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"Good to Think With": Women and Exempla in Four Medieval and Renaissance English Texts

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“Good to Think With”:
Women and *Exempla* in Four Medieval and Renaissance English Texts

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines four English texts—*Beowulf*; *Ancrene Wisse*; Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*' *Man of Law's Tale* and *Second Nun's Tale*; and Richard Hyrde's English translation, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, of Juan Luis Vives' *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*—in terms of their use of *exempla* related to women. These texts all find women good “to think with,” to use, from *The Body and Society*, Peter Brown's appropriation of Levi-Strauss's famous wordplay. The ways in which these Old English, Middle English, and modern English texts portray women's lives and bodies as a gateway into thought about the Christian life are also compared with portrayals of the lives of female saints in hagiographic texts of late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to Catherine, Ella, Isabelle, Miles, and William, in appreciation and love for them, and to their father and my husband, Charles Pastoor, for his love, inspiration, encouragement, and uncomplaining hard work in making possible and worthwhile my writing. I dedicate this work also to my mother, Jean Fish, who has always made every kind of work and educational goal seem beautiful, and to my brothers Steve Fish and Jeff Fish. And chiefly I dedicate my work to those I miss very much, but whose voices I can still hear and remember: my father, Roy Fish, and my sister, Holli Lancaster.

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Introduction

I am writing about four texts that have something to say about women's conduct, especially through *exempla* and exemplary narratives: *Beowulf*, *Ancrene Wisse*, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and the *Second Nun's Tale* from the *Canterbury Tales*, and *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, Richard Hyrde's English translation of Juan Luis Vives' neo-Latin treatise, *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*. The texts cover a sweep of time: *Beowulf* might have been composed as early as the eighth century, and the *Instruction* was written in the early sixteenth-century. All the texts share in common English provenance and language, despite the differences between Old English, two varieties of Middle English, and modern English of the fifteenth century. Vives' *Instruction* was first composed in Latin; however, it was written for Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's queen, and the text was soon translated into English by Hyrde, friend of the Thomas More family.

All four of my authors are (most likely) men, not women; that is, unless a woman wrote *Beowulf*, as Paull F. Baum speculated decades ago and for which idea he gives no less than fifteen reasons. One of his reasons is the nature of *Beowulf*'s *exempla*—or digressions—which are the topic of my first chapter, and another is the feminine “mildness” of *Beowulf*, still a topic of scholarly interest (358-359). Another caveat: the author of *Ancrene Wisse* is unknown, although Bella Millett has discovered that most evidence leads to Dominican authorship (General Introduction xix)—which would make the author a man.

Rather than approaching these texts' *exempla* for women in terms of the binary of male vs. female, I am interested in the kind of model described by Peter Brown, that reveals the “deeply ingrained tendency of all men in the ancient world, to use women, ‘to think with’” (*Body* 155, 153), to use Brown's appropriation of Levi-Strauss's famous wordplay. Brown is speaking

of the late antique Christian use of romance formulas in early hagiography in the Apocryphal Acts of the first centuries of Christianity.

In using Brown's schema for my own examination of medieval *exempla* for women, I do not want to ignore what J. H. Robinson, in his biographical introduction of Petrarch, called the "unnatural and often indecent twaddle about women which fills the theological works of the Middle Ages" (92) and which today is simply called misogyny. However, I want to explore the idea that it was not only in early Christianity that women and their bodies were a gateway into thinking about and to performing Christianity—but that it is also true of the medieval and early modern period too. As Brown puts it, not only did the early church find women

less clearly defined and less securely bounded by the structures that held men in place in society. The woman was a 'gateway.' She was both a weak link and a bridgehead. Women allowed in what men did not permit to enter. . . . Yet women were often a gateway in a positive sense. . . . The immediacy of the bonds of which women were considered capable was valued by a community that desperately needed loyalty. (*Body* 153-154)

Exempla show that the medieval and early modern worlds found women "good to think with" as well. Take for example the assumption that male vs. female—and soul vs. body—are medieval dualisms. Caroline Walker Bynum writes that historians of the body frequently embrace these as "dualisms" or binaries as taken for granted in medieval thought. It would follow then, that because women represent the flesh and the body, that "discipline or control of the body" is therefore discipline or control of the woman, since she is the body as opposed to the soul. (*Fragmentation* 182-183) As one medieval sermon shows, *exempla* can reverse these association of the female with the body (and sex) and instead associate female with the soul in

opposition to the body, as is borne out Bodleian MS 806, a manuscript set of Sunday sermons, c. 1400. H. L. Spencer's puts in side-by-side columns a transcription of an Advent Sunday sermon by Odo of Cheriton, both in the Latin and in the Middle English into which the Latin was translated.

In this Advent Sunday sermon, centered around the text of the triumphal entry, the speaker dilates on the donkey—"asse"—that Jesus rides into Jerusalem in Matthew 21:

A wode man he were þat wolde sette his asse on his deys by hum at þe mete,
 arayep hit and fedep hit and kisseþ it, and turmente his fayre wyfe wiþ hougir,
 þurst and colde . . . Bot þe fayre soule, Cristes spouse [. . .] wiþ gostly foode we
 fedon it not, ne cloþen it not wiþ vertues . . . So we louen oure asse, þat is oure
 fleysche, ful of stynkyng lust, but þe fayre ymage of God, þe sowle, we hauen in
 dispite. (Spencer 650-651)

He is a mad man who would set his donkey at the table with him for dinner,
 clothe it and feed it and kiss it, and torment his fair wife with hunger, thirst, and
 cold . . . but the fair soul, Christ's spouse, with spiritual food we feed it not, nor
 clothe it with virtues. . . . So we love the donkey, that is our flesh, full of stinking
 lust, but the fair image of God, the soul, we hold in contempt. (Translation mine)

This sermon's *exemplum*, which follows its Latin original closely, is a crude overthrowing of the male/female and soul/body binaries—but it breaks the assumed patterns nonetheless, and urges the listener: as a man would love his wife, so he should care for his soul, rather than the ass of the flesh. Here, female is the soul and not the flesh.

This particular sermon example also proves, however, that women are “good to think with” and in particular good to explicate Scripture with. The Middle English version, in a

deviation from Odo's Latin original, adds in another bit of commentary about the nature of women: *And þerfore we [ben] blynde, for a blynde man as gladly he clippip and kisseþ a foule lopely strumpet as a fayre womman* (651) "And therefore we are blind, for a blind man embraces and kisses a foul, repulsive debauched woman as happily as he would a beautiful woman" (Translation mine). After the binaries of ass/woman and flesh/soul, the Middle English version gives us now two types of women: loathsome, unchaste woman and the fair woman to illustrate the flesh/soul binary. Both sides are female now, and apparently the negative, fleshly side of the *exempla*—the *asse* and the *strumpet*—are best of all to think with, requiring twice as many words of explanation as the soul and the fair woman.

But what are *exempla* in the first place, and how do they work? Joseph Albert Mosher defined *exempla* in his 1911 book *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England* as a "brief narrative" with "human characters" (6). He also lists four types of materials containing *exempla* and six uses for it, chiefly involving morality, truth, or entertainment (6-8). Despite his use of the term "brief" in his definition of exemplum, Mosher includes saints' lives, at least in terms of "sources from which *exempla* were taken" (6-7). More recent studies of *exempla* employ narratological strategies; other *exempla*-like terms for analogous short narratives are "para-narratives," a term Maureen Alden uses for primarily artistic stories nestled within works and that happen within the time of the main narrative (Gwara, "Misprision" 303). Alden explores para-narratives in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Homer's para-narratives include the sort of passage in which Telemachus is encouraged to act more like Orestes, who had recently killed Aegisthus for seducing Orestes' mother and killing his father, Agamemnon (Alden 3). In the *Odyssey*, the Aegisthus story is not from the distant past, and it evokes the dangerous possibilities for Penelope and Odysseus, since Odysseus is absent and

Penelope surrounded by lecherous suitors. *Beowulf*'s inset stories, or “digressions,” as in Adrien Bonjour calls them in *The Digressions in Beowulf*, could not be para-narratives, since most of them happen in the time before the main narrative. Scott Gwara calls the *Beowulf* stories “metadiegetic narratives.” Like para-narratives, *Beowulf*'s metadiegetic stories give the characters situations analogous to their own to which they can respond. Other words for *exempla* are “episodes, paradigms . . . mirror stories” (Gwara, “Misprision” 303).

The early history of *exempla* comes out of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Topos*. Aristotle uses the word *paradeigma*, “example,” to describe “one of the two bases of all rhetorical argumentation,” which can be either a past happening or an invented fiction (Lyons 7). In the late antique and early medieval period *exempla* were deployed frequently in sermons, since *exempla* “grew up in the Roman Church as a distinct species of illustration based upon actual or supposedly actual happenings” (Mosher 6). However, early medieval sermons are few and far between. Few priests were trained in rhetoric, and “clerical education was designed primarily for performance of the liturgy”—although Aelfric, Wulfstan, and the Carolingian reformers were exceptions “to the early medieval ambivalence toward preaching” (McLaughlin 84-86). Once the pastoral reforms of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council were enacted, however, biblical and devotional literature—and the *exempla* in them—began to proliferate to meet the demands of increasing lay piety and vernacular spirituality. Every person was supposed to attend Mass and confession at least once a year, and priests would have to be properly trained to receive confession and to themselves teach their parishioners. To this end, “the mendicant orders (particularly the Franciscans and Dominicans . . .) undertook the production of a vast literature relating to child-rearing and education, including works of hagiography, confessional manuals,

encyclopaedias, collections of moral *exempla*, educational manuals, and sermons” (Goodich III.1).

Frederic Tubach claims that after Lateran IV, *exempla* reflected a more socially aware clergy and lost the univalent, ethical core mission they had in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages (412). Later medieval exemplums, says Tubach, became more a “mirror of life” or “satire of personal weakness and social malpractice” (412). The Franciscan and Dominican orders were excoriated in the 1386 Council of Salzburg for misuse of *exempla*: “These false prophets [. . .] by their sermons full of fables often lead astray the souls of their hearers.” Three more councils passed measures to curb *exempla* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Mosher 18).

Mosher’s definition of *exempla* “based upon actual events” was particularly important for sermons because the *sine qua non* to a sermon was that it “must be **true**” (sic) (Spencer 633). Otherwise, someone who did not care for the sermon or how it was delivered would try to label such preachers as “false preachers, who told lies”—a paramount sin in medieval culture both because of the idea that the spoken word was legally and spiritually binding and because a frequent accusation made by and against Lollards was spiritual heresy, or telling lies (633).

Avoiding this problem—being accused of giving the lie—explains why most medieval English sermons are derived from Latin ones (Spencer 630), why the form (though not necessarily content) of sermons in medieval England stays safely with the patristic homily, and why writers of medieval English sermons are noticeably, and by our standard peculiarly, unwilling to write original prose—this is perhaps their most distinctive characteristic. They were reluctant because the merely personal has no abiding authority—why should audiences believe a preacher on his own say-so? (635)

Perhaps exceptions to this last point—a lack of original composition—occurred when preachers supplied *exempla* themselves in model sermons made without them (Kienzle, Conclusion 976).

Lateran IV was one watershed in *exempla* proliferation; historians of *exempla* see another in the Renaissance. John D. Lyons, for one, says *exempla* were treated differently in the late Renaissance, as compared to the Middle Ages, in large measure because the Renaissance also laid new claims to *exempla* of classical antiquity. Lyons claims that he tries to avoid saying that medieval use of *exempla* was indoctrination only: he admits that the claim that medieval “exemplary texts” sought univalently to indoctrinate or “[convey] a ‘message’” is an oversimplification of their function and represents only the “putative” practice of the Middle Ages (23-24). Other scholars see in Renaissance texts, in particular Montaigne, new awareness of the fragility of the relationship between *exempla* and their context and assert that Renaissance humanism “puts new pressure on the exemplary impulse toward univocal moral truth” (Allen 9).

The truth of *exempla* seems to be that *exempla* were problematic both before and after the Renaissance. With the revival of classical texts, Renaissance humanist writers had new opportunities to deploy classical *exempla*. The English version of Juan Luis Vives’ *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, for example, is stuffed with *exempla* of classical heroines and Roman matrons. The text also betrays the tensions of using pagan *exempla* in a text with the fifteenth-century Christian agenda of giving advice to young women: Even while using *exempla* from Ovid, the text suggests that readers avoid Ovid’s love poetry. *Instruction* also lists as exemplary, saints like Thecla—who preached and baptized herself, obliging Tertullian to explain in his *On Baptism* that her story was invented by a rogue presbyter (W. Hansen 53). The text navigates the difficulties of the cross-dressing Thecla by not going into much detail about her or her exploits. Vives also participates in the tradition of apologizing for *exempla*. After reciting numerous pre-

Christian anecdotes, the text professes that “after these preceptes of Christen men, I am a shamed to reherse ought out of Pagans” (41).

This strategy—apologizing for pre-Christian examples but using them nevertheless—had already been employed six hundred years earlier by Alfred when he translated Boethius’ *Consolatio Philosophiae* into the vernacular Old English at the end of the ninth century. Alfred uses thirteen out of fourteen of Boethius’ classical stories, and just before the anecdote of Orpheus and Eurydice, inserts his own words:

Ne fo we no on ða bisna & on ða bispel for ðara leasena spella lufan, ac forðæmmðe we woldon mid gebecnan þa soðfæstnesse, & woldon ðæt hit wurde not to nytte ðam geherendum.¹ (XXXV.10-13)

We do not betake ourselves to examples and fables, for love of fictitious speeches, but because we desire therewith to point out the truth, and desire that it may be useful to the hearers.² (84)

Despite his disclaimer, Alfred extends most of the classical narratives he uses and also makes those stories more “vivid and concrete” (Mosher 23), even as he has assured readers that he does not love the mythological and classical *exempla* for themselves.

The value and use of classical and pagan narrative stories and *exempla* in Christian use was even before Alfred a topic of anxiety in the Middle Ages in English texts, although Alfred deals with the classical stories of Boethius by turning the Orpheus and Eurydice story into allegory that is “explicitly Christian” (Greenfield and Calder 48). Some hundred years earlier, in

¹ Quotations from Alfred’s Old English translation of Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* are taken from *King Alfred’s Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae*, edited by Walter John Sedgefield.

² This English translation of Alfred’s translation of Boethius’ *Consolation* is by Samuel Fox in *King Alfred’s Anglo-Saxon Version of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy*.

797, in a Latin letter addressed to “Speratus,” now known to be Bishop Unuuona of Leicester, the York-educated Alcuin wrote an *epistola ammonitoria* from St. Martin’s, Tours (Bullough 102) about lays of *Hineldus*. *Hineldus* is “unmistakably Ingeld, the *Heaðobardic* prince who appears in *Beowulf*, *Widsið*, and several continental sources” (Neidorf 44). Alcuin writes:

Let God’s words be read at the episcopal dinner-table. It is right that a reader should be heard, not a harpist, patristic discourse, not pagan song. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow and has no room for both. The Heavenly King does not wish to have communion with lost, pagan kings listed name by name: for the eternal King reigns in Heaven, while the lost, pagan king wails in Hell.³ (qtd. in Bullough 124)

Perhaps some of the “patristic discourse” Alcuin would recommend might have been that of Augustine, who berated of himself for caring about the pagan Dido when he ought to be more concerned for his soul (15).

We know Alcuin’s and Augustine’s reactions to pagan stories, but is difficult to examine the reaction of female medieval audiences to such *exempla*. Bullough’s analysis of Alcuin’s letter reveals that the context for Alcuin’s prescriptions about the “episcopal dinner table” revolves around the *convivia*. Since *convivium*, as Bullough shows, is a non-monastic term for church or even secular feasts in Alcuin’s letters (105-106), it is conceivable that there sometimes might have been women in this audience.

We can, however, read ways that the texts imagine their readers will respond to *exempla*: the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, a thirteenth-century guide to living for anchoresses, considered reading to be an active process for his audience. He suggests it as the antidote or cure to sloth in

³ Translated by David A. Bullough in the Appendix to his “What Has Ingeld to Do with Lindisfarne?”

at least two instances in his section on temptations in Part IV. The bodily nature of reading is also clear in the quote from Jerome that the speaker uses as an authority: Jerome's *Epistola 22*: "Semper in manu tua sacra sit lectio [. . .] Hali redunge beo eauer I pine honden" (1558-1560) "Let holy reading be always in your hands" (153). The rest of Jerome's passage—in his letter on women who have chosen ascetic virginity—indicates that holding onto the holy reading will help one with the endurance to keep awake, although if one does fall asleep, at least one's head will land on the holy text. Jerome's view of reading goes against modern ideas of reading as an inactive luxury and supports Mary Carruthers' assertion that the "medieval understanding of the complete process of reading does not observe in the same way the distinction we make between 'what I read in a book' and 'my experience'" (qtd. in Allen 17). In the *Ancrene Wisse*, reading was a form of manual labor, the opposite of slothfulness, for those privileged enough to hold texts in their hands. We might well wonder how many women, besides the original aristocratic young audience of *Ancrene Wisse*, had the luxury to read or hear the text, and therefore judge for themselves the *exempla* that abounded in texts of the medieval period?

In the early medieval period, many women in monasteries would have been literate. Women in religious orders were "rich matrons, noble ladies, and members of royal houses" are the only ones who could afford the life in a monastery—only sliver of the population. Female religious were probably of higher social class than men in their religious orders (Diem 434). In many cases, in fact, the dividing line between those who were educated and those who were not in the medieval period is not so much a barrier of gender but social status. As Peter Dronke explains, in the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen was challenged over her policy of excluding women of lower rank from her monastery, perhaps the least palatable aspect of her "overpowering, electrifying presence" (Dronke 165, 144). We know that Anglo-Saxon nuns, as

Elizabeth Robertson and others explain, were “exceptionally proficient in Latin,” especially before the Benedictine Reform in the tenth century (“Living Hand” 18). Robertson cites as evidence of Latin literacy the Abbess Hild of Whitby from the 600s; the nuns at Barking who read Aldhelm’s *De virginitate*; and even examples after the Norman conquest of the eleventh-century nuns of Wilton abbey (“Living Hand” 18). Twelfth-century nuns discussed lyric poetry and “wrote in Latin and used classical models” (Labarge 219).

This short list is far from exhaustive—and it is focused on the Anglo-Saxons—however, it illustrates how specific and fragmentary (although growing) our knowledge of educated women in the early Middle Ages is. Most women would have been listeners and not readers to any text. The distance, however, between an “oral lay culture and a written clerical culture” began to break down in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The late medieval period brought more disparity between the education of men and women. The universities, the first of which appeared around 1200, excluded women and were a setback for the education of women, who now lacked access to professional academia (Ferrante 17; Green 85). There is, however, evidence of “female reading communities” (Green 88), attested to in the availability of prayer books and by the way women left one another books in their wills. Especially in England, women were apparently bequeathing their Book of Hours and other books to their daughters or to female religious houses (88). In the late fifteenth-century, the seal of Margaret, Lady Hungerford and Botreaux, depicts a kneeling woman looking down at an open book on her lap (Meale 128). Women did read romances, which together with “court literature” were the “second largest group in women’s reading matter,” but secular literature would never eclipse the importance of religious writing and didactic literature in the Middle Ages (Green 129). I have so

far discussed religious literature, but in the late medieval period, other didactic literature, especially conduct books, “proliferated” (Ashley and Clark x).

When I announced to a friend I was doing a study of books of conduct for women she responded, “Oh—yes. Men telling women what to do.” Scholars note, however, of a general undoing of the view that “conduct books were written by men to discipline women” (Ashley “*Miroir*” 87). Part of the problem may be the modern view of exemplary literature as always providing the kind of didacticism we expect. Sherry Reames implies that Chaucer was doing something revolutionary by presenting the secular saint Custance as a model in the fourteenth century—because “envisioning the saints chiefly as moral exemplars was not yet common in Chaucer’s time, even among the clergy” (“Piety” 93). In Chaucer’s lifetime, the Sarum manuscript tradition shows that breviaries with full-length “more sensational, miracle-filled lessons continued to flourish” over attempts to condense them into more “sober” synopses that emphasized imitating saintly good behavior. Keeping the more flamboyant traditional versions of saint’s tales apparently reflects what clergy themselves wanted (Reames “Piety” 93-94 n.37).

This brings up another question: what effect do *exempla* have? Do they work mimetically, encouraging their listeners or readers to imitate (or conversely, to avoid) the behavior illustrated for them? Certainly the idea of imitation of exemplary figures is the motivating factor in histories of monasteries that tell stories of their founders. As Catherine Cubitt explains, Bede's *Historia Abbatum* and Aethelwulf's poem *De Abbatibus* provide "the recollection of and veneration for founding fathers which forms the context for the cult of the native saints in early Anglo-Saxon England" (33). However, mimesis can also go the other way. Anxiety about the influence of *exempla* and narrative appears to have been around for as long as

exempla have existed. Concern about the effects of narrative on readers goes as far back as the Plato's concern in the *Republic* that poetry might be dangerous (Allen 12).

My goal is to examine *exempla* closely in the text in which they are deployed. Two of my texts are instructional manuals, and two are narrative poetry. In *Beowulf*, the topic of my first chapter, I explore a site of instruction to women from the narrator—the episode about Offa's wife, Fremu. In the Fremu episode, the issue of queenly conduct is taken up and the problem of Fremu's violence resolved by her marriage to Offa. Queens in *Beowulf*, however, are key if somewhat liminal figures in the *comitatus*, which is not, perhaps, such a purely male organization. However, explorations of kinship systems suggest that when women are married off to create alliances, the most potent meanings of the marriage exchange may have more to do with the men from which she is taken and to whom she is given than the bride herself. The poem's preoccupation with the continuation of royal lines also suggests that *Beowulf* is really the focus of the Fremu episode. That *Beowulf* requites the Fremu episode with his own, darker Freawaru story, however, suggests that he dodges this primacy by not marrying and, therefore, by not producing an heir. In the case of the Freawaru episode, using "women to think with" may involve *Beowulf* thinking about *Beowulf*, especially if he is a feminized, liminal character in his peace-keeping activities on behalf of the alliances in the narrative.

The second chapter focuses on a thirteenth-century text, the *Ancrene Wisse*, a text of many sources and one of many devotional texts that proliferated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. My discussion of *Ancrene Wisse's* Book III focuses on the speaker's remedies in helping the anchoresses, his reading audience, overcome anger. The medicinally-termed therapies offered by the speaker include the type of philosophical *therapeia* discussed in Stoic and Epicurean texts. I also discuss the anchoresses' relationship to other contemporaneous texts

in what one might call the “discourse community” of the *Ancrene Wisse*, such as the heroic and saintly life of the Middle English *Seinte Katherine*, that are likely intended reading for them in their own heroic spiritual endeavors as recluses.

