fro hir, owyr mercyful Lord Crist Jhesu, evyr to be trostyd, worshypd be hys name, nevyr forsakyng hys servawnt in tyme of need, aperyd to hys creatur whych had forsakyn hym in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyvows, and most amiable that evyr mygth be seen with mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpl sylke, syttyng upon hir beddys side, lokyng upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys, seyde to hir thes wordys:

‘Dowtyr, why hast thou forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?;

And anoon, as he had seyde thes wordys, sche saw verily how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn, and he stey up into the eyr, not rygth hastyli and qwkly, but fayr and esly, that sche mygth wel beholdyn hym in the eyr tyl was closyd ageyn.

And anoon the creature was stablyd in hir wyttys and in hir reson as wel as evyr sche was befor. (55-56)

As I indicated above, this account is remarkable not so much for the fact the devils visited Margery and tortured her—although this does mark a slight departure from the accounts of other writers I have included here—it is remarkable because Margery gives in to their demands. Here again, Elaine Scarry’s exploration of the body in pain is helpful as she explores the effects of torture on the prisoner:

For the prisoner, the sheer, simple, overwhelming fact of his agony will make neutral and invisible the significance of any question as well as the significance of the world to which the question refers. Intense pain is world-destroying. In compelling confession, the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying. (Scarry 29)

The pain inflicted on her by the devils is so intense that it obliterates the world as Margery has previously known it; in a very real way, her identity is taken from her. So intense is this kind of obliterating pain, that it can cause the one experiencing it lose all

touch with their identity “the contents of consciousness are...obliterated, so that the name of one’s child, the memory of a friend’s face, are all absent” (Scarry 30). We know that Margery is experiencing precisely this kind of pain because of the confession, or rather the profession that the devils are able to draw from her: she denounces her faith, the Virgin Mary, and God Himself. The text also notes, however, that she does not stop there. She goes on: “Sche slawndred hir husband, hir frendys, and her own self.” It does appear that Margery’s world has indeed been obliterated, and that she has lost, in a very real way, the connection between herself and her understanding of her physical and social world and her place in it; the pain is overriding all other thoughts, considerations, or abilities. In writing about her pain thus, Margery is depicting her suffering as beyond the suffering of the other writers I have included in this study. So great is her pain that it literally unmakes her world, plunging her into a state of temporary chaos. So utter and complete is Margery’s confusion and despair, so profound is the chaos, that it is none other than Jesus himself who must come to Margery and remake her world.

Her narration of his appearance is almost shockingly mundane. With very little fanfare, he simply appears one night, sitting, no less, on her bedside, as any friend or confidant might do. While she does use the words “merciful” and “beauteous” to describe Jesus, and mentions that he is clad in purple silk, she also uses words like “amiable.” This also marks a sharp contrast from other visions of Jesus that are usually the culmination of a visionary life and marked by their authors with a great level of solemnity and usually by some indication of the difficulty with which the right to this vision was earned. Not so with Margery. Again, her writings seem to be twisting the convention. Jesus is familiar to

her, the one fixed, friendly face in a world that has been thrown into chaos. He remakes Margery's world, for once he speaks to her, "hir reson was wel as evyr sche was beforn." This gives Margery a very unique claim to authority; her old self and the world she inhabited, obliterated by the devils who tormented her, has been literally remade by Christ, and to a medieval reader, anything perceived to have been made by Him would and should have been regarded as beyond reproach, perfect.

In some ways Margery's account shares important parallels Paul's of the New Testament. Just as Paul "hanc viam persecutus sum usque ad mortem, alligans et tradens in custodias viros ac mulieres" ("persecuted this Way [Christianity] even to death, binding and committing to prison both men and women" Acts 22.4)³², Margery slandered her Christian faith. Just as Paul received a life-altering visit from Jesus as he was going about his daily affairs, Jesus visited Margery at her bedside. And finally, just as Jesus remade the world for Paul, apparent in Paul's blindness and the subsequent regaining of his sight, Margery world was similarly remade; her reason, rather than her sight, is restored to her. In both cases, however, the ways in which Paul and Margery see and experience their world has been remade. Saul reopens his eyes as Paul, and sees the world differently; Margery's reason is similarly altered. In the first chapter of this dissertation I discussed the ways in which scripture could also serve as a pattern for medieval writers, and it does appear, to a degree, that Margery is using Paul's vision as a rhetorical pattern for her own. The Jesus that appears to Paul, however, is very different than the Jesus who appears to Margery. The appearance of Jesus to Paul on the road to

³² Douay-Rheims translation

Damascus is marked by a great light at noon, and Paul falls to earth, overcome by the vision. When one sets this depiction of Jesus against Margery's, there is something remarkably different about this "beauteous" and "amiable" Jesus who sits at her bedside to convert her. Here Jesus appears as a friend, more than an overt figure of authority, yet it is His authority on which Margery's is entirely based. In this, Margery is not unlike her fellow visionaries, Hildegard, Elisabeth, and Julian. The idea of Jesus as friend in a very mundane and familiar sense speaks to the power of friends and friendship in the context of women's lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen the way that women figured their bodies as sites of experience and the ways that women figured their bodies so as to both reflect and defy the cultural concepts through which their bodies were defined during the period. Through doing so, writer's like Elisabeth of Schönau were able to institute new rhetorical practices for figuring the body which later writers like Julian and Margery used to their advantage. Margery Kempe pushed the rhetorical limits of the body, showing the ways in which the body in pain could obliterate any concept of self. She then used that obliteration to allow herself to be remade through Christ, thus conferring upon her experience the highest authority possible. Through such devices, these writers created what Pierre Bourdieu terms "orthodoxy": "The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of the *doxa*, or short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy" (169). Writers like Hildegard and

Elisabeth established an orthodoxy: a means through which female writers could assert their authority in the text; the body was an important facet of this orthodoxy, but so was a reliance on canonical sources like the Bible, which they used not to ground their ideas themselves, but to demonstrate precedents for their own experiences. Julian and Margery were, in a sense, the beneficiaries of this orthodoxy; however, they tested the boundaries of it, exploring the limits of the body as a site of experience, unmaking and remaking its limits. Other women, however, relied on their bodies to more positively affirm their experiences. Elizabeth of Schönau used her body as a direct means to experience the divine as an essential part as well as an outward manifestation of her visions, a practice that made her suspect in the eyes of her contemporaries.

Because their bodies were perceived during the Middle Ages as so subject to sensation, women could, through physical or spiritual acts of obliteration of their bodies transcend them and draw closer to God, thus endowing themselves, and their writing with authority directly. In fact, according to Bynum, “lyrical female mysticism...found...direct authorization by a regal yet approachable God a substitute for clerical status” (185). We see this approachable God in the writing of Elisabeth; He is more pronounced in the writing of Julian of Norwich, and especially pronounced in the writing of Margery Kempe.

This depiction of God, the ultimate authority figure, as approachable to the point of appearing at the bedside of Margery was a radically different way of imagining authority and access to it. No longer was schooling in a long tradition of scholarly texts a prerequisite for access; experience, and the grace of an amiable, loving God were the

only requirements. Where these authors referred to canonical texts, such as the Bible, they did so only to support what they had already learned through experience. They used authoritative texts much as Hugh used autobiographical detail: to support a point already proven. This dramatic shift in perceptions of authority would come to alter both spiritual and secular writing in the decades and centuries that followed.

Chapter 4: Good Women and Men in Drag: Experience in the Late Middle Ages

In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries men began to see the literary potential afforded by this epistemology and began adopting it in their own writing. In order to do so, however, many of the first men who rooted the authority of their writing in experience felt the need to dress in literary “drag,” adopting the voices of women in their writing. By the close of the fourteenth century, however, so entrenched was the idea of rooting textual authority in experience that female writers like Christine de Pisan scarcely felt the need to apologize for it; in fact, as we will see, Christine often privileges experience over the classical authorities to whom, by virtue of her education and unlike so many of her female predecessors, she clearly had access. This, I argue, is a defining moment in the history of experience-as-textual-authority; that an author, albeit a female author, would choose experience over the authority of the canon marks a central shift in the way that the literate community saw authority and what constituted it in writing. This is evidenced in Christine’s tremendous popularity during the period among both male and female readers.

Men in Drag

So far this dissertation has largely looked at the works of women writers, exploring the ways that these women used and depicted experience. However, by the thirteenth century, an interesting phenomenon begins to emerge in writing by men. Lyrics and poems written in the female voice had been a part of the medieval tradition for

centuries;³³ however, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a variation of the troubadour tradition emerges in Portugal. The literary tradition of the Portuguese Middle Ages has received comparatively little scholarly attention, a lamentable fact, especially given the country's political and social prominence during the late medieval period. Since before Portugal's beginnings as a sovereign nation in 1143, the country has enjoyed a rich literary tradition. Portugal established one of the first universities in Europe in Coimbra in 1290, and the Royal Convent and Palace of Alcobaça, founded in the late twelfth century, became one of the Cistercian headquarters of Europe (Williams 29). While today Portugal tends to be viewed as a marginalized country on the periphery of European culture, there is no question that during the late Middle Ages, Portugal was central to the political, religious, academic and cultural life of Europe. During the age of discovery, it was one of the prime European powers.

The Portuguese poets of the thirteenth century were well versed in the medieval troubadour tradition. The genre in which they they wrote, *cantigas*, had been popular in the Iberian Peninsula for several generations. These *cantigas*, according to Frederick Williams,

have traditionally be grouped into four classifications: *cantiga de amor* (song of love), patterned after the style of the Provençal troubadors where the persona's voice is that of a male bemoaning his unrequited love; *cantiga de amigo* (song of friend), whose persona is a female complaining to a confidant about her lover's faithlessness; *cantiga de escarnho e maldizer* (song of scorn and malediction), which a scurrilous and often

³³ Most notably in the study of English literature are the Old English elegies, "The Wife's Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer." Medieval lyrics written in the female voice also survive; however, the way the Portuguese tradition formalized the use of the female voice in song is, so far as I have been able to determine, unique.

obscene songs attacking both males and females; and *cantigas de Santa Maria* (songs of Saint Mary). (29)

The *cantigas de Santa Maria* were written almost entirely by one man, King Alfonso X of Castile (1221-1284). Other thirteenth century writers throughout the Iberian Peninsula, particularly in Portugal, continued to write in the other three genres, the most popular being the *cantiga de amor*; by the end of the thirteenth century, however, a notable shift in the poetic tradition occurred. Alfonso X's grandson, King Dom Dinis of Portugal (1261-1325), whose reign began in 1279 and spanned the first decades of the fourteenth century, was a prolific writer and musician. Over 1700 of his poems and lyrics survive in three separate manuscripts. Dinis was remarkable not only for his prolific contribution to the genre, but also for the number of *cantigas* that he wrote in the female voice. There were other poets who wrote *cantigas de amigo* and *cantigas de mal dizer* in the female voice, but no one man appears to have been nearly as productive. Dom Dinis's work is notable not only for its volume but for its emotional complexity. Not all of Dom Dinis's poems offer the same exploration of female interiority, but his work is particularly extraordinary when set against earlier *cantigas*. The following is a *cantiga* written by Nuno Treez, a thirteenth century *jogral* (medieval lyricist) about whom little else is known; the poem is fairly typical of the thirteenth century *cantiga*:

San Cremenço do Mar,
Se mi del non uingar,
non dormirey.
San Cremenço senhor,
se uingada non for,
non dormirey.
[Se mi del non uingar,
do fals'e descal,
non dormirey].

