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The articulation of protest in Marguerite Porete's 'The mirror of simple souls'

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the thesis is on the counter-cultural comments and formulations in the medieval text *The Mirror of Simple Souls* by Frenchwoman Marguerite Porete, who suffered execution at the stake in 1310. The thesis demonstrates how in the past and into the current reading world the text can be seen as a form of literary protest/activism. The theoretical energies for the thesis draw from accounts of the medieval female experience, and the analysis is part empirical, part Marxist-feminist and part deconstructive. The broader context explores what literary protest/activism could have meant in medieval contexts and the gender strategies that were employed. The verbal texture of the book receives sustained attention as do the power relations between the *dramatis personae*, and the interplay between author and translator and (un)intended audience/reader(s) is explored, particularly shifts between presumed laity and expert theological influences and audiences.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MoSS Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., J.C. Marler, and Judith Grant's English version of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

CC French and Latin versions of *The Mirror* in The Corpvs Christianorvm Continuato Medievialis LXIX

AI Middle English version of *The Mirror* in the Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta

A note on the absence of the adverb 'sic': I do not use the adverb to indicate Americanised or any other variant spelling forms, nor do I use it to indicate my opinion. Variant spelling occurs in direct quotations only, and accompanies its reference. I give indication of the latter as my discourse unfolds.

CHAPTER ONE
HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The Text in Context

The Mirror of Simple Souls is a medieval manuscript produced in France somewhere between the years 1285 to 1306.[1] It was written originally in a 'Picard form of French', that is, Old French.[2] It is widely believed that the manuscript is the work of Marguerite Porete. In 1310[3] Marguerite was executed for refusing to recant 'the heterodox tenets of her ideas'.[4] We assume those ideas are as they are contained in *The Mirror*, for information regarding Marguerite is scant. Marguerite was originally from Valenciennes and ended up living in Hainut at the start of the 14th century.[5] There is speculation that Marguerite might have been a Beguine.[6] Beguines were lay religious women who, in their shared adversity as marginalised medieval women-folk, formed quasi-autonomous communities dedicated to humanitarian efforts and lifestyles of solitary religious worship but who were not endorsed by the Catholic Church.[7] This sub-culture arose spontaneously out of an awareness that medieval women had of their marginalised status. Beguines did not consciously choose to form a sub-culture. Rather, it seems that women being aware of their social restrictions consciously chose an alternative lifestyle. Due to the increase in the number of women who exercised the choice of a solitary and mendicant lifestyle, Beguines and Beguinages developed spontaneously as a semi-organised subculture.

We know that *The Mirror* was publicly burned by the Bishop of Cambrai in Valenciennes probably before 1306 and that those involved with the text's production were thus symbolically warned to desist from involvement therein.[8] Marguerite, it seems, continued to work on the condemned text. Scholars believe she added a further 17 chapters

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[1] R. Lerner, 'New Light on the Mirror of Simple Souls', *Speculum* 85 (2010): 91–116 (p. 93).
[2] Lerner, 'New Light on the Mirror', p. 95.
[3] M. Lichtman, 'Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls: Inverted Reflection of Self, Society and God', *Studia Mystica* 16 (1995): 4–29 (p. 4).
[4] K. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. vx.
[5] E. Collegde, OSA., J. C. Marler and J. Grant, 'Introductory Interpretative Essay', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, by M. Porete, trans. E. Colledge J. C. Marler, and J. Grant (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. xxxviii.
[6] Colledge et al., 'Interpretative Essay', p. xlviii.
[7] N. Carol, 'The Origins of the Beguines', *Signs* 14.2 (Winter 1989): 321–341.
[8] Emery, K. Jnr, 'Foreword', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, by M. Porete, trans. E. Colledge, J. C. Marler and J. Grant (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. ix, xxxix.

to it and sought authoritative ecclesiastical endorsement for her work. Tried by the Inquisition and condemned as a relapsed heretic, she was eventually burned at the stake.

Cultural Forces Influencing and Impacting on Marguerite and *The Mirror*

Within the historical context and working within the date range of the 13th–14th century, the Church was attempting to regulate women's revelatory discourse and the outbreaks of spiritual movements that came to populate the flourishing urbanisation of Valenciennes, and elsewhere on the continent.[9] This having been said, what follows is a brief discussion of pertinent cultural forces that we might suppose Marguerite would have found restrictive. The historical information that follows comes from scholarly works and from digital resources. The latter, whilst not all academic works, serve nonetheless as a useful source for the historical information surrounding Marguerite and *The Mirror*.

In 1208, Pope Innocent III proclaimed a crusade against the Cathars. The Cathars were a free spirit movement in southern France who refused to cede to the Catholic Church's authority over their religious beliefs. Consequently, two hundred Cathars perished at the hands of royal officers in 1245.[10] Furthermore, the Catholic Church centralized its authority over lay religious life. For example, in 1215 the fourth Lateran Council made annual confession and communion obligatory. Guides were produced that enabled priests to hear confession and assign penance.[11] After they received papal approval for their vows of poverty in 1173, another free spirit movement, the Waldensians, were declared heretical in 1184 because of their preaching – an activity which was strictly forbidden to the laity. I believe all of this corroded the self-responsibility of the laity over their religious lives.

There was complicity by secular authority with ecclesiastical authority in the mass slaughter of innocent lives when King Philip had 50 French Templars executed. Consequent to that execution many other Templars across the continent were tortured and killed or died in incarceration. The Catholic Church was also complicit with secular authority in corruption: the consensus amongst historians is that King Philip suppressed the Templars in order to gain access to their vast wealth. Only after the fact did the Church distance itself from the

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[9] Emery, 'Foreword', p. viii.
[10] 'Albigensis – Catharist Heretics of the South of France', Available URL: http://historymedren.about.com/od/aentries/a/11_albigenses.htm, 2013/07/27.
[11] C. Dinshaw and E. Wallace (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. xii–xiii.

Templars' suppression.[12] Furthermore, Marguerite might have also responded to ethical corruption by the clergy: head of the Catholic Church Boniface VIII was thought to be too worldly, covetous of money, and openly practised nepotism.[13] He, it is thought, fathered many illegitimate children despite the fact that during 1072–1085 Pope Gregory VII had called for stricter clerical celibacy. It seems authority structures were self-serving and not prone to the overall well-being of the laity.

Possibly the most restrictive of cultural forces was hierarchical dogma from the Catholic Church and the King: Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctum* Bull in 1302 asserted the Pope as supreme head of the Church and placed him above secular authority.[14] Philip the Fair responded by appointing himself judge and authority over the Pope.[15] Both, it seemed, desired laying claim to supremacy over the laity. This meant that the laity was unfortunately in the middle of the power struggle.

Laypersons and women also had to contend with censorship as evidenced by the Bishop of Cambrai's banishment of Marguerite's *Mirror* and the fact that the text has glosses. That is, Marguerite's work underwent editing of sorts, of which the identity of the original 'glosser'/clerk and the original glosses, are lost to us. Furthermore, another cleric who only cryptically acknowledged his involvement in his glosses as 'M.N.' one century after Marguerite's fate, made annotations regarding the text's interpretation.[16] I consider these attempted elucidations of the text a form of censure of what some might think are the text's unorthodox tenets.

Last but certainly not least is the fact that there were few avenues of employment for the disproportionate number of women in society. Many women came from landed aristocracy and the urban patriciate and were privilege to some form of education.[17] Hence, we could say that women seemed to occupy a surplus-citizen status in society. Society it seemed was ill equipped to accommodate women as positive and dynamic role players. From my readings, I gather that this was more entrenched in bourgeois sectors than it was in the laity's sector where economic circumstances dictated that women were an inexpensive, disposable and yet

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[12] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xxv, xxxv.
[13] 'Pope Boniface VII', Available URL: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02662.htm, 2013/07/26.
[14] 'CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Unam Sanctum', Available URL: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15126a.htm, 2013/07/26.
[15] 'Philip IV', Available URL: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12004a.htm, 20015/01/04.
[16] E. L. Babinsky, 'Bibliography', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, by M. Porete, trans. E. L. Babinsky (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), pp. 234–235.
[17] R. Lerner, 'The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Age', Available URL: www.dhushara.com/book/consum/gnos/lerner.html, 2013/07/30.

sometimes a self-directed labour force. Further compounding the restrictive socio-cultural forces was the narrowly defined Biblical determination that prohibited women from dynamic participation in intellectual, theological and civic life: the scripture, and specifically 1 Timothy 2:12 "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent", was a normative social code.[18] Women could therefore not participate in professional and civic activities. For example, Jacoba Felicie underwent a trial in Paris in 1022 for practising medicine. Broadly speaking then, women were denied civic participation. The emerging universities in Paris, Oxford and Bologna during 1215 added to entrenching the intellectual suppression of women, given that women were disallowed access to the academic institutions.[19]

Whilst some of these points may seem at face value to have little to do with Marguerite and *The Mirror*, the aim of mentioning them is to point out not only the strictures women contended with, but also to place Marguerite and *The Mirror* within their cultural context. Jacoba Felicie's trial for practising medicine, for example, serves to show how potentially suicidal it was for a woman to participate in civilian life, especially in a field that was reserved for men.

What were the real reasons behind Marguerite's execution at the stake?

There are many potential answers to this question. It is not because Marguerite was writing in a field that was reserved for men: many 13th century women were engaged in spiritual writing. There was the German nun Mechthild of Magdeburg.[20] Her text, *The Flowering Light of the Godhead*, has been described as a 'spiritual diary of sorts'.[21] Marguerite of Oingt, the French Carthusian nun (1240–1310),[22] also wrote a *Mirror*.[23] Another German nun, Gertrude the Great (1256–1301/2), wrote what has been described as a 'religious biography' of her visions.[24] The French women Felipa of Porcelet, who died in 1316, and Agnes of Harcourt (1240–1291) both wrote religious literature. It is also not only that

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[18] B. Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 3.
[19] Dinshaw and Wallace, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. x–xiii.
[20] G.M. Jantzen, 'Feminists, Philosophers and Mystics', *Hypatia* 9.4 (Autumn 1994): 186–206 (p. 189).
[21] S. L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 7.
[22] S. L. Field, 'Agnes of Harcourt, Felipa of Porcelet, and Marguerite of Oingt: Women Writing about Women at the end of the Thirteenth Century', *Church History* 76.2 (June 2007): 298–392 (p. 309).
[23] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, p. 7.
[24] S. Elkins, 'Gertrude the Great and the Virgin Mary,' *Church History* 66.4 (December 1994): 720–734 (p. 289).

Marguerite's treatise was in the vernacular when Latin was the language specifically used for theological discourse. Many women were, at the time, writing in the vernacular as opposed to Latin. Felipa of Porcelet and Agnes of Haincourt wrote in Franco-Provencal yet they did not face execution.[25] The foremost reason for Marguerite's execution was her refusal to renounce her convictions and to dissociate from *The Mirror*.

In the town of Valenciennes, Guy of Colmieu, Bishop of Cambrai during 1296–1306, had *The Mirror* burnt in Marguerite's presence and in so doing gave warning to Marguerite and everybody else present at that first condemnation of the text that *The Mirror* was unendorsed. At that condemnation of *The Mirror*, Bishop Guy further ordered that no one was to own a copy of the text, participate in its composition, use it or circulate it. We could assume that at that point in history Marguerite, as author of *The Mirror*, was still anonymous to authorities since her name was not yet associated with the text.[26] Marguerite responded to Bishop Guy's condemnation of *The Mirror* by adding to the text instead of retracting the views she had formulated. Furthermore, she did not dissociate herself from *The Mirror*. Instead, she sought clerical approval for *The Mirror* from three high profile persons, namely the Franciscan John of Querayn, Dom France Chanter from the Cistercian abbey of Villiers, and Godfrey of Fontaines, a secular master of theology.[27] It was this – her first act of defiance – that brought Marguerite to the attention of the authorities.

This point in French history was characterised by a climate of unrest.[28] Inquisitors acted on behalf of Philip the Fair and their task was to aid the crown in eradicating dissidence. In this political environment, Marguerite committed another misdemeanour. Canon and civil lawyers were, by this time, formulating trial procedures to implement at inquisitions. Where *fama*, that is, popular/public opinion, held that a crime had been committed, an appointed arresting judge investigated the truth of the matter. In matters relating to religion, the inquisitorial mandate was to convert those accused of doctrinal deviation to orthodoxy via confession and penitence.[29] Marguerite refused for a year and a half to take an oath, making it impossible for her inquisitor to interrogate her. She did not ask for absolution and she refused to reconcile herself, or *The Mirror*, to her inquisitor William Humbert and his mandate to realign defaulters with conventional theological dogma. At this point in her life,

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[25] Field, 'Agnes of Harcourt, Felipa of Porcelet and Marguerite of Oingt', pp. 307–308.
[26] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xxxviii–xxxix.
[27] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, p. 47.
[28] Lerner, '*The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*'.
[29] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, p. 19.

Marguerite openly defied first ecclesiastical authority, i.e. Bishop Guy's orders, and second, the crown, i.e. William Humbert, King Philip's confessor in 1307.[30]

A third reason pertinent to Marguerite's execution lies in the fact that the universities of 13th-century France were emerging as a new source of authority. This means that 13th-century canon and civil lawyers were not only formulating trial procedures,[31] they were effectively legislating heresy as a punishable 'legal concept'.[32] Consequently, Marguerite was in fact breaking the law when she refused to retract her views in *The Mirror* or distance herself from the text. She broke the law a second time when she was unresponsive at William Humbert's interrogation of her. Marguerite, seemingly seeking out and living a solitary mendicant life, was not necessarily a heretic. Furthermore, *The Mirror,* as an abstract text, was not a heretical document. It was because Marguerite was obstinate that the Council of Vienne declared her a relapsed heretic, and *The Mirror* a heretical document.[33] She then faced the full punishment of the law: execution at the stake.

A fourth less obvious reason underlying Marguerite's execution lies in the role played by her inquisitor William Humbert. Also known as William of Paris, the Dominican and chief inquisitor for France was, in his capacity as Phillip's confessor, mandated by Phillip to campaign against the Templars. It would appear that the mass slaughter of the Templars did not sit well with Pope Clement V. William found that he had lost favour with the pope when Clement V suspended William from inquisitorial activities.[34] Clement V only lifted the suspension on the understanding that William's campaign against the Templars would stop. We can assume then that in order to consolidate his relations with Clement V, William would act decisively on matters that would gain the pope's approval – such as suppressing deviant religious texts and practices. To that effect, Marguerite and *The Mirror* became William's scapegoats: by condemning both text and author, William attempted to regain papal favour and to restore his credibility.

Marguerite and *The Mirror*'s ill-timed presence in history does not stop with having become William of Paris's whipping boy, so to speak. A fifth reason for Marguerite's execution lies in Philip the Fair's political machinations to assert his authority above that of the pope's. Marguerite and *The Mirror* were in the middle of the crossfire between papal and

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[30] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', p. xxxviii.
[31] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor,* p. 19.
[32] T. A. Fudge, *The Trial of Jan Hus: Medieval Heresy and Criminal Procedure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 3.
[33] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor,* p. 10.
[34] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xxxvi–xlvi.

monarchical warfare. The text and its argument, the author and her recalcitrance, were, in a sense, collateral damage in a war that was bigger than the mystical and socio-political critique either of them was transmitting. Whilst Marguerite and *The Mirror* were making arguments for embracing female parity, personal autonomy and heterogeneity, King Philip IV and Pope Boniface III vied for supremacy. During the propagandist war, Boniface issued the *Unam Sanctum* in which he declared authority over the king. Philip responded by mandating his advisor William of Norgate, a professor of law, to campaign against Boniface III. At this point in French history Philip IV was determined to ensure that devotion to Christianity was the equivalent of devotion to the monarch. In other words, for Philip the Fair, the interests of the monarchy and church were identical. What this means for Marguerite is that she happened to be one of many in the centre of a power struggle between the pope and the king. As is the case in all wars, there was bound to be the death of innocents. In the battle for supremacy between Philip IV and Boniface III, Marguerite's obstinacy and counter-cultural formulations placed her directly in the middle of the power struggle between the pope and the king, resulting in her becoming a casualty of war, so to speak. Further to this, Marguerite's refusal to comply with William of Paris in his capacity as chief inquisitor of France was the equivalent of treason, because her obstinacy implied that she did not acknowledge the crown's authority and supremacy. The persecutions of Marguerite and the Templars, we can now see, intersected. This rendered them both tragic casualties of war, or what is in modern terms referred to as collateral damage, in a socio-economic-political war that was not of their making. This brings us to a sixth reason that adds to Marguerite's tragedy.

From a historical-political perspective, Marguerite presented herself not only at the wrong point in time, she also happened to be in the wrong physical place to be asserting daring socio-political opinions. The town of Valenciennes happened to straddle the Escaut River. The river served as the border between Flanders and Hainut. Valenciennes was thus a geographical site over which territorial disputes were waged. Compounding its difficult geographic location was the fact that on the right bank, the town of Valenciennes was subject to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Cambrai, and on its left it was subject to Arras. How this relates to Marguerite and *The Mirror* is that Valenciennes, as a border town, was the perfect geographical spot for bigger political statements. Valenciennes was therefore, a troubled border 'hot spot'.[35] Valenciennes is where Marguerite's tragedy started to play out and where William of Paris made all the political statements in his own and in

[35] Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, pp. 12–16, 28.

King Philip IV's favour. Marguerite was truly in the wrong place at the wrong time. Aggravating Marguerite's circumstance is the fact that she was associated with the Beguines: convention viewed this movement suspiciously because it was unauthorised.

A seventh reason for Marguerite's persecution lies in her lack of an authoritative mentor or patron. Marie of Oingt, for example, relied on the French Canon Lawyer Jacques de Vitry for support.[36] The only recorded support Marguerite had was Guiard of Cressonessart, also a solitary mendicant accused of heresy.[37] The absence of high profile support, and the lack of affiliation with an established convent such as Hildegard of Bingen's Benedictine nunnery, from Marguerite's life rendered her vulnerable.

An eighth reason underlying Marguerite's fate is that she did not base her text on visions, the voice of God speaking through her, or on the conventional bridal mysticism model. What Marguerite did was to disregard the aforementioned benchmark. Instead of following the aforementioned *status quo* her fellow female mystics used, Marguerite inserted her own voice into the text. This, coupled with the fact that Marguerite lacked a benefactor, resulted in the audacious act of appropriating the masculine and dogmatic voice from a patriarchal discourse.[38]

Finally, what cemented Marguerite's fate was *The Mirror's* daring yet refined and sub-textual objection to normative and orthodox sociological and theological discourse. The text argues for female parity, autonomy, and universalism in a number of different ways. For example, the outcry against the suppression of the female intellect shows up in *The Mirror*'s highly intellectualised style. Marguerite's open contempt for patristic theology and masculine scholarship is evident in the text's opening verses, and in the female gendered nature of *The Mirror.* The communities of women for whom the text may have been oriented could easily have identified with the feminine values the text reinforces. This was a direct threat to masculine dogma. We know that this was a recognised threat at the time by the Catholic Church, and male members of society, because the recorded medieval female experience provides us with evidence of the attempts to supress the female voice and presence. There is, for example, Marguerite's execution at the stake and again, Filippa Jacobie's trial for practising medicine. For more evidence, we could also look at the

[36] Lichtman, 'Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls: Inverted Reflection of Self, Society and God', p. 5.
[37] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', p. xlii.
[38] Cottrell, 'Marguerite's Heretical Discourse', pp. 18–19.

antipathy Margery Kempe's fellow pilgrims had towards her, as well as Kempe's 'detractors', as she negotiated her alternative lifestyle choice, and recorded her experience.[39]

Marguerite in fact threatens the strong hold the Catholic Church had over the laity. She overtly does this when the character of Love states her case for religious autonomy in chapter 5 by claiming that she 'no longer wishes for anything which comes by an intermediary' (MoSS 14–15), and that there is no intermediary between a soul and God. This type of counter cultural ideology in *The Mirror* is what eventually seals Marguerite's fate. Neither the Church nor the King was willing to accommodate the trend of emerging autotheist philosophies. In their battle for power both were complicit in attempting to contain it. Marguerite's *Mirror* provided the Council of Vienne with the strongest evidence against her as well as providing the same learned men at the Council with material to formulate the *Ad Nostrum* bull. The bull was, in effect, an attempt to outlaw the tenets radical mystics were espousing such as: one could attain enlightenment on earth, one need not fully recognise the Eucharist, and one did not need ecclesiastical status in order to access God. Apparently, the only reliable source for the formulation of the decrees, according to Robert Lerner, is traceable to *The Mirror*. Another possible source for the bull's decrees is traceable to work done by Albertus Magnus against heretics of the Ries forty to fifty years earlier than Marguerite's *Mirror*. However, if the council did consult Magnus in formulating the bull, it serves only to reveal their hostility toward the Beguines.[40] I would add to Lerner's conclusions that the Council, motivated by a fear of losing control over women, and the general populace, attempted to maintain their control and so birthed the *Ad nostrum*. Lerner calls the *Ad nostrum* the birth certificate of the heresy of the Free Spirit movement. *The Mirror*'s claim that the soul was not in bondage to the virtues, and that the soul did not need to participate in mass, sermons, fasting or prayer (MoSS 16, 20), were two of the strongest of fifteen points that were extracted from *The Mirror*, and cited against Marguerite in her trial. It proved to the Council that Marguerite was advocating moral laxity and was 'a woman given to rash religiosity'.[41] Thus, Marguerite's fate was sealed.