In Chapter Three, my analysis of *The Man of Law’s Tale* and the *Second Nun’s Tale* continues to explore the relationship of medieval portrayals of women to hagiography. The late-second and early-third century Saint Thecla’s *vitae*, much of it based on late classical romance, in many ways resembles the *vitae* of Custance, *constantia*, the secular saint who becomes the protagonist of the *Man of Law’s Tale*. Custance’s story is also based on some romance elements, but it also takes on hagiographical themes; ultimately, Custance’s trials—her trips across the Mediterranean and her changing status from virgin into wife and widow as she is faced with both mistreatment and adoration—associate her with the medieval cult of saint’s relics. In the *Second Nun’s Tale*, by contrast, Cecile is a true virgin saint whose spirited debates with authorities and *passio* resemble Katherine’s in the Middle English *Seinte Katerine*.

The final chapter explores the English translation of *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, a 1523 treatise on women’s education by humanist Juan Luis Vives and dedicated to Catherine of Aragon. Richard Hyrde’s English translation, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, went through multiple versions over decades, including a Puritan version towards the end of the century. Vives structures his text in three parts around the “virgin, wife, and widow” concept of a woman’s life. His strictures on the chastity of the young girl (but also on wives) in Part I (and somewhat in part II) are the most foreign to us today, although arguably Vives was mollifying contemporary concerns about the moral effects of his championing education for women of all classes. The underexplored area of Vives’ copious *exempla* are my topic. I argue that Vives’ real agenda of freeing the minds of women through education is his texts’ real agenda, despite his

emphasis on chastity, and that his humanist inclusion of so much classical and Roman *exempla* are evidence and education in themselves.

What *exempla* often show is that they are not removable ancillaries from the main narrative or from the didactic *sententiae* of the text in which they are deployed. In his work on medieval sermons, H. L. Spencer says that “sermons offer tantalizing glimpses of a shadowy world of lay piety and aspirations to religious knowledge through reading and devout conversation (what Margery Kempe called ‘good communication’) which no fifteenth-century churchman, however repressive, could entirely restrain” (636). The Middle Ages did not carefully separate genres, and the same aspirations and machinations apply to the *exempla* in the narrative poetry and the instructional manuals I explore here.

Chapter One

Imagined Insults: Advice to Women in *Beowulf* and Who Takes It

If one were to look for advice in *Beowulf*, one would probably head towards Hrothgar's sermon and towards the poem's strategically placed digressions or episodes. I am interested in a particular moment in the Offa episode in which the narrator offers advice, or a warning perhaps, that is aimed at women. In the episode about Offa and his wife the narrator dispenses advice about queenly conduct; consequently, the Offa episode appears to have a happy ending in which its subject has become a better person and loved queen—through marriage. Shortly after this episode, Beowulf appears to contest its happy ending by coming up with his own intradiegetic narrative. The new episode Beowulf offers, however, is a sort of anti-digression; it is not a foray into the past like the others in the epic poem but is a journey into a possible future—a prediction about a marriage, a para-narrative prediction that renders the advice to women in the episode about Offa's wife less potent—and less meaningful. Beowulf re-imagines and follows up the *ligetorne*⁴ (1943) “imagined wrong”⁵ (70) of the Offa episode into his own para-narrative about the place of women—and ultimately his own place—in Germanic heroic society.

In *Beowulf*, modern readers must navigate the conventions of epic, oral performance, medieval Christianity, and an Anglo-Saxon audience whose thoughts about their pre-Christian Germanic past remain, in the words of Michael Alexander, “speculative” to us (6). What might the advice about queenly conduct in the Offa episode have meant to the first readers and hearers of the *Beowulf* poem? Exploring this question means investigating the episode about Offa's wife (formerly called Modthryth and now seen as Fremu) in which the narrator's advice about womanly conduct appears. I also examine the way *exempla* or intradiegetic narratives function

⁴ All quotations from *Beowulf* are from Klaeber's third edition of the text.

⁵ All translations of *Beowulf*, designated by page number, are by Michael Alexander in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* unless otherwise stated.

in epic and the way, immediately after the episode, that Beowulf responds to the episode and its advice by offering up his own para-narrative to the listening Anglo Saxon audience of the poem.

Beowulf is not short advice or in the traits of wisdom literature. Nineteenth-century German scholars who analyzed the poem recognized it as a “*Fürstenspiegel*, a mirror for princes,” as Bjork and Obermeier explain in their survey of the poem’s provenance (33). Nicholas Outzen’s 1816 review cites the poem’s hero and others in the poem as a “model for imitation with a view of teaching him a virtuous outlook . . . [in which the poet] enunciates the well-deserved word of praise . . . ‘That was a good king’” (Outzen 131).⁶ One hundred and one years later, Levin Schücking agrees that Beowulf “seems such a model” and is so sanitized that he reminds one of a juvenile fiction hero from a book in a “Christmas catalogue”—a book so full of “didacticism” that it certainly seemed “intended above all as instruction for youth” (537-538). Specifically, says Schücking, *Beowulf* must be for the education of a prince or rather for royal children, “if one remembers the common education of both sexes,” although upon comparison *Beowulf* apparently falls short of other manuals of advice for young royals (538).

In her discussion of gnomic sayings in *Beowulf* and in particular Hrothgar’s sermon, Elaine Tuttle Hansen agrees that critics into the twentieth century have found portions of the poem—such as Hrothgar’s sermon—somewhat tiresome (59); she argues also that the sermon fits into the a “set piece” of wisdom literature: “parental wisdom,” in which the wise king, in this case Hrothgar, admonishes and instructs the young prince, here, Beowulf (60-61). Stanley Greenfield calls the *þæt was gode cyning* statements part of the “authenticating voice” of *Beowulf*, although he warns as well not to “over-simplify the perspective” of the narrator (50),

⁶ The German of Outzen and Schücking is translated by Haarder and Shippey.

whom others, such as John D. Niles, have accused of liking “simple judgments” (*Beowulf: The Poem* 200-201).

Beowulf’s return home in the middle of the poem from his work in Denmark back to Geatland gives rise to the episode in the poem in which the narrator directly addresses queenly behavior. The episode in question is about Offa's wife Modthryth:

Mōdþrȳðo wæg,

fremu folces cwēn, firen' ondrysne; (1931b-1932)

In light of evidence that the royal woman's name is not *Mōdþrȳðo*, but that *þrȳðo* is an abstract noun, Robert D. Fulk suggests—along with his co-editors of the newest Klaeber edition, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Commentary 224-226)—that Offa’s wife’s name is *Fremu*, and I will follow this usage, here using Fulk's translation: "It was with arrogance that Fremu, a princess of the people, acted, with terrible wickedness" (Fulk “Queen” 615). The “terrible wickedness” of Fremu prompts the narrator to dispense the poem’s only direct advice about women’s behaviour in *Beowulf*.

The narrator’s admonition about queenly conduct appears just as another royal woman has been mentioned by the narrator—Hygd, Hygelac’s wife. Beowulf has moored his ship in his home harbor is headed towards Hygalac’s throne room, when the narrator mentions that Hygd is *wīs wēlpungen* “wise, accomplished” (1927a) and generous:

næs hio hnah swa þeah,

ne to gneað gifa Geata leodum,

maþmgestreona. (1929b-1931a)

When she dealt out treasure

To the Geat nation, the gifts were generous,

There was nothing narrowly done. (69)

Much of the confusion about Modthryth/Fremu's name comes from the suddenness of the episode's beginning. Mid-line after Hygd's introduction, Fremu, another woman who unlike Hygd commits *firen ondrysne* (1932) “terrible crimes” (69) (my translation) against her own retainers, if they even look at her.

nāenig þæt dorste dēor genēþan

swāesra gesīða, nefne sinfrea,

þæt hire an dæges ēagum starede; (1933-1935)

There was no one so rash among her retainers of the house

As to risk a look at her—except her lord himself—

Turns his eyes on her, even by day (69)

Fremu, furthermore, has both the will and the means to send those who look at her to their deaths:

ac him wælbende weotode tealde

handgewriþene; hraþe seoþðan wæs

æfter mundgripe mēce geþinged. (1936-1938)

Or fatal bonds were fettled for him,

Twisted by hand: and when hands had been laid on him

He could be sure that the sword would be present. (70)

At this point, the narrator makes an evaluative comment on the queen's behavior, speaking directly about women and what they ought not do:

Ne bið swylc cwēnlic þēaw

idese tō efnanne, þēah ðe hīo ænlicu sý,

þætte freoðuwebbe fēores onsāce

æfter ligetorne lēofne mannan. (1940b-1943)

Seamus Heaney translates these lines, “Even a queen / outstanding in beauty must not overstep like that. / A queen should weave peace, not punish the innocent / with loss of life for imagined insults” (133). But Fremu quits the murderous accusations when she gets married to Offa over the sea: *Huru þæt onhohsnode Hemminges mæg* (1944) “Hemming’s son Offa put a stop to that” (70).

Fremu’s transformation is effected through a change of geography and identity—her new identity as a married woman. Since her change seems attached to her marriage to Offa, many cite a “Taming of the Shrew” connection in the episode (Leneghan 540; Bahlmann 158; Klaeber, Notes 195). This assessment, though, does not match Fremu’s actions, despite how much marriage may change her. In all shrew folktale sources as well as the anachronistic Shakespeare play, the shrew is a disaffected sister who becomes a termagant wife—the focus is on her relationship with her husband. Once married, the shrew is trained for instant obedience—to her husband, that is—through his clever, fear-inducing, and even violent tricks (Artese 317-318). Fremu’s problem in *Beowulf*, by contrast, is not with her husband.

Fremu’s problem is with her retainers. Her *sinfrea* “lord” only may look at her: *nānig þæt dorste dēor genēþan / swārsra gesiða, nefne sinfrea, / þæt hire an dæges ēagum starede* (1933-1935) “There was no one so rash among the retainers of the house / as to risk a look at her—except her lord himself—turn his eyes on her, even by day” (69). If one of these then came the *walbende* “deadly bonds” and the *mēce* “sword” (1936, 1938). All the text gives of the provocation for Fremu’s ire is her retainers setting eyes on her.

Fremu's response to her retainers' looking her in the face more closely resembles Vashti's refusal to be looked at by a great crowd of nobles in the Vulgate's Book of Esther. Vashti's husband, King Ahasuerus, after seven days of quite a bit of drinking at his lavish banquet, calls Vashti forth from her own banquet with the women in the palace, specifically *ostenderet cunctis populis et principibus illius pulchritudinem* "in order to show off her beauty to all the people and the officials" (1.11b). Vashti refuses this call, brought to her by the king's seven eunuchs, and is dismissed from queenship by the king. The text does not explain why Vashti refuses to be displayed.

Beowulf's narrator, however, does give an explanation for Fremu's murderousness towards the retainers: *ligetorne*—"pretended injury" in Klaeber's glossary; that is, the text tells us she is unjust. Many readers, however, hear in this portion of *Beowulf* the voice a man talking to other men: Gillian Overing suggests that the narrator might be gaslighting Fremu: "[Fremu]'s behavior and motivation are not identifiable [. . .] unless we accept the poet's explanation that it is all in her head—an imaginary insult, pretended injury" (106). Mary Dockray-Miller agrees that Fremu may be like an Anglo-Saxon Anita Hill (143 n. 34)—a woman who comes forward complaining of sexual harassment, certain of what has happened to her but unable to prove her allegations to the men judging the situation. The word *ligetorne*, Dockray-Miller points out, appears only in this line and only in *Beowulf* and might indicate that these wrongs are "pretended" because it would be a man's view that there is "nothing wrong with examining the possible merchandise" (86). Jane Chance sees Fremu as murdering not retainers but "suitors who stared at her too insistently" (4), although *gesīða* is translated as "retainers" or "companions" by Klaeber's glossary and by others. Overing cites Larry M. Sklute's suggestion that Fremu has "confused libidinal drives" (536, qtd. in Overing 106) and further recognizes that "at the center

of [Fremu's] rebellion is her refusal to be looked at, to become an object" (Overing 103); Fremu will "not consent to be a feminine spectacle in a masculine arena" and refuses to "be held in the masculine gaze" and in fact reverts "the masculine gaze back upon itself" (104-5), making obvious the "barely displaced violence of the act of staring as appropriation" (xxv). Tom Shippey, alternatively, does not think that the narrative makes sense unless Fremu begins the episode as a married woman who leaves an unhappy first marriage situation for a second marriage on the advice of her *fæder lāre* (1950) ("Wicked"). All of these interpretations must be added on to the silence of the text as to why Freawaru "pretended injury"; the poet will only say the things she did before she married Offa were *ondrysne* "terrible" (1932).

Fremu's change is concomitant with her marriage—although there is no evidence of the pattern of violence and abasement in the shrew folktales. After she marries, *ealodrincende oðer sædan* (1945) "The ale-drinkers told a tale quite different" (70):

ðær hīo syððan well
 in gumstōle, gōde mære,
 lifgesceafta lifigende brēac,
 hīold hēahlufan wið hæleþa brego,
 ealles moncynnes mīne gefrge
 þone sēlestan bī sām twēonum,
 eormencynnes. (1951-1957a)

All that followed
 of a life destined to adorn a throne
 she employed well, and was well-loved for it,
 strong in her love for that leader of heroes,

the outstanding man, as I have heard tell,
of all mankind's mighty race,
From sea to sea. (70)

The episode seems to admonish, "Don't be like the earlier Fremu. Be like the later Queen Fremu." When Fremu—*goldhroden* (1948) "gold-decked" (70)—voyages over the sea released from her father *fæðer lāre* (1950) she is received by Offa, her husband, and is, after marrying Offa, *gōde mære* (1952). She spends the rest of her life well: *līfgesceafta lifigende brēac* (1953). The advice passage ends positively, and presumably Fremu has quit being a "war weaver" (Sklute 541) and begun acting like the peaceweaver the narrator calls her.

Exactly what is meant by a peaceweaver here is contested territory. Fremu's actions, however unexplained, provoke the poet to "comment on the way a queen should conduct herself: she should establish peace among peoples The relationship between private or social morality and public or political morality is made explicit" (Moore 129). Stacy Klein, echoing many who are slightly disappointed by the end of the episode, laments that Fremu is "repatriated into conventional femininity" (108). However, exactly what would have been "conventional femininity" in *Beowulf*, and to *Beowulf*'s first readers, needs explanation.

What would the chastising words of the narrator, and Fremu's change, mean to *Beowulf*'s first readers? What was considered queenly action in Anglo-Saxon England? This is a question with scope: John D. Niles reminds us that the time period for possible composition of *Beowulf*, sometime between the "sixth and seventh-century conversion of the English" and the *Beowulf* manuscript's date (possibly as late as 1025) is a unwieldy mass of time and of enormous cultural assimilation, out of which was eventually formed "*Englaland*, modeled on Carolingian and Ottonian precedents and taking inspiration from the ancestral Germanic past, the classical

Mediterranean past, and Biblical antiquity" (Niles, "Reconceiving" 144-145)--and masses of time are hard to generalize.

From history and archaeology, Christine Fell points out that much of what queens and princesses did in the Anglo-Saxon England "get[s] little attention in chronicles centering on power-struggles" (93). She names the royal careers of *Æðelflæd* who ruled, de facto, and built fortresses in tenth-century Mercia. Pauline Stafford describes *Æthelflæd* as "a warrior queen [who] moved fundamentally outside the gender expectations of later historians and chroniclers" (49). The earlier Queen *Cyneðryð*, King Offa's wife, had coins struck in her name (Fell 90-9, Stafford 39). Stafford cites women named as heirs in disputes over monastic property; these "claims on behalf of women as heirs in early ninth-century Mercia were thinkable and arguable" (41). In his work on early medieval life expectancy for women, David Herlihy points out that the Carolingian *Lex Alamannorum* and other Germanic codes indicate the high value attached to women in the early middle ages: "women were protected with double fines for any injury done to them" (8). These double fines lasted through the life-span of a woman—extending even to the loss of a female fetus, should someone cause a pregnant woman to miscarry and the sex of the fetus was identifiable (8). The Anglo-Saxon era complicates modern attempts to define on its behalf what might have been "conventional femininity" or gender norms.

A later date for *Beowulf* allows one to see the eleventh-century situation of queens like Emma of Normandy as historical backdrop for the poem. Stafford discusses Emma in terms of the eleven-century biographical *Encomium* that summarizes some of her speeches, and Helen Damico suggests that the speeches of Wealtheow are the closest we might come to hearing the voice of eleventh-century queens such as Emma, who, like Wealtheow, dwells "upon the succession of her sons to the throne and on her office as queen to uphold the solidarity of the

kingdom” (Damico 209). Fremu herself does not speak in *Beowulf*; we have only her initial refusal to be looked at and her subsequent reform and marriage to Offa. Does she become someone like Wealtheow? As Francis Leneghan points out, the episode ends emphasizing not Fremu at all but instead Offa’s kingship and the continuance of the kingship in Offa’s son—which throws into relief the important problem of Beowulf’s not marrying, and Beowulf’s not producing an heir (547, 553). The *Beowulf* narrator leaves the Fremu episode on these terms, which put Beowulf at the center.

It is Beowulf himself, however, who in the lines following the Fremu/Offa episode appears to assess the episode differently. We can think about what the chastising advice about Fremu might have meant to its first readers and hearers by examining what effect it has on the characters in the main narrative—Beowulf—and by observing the setting in which the poet placed that advice. The significance of Beowulf’s inset stories, argues Scott Gwara, lie in their relationship to the immediate context in which the stories appear. Such episodes, or intradiegetic narratives—“formerly called digressions, episodes, paradigms, *exempla*, mirror stories, or metadiegetic narratives” (“Misprision” 303)—Gwara explains, are one of the “common features of epic Characters can be shown to evaluate and react to intradiegetic narrative that analogizes their circumstances and guides their conduct” (“Foreign” 233). Subtle “influence” on characters and their actions (Gwara, “Misprision” 304) is exerted by *Beowulf*’s episodes—and the influence can be seen in the passage immediately following the episodes.

However, the most powerful influence of a metadiegetic narrative on the poem occurs just around in; more specifically, just after it. John M. Hill reminds readers that *Beowulf*, as a product at some point of oral tradition, is “to be read linearly, with passages taking on their suggestive force and meaning from their local, ongoing moments” (14). The Anglo-Saxon

audience of *Beowulf* would have most likely consisted of some readers but most likely listeners to the poem and to its critique of queenly conduct in the Fremu episode. Their experience of the episode would be framed by the passages just before and after it. The poem is “archaic, nonorganic” (Hill 14), and “in a time-bound oral narrative, each passage stands alone,” bound more by context than by the literary tendency to see meaning chiefly in the patterns tied to the macrocosm of the poem of a whole (Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem* 169).

These observations about the contingent episodes and meaning in the poem are important because of the proximity, in the poem, of the Fremu episode with Beowulf’s Freawaru prediction. Gwara argues that the Freawaru episode is Beowulf’s reaction to the Finn-Hengest story (“Foreign” 233), but the Finn-Hengest story ends over eight hundred lines before the Freawaru episode. The Fremu episode ends as Beowulf is about to enter Hygelac’s throne room in the middle of the epic, only about fifty lines from start of the Freawaru episode. The hospitality of Hrothgar’s wife and the two stories about women—Hygd, Fremu, and Freawaru—together form a “cluster of femininity at the poem’s center” (Dockray-Miller 89). Hygd and her hospitality is mentioned first, as Beowulf returns to her and her husband, Hygelac (1926), and then Fremu is introduced, scolded, and reformed about ten lines later.

At this point, the poem might seem to be done with discussing peace-weavers and their hospitality. Hygd is pouring her cup all around and Hygelac and Beowulf face off to each other *mæg wið mæge* (1978) “kinsman and kinsman” (71). Hygelac badly wants to know the details about the fight with Grendel, as both the narrator and Hygelac make clear. The narrator says that *hyne fyrwet bræc* (1985) “Curiosity burned in him” (71). Seamus Heaney says Hygelac “hankered” to know (135). Hygelac’s words reinforce the narrator’s: he asks Beowulf how he fared and whether he was able to give Hrothgar the help he needed; that is, kill Grendel.

However, instead of answering the question directly, Beowulf introduces a story about a third woman—Freawaru. It is an odd development, because the waiting Hrothgar has framed his questions with such emotion:

‘Hu lomp eow on lade, leofa Biowulf,

þa ðu færinga feorr gehogodest

sæcce secean ofer sealt wæter,

hilde to Hiorote?

.....

Ic ðæs modceare

sorhwymum seað [. . .]’ (1987-1990, 1992-1993)

‘What luck did you meet with, beloved Beowulf,

on your suddenly resolved seeking out

of distant strife over salt water,

battle at Heorot?

.....

Overwhelming doubts

troubled my mind’ [. . .] (71)

After his inquiry, and with his explicitly burning curiosity, Hygelac, as well as the reading or listening audience, Hrothgar nevertheless has to wait about sixty more lines for the answer.

In lieu of a detailed answer, Beowulf unleashes a para-narrative about Freawaru—the third one of the “cluster” Dockray-Miller cites. Up to now, the text’s other digressions, such as the Finn-Hengest episode and the Sigemund episode, have been stories told as history, including

the Fremu episode. Beowulf launches into a scenario, his own para-narrative, that is a projection into the future. Freawaru is Hrothgar and Wealtheow's daughter who is to marry Ingeld:

*Sio gehaten is,
geong goldhroden, gladum suna Frodan;
hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga,
rices hyrde, ond þæt ræd talað,
þæt he mid ðy wife wælfæhða dæl,
sæcca gesette. (2024-2029)*

She is betrothed to Ingeld,
this girl attired in gold, to the gracious son of Froda.
the Protector of the Danes has determined this
and accounts it wisdom, the keeper of the land,
thus to end all the feud and their fatal wars
by means of the lady. (73)

Freawaru, very much unlike Fremu, is not using her power to cause the death of her own retainers, and Freawaru does not produce an advisory rebuke from the narrator.

Like the narrator of the Fremu episode, however, Beowulf deploys his own gnomic statement for his episode—a statement that is similar to the narrator's comment on queenly conduct and Fremu. Beowulf claims: *Oft seldan hwær /æfter leodhryre lytle hwile / bongar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge* (2029-2031). “Yet when a lord is dead / it is seldom the slaying-spear sleeps for long— / seldom indeed—dear though the bride may be (71-73). In his own statement about the possibility of feud breaking out, Beowulf demurs with a caveat—an adverbial clause of concession: *þeah seo bryd duge* (2031); however “good,” “dear,” or “strong”

the bride may be—the feud may not be able to rest, that is, the *bongar* “spear” (2031). In the narrator’s negative statement about queenliness, the *peah* concession is, *pēah ðe hīo ænlicu sȳ* (1941). However *ænlicu* “matchless,” “peerless” or “beautiful” the queen may be—she nevertheless ought not demand someone’s life on false pretenses. Both women’s situations are gone awry—one in the woman’s control, and one out of it. The optimistic scenario is Fremu’s—she changes, and the situation changes. Freawaru’s conditional statement is less optimistic; her circumstances are out of her hands.