Se uingada non for
do falss'e traedor,
non dormirey. (Williams 74)

Saint Cremenço of the Sea
If I am not avenged on him
I will not sleep
Saint Cremenço, Lord,
If I am not avenged
I will not sleep
(If I am not avenged on him
Who is false and untrue,
I will not sleep.)
If I am not avenged
On the false traitor,
I will not sleep.

The female sex of the speaker is revealed by the adjective “uingada,” “vingada,” or “avenged.” Beyond that, there are very few gender markers at all in the poem. There is no reflection in the poem; the speaker does see herself to some extent as subject to the “fals’ e desleal” or “falss’ e traedor” (“the false, disloyal one” or “false traitor”) and is praying to San Cremenço for vengeance; however, the poem does not give us much scope for understanding the experience of the speaker. The constraints of the genre here, one could argue, make such introspection difficult; the poetic device of *leixa-pren* (in modern Portuguese, “deixa-prender,” or “leave and pick up”), requires the author to repeat certain words and phrases throughout each stanza; then too, *cantigas*, like the ballads of the troubadours, have a common refrain that must also be repeated. Even with such genre constraints, however, Dom Dinis is able to explore the inner world of his female speakers far more thoroughly:

O meu amig', amiga, non quer'eu
que haja gran pesar, nen gran prazer,

e quer'eu este preit'assí trager,
 ca m'atrevo tanto no feito seu:
 non o quero guarir, nen o matar,
 nen o quero de mí desasperar.
 Ca, se lh'eu amor mostrasse, ben sei
 que lhi sería end'atán gran ben
 que lh'haverían d'entender por én
 qual ben mi quer, e por én esto farei:
 non o quero guarir, nen o matar,
 nen o quero de mí desasperar.
 E, se lhi mostrass'algún desamor,
 non se podía guardar de morte,
 tant'havería en coita forte,
 mais, por eu non errar end'o melhor,
 non o quero guarir, nen o matar,
 nen o quero de mí desasperar.
 E assí se pode seu tempo passar,
 quando con prazer, quando con pesar.

My boyfriend, girlfriend, I don't want him
 To feel either great sorrow or great pleasure
 And that's how I want this my plea to be brought forth
 Which I dared to work so hard to prepare [create, write]
 I don't want to give him comfort nor do I want to kill him
 Nor do I want him to despair of me.
 For, if I show him some affection, I know very well
 That it would be a very great boon to him
 And that's how it would be understood in fact,
 Like a "she-loves-me", and that's in fact what I
 will do
 I don't want to give him comfort nor do I want to kill him
 Nor do I want him to despair of me.
 And, if I should withhold affection
 He would not be able to keep from dying
 Due to the very strong pain
 Hence, so that I do not err, but keep the best [of both situations]
 I don't want to give him comfort [shelter] nor do I want to kill him
 Nor do I want him to despair of me.
 And thus he can pass his time away,
 When he has pleasure, when he has sorrow. (Williams)

The first notable feature of the poem is that it is written or spoken in the voice of a female
 to a female friend. This is typical of the genre, but it is genre convention that Dom Dinis

invokes in unique ways. In Dom Dinis's poetry the friend of the female speaker takes on tremendous importance, enabling the speaker to express her pain, but also, in some cases, bringing new confidences to her. Also, notably, this is more than just a passing conversation between the two friends. The female speaker calls clear attention to the importance and the act of making the poem: "e quer'eu este preit'assí trager / m'atrevo tanto no feito seu." She has been at some trouble to compose this *cantiga*, which she refers to as a "preito" or "plea." This line seems to mark the work as an oral versus a written communication, but the next line seems to complicate that idea. The word Dinis chooses to express the composition of this *cantiga* "atrevo," translated "dare," also implies "work" when combined with "tanto." Literally, the line conveys the sense she has worked hard in the making (constructing, creating) of this plea. Here, as in the earlier work of Marie de France, we again see the emphasis a female speaker places on the act of making a traditionally oral communication, but this time the female voice is being borrowed by a man. Why Dom Dinis, a man whose authority and influence cannot be overstated, would choose, along with many of his male contemporaries, a woman's voice to compose much of his creative work is a provocative question, but at least one cause for this decision might be that using a female voice allowed male poets to call just such attention to the constructed quality and the hard work that went into a genre, the *cantiga* (or "song") traditionally regarded as an oral and therefore transitory or even insubstantial genre.

This *cantiga*, as most *cantigas de amigo*, also highlight the tremendous importance of community in meaning-making as these poems are almost without

exception directed to a friend or female relative. This is in sharp contrast to the *cantigas de amor*, those *cantigas* with male speakers, which are almost always soliloquies. The primary audience the *cantiga* above is ostensibly the “amiga,” the girlfriend or confidant of the speaker, but elsewhere in the poem, she seems to imply that she hopes her hard work might find a wider audience. In line 3, when she discusses how she wants her plea to be “assí trager,” (“brought forth” or “understood”) she seems to shift her focus to a wider audience. Nonetheless, without this audience (whether her female confidant or a wider group of sympatico readers), she would not have been able to dare (“atrevo”) to create such a work. In other words, on some level it is her audience which empowers her to communicate her experience. Thus we see an emphasis on the importance of female communities in meaning-making and expression. Through the *cantigas de amigo*, male poets were able to adopt a female voice, create, and join imaginary female communities. According to Catherine Sanok, male writers used an imagined feminine audience “to figure a stable community” (Sanok 83). Certainly, that is what Dom Dinis appears to be doing here. I also argue that in this case the process worked in reverse. Men imagined female communities to help figure themselves and their audiences (who were mostly men). Elaine Tuttle Hansen has argued that men use female voices or female characters to allow them access to certain subjects and emotions. Chaucer, in particular, argues Hansen, destabilizes the idea of a fixed gender identity.³⁴ Donning literary “drag,” and

³⁴ This, argues Hansen, is a result of courtly norms for men of the fourteenth century that were seen as increasingly feminizing, calling into question what it meant to be a man; Chaucer’s aim, according to Tuttle, was ultimately to reinstate the superiority of masculinity by inhabiting female characters and depicting them in traditionally medieval ways: as frail, untrustworthy, weak characters.

pouring one's heart out to an imaginary, sympathetic female audience allowed men like Dom Dinis the luxury of such catharsis without compromising his public ethos of dominant masculinity. Whether or not Dom Dinis ever had the particular problem that is the subject of this poem, ambivalence toward a lover coupled with a desire not to hurt the lover too much, expressed by the speaker in this *cantiga*, the idea of borrowing a female voice, and an epistemology developed by women, to contemplate an event, in other words to commit an experience to writing, was clearly an attractive one to the King of Portugal.

What is remarkable about this *cantiga*, as with the other *cantigas* of Dom Dinis, is the depth to which Dinis explores the speaker's feelings. This is consistent with the depiction of experience in the text as I've described it in this study. In this case, the female speaker sees herself as subject to her lover's obsession, and she is aware that he wants more of her than she is willing to give. This awareness has caused her to reflect on her situation, and the product of that reflection, this "preito" (plea), she has recorded and shared with her community. The recording of the experience is itself a vital part of the process, as we have seen in the writings of mystics like Elisabeth of Schönau. Only through committing the experience to writing is the speaker able to fully understand the experience, and perhaps more importantly, only through writing can she offer it to the widest possible audience who in turn may incorporate the experience into shared knowledge of the community. This emphasis on the importance of writing becomes especially evident for Chaucer's female writers in *The Legend of Good Women*.

But it is Chaucer's Wife of Bath whom I wish to discuss in brief first. The Wife of Bath represents an important shift in the writing about women and in the understanding (though not necessarily the appreciation) of women's epistemologies. This is clear from her opening lines, "Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me" (1-2). This celebrated opening the Wife of Bath's prologue has been used by generations of scholars to point out what little currency "experience" like that of the Wife of Bath's had when compared to canonical, textual authority. Indeed, as I noted early in this dissertation, the Oxford English Dictionary designates this line in *The Canterbury Tales* as the first time the word is used in the sense of "seeing oneself as subject." I argue, however, that Chaucer could not have even invoked the term "experience," and proceed to write a lengthy prologue unless experience *did* in fact have some currency, some authority, among certain groups of readers and in certain situations. If we take the evidence of the mystical writers, coupled with the secular writings of Marie de France or Dom Dinis, a different picture of the authority of experience begins to emerge.

While the world of the clerical establishment, with its reliance on canonical sources, may have viewed her experience as insufficient, for her, it is enough. And for her, that is all that matters. The Wife of Bath is an acknowledgement of how radically notions of authority have changed; women (in this case a fictional woman, the literary creation of a man) for better or worse, are willing to not only rely on the authority of their own experience but to cite such authority in the company of not only other (fictional) women, but also (fictional) men. Whether Chaucer meant the Wife as a

laughing stock or a sympathetic figure, the fact remains that Chaucer can and did represent a female character citing her own life's experience as the authority for her text.

Nor was the Wife an isolated case. Chaucer also constructs the stories in *The Legend of Good Women* with an eye to the impact and value of women's experience. Chaucer recognizes that because of the conscious subjectivity and reflection involved in the process of experience, the experiences of the women of *The Legend* have tremendous potential for pathos; Chaucer recasts the experiences of these women, often, as in the case of Medea, by adopting the woman's own voice through "reproducing" a letter; thus in highlighting the experiences of his female subjects, demonstrating their helplessness and using their limitations to evoke sympathy for them, he is ultimately using the experiences of the women in the stories as a means of granting even the most unlikely women the title "good" by depicting them as loyal lovers trapped in situations not of their own making. Their experiences that have led these women to behave as they have, and seen through their experiences retold in their own voices, their actions become clear in the eyes of the reader and can even be interpreted as "good." Thus the experience of these female characters becomes transformative for the audience as well as the characters, allowing us to understand them in ways we could not have considered without seeing their experiences through their own eyes, as it were.