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[39] M. Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London, Penguin Group, 1994), pp. 12, 13.
[40] R. Lerner, 'The Heresy of the Free Spirit', See footnote 18 for URL, 2014/10/15.
[41] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xlvii, xlviii, lxx.

The Manuscript

The Mirror survived its medieval suppression via an 'underground transmission'.[42] It has come down to us over a period of seven centuries in various translations. According to one translator, extant copies of *The Mirror* are as follows:

Manuscripts:

Old French: Three copies exist but only one is accessible. That copy dates to the late 15th century, is owned by a nunnery at Orleans, and remains at Musee Conde as Chantilly MS F XIV 26. This copy, edited by Romana Guarnieri, commonly referred to as the C–manuscript, is currently the most widely referenced French copy of *The Mirror*.

Latin: Translated from Old French, three are preserved in the Vatican library (BAV) as Vat. Latino 4355, Rossiano 4, and Chigiano C. iv. 85. A fragment of *The Mirror*, also in Latin, is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, as Laud. Lat. 46.

Four Italian: These are Italian translations from Latin. One 14th century copy is in Florence. Other late 14th century copies are in manuscripts in Naples, Vienna, and Budapest. It is possible that 36 copies were circulating in Italy in the 15th century.

Three Middle English: A 15th century copy, probably translated by Carthusians, from French, is held at the London British Museum as MS Add. 37790. The Bodleian Library holds a second, translated from French, as MS 505. A third held at St. John's College, Cambridge, is translated from French and preserved as MS 71. A Carthusian monk, Richard Methley (1451–1528), translated from the Middle English copy to Latin in the late 15th century. This copy is at Pembroke College preserved as MS 221. Current scholarship holds that Methley is the person who added annotations to *The Mirror*, known as *The Mirror*'s glosses, and who cryptically refers to himself only as M.N.[43]

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[42] Emery, 'Foreword', p. vii.
[43] The *International Marguerite Porete Society*, Available URL, http://margueriteporete.net/?p=87, 2015/01/15.

With due consideration given to the potential for distortion of the text as it travels from one translation to the next, this study has relied on the English translation of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* by Edmund Colledge O.S.A., and his colleagues J. C. Marler and Judith Grant. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, it is the most recent English translation. Secondly, it is a direct translation from the extant French C–manuscript currently widely relied upon as the only French copy of *The Mirror*. Thirdly, Colledge's version includes an interpretative introduction to the text, running commentary in the footnotes and a foreword by Emery Kent Jr. All this serves as a helpful introduction to the text and its context. A text similar to *The Mirror* was uncovered in 1976, in a library in Valenciennes. Known as the V–manuscript, this copy has not yet received wide recognition. It is only said that it resembles *The Mirror*'s language, and only so in two of its chapters.[44]

There is debate amongst scholars about which of the versions of *The Mirror* is most true to its original. However, the ones most widely relied upon as authoritative versions of *The Mirror* are Dr. Romana Guarnieri's French C–text which runs alongside Paul Verdyn's Latin version in the *Corpvs Christianorvm Continuatio Mediaeualis* LXIX,[45] and Marilyn Doiron's edited Middle English version in the *Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta*.[46] For the sake of enhancing this study's findings all three the aforementioned versions of *The Mirror* have been consulted in conjunction with the reading of Colledge's English translation on which my analysis is based. For the sake of easy reference, I use Colledge's text for quotations and give the chapter numbers in the text and page numbers in parenthesis. For example, "In chapter 15 Marguerite deals with the Eucharist (MoSS 320)". I use material from other texts to emphasise a point I am making, and to show that there is no distortion in meaning in the translations.

The Mirror in the Academy

Marguerite's execution at the stake, her obscure background, the context within which she lived and wrote, the content of *The Mirror* and the fact that the text still generates interest inside and outside of the academic world, allow us to assume that then as now the spiritual theme and *The Mirror*'s inherent social critique are relevant, intriguing and contentious. To

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[44] Lerner, 'New Light on the Mirror', p. 95.
[45] Romana Guarnieri and Paul Verdyn (eds.), 'MARGUERITE PORETE, LE MIROUER DES SIMPLES AMES', and 'MARGARETAE PORETE, SPECVLVM SIMPLICUM ANIMARVM', *Corpus Chistianorum Mediaeualis LXIX* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1986).
[46] Dorion, Marilyn (ed.), 'ÞE MIRROUR OF SIMPLE SOULES', *Archivio italiano per la storia della pieta 5* (1965): 513–635.

prove this we need look no further than current scholarly debate surrounding Marguerite and *The Mirror*. What follows is a brief overview of current scholarly opinion on Marguerite and *The Mirror*.

Generally accepted and treated as a mystical text, there is scholarly division in opinion as to whether or not *The Mirror* is doctrinally orthodox. There are those like Edmund Colledge who are of the opinion that *The Mirror* is more a document of protest against spiritual decay. At one level of understanding, I agree with this statement. However, the *Mirror*'s use of allegory suggests that there is more than one level of protest inherent in the text. For example, Kathleen Garay illustrates how Marguerite adapts the courtly romance tradition to provide a theological critique of authority.[47] Gwendolyn Bryant, on the other hand, states clearly that *The Mirror* is a mystical treatise and not an attack on clergy.[48] Robert Cottrell, Garay and Maria Lichtman all address the socio-political critique inherent in *The Mirror*. Undoubtedly, *The Mirror*'s ambiguous style lends itself to many opinions. This is perhaps also the reason why *The Mirror* is still relevant today. It lends itself to debate about orthodoxy and convention, themes that are as relevant today as they were in the 14th century.

There are also those who address *The Mirror*'s spiritual dialogue. Cottrell points out that *The Mirror* aligns with orthodoxy if one reads it figuratively.[49] Michael Sells highlights *The Mirror*'s major themes such as the nature of divine love, the form of mystical union and the reversion of the soul.[50] Heidi Marx considers Meister Eckhart alongside Marguerite, pointing out that although neither were theological contenders their work influenced Christian thinking.[51] Amy Hollywood also considers Marguerite's *Mirror* alongside the work of a revered mystic, namely Mechthild of Magdeburg.[52] These dialogues concerning *The Mirror*'s mystical aspect are part of a wider dialogue about spirituality, religion and God. Like the *Mirror*'s subversive socio-political themes, the mystical dialogue is also relevant

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[47] K. Garay, 'She Swims and Floats in Joy: Marguerite Porete, an Heretical Mystic of the Later Middle Ages', *Canadian Women Studies/Le Cashiers de la Femme* 17 (1997): 18–21.
[48] G. Bryant, 'The French Heretic: Marguerite Porete', *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. K. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 204–226.
[49] R. Cottrell, 'Marguerite Porete's Heretical Discourse: or Deviating from the Model', *Modern Language Studies* 21.1 (Winter 1991): 16–21.
[50] M. Sells, 'Apophasis of Desire and the Burning of Marguerite Porete', *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (London: Chicago University Press, 1994), pp. 116–145.
[51] H. Marx, 'Metaphors of Imagining in Meister Eckhart and Marguerite Porete', *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1988): 99–108.
[52] A. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (South Bend IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 87–119.

and contentious because modern comprehension about God, creation, spirituality and enlightenment is not stagnant, but evolving. This explains why *The Mirror* still holds relevance.

Colledge is of the opinion that there is no conclusive proof that Marguerite was a Beguine. Robert Lerner shares this opinion with Colledge.[53] By contrast, Barbara Newman and Gwendolyn Bryant both treat Marguerite as a Beguine. Newman goes so far as to group Marguerite with revered Beguines Hadewijch and Mechthild .[54] The debate about whether or not Marguerite was a Beguine is a significant one. Both stand up to scrutiny. The argument for Marguerite being a Beguine, I believe, recognises the life-centred experience that women were recording as part of their mystical dialogues: the Beguines occupied a liminal space in medieval society. When we categorise Marguerite as a Beguine, we become aware of the Beguine life experience that shows up in the text's theme of being and non-being. That is, women's, and the Beguines', marginalised space in society informs *The Mirror*'s theme of women as present and dynamic participants (being) versus women being unobtrusive, silent and non-participatory (non-being). Secondly, the argument for Marguerite's status as a Beguine acknowledges the similarities between *The Mirror* and other works of Beguine origin. Lastly, this argument provides a framework within which one is able to approach the text, and its author's little known background, thus providing better comprehension for study.

The argument against Marguerite's status as a Beguine recognises that *The Mirror* asserts a deviation from typical Beguine writing in that it deviates from bridal mysticism. This perspective also recognises that *The Mirror*'s dialogue seems to argue strongly for individualism and independence from any association characterised by confinement. Furthermore, Marguerite does not identify herself as a Beguine. She mentions them in the text in what appears to be an address that is external to her, and not something with which she associates. That is, she acknowledges the Beguine presence and empathises with them in her capacity as a woman, but gives no indication that she is one of them. Furthermore, this opinion bears in mind that the Council of Vienne does not accuse Marguerite of being a Beguine but instead prosecutes her as a suspicious free spirit. We can conclude then by saying that, depending on one's perspective, Marguerite's background and her text are open to interpretation, at least until such time that evidence surfaces proving otherwise.

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[53] Lerner, 'New Light on the Mirror of Simple Souls', p. 93.
[54] B. Newman, 'The Mirror and the Rose: Marguerite Porete's Encounter with Dieu `d'Amours', *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, eds. Renata Blumenfield-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Warren (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 105–123.

The similarities and differences in the scholars' findings contribute to this study's concern, which contends that embedded in *The Mirror*'s overt mystical character is a strong medieval female, literary, social critique. This social critique runs parallel to the mystical narrative, and besides the text's occasional outrageous declarations such as its discourse on dispensing with the virtues, and its seemingly overt contempt for masculinity, there is a stronger latent literary social protest present in *The Mirror*, which is rooted in the medieval female experience.

CHAPTER TWO
APPROACH

General and Theoretical Departure

To begin my analysis, I use as a departure point a scholarly opinion of how mystical writing is a form of social challenge, because the given opinion succinctly captures my perspective. Bernard McGinn describes medieval mysticism as 'a refined challenge always in theory if not in daily practice, to the regular normative way of religious salvation', and says that 'mysticism has always been a protest against dogmatic theology, serving more often than not a female critique of male-dominated religion'.[55] Using McGinn's statements as a starting point, we can see the immediate and simultaneously subtle and openly daring challenge to 13th–14th century clerks and male authority. In the 'Explicit' (MoSS 9) – Marguerite's use of convention to introduce and end a manuscript – she writes 'Consider well what you may say of [the text]/For it is very hard to understand', and 'Men of theology and scholars such as they/Will never understand this writing properly' (MoSS 9). Add to this the fact that Marguerite was (obviously) female and the fact that her lifestyle was other than normative, given that she is associated with the Beguines, Marguerite and *The Mirror* already conform to McGinn's aforementioned recognition that mystics, mystical writing and mysticism are forms of protest. McGinn further explains mysticism's links to social challenge by stating that mysticism is a 'nuanced interaction among different elements within the framework of catholic belief and practice'.[56] In *The Mirror,* this manifests in Marguerite's skilful use of typical Catholic values such as faith, hope, love, charity, truth, etc. as interacting *dramatis personae* in the text, thus personifying the values. Furthermore, on an intra-textual level, Marguerite imbues these Catholic values with her own brand of meaning whilst simultaneously enhancing their original Biblical meaning as the text progresses. For example, Marguerite imbues the character of Love with Boethian traits in that she is the character around which all other characters and topics of discussion orbit. It is Love, as in Boethian philosophy, that holds the polemic dialogue of the text in balance.[57] Love says 'one and the same word has two meanings' (MoSS 40). This sentiment voiced early on in the text,

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[55] B. McGinn, 'Evil-sounding, rash, and suspect of heresy: tensions between mysticism and magisterium in the history of the church', *Catholic Historical Review* 90 (2004): 193–212 (p. 200).
[56] Ibid.
[57] Anicius, Manlius, Severinus, Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Prosa 7, Metrim 8, translated by G. Chaucer as, 'Boece', *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 397–469 (p. 420).

as early as chapter 20 out of 139 chapters, serves two purposes. Firstly, it cements Marguerite's gnomic style of writing, and secondly it imparts an inherent ambiguous character to the text that allows Marguerite to circumnavigate social and theological prescription. Furthermore, the character Love and the concept of love gain deeper dimension. That is, Marguerite blends the Boethian concept of love with the orthodox Catholic concept of love whilst simultaneously arriving at an enhanced definition of the concept.

According to McGinn, mysticism as a form of social challenge is characterised by two strands of thought. One strand is complementary, conservative, and in line with Catholic sentiment whilst the other strand is contradictory, revolutionary and operates outside the boundaries of Catholic sentiment.[58] This aspect of McGinn's idea of mysticism being a form of protest is very noticeable in Marguerite's text. At intervals throughout the text, Marguerite punctuates revolutionary formulations with Biblical assurances. For example, she writes in chapter 19 about 'Holy Church the Less' (MoSS 38), which is a disparaging reference to the Catholic Church. However, this reduction of the Catholic Church's status and authority is written in a chapter heading which is in part derived from 1 Corinthians 13: 33, namely that of Faith, Hope and Charity. Thus a revolutionary formulation, that is, the reduction of the Catholic Church's status and authority, is present, whilst still held in balance with conservatism that is rooted in Catholicism, i.e. faith, hope and charity. Interestingly it seems that this form of protest pits the Bible against the Church and in so doing still manages to invoke authority.

Because *The Mirror*'s social critique is latent, the departure point of this study relies on understandings derived first from *The Mirror*'s primary level, that is, from the text's spiritual and mystical dialogue. Thereafter, I address the underlying subversive sub-text alongside the primary level of understanding. Because the social and theological aspects of the text are intertwined and not easily distinguishable from each other, there is no attempt to disentangle the two in this project. Instead, the focus is on *The Mirror*'s less obvious 'counter-cultural' commentary and formulations.[59] This counter-cultural dialogue, I contend, hides within the devotional discussion, and is rooted in the medieval female experience.

In order to uncover the veiled social and religious remonstrance in *The Mirror*, I combine an empirical approach with elements of deconstruction. Empirically I am able to

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[58] McGinn, 'Evil-sounding, rash, and suspect of heresy', p. 200.
[59] Emery, K. Jnr, 'Foreword', and E. Colledge, J. C. Marler, and J. Grant, 'Interpretative Essay', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, by M. Porete, trans. E. Colledge, J. C. Marler and J. Grant (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame, 1999), pp. vii, lxx.

move forwards and backwards in the chapters, quotes and poetry of the text, in my attempt to trace and uncover the subversive critique. The deconstruction elements lend themselves well to an analysis of *The Mirror* because the text is generally considered to be one that holds many unresolved enigmas because of its 'delphic manner', its 'layers of ambiguity',[60] and its 'linguistic disguise',[61] and because *The Mirror* generally seems to contradict itself in places. As such, the deconstruction elements in my approach seem an appropriate practice considering that *The Mirror*'s dialogue itself leads us to believe that there are no given truths, only rival interpretations. By my understanding, the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida posits that there is a relinquishment of absolute truth. A reading of *The Mirror*, I contend, leads one to the same conclusion. This statement, as well as the deconstruction elements in my approach, becomes clearer by first looking at a broad definition of what deconstruction theory entails.

Deconstruction seeks to 'relocate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment; to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed'.[62] Not only does this, Spivak's 'nutshell' definition, elucidate my approach and the reason for my approach, but given what has been mentioned about *The Mirror*'s delphic manner, Spivak's definition of deconstruction would have us consider that *The Mirror* actually deconstructs itself.[63] It seems apt then that deconstruction elements form part of my analysis.

It is necessary then, to look at the verbal texture of the book. That is, there is investigation into the following: tone of address between speakers, address of the audience, the speech assigned to characters, the subject matter assigned respectively to poetry and prose and the effect thereof, at which points in the dialogue philosophies intersect, and the text's narrative trajectory, because all of these components function cohesively to veil Marguerite's socio-political critique. Furthermore, because *The Mirror* employs allegory, and because allegory is a less accessible mode of signification, I focus on the story first, because the latent social critique that *The Mirror* delivers is revealed not only in the personification of the

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[60] Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 88.
[61] K. Garay, 'She Swims and Floats in Joy: Marguerite Porete, an Heretical Mystic of the Late Middle Ages', *Canadian Women Studies* 17 (1997): 18–21 (p. 4).
[62] Gayatri, Chakravorty, Spivak, 'Translator's Preface', *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. lxxvii.
[63] Further discussion on *The Mirror*'s self-deconstruction is in my Conclusion.

interlocutors, but in what they say and do, and in how they relate to each other. By attending to the narrative level of *The Mirror* first, the text's subliminal inversion of convention starts to reveal itself.[64]

My analysis also leans on a Marxist-feminist reading but does not attempt to be a thoroughly Marxist-feminist critique. I also bear in mind that Marguerite's objections to convention can be seen through a Marxist-feminist lens but that Marguerite was neither Marxist nor a feminist in the modern sense. By my understanding and application of this theory, the following receives scrutiny: the construction of the *dramatis personae*, the power relations between the *dramatis personae*, and the power relations between Marguerite and her interlocutors. Furthermore, there is attention to questions such as how authority structures and the laity are portrayed, who is most likely to benefit as an audience to the text, what the text reinforces, subverts, and, what it tells us about medieval female strategies and medieval sisterhood, as well as how the male and female roles are (re)defined.

I also consider *The Mirror's* inter-textual and intra-textual phenomena. The former addresses the notion that Marguerite's *Mirror* relies on ancient religio-philosophies drawn from Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Bonaventura, Augustine as well as the Bible, whilst the latter addresses how Marguerite enhances those philosophies and arrives at nuanced meanings of the originals.

What would have constituted literary social challenge in the 13th–14th centuries, and what did literary protest mean then?

Marguerite and *The Mirror* were not alone in the medieval era to display the kind of social challenge that I describe here. The concept of courtly love found in the kind of literature that entertained aristocratic and bourgeois society of the 13th century explores the dynamics involved in a social system that relied upon arranged marriages to enhance socio-economic prestige and strengthen political alliances. The lyrical poetry that flourished at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who became Queen in 1137 and who imported lyrical poetry with her from her home in the south of France to Paris, explores the dynamics and tensions involved in socio-politically arranged marriages. Her daughter Marie's court became a centre for discussions about the tensions between extra-marital love and the institutions of marriage and church. At this level of society courtly literature included troubadour lyrical poetry and short

[64] J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work: Middle English Literature and its Background 1100–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 87–101.

narrative lais such as those of Marie de France. How this relates to medieval literary social critique is that much of this written work upheld the notion that romantic love could not exist within arranged marriages and that the church was hypocritical in condemning extra-marital affairs. In other words, these texts were exposing and challenging social inequities and hypocrisies.

Hildegard of Bingen corresponded with popes, emperors, abbots and abbesses. Her labours are in fact, in and of themselves, dynamic and involved petitions on the part of Hildegard for social change. Her sermons, her medical writings and her morality play serve as evidence enough to prove that her writing was of itself a form of literary objection to convention specifically because Hildegard undertook her work when the patriarchal *status quo* forbade women from participation in those activities.

The medieval middle class also developed their own form and style of writing that we can consider as forms of literary objection to convention. For example, Jacquemart Gelee's satirical narratives, *Renart le bestoume* – Renard the hypocrite, and *Rutebeuf and Renart le nouvel* – Renard the New, critiques feudal customs, abuses of justice and religious hypocrisy. The short narrative verses of fabliaux like the *cortes arire* (tales for laughing) and the *cortes moraux ou editants* (moral tales), whilst providing entertainment, also typify medieval writing which objects to and exposes social vice and hypocrisy.[65] Thus, despite the satirical narratives and the fabliaux which flourished in France during the 13th–14th century serving to entertain their audiences, both are forms of writing with undercurrents of dissent not only in their themes but also of themselves, because they functioned as covert protest in that they subliminally alerted their audiences to social injustices and called for reform.