The Freawaru story would presumably would have been well known in the world of Beowulf’s audience. In particular, Ingeld, whom Freawaru is pledged to marry, is referred to in other sources, including an Anglo-Latin letter from 797 (Bullough 102). The stories about Ingeld rankle Alcuin of York in his letter to the “pseudonymously known” Speratus: “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” Alcuin famously asks, since apparently stories about Ingeld are being read, or sung, “at the episcopal dinner table” (qtd. in Neidorf) at the end of the eighth century in Mercia. Just this “episcopal dinner table,” by the way, could constitute one of *Beowulf*’s first audiences. Donald A. Bullough gives a detailed argument that the Speratus letter is addressed to a non-monastic audience, possibly a Bishop Unuuona of Leicester. In “episcopal meal times. . . other clergy will normally participate, with lay guests (even the monarch) from time to time: the presence of the latter may or may not influence the choice of literary fare” (Bullough 109). Ingeld is one cog in the “allusive style of Beowulf” that points to the extensive and “deeply familiar” cultural knowledge the poem’s audience would have of Germanic heroes (Neidorf 56). The narrator takes for granted that the poem’s audience has a “sophisticated knowledge” of the Germanic past (Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem* 207); therefore, the audience would perhaps even have had knowledge of the ending of the poem (Gwara, “Heroic Identity” 42). In that case,

much of what would keep the audience entertained by an epic poem would be the poet's choices about where and how to deploy episodes and characters. The audience knows Beowulf will eventually get to fight the dragon—but how does he get there, why, and with what ideas does the poet play in the process?

In this case, in the aftermath of the poet's advice about queenly conduct, the poet has Beowulf embed yet another a story within his story. In the his Freawaru narrative, Beowulf sets up a scene in which the young Danish retinue of Freawaru enters Heathobard dining room, jingling with battle accessories that have emotional resonance for their hosts since they are recently plundered from the bodies of the friends and fathers of the Heathobards. The focus shifts onto a grizzled Heathobard warrior:

*eald æscwiga, se ðe eall geman,
garcwealm gumena—him bið grim sefa—,
onginneð geomormod geongum cempan
þurh hreðra gehygd higes cunnian,
wigbealu wecccean. (2042-2046)*

An old spear-fighter shall speak at the feast,
the hilt-ring—his heart grows fierce
as he remembers all the slaying of the men by the spear.
In his dark mood he deliberately
tries out the mettle of a man who is younger,
awakens his war-taste. (73)

The goading of the old Heathobard works, and the young man responds and kills the young member of the Danish retinue who is wearing what had been his father's sword.

In Beowulf's Freawaru story, the old warrior plays the role that the critical narrator played in the Fremu episode: he points out an injustice. A queen, the narrator had said in the Fremu episode, should not have men killed for *ligetorne*—imagined wrongs. Here, in Beowulf's Freawaru episode there is also, according to Hill, a juridical quality to the old warrior's goading, one Beowulf would have approved of (58), in the warrior's pointing out that the sword worn by the Dane *m*belongs to the young man *id rihte* "by right," the son of the slain Heathobard. Both are effective: Fremu marries and changes; the young man kills the Danish retainer with his father's sword.

Both stories are also couched in the formulaic epithet of communal beer-drinking. It is specifically ale-drinkers, the *ealodrincende* who praise Fremu for the queen she becomes: *ealodrincende oðer sēdan* (1945). "And the ale-drinkers then told a tale quite different" (72). It is also, in Beowulf's imagining, *at bēore*—"at beer," or "at the beer-drinking"--that the *æswiga* "ash-warrior" speaks up and decides to tempt the mind--*higes cunnian*--of the other warrior (2041-5). The success of the old warrior in reviving the feud—which rather than being inevitable had not lain dormant long enough to withstand the presence of the young warrior wearing the sword (Hill 59)—leads to a cooling of Ingeld's "wife love" *wīflufan* (2065) for Freawaru.

The presence of the formulaic drinking, weapons, and the peace-pledge such as Freawaru in the story are also direct references to the relationship of a queen to the king and to the *comitatus*. The plight of Freawaru in this case leads many to see royal women in her circumstance as "trafficked" (Jamison 13-14) or as being "traded" like so many goods (Dockray-Miller 84). In his work on the queen/king/*comitatus* relationship, Michael Enright demonstrates a different relationship of queen to her people groups, namely, that the *comitatus*, rather than

being “purely male institution,” is one in which the queen is a liminal but key figure, like the “mortar between the bricks must be regarded as part of the building” (35-36). Just as weapons and liquor “bind the comitatus” they also cement the bond between a new wife such as Freawaru to her new family (77). Freawaru and Fremu are both in a “triangular pattern of relationships” between “warlord, wife and followers” (38).

If, as Enright demonstrates, the relationship between a queen and retainers is a significant one, then Fremu’s killing of her retainers for unjust reasons is not just what Overing calls the actions of a “hysteric” (81) whose otherness confounds the usual binaries of the poem, or a Vashti-like refusal to be displayed before a banquet of drunk men. Fremu, as important part of the lord-retainer relationship, would be betraying known cultural relationships in which queens such as herself took an active part. No wonder the narrator intervenes with advice in order to chastise her activities: he is also giving advice to a female readership.

Fremu’s *ligetorne*—imagined insults—are also contrasted with the real and valid offense that occurs when the young warrior sees the Heathobards wearing his father’s weapons. Fremu changes her imagination, or at least changes her life and therefore her reputation with the *ealodrincende*—by ceasing to punish her retainers. In the breakout of the feud in the Freawaru episode, the offenses are not imaginary, so when the old warrior remembers—*geman*—and then urges and reminds the young warrior—*Manað swā ond myndgað*—he also has something real and not imagined in the room to point to: *Meaht ðu, min wine, mece gecnawan*—“My friend, is that not a familiar sword?” (73). The old warrior’s reference point, the sword, is all too concrete, especially compared to the mysteriousness of Fremu’s murderous responses to imaginary offenses. The violence cannot be quashed in Beowulf’s story about Freawaru, in stark contrast to Fremu’s.

Hill discusses hostilities in marriage exchanges in *Beowulf* in terms of Georges Devereux's *Ethnopschoanalysis*. Devereux's thought is that marriage rituals in which women are given into another family go beyond husband-wife bonds and the "alliance between the two families." These marriages "principally concern relationships between men" and only "seem to put women at the center" (Hill 55). Although Hill does not see in *Beowulf* the "threatening specter of latent homosexuality" that Devereux discusses (qtd. in Hill 55), he sees in the Freawaru episode one in which the giver of the woman—the Danes—is in a superior position to the Heathobards, who are recipients and in the position of inferior. As such the Heathobards are sensitive to the "taunt in the weapons Danes carry to the wedding festivities" (56). In this paradigm, the woman as peaceweaver and her worth—however dear—matters much less than the two opposing men, the real figures in the exchange, the father who gives and the husband who receives.

By identifying that it is no failure on Freawaru's part that the alliance fails, *Beowulf* exposes the male-on-male nature of the alliance; it is he who puts Freawaru and women at the center after all—by not participating in the exchange himself. *Beowulf* also emphasizes Freawaru's importance; he discusses the men's knowledge of her name and that she is Hrothgar's daughter. Like Wealtheow, she *earlum on ende ealuwæge bær* (2021) "bore the ale-flagon to each earl in turn" (72). In telling the Freawaru story he resists the poet's efforts to foreground Offa's successful alliance-making, and then resists his own moment at the center by putting off the answer for seventy lines to Hrothgar's understandable questions about Grendel. If Offa's successful rule and marriage-alliance is really about *Beowulf*, then *Beowulf* refuses that role.

At the same time, *Beowulf* may manage to appropriate the starring role that the women in *Beowulf* do get to play. Robert Morey argues that *Beowulf* has been feminized, himself a

freoðuwebbe “peaceweaver” by his “womanly” alliance-strengthening activities between the Geats and the Danes in which he fights Hrothgar’s monsters (496). It is when Beowulf crosses tribal lines—which so many of the poem’s women do in order to marry and increase the chances of peace between tribes—that Beowulf is liminal and feminine in his activities, securing the peace by paying his father’s debt to Hrothgar. Then, as if he were one Hrothgar’s children marrying out of the family, he takes Hrothgar’s lavish gifts back to Hygelac and Hygd (Morey 493). Based on the words at his funeral that the Geats use to describe him—*milde*, *mondwære*, and *liðe* (3180-3182)—“mild, gentle, and kind” in Klaeber’s glossary—Mary Richards argues that he may even “be a candidate for sainthood” (qtd. in Morey 494).

The entire scene of the resurrecting Heathobard resentment is Beowulf’s conjecture; he is the new Fremu, conjuring up *ligetorne*—imagined insults that have not happened. Moreover, Fremu is the only woman specifically called a *freoðuwebbe* (1942), a peaceweaver, in the poem. Fremu the peaceweaver seems happy to follow the narrator’s advice and gets married; Beowulf the peaceweaver responds to the advice with an alternate vision of marriage alliances—like the religious celibates of early Christianity, he rejects such earthly societal norms as a form of bondage (Brown *Body* 98-99). Beowulf may have some saint and some of the early Fremu in him.

In his Freawaru para-narrative Beowulf supplies an alternate story, parrying the explicit judgments and positive ending of the Fremu episode with his own more fateful, pessimistic, and visually rich vision of a peace-weaving alliance in trouble. If Beowulf himself is a *freoðuwebbe*, as Morey says his diplomatic activities suggest, then the advice addressed explicitly to peaceweavers in the poem would also be directed at Beowulf. How does Beowulf deal with this advice? Beowulf, as Leneghan emphasizes, “fails to follow the example of Offa, and is therefore

ultimately unable to prevent the demise of the royal line of Hrethel” (553). If Offa is such a dynastic model for the poem, then perhaps Beowulf’s different path is not a subsequent “failure to marry and produce an heir” (560) but the result of Beowulf’s own decision for an alternate chosen life in which he is guided by his own Freawaru para-narrative. Perhaps he sees himself as the audience of the narrator’s advice to women and is ultimately taking that advice—with not Offa as model but Offa’s wife Fremu. The audiences inside and outside of the poem are listening, although as is often the case with advice, it may be that no one wants to hear it.

Chapter Two

“Anger is a Shape-Shifter”: Philosophic *Therapeia* in the *Ancrene Wisse*

The Middle English *Ancrene Wisse*, a thirteenth-century guidebook for anchoresses, reflects an accreted tradition of literary, scriptural, and linguistic knowledge. What the speaker of the text does, in the words of Nicholas Perkins, is "direct that knowledge towards practical, spiritual, and devotional ends" of its female audience (211). The *Ancrene Wisse* is an intensely multi-sourced manuscript, produced in the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century milieu of scriptural traditions and accretions of sources of what is often called the Medieval Reformation (Gunn, “Beyond” 162; Millett, General Introduction xxv). The author studied, perhaps, at the University of Paris; his work is analogous with other pastoral literature “produced by the Paris schoolmen, particularly the circle of Peter Cantor (d. 1197)” but also with that of the Dominican monks (Millett, General Introduction xvii-xviii). The anchoresses had to navigate their religious life on the margins—as female anchorites, they were in a liminal, in-between place in society because they were neither lay people nor officially established clergy (Gunn, “Beyond” 162; Jones 44). Women looking for a religious vocation had diminished opportunities to become nuns in England during this period. For one, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 barred the formation of new religious orders, and, for another, already-established orders of monks were increasingly reluctant to take on female religious for training. In *Ancrene Wisse*, lay readers gained an accessible version of the intertextual devotional tradition that the mendicant Dominican author had been trained in.

In Part III of *Ancrene Wisse*, the speaker launches his discourse specifically about the interior life—the rule that his preface states is *eauer inwið ant rihteð þe heorte* (15-16)⁹ “always within and sets the heart right” (47)¹⁰. Using his own sort of thirteenth-century devotional *therapeia*, or philosophical therapy, the text guides its readers in dealing with the possibilities of anger and resentment in response to mistreatment. The interior life is the key to the anchoritic life, and so this section is the “heart” of *Ancrene Wisse*: “in it, the spiritual or monastic life is defined through a consideration of its essential qualities” (Maybury 95). Among the “practical, spiritual, and devotional ends” the speaker needs to accomplish in delineating these “essential qualities” is helping his charges, as the text’s preface states, envision their inner life, the *heorte wiðinnen* (33) the “heart within” (48). Paying attention to the inner life, the speaker’s enclosed anchoresses can manage the inner trials to which they are subject. From there, the speaker uses his interpersonal skills to equip the anchoresses with the cure for bad emotions, such as anger. The goal is not a small one: to fail to be *inwið softe ant milde ant eadmode, swete ant swote iheortet* (2-3) “gentle and mild and humble within—sweet and tender-hearted” (93), is to miss the inner heroics of the Christian life in the anchorhold, to *al leosen* “lose everything”—as the speaker specifies straight off in Part III.

The speaker and author of *Ancrene Wisse* has what might to us seem a daunting task: sustain and encourage young women in an active spiritual and purposeful life while, as many have noted, they are bricked inside a small space. The *Ancrene Wisse*'s original stated reading audience, in its earliest extant manuscripts, is three young women—“gentlewomen, able to read

⁹ All quotations from *Ancrene Wisse* are designated by line number and taken from *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, edited by Bella Millet, EETS, Oxford UP, 2006.

¹⁰ All translations of *Ancrene Wisse* are designated by page number and are from *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, translated by Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, Paulist Press, 1991.

some French and Latin, but whose first language was English" (Gunn, "Private" 68)—who took up solitary life in anchorholds, enclosures attached to church buildings. This audience expands, as later manuscripts make clear, to a group of around twenty anchoresses who are addressed in the text (Millett, General Introduction xxiii). Choosing the vocation of anchoress meant having the last rites chanted as the young recluse entered her cell and was bricked in. E. A. Jones's study of ceremonies of enclosure indicates that the last rites were often truncated, with a greater emphasis placed on the final step of blocking the door to the anchorhold (44), the place which would be her home and paradoxical tomb for the rest of her life (125 Dickinson). The anchoritic life was not only to be penitential and ascetic, but also public and spiritually inspirational for those who witnessed it, who would be many, since churches to which the anchoress's room (or rooms) were attached were usually in the middle of medieval towns (Savage and Watson, "Ancrene Wisse: Editors' Note" 16). Later manuscripts indicate that the number of anchorites grew from the original three, apparently sisters, into a community of twenty or so young women at different locations (Savage and Watson, "Ancrene Wisse: Editors' Note" 41-42), all practicing the Christian life in the isolated anchorhold.

The success of the speaker's task in *Ancrene Wisse* might be demonstrated in the fact that it may have had the longest circulation of all prose works in Middle English (Edwards, "Middle English Manuscripts" 103). It did not circulate alone: the *Ancrene Wisse* is connected in language and manuscript tradition to a group of other Middle English texts—the "Katherine Group," named after the *Seinte Katerine* story—one of five texts which are together in the Bodley 34 manuscript. The *Ancrene Wisse* also appears in another manuscript together with the main works of the *Katherine Group* (Edwards, "Middle English Manuscripts" 105). J. R. R. Tolkien first established the linguistic connections between *Ancrene Wisse* and the five texts of

the “Katherine Group” in his 1929 analysis of the texts' variant of Middle English, which he called "Language (AB)," named after a scribal abbreviations on the manuscripts (Millett, General Introduction xiv). This *Ancrene Wisse* group also includes a group of prayers and meditations called the *Wooing Group*; all of these texts share a "preoccupation with female virginity" and help illuminate the world of the anchoresses addressed in *Ancrene Wisse* (xi). The entire group is, one might say, in the words of Bella Millett, part of a "discourse community" of "mutually reinforcing and influential" texts (Huber and Robertson Introduction). All come as well from a "West Midlands *milieu* in which older and newer preaching traditions coexisted, and the local vernacular was being used for the pastoral instruction of both listeners and readers" (xi). The readers of *Ancrene Wisse* were almost certainly readers of the Katherine Group, with its similar language and emphasis on the heroic life of the "spiritual aristocrat" (Savage and Watson, General Introduction 20). I will further focus on the hagiographical text of the popular *Seinte Katerine* as I progress.

The rhetorical structure of *Ancrene Wisse* and many of its illustrative *exempla* are sites of layered academic borrowing—one might say intertextuality—in that they come from a palette of sources themselves often borrowing from bestiaries, patristic literature, and classical models. In this sense, the discourse community of *Ancrene Wisse* might be said to extend beyond the “Katherine Group” and other AB texts. Notes to translations of *Ancrene Wisse* form a multilayered exercise in literary, textual, and religious history—the text’s broader discourse community. The text's roots in "the rhetoric of the preaching aids, confessional manuals, penitential treatises and other *pastoralia*" are evident in it (Gunn “Beyond” 162). Biblical texts in this period were increasingly manuscripts with multiple sources, which were reflected in their glosses, along with other forms of exegesis, such as patristic sources (Perkins 208-209).

Some influences on *Ancrene Wisse* are more obvious than others. More obvious ones come from Scripture or patristics or 12th-century monastic writers (Millett, General Introduction xxx). *Ancrene Wisse*'s eight-part structure, for example, is borrowed from the way sermons were divided up and elucidated (Gunn "Beyond" 163). Scripture "inhabits" the *Ancrene Wisse* in "complex ways" (Perkins 207). The speaker is armed with 12th and early 13th-century habits of biblical engagement—a combination of "direct reading and meditating" and "sophisticated memorial techniques" enabling him to "combine references and allude to biblical texts with great freedom" (Perkins 208). Classical material also appears in the *Ancrene Wisse*, but like most sources is rarely directly cited and so appears indirectly (Millett, General Introduction xxx): nevertheless, much of the *Ancrene Wisse* clearly has analogues in "academic and pastoral literature produced in the Paris schools of the twelfth and thirteenth century" (xxxiv).

The theme of mistreatment and its effects in Part III of *Ancrene Wisse* connect it to other works in the Katherine Group, such as *Seinte Katerine*. It is true that the troubles of the Christian endeavor—dealing with the temptations that the speaker addresses in Book IV, for example—seem hardly comparable to the life and *passio*—suffering—of *Katerine*. Katherine is defiant in the face of pagan persecution and endures physical torture—for example, being put on the wheel designed to pull her apart (although she escaped it), a stint in prison, being whipped with a lead scourge until she is bloody, and finally beheading. It is particularly Katherine's renowned academic prowess in debate and theology—she faces off with fifty seasoned debaters whom she verbally combats and then converts—that makes her an excellent hero model for thirteenth-century anchoresses, living in a time in which women had increasing numbers of written texts available to them, including saint's lives written in their own tongue (Goodich X.25) and devotional texts such as *Ancrene Wisse* and the other texts of the Katherine Group.

Katherine would be a "fitting model of female piety" and an increasingly popular one in an increasingly literate time as is evidenced by the spread of her cult in both England and Europe (Goodich X.26). Encouraged by the heroines of saint's stories, the anchoress in her cell, too, could be ready to fight her own inner battles and coping strategies for persecution and for dealing with the resulting resentment and anger. Giving her ways to combat bitterness, the *Ancrene Wisse* equips its charges in a kind of cerebral, many-voiced Christian heroism that is available to them as women confined in an anchorhold.

The anchoresses had opportunities for social contact and therefore opportunities to be wounded by it. The anchorhold also was a place, although private, public enough for its occupants to have interaction with the outside world; it was not the thirteenth-century equivalent of today's solitary confinement in prisons. The anchoresses, in other words, would have to deal with other people. In Part II, the anchoress has to be warned not to be too social, and have a third party to back her up in almost every interaction: *Wiðuten witnesse of wummon oðer of wepmon þe ow mahe iheren, ne speoke 3e wið na mon ofte longe* (327-328) "Speak with no one often, or for long, without men or women as witnesses who can hear you" (74). Even in confession there ought to be a third party sitting nearby (328-330). All of this, along with setting an example, is so that the *ondfule* (337) "envious" (74) will not spread lies about them. In Part VI, the speaker suggests that even "*Sluri þe cokes cneawe*" (448) "Slurry the cook's boy" (187) may view the anchoresses—women whom we know, from the earliest *Ancrene Wisse* texts, are of "gentle birth"—as beneath him (Gunn *Ancrene Wisse* 1). Nevertheless in their status as anchoresses they may be treated as unworthy of the cook's boy's *danger* (448) "arrogance" (187) or "effrontery."

It is specifically from these kinds of interactions with others that the anchoresses are in peril of anger. In Part III, the speaker sets up the scenario for anger and bitterness in the inner life: *ʒef me misseið þe* (52) “If people insult you” (94). The anchoresses, the text makes clear, will have someone commit “*misdede oðer missahe*” (97) “harmful deeds or words” (95) against them. Therefore, in Part III, the anchoresses will have to be “*þolemode aʒein woh of word pet me seið ow*” (3-4) “patient in the face of evil words said of you” (93), for there is the real possibility of becoming the topic of a reproach against *bitter ancres* (5) “bitter anchoresses”. In the face of contempt and mistreatment, the speaker builds his therapeutic approach—his *aʒeines wraeððe monie remedies* (50) “many remedies against anger” (94)—around showing the anchoress how to imagine herself or her circumstances physically transformed in order to cure her anger.

The speaker’s opening assertion about anger in Part III is that *Wraeððe is a forschuppilt* (32) “Anger is an enchanter” (93) or more technically, anger is a (female) shape-shifter—“a woman who changes [people’s] shapes for the worse” (Millett, Dobson, and Dance, Textual Commentary 166). This concept—that anger can malevolently change things, and in this case these young women—becomes a theme in the opening portion of Part III. Instead of an *in bono* transformation, like transubstantiation in the Eucharist, the effect of wrath here is the *in malo* transformation. Part III has not received critical attention for its transformation motif; it is typically noted instead for its tripartite bird images: the pelican, the bird of night, and the sparrow. The pelican is the “essential metaphor” of Part III, says Grayson (57), and Maybury focuses on the pelican as well (96-98). The pelican is taken from a Psalm 101—*similis factus sum pellicano solitudines* (5-6); it has chicks it is wont to kill when they anger it. It then repents and resurrects them by drawing blood from its breast: *smit him seolf wið his breoste, ant wið þet*

he sloh ear his briddes wið, and draheð blod of his breoste, ant wið þet blod acwike eft his briddes isleine (9-11) “strikes itself with the bill it has just killed its chicks with, and draws blood from its breast; and with that blood it brings back to life its slain chicks” (93). The speaker makes clear that the resurrection of the chicks, who are the anchoress's *godes werkes* (12-13) “good works” (93), was effected by the *schrift of hire muð* (15) “the confession of her mouth” (93).

Key to what is happening in this passage not really the oft-cited pelican itself but the shifting mood and actions of the pelican—from murderous rage to *muchē man* (9) “great lamentation” (93) and confession. Both anger and confession, here, are transforming agents, each one a sort of *forschuppilt*. Anger turns the pelican into a murderer, but confession shifts it right back into a remorseful parent who resurrects the chicks with its own blood and confession.

It is the transformation that is key, and the *forschuppilt* shape-shifter motif extends beyond the pelican into a discussion of the ways the anger, and in particular female anger, causes people to turn into beasts—apparently a contemporaneous folktale motif. Women in particular can be malevolent enchantresses. In “entertainment literature” of this period, c. 1200, Caroline Walker Bynums finds stories about werewolves who are almost all “‘sympathetic’ werewolves—victims who are changed into wolves, usually by evil women” (*Metamorphosis* 94-95).