The Wife and the women of the *Legend* have traditionally been regarded as very different from each other. Carolyn Dinshaw sees Chaucer's Wife of Bath as "the voice of the woman" (*Poetics* 113): Chaucer's attempt to view what she terms "the brotherhood of authors" with their insistence on "reading like men" from the perspective of Other, and it

seems only appropriate that such a character claim “experience” as her authority for her text. As a woman, her experience, which is tied, as Dinshaw and others have noted, explicitly to her “joly body” grants her the authority, she feels, to interpret scripture.³⁵

It is easy to point to the Wife of Bath as an example of feminized epistemology of experience at work in Chaucer; on the other hand, the women of the *Legend of Good Women* have more often been seen, in Dinshaw’s words, as “passive feminine bodies manipulated by the [I would add here ‘male’] narrator” (114).³⁶ As Dinshaw contends, the women in the Legend are manipulated by and read through male eyes. In her chapter in *Sexual Poetics* on *The Legend of Good Women* Dinshaw claims that in reading Saints’

³⁵ Unlike Hansen, who views the Wife of Bath as Chaucer attempt to reinstate the superiority of masculinity, Dinshaw reads the Wife of Bath as a good faith attempt to explore her feminine otherness. On the other hand, Dinshaw sees the *Legend* as a space in which Chaucer is reaffirming masculine modes of reading and understanding women. However, her argument differs from Tuttle’s in that she never claims that Chaucer inhabits the female characters in order to expose their feminine frailty. The *Legend* reaffirms masculinity only in so far as it reinscribes, in Dinshaw’s view, masculine ways of knowing and reading on female subjects.

³⁶ *The Legend of Good Women* has enjoyed a surge in scholarly interest. Long regarded as one Chaucer’s lesser works and dismissed as less avant garde in both its literary merits and its social agenda, the *Legend* nonetheless has received attention as a work through which to understand the development of Chaucer’s literary and political poetics. Sheila Delany argues that in addition to relying on Ovid for source material, Chaucer also relies upon Geoffrey of Monmouth in her 1987 article “Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Good Women’.” Delany’s book *The Naked Text: Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (1994), Helen Phillips’s “Register, Politics, and the Legend of Good Women” in *Chaucer Review* (2002) and the series of articles in *The Legend of Good Women: Reception and Contexts* (Carolyn P. Collette, ed.; 2006) that explores the social, literary and historical milieu that produced the work along with the contemporary reception the work received are also good examples of scholarship seeking to locate the *Legend* in the context of Chaucer career and times. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Catherine Sanok have all looked to the *Legend* for the ways in which Chaucer reinscribes models of traditional, patriarchal masculinity. The *Legend*, which on the most superficial level appears to be or at least to have the potential to be a feminist text has typically been read as antifeminist reinscription of patriarchy; my own aim in this study is to problematize that reading somewhat.

Lives, women were being invited to “read like men.” She also argues that the stories in the *Legend* can be read as saintly lives of a sort. These narratives, according to Dinshaw, reinforced the patriarchal order; they ensured that women would continue to view the “ideal” woman as passive, within the sphere of masculine control; thus the narrator of the *Legend* is able, in Dinshaw’s words, because he is writing about examples of feminine goodness he is able “to appease ‘every gentil womman’ while still reading like a man” (66). Of course, Catherine Sanok contends that, in fact, the *Legend*, like the medieval saints’ lives “construct a feminine audience” that rather than being forced to “read like men,” “encouraged medieval hagiographers and their audiences to reflect on historical continuity and discontinuity through the category of women’s religious practice” (xi), in other words, to quote Sanok, “Female saints’ lives ask women to read *as* women” (24). Both Sanok and Dinshaw agree that the *Legend* could be grouped loosely in this category of female saints’ lives. Astute though Sanok’s re-envisioning of the female saint’s life is, Sanok presents a different kind of hermeneutic from the one discussed by Dinshaw as employed by Chaucer in the Wife of Bath. Sanok’s argument is not that these women’s experiences are authorizing the text, but that in recording their experience, Chaucer is inviting the participation of his female readers.

Thus, according to both Dinshaw and Sanok, the epistemology of the Wife of Bath seem irrevocably missing from the *Legend*. The *Legend* may well, as Sanok contends, provide an example of the ways in which texts “opened vernacular hermeneutics by imagining a female audience;” on the other hand, one can still see Dinshaw’s point: the Wife of Bath who “reads like a woman”: through her own body and

direct experience seems a likelier model for a feminine epistemology at work in Chaucer than *Legend of Good Women*: a series of stories of women who are subjects of male action, read mostly through the male narrator. Yes, we may argue that the narrator of the *Legend* is constructing a female audience, but, according to Dinshaw, there are two problems with the narrative: First, these women are the subjects of male action, and secondly, they are subjects of the narrator, who is presumably male.

The word “subject”—that the women of the stories are subject of male action and subjects of the narrator—here is crucial as the definition of experience as an interpretive act requires that the interpreter perceive herself as subject. But here we run into another problem: at first glance, it appears that the characters in the *Legend* cannot reflect at all: they are, after all, “manipulated by the narrator,” to use Dinshaw’s words. While I would not argue that *The Legend of Good Women* is a text that demonstrates a feminized epistemology of experience in the same way that the Wife of Bath does, I think we do have glimpses throughout the text of Chaucer’s searching for—and in some cases finding and employing a similar epistemology; in no place is this more evident than in the moments when the voice of the male narrator of the *Legend* cedes control to his female characters.

Perhaps one of the most striking instances of this is in the “Legend of Medea.” Medea is acting and speaking through much of the text.³⁷ The narrator makes it clear that, although in the end, she is a victim of Jason’s misdeeds, she is a powerful actor as well. It

³⁷ George Kittredge, of course, felt that the Man of Law’s reference to Medea in his introduction may indicate that this section of the *Legend* was composed after or concurrently with parts of *The Canterbury Tales*.

is Medea who “wex enamoured upon” Jason (1610). It is also Medea who guides Jason to the fleece because, as she says, “For whoso wol this aventure acheve, / He may nat wel asterten, as I leve, Withouten deth, but I his helpe be” (1614-1616). Without her help, Jason is powerless; Medea makes it clear that his life rests entirely, at least in this moment, in her hands. Indeed, a large portion of the text is dedicated to an explanation of the way that Medea guided Jason through the task of recovering the Golden Fleece; Jason becomes the subject of *her* will, culminating in the vow that she extracts from him,

that he for lef or loth
Ne sholde nevere hire false, nyght ne day,
To ben hire husbonde whil he lyve may,
As she that from his deth hym saved here. (1639-1642)

Of course, Jason does not remain subject to Medea’s wishes or to the oath that he has made to her, and Medea herself becomes a victim.

It is only then that we are allowed to glimpse the kind of reflection that both Dinshaw and Sanok argue is necessary for a feminine reading of the text. In fact, not only do we hear Medea’s voice through her spoken words, but the narrator goes so far as to include Medea’s writing, making her, and her own interpretation of her story, co-equal with (if not more authoritative than) his own telling of the story. Medea becomes the author, and in that moment, Medea’s own interpretation of her experience eclipses any of the narrator’s own glossing of the story; the tale concludes with her own *written* interpretation of the events, via a surviving letter:

Why lykede me they youthe and thy fayrnesse,
And of they tonge, the infynyt graciousnesse?
O, haddest thou in thy conquest ded ybe,
Ful mikel untrouthe hadde ther deyde with the! (1674-1677)

She is clearly, according to the definition of experience I presented earlier in this study, viewing herself as the subject of her own poor judgment and estimation of Jason's charms. Of course, this is a motif that occurs throughout the *Legend*, but this passage is unique in that it is Medea herself, through her writing, and not the narrator, who is interpreting the events. She sees herself as having been wronged; this appears, to me at least, a very feminized reading of the story of Medea. Were we to read the story like a man, we might come to the same conclusion about Medea that Chaucer's narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* comes to about her in speaking to the knight, "Ye shoulde be dampned in this cas / By as good right as Medea was, / That slough hir children for Jasoun;" (BD 725-727).³⁸ It is interesting to note that Chaucer, in the *Legend*, omits what has been viewed as the single most important detail of the Medea story; the fact that Medea killed her children—we are not, at the end of the *Legend*, interpreting the story through male eyes, however. We are interpreting through Medea's eyes.³⁹

³⁸ Medea also appears briefly in the *House of Fame*, listed with the names of other "Magiciens, and tregetours, / And Phitonesses, charmeresses, / Olde wicches, sorceresses" (HF 1260-62). She is listed with Circes and Calypso. While the *House of Fame* does not give any details of Medea's story, one could argue that being depicted as a "witch" and "sorcereress" and being mentioned with women like Calypso and Circes is hardly a positive depiction. However, this reference is certainly far less condemnatory than Chaucer's depiction of Medea in the *Book of the Duchess*.

³⁹ There are those, like Florence Percival, who argue that Chaucer's treatment of Medea as a "good" woman was not too far out of the common way for a medieval writer. While Chaucer does not mention the killing of her children directly in his discussion of Medea, he does indirectly refer to it in his discussion of Hypsipyle. In this way, Percival argues, Chaucer's treatment of Medea has more in common with retellings of the Medea story by Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Machaut (Percival 213). However, I argue that the fact that Chaucer left this detail out of his discussion of Medea's story itself in the *Legend* is crucial, especially since the slaying of her children is so prominent a part of the short account of Jason and Medea given in *The Book of the Duchess*.

It is not only Medea, however, whose story is treated differently. The *Book of the Duchess* condemns Dido, Phyllis, Hypsipyle, and Ariadne (but reverses her condemnation in *The House of Fame*, albeit fairly briefly). However, it is in the *Legend* that we find, in Larry Benson's words, "detailed treatment" of the stories. And the details Chaucer includes and omits can tell us, I would argue, as in the case of Medea, quite a bit about how Chaucer wants us to interpret these stories. We do not read about the killing of Medea and Jason's children as we do in *The Book of the Duchess* because this story is not told to us from that perspective; the interpretation of the events and their significance is Medea's, and the killing of her children goes unmentioned.

Chaucer constructs the stories in *Legend of Good Women* with an eye to the impact of women's experience, a theme he would emphasize in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*. Chaucer recasts the experiences of these women, often, as in the case of Medea, by adopting the woman's own voice through "reproducing" a letter; thus in highlighting the limitations of his female subjects, demonstrating their helplessness and using their limitations to evoke sympathy for them, he is ultimately using the experiences of the women in the stories as a means of granting even the most unlikely women the title "good," as loyal lovers trapped in situations that in some cases they have helped to make; they are not only subjects, they are actors as well. It is their experiences that have led them to behave as they have, and seen through their experiences, their actions become clear in the eyes of the reader and can even be interpreted as "good." Thus the experience of these female characters becomes transformative for the audience as well as the

characters, allowing us to understand them in ways we could not have considered without seeing their experiences through their own eyes, as it were.