Medieval epistles such as the communication between Heloise and Abelard are also forms of literary dissent. Religious orders forbade Abelard and Heloise from participation in any form of romantic liaison. However, they had a physical union and produced a son. Therefore, their experience became the site that birthed the epistolary socio-religious debate between male religious-philosopher (Abelard) and woman erudite-nun (Heloise). Their letters are an exposé of social and religious vice and hypocrisy. In her letters to Abelard, Heloise defies convention by insisting that Abelard give recognition to her human and emotional understanding of love. She rejects Abelard's definitions and declarations of spiritual love for her and insists on his confirmations of romantic interest in her. She also

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[65] 'Forms of Protest in the Middle Ages', Available URL: www.countriesquest.com/europe/france/culture/literature/the_middle_ages/forms_of_protest.htm, 2014/02/03.

waives marriage – an act which of itself defies convention. Missives between men and women in religious orders were common. However, what was unconventional was the romantic and physical history of their relationship. This renders their letters as well as the content of the letters, that is, debates about spiritual and romantic love, forms of literary protest simply because their existence and content defies conventional dogma. Abelard himself produced works that addressed inconsistencies in Christian teaching.[66] This fact renders at least some of his independent philosophical writing attempts at addressing religious wrongs and thus forms of literary social challenge in and of themselves. Another example of medieval epistle protest would be the letters Hildegard wrote, some of which have clear socio-political agendas.[67] For example, in her epistle to Pope Anastasius IV she advises the pope to hold strong against the appointment of an archbishop by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. This renders some of Hildegard's numerous epistles diplomatic correspondences, and thus forms of written social protest.

If we define literary protest as writing that challenges and questions convention, and simultaneously begs for change, provides entertainment and education, and acts as a catalyst to reformation, then *The Mirror* – along with medieval writing such as the satirical narratives, lais, fabliaux and epistles – falls within the ambit of what we can consider medieval literary protest. Further to this definition of medieval literary protest, one should add that protest writing should at least be persuasive if it means to incidentally or deliberately awaken its audience to social injustice and/or convert its audience's ideology, and/or catalyse reform. This opens the door for brief discussion on rhetoric and its presence in written protest as it appears in *The Mirror*. Since it is the purpose of written objection to challenge the *status quo* and argue for reform, elements of rhetoric will be at work in the texts. It is beyond the scope of this study to attend to rhetoric as it presents in the lyrical poetry, satirical narratives, lais, fabliaux and epistles of the middle ages mentioned here. However, it can be broadly said that those works portray dialectical debate each in its own style and form and therefore constitute socio-economic and political critique whether their argumentative style relies on Socratic, Platonic, Aristotelian or even current definitions of rhetoric.[68]

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[66] A. Nye, 'A Woman's Thought or a Man's Discipline? The Letters of Abelard and Heloise', *Hypatia* 7 (1992): 1–22 (pp. 2–5).
[67] S. Flanagan, '*Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)',* University of Adelaide, Available URL: http://www.hildegard.org/flanagan.html, 2014/03/23.
[68] Reasoning aided by the process of talking and thinking, reasoning that relies on the separation of the idea into its natural parts, reasoning that relies on the notion that experience increases the ability to see likenesses and

It is also beyond the scope of this thesis to attend to rhetoric *per se*, as it presents itself in *The Mirror*. However, details regarding Marguerite's dialectic unfold as this discourse progresses. Suffice it for now to say, *The Mirror*'s rhetoric flows between attempts to be convincing, and despairing resignation. The former receives attention in the chapter on subliminal proto-feminism. For the latter we can look at chapter 36. Titled, *How the Soul is free and released from her subjection to Reason*, all three characters in this chapter display tones of irritation in their responses to each other (MoSS 56–57). At other points in the text, there is a reliance on oratory – such as when there is direct address to the audience and the reader (MoSS 9, 27, 29, 38, 45, 57, 78, 80, 107, 122, 146, 157). The text shifts in tone and mood from exaltation to despair, from scolding to mockery and from 'humility to haughtiness'.[69] Marguerite's rhetorical style shifts between poetry and prose. She uses medieval style allegory, e.g. the human love of the damsel for the king in the prologue functions as the spiritual love that humans desire for and from God. There is food and drink imagery, for example mention of 'bread', 'kernel' and 'wine' (MoSS 33, 38, 43, 10). Marguerite also makes use of the romance tradition, e.g. the damsel who yearns for true love and who dreams up her ideal king in the prologue. What all of the aforementioned amounts to is a highly sophisticated form of medieval, literary, social challenge.

We have now arrived at a working understanding of what constitutes medieval literary protest and what it could have meant. Medieval literary protest is any form of literature that responds to and exposes inequity, in any one or in any combination of the following fields: social, domestic, political, religious and economic. This literature might have held entertainment value such as the writings about anguished and unrequited love by the Provencal trobairitz-poet Countess Castelloza.[70] It might also have held scholarly value. The latter refers to, for example, Hildegard von Bingen's *Causae et Curae* and her *scivias*, which are texts that carry medical and spiritual-theological weight respectively.[71] Furthermore, Mechthild of Magdeburg's recorded visions in *The Flowering Light of the Godhead* are, like Hildegard's *scivias*, works that situate themselves in the theological realm.[72] This is despite the fact that theological discourse was the domain of the masculine. Sometimes it is easy to

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differences relevant to one's purpose, and reasoning that employs specific literary features to influence the audience in specific ways.

[69] S. L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, p. 8.

[70] P. Dronke, 'The Provencal Poet trobairitz Castelloza', *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. K. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 131–133.

[71] P. Escot, 'Hildegard von Bingen: Universal Proportion', *Mystics Quarterly* 19.2 (March 1993): 34–39 (p. 35).

[72] W. Seaton, 'Transformation of Convention in Mechthild of Magdeburg', *Mystics Quarterly* (June 1984): 64–72.

see the author's intentional call for reformation, such as the example given about Hildegard's diplomatic epistles. Any reformation arising out of the literature whether in practice, principle or law may have been incidental. For example, Hildegard enjoyed the privilege of corresponding with high profile persons. This could be incidental. Alternatively, it might have been a desired outcome on the part of the author. For example, Hildegard specifically wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux requesting his endorsement.[73] The literature might have catalysed stricter repressive laws – such as the *Ad Nostrum*, a bull that appeared after Marguerite's execution and the text's banishment and which outlawed deviant religious practices.[74] The literature might also have allowed for more freedoms, albeit marginal. For example, Pope Eugenius III endorsed Hildegard and she enjoyed the privilege of public preaching – something that was denied other women.[75] Medieval protest literature as it presents in mystical writing is characterised by its use of a rhetorical style co-opted from the priestly class. It attempts to persuade by challenging, exposing and suggesting alternatives to that which is normative and enforced dogmatically. It does this via its stylised spiritual characteristic, which functions as a voice-over/dubbing. The allegorical character of the work embeds the voice-over, and is the means that delivers the actual socio-economic and political critique. The fact that so many female writers actually claim that it was the voice of God speaking through them and that they were merely vessels, microphones, one could say, serves as evidence of voice-overs-in-action. That is, the voice of God speaking about spirituality is speaking over the voice of the author who is actually commenting on society. In so doing, mystical writing as literary protest may rely on two strands of dialectic in which one strand conforms to convention and the other proffers radical alternatives to convention. Medieval literary protest often displays a gendered nature. In the case of *The Mirror*, there is an all-female cast. Often the contempt for masculine authority is clear and obvious. In chapter 39 the Soul says 'To all those … who live by your counsel, who are so stupid and asinine that because of their credulity I must be circumspect, not speaking in my language … because of these men's credulity I have to be silent'(MoSS 89). Medieval literary protest could also be described as 'belief papers', that is, work that the originator holds to be true

[73] V. J. Corrigan, 'Hildegard of Bingen', *Icons of the Middle Ages: RULERS, WRITERS, REBELS, AND SAINTS*, Greenwood Icons, vol. 2, ed. L. Matheson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), pp. 381–382.
[74] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xxxv–xxxvi.
[75] Corrigan, 'Hildegard von Bingen', pp. 381–382.

and would suffer for, be that death, excommunication and/or ridicule.[76] In *The Mirror* in chapter three, Love actually expresses this sentiment and says that she would speak only 'what is true, even though [she would] die for it' (MoSS 13). In this regard, one could say that Marguerite might have even prophesied her own execution.

Approaching *The Mirror* as a Subversive Document

Deconstruction theory would have us consider that in order to derive meaning we must first find and preserve the oppositions inherent in a text. That is, opposing concepts are necessary in order to create meaning or make sense, and words and concepts can only create meaning in terms of the contrasting effects of other words and concepts.[77] It follows then that a text can exhibit tensions between opposing forces. In *The Mirror*, femininity is pitted against masculinity, internal authority against external authority, diversity against similarity, far against near and life against death. The focus of this thesis is on the aforementioned first three juxtaposed concepts and the argument that they make about Marguerite's resistance to convention. The last two polarities listed above find expression within the discourse and relate to the first three. The juxtaposing concepts identified and briefly described here will at first glance appear to rest on superficial affinities between elements in the dialogue and the social and ecclesiastical context. However, it must be borne in mind that in a text as cryptic as *The Mirror*, the roles played by the characters are multidimensional and the text itself has a multi-faceted character.[78] As already explained, I will attend to the primary level first because doing so will draw out *The Mirror's* subliminal protest features. Identified and briefly described here are the three aforementioned points of interest. Hereafter, I explain each in its own chapter.

Subliminal Proto-Feminism

The prologue fable introduces Marguerite's objection to the conventional male and female roles in medieval society. We are deliberately and immediately alerted to the allegorical aspect of the text when we are told in the prologue fable that the text is 'a brief story of worldly love … that applies also to divine love' (MoSS 10–12). However, despite this literary alert, we are already aware that Marguerite is making statements concerning the male

[76] G. Gertz, *Heresy Trials and English Women Writers 1400–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 21, 62.
[77] Spivak, 'Translator's Preface', pp. xx, lxxii.
[78] I illustrate both points as the discourse unfolds.

and female roles in society, when the short verse preceding the fable states that 'Men of theology and scholars … / Will never understand this writing properly' (MoSS 9). Nonetheless, we are drawn into the narrative by the following: the fable's plot outline of a woman in emotional distress yearning for a seemingly powerful but inaccessible and distant potential spouse, mention of a portrait, a book, and implied courting rituals. However, closer inspection and consideration of the prologue fable reveal a broad outline of the social positioning of many 13th century women, in particular those belonging to the middle and aristocratic classes. That is, we are given an overview of what medieval women had to contend with in that they were subject to powerful, emotionally and psychologically, as well as physically distant, and therefore inaccessible, male members of society. For evidence of this social convention we can address Marguerite's concept of the 'Far-Near' (MoSS 78), the '*Loingpres*', the '*longe propinquum'* (CC 168, 169), first mentioned in chapter 58, and described as a lightning bolt. At the primary level of understanding this prominent feature of the spiritual dialectic refers to God being omnipresent but intangible – hence near but far. In chapter 61 a character named The Spouse of the Soul describes the Far-Near as 'the very Trinity . . . which we call movement to the The Far-Near that is the trinity that is the movement to the soul'. That is, God's essence is imported from the Father through to the Son through to the Holy Spirit and ultimately through to the human soul. In this regard, there is a sense of ethereal intangible movement. In short, the Far-Near concept is a communication of mobility and agency, but at a spiritual level. Still at the primary level of understanding and remaining in the prologue fable, the concept also illustrates the lament about the spatial dimensions between the princess and the king she desires. There is lament about the damsel who 'was so far off from [the] great lord', 'far-off love', 'but he was so far away from me', and 'still I am in a distant land, and far from the palace'(MoSS 11, 82–83). This lord, who is so removed from the damsel, is however, near, in that he dwells in heart, mind and imagination.

However, what informs Marguerite's illustration of the Far-Near concept is the actual distance – physical, emotional and psychological – between male and female members of society. At one level of understanding, the concept is an indicator of the convention that women were generally denied dynamic participation in the public sphere and in contracting their own marriages, for example.[79] Hence, women were removed (far) from public life and were contained (near) within the domestic sphere. At this level of interpretation, the Far-

[79] E. Power, *Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 9, 82–83.

Near concept communicates the disabled agency in the lives of medieval women. The damsel cannot reach the king 'see him nor possess him', despite the fact that she has chosen him 'of her own will' (MoSS 11). However, what the prologue points out is that, despite the lack of dynamic physical agency, medieval women were not lacking in dynamic personal agency. That is, they had the ability to choose and did so even though the physical means to enact the choice was lacking. In a sense then the damsel/Marguerite, is negotiating alternatives to the confinement placed upon her by convention.

At another level of understanding, the Far-Near concept also communicates that men were the catalysts in women's actual social and physical movement – given the lightning bolt Marguerite uses to describe the Far-Near concept. Convention dictated that medieval women comply with being an invisible presence as regards the contracting of marriages, for example.[80] Domestic arrangements sometimes resulted in their having to move from one household to another and sometimes even from one country to another. Oftentimes marriage itself was an indicator of social mobility. In his foreword to the text, Kent speaks about the 'advancing and withdrawing' agency Marguerite ascribes the Far-Near concept.[81] We could say that what informs this construction is the reality of the ritual of courting in the courtly love tradition, and in the reality of protracting medieval social alliances. For example, a bourgeois medieval woman would be approached (advance) by a delegation/relative of a potential suitor, who would then return (withdraw) to the suitor and report on the outcome of the proposal. This type of marital negotiation constitutes a courting ritual of forward (advance) and backward (withdraw) movement that could occur over a period of time.

The fact that the Far-Near behaves like a lightning bolt and is defined for us by a character named The Spouse of the Soul could be understood as subliminal commentary on the aforementioned social convention when one considers the potency that lightning bolts have to effect drastic changes in environment. That is, The Spouse of The Soul, not The Soul itself, is defining who, and what, the Far-Near concept entails, in the same way that patriarchs defined the parameters of medieval women's lives and mobility.

What the prologue accomplishes is an inversion of social convention relating particularly to the roles of men and women. Marguerite rejects the passive involvement of women in society. She assigns King Alexander a function that a medieval woman might

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[80] My readings lead me to believe that this convention might have been more dominant in the middle and aristocratic classes than it might have been in the lives of the laity.
[81] Emery, 'Foreword', p. lii.

have held in the masculine ideal of medieval society. That is, she is present but unobtrusive, she occupies a space in the male imagination and construction of her identity and she is the site of male desire. The locus of (pro)creation has thus been abrogated from the masculine and placed within the feminine. That is, the damsel in the fable births/creates her ideal mate King Alexander, by invoking him. The damsel is at the forefront of voicing and articulating desire and creation of her ideal spouse and a corresponding work of art. Furthermore, despite deferring her authorial voice in that the damsel is the mouthpiece for Marguerite, Marguerite is still at the forefront of the narrative, because it is Marguerite's voice that permeates the damsel's tale. In fact, deferring her voice only serves to emphasize Marguerite's dynamic involvement in the text's creation and amplifies the female intellect, as well as compounds the idea of a woman being the locus of (pro)creation. Peter Dronke explains this as the text having an intra-story that is encompassed by an outer textuality.[82] That is to say, Marguerite is the damsel in the fable. The fable plays itself out in the text that is *The Mirror*, but *The Mirror* is encompassed by a larger narrative playing itself out in the context of Marguerite's life, that is, the reality of the medieval female world. Furthermore, the text's shortened title, *The Mirror*, alludes to the work being a reflection of social reality. The text, we could say, is a microcosm and the social reality is the macrocosm.

The prologue sets the body language of the text. That is, it is an assertive literary female posturing that is responding to the social marginalisation of women. Consider for example, the fact that The Spouse of The Soul appears once and has one small paragraph, then disappears from the text thereafter. The marginalisation of women in Marguerite's social reality is what informs this particular character's construct: we could speculate that The Spouse of The Soul's minor appearance and speech is reflective of the manner in which women, their voices and opinions, might have been accommodated in medieval times. However, convention is inverted because the symbol for masculinity, that is, The Spouse of The Soul, is assigned the role that women occupied in social reality. Hence, we could say that the tension between male and female definitions in the text is taut, and that ultimately Marguerite redefines the conventional roles. She starts in the prologue by enforcing the idea that a medieval woman had the ability to transcribe thought, creativity and imagination and that she was capable of being a proactive figure in her own life as opposed to the widely held

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[82] P. Dronke, 'Lyrical Poetry in the Work of Marguerite Porete,' *Literary and Historical Perspectives of the Middle Ages*, eds. Patricia W. Cummings, Patrick W. Conner and Charles W. Connell, Proceedings of the 1981 SEMA (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1992), pp.1 – 19 (9).

masculine medieval view to the contrary, that is, women were 'defective males'.[83] Thus is the opposing force between male and female constructed in the text and used to shape and create an alternative meaning. The inversions of the gender identities of Reason and the King will come into discussion here as well as the metaphysical aspect of the text not only because the latter is a significant aspect of deconstruction, but also because it is through the text's mystical feature that Marguerite's feminine voice breaks through.

Annihilating the Soul as a Means to Reclaim Autonomy

The full title of the text reads, *LE MIROUER DES SIMPLES AMES ANIENTIES ET QUI SEULEMENT DEMOURENT EN VOULOIR ET DESIR D'AMOUR* (CC 1), that is, *The Mirror of Simple Souls brought to nothing, and who live only in the will and desire for Love* (MoSS 1). The words '*brought to nothing'* and '*live*' introduce the juxtaposing concepts of life and death, ascent and descent, and creation and decreation (originally coined by Simone Weil, meaning humankind's response to the original creation), all of which relates to the text's theme of liberation via annihilation.[84] Another of the text's polarities and tensions, as well as another of Marguerite's strands of protest, starts to emerge. That is, it is through the death of the external that the internal starts to live. Zoning out the external forces an individual is subject to awakens the internal force. That internal force is the Soul who is already in union with God. This concept links to Marguerite's protest against authorities having control over the minutiae of the lives of individuals, such as the 1215 Catholic Church's ruling of ministering to the laity and making communion, confession and penance obligatory.[85] This means that late medieval religious worship and ritual was characteristically a public act, not a private one. Mass was a corporate activity and the community would ideally gather for the various daily religious rituals. Thus, religious worship had become increasingly 'clericalised'.[86] It is not a stretch to think that during Marguerite's lifetime this convention was in place given the Church's 1215 ruling of religious intervention in the lives of the laity.[87] It is therefore unsurprising to find that early on in the text there is an entire chapter dedicated to arguing for

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[83] F. Beer, *Woman and the Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), p. 21.
[84] W. Pratt, *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry*, Columbia: University of Missouri, 1996, p. 183.
[85] C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, p. xiii.
[86] V. Edden, 'The Devotional Life of the Laity in the Late Middle Ages', *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts: Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 38–40.
[87] Explained in **a,** of the Historical Introduction.

autonomy, and liberation from centralised religious authority. Chapter 4 is a soliloquy by Love, the main thrust of which is a desire for freedom from external dictates. The idea that individuals are accountable only to the self in union with God, reads as follows:

> *Of the noble virtue of Charity, and how she obeys no-one but Love. Chapter 4.*
> *Love.* Charity is obedient to no created thing, but only to Love. Charity has nothing of her own, and even if she had anything, she does not say that it is hers at all. Charity abandons her own task and goes off and does that of others. Charity asks no return from any creature, whatever good or happiness she may give. Charity knows no shame or fear or anxiety: she is so upright and true that she cannot bend, whatever happens to her. Charity takes no notice or account of anything under the sun, for the whole world is no more than superfluity and excess. Charity gives to everyone everything that she possesses, and does not withhold even herself, and in addition, she often promises what she does not possess, in her great generosity hoping that the more one gives, the more one will have left. Charity is such a shrewd business woman that she makes profit everywhere; when others lose, she escapes from the bonds in which others become caught, and so her store of these things that are pleasing to Love multiplies greatly. And notice that if anyone was to have perfect charity, he would have his affections mortified in the life of the spirit by the work of Charity (MoSS 13–14).

In the opening line, Love makes clear her deviation from the obligation to laws made by humankind, by using the words 'to no created thing'. The Latin version has it as '*nulli rei creatae'* (CC 19), which translates as it stands in the English version. The Old French version '*Charite n'obbeist a chose creee fors que a Amour'* (CC 18) literally translates as: charity does not obey a created thing except for love. Four sentences further into the soliloquy, Marguerite reiterates this sentiment, and this time it directly implies abhorrence of worldly and moral corruption when Love says 'Charity takes no notice or account of anything under the sun for the whole world is no more than superfluity and excess' (MoSS 13). The 'perfect charity'(MoSS 12, 13) or '*parfaicte charite'*, and '*perfectae caritatis'* (CC 14, 15), that Marguerite is speaking about here and in the near and preceding chapter 2, rests upon the notion of complete abandonment to an inner self which recognises that it is in union with God. Love says *'ne elle mesmes ne se reticent elle mie*/*nec etiam retinet semetipsam'* (CC 118, 119), that is, she 'does not withhold even herself' (MoSS 12–13). Because the inner

being is union with God, it does not recognise any external authority that seeks to contain it. Hence, the charity that the inner being delivers is not subject to ransom by any external dictates. The individual dispenses charity as seems fit because it is in harmony with Divinity. Because the inner person is in fluid union with God – it/the inner being/the soul – lacks obligation to anything and anyone.