Forschuppilt in the Middle English corpus appears only in the *Ancrene Wisse* as far as we know, and the Latin phrase preceding it, *Maga quedam est, transformans naturam humanam*, has no identified source (Millett, Dobson, and Dance Textual Commentary 106). The *forschuppilt* is a woman who “disfigures or degrades” (*Middle English Dictionary*). Moreover, when anger is a *forschuppilt*, the speaker makes explicit that he is referring to folktales: *Wraeððe is a forschuppilt, as me teleð i spelles, for has reaued mon his wit ant changed al his chere, ant*

forschuppeð him from mon into beastes cunde" (31-34) "Anger is an enchanter, like one hears of in stories, for she deprives a person of their wits and changes their whole appearance, and transforms them from a human into the likeness of a beast" (93). In his list of ways that anger transforms women and men into beasts, men become unicorns or lions, and a woman's anger changes her into a wolf: *Wummon wrað is wuluene* (35) "An angry woman is a wolf" (93).

One might expect the speaker to insert a remark here about the unsuitability of such pagan stories about werewolves or the danger of witches or shape-shifters or present some kind of discomfort with his *exempla*. He does not; *Ancrene Wisse* reflects no anxiety over *exempla* that focus on the magical practice of shape-changing or female shape-shifters. Instead, the text's words stress the communal function of such tales: "*as me teleð i spelles*" (33) "like one hears of in stories" (93).

The speaker's anxiety about the anchoress-turned-wolf, as he dilates the topic, is reserved for the effect of anger on the anchoress's inner spiritual life. The anger transforms her liturgical recitation and seems to erase her human voice from being heard. Without quoting the verse itself, the text echoes Scripture in asserting, *Hwil þet eauer wreaððe is i wummone heorte, versaili, segge hire Vres Auez, Pater Nostres, ne deð ha bute þeoteð* (37-38) "For as long as anger is in a woman's heart, though she say her versicles, *Hail Marys, Our Fathers*, she does nothing but howl" (94). The *Ancrene Wisse* author knows I Corinthians 13:1 (of which he quotes a portion in Part V), and the same twisting of sacred speech happens in the when love is absent: *si linguis hominum loquar et angelorum caritatem autem non habeam factus sum velut aes sonans aut cymbalum tinniens*¹¹ "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I

¹¹ All quotations from the Vulgate are taken from *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgata Versionem*, Eds. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 4th ed. 1994.

am becoming as sounding brass, or a tinkling symbol"¹² The echoed reference is intensified: in place of the pleasing and sacred words of holy language, the beastly howling of a wolf in the *Ancrene Wisse* text is even more sinister than the inanimate percussion instruments of Scripture.

The speaker goes on to assure the anchoress that when she harbors anger, the transformation goes beyond sound and into appearance: *Naueð ha bute, as þeo þet is iwent to wuluene i Godes ehnen, wuluene steuene in his lihte earen* (37-39) “In God’s eyes she looks just like someone who has turned into a wolf; in his keen ears she has a wolf’s voice” (94). Now the angry anchoress looks like a wolf to God too. The rest of the introductory commentary, which precedes the remedies or *therapeia*, includes the Horatian quote, “*Ira furor brevis est*”—translated by the speaker “Wreaððe is a wodschipe” (39) “Anger is a madness” (94). The text emphasizes the beastly transformation in the effect of anger on the countenance: “*wreaððe, þe forschuppilt, forschupped him into beast as Ich ear seide*” (44-45) “anger, the enchanter, transforms them into beasts, as I said before” (94). Here the speaker has a chance to mention that since the anchor is *Iesu Cristes spuse* (45) “Jesus Christ’s spouse” (94), it is particularly out of place if she is *forschuppet into wuluene* (46) “transformed into a wolf” (94). By turning into a wolf, since she is Christ’s spouse, the angry anchoress would require that Jesus Christ have a wolf bride. To prevent this situation, the anchoress should *sone forwarpe þet ruhe fel þe heorte, ant wið sahtnesse makien hire smeðe ant softe as is cundeliche summone hude; for wið þet wuluene fel na þing þet ha deð nis Gode licwurðe* (47-49) “shed that rough pelt from about her heart at once, and make herself smooth and soft with soft reconciliation, as a woman’s skin is by nature” (94). Jesus will not have a wolf bride, but a soft one who has taken the wolf pelt off of her heart.

¹² All translations of the Vulgate are from the *Douay-Rheims Bible: The English Translation of the Latin Vulgate*, Vulgate.org, The Latin Vulgate Bible.

The question is, How to get there?—how does one keep the shape-shifter anger from turning one from a soft-skinned bride of Christ into a beast? Part III is the praxis to the earlier theories of anger. It is time for the cure, and for the language of philosophical therapy. Now that the speaker has presented the problem and its implications, the stage is set for remedy. I should emphasize that this section in *Ancrene Wisse* isn't the only one mentioning anger. Anger is also mentioned in the Part IV, which deals with temptations. However, the speaker's approach in Part III is unlike the approach given to anger in Part IV, where anger is couched together and delineated with other temptations. There, anger is merely contrasted, like the other temptations, with what appropriate virtue the anchoress should take on: instead of anger, one should have *polemodesse* (1404) "long-suffering" (149); that is, *patientia*. Similarly, instead of sloth, one should take up *redunge* (1404) "reading"; instead of meanness, *freo heorte* (1405) "a generous heart," and so forth. This approach would never work in Part III since it is to be a source of *monie remedies* (50) "many remedies" (94)—helpful instruction, that is, not merely a description of what ought to happen.

If the speaker's use of the words *remedies* or *boten*, both translated "remedies" for overcoming *wreaððe* sounds medical, it is. These remedies are of the mind, however, not the body; they are philosophical cures. The medicinal focus is not on God as the great physician as described in Part IV, in which the recluse who fails to see her own temptation, says the speaker, is like a sick person who fails to call the doctor. Liz McAvoy describes this kind of medicinal context when she asserts that "for the *Ancrene Wisse* author, all worldly suffering . . . is intrinsic to life's penitential condition and able to be healed only by the compassionate medicine of the ultimate physician, God" (89). Such is not the case for remedying the sickness of the inner life of Part III. Rather, in Part III's discussion on anger, the speaker uses a different medicine:

healing from one's mind, on the inside, not from the doctor-physician. Martha Nussbaum describes this kind of medicine in her book *The Therapy of Desire* when she quotes Cicero's speaking for the Stoa in *Tusculan Disputations*: "There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves" (14). Part III's healing of anger comes from an inner source.

The inner healing requires, it seems, correct argumentation, or correct beliefs. Nussbaum follows up, "Philosophy heals human diseases, diseases produced by false beliefs. Its arguments are to the soul as the doctor's remedies are to the body" (*Therapy of Desire* 14). Such ideas, primarily Stoic, flowed to the West chiefly through Seneca (whereas the Eastern fathers were reading Chrysippus), who is quoted in *Ancrene Wisse*, on an unrelated point, earlier in Part II (l. 380-382). Stoic philosophy, like the speaker of *Ancrene Wisse*, allows no anger, and many texts related to the *Ancrene Wisse* are influenced by it: "When Christian thinkers write about divine anger, or about mercy for human frailty, they owe a deep debt to the Roman Stoics" (Nussbaum *Therapy of Desire* 4). *Ancrene Wisse* contains this medical language of remedy—specifically, the philosophical medicine of curing the soul by combating one's false beliefs.

The speaker focuses on beating anger's transformative effects by seeing and thinking differently, by doing some transforming of one's own. Bella Millett suggests that the structure of Part III, aside from the bird imagery, seems to be topically-based "free association" (General Introduction xliii). The introductory section on anger seems crafted, however: first around describing the destructive transformations of anger and next around the speaker's therapy, offering transformations as a cure. He proposes, *Lo her ageines wreaððe monie remedies* (50) "See! Here are many remedies against anger" (94) and begins to help the anchoress by showing her how to redefine the nature of the abuse she suffers. The hallmarks of his *therapeia* are in his

imperatives to the anchoresses to see and to think in a new way, to either see—*Lo*—or think *thench*—differently.

The speaker encourages the anchoresses to do their own imaginative shape-shifting, changing it from a malevolent activity into a benign one. In his philosophical therapy, the speaker keeps his *forschuppilt* motif. This time, however, the anchoresses, not anger, are empowered as *forschuppilt* this time. *ʒef me misseið þe* (52) “If people insult you” (94)—the remedy is to change what you think you are: *þench þet tu art eorðe* (52) “think that you are earth” (94). The speaker continues arguing the implications: *Ne totret me eorðe? Ne bispit me eorðe?* (52-53) “Does one not tread on earth, spit on earth?” (94). If the anchoresses pretends she is the earth, then the bad treatment given her is fair: *þah me dude swa bi þe, me dude the eorðe rihte* (52-53) “Even if they did this to you, they treated the earth properly” (94)—the problem is solved when the anchoresses “you” is the “earth.” If the anchoresses are insulted, they should *þench* on the other hand: *hwet is word bute wind?* (61) “what is a word but wind?” (94). One transformation—anger turning anchoresses into wolves—appears to deserve other transformations, only now the anchoresses are the shape-shifters. The transforming women are no longer turning *in malo* into wolves—now *in bono* the translation, although humble, is to become the earth, or see words as only the breeze.

The pattern continues, with the speaker asking the reader to see or think in a new way, usually followed by questions or further argumentation to set the truth before his reader. Think if Christ did this! the speaker orders, when he describes the desire to retaliate against wrongdoing: *ʒef þu berkest aʒein, þu art hundes cunnes; ʒef þu stingest aʒein, þu art neddre cundel, and nawt Cristes spuse. þench dude he swa* (53-55) “If you bark back, you have a dog’s nature; if you sting back, you have an adder’s nature, and not that of Christ’s spouse. Think if he

did so” (94). The desire to retaliate is associated, once again, with the behavior of the inhuman beasts—the barking of the dog and the sting of the adder. The cure, again, is to *pench*.

In his final narrative *exempla* as a remedy for anger, the speaker reiterates his call for the reader to see—*lo*—and to therefore know—*cunneð*—the truth: *lo her on ende þe beste remedie, ant cunneð þis essample* (97-98) “See here finally the best remedy against harmful deeds or words—and know it through this illustration” (95). In this final and *beste* remedy for anger, the speaker has the anchoress imagine that she is hit on the breast by someone throwing in a bag of ransom money to free her from prison—she is *hurte sare* (117) “hurt badly” (96) having been hit *ful hearde upo þe breoste* (115-117) “very hard on the breast” (95). However, she has been hit by a bag of money, thrown in as ransom that frees her from prison.

That the setting of the illustration takes place in prison—analogue to the anchorhold—lends the story a bitter note: the speaker frankly acknowledges that anyone would want to get out of a prison, and the anchorhold itself has already been referred to in Part II as *Godes prisun* (877) “God’s prison” (88). The target audience of the *exemplum* can hardly miss the reference. The illustration makes no bones that the ordinary human response to being in a jail cell is to want out of it. The speaker is quick to follow up, however, when he asserts, *O þis ilke wise, we beoþ alle i prisun her* (103-104). Having established the communal fate that “in the same way, we are all in prison here” (95)—it’s not just you anchoresses!—the speaker can show how the bag of coins is transformed from a hurtful projectile into the means of freedom.

The key is to *pench as þe prisun walde þe þe oðer hurte sare wið þe bigurdel* (117) “think of it as the prisoner would whom the other person hurt badly with the bag of coins” (95-96). The prisoner awaiting freedom knows how things really stand: *nalde he cunne god þonc a mon þe duste uppon him of peonehes a bigurdel forte reimin him wið ant lesen him of pine?* (98-

102) “would he not greatly thank someone who threw a bag of coins at him to redeem himself with and release himself from suffering?” (95). The anchoress, receiving her therapy, earlier was instructed to “think” that she was the emotionless earth itself, since of course the earth would never get angry at insults. Now she can correctly see that the painful injury she has received is really her ticket to freedom—what prisoner would begrudge a ransom? The speaker ups the ante in the illustration by making the ransom a reprieve from execution: *for wiðute cwitance, up of þis prisun nis nan inumen þet nis anan ahonget* (109-110) “For without payment no one is taken out of this prison who is not hanged at once” (95). The redemption is a painful wrong or insult—like a projectile bag of coins; she is smarting from its impact, but it is a small thing when it enables her to walk out of prison without being hanged.

To suggest that what might normally make one angry (being injured) instead might inspire gratitude is to make the same link that Epicurus and one of his successors first-century Epicurean philosopher Philodemus (in his *On Anger*) do: to them anger is tied to gratitude in that both rely on the actions of others (Nussbaum *Therapy of Desire* 242-243). In a final link to ancient emotion theory, the speaker ends with the suggestion that the anchoress redefine the significance of her injury to the extent that she thank her persecutor: *þonke þe þe hit sent te* (118-119) “thank the one who sent [the bag of coins] to you” (118-119). Precisely this tie—the way both anger and gratitude are both based on “exposure and weakness” and “fear and need”—make them alien to the gods, who as Epicurus explains in his *Principal Opinions* are “in a condition of self-sufficiency” (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire* 242-243). The human anchoress in her cell is decidedly not one of the gods—she needs philosophical therapy to rethink her injuries into something for which she is grateful.

To do this rethinking, the anchoress also, I argue, needs a “discourse community,” once again using Bella Millett’s term. The speaker himself gives her quite a multi-layered community of voices in Ancrene Wisse. But she needs, perhaps, what one might call a feminine discourse model, which hagiographical texts like *Seinte Katerine* offer. The speaker, in Part IV, advising the remedy for sloth, *accidies*, proclaims it to be *redunge*, reading, in the manner of the posters in elementary school libraries. He goes on later in Part IV to advise *redunge* in a way that is quite more emphatic: *Ofte, leoue sustren, ze schulen uri leasse forte reden mare. Redunge is god bone. Redunge teacheð hu ant hwet me bidde, ant beode bizet hit efter. Amidde pe redunge, hwene pe heorte likeð, kimeð up a deuotiun pet is wurð monie benen* (1552-1557). “Often, beloved sisters, you ought to pray less so as to read more. Reading is good prayer. Reading teaches us how and what to pray for, and prayer achieve it afterwards. As you read, when the heart is pleased, a devotion arises which is worth many prayers” (153). In the devotional economy of the early thirteenth century, reading actually trumps prayer—*uri leasse* (1553). Reading *Seinte Katerine* also might be something that the anchoress’s *heorte likeð*; the Middle English St. Katherine is typically understood to have been worked over with an anchoritic audience in mind (Kinane 33). Would the 13th-century anchoress have seen herself in Katherine? She would have seen, for one thing, someone who, like the gods of the older philosophical traditions, did not show the “fear and need” (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire* 243) of either anger or gratitude. Katherine is certainly fearless; she is a sassy apologist who is “ruder” in the Middle English than her Latin source (Savage and Watson, “Notes to *St. Katherine*” n.22 p. 425).

Thecla and Sainte Katherine

Christians had been seeing themselves in, if not exactly imitating, female saints for centuries. No one needed to give Katherine *therapeia* when she was mistreated. Appropriately then, perhaps, Karolyn Kinane uses the term “divinization,” from Giles Constable, to describe the fruit of the anchorite’s experience of “[imitating] the saint in seeking and expecting” her own version of a saint’s life in the anchorhold. They were the “gateway” (Brown “Body” 153-4) for thinking about the individual’s body and the Christian life when, a thousand years before the *Ancrene Wisse*, the Acts of the Apostles was written. Peter Brown describes the “stroke of genius” in the way the Acts appropriated the genre of late classical Romance. In the Acts of the Apostles’ use of the romance genre, instead of featuring the trials of young lovers, the vulnerable young girl is the heroine who manages to survive with her virginity intact. The goal is not the marriage bed but “the Apostle’s call to continence” (156). It was especially the late second- and early third-century apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* that captured the late 2nd and 3rd-century imagination. Thecla was not so very different from Katherine, whose story first appeared in the 8th century, and whose Middle English version is, of course, part of the *Ancrene Wisse*’s discourse community.

Both Thecla and Katherine were immensely popular female saints in their times and eschewed marriage in order to pursue celibate Christian passions. In Thecla’s case, she chooses to follow Paul, and in the case of Katherine, who was educated by her father, she becomes an expert in medieval disputation combating heresy and paganism. Like Thecla, who is persecuted by her pagan parents and ultimately rulers for refusing to marry and for following the Apostle instead, Katherine is young, wise, lovely, beautiful in form, and instead of love songs, she loves

the Holy Writ¹³ (263). Thecla roughs up a Syrian magistrate who tries to kiss her; she knocks his crown off of his head (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 60); Katherine leaps forth among gory altars of the crowd of fearful Christians sacrificing to the devil and defies the pagan Emperor (263). Both are paraded naked in front of the authorities and beaten. Like Thecla, Katherine is accused of witchcraft (282). Her last words, before her head is struck off, are to Jesus as her lover (283).

Both female saints were popular in their time because they touched a contemporary nerve. Thecla's tale fascinated its audience with the erotic possibilities of the intact and vulnerable young body resisting persecution (Brown 157-159). *Seinte Katerine* was also emblematic of her time; her tale is different from Thecla's in that it is a cerebral one featuring Katherine's famously long and spirited disputations, which echo the scholasticism that characterized centers of learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. She also sounds much like an eleventh-century apologist of the "central tenets of the Christian faith" (Savage and Watson, "Editor's Note" 261). After Lateran IV in 1215 when the Dominican mendicants (one of whom, Millett theorizes in her General Introduction to the text, was the author of *Ancrene Wisse*) "[appropriated] disputation as a constituent element of their preaching agenda," disputation truly "entered the public sphere" (Novikoff 155-156). Katherine's debating abilities and erudition made her a "fitting model of female piety in this period" (Goodich X.26).

Katherine is renowned as a verbose model of academic combat. As such, she has mastered one of the most important maneuvers of debate: to take charge of the definitions, a move that is not unlike the sort of re-thinking and re-seeing that the *Ancrene Wisse* advises for overcoming mistreatment. When the emperor meets Katherine and speaks to her for the first

¹³ All translations of *Seinte Katerine* are from Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *St. Katherine, in Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*.

time, he chastises her for demeaning the sun and moon, their *undeadliche godes* (126-127)¹⁴ “undying gods” which everyone should *hersumin ant herien* (127-128) “worship and honor” (265). She responds to him by asserting that they are no such thing but are God’s creations and that everything does God’s bidding *bute mon ane* (135) “except humanity alone” (265)—and the list goes on; Katherine reviles the emperor’s *witlese lei* (308-309) “stupid law” (269) and continues to redefine what the debaters attempt to use against her. Masters of debate is not exactly what the *Ancrene Wisse* encourages anchoresses to be; they are encouraged not to counsel or preach, and one of the things to be dreaded is someone visiting and then musing afterward that *Peos ancre . . . is of much speche* (II.283-284) “this anchoress talks a lot” (73). No one argues that the audience is obliged to imitate the female saint on this count, however much the voluble Katherine reflects the devotional and academic priorities of the 13th century.

One of the priorities of the post-Lateran IV world’s disputation was combating and converting heretics, and Katherine converts the “fearsome fighters,” the fifty debaters she is pitted against. Katherine pummels her hearer’s ears with words—King Maxentius remarks, *wordes þu hauest inohe* (191) “you have plenty to say” (266)—updating for the thirteenth century the way that Thecla physically “boxed” Alexander of Antioch’s ears and knocked off “the great golden crown of a priest of the Imperial cult, heavy with images of the Emperors themselves” (Brown, *Body* 157). After the debaters convert, as they are dragged to their deaths in a blazing pyre proclaiming their faith; the queen is so impressed with Katherine that she herself converts.

These developments do not go down well with King Maxentius, who becomes progressively more enraged; he is the opposite of what the therapeutic Part III in *Ancrene Wisse*

¹⁴ All quotations from *Seint Katerine* are designated by line number and are from the “Edited Text based on MS Bodley 34” in *Seinte Katerine: Re-Edited from MS Bodley 34 and the Other Manuscripts*, edited by S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne and E. J. Dobson, Early English Text Society by the Oxford UP, 1981.

would instruct. At one point he *keste his heaved, as wod mon [o] wreððe* (496) “rolled his head around in rage like a madman” (274) at Katherine’s defiance. The reading anchoresses of the *Ancrene Wisse* would recognize the transforming effects of anger in the king—“*Wreððe is a wodschiþe.*’ *Wrað mon, nis he wod? Hu lokeð he?* (39-40) “Anger is a madness. Is not someone who is angry mad? How do they look?” (94). They look like the wolf-man Maxentius, who progressively turns into more and more of a Herod figure (Savage and Watson, “Notes to *St. Katherine*” 427).

The anchoress of *Ancrene Wisse* might recognize something else in *Seinte Katerine*: her own female body. In order not to be someone like the dreaded Maxentius, the emperor turned *wedde wulf*, she has considered the softness of her skin, so she can shed the wolf’s pelt, the *ruhe fel* on her heart to be soft with reconciliation as is *cundeliche wummone hude* (47-48) “as a woman’s skin is by nature” (94). Maxentius in *Seinte Katherine*, on the other hand, when the queen converts to Christianity, informs her that *ich chulle leote luken ant to teo þe tittes awei of þine beare breosten ant þrefter do þe to de[a]ð* (766-767), “I will have the nipples torn and rent from your bare breasts, and then put you to death, the cruelest thing to suffer” (280). The anchoress has already considered her own female body in *Ancrene Wisse*, although not quite so gruesomely, when she imagined her the people insulting her to be friendly bank loan officers who probably didn’t intend to hit the anchoress quite so hard on the breast with the bag of ransom money they were hurling into her prison cell (95-96).

In the face of a character like *þe þurs Maxence, þe wedde wulf* (678) “the monster Maxentius, the mad wolf” (278), the anchoress would see what she could become--the wolf-bride not fit for Christ (94) if she does not learn how to use her imagination and transform her inner life. As a guide, there is her fellow female practitioner of extreme Christianity (Savage and

Watson, General Introduction 18), Katherine herself Stoically reflects no anger, in fact occasionally *smirkende* “smiles a little” and only gives thanks once, in a prayer shortly before her death. She thanks God *þet tu hauest uleue[t] me ant wildest þet ich were [itald] I [þe] tale of þine wummen* (872-873) “that you have given your consent, and desire me to be accounted in the number of your women” (283). This would be the highest wish of the anchoress too. *Seinte Katerine* may face off with fifty heretics in a feat of medieval *disputatio*; the anchoress will face off with the emotional heretic within herself in Part III with the aid of the speaker’s philosophical *therapeia*.

Chapter Three

“What Maner Womman Artow?": Secular and Traditional Sainthood in

Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and *Second Nun's Tale*

Custance in the *Man of Law's Tale* and Thecla in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

Custance, who becomes the protagonist of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, is not a professional religious person but might be termed a secular saint (Kaiser and Dean), or at least a “hybrid” of the saint's legend and “miracle of the Virgin story” (Broughton 111). She is no nun, and she marries and has a child. The plot points that form her story are an amalgamation not from saints' lives but from romances—that of the “accused queen” who gives birth to a malformed, monstrous child (Benson, Explanatory Notes 857) and of the “persecuted queen,” an incest tale, like *Apollonius of Tyre*, in which the daughter of a king escapes the father who want to marry her (Schlauch 156-157).