No other character in the *Legend* better illustrates the authorizing process of experience better than Dido. When we first encounter Dido in Chaucer, she is condemned as a “fool” (*BD* 734) for committing suicide over a man,

Another rage
Had Dydo, the queen eke of Cartage,
That slough hirself for Eneas
Was fals—which a fool she was! (*BD* 731-734)

In recounting her story in the *House of Fame*, the narrator does not go quite so far as to call Dido a fool; he does lay some of the blame on Aneas, as he does in the *Book of the Duchess*, but also blames Dido, “Loo, how a woman doth amys / To love hym that unknowen is” (*HF* 269-270). This retelling of the story may show a bit more sympathy for Dido, but it is still, I would argue, read from a traditional perspective. If Dido had only followed the (male) narrator’s advice, she would have avoided suffering: her story in *House of Fame* reads, like the couplet above, very much as a warning to other women to remain within the bounds of trustworthy masculine control. This indictment of women appears again in the *Legend*, but we also see a Dido who is more autonomous, developed and self-aware. We also see, however, briefly, the narrator ceding control of the narrative to Dido in *House of Fame*; then, in the middle of her lamenting her situation, the narrator interrupts with

In suche words gan to plyene
Dydo of hir grete peyne,
As me mette redely—
Non other auctor alegge I. (*HF* 311-315)

There is a recognition here that Dido's words are authoritative; her own words, her own interpretation of the experience is so authoritative that he does not need to rely on any one else's words; there is assertion that her words, and by implication her experience, are the more powerful than the author's or, indeed, anyone else's. This brief introduction to Dido's story and her grief demonstrates some of the features of the epistemology of experience: Dido is seeing herself as the subject of the events that have taken place, and she is making meaning from these events through reflecting on them. Still, however, there are overt moves to make the story of Dido a cautionary tale: the story in *House of Fame* invites us first to read like men, but near the end, to read the text, to read the events, through Dido's own experience.

In the *Legend*, the narrator begins by citing his textual authority, the *Anneiad*, a conventional move, and one that might signal to readers he is telling the story like a man. He recounts the misfortunes that plagued Enneas and his family, but the narrator shifts his tone when he begins to discuss Dido, he lays Virgil aside because, "it wolde lasten al to longe while" (*LGW* 1003). Almost as soon as Dido enters the narrative, the narrator's interest is in her feelings and her actions. Once again, he cedes a large portion of the text to her, and we hear her describe her feelings and desires. Like Medea, it is she who is first drawn to the man who proves her undoing. It is also through her actions that his misfortunes are reversed, as Medea "from his [Jason's] deth saved him," Dido tells Enneas, "Youre shipes and your meyne shal I save" (1089). The emphasis is placed on her power. Although she later becomes smitten with Enneas, the narrator makes it clear that her agency is involved, she chose to pity him, "And with that pite love com in also"

(1079). In Dido's speech to her sister Anne, she reflects on what has happened to her:

once again, she is viewing herself as subject:

This newe Troyan is so in my thought,
For that me thynketh he is so wel ywrought,
And ek so likely for to ben a man,
And therwithal so moche good he can
That al my love and lyf lyth in his cure.
Have ye nat herd him telle his aventure?...
In hym lyth al, to do me live of deye." (1172-1177)

His person, but more than that, his story has caused her to become utterly subject to Anneas, and it is her continued reflection on him and his story that have caused her to be so and to realize it. When Enneas finally leaves her, she commits suicide, but not before she writes a letter. Once again, we see the narrator ceding textual authority to the female character at the end of her text. Ultimately, it is her voice, her interpretation of the story that supersedes the narrator's voice, her own written words that end the story.

Thus we can see that at least in the cases of Medea and Dido, the *Legend of Good Women* invokes a hermeneutic grounded in the experiential epistemology that would later (though probably not much later) inform the *Wife of Bath*.⁴⁰ The narrator does not merely portray the women he narrates as subjects of male action; he describes the women of his legends not only as victims but also as actors. We see this feminine hermeneutic most clearly, however, when the narrator of the *Legend* allows the women he is describing to speak, and sometimes write, for themselves. These characters see themselves as subjects, and through that subjectivity they and we come to—hopefully—a new understanding about the situations that these good women found themselves in. This experiential

⁴⁰ There were probably no more than two or three years between the writing of *Legend* and the writing of *The Wife of Bath's Tale* according to Larry Benson.

epistemology, claimed by the Wife of Bath and apparent in much of the writing by and for women in the Middle Ages, is I argue, a feminized process and an epistemological technique that Chaucer appears to have developed through at least two of the good women of the *Legend*.

In the Wife of Bath's prologue, Chaucer gestures toward two other facets of this epistemology of experience, the importance of sharing it, and the importance of community. In discussing her abusive fourth marriage, Alisoun says that she would often go to her friend, Dame Alys; another woman on her street; her niece; and the (male) apprentice, Janekyn, and tell them her troubles. The importance of her community in helping her to make sense of the events of her life is very provocative as is the male member of this otherwise female community.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Catherine Sanok notes that men of the Middle Ages saw the attractions of female communities as a means of stabilizing their audience(s); Carolyn Dinshaw's work explores the ways that men relate to groups of women to stabilize their identities in her recounting of John/Eleanor Rykener's feminine education in *Getting Medieval*. Rykener, a male prostitute who dressed and performed sexual acts as a woman, was apprehended by local authorities and interrogated:

Under interrogation, Rykener responded to questions about who taught him/her how to ply his/her trade, for how long, where, and with whom s/he had committed the act; s/he related the tale of unofficial apprenticeship in embroidery (with one Elizabeth Brouderer), tutelage in the act of having sex in the manner of a woman and getting paid for it, and many, many sexual contacts in various locales. (Dinshaw, *Medieval*, 101)

In John/Eleanor's case, argues Dinshaw, gaining access to a female community was a way for him/her to explore his/her identity. However, in a less spectacular fashion, we

see men joining female communities in the literary record even as early as the twelfth century. Marie de France seems to often admit men into women's social groups:

Guigemar is an excellent example. These men often tend to enter women's groups as sexless, or at least sexually unavailable entities (Janekyn is the apprentice of the Wife of Bath's husband, Guigemar is wounded in his thigh, John wants to become a woman) who sometimes end up as objects of women's sexual desire. My argument is that authors like Geoffrey Chaucer and Dom Dinis are the authorial equivalents to Guigemar, Janekyn, or even John/Eleanor. This is a phenomenon allows us to turn to the writing of Dom Dinis with a newly unsettled point of view:

O voss' amig', amiga, vi andar
Tam coitado que nunca lhi vi par,
Que adur mi podia já falar,
pero, quando me viu, disse-mi assi:
 "Ai, senhor, id'a mia senhor rogar
 por Deus que aja mercee de mi."
El andava trist'e mui sen sabor,
Come quen é tan coitado d'amor
e perdud'á o sen e a color,
pero, quando me viu, disse-mi assi:
 "Ai, senhor, ide rogar mia senhor
 por Deus que aja mercee de mi."
El, amiga, achei eu andar tal
come morto, ca é decomunal
o mal que sofr'e coita mortal,
pero, quando me vio, disse-mi assi:
"Senhor, rogad'a senhor do meu mal
por Deus, que aja mercee de mi." (Williams 68)

Your boyfriend, girlfriend, I saw pass by
Looking as dejected as I have ever seen him
So bad I didn't think he could speak
But when he saw me he said,
 "Oh, sir, go beg my lady
 For God's sake to have mercy on me"
He passed by sad and listless

So very lovesick
 That he has lost his senses and his color,
 But when he saw me, he told me,
 “Oh, sir, go beg my lady
 For God’s sake to have mercy on me”
 He, friend, I thought just walked along as though
 One dead, for truly it’s uniquely so
 he was suffering from fatal lovesickness
 But when he saw me, he told me,
 “Oh, sir, go beg my lady
 For Heaven’s sake to have mercy on me” (Williams 69)

The lovesick man in the poem addresses the speaker as “sir,” indicating, most likely, a male friend of his lady, as well as a male voice narrating the poem. I say “most likely” because the lover also addresses his lady as “mia senhor” (“my sir” or “my lord”). The pronoun is feminine; however, the title is the masculine “senhor” (versus the feminine “senhora”). The speaker of the poem, however, provides no indication of her (or his) sex, and the lover does not use any feminine pronouns to refer to his friend, the speaker; thus it seems probable that the speaker in this *cantiga* is male. This complicates the *cantiga* somewhat as it no longer fits neatly into any of the pre-established genres. The *cantiga de amor* is uttered as a soliloquy by an amorous man, who is usually enumerating the many graces of his beloved. The *cantiga de amigo*, on the other hand, is voiced by a woman and usually expresses some kind of vexation or hurt. Here we have a poem that combines features of each genre, with an important difference. It is a friend, a part of the communal circle of each of the lovers, who is speaking, and this friend appears to be male, and a male who is simultaneously friends with the lovesick man and a part of a feminine community, and deep in the female beloved’s confidence. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would argue in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) that

during the Victorian period, an expressed but nonexistent desire for a woman was the only way that two men could route a desire for each other, the term “homosocial” referring to male bonding while simultaneously implying a fear of the homosexual. This particular reading may or may not apply to this poem; however, it is certainly true that in this case, the female beloved has enabled the two men the lover and the speaker to participate in each other’s experience. However, rather than the female beloved functioning merely as a conduit through which the two men may bond, she is actually, I would argue that she enables not their bonding with each other, but their ability to join in the process of making meaning through experience and to do so as men, rather than as men in drag.

Moreover, in this poem, meaning is being created not through the lovers’ experience directly, but through a friend’s interpretation of the experience, and this friend appears to be a man. I argue that this marks a crucial shift in perceptions of experience and community. We have, in the early decades of the fourteenth century, literary evidence of a man participating as a man (without borrowing the voice of a woman) in the process of experience.