The concept of charity here has numerous functions. It functions in the Biblical sense in that it is a form of tithing. It functions in the sense that it is a state of mind or a state of being. It functions as a personification, and it functions in a metaphysical sense in that it indicates the complete abandonment of Marguerite's self, that is, her soul and its annihilation as it transmutes into the Divine Soul. That is, the act of charity is the annihilation of the human soul so that it no longer exists except in a state of perfection. Differently put, the complete giving over of the human soul to the Divine Soul constitutes the act of perfect charity. Thus, even the inner self is abandoned. This state of being is now perfect because it no longer exists in its corrupt human form but exists instead in the purity of the divine. In *The Mirror,* the character Love has a dual identity. One is synonymous with God and the other is that of narrator.[88] Given the general assumption that love is synonymous with God and charity, the perfect charity spoken of here is that which is unrestrained and defies containment because of the essence of its divine nature.

The anxiety about conforming to social and religious stricture exposes itself in Marguerite's annihilation-of-the-soul discourse. There appears to be a desire to give one's self over to uninhibited freedom. There is a sense of a wanting to release a deeply hidden and suppressed natural being who knows only pure love and no corruption. For example a baby/child/toddler, who cannot tell the difference between safety and danger or wrong and right because it is so immersed in its own pleasure and in its own naturalness that it is actually behaving according to divine will, might be an apt analogy to illustrate Marguerite's desire for spiritual liberation. It just so happens that this is exactly the analogy Marguerite uses in chapter 29 when Love explains to Reason the state of being an annihilated soul is in when in union with God. It says there 'See an infant which is purely innocent: does it do anything, does it refrain from doing anything, for the sake of the great or the small, if it does not please?' (MoSS 47). What Marguerite's annihilation discourse is actually communicating is a desire for freedom from social dictates and constraints and immersion in

[88] H. Marx, 'Metaphors of Imagining in Meister Eckhart and Marguerite Porete', *Medieval Perspectives* 8 (1998): 99–108 (p. 102).

a pleasurable spiritual identity. It is also communication of a desire to be self-possessed in that the self is in harmony with the divine, and as such is not owned by anyone or anything. Marguerite explains this in feudal terms in chapter eight when she explains to Reason that annihilated souls understand well the 'bondage which Lordship is wont to exact' (MoSS 19). In other words, at the textual level of understanding, to conform to convention is to give one's self over to servitude. However, at the sub-textual level of understanding it is an indication that bondage could be a pleasurable experience if one gives one's self over to only God and not to humankind's lords. Marguerite's annihilation discourse is a call for liberty of conscience. It espouses the notion that because God is pure love, a soul can only enact and embody that love. Marguerite argues that the Divine Conscience is in control of human will when the human will completely surrenders to it. Love explains this to Reason as follows:

> *Love.* Reason, says Love, is not at all her will which wishes this, but rather it is the will of God which wishes it in her; for this Soul does not dwell in Love, for Love would make her wish for this through any longing; rather it is Love who dwells in her, who has taken her will from her, and so Love works her own will in the Soul, and Love performs her works in her without her help, as a result of which no anxiety can remain in her (MoSS 18).

Thus, the proposal is freedom of conscience as opposed to moral policing. The discourse on the annihilation of the soul is thus a proposal for individualism and the right to a private life away from religious and state control, and Marguerite frames the proposal within mysticism. This is one of the ways that Marguerite circumvents dogmatic theology and puts out the idea that a society without systematically enforced religious strictures and suppression is possible. In essence, Marguerite promulgates a refusal to conformability when and where she deems no wrong done, especially on the part of those subject to conventional strictures. This chapter will focus on how Marguerite's discourse on annihilation pits the opposing forces of life and death, and freedom and containment, against each other in order to build a case for autonomy. There is discussion on what annihilating the soul means as well discussion on Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic theology because the latter illustrates how liberation is gained through death.

The Case for Heterogeneity and Universalism

The inherent polarities that seem to co-exist in *The Mirror* reveal Marguerite's articulation of a desire for the accommodation and acceptance of diversity and heterogeneity. I do not use diversity and heterogeneity in the modern political understanding of the words. Here, it implies the following, Augustinian, thinking: systems exist. Systems exist within systems. There are categories of systems, be that human, animal, spiritual, etc. Each system has a unique character that appears to contradict that of other systems. However, units in a system, and systems themselves, synergise in their space and place towards a unifying wholeness despite their seemingly contradictory appearance, function and chaotic interaction.[89] We could relate this to Marguerite's social reality. French religious population, during the 13th – 14th centuries, included the Cathars, Waldensians, Beguines, Jews, Franciscans, Dominicans, etc. All, it would seem, desired the same outcome. That is, alignment with God. However, practice and custom differed from group to group and the various groups seemed to contradict each other. Unhindered, this seemingly chaotic human-scape is actually cohesive because their commonality is to align themselves with God. This kind of phenomenon relates to what has been termed chaos theory. According to proponents of chaos theory, various kinds of systems exist within a state of chaos. Suddenly and inexplicably, there emerges something called a strange attractor. This strange attractor rearranges the chaos into a new order and restores balance and harmony.[90] Bearing this in mind then, diversity and heterogeneity as they apply here refer to overall multiplicity as opposed to the current political understanding of it, which only implies variety in culture and race in human society. We cannot, however, ignore the political aspect of diversity and heterogeneity altogether. Within the historical context, politics deserves some mention because Marguerite's environment informed her discourse. Consider, for example, the fact that there is a diverse cast of forty-one characters, as opposed to a much smaller number. All these characters orbit the three main characters, viz. Reason, the Soul and Lady Love, at random intervals. What Marguerite seems to be doing, in casting numerous and contrasting interlocutors held together by three main cast members, is what Richard Rohr might call trying to 'find a higher order inside constant disorder'.[91] When we place this assertion in the historical context, we

[89] A. H. *Armstrong, An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen and Company, 1986), p. 221.
[90] A. Nolan, *Jesus Today; A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006), p. 43.
[91] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*: *A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey–Bass, 2011), p. 59.

see that Marguerite could be commenting on the suppression and slaughter of various religious sects – some of which were endorsed – that sprouted during the medieval era such as the Cathars, Waldensians, Beguines, Templars, etc. The presence of various faith communities in 12th–14th century France constitutes an array of differing beliefs and customs, all of which claim to answer and worship only God. In her discussion on the meditation of Pure Love in chapters 27–28, Love asserts that 'they have one common will'. That is, the souls belonging to the various sects present differently yet the basic and common tenet is the meditation of Love/God – this reiterates the idea of systems synergising towards a unifying wholeness. It is borne in mind that whilst the discussion at this point in the dialogue is only between Love and The Soul and is about their will combining, at a different level, The Soul also functions as the layman, that is, the medieval world's Every(wo)man, or Julian of Norwich's 'evenchristian'.[92] Therefore, whilst the conversation between Love and The Soul is about these two characters' wills specifically, at a sub-textual level comment is also being delivered on the soul of Every(wo)man meditating on pure love such as that exercised by anchorites, Beguines, Cathars, Waldensians, Templars, etc.

The character of Reason relates to medieval establishment, The Soul relates to the individual and Lady Love relates to Divinity. The rest of the cast constitutes the heterogeneous human-scape in varying degrees, each of whom interacts with the three key-persons of the dialogue. At the inter-textual level, the Boethian influence is obvious: despite the astounding declaration that the virtues are dispensable, and not a necessary precondition towards divine union, Marguerite explains that because of love's surpassing understanding and gravitational pull, balance and order is maintained (MoSS 17–21). This is almost a paraphrase of Lady Philosophy's explanation of Love to Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*.[93]

In chapter 17 of *The Mirror* Love says 'This soul gives to Nature whatever she asks of her'. This means that we cannot judge an individual's response to an inner prompt, be that active or passive, and responses are neither good nor bad. Furthermore, nature, as a concept, gains higher status due to Marguerite's personification of Nature in the extract. This construction implies that Nature could very well be synonymous with God. Therefore, to give to Nature whatever it asks means to yield to Divine Essence. Since Divine Essence is purity itself, it can do no wrong. It is only one's perception that arrives at the understanding

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[92] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 19.
[93] Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Prosa 7, Metrim 8, p. 420.

that a good or bad thing has occurred. However, that perception is the perception of unenlightened/unannihilated souls, not the perception of the Divine Essence. Hence, the implication is that Nature/God orders everything so well that that which seems desecrated is not so, because everything has already been divinely willed. More to the point, in chapter 11 Love says 'sin is nothing' (MoSS 36), '*Ceste Ame donne a Nature quanqu`elle luy demande*', '*Ista dat naturae quicquid ipsa petit*' (CC 68, 69). This could imply that what one generally considers sinful might actually be Divine Will at work. That is, it is predetermined that each unique unit and system synergises with a higher good despite its outward appearance of chaos. Julian of Norwich has it as 'Nothing is done by hap or aventure'.[94] This means everything is Divine Will. Nothing is coincidental and what might appear random is actually predetermined and decided upon at a higher spiritual level.

There is spontaneous and dramatic tension and conflict between the characters in their interchanges.[95] We could see this as a reflection of the extant social tensions of 12th–14th century France. That is, pope and king vying for supremacy at the expense of the populace, the dynamics inherent in feudalism, women's marginalisation, territorial wars, etc. Again, like Lady Philosophy in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, it is Lady Love, in *The Mirror,* that is the locus for diffusing the strife. Take chapter 32 for example. Three characters are in discussion, viz. Discretion, The Soul and Reason. They are debating if it is possible to retain one's sanity when comprehending the all-consuming love of God. According to Discretion, it is impossible to be sane when in such a state. However, The Soul believes it is possible to remain sane when in hypostatic union. Reason's response is 'Prove this' (MoSS 51). Reason plays the role of inquisitor. Proof – we can safely assume, whether acquired ethically or not – Marguerite and the Templars are cases in point – was what the inquisitors relied on in their interrogations of those accused of non-compliance with the church and king. The rest of chapter 32 is an attempt at proof-by-way-of-explanation by The Soul, which results in her furthering her own confusion and which then runs into the next chapter's soliloquy also by The Soul. Finally, a confused Soul eventually turns to Love for clarification. Love then proceeds to resolve the debate in the subsequent chapter. Following that, chapters 35 and 36 provide further clarification of the harmonising role played by Love when tensions and conflicts between The Soul and Reason flare up yet again. In these chapters, Reason functions strongest as medieval institution arguing against The Soul's desire

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[94] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 27.
[95] Dronke, 'Lyrical Poetry in the Work of Marguerite Porete', p. 2.

for freedom. Reason challenges The Soul a second time by saying 'prove what you say' (MoSS 55). True to the Boethian model, it is Lady Love who functions as mediator and peacemaker holding Reason (medieval institution) and The Soul (deviant thinker) in balanced orbit with each other. Thus, through her use of the Boethian model Marguerite articulates her case for tolerance of heterogeneity. Hence, Lady Love as she functions in *The Mirror* is not only a principle, that of love, but also fulfils the job of being a literary device in that Marguerite personifies her as a character who is synonymous with God.

Marguerite's use of the book, the painting and the mirror are all medieval tropes her audience would have easily recognised. However, on an inter-textual level these medieval tropes enhance Marguerite's protest against exclusive ideology. That is, Beguines are different from Catholics who are different from Cathars who are different from Waldensians who are different from Jews, etc. by implying that at a micro level individuals present differently – the book, the painting and the mirror are different products – but, at the macro level all are functioning parts of a sameness. For example, the book is mirroring social reality and spirituality, a painting is a likeness of something, a mirror displays images, yet all have the same purpose, that being the ability to reflect/display/show. In other words, they are different products with the same function. The Soul explains this 'house of mirrors'[96] and its imploding images as follows:

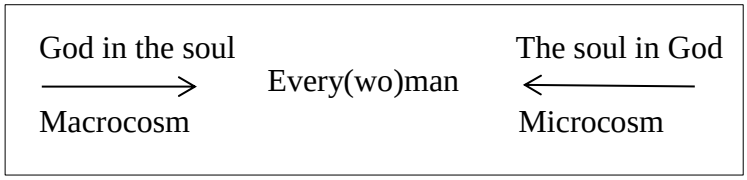
> *The Soul.* Since the time, says the soul, when Love opened his book for me. For this book is so written that, the moment when Love opens it, the Soul knows everything, and has everything, and every work of perfection is accomplished in her by the opening of this book. This opening has made me see clearly that it has made me give him back what is his, and take back what is mine; that is, that he is, and so he always has his own self, and I am not, and so it is right indeed that I have nothing of myself. And the light of the opening of this book has made me find what is mine, and dwell in it, and so I do not have so great a state of being as I could have in me from him. So Justice in justice, has given me back what is mine, and has shown me nakedly that I am not; and so in justice it wills that I should have nothing of myself; and this just law is written in the midst of the book of life. It is with this book and with me, says this soul, as it was with God and with his creatures when he created them. He willed it by

[96] M. Lichtman, 'Negative Theology in Marguerite Porete and Jacques Derrida', *Christianity and Literature* 47 (1998): 213–227 (p. 1).

his divine goodness, and in the same instant all this was done by his divine power, and all was ordered, in that same hour, by his divine wisdom (MoSS 125).

The triple imagery of book, mirror and painting is present in the extract in that the extract talks about the self/soul recognising its divine counterpart in the book, which by my understanding of the extract reflects the soul's likeness, and the soul's likeness is God. The Soul's likeness to the Divine alludes to the soul being a copy of God, and this invokes the idea of a painting. The link to social diversity lies in the part where the soul moves from speaking about herself only (singular) being an image of God, to referring to how God is reflected in all 'his creatures when he created them' (plural).

Interestingly, the word justice indicates that The Soul resides in God and vice versa. It is written as 'Justice in justice', that is, it is written in upper case and then repeated in lower case, and in a palindrome. Diagrammatically the construction looks like this:



This depicts God, the macrocosm, resident in Julian's evenchristian, the microcosm, and how that an individual is incapable of doing wrong since he/she is acting out the Divine Will which is the permeating presence of the Holy Spirit, and thus, that the Divine Will is acting through and out of the individual. Hence, we come to see that by Marguerite's articulation, diversity is actually similarity. The book and the mirror become unifying concepts that symbolise an all-encompassing macrocosm. Self-reflecting microcosms constitute the macrocosm. Julian of Norwich arrives at the same realisation when, in her vision, she recognises her place in the macrocosm, after she is presented with a hazelnut in the palm of her hand. Puzzled at first, she eventually realises that 'If I look singularly to myself I am nought; but in [the] general [body] I am, I hope, in oneness of charity with all mine evenchristians. For in this oneness standeth the life of all mankind that shall be saved'.[97] What Julian is saying is that she recognises her place as a unit within a system synergising with fellow units in her system and with others, towards a greater good/wholeness.

[97] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, pp. 19–20.

This last chapter will explore the concept of diversity as it may have applied to the medieval mind. It will investigate how *The Mirror* mimics socio-religious diversity and finally it will explore the significant and seemingly opposing philosophies of Bonaventura and Aquinas as they appear in *The Mirror* in order to illustrate the case *The Mirror* builds for tolerance of heterogeneity and thus the acceptance of universality.

CHAPTER THREE

SUBLIMINAL PROTO-FEMINISM IN *THE MIRROR*

This chapter seeks to investigate Marguerite's response to medieval assumptions, shaped by Biblical and other cultural influences that excluded women from general participation in civic life. Scholars are in general agreement that at the literal level, the cast of characters in *The Mirror* are all female, with the exception of King Alexander, who is the only male mentioned briefly in the prologue. Upon closer investigation though, King Alexander's biological identity becomes questionable. His biological identity, along with another important character, namely Reason, deserves attention. Marguerite sets up conventional male and female roles in the prologue fable, then inverts them during the course of the text. It is where, when and how the inversions play themselves out, and what those inversions communicate to us, that this chapter will focus on. The aim is to demonstrate that Marguerite produces a text that is very self-aware as a female creation and that the male presence is a foil to this, and that the text has features that provoke an awareness of the same in the audience. Suffice it for now to say that King Alexander and Reason are not, unequivocally, the male and female characters respectively that they initially appear to be. Briefly, King Alexander takes on a female role in that he is the site of desire, and Reason conducts herself during the course of the text as one might expect the medieval male might have done. I explore the effect of this literary cross-dressing in this chapter to see where and how it enhances Marguerite's protest against misogyny. Of particular interest will be the conflict Reason has with Love and The Soul, Reason's death, Love and The Soul's voyeuristic watch over the spectacle of Reason's death in chapter 87, and Reason's literary resurrection via a role-play by The Soul in chapter 88. King Alexander's role and his function as Marguerite's critique of patriarchy will also receive attention.

Reason and King Alexander

Reason's conduct in *The Mirror* is similar to what we know of William Humbert's conduct during Marguerite's trial. That is, Reason is the inquisitor in *The Mirror* just as Humbert was an inquisitor at Marguerite's trial. Spearheading an inquisition is generally speaking not a task that the medieval woman is, or was, associated with, if we are to believe presentations of women from the dearth of medieval literature available to us. We can safely assume that if medieval women were generally not allowed participation in medical practice they would

certainly not have been allowed participation in public debate or legal discourse, save their testimony at any given trial. This excludes rare historical cases such as, for example, Hildegard von Bingen's medical treatise and Margery Kempe's tolerated, but suspiciously regarded, open displays of mystical experience (for which she did suffer imprisonment). If we accept that 'women clearly live on a more emotional level than men', then we must make allowance for the medieval notion that women are illogical creatures.[98] This is a dubious and very broad notion that is still current, and is a notion I do not align with. Nonetheless, by the aforementioned understanding, Reason automatically, and by virtue of name alone, assumes a male role in *The Mirror*. In *The Mirror*, this plays out when Reason employs logic and structured argument based on scripture, with which to debate. Most of Reason's dialogue is in prose, not verse. When articulating the ineffable, Marguerite assigns her characters poetic dialogue, and when attempting to provide explanation of the ineffable in terms that Julian's evenchristian can understand, the characters are assigned prose dialogue. Reason's discussions occur mostly in sequenced, categorised, thought-out intellectual prose interrogation, whereas The Soul's or Love's discourse sways from poetry to prose, back to poetry, and then again to prose, intermittently, and specifically when articulating mystical concepts. To illustrate this point let us look at an example of Reason's dialogue compared with that of The Soul and Love.

Our first introduction to Reason is in chapter 7 when she challenges Love with the interrogation 'For God's sake…what is the meaning of what you say?', in response to Love's contention that The Soul heeds no shame, honour, poverty, riches, love or hate (MoSS 17). Already, in our first introduction to Reason, Marguerite positions the character as an interrogator – one of numerous disguises that Reason wears. In this case, we can imagine that Reason seems to be echoing the voices of Marguerite's interrogators. Reason questions Love's statements because the states of being that Love claims that The Soul is immune to do not make logical sense, because Love, the character – and by extension the concept – qualifies these states of being as polarities that equate with, and negate, each other. The questions Reason seems to be asking are, for example, how can one be rich and by the same token be poor, or, how it is that one can one love and simultaneously hate. Thus, Marguerite establishes, and maintains, Reason's role as interrogator. Reason, we can now understand, is in the persona of a male, or rather, a female interlocutor disguised as a male. Marguerite then loses no time in faulting masculinity and patriarchy: after our introduction to Reason in

[98] E. Ennin, *The Medieval Woman* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989), p. 275.

chapter 7, in the next chapter, Reason is self-deprecating, and indulges in self-mockery when she asks Love her next question. Reason asks in the opening line of chapter eight 'Ah, Love, says Reason, who understands only the obvious and fails to grasp what is subtle, what strange thing is this?' (MoSS 18). Reason in her capacity as a female disguised as a male, claiming to understand only what is obvious and failing to grasp what ought to be intuitive, is actually Marguerite's voice – Reason in yet another disguise – belittling male dogma and the supposed superior male intellect.[99] This makes Marguerite's presentation of Reason satirical. Thus is Reason's male persona as fool – considering Reason's self-mockery, and hence another of Reason's disguises – revealed to us early on in the dialogue. Placed in the context of a female critique of patriarchy it is easy to see then how Reason serves as Marguerite's objection to female suppression. However, it is in chapters 13, 30, 35, 39, and 44 – to mention only a few – that we are able to see that Reason is ascribed logic and structure in her arguments. In these chapters Reason picks up on the ideas Love and The Soul put forth, and entertains discussion thereon in a structured manner – thus revealing Reason in yet another disguise, this time as Aquinas' demonstrative way – only moving on once satisfied that she has received adequate explanation.[100] Let us look at Chapter 13 to illustrate this point.