These romance plots are not left to themselves, however, but are changed by Chaucer's main source for the *Man of Law's Tale*. Nicholas Trivet, who like the probable author of a *Ancrene Wisse* (Millet, General Introduction xix) was Dominican friar, includes the story of Constance in a section of his Anglo-Norman chronicle of world history. Trivet's version of Constance takes away some of the objectionable elements of the analogous romances, such as the incest, and adds hagiographical and pseudo-hagiographical elements. One such addition is Custance's marriage to the converting Sultan, to “help the Christian cause” as Schlauch puts it (157-158). Even with these additions and excisions in his source, as Chaucer's *Man of Law* makes clear, he will “noon reherse” an incest tale (II.81-89)¹⁵—a remark often taken as a

¹⁵ All quotations from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, edited by Larry D. Benson, Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

reference to John Gower's inclusion of a "Story of Apollonius" tale in his *Confessio Amatis* (Scheps 287).

The way that the *Man of Law's Tale* both follows and carefully upends the conventions of hagiographical romance highlights not only Custance's *patienta*—her patient holiness—but also the communal response to Custance and her emblematic suffering. Even with the incest tale and other elements from excised from Trivet's *Chronicle*'s version of the Constance story, Chaucer makes more changes from Trivet and also from Gower's analogue version of Constance in his *Confessio Amatis*. Scenes from Trivet in which Constance lies to her would-be rapist and craftily shoves him into the sea are "carefully expunged" (Yunck 258). Even sanitized this way, Custance as Elizabeth Roberson says, "is not a saint" ("Elvyssh" 172). As surely as she wends her way across the Mediterranean, the Celtic Sea, and even the Straits of Gibraltar, The Man of Law's Custance wends her way through the three modes of bodily female life as virgin, wife, and finally widow. She is not one of the *perfecti*—since she isn't a professional religious or contemplative—such Augustine delineates in *De Civitate Dei*'s hierarchy of Christians (Watson 101). As Nicholas Watson puts it, Custance's story is instead about the Christian community of the *mediocriter boni*, as is the entire *Canterbury Tales*. The *mediocriter boni*, "the middling good," are the players in the "authentic state of Christian living" in the community represented in Chaucer's *Tales* (112).

Custance's charged beauty and holiness challenge and confront those who come across her. As Chaucer's secular saint, Custance, like other saints, must deal with the public response to her holiness and otherness, that quality that causes so much chaos in saint's *vitae*. Custance spend much of the tale journeying the Mediterranean by ship and replaying the epic motif of arrival, since she is frequently the stranger appearing on foreign shores to either hospitality or

hostility. The response to her appearance is, frequently, that she is mistreated by others. As Geraldine Heng observes, women who do not “intensely hate her, and wish her far from their countries, intensely desire her” (181). Like the romance heroines of her folktale origins, Custance is falsely accused both of murder and bearing a monstrous child, and at one point she is on the verge of being condemned to death.

Custance, I argue, is treated in some ways like an icon: a spectacle, a cross-like and even relic-like figure who endures acts of both evil and of religious adoration. She endures her lonely suffering with devotion: she kneels, she crosses herself, she prays. In response to the liturgical nature of her actions, Winthrop Wetherbee asserts that the “Man of Law deploys his Custance as a sort of icon in a series of tableaux” (70). Laurel Broughton sees her as a “mirror of Mary” (127) and V. A. Kolve has analyzed the tale’s connection, especially through its rudderless ship, with medieval iconographic art (*Imagery* 301-302).

The Man of Law’s Custance is set in the period of the early church—or at least the very early church for Northumberland, the setting of Custance’s marriage and motherhood in the tale. Custance’s son is identified as Maurice, the future Emperor Mauricius of the sixth century. The significance of the tale in this setting, Kolve says, is that “the Church was a shining article of faith” (*Imagery* 297). What was truly shining about the faith of the early church was how faith was portrayed in the bodies of its virgin saints, whose stories also incorporated elements of late classical romance, like that of Custance. Such was case with Thecla, the cross-dressing saint of early Christian popularity. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* owes much to late classical romance; it resembles tales such Xenophon’s *Ephesiaka*, or *An Ephesian Tale* (von Contzen n. 66; Brown, *Body* 155-156). Like Thecla, the young protagonists of *Ephasiaka*, Anthia and Habrocomes, inspire devotion in those who merely see them. Their bodies are preserved in midst of

improbable circumstances: Anthia is not devoured when she is thrown in a covered ditch with two mastiffs as punishment—although, somewhat less than miraculously, a guard smitten with Anthia is feeding them into gentleness (Xenophon 37). Thecla is not devoured by the lions, a bear, or bulls set against her (*Acts* 61).

Custance, then, is not the first saint-like figure to bring with her elements from a romance background. Armed with similar romance motifs, the story of Thecla fired the imagination of second- through fourth-century Christianity; her tale is “epic Christianity” (Brown *Body* 156). The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* straddles the genre of saint’s legend and late classical romance so successfully that it is today anthologized both in collections of popular ancient Greek novels¹⁶ and collections of apocryphal Christian literature.¹⁷ True to its late classical romance roots, The *Acts* begins with falling in love: From her window, Thecla sees the apostle Paul and is “swept out of the household into the entourage of Paul” (Brown 156). Thecla herself inspires devotion—an Antiochean city official, Alexander, falls in love with her, and a bereaved rich woman takes her in as her own daughter and “mourned, considering that such beauty was to be thrown to the beasts” when Thecla is sent to contend with wild animals (*Acts* 60). Thecla is available for the rich woman’s protection because she has ruptured with her own family.

Such a rupture with family in favor of new loyalties is also typical of a saint’s biography even a thousand years later in the thirteenth century. Michael Goodich writes about the many saint’s biographies in which the youthful saint rebels against the parents’ values. When marriage or a rich family heritage is at stake, parent-child conflict over the saint’s choice of vocation (particularly for orders involving vows of poverty) can pit well-to-do parents against their

¹⁶ *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, Ed. William Hanson. Xenophon’s *Ephesian Tale*, labeled “Romantic Novel,” sits next to *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, labeled “Christian Novella.”

¹⁷ *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament*, Bart Ehrman.

offspring. St. Francis of Assisi's cloth-merchant father, for example, is not happy when Francis sells his bolts of cloth and gives the proceeds away after having a vision of "the sacredness of poverty" (294). Thecla herself breaks with her family when she refuses to marry her fiancé Thamyras and instead follows Paul (57-58); loyalties have been made new.

The *Man of Law's Tale* has different plans for Custance, and her trajectory is not Thecla's. Custance's rupture with her family is less self-motivated, less wilful than Thecla's. Secular saint Custance's version of "authentic Christian living," to use Watson's phrase, seems more passive. She is propelled—unwillingly—from her family in Rome and into the rest of the Mediterranean world to endure mostly bad treatment. Her tribulations go thusly: Sixth-century merchants see the beauty and virtues of Custance, sixth-century daughter of the emperor of Rome, and regale the Sultan of Syria with stories about her. He converts in order to have her, swears oaths with the Roman Emperor, and Custance is sent forth over the sea to him, where his mother pretend conversion but kills her son the Sultan and his followers. Custance is sent on a rudderless ship into the Mediterranean, lands eventually in pagan Northumbria, is taken in by a constable and his wife, who is killed by a jealous knight who cannot win Custance's love and so frames her for the murder. Custance survives her trial in front of King Alla by miraculous intervention; Alla marries her but leaves his newly pregnant wife to fight in Scotland, whereupon false letters sent by his mother after the birth of his child inform him that his child is a monster. His grieved but magnanimous response letter is stolen and changed by his mother, and Custance, now with her baby, is again banished onto a ship and, with a brief stop near the Straits of Gibraltar where she defends herself from rape, floats back to Rome where she falls in with the care of her aunt and is eventually reunited with her father and also her husband, on pilgrimage;

Alla takes her back to Northumbria, where they live a year in happiness until his death and her departure see her back to her beginning point in Rome.

Custance has few choices to make beyond reacting to the indignities that are put upon her. She spends much time being hustled from point A on the Mediterranean to point B willy nilly. After her catastrophic first wedding, she is spared the carnage meted out to her husband and his followers but is hustled “anon, foot-hoot” onto a “ship al steerelees” (438-439), a phrase that characterizes much of her story. Accordingly, much critical reaction paints Custance as “a passive and helpless victim,” as Robert B. Dawson says in his survey of criticism of Custance (294), towards whom there has been, on the part of readers, a general “failure of our sympathy” (295). Cathy Hume says that Custance is a “victim of patriarchy, a pawn on the marriage market” in her article outlining the similarities between Custance’s quandaries and those of real-life fourteenth-century women (109). Custance, says Geraldine Heng, is the “blankest of blanks”—“for the fantasy of others” and made by Chaucer more passive than the Constance of her sources (Heng 192, 191). What is all this passivity, and to what end?

Custance lacks the self-motivation of saints such as Thecla, who, for example, looks out of her window and, seeing and hearing Paul, becomes obsessed with him, forcing her way into sainthood, preaching and eventually baptizing herself. Although Thecla’s story, like many of the Apocryphal Acts that appeared in Asia Minor in the mid second century, appropriates from classical romance the adolescent love-at-first-sight moment (Brown, *Body* 154-156), that defining moment in the *Man of Law’s Tale* is not Custance’s. Custance demonstrates none of this headstrong initiative or other qualities that saints in thirteenth-century biographies frequently display—such as an odd maturity at a young age—“quasi senex” (Goodich I.287).

Custance's passivity, then, upends some of the conventions of hagiographic romance and in fact leaves a void for another character in the *Man of Law's Tale* to fill. In the opening sequence of the tale, during which Custance is sent away from Rome to Syria, the decisions and the falling-in-love story that bear Custance away from Rome to Syria are not her own. She is not the agent in her own secular-saint *vitae*. The hagiographic conversion moment of love-at-first-sight is usurped in the *Man of Law's Tale* by the Sultan, who must have Custance:

To han hir figure in his remembrance,
That all his lust and all his bisy cure
Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure. II.187-189

He must have her “withinne a litel space” (208b); otherwise, “He nas but deed” (90). He converts from Islam to Christianity in order to seal an alliance with Custance's father and to acquire Custance as a bride: “I moot been hires; I may noon oother chese” (II.227). Custance is the desired, hence the emphasis in her story is on the of the people who view her, and the men—her father and the Sultan—whose mutual oaths to secure her across the Mediterranean (II.244).

Even before the Sultan steps up to claim her, Custance is a spectacle instead of an actor. The merchants are in the habit of relaying to the Sultan “the wondres that they myghte seen or heere” (II.182); it is the “marchantz” who “han hym toold of dame Custance” (184). That Custance does not convert the merchants when they are in Rome is Chaucer's innovation, noticed by Kolve (*Imagery* 303). Here Chaucer breaks not only with his source in Trivet and but also Gower's Constance tale in *Confessio Amatis*—in both, Constance boldly converts the merchants to Christianity. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, however, the merchants only see Custance's goodness and beauty. Instead of focusing on Custance's initiative, the tale focuses instead on

Custance's reception—what others make of her. Simply viewing Custance and hearing about her suffices to set the entire plot in motion.

Since there is no active Custance in the Man of Law's version, there is no converting to Christianity and newly adoring Christ for the merchants; instead, they see Custance and newly adore her. In this, she in another way is like romance protagonists successfully absorbed by the apocryphal *Acts*: "the male and female stars of the romantic works need only be seen to cause others to fall in love with hem. They have magical erotic power" (Pervo 135). Thecla's family complains that she is so captivated by Paul that she "sticks to the window like a spider" to view him (*Acts* 56-57). This sort of fascination also grips the Sultan, who tells his council that "To geten hire that hath my lyf in cure, / For in this wo I may not longe endure" (II.230-231).

In this role, it is the Sultan who is a rebellious saint figure, albeit an abortive one. Here, the smitten Sultan resembles Thecla more than Custance. Custance is instead St. Paul, who is "a feckless mentor" (W. Hansen 53), to the Sultan's Thecla. Following the model of the saints *vitae*, rupturing with family, the Sultan converts to Christianity, to his mother's vast, if hidden, displeasure. The idea of an imported "bilsful mayden," however, does not make everyone wax "ful fayn" as it does the merchants when the first see Custance (II.172-173). The Sultan, besotted with Custance, is the one who initiates the conversion of himself and "his baronage / And alle his liges" to be christened, so that he can marry the daughter of the Christian Emperor. He consults his "privee conseil" (II.204), but he does not consult his mother. Perhaps the Sultan should have realized, when "so glad he was, he nyste what to seye" (II.384), that his mother's pliant testimony of wishing to be converted alongside him was too good to be true. The Sultan's mother has recognized Custance for what she is—a threat. Custance is "an embodied Christianity who inspires both violence and desire" (Robertson, "Elvyssh" 159).

The merchants' role in seeing Custance, evaluating her worth, and then traveling across the Mediterranean where they interest the Sultan in Custance—as though she were one of their imported wares—turns Custance in to a sort of commodity (Barlow 406, Ladd 23). In a passage just after the merchants hear that the “commune voys of every man” declare that Custance has not only “heigh beauties, withoute pride . . . Hir herte is a verray chambre of hoolynesse, / Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse” (II.155, 162, 167-168), the text gives a sense that for the merchants, seeing Custance has put the dazzling finishing touch on their business in Rome:

Thise merchantz han doon fraught hir shippes newe,
 And whan they han this blissful mayden sayn,
 Hoom to Surrye been they went ful fayn,
 And doon hir nedes as they han doon yoore (II.171-174)

However, the text does more than impart the idea that Custance is a commodity—her heart is “a verray chambre of hoolynesse”—as if she herself were a reliquary.

The medieval relic trade, as Patrick Geary describes it, was an important type of commerce itself. As reluctant as moderns are to embrace the idea, much of medieval life revolved around saint's relics: “There was no class of [individuals] . . . for whom relics were not of great importance . . . an indispensable part of daily life, accepted as unquestioningly, in fact, as life itself” (Geary *Furta* 4). No church altar could be without its saints relics (Geary “Sacred” 176). That Custance is a woman heightens the connection: The bodies of female saints “provided a disproportionate percentage of the wonder-working relics in late medieval Europe” (Bynum *Fragmentation* 187). Some holy women turned into relics even before their own deaths (187).

The medieval longing to appropriate the venerated relics of saints is chronicled in *translatione*—stories of the movement of relics from place to place. Seeing the story of Custance

in the *Man of Law's Tale* as she is transported from place to place, from Rome to other lands, as a sort of *translatio* gives rationale to her frequent trips across the Mediterranean. It also gives rationale to the stress given her varied reception on foreign shores; after all, the “symbolic value of a new or rediscovered relic was only a reflection of the values assigned by the society that honored it” (Geary, *Furta* 7). For example, when the beautiful Custance lands “under an hethen castel,” she is only stared at instead of helped—who would appreciate a relic in a pagan land?: “Doun from the castel cometh ther many a wight / To gauren on this ship and on Custance” (II.911-912). Custance is perhaps in Spain or Morocco, since her ship leaves “thurghout the narwe mouth / Of Jubaltare and Septe” (II.946-947), in a heathen place that would not worship Christ or venerate the relics of a saint. The land is populated by an unhelpful crowd and a thief, a renouncer of Christ, who attempts to rape Custance.

That Chaucer's Custance is hardly militant in her conversion strategies (not converting the merchants and only quietly converting the Constable) helps undermine the view that her multiple Mediterranean crossings are Crusade references, particularly her going to Syria (Lewis 366), even as the fourteenth century “saw growing skepticism about crusades” (Phillips 72). An alternative view is that Custance enacts multiple times the translation of saints' relics as they traveled across the Mediterranean.

The entry of Custance and her retinue into Syria evokes the saint's festivals in which local crowds reenacted the original entry of the saint's relics into their city. Such festivals were originally based on the late-Roman ceremonial of the emperor's *adventus*, or “arrival in state” into a city (Brown, *Cult* 98). Custance, as both the secular saint and the daughter of the Roman Emperor, is doubly embedded in the comparison. The *Tale* makes the *adventus* reference explicit:

Noght trowe I the triumphe of Julius,
 Of which that Lucan maketh swich a boost,
 Was roialler ne moore curius
 Than was th'assembled of this blisful hoost. (II.400-403)

Custance's triumphal entry, however, is only a parody of the community unity that was endemic to saints' festivals and to the *adventus*, which were "held to embrace the whole, undivided community" across professions and classes (Brown, *Cult* 98). In this perverse version of the triumphal saint's entry, the Syrian community is only partly and dubiously Christian—the Sultan's conversion, with its questionable motives, is a top-down affair in which his mother is most definitely not a part. It is also the Sultan's mother, the Sultanness, the "welle of vices" (II.323) who decided with her advisers to "feyne us cristendom to take" (II.351) and who is plotting a bloodbath instead of a wedding—"She shal have need to wasshe away the rede" (II.356)—who accompanies Custance from her ship into town. Custance, instead of being borne into town by a singleminded crowd of jubilant faithful, is accompanied by one of the arch-villains of the tale.

In both of these stories, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Man of Law's Tale*, the mothers turn murderous against their changed offspring. When Thecla is asked by the governor why she will not marry her fiancé Thamyris, "according to the law of the Iconians," Thecla's mother Theocleia shouts: "Burn the lawless one! Burn her that is no bride in the midst of the theatre, that all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid!" (*Acts* 58). In the *Man of Law's Tale*, the Sultanness sees to it that her own son and his followers at the wedding-day feast "been al tohewe and stiked at the bord" (II.430). The Sultan's story, unlike Thecla's, ends not in sainthood but filicide.

That Custance does not choose her sainthood associates her with other characters who are unhappy with the Sultan's and the Roman Emperor's decision to unite their families in marriage. Both Custance and the Sultanness are chafing at the same phenomenon, sisters in their mutual complaint about "mannes governance," a phrase they both use to describe their fate as women in light of men's decisions. Custance, hardly imbued with missionary zeal at the prospect of leaving her parents and her home for "the Barbre nacion" (II.281), declares to her father and mother, "Wommen are born to thraldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance" (II.286-287). Custance is not exactly correct about "mannes governance" as she repairs to her "chambre" where she shortly indulges "tendre wepyng" (III.292, 293). Soon the chamber where she will stay—for eight years total over two trips—will be a rudderless boat, guided not by "mannes governance" but mysteriously by God. "Mannes governance," on the other hand, will fail Custance multiple times during the story (Hume 123). The Sultan, who "may noon oother chese" (I.227), hardly has "governance" over himself as he is deceived and killed by his mother's design. The Man of Law's narrator also regrets that the other man governing the situation, Custance's father, the Emperor, cannot see how badly things will turn out for Custance: "Imprudent Emperour of Rome, allas!" (II.309). The Sultanness, in her own evaluation converting to Christianity, is slightly more on track: "What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe / But thraldom to oure bodies and penance?" (337-338) she asks. Custance's fate will show the Sultanness to be correct: to be a Christian, and to be Custance, is to very much have a body in "thraldom."

The bodily nature of Christian life—which, ironically, the Sultanness correctly perceives—is illustrated in Custance. Dawson argues that Custance is a "somewhat woodenly emblematic figure" (295), and Kolve associates her with iconographic imagery (*Imagery* 310-311). Liturgical motions are characteristic of nearly all the bodily actions performed by

Constance in the poem: she rises, stands, kneels, weeps, prays, thanks God, crosses herself, falls to her knees, lies still in her room, and casts her eyes heavenward.

One illustration of Custance as liturgical tableaux is Custance's prayer at one of her moments of desperation. When the Sultanness has her son the Sultan and his converted entourage killed, Custance is rushed to the rudderless ship. Before she leaves, she crosses herself, that is, "blesseth hire, and with ful pitous voys" (II.449-450) begins to address a prayer to the Cross:

O cleere, o welful auter, hooly croys,
 Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pitee,
 That wessh the world fro the olde iniquitee,
 Me from the feend and fro his clawes kepe,
 That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.

Victorious tree, proteccioun of trewe,
 That oonly worthy were for to bere
 The Kyng of Hevene with his woundes newe,
 The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spere,
 Flemere of feendes out of hym and here
 On which they lymes faithfully extenden,
 Me kepe, and yif me might my lyf t-amenden." II.451-462

J. Stephen Russell suggests that these lines are evocative of *The Dream of the Rood* and wonders if Chaucer could have known a Middle English variant of the *Dream*. As does Custance's prayer, the *Dream* refers to the cross as a *sigebeam* "victory-tree" (238 n.13). But in *The Man of Law's Tale* it is not so much Custance's address to the cross that resembles the cross in the *Dream of*

the Rood but her movements, her circumstances, and her status as a spectacle. It is Custance, as one of the “wondres” that the merchants “myghte seen or heere” (II.182), who is like the tree that is *sylic* “wondrous” (13) that is observed by the dreamer in the *Dream*.

The “wooden,” iconic, inanimate, even passive quality of Custance—who in Wetherbee’s words is denied “a full measure of earthly existence” (69)—recalls the way the the rood is hefted about and forced to become what would not have chosen to be: *Genamen me ðær strange feondas / geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me heora wergas hebban* (29-30) “I was cut down from the edge of the wood, / ripped up by my roots. They seized me there, strong enemies.”¹⁸ Custance chafes at the “thraldom” (II.286) and her exile to foreign lands: going to “the strange nacioun” (II.268)—“the Barbre nacioun”—but “I moste anoon” (II.282), away from “freendes that so tendrely hire kepte” (II.269). Like Custance, the tree, having been ripped away from its place of origin, is among enemies—*feondas*.

The tree, quite naturally, performs a limited repertoire of body movements—that is, until circumstances permit a miraculous anthropomorphic change in its nature. Initially it stands: *þær Ic þa ne dorste [. . .] bugan oððe bersten [. . .] Ic fæste stod* (35-38) “I did not dare [. . .] bow or break [. . .] I stood fast.” The tree, in fact, repeatedly invokes its need to stand even at its most climactic moments: *Bifode Ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte; ne dorste Ic hwærðre bugan to eorðan* “I trembled when the warrior embraced me; even then I did not dare to bow to earth” (42). This key moment, when the cross is embraced by Christ, feminized, penetrated—*þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum* (46) “they pierced me with dark nails”—transforms its nature. After protesting that it dare only stand, it bows.

¹⁸ All text and translation from the *Dream of the Rood* are taken from the *The Dream of the Rood in Old and Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology*, edited by Eileen Treharne.

Key to the cross's change in posture is its audience. Éamonn Ó Carragáin points out that in his examination of cross poems and iconography that it is the English poet's "unique idea" to incorporate the gesture of the cross bowing down, which stems from a Roman/Gelasian rite (180). Not only was the imperative of standing emphasized, but to bow down is a violation of its "'nature' as a cross" (181). The context of the unique bow, moreover, is that the cross is delivering Christ's body to his newly-arrived followers—a new audience. The poem refers frequently to the watching audience around the cross; the strong enemies who take up the cross *geworhton him þær to wæfersyne* (31) "made me a spectacle for themselves there"; the young hero is *modig on manigra gesyhðe* (41) "brave in the sight of many."