Christine de Pisan

The idea that experience is not a strictly personal epistemology is highly developed in the writing of Christine de Pisan.⁴¹ In her introduction to *Cité des Dames*,

⁴¹ Although she was among the most popular authors of her age and continued to enjoy tremendous popularity in the decades after her death, Christine de Pisan was only recently “rediscovered” in the late twentieth century, and although since that point, excellent work has been done in Christine studies, the area of Christine scholarship remains one in which the need for continued work and inquiry is clear. Suzanne Solente

Christine shares autobiographical details that reinforce her authority to write the text. But she also cites her long experience listening to women from all walks of life and their struggles in addition to her own particular struggles as a woman who has been left to provide for her entire family, including a niece whom her own brother could not care for. The *Cité des Dames* is a chronicle of other women's experience that readers are asked to

did much work in the mid twentieth century to edit and publish many of Christine's works, including the multivolume *Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, an important semi-autobiographical work which has yet to be translated in its entirety into English. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several of Christine's major works received English translations (the first English translations of Christine's work to be undertaken since the sixteenth century). Notable among these are Earl Jeffrey Richard's 1983 translation of *The Book of the City of the Ladies* and Sarah Lawson's translation of *The Treasure of the Ladies, or, The Book of Three Virtues*. This work in particular enjoyed tremendous circulation and popularity in the years and decades after the death of Christine in 1434. Charity Cannon Willard, who began publishing her work on Christine in the 1950s, is credited with bringing attention to Christine de Pisan in the twentieth century, particularly among English-speaking scholars. Her *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*. (1984) is seen as a definitive study. The resurgence in Christine's popularity has not been without controversy. Many have long felt Christine to be in Gustave Lanson's words, "a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, but otherwise one of the most authentic blue-stockings ever to appear in [French] literature, the first of that insupportable line of women authors" (in Richards, *Reinterpreting* 1). The notion of Christine as "a humorless drudge" (2) or as an author whose "feminism seems not to go far enough in attacking patriarchal domination (1) has been convincingly dispelled in the last twenty-five years by scholars such as Liliane Dulac, Thelma Fenster, Eric Hicks, Christine Reno, and Jeffrey Richards himself. While much of Christine's authority was drawn from her experience, Christine also relied on more traditional medieval modes for authorizing her work. Several scholars, including Sheila Delany, have called into question Christine's level of erudition and her ability to read and correctly interpret the Latin text to which she so often responds. While some question Christine's ability to critically read and respond to texts, no one seems to question the heightened awareness Christine shows to her readers. David F. Hult in his "The *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan, and the *quarrelle des femmes*" notes that Christine's debate over the *Roman de la Rose* along with the way she edited and supervised the publication of the manuscript clearly show an author and publisher who is extremely sensitive the ways in which her readers may receive and interpret the text. I argue that this sensitivity is do in no small part to the literary phenomena I explore in this study, experience and the epistemological power of experience for both writer and reader.

consider and incorporate into their own modes of thinking and behavior. And yet, throughout the text, Christine is herself involved as a character, and she draws frequently from her own experience and education, education. This is experience her readers would already be familiar with, as both her *Mutacion de Fortune* and autobiography, *L'Avison Christine* were quite popular. Christine's autobiography marks one of the first autobiographies to emerge in the West. Given the emphasis of women writer in the late Middle Ages on experience, it is perhaps no wonder that a woman should author one of the first autobiographies. The biographical details of Christine's life were, I will argue, absolutely essential to her authorial persona. Christine's life in the text and the creation of herself as a devout Catholic woman allowed her to question entrenched doctrine, even finding indirect fault with revered scholars. Among the more interesting facts about Christine is that she before her fame as an author is that due to her education and high degree of literacy, she worked as a scribe. Highly literate in both the vernacular and Latin, Christine had an advantage that earlier women writers did not. She is able to speak for herself, as it were.

Thus, from a time in the Middle Ages when "the term 'woman writer' ... [could] be regarded as oxymoronic" (McAvoy 6), we have arrived at a time when a woman writer was among the most popular and in Europe, "a widely disseminated" writer who "was one of the first vernacular authors who supervised the copying and illuminating of her own books" (Richards xx-xxi). Earl Jeffery Richards calls her "both a writer and a scholar" (xxi). Christine's work was highly regarded and popular during her lifetime and remained so for at least a century after her death. During the intervening centuries, her

work has been “rediscovered” several times, but only in recent decades has it enjoyed the level of respect and popularity that it enjoyed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Richards xix).

In characterizing the source of Christine de Pisan’s authority, Alexandra Barratt claims, “Christine de Pisan is a moral and didactic writer, but her strategy here for circumventing male authority is analogous to that of many women mystics: she sets up an alternative authority which derives from her own experience” (Barratt 11). While I do not disagree with this statement, indeed, I agree that Christine often uses this strategy in her writing, it is important to emphasize, as Richards claims, that Christine was both “a writer and a scholar.” Unlike the mystics, Christine’s Latin training along with centuries-long tradition of women writers allowed Christine to do what her earlier mystic counterparts could not: Christine could and (on occasion) did refer to canonical sources which she read in Latin. Despite her access to the older tradition of establishing her authority, Christine often chooses to cite experience. Barratt’s brief analysis of the role of experience in her anthology *Women’s Writing in the Middle Ages* does not point out the ways that the way Christine uses her experience differs in some profound ways from her mystical counterparts. Moreover, though Christine often did cite her experience in compelling ways that differ markedly from her mystical counterparts, she also at times grounded her authority in texts in the canonical scholarly tradition. And in other cases, Christine seems to blend the two tactics. Richards also notes that “Christine’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* shows us how she used her own erudition to exemplify the affinity of women for learning” (Richards xxvii-xxviii).

It is true, however, that Christine does seem to privilege experience, even when citing authoritative sources. Christine de Pisan deploys and depicts experience, both her own experience and the experience of others, in complex and sophisticated ways throughout her work. To say that her use of experience is “analogous” to that of the mystics belies the way that Christine complicated and expanded the epistemological scope of a wide range of experience: from bodily experience to bereavement. This is probably most apparent in the *Livre de Mutacion de Fortune*, a semi-autobiographical musing on the history and power of Fortune. Upon the death of her father and husband, which Christine depicts as a profound experience, Fortune changes the character Christine into a man through a very bodily, quasi-sexual process that Christine the writer very clearly depicts as an both an event and as a meditation of the personal implications of the event; in other words, she relies on experience.

While the actual scene of transformation occurs near the end of Book I (lines 1325-1355), Pizan informs of the audience of her masculinity early in the text, summarizing Fortune’s actions at the end of the second of thirteen parts:

Vous diray qui je suis, qui parle,
Qui de femelle devins masle
Par Fortune qu’ainsy le vould;
Si me mua et corps et vould
En homme naturel parfait
Et jadis fus femme, de fait
Homme suis, je ne ment pas, (141-47)

I tell you that I am, who speaks,
Was from female made male
By Fortune, who so wished;
She transformed me body and will
Into a complete, natural man

No longer was I a woman, indeed
I am a man, I do not lie.

By the end of the first hundred and fifty lines, Christine forcefully tells us that she is a man “Homme suis” and that we ought to think of her as such. While nearly all of Christine’s texts acknowledge her femininity right away and go to pains to establish her authorial ethos despite her sex, *Mutacion* is unique in that it asks her readers to accept her initially not in spite of her being a woman, but asks them not to even question her authority because she is a man. This too represents a clear departure from the ways in which mystical writers represented themselves in the text. Their strategy was to emphasize their own frail, weak, femininity, borrowing their authority, as it were, from God Himself. Clearly, this strategy was not available to Christine, a secular writer. If as Judith Butler notes “one can risk serious disenfranchisement and physical violence for the pleasure one seeks, the fantasy one embodies, the gender one performs” (*Gender Trouble* 212), certainly Christine would have recognized the fact that creating a text was a masculine-gendered performance, and that writing carried certain risks or stigmatization and disenfranchisement. Her choice to represent herself as a man becomes more understandable in that light, especially so early in her career. While her choice to represent herself as a man is no doubt due in part to her own tenuous authority as a writer so early in her career,⁴² I argue that Christine’s status as a female who has been made male gives her maximum credibility as one who intends to explore and rehabilitate the traditional medieval conception of women—she can, as it were, view the issue from both sides.

⁴² The text was delivered to the Duke of Burgundy in 1404. (Solente xv)

Further adding to the weight of her masculine performance, Christine points out the significance of her name which she says Nature has given her,

Le nom du plus parfait homme,
Qui oncques fu, le mein nomme,
I. N. E. faut avec mettre,
Plus n'y affiert autre lettre. (375-378)

The name of the most perfect man,
who ever was, is my name,
I. N. E. must be put with it
But it doesn't rely on any other letter.

If even the female version of Christine, a product of her father, Thomas de Pizan and Nature, is worthy to be named for the “plus parfait homme,” Christ(ine) leaves her readers little room to question what kind of a man Christ(ine) must be; here then, is the technique that we have seen so many women writers before Christine use: she is implying such an affinity with God that to question her authority is to question the authority of God Himself.

Book I makes it clear that Fortune needs a man in Christine's life to direct it, but since all the in Christine's life are gone, unusual steps must be taken. Christine de Pizan uses a ship's voyage as a metaphor for her life throughout Book I, and with both Thomas, Christine's father, and Etiénne, her husband, gone, Fortune transforms Christine the character into a man so that Christine may serve Fortune by “charting the course of her own voyage” (Newman 118). Without any men in her life, Christine was no longer fit to be in Fortune's service: “et Fortune, ayant pitié de son malheur, la [Christine] changea en homme et la rendit capable de mener une nef” (“and having pity on her [Christine's] misfortune, Fortune changed Christine into a man and makes her capable of steering a

ship”; Solente xiv). Christine de Pisan is not arguing for a usurpation of the role of men by women—an idea which would have surely discomfited male readers. Not only are men included in the world that Christine de Pisan constructs, they are necessary—and Fortune will go to extraordinary measures to insure their presence.

In her description of the transformation of Christine the character into a man, Christine de Pisan the author describes the encounter with Fortune and Christine the character’s subsequent resexing in terms that denote a sexual experience, in which Christine is characterized as the female participant. Fortune visits her one night, after her bereavement; Christine retires to bed and is overcome.

Adont vers moy vint ma maitresse
Qui a plusieurs la joye estrece
Si me toucha par tout le corps
Chacun membre, bien me’en recors
Manyä et tint a ses mains[...]
Transmuee me senti toute
Mes membres senti trop plus fors [...]
Et ma voix forment engrossie
Et corps plus dur et plus insel
Mais choit de mon doy fu l’anel
Qu’Ymeneüs donné m’avoit
Dont me pesa, et bien devoit,
Car je l’amoie chierement. (1325-29; 1336-37; 1350-55)

Then my mistress came to me
she who gives joy to many
and she touched me all over my body
she palpated and took in her hands each bodily part,
I remember it well
I awakened and things were such that
I touched myself all over my body
and my voice was much lower,
and my body harder and faster.
However, the ring
that Hymen had given me had fallen from my finger,

which troubled me, as well it should have,
for I loved it dearly. (Newman 118)

The description of Christine's change at the hands of Fortune highlights elements of the masculine body Christine now possesses. That body then, should make her maleness incontrovertible—at least in a physical sense. According to Connell,

The physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is...a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are. (Connell 52-53)

Christine comes to the realization that she is inhabiting a male body because of the way it feels. Touch and feel are extremely important to Christine's concept of a masculine identity; the emphasis on these senses is a fact that we have seen is characteristic of experience as it was depicted in the Middle Ages and makes the reality of this experience all the more incontrovertible. What Christine's male body can feel and do is much more important to Christine than what it actually looks like, in fact, we never get a physical description, we are only told how it feels to her. It is "harder" and "faster." She implies that she doesn't trust appearances anyway, and admits the possibility that eyes are not be trusted, "*Si haulçay les yeulx, d'adventure,*" ("If, peradventure, my eyes have haulcinated" (1364)...then she goes on to describe how she has been able with her "*corps plus dur et plus insel,*" "*Ma nef appointay et tiray*" ("to command and steer my ship" (1410), and she describes all of the physical work required in that undertaking—the ways she can move—explaining that as a woman her body would have been incapable of

performing the work, and with her husband and father gone, there was no longer anyone left to steer the ship, so Fortune changed her to allow her to continue on her voyage.