After our introduction to her in chapter 7, Marguerite reduces Reason's dialogue to brief statements and short questions that have a sense of chronology. Not satisfied with the responses given in subsequent chapters to the question she posed in chapter 7, Reason actually steers the discussion back to our introduction of her in chapter 7 when Love postulated that The Soul is immune to poverty and riches, love and hate, etc. Reason says 'this book says astonishing things about the soul. It says in the seventh chapter that this Soul takes no heed of shame, or of honor, of poverty or of riches, of ease or of hardship, of love or of hate, of Hell or of Paradise' (MoSS 29). When she steers the conversation back to chapter 7's question in chapter 13, Reason is assigned lengthy prose in which she logically and chronologically satisfies herself first, with Love's postulation about the seemingly binary stresses that The Soul is immune to, and then proceeds to ask 'other questions for the sake of ordinary people' (MoSS 29). Reason is in fact conducting herself as one might expect a lawyer would in a court of law. That is, she poses a question, allows the respondent to answer and talk as much as he/she wants to in the hope that the respondent, during his/her

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[99] I discuss Marguerite's 'voice', and how she inhabits the speech of the interlocutors, in the paragraph that deals with the role of King Alexander, and in the subheading The Female voice in *The Mirror*'s Meta-texuality.
[100] I address Reason's disguises as Aquinas', and Bonaventura's philosophies, briefly in the introduction, and detail it in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

speech, might expose discrepancies in the respondent's testimony. The lawyer – we can read here Reason, in possibly another disguise – then seizes upon those discrepancies in an attempt to discredit the respondent and the respondent's testimony.[101] Furthermore, Reason's disguise as a lawyer would be in favour of the prosecution, that being medieval establishment/convention. By contrast, it does not take long for Marguerite to slip into poetry when Love speaks. This happens as early as chapter 5, in which Love provides us with a description of an annihilated soul. Keeping in mind that Love is synonymous with God, when she slips into poetry it is easy to understand then, that the articulation is the ineffable via the voice of a spiritual being. Love, as the narrator, slipping into verse serves to amplify Marguerite's literary and narrative technique, which simultaneously compounds Marguerite's characters' multidimensional femaleness as it stands in opposition to Reason's male persona's one dimensional thinking. The fact that Reason is a female literarily wearing many disguises, amplifies the multi-tasking multi-dimensional capabilities of women.

Let us turn our attention to Reason's death. As will be explained in chapter 3 of this thesis, Reason is herself on an ontological journey. That is, Reason evolves as the dialogue progresses by questioning the nature of her being, existence and reality. By the time she dies in chapter 87, Reason no longer uses logical and structured argument. She succumbs to her emotions and thus reveals yet another of her many disguises. Here, that of Bonaventura's affective way that, it appears, is repressed.[102] At the point when she succumbs to the affective way her logic fails her, she is overwhelmed and dies. Reason says at that point 'Truly Lady Soul, I lose my senses to you, and my heart falters. There is no life in me' (MoSS 112). The French version reads *'Je deffaulx vrayement, dame Ame, en vous oir: le cueur m'est failly. Je n`ay de vie'* (CC 246). At this point Reason sheds her male persona in that she admits to losing her senses, and by the understanding put forward in this thesis, her senses are her reasoning mind that tells her what is logical. The chapter following Reason's death, Chapter 88, has The Soul do a role-play in that she speaks in the persona of Reason. The Soul asks such questions as Reason might have asked had she not died:

> *The Soul speaks in the person of Reason.* Then from where does she come, says this Soul who speaks in the person of Reason, that Humility who is mother of these

[101] It might not even be a stretch of the imagination to suppose that Marguerite might have actually witnessed such tactics employed by inquisitors at trials during the inquisition.
[102] Again, I discuss how Reason functions as representations of Aquinas', and Bonaventura's philosophies, in the introduction, and detail it in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

> Virtues. Whose daughter is she, where does she come from, who is mother of so great a line as the Virtues, and grandmother of Sanctity, whose mothers the Virtues are? Who is Sanctity's forbear? Can no-one tell us whence such a family derives? (MoSS 113).

What Marguerite is doing here is making further mockery of masculine dogma: now that Reason's masculine persona is dead, The Soul mimics Reason's masculinity by doing what Reason might have done had Reason still lived. That is, she employs logic as a means to comprehension.

At this point in the text, in its mockery of masculinity, via its literary cross-dressing and rhetoric, *The Mirror* borders on a pantomime. Anachronistic though the analogy may seem at first, there are a number of points to bear in mind. First, transmission of information during the medieval era occurred via pageantry. That is, travelling guild plays, bards, troubadours, and mimes/mummers were all forms of public and private communication, entertainment and religious instruction. Second, we know that medieval folk used and relied on oral and visual transmission of information because the aforementioned modes of communication and entertainment were prevalent in medieval society and because many were illiterate. Another is the fact that theatre/drama such as the cycle/morality plays were a part of the medieval way of life. Lastly and more importantly, *The Mirror* was meant for performance/a listening audience, because the characters themselves intermittently directly address the audience. Hence, Marguerite's creative licence in the rendition of her morality play, that is *The Mirror*, allows us not only to imagine its performance, but working with given elements in the text we are able to apply modern terminology to what was already present in an ancient text but not known or understood by that name. Let us now apply the pantomime analogy to the above scene, and briefly to the general text, to see what subliminal proto-feminist critique it reveals.

Relying on the generally understood characteristics of pantomime, *The Mirror* imitates this genre as follows: there has already been mention of *The Mirror*'s literary cross-dressing – modern pantomime uses cross-dressing as part of its theatrical aspect. The Soul's role-play of Reason serves as mimicry – pantomime characters often employ imitation for comedic purposes. *The Mirror* actually employs poetry that can stand in as a pantomime's musical theatricality. *The Mirror* has a fairy tale basis at the start of the text in the prologue – pantomimes are satirical fairy tales. When in her male persona Reason plays the fool, this constitutes slapstick comedy – slapstick comedy is a characteristic of pantomimes. There is

tragedy in the death of Reason and the annihilation of The Soul at the literal level – pantomimes satirise the tragedies of social reality. Lastly, *The Mirror* addresses topical issues such as religion, spirituality and women's position in society – pantomimes also address social convention. Collectively this amounts to satirical humour. However, the undercurrent tragedy in this quasi pantomime, and hidden from obvious view, is the exposure of the suppression of women. What Marguerite is in fact doing is exposing and highlighting the plight of supressed medieval women, and daringly opening a dialogue for inclusive public discussion about the aforementioned, in that the quasi-pantomime prompts its audience into review discussions after its performance.

When Reason dies, Marguerite not only expels Reason's male persona from the dialogue, she also effectively silences the male voice. By having The Soul, a female character, play-act Reason's dead male persona immediately after Reason's death, Marguerite suggests that it is only once males are on par with females in multidimensional sophistication that men can be considered as on an equal footing with women. This works as follows: the character, The Soul, is a female acting as a male in that she is mimicking Reason after Reason's death. However, Reason was a female disguised as a male, before her death. These two interlocutors' gender switching suggests a hermaphroditic dimension to the characters, which in turn suggests equality between the sexes. Furthermore, The Soul and Reason fluidly inhabit the male and female roles. This suggests a blurring of the conventional social lines that distinguish male and female skills and aptitudes from each other.

However, there is another dimension to the gender of the character of The Soul, who speaks in the person of the deceased Reason. We must remember that Reason is actually a female disguised as a male. The male disguise dies off when Reason discards all logic – hereto associated with masculinity – and succumbs to the affective way – hereto associated with femininity. Thus Reason, in the throes of death, switches genders from male persona to female persona and actually dies as a woman. When The Soul takes on the personality of Reason after Reason's death, she also takes on the female persona, of the now deceased, and gender switched Reason. This 'same sex' union communicates a nuanced affinity between the characters.[103] By my understanding, this implies two things. Firstly, Reason has shrugged off a male styled earthly logic and has succumbed to a female styled spiritual awareness. Secondly, it also communicates a heightened conceptualisation of the ineffability mystics, mystical writing and mysticism, it seems, struggle to articulate. To put it another

[103] S. Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), p. 17.

way, the differences between male and female blur at a higher spiritual level. When The Soul says about Reason in chapter 87 at Reason's death 'Alas! Why did she not die long ago?', The Soul is actually lamenting Reason's ignorance of the sameness of the sexes. Marguerite accomplishes two things here. Firstly, The Soul is expressing an exhausted exasperation at Reason's male persona having taken so long to become enlightened. Secondly, Marguerite communicates the latent desire for the expulsion of masculine dogma.

But what are we to make of Reason's reappearance in the dialogue after her death in chapters 89, 98, 101 and 106? In those chapters, Reason speaks in his/her own voice. There is no textual explanation for this literary resurrection. If Marguerite has expelled the male voice from the dialogue via Reason's male persona death, then whose voice is it that speaks in these chapters? The answer to this question resides in exploring *The Mirror*'s literary cross-dressing. When Reason succumbs, the masculine persona and voice dies. The female character named Reason, disguised as a male, reverts to her female person when the masculine disguise dies. The actual female interlocutor disguised as a male did not die. Marguerite retains the female character Reason, who has now shed the masculine disguise, albeit for very brief appearances. But why retain her? Reason's retention is to show that in her after-life appearances, she is no longer in disguise as a male. The male voice died. Reason in her after-life appearances is now a fully-fledged female character who, in each of her four cameos, that is, her brief but significant performances, applies logical interrogation in order to attain comprehension. In each chapter, Reason asks a single and simple question. What this does is point out that – contrary to conventionally held thought – women are competent when it comes to applying logic and reason for the sake of comprehension. The fact that Reason, in her after-life female persona, is allowed questions in parts of the text that deal with The Soul in the throes of mystical union, compounds the idea that the female intellect is sophisticated enough to grasp complex issues. The indicators that Reason has shed her male persona and has reverted to her original appointment as a female cast member sit in Reason's dialogue after her death. Gone is the antagonistic attitude towards Love and The Soul. Reason's one-line interrogatives in chapters 89, 98, 101 and 106 after her death are so toned down that they function more as points of clarification than they do as points of objection. Those single-line queries are as follows: in chapter 9 Reason asks 'And how would they be Lords?' In chapter 98 she asks 'Ah, for God's sake … what do they do who are in a state of being above their thought?', and in chapters 101 and 106 respectively she asks 'How long ago, since when?' and 'Then how can you know?' This can be contrasted with Reason's counter arguments throughout the text prior to her death, and then immediately

before her death in chapter 86 – she dies in the next chapter, chapter 87 – in which Reason exasperatedly and inquisitorially asks 'O God, o God, o God! … what does this creature say? This is utter bewilderment! What will those whom I nurture say? I could find nothing to say to them nor to answer them so as to excuse this' (MoSS 110). Thus, we can see Reason finding complicity and affinity with her female co-characters Love and The Soul. Reason, we can safely say, is no longer an adversary to Love and The Soul.

Because Reason is no longer in opposition to Love and The Soul it means she is now in a position of sisterhood with them. Further to this, it makes sense that Reason employs a different rhetoric after her annihilation and resurrection. We assume that Reason is, after all of that, in union with God. Hence, Marguerite assigns Reason a refined mode of communication. However, Marguerite also assigns Reason a feminine transmutation. This aspect of character construction compounds the statements Marguerite makes, of the female ability to participate in all levels of society. In other words, Reason, the female character who has now completely shed all the traits of her male disguise, rises, in her capacity as a woman, into the spiritual realm, after first occupying a male role in the earthly realm, and this specific transmutation communicates women's ability and flexibility to inhabit multilevel roles.

Finally, we could also ascribe Reason's reappearance in the dialogue, after her death, to the following consideration: given that she is resurrected in the last chapters of *The Mirror* and makes only the briefest of appearances, and the fact that Marguerite added to *The Mirror* after its initial condemnation – as well as Love and The Soul's lengthy prose responses to Reason's brief appearances and single line questions – Marguerite might be using Reason and the specific dialogues that she appears in after her death to clarify issues and to impress upon her inquisitors that they were bypassing and/or misinterpreting the messages and themes of *The Mirror* in their condemnation of it and of her. In this sense, the discussions in which Reason appears after her death, that is, in chapters 89, 98, 101 and 106, function as amending dialogue. That is to say, in those chapters, Reason voices and summarises some of the main points of *The Mirror* such as personal will is Divine Will in disguise, and there is no right (male) or wrong (female), only Divine Will enacting and revelling in its enactment of superficial divisions. These are the themes that might initially have been called into question, or were misconstrued. The evidence for this is in chapter 89's entire dialogue. We could even go so far as to hazard a guess that Reason's questions in those chapters might even be echoes of the actual questions that were initially asked of Marguerite by her detractors. Furthermore, Reason's amending dialogues also work to defend Marguerite in the absence of

her own voice because of the fact that she was unresponsive and uncooperative towards her interrogators. Also, it foregrounds chapters 123–139, which were the chapters Marguerite added after *The Mirror*'s first condemnation by Bishop of Cambrai, and which compound the themes Reason's questions bring to clarification in her after-life appearances. It is difficult to pinpoint with accuracy what exactly Marguerite was asked since the evidence for that is scarce. Evidence from the trial documents state only that Marguerite was obstinate in her refusal to comply with desisting in *The Mirror*'s production, distribution and in her refusal to co-operate at the inquisition, and to cede to its male authority. This, it seems, was more than likely the real reason behind Marguerite's execution.[104] That is, her refusal to withdraw into the marginalised space nominated for women by masculinity is probably what sealed Marguerite's fate.

Medieval piety, and the medieval patriarchal mandate, symbolically linked medieval women with physical existence. Women were thus the locus of carnal desire.[105] This means that her identity was constructed by the Biblically informed imaginations of men that rendered her either virtuously virginal like Mary the mother of Jesus, or, temptress like Eve. She could not, it seems, occupy a middle ground and so was socially recessed so that she might be safely contained. Like Reason, and in terms of commenting on patriarchy, King Alexander, in the prologue, has much to communicate. The invisible king is where *The Mirror* is pregnant with what we could consider as a berating of misogyny. Some of what follows repeats what has already been mentioned in the introduction but is worthy of the repetition given its proto-feminist critique.

The king, in the prologue fable, functions in the text as the medieval female might in the masculine ideal of medieval womanhood. That is, she is present but unobtrusive: Marguerite mentions King Alexander in the prologue, but she relegates him to the background of the narrative. Alexander does not even enjoy the privilege of dialogue in the text. This calls to mind the relegation of medieval women away from visibility in the public sphere to the enclosed obscurity of the private domestic environment, as well as the removal of the female voice from civic participation. Secondly, King Alexander occupies a space in the princess's imagination and construction of his identity, and he is the object of the princess's desire. Marguerite abrogates the locus of (pro)creation from the masculine and

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[104] S. L. Field, *The Angel, the Beguine, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 39-62.
[105] R. D. Cottrell, 'Marguerite Porete's Heretical Discourse; or Deviating from the Model', *Modern Language Studies* 21 (Winter 1991): 16–21 (p. 19).

firmly places it within the feminine: it is the princess in the fable that births/creates her ideal mate, King Alexander. The social norms that Marguerite rejects via her inversion of the male and female roles are masculine directives, female silence and passive/background feminine involvement and participation in civil life – the princess in the fable is at the forefront of voicing and articulating desire and creation of her ideal spouse and a corresponding work of art. Marguerite is at the forefront of the narrative/dialogue since she is the mouthpiece for the princess as the narrative unfolds despite deferring her voice: by framing *The Mirror's* dialogue within the fable at the start of the text, Marguerite actually transfers her voice onto that of the text's characters. The princess in the fable initiates the story on behalf of Marguerite. This construction emphasizes Marguerite's dynamic involvement in the text's creation because it allows Marguerite's voice to enter and exit the dialogue of *The Mirror* not only through the princess but also through the other characters. Thus the same construction amplifies the female intellect as well as compounds the idea of a woman being the locus of (pro)creation. Women, it seems, were already constructed as absent from the literary tradition but Marguerite manages to find and retrieve the lost medieval female author and writer.[106] She achieves this by casting the princess as the catalyst to the dialogue that is *The Mirror*, and frames her own mystical experience within a fable. That is to say, Marguerite uses the princess as a literary device with which to initiate the dialogue that relates Marguerite's mystical story. In other words, Marguerite uses the princess to invoke the fairy tale that is actually Marguerite's mystical narrative. Marguerite does not indicate that she herself is a cast member, but as the dialogue progresses we come to understand that the princess is actually Marguerite in disguise. In this way, without actually casting herself as an interlocutor, Marguerite's voice enters and exits the speech of various interlocutors given their overlapping/alter-ego roles, and hence, infiltrates the entire dialogue. Thus, Marguerite renegotiates the literary space occupied by men in their positions as theologians, kings and philosophers.

Compounding the aforementioned statement is the probability that French was more commonly spoken than Latin. The significance of this is that Marguerite's writing of *The Mirror* in the vernacular is not only an act of defiance against spiritual/religious discourse occurring only in Latin, but it is also a way of placing her work, in her capacity as a woman,

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[106] D. Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Medieval Women in England, 1100–1500*, (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), pp. 2, 12.

in a wider space so that it has more reach. In this wide open space she platforms female dialogues and voices, and introduces the subversive proto-feminist discourse.

Marguerite's proto-feminist discourse invalidates the *Brautmystik* designed by male authors for female protagonists. What the model did was imply that only by aligning herself virginally with Christ as his bride, in effect, his wife, could a woman evolve spiritually towards God. In other words, as a woman she was still secondary to her master/lord. Furthermore, the model embedded the notion of a woman's fleshiness in that in her capacity as a virgin bride/wife, she was still subject to consummation at some point in time. The delayed consummation invoked an eroticized contemplative practice and consigned the woman, her narrative, and her experience, to her fleshiness and consequently to the disabling stereotype of temptress.[107] This model is absent from *The Mirror*. Margery Kempe, for example, fits the bridal mysticism narrative because despite the blight – by medieval standards, if one wanted to rise above the ordinary in terms of spirituality – of marriage and motherhood in her earlier years, Margery convinced her husband to join her in a mutual vow of chastity, and devoted her later years to her spirituality, her mystical experiences and repeatedly refers to herself as 'daughter', when she reports God's address to her.[108] Thus, Margery suggests familial domestic intimacy but still places herself secondary to a lord. By refusing to use the medieval female literary model around which to organise her experience, Marguerite is not complicit in unwittingly entrenching female subjugation. Claiming to be a bride of Christ merely reinforced the idea of a woman's fleshiness and her being the locus of carnal desire. Marguerite overturns this disabling stereotype with her unconventional approach to recording her mystical experience. In short, by conjuring her ideal mate and commissioning his portrait, Marguerite has actually usurped the patriarchal discourse. Not only is a woman openly undertaking the pursuit of a potential spouse, she is also indulging in the commission of his portrait – a common request, it seems, by men of the time so as to assess the aesthetics of potential brides. One could even say that at this specific point in *The Mirror* fact (the commissioning of a potential spouse's portrait) and fiction (the princess in the fable prologue commissioning Alexander's portrait) merge.