Custance's liturgical movements take place in front of audiences as well; she kneels for the first time when she is found by the Constable on her boat, whereupon she pleads for death, but instead he "broghte he to the londe" where Custance "kneleth doun and thanketh Goddes sonde" (II.323b-324). When she is on trial for murder of the Constable's wife, surrounded by a sympathetic crowd, Custance kneels, "for as the lomb toward his deeth is broght" (I.617), and "ther was greet moornyng / Among the peple, and seyn they kan nat geese / That she had doon so greet a wikkednesse" (II.621b-623). Before Custance is put on another rudderless ship, this time with her infant, she kneels with her child, and "wepen bothe yonge and older in al that place" (II.820). One sees why Winthrop Wetherbee asserts that the "Man of Law deploys his Custance as a sort of icon in a series of tableaux" (70) emphasizing her inability to help herself and therefore "God's providential concern" (70).

That Custance's liturgical tableaux are not private moments but public occasions is important because, as Heng and Wetherbee have noticed, the changes Chaucer makes from Trivet's *Chronicle* and Gower's analogous Constance episode in the *Confessio Amatis*, often

subtract from Constance's active social role. In Gower, maintains Wetherbee, Constance not only converts but teaches the merchants; she is not only beloved of Hermengild (as she is in Chaucer's tale) but speaks with her all the time, and generally becomes "a part of Northumbrian society" (73). These are omissions in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.

However, these absences of Custance's social importance also highlight the ways in which Custance does have an active societal role in the *Man of Law's Tale*. Elizabeth Robertson argues cogently that Custance forms horizontal human relationships and that her "religious ideal is a force of personal transformation" ("Elvyssh" 169). Chaucer leaves in the pathetic passage in which Custance holds her baby while she prepares to enter yet another rudderless ship.

Performing one of the most universal human activities on earth, Custance tries to lull her baby to sleep. The scene reminds the reader—and the audience in the scene—that Custance is not a virgin saint; she is a woman with the common lot of the fragmented life, separated into segments by wifhood and motherhood (and later widowhood), and that her identity now is as a mother and wholly not virgin saint. This earthly identity is hammered home when Custance kneels, holding her weeping child:

"Pees, litel sone, I woldo thee noon harm."

With that hir coverchief of hir heed she breyde,

And over his litel eyen she it leyde,

And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,

And into hevne hire eyen up she caste. II.836-840.

Custance, at this point, has left her father and mother; been deprived of a husband she hardly knew; been exiled on the ocean; bonded with Hermengild, the Constable's wife; been falsely accused and exonerated in her murder; married Alla and had his child; and now, by her mother-

in-law's forgery, is exiled again. Her story is one of ruptured families and new families that form, break up, and form again around her.

The public weeping and outcry engendered by the plight of Custance on these occasions is reminiscent of the reaction of the women in Antioch when Thecla is threatened by animals: "the women mourned the more, since the lioness which helped her was dead" (61). Heng calls the "collective emotion" that coalesces around the heroine in Constance stories a "fiction of associative unity"—communal acts associated with empire and nation-making (214). But this communal fiction defines Chaucer's Custance—the "commune voys of every man" (II.155) proclaims her virtue at the beginning of the poem.

Moreover, the kind of processes that publicly happen when Custance is threatened also identify her as a type of holy figure for the community—she marries the king and has his child when she is vindicated. At the climactic moment Custance is about to die because the false knight swears that she killed Hermengild, she is saved by the hand that appears and blasts out the eyes of the young knight. At the same time, a voice proclaims "in general audience" that "'Thou has desclaundred, giltelees, / The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence; / Thus hastou doon, and yet hold I my pees!'" (II.673-675). The scene is reminiscent of Matthew 3, when the Spirit of God comes down as a dove and a voice proclaims at the baptism of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Douay-Rheims Bible Matthew 3:17b). Custance's public miracle saves and identifies her. Being deprived of sight, as the lying knight is, is a frequent result of blasphemy in late medieval hagiographic texts (Goodich XV.25). Moreover, moral treatises such as "the *Speculum morale* (1300?) . . . [make] no real distinction between blasphemy against God and the saints"; here, the "illustrative examples are drawn from hagiography, describing the vengeance wreaked on those who defiled the saint in word and

deed” (XV.25). Custance is not only identified with saints in this scene—she is identified with the divine.

Custance’s knowledge of her own identity, divine or saintlike, appears tenuous, however. Twice she refuses to tell who she is—first, when she arrives on the rudderless boat and meets the Constable and his wife and again when she arrives, rudderless again, back in Rome to her own aunt. In the *Acts*, when the governor asks Thecla why she won’t marry her fiancé, he is trying to figure out who she is and why she would follow someone like Paul, who is being accused of being a sorcerer—and Thecla also does not answer (58). Rather, she “stood there looking steadily at Paul,” which was answer enough for her own mother and the governor, who both agree she should be burned (58-59). Thecla reveals who she is, even if tacitly.

Custance offers no such markers of her identity; she does not have Thecla’s fascination with Paul and his gospel. She stands as a sort of monolith outside any tradition except Christian humility and the female “thralldom” of inhabiting one’s body as virgin, wife, or widow. Her adherence to the emblematic motions standing, bowing, and kneeling in the face of difficult circumstances continues even when, back in Rome, she find out she will soon see her husband Alla, whom she believes banished her after she bore their child. At the news that she will face him again at long last, “unnethe upon hir feet she myghte stoned,” but stand she does, when she does see him. Rood-like, she “doubt stant as a tree / So was hir herte shet in hir distresse, / Whan she remembered his unkyndnesse” (II.1005b-1057). The “unkyndnesse” of Alla, that is, his unnaturalness towards his own wife in banishing her, is what shuts Custance’s heart up in silence. She is not the virginal saint on a ready-to-be-declared mission; her life is that of a deserted wife and mother rather than that of the usual saint’s *vita*.

Custance's compass is always steered towards her earthly relationships, in particular her family. Like Thecla at the end of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Custance is with family at the end of the *Man of Law's Tale*. However, the emphasis with Thecla is nevertheless on the new life and the new relationships of the kingdom. Thecla declares her return to her mother—"see, I stand beside thee"—but not without urging her, "Theocleia my mother, canst thou believe that the Lord lives in heaven?" (63). Custance arrives at her father's side on her sixth and final voyage across the sea and falls to her knees one last time, because she finds her "freendes hole and sounde" (II.1150) and most especially "she hir fader hath yfounde" (1152).

Custance embraces the life of the *mediocriter boni*. The pull towards the heavenly, next life in the *Acts* is missing in Custance's secular saint's tale—she is merely glad to be back with her earthly family. Cathy Hume suggests that the story of Custance's suffering makes her an "exemplar we can hope to imitate" (126), ultimately meant to help its readers find "resilience" and "focus on the next world rather than this" (126). If so, Custance does not do a very good job of focusing on the next world, as she prays multiple times to be preserved for this present world and prefers the company, unlike the typical saint, of her biological relatives. The afterlife receives scant mention, and the *Tale's* brief mentions of delight center around Custance's reunion with Alla, her earthly husband, and her earthly father. Were Custance a celibate, holy woman, one of the *perfecti*, more focus would be on the next life: the cult of celibacy from its origins was the ultimate rebellion against the marriage bed, procreation, and the continuation of stable society as usual (Brown, *Body* 98-99); the altered loyalties of celibate saints point to the next world in which the relationships of mother, father, brother, and sister are determined by new spiritual loyalties.

Rather than a failed hagiographic romance (Wetherbee 81), the *Man of Law's Tale* is a somewhat upended hagiographic romance emphasizing not the stand-alone saint with the inviolate body but the secular saint, the woman who is attached to the world and inextricable from it and dependent on its other inhabitants in a way saints never are. She is like the cross in the *Dream of the Rood*, which is ripped out of its native safe space and cast in a starring role, gamely played, in a drama not of its own creation.

The *Second Nun's Tale* and *Seinte Katerine*

If Custance is the secular version of Thecla—mysteriously drawing the attention and desire of others, and evading rape almost miraculously—Cecile of the *Second Nun's Tale* is like *Seinte Katerine*, one of the thirteenth-century Middle English texts in the *Katherine Group*. In contrast to *The Man of Law's Tale*, the readiness of the thirteenth-century protagonist Katherine to tell the authorities exactly who she is—and who she thinks they are—is also modeled by Cecile in the *Second Nun's Tale*.

St. Katherine is direct about both her worldly and spiritual identities—and how the latter now subsumes the former—when the king speculates that she must be *freomonne foster* (164)¹⁹ “the child of freemen” (266)²⁰. She answers, *ich am Katerine icleopet ich am kinges dohter ant habbe ihauet hiderto swiðe hehe meistres Ah sone se ich she þe leome of þe soðe lare þe[t] leadeð to eche life, ich leafde al þet oðer, ant toc me him to lauerd ant madeðe him mi leofmon* (169-171, 174-176) “I am called Katherine I am a king’s daughter . . . and until

¹⁹ All quotations from the Middle English story of St. Katherine are designated by line number and are from *Seinte Katerine: Re-Edited from MS Bodley 34 and Other Manuscripts*, edited by S. R. T. O. d’Ardenne and E. J. Dobson.

²⁰ All translations of *Seint Katerine* are designated by page number and come from *St. Katherine*, edited and translated by Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson in *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*.

now I have had very great teachers But as soon as I saw the light of the true teaching that leads to eternal life, I completely abandoned the other, and took him as my Lord, and made him my lover” (266). It is no surprise that Katherine, about whom the king says *wordes þu hauest inohe* (191) “you have plenty to say” (266), identifies herself by the type of knowledge she loves.

Both Cecile and Katherine tend to march into crowds with “plenty to say.” When the authority in charge asks Cecile about the nature of her identity—“What maner womman artow?” Cecile can tell him, like Katherine, that she is “a gentil womman born” (VIII.424-425) and then, also in the manner of the Middle English *Seinte Katerine*, deconstruct the authorities’ attempt to deal with her: “‘Ye han bigonne youre questioun folily,’ / Quod she, ‘that wolden two answeres conclude / In o demande; ye axed lewedly’” (VIII.428-430). Both saints perish by having their necks cut, although Katherine’s head is struck off, whereas the executioner cannot strike off Cecile’s. After the fourth attempt, he gives up, and Cecile “nevere cessed hem the feith to teche / That she hadde fostred; hem she gan to preche” (VIII.538-539). Cecile never in the tale mentions her earthly family—so much the locus of longing for Custance.

The Second Nun’s Tale is “the only actual saint’s legend Chaucer retells at any length” (Reames, “Piety” 94). It does not provide the same kind of examination of Chaucer’s narrative choices as *The Man of Law’s Tale* because it follows nearly line-for-line its Latin sources. Lines 85 to 344 cover part of the *Second Nun’s Prologue* and into the part of the *Tale* in which Cecile instructs Tiburce on the doctrine of God as “thre persones” (VIII.341); this portion is from Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*. After that section, Chaucer’s source is what Sherry L. Reames calls “the Franciscan abridgment,” of which two copies are extant, one of which is thirteenth century (“Recent” 337). Because Chaucer adheres so closely to both of these Latin sources, his innovations in the plot and description are few, although his choice of the text—the

abridged text for the all the scenes past Tiburce's conversion—means that Cecile's conversion debate scenes are fiercely truncated, occasionally to the extent that there are non-sequiturs in the dialogue (“Recent” 339-341).

Although the dispute between Cecile and the prefect Almachius is truncated, Cecile's struggles are not likewise minimized. She does not escape from torture as does Katherine from the wheel (Reames, “Piety” 96), although Katherine, naked, is scourged at one point with lead whips (275). With Katherine, Cecile shares a certain amount of verbal sass but does not have her long debate passages and demonstrates greater attachment to other people than Katherine. Like a Stoic, Katherine tends to reproach those who are weeping (282). One suspects Katherine would have something to say to Custance, who weeps frequently in the *Man of Law's Tale*.

Chaucer not only portrays his Cecile as truly suffering and explicitly is in pain—but without the emphasis on the supernatural in her miracles (Robertson, “Apprehending” 124). After the executioner fails to sever her neck, other Christians try to stanch the bleeding while for “Thre dayes lyved she in this torment”—albeit still able “to teche” and “to preche” (VIII.537-539). Katherine suffers too, although Reames puts her in contrast to Cecile because she escapes the wheel that tries to tear her apart (“Piety” 96). Katherine, though, does not escape torture and bleeding before her execution: *Het o wod[e] wise strupen hire steort-naket ant beaten hire beare flesch ant hire freoliche bodi wið cnottede schurgen, and [swa me] dude sone, þet hire leofliche lich liðerede al [o] blode* (564-567) “He madly commanded that she be stripped stark naked and her bare flesh and her beautiful body beaten with knotted scourges, which was immediately done, so that her lovely body was all lathered with blood” (275). Unlike Cecile, though, Katherine is said to have hit *lihtliche aber ant lahinde þolede* (567) “bore it lightly, and suffered

it laughing” (275). The beautiful, bleeding Katherine, while enduring both the indignities of pain and nakedness, laughs through her suffering.

Chaucer makes Cecile’s suffering real, but he dampens associations he could make with the transcendent by leaving out the kind of “horrible yet delicious elevation . . . a means of access to the divine” (Bynum *Fragmentation* 182) that is represented in the bloody body of Katherine. Katherine’s *passio*, her moment of crucifixion-imitating suffering and bloodiness recalls the transformative moment for the cross in the *Dream of the Rood* poem: the cross becomes smeared with Christ’s blood and is mocked with Christ: *Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere. / Eall Ic wæs mid blode bestemed* (48) “They mocked us both together. I was all drenched with blood.” When the cross is corporately mocked with Christ and *bestemed* with his blood, the cross is able to miraculously bows down; second, it completes this action *elne mycle* (60)—“with great eagerness”—an modifier that in the first half of poem and was given to the young hero, Christ. The cross gains a kind of divine ability and agency from its bloody, shared transcendent experience with the crucified Christ. Katherine shares this kind of moment.

The kind of agency Cecile manifests, rather than transcendent moments of bloody suffering, comes from her rational and confident speeches in which she and others in the poem restructure her family according to the new divine order and not the earthly, fleshly one. Cecile, unlike Custance, has chosen to make her marriage what it is, and of her own serene volition makes her husband aware that she’ll be keeping her intact body on their wedding night. When St. Urban, addressing “Almyghty Lord, O Jhesu Crist,” (VIII.191), refers Cecile her in his prayer as “thyn owene thrall Cecile” (VIII.196), the epithet “thrall” has none of the dark implications of Custance’s statement that “women are born to thraldom” because of “mannes governance” (II.286-287). Rather, Cecile’s statement sounds more like a restatement of the alternate family

agreement spun between her and Valerian—she is God’s, and her guardian angel’s, and will live “with body clene and with unwemmed thought” (VIII.225) with her husband.

Cecile’s relationship with Valerian as husband, or her relationship with her earthly family, however, is in no way portrayed as a carnal attachment. In contrast, Chaucer goes out of his way to make clear that the secular Custance has carnal relations with her husband on her wedding night: “For thogh wyves be full hooly thynges, / They moste take in pacience at nyght / Swiche manere necessities as been plesynges / To folk that han ywedded hem with rynges” (II.709-712). Cecile’s most physical moment with another person might occur when she hears Tiburce, Valerian’s brother, profess willingness to leave idol-worship. At the news, she “gan kisse his brest” (290), which is more physical affection than she gives her husband, although Tiburce has earned it only because “he koude trouthe espye” in his conversion (VIII.291). The coolness with which Cecile informs Valerian, on their wedding night, that he may not touch her body is reflected, Kolve explains, in the way Cecile sits “‘al coold’ in a bath of ‘flambes rede’” during the first attempt to kill her (“Cecelia” 157).

This coolness of Cecile is also reflected in what she does share with Katherine’s *passio*: laughter. Katherine’s laughter rings out when she is naked and foaming with blood, defiant of the torture she is receiving. Cecile, unlike most virgin-martyrs in saint’s tales, is not depicted naked and Chaucer pays “remarkably little attention to her body” (Reames, “Piety” 94). Cecile’s laughter comes when the prefect Almachius has just threatened her with his power, warning, “Chees oon of this two: / Do sacrifice, or Christendom reneye, / That thou mowe now escapen by the weye” (VIII.458-460). Cecile has already buried her husband and his brother, so she knows where she will go next. Her laughter marks the same kind of transcendence that Katherine

has when bloody and beaten; it marks Cecile's new identity as someone who does not belong to the world and knows she does not care about the small powers of prefect Almachius.

Cecile's new identity—the heavenly at the expense of the earthly—has been in the making since the beginning of the tale. When Cecile asserts that she is “a gentil womman,” in answer to the prefect's question, “What maner woman artow?” (VIII.425, 424) she is not so much giving family background as she is avoiding answering specifically in order to be on her way to insulting him two lines later. Cecile had no break with her parents; she is “fostred in the feith” (VIII.122b) and went into marriage with Valerian obediently, although Lynn Staley Johnson asserts that in doing so she deceived both her parents and Valerian, who would assume the marriage would be a traditional one (322). Like Katherine who is an orphan but was taught by her father, Cecile has no need for a rupture with her family in order to embrace the life of a saint. The closest Cecile comes to connection with her earthly family is her reference to the family cemetery after Valerian, Tiburce, and the Roman officer Maximus are killed. She buries the converted and scourged-to-death Maximus alongside her husband and his brother, “withinne hire burying place, under the stone” (VIII.409). The family restructuring that this burial signals is one of the many upheavals of earthly traditions in the *Second Nun's Tale*. Johnson lists Cecile's “complete reversal of accepted social norms,” which include a defiance of “hierarchies” that is “far more threatening than any of the Wife of Bath's solutions for contemporary relationships” (322).

In early Christian centuries, family burying places like Cecile's became loci for saint worship, where the martyrs' deaths were not only a “triumph over physical pain; they were vibrant also with the memory of a dialogue with and a triumph over unjust power” (Brown *Cult* 191). The body of Cecile herself, after, like saints before her, she was executed a cruel act of

“unjust power,” is taken after her death by St. Urban and secretly buried “by nyghte / Among his othere seintes honestly” (VIII.548b-549). St. Urban is first found by Valerian, earlier in the tale, when he is hiding in the catacombs: “among the seintes buryeles lotynge” (VIII.186). Custance in the *Man of Law’s Tale* ends up with her own fleshly father, falling on her knees when she sees him. But the final trade of earthly family for spiritual family, the final defiance of earthly norms, is represented in the *Second Nun’s Tale* when Cecile and Urban take the martyred dead into their own family burial grounds.

Chapter Four

“I Am A Shamed to Reherse Ought out of Pagans”:

Excess of *Exempla* in *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*

In 1523, Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives completed his *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* and brought his text to print in Antwerp. On its face his text, published in 1524, does indeed provide instruction on the way women should live. The book structures itself around the female lifespan as a triptych of life stages: first one is a young girl, then a wife, and then, presumably, a widow; all three stages play out in Books I, II, and III respectively. But *De Institutione*—and its first (and for centuries only) English translation, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*,²¹ by Richard Hyrde—is also a record of the degree to which its author’s mind was a product of his classical, humanist education. As such, *Instruction* is not only a book of advice and precepts (the most studied of which is the emphasis on chastity) but also an intertextual document of classical stories and *exempla*. Vives’ *exempla* reflect not only the Renaissance humanist preoccupation with the classical past but the importance of literature and of the imagination. At times, the classical stories Vives tells exceed or clash with the precepts he outlines: a typical Renaissance problem. *Instruction of a Christen Woman* is an intertextual project urging a kind of chastity that is an “integrity of the mind” as well as body (Fantazzi Introduction 19) in keeping with Vives’ conception of Christian moral formation.

De Institutione is one of the works of Vives' prolific later years from 1521 until his death in 1540 (González 46). The book is the “first systematic study to address explicitly and exclusively the universal education of women” (Fantazzi, Introduction 1)—that is, to imagine

²¹ All references unless otherwise specified are taken from the 1529 first edition of *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* as edited and published in 2002 by Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman, and Margaret Mikesell. Robert Hyrde was the translator of *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* from Latin into English as titled above.

and defend education for women of all classes. Vives had fled increasingly hostile Spain by the age of seventeen for an education in Paris, after which he tutored in Belgium. By 1520 he was a friend of Thomas More and gained a salary at the English court from fellow countrywoman Queen Catherine of Aragon. He quickly became friends with Thomas Wolsey and the chief English humanists: Cuthbert Tunstall, Thomas Linacre, William Latimer, John Fisher (Fantazzi, Introduction 8). At Erasmus' behest, Vives wrote an edition and commentary of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* in 1522 (although the endeavor exhausted him), dedicated it to Henry VIII, and then wrote *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* for Catherine in 1523.

Richard Hyrde, tutor of the Thomas More household, translated *De Institutione* into English in the 1520s. His translation came to press in either 1528 or 1529 (Fantuzzi “Introduction” 32). Richard Hyrde died in 1528, however, and his translation of the early, unrevised edition of *Institutione* remained the one English readers would consume for the entire Tudor period and even later. That same English translation, from the early *Institutione*, went through nine editions (Fantazzi, Introduction 32). It was the most well-known conduct manual for women of the period (31). Vives' first edition of the text remained the one English audiences would read, frozen in time as it were in Hyrde's translation and excluded from benefiting from Vives' revisions, which were yielded from a process that involved sharing the text with Erasmus and others (Fantazzi, “Vives” 69-70).

That the Hyrde translation of Vives' text remained the English version for centuries means that the popular English version was more misogynistic, in some ways, than the Latin text, which benefited from Vives' revised thought. Other continental translations managed to bring these Vives' revisions from the Latin text into their own languages—but no such second translation, from the revised Vives Latin text, was made in England. Therefore in the long-

standing Hyrde translation, at least one passage with a "potentially misogynistic" interpretation—that women's lesser judgment might render them unfit to be educated—stands. In his extensive revisions of the Latin *De Institutione*, though, Vives carefully restructures his argument and champions the opposite: he states that despite all comers who say otherwise, the case is that women benefit from an education (Patton 113).

Certainly some women were educated, usually depending on class, having learned at home like Margaret Roper, daughter of Thomas More, who herself “translated Erasmus’s commentary on the Lord’s Prayer” at the same time, and out of the same household, as Hyrde’s translation of Vives’ *De Institutione* (Patton 111). The English nunneries were gone within a decade of Hyrde’s 1529 English translation, so that option for a good education—or at least for a possibly good education—for upperclass women had vanished for Vives’ English audience (Power 99). Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* reveals that in the fifteenth century, hardly any women were among those indicted as Lollards in East Anglia for reading the Bible in English, as Eileen Power documents in her search for clues about female literacy (Power 86). The determining factor as to whether anyone, boy or girl, was taught to read and possibly to write probably rested more on class than gender. There were no schools on the institutional level for women (besides nunneries) before Vives’ *Institutione*, but such schools sprang up in Europe shortly after, in England as “charitable girls’ schools, catering to the lower and middling classes” as well as boarding schools for the girls of the elite class (Mondelli 11-12).

Vives was born in a century one of debate about *querelle de femmes*--“the women question.” In 1405, Christine de Pisan had written her masterpiece, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, to repudiate the view of women Jean de Meung propagated in his *Roman de la Rose*, that women are debauched and unworthy of salvation. The subsequent war of words on the matter—

querelle de femmes--continued through the century and beyond (Fairchilds 16-18).