Proceeding under the assumption that the very process of creating and performing a gender identity tallies with the process of experience, that “gender is complexly produced through identificatory and performative practices, and that gender is not as clear or as univocal as we are sometimes led to believe” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 212), a reading of Fortune and Christine’s encounter as sexual performance raises questions about the nature of this experience for Christine the character as well as Christine the writer. While the text does not explore the “possibilities” in sex for the male Christine—Fortune’s role in the transformation is curiously masculine. It is she who comes to Christine—initiates the encounter and forms Christine—according to beliefs of reproduction, “a ‘mother’ [*mater*] is so called because from her something is made: for ‘mother’ [*mater*] is as it were ‘matter’ [*material*], while the father is the cause” (Seville 44). According to Thomas Aquinas, the offspring “receives its form only by means of the power which is contained in the father” (Aquinas 47). It is Fortune who is clearly the cause, and the power, by which Christine is formed. By literally forming the raw material, Christine, with her hands Fortune creates a male offspring, while Christine is merely the matter from which the form is made. This role reversal has profound implication for Christine’s masculinity—it appears then that in the sexual act, Christine’s role had to be female to become male. Fortune remains female before, throughout, and after the encounter and yet is the clear male participant in the encounter. Fortune, the quintessential female, is performing the biological function of a man in procreation.

Paradoxically, as a clear female figure, Fortune could also be credited with “giving birth” to male Christine. This reminder that it is women who literally create men should serve as a reminder to the male audience that in this way, women ought to be viewed as good; without them, there would be no men. This is an argument that Reason will later make more explicitly in *Cité des Dames*.

Almost immediately after Christine’s transformation, Christine realizes that this change will be an enduring one,

...homme remaindray
Et o ma dame me tendray
Combien qu-en son service truis [...]
Mais jusqu’a la mort m’i faut vivre,
Dieux a sauvement m’en deliver! (1403-05, 1407-08)

I will remain a man
and my lady shall have me
as I am in her service
But until death I must live this way,
The gods preserve and deliver me!

There is a great deal of sadness in the loss of her femininity; clearly Christine sees herself as subject to this occurrence and reflects upon it a great deal. Although Christine recognizes it as necessary in the light of her circumstances, it is not what she would have chosen for herself—an indication that she valued her femininity and womanhood.

Sadness at her transformation would have been provocative to her readers; Christine does not depict her transformation as an ascent, indeed she says the loss of the ring “me pesa” (grieved her), because “l’amoie cherement” (1354, 55).

Her womanhood is represented, interestingly, by the loss of the ring she received in the Court of Hymen. When she marries, she is sent to the court of Hymen, who

welcomes her as her daughter and gives her a ring, “un anel de fin or me tent” (916). The ring of fine gold is obviously a wedding ring—which could be used equally as a male or female symbol, but in this case as Hymen gave it to her, must symbolizes her femininity and her role as a wife. By the twelfth century, it appears that the practice of clerics and nuns wearing wedding rings to symbolize their union to God had been cemented (McLaughlin 212). Thus, the ring might have also represented Christine’s devotion to Hymen, who is depicted as a goddess, and to her court.

I argue that the ring symbolizes and acts as a circuit for Christine’s identity as a woman much in the same way that Cohen argues that spurs symbolize knightly masculine identities, and demonstrates the way experience can and was beginning to be mediated through the material world, a facet of experience that is largely absent from mystical and religious writing. Jeffery Jerome Cohen describes how this can occur, claiming “objects lose their materiality to become conduits and agents. All are transformed (at least for a little while)” (179). The ring becomes a conduit through which womanhood is bestowed when Christine comes of age to marry and through which womanhood is taken away when she becomes a man at the hands of Fortune. In functioning as a conduit through which femininity is bestowed and withdrawn, the ring transcends its materiality in those instances, though I would argue that it still has significance as a material symbol connected with gender construction. The fact that Christine de Pisan so clearly depicts the constructed quality of sex, and the ways in which her perceptions of her sex are reliant on her experience appears radical, predating by over five hundred years twentieth century theories on the constructed quality of sex.

So radical, in fact, are some of Christine's depictions of her experience (like her depiction of Fortune's transformation), that though one can recognize earlier medieval experiential hermeneutics at work through Christine's subjectivity and reflection, one wonders how and why Christine de Pisan was able to so drastically explore and expand the idea of experience within a text. This phenomenon may in part be explained by Pierre Bourdieu who states, "In a determinate social formation, the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agents' dispositions, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted" (165-66). The social formations upon which Christine de Pisan's life was contingent all crumbled when Christine was twenty-five, a young widow with three children, a mother, and a niece to support. It is possible that this disintegration of the social structures around her, allowed her the degree of conscious subjectivity and the space for reflection necessary to perform such a radical interrogation of gendered or sexed experience; Christine de Pisan appears to have taken very little for granted.

In addition to citing the events of her own life frequently in her work, most notably in her autobiography, *L'Avison Christine*, one of the first autobiographies to be written in Europe and almost certainly the first autobiography by a woman, Christine also frequently cites the experience of other women. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Christine's *Cité Des Dames*.

Christine's experience underlies her authority even as a translator. One of the primary arguments of Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* is that "translation is a vehicle for vernacular appropriation of academic

discourse” (3). Christine’s translation of Vegetius, her primary source for *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, appears to fit this description. Academic discourse and its value were, in general, areas of interest for Christine as she attributed to so much of her own success to her being schooled in the academic discourse. In her introduction to the text, she at first states her unworthiness,

Pour ce que hardement est tant neccessaire a haultes choses entreprendre que sans lui jamais emprises ne seroient, ycellui mest convenable a ceste present oeuvre mettre suis autrement, veu le petitece de ma personne, qui je congnois non digne de traictier de si eslevee matiere, ne losasse ne seulement pensez, mais quoy que hardiesce face a blasmer quant elle est folle. Moy, non mie mene par arrogance ou folle presompcion, mais admonnestee de bonne atieccion et bon desir du bien des nobles hommes en loffre des armes, suis ennorte après mes autres escriptures passees...

As boldness is essential for great undertakings, and without it nothing should be risked, I think it is proper in this present *work* to set forth my unworthiness to treat such exalted matter. I should not have dared even to think about it, but although boldness is blameworthy when it is foolhardy, I should state that I have not been inspired by arrogance or foolish presumption, but rather by true affection and a genuine desire for the welfare of noble men engaging in the profession of arms. I am encouraged, in the light of my other writings... (*Deeds* 11-12)

Here we see Christine employing an utterly conventional device typical of medieval women who wrote since the twelfth century, a declaration of her unworthiness. She counters this declaration, however, in two interesting ways. First, she cites her affection and desire to help those engaging in warfare, and second, and provocatively the phrase, “in the light of my other writings.” Her previous experience justifies her venturing into this subject that would be seen then as it remains to a large degree today, a subject outside of women’s experience. However, in Christine’s mind, her experience gleaned from composing her other works, which also included free translations and adaptations,

qualify her to undertake this challenge. And judging from the popularity of the text, her readers agreed. Here we see evidence that, at least for one woman, not only reading but writing, and especially translating, could build the foundations of her experience, her authority. In fact, Christine herself describes this process in terms that resonate with Rita Copeland's notion that translation often served as a vehicle for the author's own rhetorical agenda:

Jay assemble les matiers et estre cueilly en plusieurs livres pour produce ce present volume. Mais comme je affiere ceste par plus exactee parfait dilligence et scens que par soubtillite de parles poliés... Je intens attratier nemais plus plain entendible language que je pourrar à celle fine que la doctrine donnée par plusieurs autteurs que al ayde de dieu propose en ce present livre declarier puirt estre a tous clere et entendible.

I have gathered together facts and subject matter from various books to produce this volume. But inasmuch as it is fitting for this matter to be discussed factually, diligently, and sensibly, rather than with subtlety or polished words... I intend to treat the matter in the plainest language, so that, with God's help, I may make clear and comprehensible to all readers

the doctrine set forth by the several authors whose works I have consulted.
(*Deeds* 12)

Toward the end of the passage, we see Christine establishing her authority in the conventional medieval sense; the "facts and subject matter" she has gathered are from ancient and reputable authorities, a pattern that she relies on elsewhere in her writing. She is also meredly providing the reader with the "doctrine donnée" from more authoritative sources. As Jennifer Summit notes,

The *auctor's* states emerged through a system that linked *auctoritas*, authority, to tradition, defined as a stream of continuous influence by its root *tradere*, to pass on. This is the understanding of *auctor* to which Christine de Pizan refers in the well-known opening of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, when reading in her study, she envisions a 'serieis of

author' ('moult grant foyson de auteur') who appear to her 'like a gushing fountain' ('comme se fust une fontaine resourdant')." (Summit, *Authorship* 92)

Christine does, at first, stake her authority in traditional medieval terms. This is understandable, given the subject matter. In addition to relying upon these sources, however, in this introduction to *The Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*, we also see Christine nodding to the fact that she intends to alter the works of these scholars, hinting that by doing so she will be improving their contents. While there can be no doubt that Christine's sources accounted for much of the authority of her work, her final word to her readers in her introduction is not a reminder of the sources upon which she is relying. In the medieval tradition, she invokes the blessing of a goddess, but her invocation is somewhat unique:

Et pour ce que c'est chose non accoustumée et hors usaige à femme qui communement ne se sieult entremettre ne mes quenouilles, fillaces, et choses de mainage je supplie humblement audit tres haute office et noble estat de chevalerie que en contemplacion de la sage dame Minerve née du pays de Grèce que les anciens pour son grant savoir reputèrent déesse...