Fact and fiction merge again in the way that Marguerite assigns King Alexander the role of the Far-Near concept: at one level the king is a just-out-of-reach spiritual being. At another level of understanding, the Far-Near concept is also a reference to the psychological

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[107] B. Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 138.
[108] M. Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 46, 226.

distance between medieval men and women. If we are to rely on documentary recordings about the literate bourgeoisie and clergy, one gets the sense that medieval marriages may have been more a form of an arranged and negotiated co-habitation than what our modern understanding of marriage is. In a sense then, men and women might have been physically near to each other but psychologically removed from each other in terms of emotional intimacy. Another medieval scenario might actually have the patriarch of the feudal family physically distant from his wife and the women of his household due to his ecclesiastical, monarchical and economic obligations. Marguerite's invocation of the Far-Near concept could then be understood in modern terms as the presence of absence: that is, medieval male's pervasive presence in all that concerned the welfare of women but his absence in all that concerned the well-being of women. That is to say, the medieval woman's welfare concerned everything which had the potential to expand the social, financial, dynastic, etc. aspirations of the husband and/or the wife, whereas the medieval woman's well-being, that is, her emotional, psychological and mental concerns, was easily dismissed and placed second to her material welfare. The case of Abelard and Heloise is a good example to use here. Abelard it seems was dismissive of Heloise's emotional outpourings, her well-being. He seemed more cognisant of her, and possibly his own, career, i.e. welfare, as respected nun and monk respectively, when he distanced himself from her.[109]

In usurping the patriarchal discourse, Marguerite anticipates Edmund Spenser's character Britomart, in *The Faerie Queene*. She too sets off to pursue her potential spouse, Artegall, whom she sees in a vision – curiously, given the commonly used shortened title of Marguerite's text, *The Mirror* – in a mirror.[110] Like Marguerite's princess, Spenser's Britomart does not play the role of conventional passive recipient. She is, instead, a dynamic participant in her own narrative. Broadly speaking, Marguerite does not only anticipate some aspects of *The Faerie Queene*'s plot and characters, she inverts them as well: Spenser's Gloriana is similar to Marguerite's King Alexander in that neither actually appears as a participant in the narratives. Instead, both symbolise the ultimate goal and destination towards which the protagonists of both texts are moving. Spenser's Arthur also resembles Marguerite's prologue fable princess in that neither of these characters is significant in terms of the actual action of the narratives. Whilst both are the champions central to the narratives,

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[109] Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, pp. 46–75.
[110] E. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: Scott, Webster and Geary, MDCCCXLIL), III 1 8, p. 167.

neither Spenser's Arthur nor Marguerite's princess are overall essentially pivotal to narrative development and narrative progress. Instead, they seem to function more as catalysts to the action of the narratives. Another commonality is that both these characters have aspirations towards an ideal monarch/spouse. Arthur sees a vision of the fairy queen and the princess envisions the king. This curious pattern of Arthur and Gloriana/Britomart and Artegall might even be Spenser's way of blurring the male and female distinction within the context of Elizabeth I's reign. At a time when a woman was occupying the throne of England, it seemed appropriate to give recognition to female skills, strengths and attributes. For example, Susan Frye discusses how Spenser draws on Elizabeth I's status as Queen when he attributes Britomart regal status, and specific character traits such as chastity and independence.[111] However, centuries before Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Marguerite's *Mirror* anticipates this inverted gender construction and, in so doing, creates a strong proto-feminist discourse.

Another proto-feminist feature in *The Mirror* resides in Marguerite's use of King Alexander to comment on patriarchy. At one level of understanding, what Marguerite is doing is referring to humankind's primal desire to reunite with Divine Love.[112] At the level on which the critique of convention resides, and given that the beloved here is male, this could translate as the love of the medieval man of himself/his maleness – his hubris. We can unravel this subversive proto-feminist critique as follows: at one level of understanding, King Alexander is symbolic of God. During the course of the dialogue, we come to understand that by Marguerite's reckoning God is innate to man. It follows then that Alexander/God is innate in the princess. If the princess in the fable is yearning for Alexander/God and Alexander/God is innate in the princess, then what Marguerite is referring to other than at the spiritual level of the love of God for and of love, is medieval men seeing superiority in themselves. Whilst it is the princess, a woman, who invokes her beloved in the fable, we must remember that Marguerite assigns the princess male agency in that the princess is the initiator and catalyst of the dialogue in the same way that men were the forefront voices in medieval society. Thus, the princess is also an inverted character in that she assumes the medieval masculine trait of voicing desire for a spouse. When the inverted male/princess, invokes the king who at the superficial level is male, what we have is 'the love of the lover

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[111] S. Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 114, 119.
[112] R. D. Cottrell, 'Marguerite Porete's Heretical Discourse, or Deviating from the Model', *Modern Language Studies* 12 (1991): 16–21 (p. 19).

for himself'.[113] Here is an allusion to Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection. In fact, scholars have suggested that the opening fable of the maiden and the king echoes the story of the mirror of Narcissus.[114] Hence, in a sense we have subliminal critique of medieval man's hubris. The inverted male yearns for and invokes the king. This translates as medieval man's love of his masculinity: what appears to be the princess's narcissism is actually a trait transposed into a male feature because the princess is an inverted male.

We understand that Alexander and the princess in the prologue is Marguerite's way of setting up human relationships to describe the spiritual relation and relationship between man and God. We also understand that at one level Alexander is an inverted female. Marguerite's inverted construction of Alexander points to a feminine God. That Alexander functions as an inverted female and that Alexander is synonymous with God implies that God is conceptualised as a female deity, not a male deity. The character's fluid ability to inhabit both genders compounds the subversive proto-feminism. That is, the princess is an inverted male, King Alexander is an inverted woman, Reason is a female interlocutor disguised as a male, the female Soul easily mimics the pre-death male Reason, and so on. Ultimately though, the blurring of biological identity of Reason and King Alexander and the other hereto mentioned characters is suggestive of the potential for male and female energies to synergise. Its effect is to impress a supernatural harmony between opposing forces whilst never relenting on the tensions between the forces. This blurring of gender lines is where Marguerite's strongest proto-feminist critique resides.

The Female Voice in *The Mirror*'s Meta-textuality

Scholars are in general agreement that Marguerite's voice permeates *The Mirror*. We know that, like her contemporaries, Marguerite employed a female strategy to circumnavigate general prescriptive masculine and ecclesiastic dogma. We understand that Marguerite's technique differs from that of her contemporaries in that succumbing to the bride-of-Christ model in their writing, some medieval women were still unwittingly entrenching the suppression of women, whereas Marguerite's technique worked in a way that allowed her to covertly claim authorship, and consequently ownership and authority over the writing of her

[113] Ibid.
[114] B. Newman, 'The Mirror and the Rose; Marguerite Porete's encounter with Dieu `d'Amours', *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renata Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 4.

text at a time in history when the concepts of author and writer were blurred and women carried little if any authority at all. Author did not necessarily mean writer and writer did not necessarily mean author during the Middle Ages.[115] The concept of authorship especially within the context of medieval women's writing did not exist as we understand and employ it today. The ultimate *auctor* was God and the repository of written *auctoritas* was the Bible, all of which in medieval society translated into a culture of writing that was almost exclusively male.[116] Like some medieval women, even male medieval authors positioned themselves as 'lesser figures, as scribes, compilers and commentators'.[117]

We know that Marguerite made use of a scribe or scribes, because she refers the audience to 'the gloss[es]' in the text in chapters 55, 60, 71, 77 and 84, which implies that a scribe might have physically recorded *The Mirror* for her. But, does this mean that Marguerite employed a clerk specifically to record her dictates as Margery Kempe did?[118] Or, does it mean that Marguerite wrote in her own hand and sought the services of a scribe for his skill in disseminating her complex concepts whilst simultaneously hoping that his glosses would provide some form of ecclesiastical endorsement? The fact that scribes saw themselves as compilers and commentators suggests both as possibilities. But how does the fact that Marguerite refers her audience to the glosses set her work apart from that of her peers? By referring the audience to the glosses, Marguerite displays an awareness of a number of things. Firstly, it seems that she knew that there would be those unable to comprehend her discourse, and so refers them to the glosses in which we assume simpler explanation and clarification lie. Secondly, Marguerite is asserting her sophisticated reasoning and writing by directing those with possibly lesser discerning abilities to find comprehension in what might be an easier explanation, the glosses. The apology she proffers for her complicated style that reads 'the zeal of love and the labor of charity . . . made me write this way'(MoSS 81) only emphasises the sophistication of her work. Thirdly, Marguerite's referring of her audience to the glosses seems to indicate that Marguerite was aware of the possibility that her work could reach a diverse audience. This audience could have ranged, it seems, from discerning theologians to lesser discerning clerks, to recreational consumers of writing in the upper echelons of society, and to the simple laity in their capacity

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[115] Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works for and by Medieval Women in England, 1100–1500*, p. 9.
[116] A. Barret, *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman Group, 1992), p. 7.
[117] Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works for and by Medieval Women in England*, 1100–1500, p. 9.
[118] B. A Windeatt, 'Introduction', *The Book of Margery Kempe*, by Margery Kempe (London: Penguin Group, 1994), pp. 9–10.

as an audience to say, guild plays, charitable public performances/readings, or even as audience to ministry by a clerk or as members of a congregation. In short, it seems Marguerite was working with the idea of the reception and comprehension of her text and its audience in the back of her mind. On the other hand – I tentatively suggest – her peers might have written for the sake of making a record of their experiences, not so much for the sake of sharing their mystical experience with a wider audience.

Whilst production of a manuscript seems to have been a collaborative effort, Marguerite seems not so much to defer to the scribe's glosses than she refers to them. In other words, she does not cede to the scribe and his glosses as authority. Instead, she seems to be saying that her concepts are complex and the scribe's glosses simplify them, for those lacking critical discernment skills. Thus, to me, Marguerite's *Mirror* does not seem to have been much of a collaborative effort, as was the general case regarding the production of a medieval manuscript, but more of a self-directed venture. It seems more to me that the scribe and his notes were under Marguerite's instruction. I arrive at this conclusion based on Marguerite's actual reference to the glosses. In chapter 55 she seems to be saying that enlightened souls do not need to refer to the simplified glosses because they would grasp what she speaks about. She says there 'those who have attained to the state of being of such a life, understand this in a few words, with no need of explaining the glosses' (MoSS 74). Chapters 71, 77 and 84's reference to the glosses read as 'the brief words of Love . . . are hard to understand for anyone who has not the meaning of the gloss', 'Now understand . . . the gloss of this book', and 'Understand the gloss' (MoSS 92, 99, 108). The perfunctory tone of these quotes suggest that Marguerite is absorbed with sophisticated concepts and so instructs uncomprehending audience members towards what she has already deemed simplified in the glosses, and has directed the scribe to record accordingly. The strongest evidence for this notion resides in chapter 60's reference to the glosses. It says there that those who are 'living a life beyond [their] understanding . . . may at least provide glosses for this book' (MoSS 74, 81). In other words, those who identify with Marguerite's mystical experience should also provide some explanation in gloss form, implying that Marguerite has already done exactly that. It is also important to note that the glosses Marguerite refers to are not those of M.N. M.N.'s glosses were done long after Marguerite's demise. The glosses that Marguerite refers to, it seems, are lost to us.

What follows next may seem a lengthy consideration of the hurdles that medieval women had to overcome regarding the production of a manuscript. However, it is necessary because it shows not only the difficulties Marguerite had to overcome in the production of

The Mirror, but also foregrounds our understanding of the way in which Marguerite claims authorship and ownership of *The Mirror*.

During the late medieval period it was common to be able to read but not common to be able to write. Writing was an act that required expensive raw materials such as parchment and ink as well as access to a private space with adequate writing facilities such as a table and a desk. It would also have required a fair amount of free time – which in the medieval feudal system does not seem plausible unless you were high born, and given the reliance on agricultural self-sustainability during the Middle Ages. What then does this tell us of Marguerite and *The Mirror* and the social comment the text and Marguerite are delivering? If, as is speculated, Marguerite came from aristocratic lineage, it is possible that she may have employed a clerk to do the writing for her – it was common practice given that writing was a complex manual skill best left to professionals and not necessarily for upper-class women.[119] The opposite may also be true. That is, if Marguerite was of aristocratic lineage she may have enjoyed the privilege of being tutored in reading and writing and could have 'penned' *The Mirror* herself. Whatever the case may be, given what we do know of the act of writing and the cost involved in undertaking a manuscript in the middle ages, it is safe to say that what was required, at the very least, was some form of commitment on the part of the person wanting to make a record. Scholars generally assume that Marguerite did write in her own hand. For the purposes of this thesis, we confine ourselves to this widely held belief. Apart from a commitment to writing, the 'technology of writing' in the Middle Ages means that scripting an entire book translated into the project becoming a personal act, because the effort of writing underlies investment in the project.

Marguerite, it appears, was not only committed to undertaking such a personal act but invested herself in the production of *The Mirror*. Marguerite revised *The Mirror* after its initial condemnation and sought ecclesiastical endorsement for it. But why go through all that trouble and place your life at risk for the sake of writing a book? It seems as if Marguerite was exercising a number of convictions. By my reckoning, at least four come to mind. Marguerite had a real mystical experience and wanted to record it. She had opinions about convention. She had strong spiritual convictions, and it appears she desired to exercise her intellectual capacity. Given the aforementioned obstacles that stood in the way of her writing a book, we can understand why the medieval woman's writing was a site of strife. We can also be assured that having overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of her

[119] Barret, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p. 4.

project, the medieval woman's/Marguerite's writing was not going to be a mediocre undertaking, nor would she reserve her passions in her writing – as all known medieval women's literature can attest to. Further to the aforementioned obstacles inhibiting the medieval women's production of a manuscript, we should also bear in mind that in the thirteenth century written documents and texts were beginning to overtake oral and face-to-face communication as authentic modes of communication. The development of national languages and the decline of Latin in educational endeavours also hint at reasons why Marguerite wrote *The Mirror* in the vernacular. Vast amounts of exchequer documents and the overwhelming cultural cache of religious texts, and the halo given them, as well as the fact that merchants were increasingly becoming reliant on the written word for the purposes of insurance, meant that during the 13th–14th centuries, the medieval woman was in the midst of a transitional society. That is, she, and society in general, was at a crossroads in terms of the status of their literacy – their ability to read and write fluently. The populace became aware of the utilitarian value of writing and the written word. [120] However, whilst women were recreational consumers of written texts, a written text carried and created authority and it was a tacit agreement that authority and authorship were incompatible with femininity.[121] This explains why some medieval women claimed that the voice of God was dictating their writing and why they relied on the model. As writers, they had to circumvent the conventions and assumptions of authorship. Of course, all of the above can apply to any given medieval woman's work.

So how did Marguerite bypass the obstacles that faced her undertaking a literary project? How exactly did she exercise her convictions in a way that allowed her distinct female voice to come through in *The Mirror*, despite the prologue fable serving to defer her voice?

Marguerite's strategy to overcome the obstacles before her, and to claim authorship of *The Mirror*, starts with her framing her experience within a fable. This allows Marguerite to act as first narrator and thus covert author in the text. In this way, Marguerite is able to enter and exit the dialogue of the text via the interlocutors. There is no claim that the voice of God is speaking through Marguerite. After speaking in the verse explicit at the start of the dialogue Marguerite, as initial narrator, disappears from the text and Love stands in as second

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[120] M. Richardson, *Middle-Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), pp. 1–9.
[121] Barret, *Women's Writing in Middle English*, p. 5.

narrator. However, the audience can sense Marguerite's presence because it permeates the dialogue. The audience, whether reading or listening, can easily identify Marguerite's female voice. *The Mirror* reads then, as if it is Marguerite's disembodied voice. That is, we distinctly hear and sense Marguerite speaking through her interlocutors, even though the text does not identify her as one of the *dramatis personae*. She is unseen but heard. Visually Marguerite is absent, but she is present in terms of audio. Through this, her disembodied voice, Marguerite's disdain for patriarchy comes through when we read about the 'little ones' in the prologue and in chapters 22 and124, her admonishing tone of address in chapter 26's 'Now listen, you sirs', and the reduction in status of Holy Church the Less in chapters 51 and 66. What Marguerite is doing is using dissimilation because medieval masculinity dictated that medieval women hide their opinions, talents and feelings.

In order to find further evidence in *The Mirror* of the female voice critiquing society, let us briefly address and then apply the concept of meta-textuality to the text. This is necessary because the discussion that follows deals with the multiple levels of *The Mirror*'s discourse, which Marguerite's disembodied feminine voice holds together. The only way to access that voice is to explore *The Mirror*'s meta-textuality.

What makes for a meta-textual work and how do we know that *The Mirror* has elements of meta-textuality that resonate Marguerite's female voice? The following working definition of meta-textuality provides us with a framework with which to understand the concept:

> . . . a quality of certain types of literature . . . that seem to have two levels of dialogue going on at once. The text … has a layer in which it generally proceeds as normal – it is a typical text. At the same time however, there is a second level of commentary in which the text knowingly comments on what it is doing. It calls your attention to the process of its own creation, or the text will knowingly get in its own way, constantly interrupting what it is doing … the text draws attention to its status as an artefact … in order to be funny, to try to break free from old norms, or to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. These are works in which the process by which the story itself is created becomes a central focus.[122]

[122] 'Metafictional (or Metatextual)', Available URL: www.longwood.edu/staff/mcgeecw/notesonmetafictional/htm, 2014/06/06.

Let us see now where and how Marguerite's text employs the aforementioned meta-textual devices that allow her to platform her feminine voice. I contend that the social critique is embedded in the spiritual dialogue. It is borne in mind though, that both dialogues hold value, and I have already made mention of the text's gnomic style that allows us to accommodate both the dialogues. So, at one level *The Mirror* tells a story: the princess in the fable tells of her love and desire for King Alexander. At another level, the spiritual dialogue of the individual's desire and love for God simultaneously comments on society. Hence, we see, as pointed out in the extract about meta-physical texts, that *The Mirror* has two dialogues under way. Mention has already been made of how *The Mirror* blurs the lines between fact and fiction and where and how the two converge in the text. To refresh, the painting mentioned in the prologue alludes loosely to commissions potential medieval spouses had made of each other. Fact and fiction merge again in Marguerite's commentary on marriage in chapter 84. There it says '(no-one of base birth is taken here in marriage, and so she is of most noble stock)'. This translates as direct commentary on the medieval approach to aristocratic marriages. Marguerite's use of parenthesis also compounds the idea that there are two dialogues underway in *The Mirror*: Love is speaking about a higher evolved soul whilst Marguerite's disembodied voice simultaneously refers to the reality medieval women faced when it came to their social status and the bearing that had on their lives. Furthermore, the use of parenthesis also proves that Marguerite's disembodied voice enters the dialogue intermittently. This is an example of the interruption of the narrative or, as the extract above puts it, the text interrupts itself. When The Soul acts as Reason after Reason's death, not only do we have Marguerite's female voice alluding to how male interrogation of women and their experience might have played itself out in the middle ages, but we also have Marguerite's female voice creating a parody. The extract defining meta-physical texts has it that metaphysical texts try to be funny and try to break free from old norms. This shows up in *The Mirror* when the female voice exposes the topical issues in pantomime style. To elucidate Marguerite's female voice breaking through in *The Mirror*, an extension of the definition of what makes for a meta-text is necessary.

Meta-textual works are self-referential. That is, the text recognizes itself as a text, it breaks the illusion of reality and the characters become self-aware. Meta-texts also break the boundary wall between audience and performers. That is, the characters in the text directly address the audience. Meta-texts blur the lines between fictional and real worlds. To that effect, the text sometimes employs parody. Meta-textual narrators either interrupt the flow of

the story or fail to pull the story together. Lastly, meta-textual works remind the audience of the fact that it is a book.[123]

In *The Mirror*, we can trace these meta-textual features as follows: the fluidity between prose and poetry blurs two literary genres. Is *The Mirror* a poem or a prose dialogue? Or is it a 'proem'?[124] Whatever its definition may be, its effect is to call our attention to the constructed boundaries between worlds. The boundaries between male and female, and earthly and spiritual also become fused. Marguerite accomplishes this at the level of literary technique, and in terms of the temporal and metaphysical planes on which the narrative of *The Mirror* plays itself out. For example, prior to her annihilation, The Soul and Love move harmoniously through poetry and prose, and Reason, although assigned only prose dialogue and brief interjections, travels along comfortably within Love and The Soul's dialogue whilst they enter and exit the poems and the prose. After The Soul's annihilation and Reason's death, that is, in their after-lives, The Soul and her fellow interlocutors' speech becomes lyrical for at least three chapters (120, 121 and 122), thus creating the sense that we have entered the Divine Realm. However, the chapters following those, that is, the concluding chapters, slip into lengthy prose, save for a short poem in chapter 131. One gets the sense of being audience to a sermon, and that sense jars the idea of having just entered the Divine Realm since in the Divine realm, it seems, there is no ministry, only pure love. The overall effect though is to illustrate the ability of the feminine essence to inhabit multi-dimensional spaces and the capacity women possess that enables mobility between the worlds of man (logical prose) and that of woman (art and poetry).