Counterattacks were launched re trumpeting women's inferiority; and yet other texts proclaiming women's equality, or rather, superiority, to men were produced in response. In her dissertation on the history of women's education, Victoria Mondelli identifies Vives as one of four humanists who justified female learning and "catapulted the movement for female worth and education to much greater acceptance" in the sixteenth century: Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Thomas More, Erasmus, and Vives. Among the four, Vives was the fixer who "provided the necessary argumentation to mollify the chastity issue"--the apologist who explained that women could be educated and still maintain their chastity (Mondelli 113).

Such handling of chastity was needed because of the premodern worldview that chastity is the chief feminine virtue. The European preoccupation with chastity—and the idea of keeping women at home as a program of preserving it—was not Vives' invention. The antifeminists accused women of "insatiable lust"; women and their champions in the *querelle de femmes* asserted that they absolutely were "capable of chastity" (King and Rabil xxiii). Chastity in a wife was key; otherwise the man of the house could not be sure his children were his (xxiv). In 1439, Italian humanist Isotta Nogarola was accused of incest and unchastity—"because the saying of many wise men I hold to be true" said her accuser, "that an eloquent woman is never chaste" (King and Rabil 68).

Vives would have known that he brought his treatise into a world that saw educating women as a suspect. He was no stranger to anxiety during the writing and publication of *De Institutione*; Vives worried about presenting radical ideas because of his family's status as *converso* Jews and his father's imprisonment and 1524 death by the Spanish inquisition, which also dug up his mother's bones and burned them (González 57). Moreover, Vives was already in

a state of personal worry because he had lost funding from two sources and opened himself to attack by supporting Erasmus in a split of the University of Louvain theology faculty into two camps (54). Vives was almost “prostrated” by these and other concerns (Beauchamp xv),²² among which was his visceral opposition to war—in which opposition he had the company of other Renaissance humanists. Enrique González González describes Vives as “obsessed by poverty, war, and the urgent need to resolve differences between Catholics and Protestants” as well as the relationship of Turkish issues to Europe and yet living in an age when each of these social problems was growing to a crisis (56). *De Institutione*, written amidst these concerns, represents Vives’ interest in social problems, argues González, and in particular the questions of how boys and girls should be educated, how their families should participate, and what role women should play in family structure (56).

Instruction’s first readers, the intended audience of the Hyrde translation, were the women of England in the Tudor era. Women in the sixteenth century were “still near to the Middle Ages” in that their real interest was in land and the household--and they still lived under feudal law (Stenton 5). Married women fit into society with various roles available for them in and out of the domestic realm. Families with unmarried daughters worried about them, however. Among their fears was that their daughters would get involved with their father’s servants or “men without a livelihood,” which is what the prestigious Paston family feared for their daughter in the mid fifteenth century (Stenton 94). Hence, daughters were frequently sent to work in other men’s houses where they would be kept busy (94); if one’s daughter were unchaste she could not become someone else’s wife, “and [her father] was dishonored” (King and Rabil xxiv).

²² Beachamp is among five authors of the Introduction of *The Education of a Christen Woman*; the entry for the Introduction lists Mikesell first. Beachamp is specified on page x of the Preface and Acknowledgements to be “the principal author of the biography of Vives” in the Introduction.

Poor women were in a difficult position; they could not expect to maintain their chastity if they “were in contact with high-status men to whom all women but those of their own household were prey” (King and Rabil xxiv). The consequences for Tudor women could be dire; In Elizabethan times, cruelty to unmarried pregnant women was rampant (Stone 98). In early modern England, single women posed “an economic threat” to their villages since their fatherless children would likely drain support from the village (Willen 561), which may explain why unwed mothers were repeatedly chased out of villages in England (Fairchilds 89)—they were “condemned and ostracized” (Amussen 117).

Modern critics have a fascination with what they term *Instruction*'s fascination with chastity. However, Vives would have known that women's reputations were more friable than men's and their reputation more tied to their sexual behavior, as Susan Amussen reveals in *An Ordered Society: Gender and class in Early Modern England* (103): “certainly no girl could come of age in early modern England with illusions about the treatment of those who bore bastards” (117). Such a woman, as a 1566 record of Amussen's shows, would be expected to at least do penance (100).

The moralism of Vives—that his text addresses private sexual behavior, public gestures, modes of dress, and inner attitudes—is strange to us moderns. It would, however, not have been strange to his readers. In early modern England, attitudes towards women, sexual chastity, and one's private life were truly not private at all. In his discussion of the communal aspect of life in early modern England, David Cressy argues that there was no “separate private sphere” of life: “Even within the recesses of domestic routine,” behavior—“every action, every opinion”—was “susceptible to external interest, monitoring, or control” (187). The Tudor—and Stuart—English

state saw itself as important in regulating “affairs which modern society would categorize as private” (Willen 560).

As if Vives’ audience and these alien expectations—from the modern viewpoint—are not enough, there is the matter of Vives’ sixteenth-century text: “Viewed with modern eyes, premodern texts are strange” and bereft of “modern textual assumptions” (Hörnqvist 25). Critics of Vives are—roughly—of two hues. On the one hand, critics, among them those who participated Vives’ twentieth-century rediscovery, see *De Institutione* as one of Vives’s many pedagogical and social-issue texts. These readers largely view *De Institutione* in a broad historical context; they see Vives’ work as Renaissance humanist projects of a philosopher, prolific author, educator, advocate for women (although they see some misogynist moments in *De Institutione*). An alternate camp of literary critics sees *De Institutione* as chiefly a conduct book in which the male voice would subject its female readers to its will; these critics are more reactive to *De Institutione*’s chastity topoi, seeing the text as relentlessly “inculcating chastity” (Pabel 73) in its readers.

Both sides have roots in the truth. Vives does seem to care about chastity for its own sake and to support male—that is, the husband’s—dominance in many ways, and the *De Institutione* confirms that he believes in the Renaissance project of achieving a moral life through exposure to the right kinds of literary and other influences—for all sorts of women, no less. Critics of the text itself also tend to focus almost exclusively on its precepts and topoi such as chastity and pay most attention the text’s *sententiae*, the term from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* for a text’s declarative precepts. However, in focusing on the precepts/*sententiae* of the text, such criticism must minimize the impact of *Instruction*’s copious *exempla*.

Chiefly focusing on *Instruction*'s precepts means seeing the text mainly as a practical guide to behavior. In her study *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640*, Suzanne Hull places the English *Instruction* in the chapter for "Practical Guidebooks" (albeit under a subsection for "Educational Guides") and describes the text as a "How-to-do-it of female living from infancy to widowhood . . . [that] stressed moral education, household arts, and medical knowledge for women with emphasis on . . . silence, piety, and obedience" (211). Whatever the accuracy of this description, it mentions only prescriptive parts of the text—which does barely mentions medical knowledge—and makes no account for Vives' reading program for young women or for the piled-on classical anecdotes with which Vives confronts his readers.

Hull is not alone in wanting to privilege *topoi* and *sententiae* over *exempla* in Vives' text. Margaret Mikesell describes Vives' pattern of discourse as "structured units" in which "Vives first offers a precept, followed by discussion" (Introduction xlvi). *Exempla* such as "the Virgin Mary and the heroism of Cornelia emerge as idealized exceptions that leave . . . commonplace generalizations intact" (xlix). There is no evidence, however, that *Instruction*'s first readers would have viewed the great volume of classical tale *exempla* in the text as "idealized exceptions."

In fact, *Instruction* shows awareness of its audience's interest in *exempla* and other narratives, for it must warn them away from chivalric romances including "Lancelot du Lake . . . William and Melyour . . . [and] Pyramus and Thysbe" (25) in an entire section entitled "What bokes to be redde, and what nat." Rather than containing a large portion of text that is "idealized exception," perhaps *Instruction*'s seemingly contradictory *exempla*—rather than divorced from the *sententiae*—create the text into an intertextual, dynamic whole informed in multiple ways by Vives' humanist, classical background.

De Institutione came from a mind shaped in the sea of classical literature, and frequent samples of classical texts find their way into it and into Hyrde's translation, the English *Instruction*. The text's first book, for example, refers its English readers to an exhausting array of ancient exemplars, everyone from virtuous Roman matrons to the early Christian ascetics. These examples, and the text's accompanying precepts regarding the minds and bodies of young girls, reflect the anxieties of Vives' Roman predecessors about the body, its purity, and its status. Moreover, the Roman exemplars of female virtue (Lucretia and Cornelia, among them) in the *Instruction* are the text's most specific, and the *Instruction*'s female Christian exemplars (the Virgin Mary and Thecla among them) typically receive far more cursory treatment. It seems the best way to instruct a Christian woman is through a Roman woman.

This imbalance, and others, represents a problematic contradiction, even in an era in which biblical and classical allusions often existed side by side. For one thing, the text itself expresses qualifications about its anecdotal illustrations; *Instruction* addresses, and attempts to excuse, both its frequent telling of pagan exemplars and the outright violence advocated in some its anecdotes. Another contradiction comes to light when one considers just how much instruction the *Instruction* offers. Hardly any of the *Instruction* is what would be termed practical advice of the sort found, for example, in other conduct books in Tudor England.

Even though *Instruction* claims it wants to be practical, it refuses to be: the first book must address, and excuse, its lack of specific instruction. Although *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, particularly its first book, addressed to unmarried young girls, offers very little actual instruction and speaks little about Christian women or the basic tenets of Christianity, it does shout volumes about masculine anxiety and values and presses its case with references to a lost,

innocent past---a nostalgia inherited from its classical Roman precedents and which likely resonated with those living through the upheavals of the sixteenth century.

The *Instruction's* preface states that the “honestie and chastyte” of a young girl is her signal virtue and sole responsibility (9). To raise this girl, one need provide, chiefly, four walls, a book, and a spinning wheel. All of these elements relate to *Instruction's* conception of a susceptible virgin: the four walls give her the solitude she needs to block out outside influences, and indeed the first book devotes an entire chapter to “the lyvyng alone of a virgin” (46).

Instruction enumerates a system of thinking about the body in which the virginal state is particularly dangerous: after all, the body is an empty vessel, a vacuum that must needs be filled. In *Instruction's* house-like architecture of the young girl, the eyes and ears are windows and are particularly susceptible portholes for receiving dangerous influences: “deathe gothe in to the soule by the senses of the bodye lyke wyndowes” (46), in which case, merely looking at someone, such as a prostitute—“she that wyll be hyred of a lover” (47)—is dangerous for a girl. Such women “inspire poyson with theyr loke and flee with the only beholdyng” (47-48). Hence the need to fill the vacuum of a young girl's mind with solitude, manual labor, and the companionship of books peopled with virtuous exemplars.

The *Instruction's* singleminded adherence to shutting girls off from bad influences--the way one would protect a house from vermin or intruders--is perhaps its most consistent trope—more than chastity. Book One worries about the influences around a girl from the start of her life: she should be nursed by her mother, for “we sowke out of our mothers teate to gether with the milke, nat only love, but also condicions and dispositions” (14). As early as toddlerhood, her caretakers should “avoyde al mannes kyn away from her” (14). In her analysis of the text, Margaret Mikesell comments that the “constraints imposed” on young girls renders the

Instruction “monodimensional” (1); *Instruction’s* “ubiquitous discussions of chastity” belie an undercurrent of “misogyny” that indicts the Vives himself (Introduction lxi). But Mikesell’s understandable views may themselves, presented from the comfortable vantage point of the twenty-first century, be somewhat monodimensional.

None of the critics shaking their heads over *Instruction’s* misogyny mention his passage on the mothering of girl infants in the first book’s initial chapter. It is perhaps one of the most charming passages in Book One and is immediately recognizable as one written by someone who has observed a baby and liked what he saw: Hyrde’s translation sounds like a sixteenth-century manual of attachment parenting. A mother, he writes,

may more truely reken the doughter her owne, whom she hath nat onely borne in her wombe and brought in to the worlde, but also hath caried styl in her armes of a babe, unto whom she hath gyven tete, whom she hath nourished with her owne blod, whose slespes she hath cherished in her lappe, and hath cherfully accepted and kyssed the fyrst laughes, and fyrst hath joyfully herde the stameryng of it, covetyng to speke, and hath holden hard to her brest, prayeing hit good lukke and fortune. (13)

Presumably, this mother, since she is correctly raising a Christian woman in her infancy, is the kind of woman Vives wants to produce: breastfeeding, kissing, and cossetting her baby. If so, then how to get there? Wouldn’t one encourage a young child’s motherly instincts with dolls, for example? Not so: the pretty breastfeeding and cuddling of the infant ends after the first chapter of Vives’ revised Latin *Institutione*; by the second chapter, “On the Later Years of Childhood” (*Education* 55), playtime is over. Vives’ subsequently advises “take dolls away from her, which are a kind of image of idolatry and teach girls the desire for adornments and finery” (*Education*

57).²³ This seemingly contradictory injunction, that one raises the nice mother in the first chapter by depriving her of dolls as a toddler in the second, doesn't appear in the English *Instruction*—Hyrde's translation of the neo-Latin *Institutione*. The passage may not have even been in the Latin text Hyrde used; Charles Fantazzi explains that Hyrde's text had to have been Michael Hillen's 1524 Antwerp edition (the very first one) since the translator died in 1528 or 1529 (43). But however the discrepancy came to be—whether by Hyrde's intentional excision or as dictated by the text Hyrde had at hand—The *Instruction* spares English girl-children the removal of their dolls, for its second chapter includes only the first half of the content of the revised Latin version. The omission also solves the problem of what Hyrde might have done with Vives' counterrecommendation that in lieu of dolls, English families might consider the way things are done across the channel: "I would be more in favor of those toys made of tin or lead that represent household objects, which are so common here in Belgium" (*Education* 57). The superiority of Belgian toys notwithstanding, the ultimate effect in the English *Instruction* is the same as the Latin *Institutione*: by the end of early childhood little girls should begin to learn housekeeping begin "the keyyng and ordryng of an house" (15)

What follows, also, is that the house begins to keep the girl; in a monumental effort to keep outside influences from polluting a young woman and her chastity, *Instruction* advocates that "a mayde shulde go but seldome abrode" (47) in its chapter, "the lyvyng alone of a virgin." Vives is primarily concerned with keeping a girl pure from the outside in: "Folkes be tolled and enticed with the pleasurs of the worlde: Where with also the soule is caught and holden" (46-47). In conjunction with his first chapter's image of the sweet baby dandled on her mother's

²³ I use Charles Fantazzi's translation, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, U of Chicago P, 2000, of Vives' revised Latin *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*.

knees, *Instruction*'s emphasis on the corruption of the girl from outside forces anachronistically reveals an almost Wordsworthian or Rousseauian notion that one begins life in a state of innocent, inherent goodness—until one is assailed from the outside by corruption from society. This idea is the antithesis of the Christian, Augustinian notion that from infancy, one is tainted with sin; Augustine posits that the transformation of the soul must happen from the inside out. He famously speculates on the sins of his own infancy, for “if ‘I was conceived in iniquity and in sins my mother nourished me in her womb’ (Ps. 50:7), I ask you, my God, I ask, Lord, where and when your servant was innocent?” (10). Vives knew Augustine well—he had produced a commentary on *De Civitate Dei* for Erasmus (Fantazzi “Introduction” 7). *Instruction* does not, however, seem to promote Augustine’s notion of spiritual change orchestrated by God both from the inside and outside, manifested in the way, for Augustine, God “applied the pricks which made me tear myself away from Carthage, and [. . .] put before me the attractions of Rome” (81).

In the *Instruction*, one ought not count on God “[making] use of their and my perversity” as Augustine insists God does (81). Once the *Instruction*'s young girl leaves infancy, she is surrounded by mortal danger. It is to help guard her soul that she should begin housekeeping (15)—and the process happens rapidly. The age for the girl varies according to which one of *Instruction*'s examples one follows: choose between the possibility of starting at ages three or four, at which “Quintilian wolde begynne” or the age of six—“in which opinion are Aristotel, Eratosthenes, and Chrysippus” (15). The age is young, but the mandate made clear by the Greek and Roman authorities. It is especially the Roman authorities who in the *Instruction* dictate what a young girl should do in her prophylactic isolation. One doesn't need dolls for it either: “lette

her both lerne her boke, and beside that to handle wolle and flaxe” (16). Instead, one needs books and wool.

Especially that a woman “handle wolle” (16) is one of the great female—and typically Roman—virtues hailed by the *Instruction*. Its third chapter, in fact, sets forth no less than fourteen anecdotes illustrating women of old and their fierce attachment to woolworking in all its forms: “In Rome all maydes, when they were fyrst married, brought unto theyr husbandes house dystaffe and spyndel with wolle, and wyped, stryked, and garnyssed the postes with wolle” (16-17). The Etruscan Caia “used al her labour in wolle” (17); Lucretia was found “syttyng at her wolle untyl late in the nyght” (17); Augustus and Terence both promoted woolworking’s virtues (13); Samuel’s mother Hannah made her son a coat (17); “the most chaste quene of Ithace Penelope passed the .xx. yeres that her husband was away, with weavyng” (17); and Macedonian and Epirian queens wove too (17). In a savvy continuum into contemporaneity, the list ends with one “quene Isabell” of Spain who taught spinning to her daughters (17), the fourth of which, the “moost holy and devoute wyfe unto the moost gracious kyng Henry the .viii. of Englande” (18) is the same Catherine to whom Vives dedicates his treatise.

After this exhausting catalog of women and their wool, one might expect the text to follow up with a detailed examination of exactly what one does with the stuff; after all, in its preface the *Instruction* sets forth as one its unique attributes its intent to “instruct or teach” rather than to merely “texhort and consayle them vnto som kynde of lyvyng” as other authors have before (8). Perhaps the *Instruction* might launch into a passage that describes the steps by which a woman tames a mass of raw wool, but despite its goal to “instruct or teche” (8), *Instruction* issues a disclaimer: “I wyl medle here with no lowe matters, least I shulde seme to make moche

ado about thynges that be to symple for my purpose” (16). Vives distances himself from actually having anything to say about how to deal with wool itself.

Instruction doesn't even seem bound to have to say anything about the usefulness of a girl working with wool for her family. Even broad statements about its practicality for warmth and comfort are limited: In its discussion of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, who “sought for wolle and flaxe,” *Instruction* says both materials “pertenye unto the necessary uses of our lyfe” (17). Vives writes of woolworking in Book One to girls who have no such housewifely responsibilities: they are not grown yet and may be as young as six. Certainly they have no husband and house. So naturally *Instruction* remains unconcerned about the actual cloth produced by the girls' work: the physical product is not the point at all; the point is that the girl occupy her hands, eyes, and mind with labor. *Instruction*'s most sensory-evocative description of woolworking focuses on the preoccupation of the body with the motions of the tasks: “Saint Hieronyme wolde have Paula *to handle* wolle [. . .] and learne *to dresse* it, and *to holde and occupie* a rocke, with a wolle basket *in her lappe*, and *turne* the spyndle, and *drawe forth* the threde *with her owne fyngers*” (italics added 16).

Here Vives diverges from the other instructive guidebooks that are written during and into the next century, such as Gervase Markham's 1616 Stuart-era *The English Housewife*. What Vives quotes in one sentence about the specifics of the activity of woolworking, Markham, a true tutor of the craft, describes in twenty-one paragraphs of practical detail in which he explains the shearing, “tozing,” dyeing, oiling, “tumming,” spinning, winding, and warping of wool—all of which precede the weaving (146-152). Markham's text, appropriately, imbues one with the desire to find some wool, sink one's fingers into it, and see exactly how one must be particularly careful of knots and debris in the wool as it is rolled up, since “the greatest art in housewifery to

mix these wools right, and to make the cloth without blemish” (149). *Instruction*, on the other hand, wants to use wool to capture the body, and by proxy, the thoughts of the young girl. It is no practical how-to manual.

Instruction's references to wool and its spinning have to do with two things: filling the vacuum of the susceptible mind and imitating the virtuous past. Regarding the former, the working of wool is “both profitable and keepers of temperance: whiche thyng specially women ought to have in price” (16). The real virtue of wool is that it keeps a woman's mind out of trouble by occupying her body with labor. *Instruction* explains that Jerome urges “the holy virgin Demetrias to eschew idlenes,” and instead go “in hande with wolle and weavyng” not because the rich woman needed cloth but “that by the occasion of workyng, she shuld thynke on nothyng, but suche as perteyneth unto the service of our lorde” (38). Work and isolation have an apotropaic function in the *Instruction*. A virginal girl is, after all, chiefly a vessel, for she “hath within her a treasure without comparyson, that is the purenes bothe of body and mynde” (28). In light of this favorite rhetorical strategy of Vives, namely, harping on one aspect of external activity because it represents an aspect of female character, it is difficult to overstate the extent to which *Instruction* eschews the practicality it claims to embody in the preface. Wool is first for the mind, not the body; hence, its function in the virgin.

Instruction's preoccupation with the body of the virgin also illustrates its consciousness of public status and reputation of the girl and her family. Schooled in classical literature, Vives' knows whereof he speaks when he writes his chapter “Howe the Mayde Shal Behaue Her Selfe Being Abroad.” In public, when “goyng, let the woman neither walke over fast, nor over slowly” (60). There is classical precedent for worrying about walking too fast. In his essay, “Walking and Ideology in Republican Rome,” Anthony Corbeill explains that the popular Roman comedy

figure of the “running slave” is so ubiquitous that the two words are nearly synonymous. The Roman-obsessed *Instruction* doesn’t want its young women to look slavish. In the late republic, in *Pro Sestio*, Cicero (whom *Instruction* quotes in this chapter) also excoriates two of his political opponents to a jury by calling attention to the “crimes and wounds” they have inflicted on the state with “their expression (*vultus*) and their walk (*incessus*)” (qtd. in Corbeill 192). One opponent walked with affected gravity, and walking in a way that is affectedly grandiose is “easily uncovered . . . and leaves them naked” (192). *Instruction* demonstrates likewise the same preoccupation. It is worried not only about the walk of the young woman, but her look and her modesty as well: “Let her shew great sobrenes, both in countenance, and all the gesture of her body” (60).

Quintilian, one of *Instruction*’s frequently cited Roman rhetoricians, writes, says Corbeill, “over fifty pages to the various ways” in which one’s head and finger motions contribute best to one’s public oratory (188). *Instruction* doesn’t expect its young girls to participate in public discussion—“ful of talke I wold nat have her” (61)—but its parallel anxiety about the possibility of a girl demeaning herself through unbecoming posture is clear: “let the mayde learne none unclenly wordes, or wanton, or uncomely *gesture* and moving of the body” (emphasis added 15). Vives’ anxiety about how the body communicates its status echoes that of that of the Roman authors he knew so well.

Instruction inherits more than just anxiety from its Roman predecessors. In its insistence that young women subdue their minds and bodies by laboring with wool and flax, *Instruction* states that they are “craftes yet lefte of that olde innocent worlde” (16). Vives does just refer to the past; he lionizes it. In other portions of the text, he decries his current Christian culture’s inability to stamp out immorality and to quit reading popular love poetry: “But we lyve nowe in

a Christen countre: and who is he, that is any thyng displeased with makers of suche bokes nowe a dayes?" (26-27). The present day isn't living up to the standards of the past.