O Minerve déesse d'armes et de chevalerie... Dame et haulte déesse ne te desplease ce que moy, simple femmelette ose presentement entreprendre à parler de si magnifique office est celui des armes duquel premierement tu donnas l'usaige. Et entant te plaise me estre favorable que je puis estre aucunement consonante à la nation dont tu fuis; en ce comme adonc fust nommé la Grant Grece le pays d'oultre les Alpes qui ores est dit Puilleet et Calabre, en Italie où tu nacquis, et je suis comme toy femme ytalienne.

As this [translation] is unusual for women, who generally are occupied in weaving, spinning, and household duties, I humbly invoke, in speaking of this very high office and noble chivalry, the wise lady Minerva, born in the land of Greece, whom the ancients esteemed highly for her great wisdom...

O Minerva! Goddess of arms and of chivalry... Lady and high goddess, may it not displease you that I, a simple little woman, should

undertake at the present time to speak of such an elevated office as that of arms. In the aforementioned country of Greece, you provided the usage of this office, and insofar as it may please you to be favorably disposed, and I in no way appear to be against the nation from which you came, the country beyond the Alps that is now called Apulia and Calabria in Italy, where you were born, let me say that like you I am an Italian woman.
(*Deeds* 13)

Through the invocation she is associating herself with Minerva, by virtue of their exotic otherness, a fact that informs much of Christine's writing and experience. She, as a native Italian, allies herself with Minerva, and although claiming to be "a simple little woman," suggests to readers that by virtue of her connection to Minerva she is uniquely authorized to write on the subject at hand. Her identity, if not her experience, qualify her. The first chapter of this dissertation explored the links between selfhood, identity, and experience, and it is clear from her transformation at the hands of fortune that experience clearly played a foundational role in the making of her authorial self. Once again we see her reminding her readers that her femininity might disqualify her to discuss such a topic; however, she reverses this disadvantage by staking her claim to authority in her identity and experience.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the *Mirror of Our Lady*, a text written presumably by a male author who remains anonymous. Although his aims were much the same of Hugh of St. Victor two hundred years earlier, his approach and tone are markedly different. The text has become, to borrow a term from Minnis, "more readerly." Gone is the authorial "I;" in fact, I will argue that the very identity of the author has been lost to history because his identity is no longer significant. His authority is no longer at issue; the value of the text, at least in the minds of his female readers, lies

in the fact that it describes for them the way that they can have a transcendent experience that will allow them to become more familiar with nature of divinity. Writing and reflection on personal experience had clearly become a full-fledged epistemology for these women.

The Mirror of Our Lady

If in Christine de Pisan we have an example of the interplay between a female author, her experience, and writing, *The Mirror of Our Lady* provides us a glance at the interplay between female readers and their experience as imagine by a man. The primary audience for the text,⁴³ the nuns of the Bridgettine Abbey of Syon, was exceptional in that it had “access to unusual numbers of vernacular and Latin texts” (Wogan-Browne 217). This was a community of women with opportunity, and presumably the inclination, to read prodigiously. However, such an inclination was not without its potential risks. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne notes that even as late as the early fifteenth century, “the were seemingly no milieus in which the reading of vernacular religious texts was uncontroversial” (217)⁴⁴; thus the anonymous author of *The Mirror of Our Lady* explains the text’s “own purpose with exemplary care,” yet Wogan-Browne also notes the “positive...description of reading” in the text itself. In the prologue to his work, the author goes to some pains to describe the process of reading to the ladies for whom he

⁴³ The editors indicate that although the nuns of the Abbey of Syon were the primary audience of the piece, the manuscript “appears to have been made in the hope of reaching a wider audience than the small community of the Bridgettines at Syon, as part of a program of self-advertisement by the Syon community” (258). If this is the case, then the author’s depiction of reading is all the more remarkable.

⁴⁴ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne cites Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1409 as a possible reason for this wariness of reading religious texts in the vernacular.

intends this, for, as he says, “Devoute redyng of holy bokes ys called one of the partes of contemplacyon, for yt causyth moche grace and comforte to the soulle yf yt be well and dyscretely used” (261). The emphasis on the value of reading is apparent, but so is the need to couple reading with reflection and contemplation; only then, when it is “well and discretely used” can it provide “grace and comfort to the soul.”

In order for the women to benefit fully from their reading, he advised “fyve thinges” (261). He first advises the nuns to read only that which is fit for them, telling them “For syth youre holy rewle forbydeth you all vayne and ydel wordes in all tymes and places, by the same it forbyddeth you all redyng of all vayne and ydel thinges. For redyng is a manner of spekyng.” The frank, authoritative way in which he links the act of reading with the act of speech emphasizes the connection between the realm of the text and the realm of speech. In Chapter 3, I argued that as the notion of experience was developed in women’s writing, women relied on traditions of orality, traditions that have long been acknowledged in medieval writing attributed to women. Here we have an author who was certainly male, establishing the act of women’s reading to speech. Clearly then, the notions of speaking, writing, and reading were seen as very much connected.

The second thing that the author counsels his female readers to do is to read with “meke reverence and devocyon.” He continues,

For lyke as in prayer man spekyth to God, so in redyng God spekyth to man; and therefore he oughte reverently to be herde. And also meke reverence had to the worde causeth grace and lyghte of understandynge to enter in to the soulle, wherby the soulle seyth and feleth more openly the trouth of the worde and hathe the more comforte and edyfycacyon theof.
(261-62)

Once again we see the emphasis on reading as an oral act. In his first piece of advice, the author tells his readers that their act of reading is a personal speech act; in his second, he tells his readers that the text also provides an opportunity for God to speak to them. Thus the text becomes a kind of dialogue, an opportunity for the reader to hear and be heard. Through this act of speaking and reflection the “lyghte of understandynge” may enter her soul, and she may gain comfort and edification: in other words, reading furnishes her with experience. Like any experience, however, this experience is not gained without conscious effort. In his third piece of advice, the author cautions his readers that they ought to “laboure to understande the same thyng that ye rede” (262).

Unlike writers like Elisabeth of Schönau and Julian of Norwich who encouraged the sharing of experience, the author *The Mirror of Our Lady* explicitly cautions his readers not to “speke yt fourthe to other” (262). This appears to fly in the face of the experiential process as articulated in this dissertation and as it appears in other texts. The reason here may be the same reason for the author’s cautious explanation of his purpose. While Lollardy might have helped impress the importance of textual interpretation on the minds of late fifteenth century readers, it has also garnered the disapproval of the ecclesiastical establishment. Lollardy, according to Steven Justice, is characterized by (1) the belief that everyone should have access to the scriptures in the vernacular, (2) that preaching is the right of everyone including lay people and women, and (3) skepticism toward the church and its rites, especially in the transubstantiation of the Eucharist.⁴⁵ In

⁴⁵ In Anne Hudson’s *Premature Reformation* (1988) she argues convincingly that Lollardy was a widespread phenomenon in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The idea

writing a religious text in the vernacular and encouraging women to read it, the author was laying himself open to a potential accusation of Lollardy, or at least of Lollard practice. To have his audience preaching to each other, or worse, to the outside community, would have been an even greater danger.

In his fifth and final note to his readers, the author once again advises discretion, telling his readers that

bokes speke in diverse wyses...and to tel how spiritual persones oughte to be governed in all theyr lyvyng...And when ye rede in eny such bokes, ye oughte to beholde in yourselfe sadly whether ye lyve and do as ye rede or no, and what wyl and desire ye have therto (262).

These women were encouraged to make these texts part of their community: to speak through them and to allow them to speak, and then to reflect on the text, to work to

that people ought to be interpreting scripture for themselves and should be free to share their interpretations with each other no doubt helped to reinforce the experiential epistemology already apparent, and to some degree available in what this dissertation is terming women's writing. We also see this ideology, some argue, in the literature from the period. For example, there are several moments in the *Canterbury Tales* which Steven Justice points to as moments when Lollardy surfaces. During the Wife of Bath's Prologue in which she begins to share her own views on marriage—grounded in some scriptural references, it ought to be noted—both the Friar and the Pardoner interrupt her. The Friar even accuses her of “preaching,” and the Pardoner asks her to stop. Justice claims that the Wife is engaging in what Chaucer's audience would have perceived as a Lollard practice: sharing her own interpretation of a scriptural passage publicly. Although I feel that this is one way to read the Wife of Bath's Prologue, and while Lollardy may have been an influence, the extent to which the Wife of Bath's speech can be termed “Lollard” is questionable. And yet I run into the problem I outline above: it seems impossible to prove that the Wife's speech is *not* Lollard, or influenced by Lollardy. In my own analysis of the Wife of Bath, I attribute the Wife's speech to a process of experience; nonetheless, I do acknowledge the debt that what I define as experiential epistemology owes to what are now perceived as Lollard ideas and practices. However, I think that there was a reciprocal relationship between the two ideas; just as Lollardy may have helped solidify the place of experience as a recognized textual epistemology, I also think that experience-as-textual-epistemology as articulated in works in the twelfth, thirteenth, and early fourteenth centuries also had a tremendous effect on Lollardy.

understand it, and to compare it with their own lives' experience as they understood it and determine what ways this new textual experience could alter or change that experience. In a very real and explicit way, this early fifteenth century male author sees texts not just as places for recording, transmitting, and encouraging experience, but a site for experience itself.

Conclusion

The shift from Hildegard of Bingen's twelfth century recording of her visions in her letters to the anonymous male author of *The Mirror of Our Lady* is remarkable. But even more remarkable is the shift from the writing of Hugh of St. Victor to the *Mirror*. While each writer had, ostensibly, the same broad purpose: to spiritual edify and teach his readers, the author of the *Mirror* seems to feel that the best way his readers can do so is through their own experience with the text rather than his authoritative word.

So apparent was the draw of experience that male writers as early as the late thirteenth century began experimenting with invoking experience as their authority through the voices of women. By the end of Dom Dinis's career in the early decades of the fourteenth century, he apparently no longer felt the need to borrow the voice of a woman, only the need to route experience through a female presence in the text, thus enabling men to participate as men in the process of experience. The trend of borrowing women's voices and their presence to access experience is articulated explicitly in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, but it appears to be a method that he explored, albeit in a more limited way, in an earlier work, *The Legend of Good Women*. What male authors gained through this invoking of experience as their authority was entrée to an

epistemology that, among other things, lent itself uniquely well to the expression of pathos in way that may not have been otherwise accessible to them textually. It expanded the range of what was textually possible.

Christine de Pisan seems to have recognized this as well as anyone, and while she could and did rely on older forms of authorizing herself and her work, she also relied on her experience because not only did it provide her scope for expression, it uniquely authorized her writing.

The contrast of the twelfth century, a time when women were beginning to craft a textual epistemology authorizing their voices, with the fifteenth, when men are encouraging women to turn to texts themselves as sites of the very kind experience that their forbearers first articulated is indeed dramatic.