According to the given working definition of a meta-textual book, a meta-textual text focusses on the process of creating a story. This notion applies to *The Mirror* and its meta-textual components working to platform Marguerite's voice as follows: we understand now that Marguerite's disembodied voice enters and exits the text. It is distinctly Marguerite's voice we hear when the characters directly address the audience. Marguerite deliberately blurs another boundary, namely that between the audience and the performers. Marguerite does not provide her audience with givens. She is interested in allowing her audience to arrive at their own interpretation and meaning. By blurring the boundary between audience and performers, Marguerite's voice coaxes, invites and implicates her audience in creating

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[123] Ibid.
[124] John A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work: Middle English Literature and Culture c1350–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 30.

their own meaning as opposed to being content with imposed ideology. Evidence for this is most striking when The Exalted Damsel of Peace says in chapter 97 'Interpret these words, if you want to understand them, or else you will misunderstand them, because they do seem to contradict themselves, should anyone not understand their essential explanation: but seeming is not truth, but truth is truth, and nothing else'(MoSS 121). The French version reads '*Glosez ces motz, se vous les voulez entendrez, car ilz ont aucune semblance de contrariete`, qui n`entend le noyau de la glose, mais semblance n`est mie verité, mais verité est, et nulle aultre chose*' (CC 270). Marguerite's voice is inserted in chapter 12's direct address to the audience when Love, the second narrator and Marguerite's alter ego, says 'you, who listen to this book' (MoSS 27). Love/Marguerite points to the audience by saying 'those who hear this book'. In chapter 19, Faith, Hope and Charity, the divine virtues, make mention of 'they… who [hear] this book' and 'Holy Church … [who hears] it read'. In chapter 37, The Soul – in its turn the alter ego of Love – considers whether 'the hearers who [would] read this book [would] not demur'. Chapter 58 has Love pleading with the audience when she says, 'Understand these words in a spiritual sense … hearers of this book! (MoSS 78). In French it reads as '*Entendez ces motz divinement, par armour, auditeurs de ce livre!*' (CC 168). There is direct address again in chapter 98 by Love. This time, there is a target audience. It says there 'You ladies, to whom God has given this life abundantly out of his divine goodness, asking for no return, and not only this life of which we speak but also with it that other state of being of which no man ever spoke, you will recognize your customs in this book' (MoSS 122). The effect of these direct pleas to the audience is to coerce fellow medieval women into turning away from complicity in female subjugation. By claiming that there would be recognition of their 'customs'(MoSS 122) in her *Mirror*, Marguerite is beseeching them to be assertive enough to listen to their innate Self, not to the dictates of male dogma. Let us visit more extracts from *The Mirror* in order to expound on this.

Love's alter-ego, The Soul, is also beseeching against complicity in the subjugation of women when in chapter 119 she says 'Ah, you unknown ladies … you who are in being, and are so without separating yourselves from the unknown being, truly you are not known; but that is in the land where Reason is lord.' Here Marguerite makes pointed reference to the social code that demands that medieval women abide by the decorum of invisibility and silence. One need not accept or obey it, The Soul points out, because it deviates from the innate Self's right to be visible and heard. 'Now you have heard', says the completely disembodied voice in chapter 124, again in direct address to the audience. This voice, we assume, is Marguerite's, because by this time The Soul has been annihilated, and does not

speak for the next seven chapters. In fact, in chapters 123 to 129, there is no character name, and no actual dialogue is taking place. What we have, is seven 'consideration[s]' (MoSS 154, 155, 158, 159, 161, 162), each of which is expounded on in its own chapter, in prose. We can assume that it is the voice of the annihilated Soul, but that might not make sense if we are to accept that the annihilated soul is completely obliterated now that it is in union with God and that it resurfaces in its own voice in chapter 130. So whose voice is it then? It is possibly Love's voice. Given that The Soul is now in union with God, we can assume that the second narrator is delivering didactic discourse on spirituality. If we accept that Love, the second narrator, is also Marguerite's alter ego, and that it is she who is speaking in these chapters, then we have to accept that Marguerite's disembodied voice is addressing us in these chapters.

Furthermore, what Marguerite's female voice is doing in these didactic chapters is providing us with a breakdown of how she has deduced that as a woman she is accountable to only God/her innate/her 'inmate'. In the extracts and examples provided here, it is worth noting that it is through the mouths of divine characters that the female voice breaks through. That is when The Exalted Damsel of Peace, Love, The Soul, and Faith, Hope and Charity – all supernatural concepts – address the audience. This gives Marguerite's disembodied female voice a sense of authority without having to resort to claiming that it is the voice of God speaking through her.

The female voice breaks through again when *The Mirror* displays two more meta-textual traits. That is, *The Mirror*'s characters are self-aware and the text reminds the audience that they are dealing with a book.[125] The evidence for this is plentiful. Reason's self-awareness is evident in the swansong that is her speech whilst in the throes of death. The opening verse clearly states Marguerite's claim to authorship and self-awareness when she says 'this book I have writ' (MoSS 9). However, after so bold an introductory assertion Marguerite quickly goes under-cover, so to speak. The Soul says in the prologue fable about itself 'the Soul who had this book made', and in the same speech The Soul says 'he gave me this book'. In other words, Marguerite reminds the audience regularly that they are dealing with self-aware characters and that they are dealing with a book, specifically, Marguerite's creative endeavour. In both the aforementioned quotes, it is interesting to note that Marguerite does not disown her authorship. As the dialogue progresses, we come to

[125] 'Metafictional (or Metatextual)', Available URL: www.longwood.edu/staff/mcgeew/notesonmetafictional/htm, 2014/06/06.

understand that Love is the second narrator who is synonymous with/is the alter ego of, Marguerite. Love is also synonymous with God, and Love and The Soul are each other's alter egos. All this translates into Marguerite claiming authorship, ownership and authority as follows: if, as Love puts it in chapter 82, God is 'Of himself in himself', then by Marguerite's reckoning God is innate. In the text, God is synonymous with Love, who is Marguerite's alter ego and Marguerite is the individual, that is, The Soul. It follows then that the female voice we hear throughout the text is specifically Marguerite's voice and the 'he' (MoSS 11) in the prologue, who gave The Soul the book, is Marguerite herself, the first cause, because God is innate. Thus, Marguerite's female voice via its meta-textuality claims authorship, ownership and authority of *The Mirror*. Add to this the fact that the 'precious pearl' in chapter 52, the French version being '*precieuse marguerite'* (CC 152), is an allusion to the Book of Esther, and the name Marguerite actually means pearl, what we have is an indirect self-reference. Colledge comments, in the footnote of *The Mirror*, that this is an arrogant and taunting pun by Marguerite (MoSS 71). I think all this translates as Marguerite, a 14th-century French medieval woman, being aware of her status as author, originator and creative director of a text, and as such, covertly claiming authorship, ownership, and by extension, establishing her own authority.

Lastly, enough has been said of Marguerite and Love and their roles as narrators. Suffice it to say only that both of them in their capacities as narrators contribute to the female voice breaking through via *The Mirror*'s meta-textuality. Marguerite's disembodied female voice, as has been shown here, constantly interrupts the flow of the text. Love, on the other hand, utilises lengthy prose and poetry in, for example, chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, to explain the rationale behind the book that is *The Mirror*. Love employs lengthy prose regularly throughout the dialogue. That is, Love as narrator overcompensates for Marguerite's disguised absence as a narrator – overcompensating or undercompensating is another trait of meta-textual books. Together these two narrators interrupt the fluidity of the dialogue via their intruding and intermittent female voices. In rounding off this paragraph, we have to wonder whose voice it is in chapters 112 and 113. Marguerite does not name this interlocutor. It seems that Marguerite appears in her own person, and what she has to say, especially in chapter 113, is a lamentation of the decay of values, and a call for reform by reclaiming self-possession. She says 'I tell all who will hear this book that we must live again within ourselves' (MoSS 135).

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By discussing the roles played by the interlocutors and the subliminal critique those roles deliver, as well as by discussing the concept of authorship as understood and employed in medieval times, and describing how Marguerite circumnavigates the obstacles towards her claiming her authorship, this chapter has explored and revealed *The Mirror'*s subliminal proto-feminist critique. The discussion included an observation of the effect of the glosses on Marguerite's status as originator and author of the text, as well as commentary on *The Mirror*'s meta-textuality, by relying on a given working understanding of the features of a meta-textual book. By describing how Marguerite's disembodied voice permeates the text, I have shown how Marguerite delivers her social critique. Lastly, this chapter ends with a comment on Marguerite's voice calling for self-possession. The significance of this relates to the context within which Marguerite lived and why she would feel the need to call for self-possession, which leads to the discussion in the next chapter about the desire for, and reclamation of, autonomy.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECLAIMING AUTONOMY

Besides being a mystical approach to union with God, annihilating the soul is also Marguerite's way of deconstructing the conventional soul. In so doing, Marguerite builds a case for reclaiming spiritual and personal welfare from the church and monarch. Mention has been made in the Historical Introduction under **a,** that religious worship had become increasingly clericalised in the late Middle Ages as regards the routines, traditions and culture of Christian worship.[126] That is, ministering to women and the laity was the domain of ordained and appointed clergy. Hence, a personal relationship with God and the right and responsibility for one's spirituality during Marguerite's time, it seems, was somewhat eroded. So too, it would appear, was the personal right and responsibility to enact choice, given that it seems monarchical and ecclesiastical concerns overrode those of the laity, and given that theodicy and misogyny characterised the era.[127] Central to Marguerite's notion of annihilating the soul is the idea of shrugging off external control and reclaiming personal rights and responsibilities.

In a sense, annihilating the soul is Marguerite-speak for transcendentalism.[128] Marguerite's brand of transcendentalism is the equivalent of socio-psychological suicide.[129] The statement that it makes is that a soul should rather die than have to submit to convention's suffocating forces. *The Cloud of Unknowing,* which is a medieval text by an unknown author, almost reads as a guide to Marguerite's idea of annihilating the soul. That is, there is an extended account on how single-minded one has to be in one's inward focus and retraction from the outside world in order to (re)connect with God. At the most basic form of understanding this entails cultivating a mind-set of detachment, which when properly understood means inner freedom.[130] This dispassionate mind-set releases one from all manner of obligation and attachment to ideas, principles, customs, ownership, sense of

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[126] V. Edden, 'The Devotional Life of the Laity in the late Middle Ages', *Approaching Medieval Anchoritic and Mystical Texts: Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, eds. D. Dyas, V. Edden and R. Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 36-42.

[127] Theodicy here means ascribing social inequity to the vindication of divine providence, and misogyny here means that women were subject to overall social strictures.

[128] Transcendentalism here means that the soul has a deep, internal connection with God that extends beyond the logical world.

[129] Socio-psychological suicide here means that one completely cuts oneself off emotionally, mentally and physically from society and maintains a solitary and inner-world existence.

[130] A. Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Southern Africa, Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006), p. 129.

entitlement, etc. Cultivating this inner freedom results in liberation from an imperialist ego.[131] That is to say, responding to stimulus in terms of having to prove anything to anybody is absent. Only when one answers to one's conscience, then is one able to experience true liberation and union with God.

Marguerite's reversal of hierarchical accountability articulates a desire for democracy and antinomianism. As explained under Approach, I do not use the concept in the modern sense of the word. Here, democracy implies that the soul descends as it reflects inwards, removing the responsibility for the person's spirituality from the church and its clerics, and posits it in the hands of the person. This allows the layperson to be a self-directed dynamic role-player in his/her own spiritual welfare. As such, Marguerite's descension theory implies that ministering to laypersons by Catholic clergy and heeding the institution that was the Catholic Church, was unnecessary. This theory threatened typical medieval practices such as, for example, paying for the reading of mass for the deceased long after a person has died, in order to aid the deceased's journey into heaven. *The Mirror* postulates that a layperson should be self-governing and that access to God/Divine Knowledge does not belong to ecclesiastical authority but is instead available to all. Hence, Marguerite is advocating a 'democratization of spirituality'.[132] The kind of tension this theory created between the institutional church and idiosyncratic mysticism was a widespread phenomenon, considering the many and variant deviant sects and mystical writings produced especially by women from, say, the 12th century onwards.

An antinomian layperson is what *The Mirror* endorses. That is, *The Mirror* envisions an individual who, by the grace of God, is released from observing man-made law and is instead allowed to develop naturally and sporadically via a self-determined path towards God. This definition of antinomian posits that all authority of law is rejected and one arrives at a place of having transcended law, which is, ultimately, the place where one is in union with God, and where no laws by our modern and human understanding exist. Transcendentalism, socio-psychological suicide, democracy and antinomianism, as described here, are concepts brought into the discourse hereunder, along with reference to Pseudo-Dionysian philosophy, because Marguerite's annihilation of the soul theory is rooted in this philosopher's apophatic theology. The ninth-century theologian/philosopher John Scottus

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[131] T. Radcliffe, 'Foreword', *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Southern Africa, Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006), p. x.
[132] J. M. Bennet, 'Medievalism and Feminism', *Speculum* 68 (1993): pp. 309-331 (p. 261).

Eriugena, explains in *Periphyseon* that apophatic theology, also known as negative theology, is not knowing what God is, because God Himself does not know what He is, because God is not anything. That is, in quite a literal sense God is not. He transcends being.[133]

This chapter outlines what Marguerite's annihilation of the soul entails. Following that, there is discussion on Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology and how it works in *The Mirror*. The third point of interest will be the antinomian strand in *The Mirror*. All three the aforementioned matters relate to the soul's annihilation, which makes statements about self-possession. That is, the journey towards annihilation takes Marguerite out of the province of clerical and monarchical control, and gives *The Mirror* its protest character. What links Marguerite and her *Mirror* to Pseudo-Dionysius is his seminal work on apophatic theology, which pre-empts the deconstruction of authority and which finds expression in Marguerite's theory on the annihilation of the soul – as is explained as the discourse unfolds below.

What does annihilating the soul mean, what is an annihilated soul and where is an annihilated soul to be found?

Chapter 5 provides us with some answers to these questions. Here Marguerite introduces us to what she calls 'another life' (MoSS 14). Love describes this life as a place of peace so whole and complete that it neither lacks nor desires anything. It is an abstract space, and place of unique tranquillity. By Love's reckoning in chapter 5, this other life is the place of the 'divine will' in which the soul who is in union with God resides (MoSS 15). On this other life and its residents, Marguerite makes nine points. Love asks:

i. whether there can be found a soul
ii. who saves itself without works
iii. who lives alone in love
iv. who does nothing for God
vi. to whom one can teach nothing
vii. from whom one can take nothing away,
viii. to whom one can give nothing,

[133] Johannes, Scotus, Eriugena, *Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans. W. Sheldon (Indianapolis, IND: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), pp. 113, 193.

ix. and who has no will at all? (MoSS 14)

Whilst Love is asking questions, what Marguerite is in fact doing is providing us with an outline of what an annihilated soul is. Chapter 11 reiterates chapter 5's nine points but goes a step further in that detailed explanations are given. From chapter 11's elaboration of the above nine points we gather that an annihilated soul is whole, complete and absolute in its state of being. Echoing Eriugena, Marguerite deems that an annihilated soul is a soul that empties itself of everything visceral, psychological, egotistical, intellectual, etc. and in its emptied and void state, is complete. In this emptied complete state, the soul resides in and with the Divine Will. Once the soul is in union with Divine Will, free will no longer exists save that which the Divine itself wills. In other words, free will becomes and is Divine Will (MoSS 14–15). Love says in chapter 27, The Soul's 'will is not her own nor in herself, but it is rather in him who loves her, and this is not his work, but it is rather the work of the whole Trinity, who work in this Soul according to their will' (MoSS 46).[134] In other words, free will is actually Divine Will disguised as free will in that Jesus' humanity, which is resident in the Trinity, is the conduit that imports Divine Will to humankind. For evidence of this, we can refer to what The Holy Spirit says in chapter 42. She says there 'she has truly everything which I have from the Father and the Son. And since she has everything which I have . . . and the Father and Son have nothing which I have not in me, so this Soul has in her . . . the treasure of the Trinity, hidden and enclosed within her'.

Hence, we can conclude that self-will is actually Divine Will. In case there is still any doubt as to this, Marguerite has Love confirm it for us in chapter 37 when Love clearly states that The Soul enacts 'our will' (MoSS 57). This phrase repeats in the same line, thus emphasising the unification of wills or rather, that there is actually only Divine Will disguised as free/self-will. Reason also confirms this precept in chapter 35 when she says 'Love guides you and you do not guide Love'. So, via extreme inward contemplation, the soul reduces itself from a human state of being and moves away from all the qualities and trappings that entail being human; then, paradoxically, the soul expands in that it has been consumed by the vast, infinite and eternal Divine.

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[134] Romana Guarnieri (ed), 'MARGUERITE PORETE, LE MIROUER DES SIMPLES AMES', "car son vouloir n`est mie a elle ne en elle, mais aincoys est en celui qui l`ayme, et ce n`est mie son oevre, aincoys est l`oeuvre de toute la Trinite`, qui oeuvre en telle Ames a voulente", Corpus Christianorum Medieavialis LXIX (Turnhout:Brepols, 1986), p. 96.

The following extract – a synopsis of Dionysian apophatic theology – serves firstly, to aid our understanding of exactly what has happened to the soul in the aforementioned description of the soul's transcendence; secondly, to aid our understanding of apophatic theology, and lastly, to assist in establishing the link between Marguerite's *Mirror* and Pseudo-Dionysius:

> Negative theology succumbs to (affirmative) theology precisely when it allows itself to take affirmative theology's place. A positive negativity, in other words a negativity that never succumbs to its own negativity, ultimately yields to the positive. A positive negativity is not a negativity; it is the positive under the guise of the negative. In order for the negative to be negative it must disappear into itself on the one hand, negation demands a return to affirmation in order to indefinitely defer an affirmative victory. Only in losing does the negative win because it is in . . . its own vulnerability, its own risk of affirmation.[135]

From the extract, we gather that the soul is negative in its human state of being. However, the soul is a positive negative because Marguerite deems that the human soul and God are one. Love says in chapter 21 'I am God, says Love, for Love is God, and God is Love, and this soul is God through its condition of Love, and I am God through my divine nature, and this soul is God by Love's just law'. By Marguerite's reckoning then, the soul is a positive negativity. As such, the soul is not a negative, but is a positive disguised as a negative. In order to negate its negativity the soul must disappear into itself, that is, reflect inwardly in order to reunite with God, the positive. Another way to put it could be that the soul has to lose itself in order to find itself. By way of further explanation, in chapter 23 Marguerite has Love succinctly explain this to us when Love says 'Love of its own right causes this transformation into itself'. Again, in chapter 39 Love points out how in the process of annihilation Love reclaims the soul and in so doing how it is that the soul succumbs to its original state of being, i.e. Love. It says there 'Love who has changed her into itself, dwells in her. So that this Soul is herself Love'.

We read first about the procedure of annihilation in the prologue's closing lines as 'seven states of noble being' (MoSS 12). Chapter 118 links to the prologue and gives

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[135] J. Fischer, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius', *The Journal of Religion* 81.4 (Oct 2001): pp. 529–548 (p. 539).

detailed explanation of the seven states, which are actually a description of the soul in the process of its annihilation; that is, the various stages of being through which the soul transforms itself back into its pre-existing divine state. From chapter 5's brief description of an annihilated soul, to chapter 11's elaboration of an annihilated soul, and from the prologue's introduction of the process of annihilation, to chapter 118's detailed description of the process of annihilation, we are able to deduce what annihilating a soul means.

Annihilating the soul is a concentrated and focussed inward experience that has as its sole aim mental and psychological immersion in and with Divine Ecstasy. An annihilated soul is one who, according to Divine Justice in chapter 17, has no 'scruples about taking what they need when necessity asks it of them', and who 'give[s] to nature whatever she asks of them'. To behave contrary to these principles would mean a loss of the soul's Divine Innocence because, as stated in chapter nine, 'Such souls cannot assess whether they are good or bad, and they have no knowledge of themselves, and would be unable to judge whether they are converted or perverted'. We can interpret this to mean that annihilated souls are souls who are so deeply immersed in Pure Divinity, and as such, are innocent in the extreme, resulting in their lacking comprehension of the distinction between right and wrong.

Regarding where annihilated souls are, Marguerite tells us that one has to die 'three deaths' (MoSS 73, 80, 86) in order to reach that place/space. We gather from the text that the first death is a psychological one in that it requires a voyage of interiority that calls for external noise to be blocked.[136] Hence, the first death calls for detachment from all human constructs. Marguerite presumes that God is already within the person/the self. Julian of Norwich also has this construction. She says 'For I saw full assuredly that our substance is in God and also I saw that in our sense-soul God is' and 'God knitted himself to our body in the Virgin's womb. He took our sense-soul: in which taking He, us all having enclosed in Him, oned it to our substance'.[137] Albert Nolan has it as 'God's dwelling in me', 'my being filled with the spirit of God', 'union of wills', 'an I-thou experience', and 'a subject to subject experience'.[138] In light of this, Marguerite's Far-Near concept – already mentioned in the Approach's subheading of Proto-feminism, and then discussed in the chapter Subliminal Proto-feminism – gains greater traction in that God is so close to us because He resides within us, but due to our inability to transcend the ego and our humanity, God is distant.

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[136] External noise here means the tacit and given directives of convention, in any and all matters.
[137] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Methuen and Co. 1901), pp. 133, 139, 145.
[138] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, pp. 145-146.