Both in its nostalgia for the past—even a national past—and in its concern for female morality, *Instruction* echoes ancient Roman literature; it has managed to leak into his *sententiae* and not be confined merely to his *exempla*. In her exploration of writings on immorality in the late Roman republic, Catharine Edwards discusses the way the authors of Roman political invective lamented the immorality of their age and pined for the purer days of yesterday; in doing so, writers were articulating anxieties about gender, status, and power. For example, the Augustan adultery law tells not so much about rampant immorality in the late republic as it does a breakdown of the social order of the top echelons of the late Republic elite—who were dwindling in number. The implication of the Roman laws and treatises we associate with supposed Roman immorality are that the republic failed—in part because men weren't manly enough to "control their wives" (47). The subtext of Roman moral political invective speaks about anxiety in a politically tense culture: the adultery law would resurrect "the virtues of Rome's rustic past" (42). In the same way, what is often termed *Instruction*'s invective (Hageman xlvi-xlviii, liii, lix, lxi) is not mere misogyny but nostalgia for a more reassuring era: that of the Roman matrons who worked with wool and of their husbands, who put morality into law.

Instruction's condemnation of love poetry also echoes the concerns of the invective of the late Roman republic:

Augustus banished Ovide hym selfe, and thynke you then that he wolde haue kept these expositours in the countre? [. . .] Therefore a woman shuld beware of all these bokes, lykewise as of serpentis or snakes. And if there be any woman, that

hath suche delyte in these bokes, that she wyl nat leave them out of her handes:
 shee shulde nat only be kept from them, but also, if she rede good bokes with an
 yll wyl and lothe therto, her father and friends shuld provyde that she maye be
 kepte from all redynge. (27)

The text not only refers to the same Augustus who instituted the adultery law but refers to the moral offense to the country as a whole, also suggesting that the men in a woman's family should keep her in line. *Instruction* seems to be reassuring Tudor England that women getting an education won't rock the boat.

Instruction's Roman orientation (as well as the tumult of the Tudor era) not only helps explain its nostalgia and invective but the frequency and specificity of its examples from ancient pagan literature. Not that the text cites only examples from Rome: in addition to the virtuous Roman matrons as its examples for woolworking, the *Instruction*, in homage to its title, does refer to New Testament and early Christian examples. These examples lack, however, the specificity and color of *Instruction's* ancient exemplars. The text tends to bunch virtuous Christian exemplars into groups. A chapter on "the vertues of a Woman and examples that she shulde folowe," refers to "Tecla, or Hagnes, Catharine, Lucia, or Cecile, Agatha, Barbara, or Margarita, or Dorothe" (56). However, little or no explanation of these women's stories follows. For example, *Instruction* has just quoted an entire catalogue of virtuous Greek and Roman virgins from Jerome. All cases were specific: the "mayde of Thebes, that whan her enemy a Macedon had deflowred her [. . .] after founde the corrupter of her virginite slepyng, whom she slewe, and after that her selfe, for joye that she had avenged her selfe of that abhomyneable vilanye" (55). This story is not only specific but it is also no the only murder-suicide that the *Instruction* narrates, and for which it does not apologize.

Such an anecdote represents part of a pattern in which the text alternately apologizes for and defends the use of pagan *exempla*. In the case of the Theban virgin, Christian women simply ought to benefit from “seyng that pagans (. . .) have set more by their chastite, than all other thynges” (56). At other times the *Instruction* expresses embarrassment in its constant recitation of pre-Christian anecdotes: “after these preceptes of Christen men, I am a shamed to rehearse ought out of pagans” (41). This embarrassment, however, is seldom powerful enough to keep Vives from telling the stories. Whatever the reader’s response to *Instruction*’s stories is, it hardly seems like “idealized exceptions” (Mikesell, Introduction xlix)—rather like violent entertainment.

Instruction indulges in a spate of violent tales: in one, the Athenian leader Hippomenes, upon discovering that his daughter had been deflowered, “shutte her up in a stable with a wylde horse, kepte meateles: so the horse, whan he had sufferd great hounge longe, and bicause he was of nature fierse, he waxed mad, and all to tare the yonge woman to fede hym selfe with” (32). Another Roman who finds his daughter “betrayed unto” a servant by her tutor, and the father promptly kills both daughter and betrayer; Publius Atilius Philiscus kills his adulterous daughter; and Lucius Virgineus the Centurion, “bicause he had leaver lose his doughter, and se her dye a good mayde” than have her raped by a judge, kills her (32). The climactic stories of the group are from Spain. In one, brothers discover their supposedly virginal sister “great with childe” but hide their outrage until her delivery: “as soone as she was delyvered of her childe, they thruste swerdes into her bealy, and slewe her, the middewyfe lokyng on” (32-33). *Instruction* comments only that “histories be full of examples” and that “neither hit is a marvaile that these be done of fathers and frendes” (33). This chapter—entitled “Of the keypyng of virginite and Chastite” studiously avoids mentioning the virgin Mary, perhaps because of the

undeniable parallel between her and the girl killed by her brothers; both women experienced pregnancy out of wedlock. Instead, the chapter culminates in Quintilian's story of Lucretia, who killed herself after she was raped (34). However, the text follows her story with the comment, "I saye nat this bicause other shulde folowe the dede, but the mynde: Bicause she that hath ones loste her honestie, shuld thynke there is nothyng lefte" (34). *Instruction*, here, offers something of a qualification or excuse for its *exempla*.

Instruction is in good company—Renaissance texts and their relationship with examples from the past result in what Timothy Hampton calls "exemplarity": "the promotion of ancient images of virtue as patterns that aim to form or guide readers is a central feature of almost every major text in the Renaissance" (ix). Vives' friend and mentor Erasmus, faced with sixteenth-century brands of humanism that seemed intent on slavishly copying Ciceronian rhetoric and Latin, wrote his "Ciceronianus" urging fellow humanists to follow the path laid by Augustine's "De doctrina christiana": "spoil the Egyptians of their gold and silver"; in other words, employ classical rhetoric, stories, and languages in the service of biblical teaching and preaching (Colish 347). Vives' *De Institutione* and its English translation, *Instruction*, are clearly not afraid to use the spoils of the classical world.

Aside from taking the text at face value, we cannot know how seriously Vives took his *exempla*, even when he apologized for them. In their defense of scholasticism, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have taken pains to show that the Renaissance project of appropriating classical stories for moral development did not turn out as promised by the Christian humanist, "Erasmian model" (156). *Instruction*, however, does not seem to invest literally in the idea that moral development will proceed from its *exempla*.

Instruction in fact seems to apologize because it has had slightly too much fun with classical stories. Rather than having put forth an “idealized exception”—one would hardly call murder and suicide idealized—the *exempla* of *Instruction* illustrate one of the seven ways of example work as put forth by John D. Lyons in his *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy*. *Instruction*’s *exempla* here show what Lyons calls “excess” of a classical exemplum—the example itself, the illustration, goes beyond the qualities of what it meant to illustrate (34). Applying this model to *Instruction*, murder and suicide—clearly—exceed the boundaries of simply maintaining one’s chastity. As is always the case, precept and illustration do not perfectly match. In cases of excess, “writer and reader may be carried away by the richness of the concrete instance”—in this case, fathers killing daughters or setting wild horses to devour them—“to the neglect of the concept to be illustrated” (Lyons 34). Perhaps, this neglect is in some way purposeful; that is, Vives certainly believes in chastity, but because his real project is education for women (after all, chastity as a virtue has been drummed into women thoroughly already), he is shoring up the imaginations of his readers with the classical repertoire that was his own education.

Even before Renaissance humanists took their cues from their classical educations and began employing classical *exempla*, extra-biblical illustrations were cropping up sermons to a degree that earned the disapproval of Wycliffe and others in the fourteenth century (Mosher 8). Vives is certainly not the first to apologize for his *exempla*—Alfred learned how to do just such apologies when translating Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* in the late ninth century (23).

The process for readers in the Renaissance involves the taking-in and imitation of the exemplar; Hampton cites Hans-Georg Gadamer’s analysis of textual interpretation to suggest that “when we understand a document from the past . . . [that is] already an application” (qtd. in

Hampton 11). One might wish to dismiss the image of brothers sticking swords into the belly of their just-delivered sister, and Vives might apologize for mentioning post-rape suicide, but he knew and planned that his readers would internalize the image. Erich Auerbach argues similarly in *Mimesis* that Dante creates such telling scenes and compelling characters in *Inferno* that the end result is that the theology of *Inferno* is subsumed by the characters' vision and recollection of the corrupt but seductive world they had lived in: "The image of man eclipses the image of God" (201-202).

Vives allows his classical *exempla* entry into his reader's imaginations in their full pagan force. *Instruction* may count on its readership to see the pagan stories as imaginary precisely because they are extra-biblical. This may explain why the tales some Christian exemplars in *Instruction* are briefly mentioned but not narrated in detail. Some such tales, if taken seriously, would be counterproductive to *Instruction*'s ideal of modest, quiet, girlhood in preparation for marriage. Take Thecla, for example. She is mentioned at least twice in Book One as a virtuous exemplar, and yet her story is never told in detail. It is not because Thecla doesn't make a great tale; she does, and furthermore, her story celebrates a new, radical asceticism that during that time of its popularity in the second century was seizing the imaginations of young Christians: sexual renunciation (Brown *Body* 61). Isn't virginity what the *Instruction* wants for young girls? If so, why not lionize Thecla, whose story was wildly popular in late antiquity? Why discuss Roman matron suicide instead?

Thecla's virginity represented a special celebration of the individual that fails to resonate in the *Instruction*, which only mentions basic facts about her—that Thecla was a "disciple of Paul, a scholer meete for such a noble master" (24) and that "wylde beastes" had "reuerence of" her virginity (51). It doesn't mention that she heard Paul preach while she "sat at a near-by

window and listened night and day” (*Acts* 56); in other words, instead of staying cloistered in four walls, she was listening to a man, which *Instruction* frequently distrusts: in the company of men, a young woman “shall here many things uncomly for a woman to here” (38). Thecla, of course, heard the gospel from Paul, but it inspired her to do several things of which *Instruction* disapproves: she runs away from home; refuses to marry the man her parents pick for her, where as *Instruction* assumes the parents will choose (156-7); takes up with Paul (a single man); cross dresses, which is condemned by *Instruction*: “a woman shall use no mens rayment, els let her thinke she hath the mans stomacke” (88); endures public nudity; and finally baptizes herself. One sees immediately why Vives gives only the sketchiest outline of Thecla’s *vitae*. Even in terms of her devotion to virginity she does not match *Instruction*’s purposes, which are not those that inflamed early Christian ascetics or that flourished later in the Middle Ages. A true devotion to celibacy manifests itself in either a kind of individual, Theclean celebration that is too immodest for *Instruction* or else it focuses on the corporate functions of a celibate community, such as the monastery, which is also not *Instruction*’s focus. Its celibacy is not an erotic representation of the life to come but a quiet, gilded waiting room for marriage.

In light of the ways in which marriage had become a place of instability even for the woman for whom *Instruction* was written—Henry VIII’s first wife Catherine, soon to be divorced when Vives wrote his text—perhaps the contradictory nature of the *Instruction* is not only obvious but helpful. It is a text in which the examples include violent endorsements of virgin girlhood, in which Christianity is endorsed with less inner transcendence and more outer defenses, and in which instruction is promised but little is given. To what end did the first book of the *Instruction of Christian Women* inspire its young readers? Were its examples and contradictions freeing—or frustrating? They were probably both. In fashioning a text that

mirrored the disjointed contradictions they must live through—both in the stages of their own lives and in the disorder of the sixteenth century—Vives was probably doing the young charges who read him a favor.

When *Instruction* leaves aside the topic of young, unmarried girls with their liminal status, and proceeds to the next chapter on wives, the text indulges in fewer classical *exempla*. Perhaps in *Instruction*'s counsel for wives, Vives considers their marginalized status and realizes that less sensation and more sympathy is called for. It is, however, still true that in their analysis Mikesell and others are distressed by the relationship between adviser and audience in *Instruction*'s second section, on wifehood. The text, they argue, is randomly put together by anger and affect, not any other structure (liii)—an “emotional trigger” and “radical tone shifts” and “hostility” characterize it and presume female sin (liii). Judging this section of *Instruction* on its straightforward, prescriptive advice might justify these criticisms. The speaker makes frequent references to St. Paul and asserts that “the husband is his owne ruler, and his wyves lorde” (100). These are fighting words in the twenty-first century. However, *Instruction* follows such comments with others less objectionable to moderns. The text goes on to state that women should not be so hungry for finery and the easy life that they commit their husband to drudgery, and Vives includes in his comments the reasonable-sounding statement that the wife ought not to “crave any more of her husbände, than she seeth she may optayne with his hart and good wyll” (100). *Instruction*'s tone is also mitigated when one considers the sheer volume of the *exempla* that the text brings to the table (a different kind of “excess” than the one Lyons discusses). If one ignores the *exempla*, one ignores one of the chief effects of the texts: the richness of excess.

In the same section in which Vives offers the commonplace early modern precept that the husband rules over his wife, *Instruction* also seeks to inspire wifely loyalty by telling the story of

Fernando Gonzalis. She visited her husband in prison, masterminded an idea to change clothes with him, and had him sneak out while she herself took his place. Her love so inspired the king of Germany, in whose prison she was in, that he let her go and prayed that God would send “hym and his children suche wyves” (94). *Instruction* teems with anecdotes like these. *Instruction*’s speaker may be less set off by emotional triggers (to revisit Mikesell, Introduction) than he is intent on finding anecdotes with which he can address the problems he sees.

Whereas in Book I, which addresses the liminal state of the unmarried young woman, Vives uses classical *exempla* the most creatively, the text address the state of marriage and widowhood in Books II and III using more biblical *exempla*; classical *exempla* are used that are parallel to his reader’s situations, those dealing with the literal stages of wifehood and widowhood. Rebecca, cites Vives in his later versions, throws her shawl over her head as soon as she realizes she is in the presence of her future husband in Genesis chapter 24 (*Education* 229). The “chaste wyfe of Spartane” made sure never to initiate sex (120); Themistocles’ wife makes sure it is her own self who ministers to her husband on his sickbed (104). Likewise in Book III, Vives enjoins widows to fidelity to their dead husband by reminding them of the fidelity of turtledoves (163-4), but also of the risks of excessive mourning in Mediterranean cultures (164) and of the Christian consolation of immortality (165). For wives, use example from tales of wives; for widows, use example on fidelity and widowhood. None of these examples are the murder-suicide sort that would demand apology.

Moreover, in the second section of the book, when *Instruction* is addressing what appears to be a concrete social problem for wives, the text’s attitude towards readers is much like the speaker’s in *Ancrene Wisse*: sympathetic. When Vives is not quoting St. Paul but is addressing a difficult and real issue, the text generates solutions that seem practical: Don’t disdain a husband

of low birth (113). Respect your husband’s love of study, and he’ll be proud of you (112). What is one marries a sick man?—well, help him at least as much as you can, and don’t spend more time helping the church than you do your husband (107). What is one marries an evil man? A stupid man?—“a good wife wyll handle wisely inough” and ought not to try to change him (106). Consider the situation that *Heli Meiðhad*, a thirteenth-century anti-marriage text of the *Katherine Group*, describes: *Bisih þe, seli wummon; beo þe cnotte icnut eanes of wedlac, beo he cangun oðer crupel, beo he hwuch se eaver beo, þu most to him halden* (165-7) “Think about it, blessed woman, for once that knot of marriage is knotted, whether he is a fool or a cripple, whatever he might be, you must remain with him” (165-7).²⁴ *Instruction*’s speaker seems to know many of his readers are in just the situation that *Heli Meiðhad* warns of.

What Vives cares for most of all might be evident in a story he tells from his own experience. He mentions and particularly praises the wife of a Paris friend, Guilemus Budeus. Budeus’s wife, her husband said, cared for his books “no worse than her owne children” (112). Although Vives has high praise for marriage, he enthusiastically discourages barren women from feeling depressed that they cannot have them and makes, for two pages, a case against them worthy of an anti-marriage treatise (*Heli Meiðhad* comes to mind): “For if the cares and sorowes, that chylidren cause unto theyr mothers, were paynted you in a table, there is none of you so gredy of children, but she wolde be as sore aferde of beastis, or venymous serpentis” (142). Vives gives the wife of his Paris friend high praise, because what he really loves—and here he differs from other manuals of advice—are the stories and examples he gives. The tools and instruction book of the new Renaissance sainthood, one might say, for Vives, are the resources of

²⁴ Text from *Heli Meiðhad* is taken from *Old and Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology*, edited by Elaine Treharne.

his own education and are manifested in a wide array of classical heroines, many of whom are nobler, smarter, and more courageous than the men around them.

Conclusion

Women's lives and bodies are susceptible to a series of transformations—so much so that in the medieval period and Renaissance the stages of virgin, wife, and widow provided customary ways to think about who women are. Even these designations are social and chiefly in relation to men. Fremu in *Beowulf* is changed from an out-of-bounds peaceweaver into a wife. Custance in the *Man of Law's Tale* ends her story where she started—in Rome at her father's side, but leaves behind her a series of earthly relationships she changed forever: both of her husbands either killed or were killed by their mothers.

A radical restructuring of familial loyalties also occurs in the lives of saints, who like women are often transformational figures “good to think with” (Brown, *Body* 153) because “the church was an artificial kin group. Its members were expected to project onto the new community a fair measure of the sense of solidarity, of the loyalties, and of the obligations that had previously been directed to the physical family” (Brown, *Cult* 31). The speaker in *Ancrene Wisse* calls his charges, who have left their homes for the anchorhold, *leoue sustren* “beloved sisters.” Cecile in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* kisses her brother-in-law Tiburce on the chest and eventually buries him and a Roman official in her physical family's burying place because Tiburce and the official are Christian converts and martyrs—her new family group. Perhaps *Beowulf*, as Mary Richards once argued, has something in common with the celibate saints. As hero of his tale, *Beowulf* seems to appropriate for himself a queering of the Germanic heroic life; he rejects what is for the narrator and for so many characters the chief paradigm of social life: marriage, alliance, and the continuance of the lines of kingship.

The women in these texts are liminal figures whom other people often seek to shape to their ends. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, Custance is, as Geraldine Heng describes her, a magnet for

love or hate. The anchoresses in *Ancrene Wisse*, liminal beings in anchorholds in the center of their towns, are also gateways through which others may try to define themselves, or compare themselves. The speaker in *Ancrene Wisse* must teach his charges how to deal with social problems and keep from being angry when they are mistreated; he gives them doses of Epicurean philosophic therapy. In a much earlier example of philosophical *therapeia*, in the *Aeneid*, Venus appears to scold her son just as he is “swept away by fury” (728)²⁵ at the sight of Helen hiding at the altar in Priam’s palace. Venus stops him with injunctions to “think: it’s not that beauty, Helen, you should hate . . . it’s the gods” and magically shows him the real situation: “Look around it’s Neptune himself, prising loose with his giant trident / the foundation-stones of Troy” . . . “There’s Juno Turn around and look—there’s Pallas holding the fortress” (752-761). Her therapy works; Aeneas turns away from Helen and toward saving his family. In the *Ancrene Wisse*, the speaker, instead of showing the anchoresses something on the outside, urges the anchoresses to turn inward and imagine themselves, not the outside world, transformed in order to deal with mistreatment from other people; if they are insulted, they should *þenç þet tu art eorðe* (52) “think that you are earth” (94).

The sort of inner transformation required by Christianity is seized upon by medieval writers who see possibilities for analogy in the mutability of the female life and body; this comparative impetus often fuels the narrative *exempla* that populate medieval biblical literature. A cross-like liturgical form is imposed upon Custance in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, and writers also impose anthropomorphism on the cross. In the Middle English “Dispute between Mary and the Cross” poem, Mary complains to the Cross that it has pierced the fruit of her womb. She is countered by the Cross’s gender-defying explanation that it has borne a new sort of fruit through

²⁵ Translation by Robert Fagles, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Penguin, 2006.

bearing Jesus in the crucifixion. The female martyrs of hagiographical stories are concerned not with the children of their body but with spiritual fruit of converting others to Christianity—for which Urban praises Cecile in the *Second Nun's Tale*.

If the bodies of women seem to be transformative communal gateways, then medieval and Renaissance texts about women are aware of that community, and the texts imagine the bodies of their reading or listening audiences. Vives' *Instruction of a Christen Woman* at one point discusses strategies that fathers might use to disengage their daughters from undesirable books; such books should be taken away if "she wyl nat leave them out of her handes" (27). Nearly three centuries earlier, the *Ancrene Wisse* quotes Jerome and tells its charges the inverse, about holy books: *Hali redunge beo eauer I þine honden* (1558-1560) "Let holy reading be always in your hands" (153). These texts picture readers holding their books, or they show audiences gathering around saintly figures to record and observe them. At the end of Cecile's *passio* in the *Man of Law's Tale*, there is a crowd to witness her still talking and teaching after her neck has been cut four times by the executioner, and a similar crowd sees the white milk come out of *Seinte Katerine's* neck when her head is cut off. These friendly witnesses are the ones who collect the bodies of those saints, and are the same kind of audience in the *Dream of the Rood*—Christ's *hinderincas* "warriors"—who come to collect Christ from the cross, which is miraculously able to bow down in their presence, *þam secgum to handa* "to the hands of men."

Medieval sermon *exempla* and what they say about women merit further exploration, especially since they were supplied locally by preachers into pre-existing sermon forms (Kienzle, Conclusion 976). But *exempla* were used outside sermons as well. Frederic's Tubach's 1962 argument that Lateran IV marked a change in how *exempla* were used—for example, with greater social ambiguity; however, Tubach's thesis ought to be re-explored. Many of Tubach's

examples are from Jacques de Vitry's collections, and overwhelmingly they feature only one side of the woman-as-gateway paradigm, the one conceived about Eve by Tertullian: *Tu es diaboli ianua* "You are the devil's gateway." Many of Jacques de Vitry's examples, see only a binary of male/female and soul/flesh. To what extent did this binary change in *exempla* after Lateran IV?

Vives' *exempla* are underexplored territory as well. The experience of reading his book is ruled by the experience—almost disorienting—of pages peopled with *exempla*. Current books on Renaissance and humanist use of *exempla* prefer to explore Montaigne and his ironic and self-aware deployment of illustrations. Vives, from a *converso* Jew family, had to leave England as Henry VIII drew near to divorcing Catherine of Aragon, his Spanish compatriot. His legacy was eclipsed following his death first by nationalistic prejudice against Spain and even now by its proximity to Erasmus. Vives himself was a liminal figure, like the women he proposed educating and like so many of the saints and heroines he put before the women who were his audience. After all, he encourages his charges not to worry so much about having their own children and to consider their husband's books—filled with *exempla* like the ones he offers his readers—as their own children. In this directing the primary interest of his female audience toward books, Vives and his *exempla* appropriate the parental role, as all advice literature does. The scroll that Jerome advises his virgins not to drop but to keep reading is now Vives' educational, intertextual treatise that defies its own intentions of keeping young girls safely inside their houses.

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