Conclusion

Experience, as developed in women's literature in the twelfth century and expanded by writers, both men and women, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, changed the nature of textual authority and altered perceptions of epistemology and authorship.⁴⁶ By the late fourteenth century, experience as an epistemology was so deeply entrenched that Geoffrey Chaucer was able to give them a name: "Experience," his Wife of Bath would claim, was "non auctoritee," yet the very fact that Chaucer was able to identify, name, and employ this process in the Wife of Bath's prologue as well as in her tale indicates that many people were coming to see experience as very valid kind of authority. This recognition of experience and personal observation as authoritative paved the way for the Age of Discovery's emphasis on empiricism; it also is at the heart of present theories of communication and pedagogy.⁴⁷ These changes in the way experience

⁴⁶ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker Liz. Herbert McAvoy's. *Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life*, a wide-ranging collection of essays treating various definitions and facets of experience as it appears in medieval women's (and men's writing) was published as I was finishing this study. McAvoy's earlier work on experience in women's writing of the Middle Ages is covered in earlier chapters of this dissertation.

⁴⁷ During the 1960s, James Britton research focused on the generative processes of writing. He argued that expressive writing was foundational to all other types of writing. He argued that all writing begins in the mind of the writer as expressive. This writing as it develops can take other forms: transactional, developed expressive writing, or poetic writing. The notion that expressive writing is necessary to perform any other kind of writing would inform Expressivism, a pedagogical approach to the teaching or writing popularized by Peter Elbow and others in the 1970s and 80s and beyond, as well as Expressivism's advocacy of free-writing, and help some expressivists argue for the value of Expressivism as a pedagogical approach. Britton's work in discussing the use of expressive writing also led to what Sherrie L. Gradin terms a "misconception" about expressivist theory. In his book *The Development of Writing Abilities*, Britton made a very clear link between the term "developmental" and the term "expressive." The thought that expressivist writing and pedagogy is somehow less developed, primary, or even

was viewed and authority granted would not have been possible without the advent of women's writing (writing by and also writing specifically for women) and the way women writers developed experience as an epistemological process.

I have demonstrated that modern notions of experience can trace their roots back to late Middle Ages, and indeed, even further. While this study has primarily explored the process of experience as it was invoked by medieval writers, the idea of experience as authoritative is by no means new. In classical times Cicero discussed its importance; the authority of experience is clear in the writings of Paul, and the *Confessions* of Augustine. However, beginning in the twelfth century, we begin to see a different emphasis and an increased attention to and value placed on experience. While Cicero discussed the importance of the senses in making knowledge, Paul cited his experience as justification for his beliefs, and Augustine reflected on the nature of interiority, the women writers of the twelfth century articulated in text a process through which their perceptions and reflections became authoritative textual knowledge, and they encouraged others to repeat this process and draw on the processes of others for their own knowledge and authority. This epistemology would revolutionize how people thought about what constituted authority and what counted as knowledge across Europe. Indeed, epistemologies embraced by the academy today such as empiricism owe an ontological debt to those twelfth century women who communicated their own observations, describing how they

“unacademic” continues to this day. It is important to remember, however, that Britton argues that expressive writing is primary *and* secondary. He places developed expressive writing on the same level as poetic and transactional writing. This is a fact that seemed to be missed by some who argued that expressive writing is necessarily foundational *only*.

drew their conclusions based on these observations, and encouraging their peers to do the same.

We see this process of experience mirrored in modern theories of practice and performativity, in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva and Elaine Scarry, whose theories have helped me to better understand and articulate the project these women of the Middle Ages were undertaking and the legacy that they left.

Through contemporary pedagogical theories, such as those of Paulo Freire and Peter Elbow, I argue that the legacy of experience in writing left to us by these medieval women writers is still a very influential part of the way we understand authority in writing. Nowhere is this influence more apparent than in the social-epistemic and expressivist approaches to the teaching and theory of writing.

When Peter Elbow was writing *Writing Without Teachers* he was doing so in an environment that Randall R. Freisinger would describe twenty years later as one of “governmental hypocrisy and institutional oppression” even in the university (188). Freisinger described the casualty reports from Vietnam mingling with reports of government excesses. He notes it as a time when the names of Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie, two of the key founding figures of what would be called Expressivism, were invoked in “conspiratorial whispers” lest they make faculty members angry at their very mention. When Ken Macrorie published *Telling Writing* in 1970, he accused educators of “unintentionally” making their students into bad writers. By forcing them to conform to an arbitrary academic standard, Macrorie argued, educators were taking away the students’ ability to write about “truths that counted for them,” and instead were forced to

write “dead” prose, but prose that was acceptable to the academic community. These teachers felt as though the academy were depriving students of the right to articulate their own experiences and observations as authoritative in favor of a more hierarchical, institutionalized model.

Inherent in both of these foundational figures’ writing, then, was a suspicion of, if not an outright disdain for traditional modes authority, and a belief that such authority often corrupted and hindered the student writer, rather than helped him or her. Authenticity, the authenticity of the individual writer or student became the most important facet of good writing. And teachers and institutions often got in the way of “good writing,” according to the early expressivist school of thought. It is no wonder then that there was such anger on the part of some teachers and institutions directed toward what Richard Fulkerson would term in his 1979 survey of the field of rhetoric and composition, Expressivism.

Much fuss was made early on, as Freisinger implies, about Expressivism’s inherent mistrust of traditional authority in favor of the authority of the individual’s experience. This mistrust, however, was not unique to Expressivism. Paul Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* expresses an even more vehement suspicion of institutionalized authority. And unlike Macrorie, Freire seems to imply that the damaging of students through what he termed the banking-concept pedagogy was in fact, intentional. Although Freire’s pedagogy of *consciencização* was a much more social pedagogy, focusing on groups of individuals rather than the individual him or herself, it is

important to note that expressivist teachers were not the first to challenge the authority of the teacher in the classroom.

Written in Portuguese in 1968, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), is the result of Paulo Freire's teaching illiterate Recifean farmers, and later rural people in other developing nations to read and write. Beyond just a theory of writing, Freire's approach to teaching proved extremely effective; he succeeded in teaching his class of three hundred Recifean student(-teachers) to read and write in forty-five days (Jacobus 315). Freire's approaches reflect clear debts to the similarly oppressed writers of the medieval period and echoes of their ideas can be found throughout Freire's work.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire introduces the concept of *conscientização*, which is the realization, or the ability of the individual to realize and perceive his or her oppression, and his or her willingness to take action against it. He speaks of the fear of *conscientização* on the part of those in power and the belief on the part of those indoctrinated in the oppressors' ideology that "the *conscientização* of men to a specific situation of injustice might not lead them to 'destructive fanaticism' or to a 'sensation of the total collapse of their world'" (Freire 19-20). He refutes the idea that his pedagogy would lead to "destructive fanaticism," instead insisting that the methods he advocates lead to self-affirmation, and responsible citizenship. He encourages people to read the work with an open mind, but admits this text is probably "for radicals" (21). "Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative" (21). In this way, Freire is describing a process very similar to the process of experience articulated in the writing of so many of the authors

whose work I have explored in this dissertation, and I believe he owes a clear debt to the women who, in the Middle Ages, achieved what Freire terms *consciencização* through their experience.

Catherine Sanok argues that “late medieval writers used [...] imagined community to think about the structure and priorities of other social communities” (Sanok 48). In a sense, these women were the first to practice what Freire terms “dialogics,” a process he feels is both necessary for learning and teaching: “[t]he ‘dialogical man’ believes in other men even before he meets them face to face...however...[t]he ‘dialogical man’ is critical and knows that although it is within the power of men to create and transform in a concrete situation of alienation, men may be impaired in the use of that power” (79). Thus these writers were practicing Freire’s dialogics, imagining their audiences, societies, and structures of power and responding to them in their writing, just as Freire would instruct his students centuries later.

Consciencização is, in some sense, becoming aware of what Bordieu called “doxa.” However, the struggle, according to Bourdieu—and I believe Freire would agree—is not enough. “The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of the doxa, or short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy” (169). The orthodoxy, the epistemology of experience with its attendant conventions, is one that Expressivism and its founders would rely on to articulate their theories on writing and writing pedagogy.

During the 1980s, influenced by Peter Elbow's second book on writing, *Writing with Power*, many expressivists were also concerned with the idea of authority: who can have it and how. Elbow, and many others, particularly feminists and writers of racial and ethnic minorities argued that power comes from a person's inherent identity. The identity or individual voice of the writer, what Donald Graves termed as "the imprint of ourselves on writing" was seen, in Graves' words as "the driving force" of writing, and one's identity as a woman, or a member of a minority group gave one power.

Later, in his conversations with David Bartholomae, Elbow argued that the students need space, free from the teacher, what Elbow saw as the most powerful societal agent in the classroom, and he advocated what he termed the "micro-utopian space" of free-writing. The need for this space that Elbow argues is so crucial for writers is also evident in the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.

In their work on autobiographical writing, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson theorize an "intersubjective" self, a self that builds his or her identity through the interactions of others. Catherine Sanok, and more recently Jennifer Bryant argue that the genesis of this conception of the self can be traced to medieval women's writing. This notion of selfhood seems, on the surface, to be the notion of selfhood that social-epistemologists like David Bartholomae discuss: a self without room for interiority. However, Smith and Watson argue that the self is created through factors that are both "internal and external," in other words, even a self that is created intersubjectively, there is some interiority, some capacity for meaning-making that resides within the self. Jennifer Bryant argues that medieval interiority worked in much the same way. In other

words, we tell stories about ourselves to ourselves, and while it's true that these stories are socially-produced, the fact that we tell them to ourselves creates a kind of interiority that experience can help us to simultaneously create and explore. One of the goals of Expressivism is to seek out, investigate, and write about that interior space.

Indeed, this seems to be a goal of writers since the medieval period. In discussing more modern writers such as George Elliot, Herman Melville, and James Joyce, Richard Poirier in his book *The Performing Self* noted, "In their struggle with language and with literary shape, the writers I'm discussing become aware, and then turn this awareness into forms of expression" (11). This, then, has become the role of the writer.

In his book, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge*, David Simpson notes that "the very notion of modern subjectivity came into being as a feminized entity" (17). The dissertation has aimed to demonstrate the truth of this statement on a very fundamental level. Not only was the entity feminized, but so were the agents. Because women found themselves unable to write with authority in the Middle Ages, they devised a system of authority that was in fact contingent on their subjected status. Through a conscious exploration of their own subjectivity, these women were able to write with authority, ultimately changing our views of what constitutes authority and who could wield it.

These writers fundamentally changed not only changed our notions of authority, but our understanding of epistemology. They altered the ways through which knowledge could be made, and in so doing laid the groundwork for early modern notions of empiricism and humanism.

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