To emphasise the indwelling of God with Every(wo)man, a recent study has it that the female affinity between the characters, The Soul and Love, is suggestive of a same-sex union the likes of which serves to enhance the intimacy between The Soul and God.[139] I would add to this statement by saying that fusion is more fluid between those of a similar nature or character because they recognise themselves in each other. Every(wo)man only has to turn away from human perception and turn deeply into the self in order to reconnect with God. Hence, we can assume that the first death occurs figuratively whilst the person is alive but in a transcendental meditative state, or rather, in a state of detachment from human constructs. The second death would be in the realm of the spirit world after the person's physical death. The first two deaths are spaces/places that Marguerite conceives of as attainable physical and ethereal realities, respectively. That is, an annihilated soul is an individual who is in a state of transcendental meditation firstly, and secondly an annihilated soul resides in the post death vacuum of an individual's evolution into hypostatic union.[140] Marguerite conceives of the third death as relative to the first two but also as a separate space and place from the first two deaths. This third death is the emptied and complete space/place where a soul who has travelled the road of annihilation – a soul who has evolved from seeing itself as human and as an entity of and on its own – has succumbed to Love. We know that these three places are where Marguerite deems annihilated souls reside because we gather as much from the text, specifically from chapters 54, 60 and 65. In these three chapters we read about the 'three deaths', the 'mountain', the 'abyss of glory', and the 'mountain, above the winds and the rains' respectively, the latter three which allude to the ultimate destination of an annihilated soul, i.e. union with God (MoSS 73, 80, 81 86).

The Pseudo-Dionysian Presence in Marguerite's Mirror: Succumbing to God, not Submitting to Man

In chapter 94, The Soul speaks of its restoration to 'its primal state'. This primal state is the *khora*, that is, a pre-birth state in which the soul does not yet exist in form.[141] There, the soul

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[139] S. Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), p. 17.
[140] Not TM, the current practice of meditation with accompanying mantras used by some to relieve modern day symptoms of stress, anxiety, and sometimes, psychiatric disorders, but instead an inward contemplation so extreme that it propels an individual into an altered state of consciousness.
[141] M. Lichtman, 'Negative Theology in Marguerite Porete and Jacques Derrida', *Christianity and Literature* 47 (1998): 213–227 (p. 4).

exists in a supra-conscious state with God, and by apophatic theology's definition, is God.[142] Marguerite's annihilation theory rests on the notion that the soul has to return to its pre-human state when it was already in union with God. In its *khoral* state the soul was not subject to human constructs. By (re)claiming a pre-union with God, Marguerite implies that monarch, pope and society should not infringe on the laity since they are accountable to themselves in their state of pre-union with God. Marguerite's Pseudo-Dionysian, apophatically infused text conceives God as lacking the earthly and human senses and qualities that distinguish between wrong and right, because God is saturated purity who is so absolute that God's experience is immaculate. We know this because chapter 24 describes it to us as such. The chapter reads:

> *When such Souls are in the true freedom of Pure Love. Chapter 24*
> *Reason.* Ah Love, says Reason, when are such souls in the true freedom of Pure Love?
> *Love.* When they have no longing, no feeling, and at no time any affection of the spirit; for such customs would enslave them, being too far away from the peace of freedom in which few men permit themselves to dwell. And also they do nothing, says Love, which is opposed to the peace of their inner being, and so in peace they bear the orders of Love. Those who are such as this are inwardly filled, for without begging outside themselves they have within them the divine sun, and so they can preserve their purity of heart; and except them no others, says Love, have any knowledge of the more. If these Souls had not such knowledge of it, they could beg for what is less, and so they could not have their fill. Such souls are solitary in all things and common in all things, for they do not deprive their being of its freedom for anything which may happen to them. For just as the son takes its brightness from God, and shines upon all things without ever receiving from them any impurity, so such Souls have their being from God and in God, without receiving into themselves any impurity, whatever they see or hear outside themselves (MoSS 44).

Further to this, Marguerite's definition of God resonates with Dionysius's many descriptions of God in his text *The Divine Names.* In this text Dionysius has it, amongst many other descriptions, that God is the One, the Superunknowable, the Transcendent, Goodness itself,

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[142] Explained in Marguerite's 7 States of being, in stages 6 and 7, in which The Soul and God recognise themselves in each other, and then God absorbs the human soul.

the Triad unity possessing the same divinity and the same goodness, 'the nameless One', 'the superabundant Wisdom', and so on.[143] Marguerite's rendition of some of Dionysius' divine names reads, in *The Mirror*'s chapter 10 as:

> The Very Wonderful
> The Unknown
> The Most Innocent of the Daughters of Jerusalem:
> She upon whom all Holy Church is founded:
> The Enlightened by Knowledge:
> The Adorned by Love:
> The Quickened by Praise:
> The Brought to Nothing in All Things through Humility:
> The One at Peace in the Divine Being through the Divine Will:
> She who wishes for nothing except the Divine Will (MoSS 21).

Whilst both of the textual extracts from *The Mirror* given here are descriptions by Love of the still-to-be-annihilated Soul, it must be borne in mind that according to Marguerite, The Soul and God/Love are one. More to the point that I am making here, is Love's description of a non-visceral and unintellectual God. Being a void that knows only the experience of love and absolute peace, in order to experience all else, God creates, or rather in philosophical terms, causes, humanity. As God's creation, humanity is an extension of God. Thus, Julian of Norwich's evenchristian, first mentioned and referenced in Approach, under the subheading The Case for Heterogeneity and Universalism, is in the image of God, and is actually God in a variant form.[144] As such, all that evenchristians do, or refrain from, is Divine Deliberation at work. Marguerite's Dionysian definition of, and reunification with, God has evenchristians travelling inwardly on a road which eventually leads to succumbing to divine ecstasy. By this understanding, Divinity is so absolute as to actually swallow itself. We are now able to deduce the following: humanity's fusion with God is pre-existing. As such, humanity is complete, but the completion is fully realised when by means of inward contemplation the soul sheds all human associations. This eventually results in the handing

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[143] Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite, *The Complete Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 53, 54, 71.
[144] A. Louth, 'Apophatic Theology: Denys the Areopagite', *Hermathena* No.168 (Winter 1998): 71–84 (pp. 76, 79, 84).

over of the earthly soul to the divine soul. This process has been described as 'The Absolute swallowing itself',[145] and God puts God inside of Himself.[146] Since the evenchristian is the image of God, it follows that if God put Himself inside of Himself, that is, inside of the layperson, then the layperson is not accountable to anybody save her/his Divine-Self. For Marguerite, reunification with God is in fact a descent, an implosion, in which one is accountable to nobody but one's self in synonymous union with God because annihilated souls are so pure that they are incapable of knowing that they might be corrupt (MoSS 20).

Because Marguerite claims a pre-union with God, the soul functions as a reflection of the Divine Image. Marguerite's contemplation of disregarding the virtues because that codification is not in line with the true reality of God is what gets her into trouble with the authorities, along with the fact that she bases her hypostatic-union discourse on an inner reflection instead of recognition of external hierarchy. However, Marguerite is at pains to ensure that her audience understands that it is by God's grace that one is relieved from human moral obligation. The Biblical reference to Martha and Mary taken from Luke 10: 41–2 in chapter 86 of *The Mirror* which, is voiced by Pure Graciousness, serves to explain how unquiet the soul is when it is bogged down by human perception in terms of moral duty. Mary, a soul completely given over to God, understands that Divine Deliberation is at work irrespective of any seemingly bad situation and as such is always at peace, and so does not concern herself with the human perception of moral obligation. Martha's moral obligation to enact virtues, on the other hand, enslaves her and hence she is 'troubled' (MoSS 111). The story of Martha and Mary also serves to illustrate the level of detachment that is necessary if one wants to reconnect with the Inner Being. That is, Martha's preoccupation with moral obligation ensnares her in an experience of human concerns, whereas Mary's spiritual preoccupation and dispassionate mindset liberate her from entrapment within human concerns. Elsewhere there is also repeated reference to the notion of liberation from moral obligation due to God's grace. The most noteworthy of these are chapter 2's 'seven states of noble being', which are then explained in detail in chapter 118.

These seven states of noble being are not just a description of the progress towards annihilation. They also show how the grace of God relieves the soul of its human duties. Marguerite's seven states of being are a short description of what I call Dionysius'

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[145] Fischer, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity', pp. 534–535.
[146] A. Carson, 'The Mirror of Simple Souls: An Opera Installation Libretto', *The Kenyon Review* 24.1 (Winter 2002): pp. 16-21, (p. 16).

transcendence encounter. Due to space, and the depth of Dionysius' work, it is difficult to provide a synopsis of his theory of transcendence, on which, I believe, Marguerite's seven states is based. However, to foreground an understanding of Marguerite's seven states of noble being the following extract from Dionysius' *Divine Names* ought to provide some idea of his theology of transcendence. I quote from the *Divine Names* and not from Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* because the latter is far too expansive to lend itself to a synopsis whilst the former captures succinctly what Marguerite describes in her seven states of noble being. The synopsis reads as follows:

> Our destiny and direct contemplation of itself is inaccessible to being, since it actually surpasses being . . . the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam granting enlightments proportionate to each being and thereby draws sacred minds upwards to its permitted contemplation, to participation and the state of becoming like it . . . What happens to those that . . . make this effort is this. They do not go tumbling downward where their own natural inclinations would take them . . . Instead they are raised firmly and unswervingly upward in the direction of the way which enlightens them with a love matching the illumination granted them . . . they take flight reverently wisely in all holiness . . . the beneficient procession of God . . . refurbishes and restores the image of God corrupted within them . . . We go where we are commanded by those divine ordinances which rule all the sacred ranks of the heavenly bodies . . . we behold the divine light in a manner befitting us.[147]

This Dionysian transcendence theory, described in chapter 118 of *The Mirror*, is simultaneously Marguerite's claim to personal and self-accountability as opposed to submitting to the church as the source of accountability for spiritual welfare through the church's regimented rituals, routines and prescription. Dionysius' transcendence theory/Marguerite's seven states of noble being are as follows: *The First State* points out that it is 'labor enough' to focus on the love of God – I imagine here that Dionysius' sacred minds are Marguerite's souls who labour, that is, make the effort to reconnect with God. *The Second State* puts it that the soul 'strains to act beyond the counsels of men'. *The Third State* has it that 'she renounces those works in which she has this delight, and puts to death the will

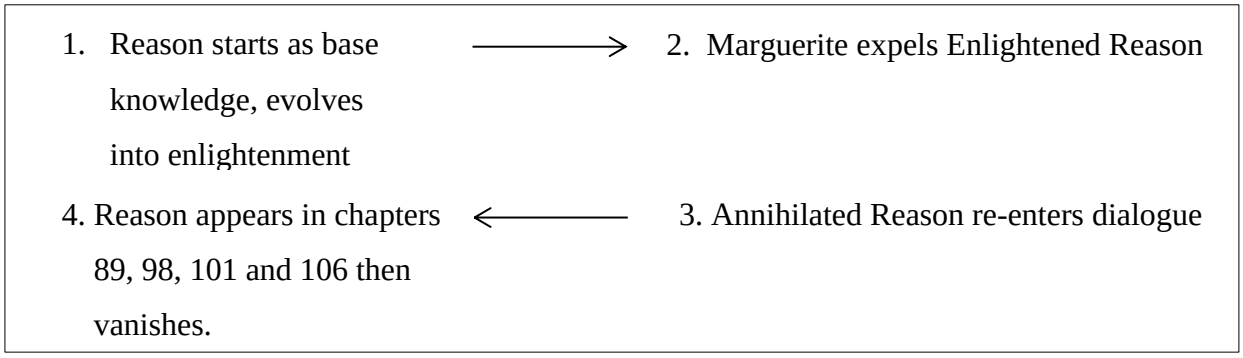
[147] Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Complete Works*, pp. 50–51.

which had its life from this'. At this level of progress the soul gladly moves away from the dictates of human prescription which – as explained in the Biblical episode of Martha and Mary – are actually only upheld due to her participation therein. *The Fourth State* has it that the soul, drawn up by love, becomes 'freed from all outward labors and from obedience to another'. *The Fifth State* has it that 'she is no longer concerned about the strife of nature', meaning that at this stage in her progress she perceives that all seemingly wrong or right is actually divine deliberation at work. I imagine these second, third, fourth and fifth states as Dionysius' reference to not tumbling downward towards one's own inclination but moving toward the love-matching illumination. *The Sixth Stage* has it that the soul and God recognize each other as one. It says there 'God of his divine majesty sees himself in her, and by him this soul is so illumined that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself; and so she sees nothing except herself' – what I imagine Dionysius refers to as refurbishing and restoring the corrupted image of God. Finally, in *The Seventh State* 'Love keeps within itself', that is, God/The Soul swallows itself, which can translate as the conclusive statement for self-possession. Thus, we see that Marguerite embeds her strongest social protest in the inversions of the established paradigms of authority and nature. These inversions constitute Marguerite's brand of negative theology or what Dionysius describes as 'The unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being'.[148] It is through her brand of negative theology that Marguerite makes subliminal statements in favour of self-containment.

Let us look at another Pseudo-Dionysian strand at work in *The Mirror* to see how it makes statements about the desire for autonomy. *The Mirror* lacks an obvious linear structure. Reason and The Soul are the only two characters who appear to be following a plot development of sorts. At one level of understanding, Reason is an itinerant rather than a participant, in the dialogue. So too, is The Soul. That is, it unfolds through the dialogue that both Reason and The Soul are on a spiritual journey. These two characters are the only ones through which we can explore what little narrative projection there is to the dialogue. Even their roles are not linear. Briefly, Reason dies, is resurrected, then disappears from the dialogue altogether. If we track Reason's appearances in the dialogue it reads something like this: Reason starts out as base human knowledge, moves forward as she becomes enlightened via The Soul's and Lady Love's mentoring, then is expelled from the plot once annihilation is

[148] Ibid., p. 49.

reached but returns, and then is finally expelled from the dialogue for good. We can picture Reason's movement in the dialogue as parallel but opposite pointing arrows. Graphically it would look something like this:



The Soul follows a similar trajectory. She starts out expressing desire, a human emotion, and hence in this instance The Soul is still in her base human state. She progresses slowly towards annihilation and, like Reason, dies, or rather, reaches hypostatic union. This occurs in chapters 119, 121 and 122. Marguerite expels The Soul from the dialogue ten chapters thereafter, if we are to accept that the speaker in those chapters is the now omniscient narrator, Love. However, The Soul reappears briefly in chapter 133 and thereafter disappears from the dialogue as a speaking character. Hence, like Reason, one could also depict The Soul's movement in the dialogue as parallel but opposite pointing arrows.

What does this mean in terms of Marguerite's negative theology and the statements she makes about autonomy? To answer this question, we can look at what Pseudo-Dionysius' philosophy holds. That is, the positive (The Soul) and negative (Reason) run alongside each other. In *The Mirror*, this translates as Reason and The Soul both complementing each other. From a Pseudo-Dionysian perspective, Reason and The Soul not only complement each other, they function as Pseudo-Dionysian 'hyper-negation'.[149] That is, there is a doubling of a reverse action in the plot: The Soul and Reason not only have parallel trajectories – the fact that they complement each other in their capacities as opposing characters negates their adversarial status. To elaborate, both die, are resurrected, surrender to Divine Knowledge, and are expelled from the plot. Thus, we have two ontological journeys, two deaths, two

[149] Fischer, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity', p. 532.

resurrections and two final expulsions.[150] The two characters' two stories, whilst functioning in supposedly opposing capacities, are a literary ploy that compounds the concept of annihilation, thus making for double annihilation, i.e. hyper-negation. Via these two characters' story lines, Marguerite emphasises the argument for self-possession. Furthermore, the self-surrender and then brief resurrection of both characters means that Marguerite imbues Every(wo)man firstly, with agency, and secondly, with the ability to communicate between worlds. That is, Reason and The Soul are Every(wo)man/evenchristians first, then after their deaths, they return as an Everyspirit. Thirdly, given The Soul's and Love's protagonist status and Reason's antagonist status as well as their parallel but opposite moving directions as explained in the image of the arrows, we are able to deduce that communication between these two worlds is a two-way street, so to speak. That is, communicating with God is open-ended and this point, furthermore, emphasises the Pseudo-Dionysian theory of positive and negative running alongside each other. In other words, knowledge, information and conversation can flow freely between the Divine and the person. This happens, as is pointed out to us in chapter five, 'without intermediaries' (MoSS 14), which is another Pseudo-Dionysian strand appropriated by Marguerite. Thus, Marguerite nullifies sacerdotal functions and renders the Catholic Church a redundant institution.

Compounding the statement for an unquestioned autonomy is the fact that once annihilated and after their very brief resurrections, Marguerite silences The Soul and Reason altogether. It is Love, the narrator, who is also synonymous with God, who speaks the final words in the dialogue and since God's word is all that there is, the implication is that there can be no further debate or argument. This is called hyper-negation. What hyper-negation does is it 'authorizes and resists any post hyper-negative affirmation'. That means, once Love/God has spoken the final words in the dialogue, there is no further discourse especially since the protagonist and antagonist, The Soul and Reason, have both been expelled from the story. This strategy that Marguerite employs, is in line with Pseudo-Dionysian philosophy in that hyper-negation 'leads us into the silence at the end of mystical theology'. That is, hypostatic union is ineffable – language fails to describe and explain union with God, so what cannot be spoken or vocalised remains silent. Thus it is we come to understand why Reason and The Soul become voiceless. Reason and Love's silence are also Marguerite's way of

[150] Ontological here means that Reason and The Soul are reconciling the essence of their being and are both on spiritual journeys.

silencing her critics: Reason in the role of medieval institution, and The Soul in the role of the layperson, are not given the opportunity to voice any opinion contrary to Marguerite's conceptions. Love's dominance in the closing chapters of the dialogue is also Marguerite's way of having the final say and is the literary equivalent of making the following statement: this-is-my-word-and-my-word-is-final. The tactic of muteness employed in the closing chapters of *The Mirror* plays itself out in Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* and one might consider that as the original source of Marguerite's method here. Further to this, one could say that the fact that Marguerite silences Reason and The Soul is Marguerite's way of staging the literary version of a silent protest. The trajectories of these two characters culminate in their propulsion into union with God. As such, there is no further need for Marguerite to produce evidence pointing to the authenticity of her philosophy and experience. Hence, Reason and The Soul need no further dialogue. Their silence speaks for itself and stands as proof of authenticity. Marguerite has gone beyond language and beyond institutional control.

Reason's and The Soul's trajectories even played themselves out in Marguerite's life via her actual silence at her trial. Her silence then, was itself a form of passive resistance, and Marguerite's eventual execution at the stake in a literal sense annihilated her. The mute method, that is, Marguerite's elevation of a passive spiritual interiority over pious, dynamic and vocative activity in view of union with God, makes a number of socio-political statements. By Pseudo-Dionysian rationale 'the silence rules out the possibility of presence'.[151] What this means is that by their silence Reason, The Soul and Marguerite indicate that human perception is dead to them and that they no longer consider themselves participants in the human world. They have nullified the self/transcended the ego, and are sentient only in the majesty of the Divine Realm, not the terrestrial realm. As such their silence stands as a refusal to acknowledge man-made constructions. The closing chapters of *The Mirror*, chapters 134–139, are in fact not even in dialogue. Love is the speaker and her next six chapters are soliloquys. But what then has happened to 'silence'? We can possibly consider the aforementioned chapters to be an internal monologue by Marguerite/Love/God. That is, not spoken dialogue but internal conversation. What Marguerite is doing is showing how absolute Love is that it even swallows itself. This idea of God being so absolute that He swallows Himself links to what physicists might call a black hole. That is, a place in space so intense in gravitational force that nothing can escape its pull. The result is a continued

[151] Fischer, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity', pp. 540–542.

consumption of all orbiting matter, in this case souls as they progress through their states of noble being into a deep and infinite vacuum. This vacuum is, by its continuum nature, impenetrable. Albert Nolan arrives at a similar deduction when he says 'The latest theory . . . concerns the quantum vacuum . . . There is nothing there, not even the hypothetical ether. But electrons and all other particles that seem to be spinning around in the atom emerge out of this nothingness and then disappear again into it'.[152] Mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme calls this black hole and its nature the 'All Nourishing Abyss'.[153] Derrida and his deconstruction theory would have us consider this as a 'metaphysical enclosure'.[154] Marguerite, via her literary black hole, communicates reclamation of autonomy, and cements her case for self-possession. The silence and muteness that accompany entry into the black hole communicate Marguerite's resolution. Thus, Marguerite fully appropriates the Pseudo-Dionysian concept of God beyond unknowability, God's incomprehensibility and the God beyond infinity with which to conclude *The Mirror.*[155]

Let us look once more at The Soul's trajectory. As The Soul's narrative progresses in *The Mirror,* so too does The Soul's reversion to its primal state. Again, the use of parallel but opposite pointing arrows illustrates Marguerite's literary technique here. She amplifies The Soul's spiritual progress via its inward contemplation whilst simultaneously highlighting self-possession, as opposed to deferring to ecclesiastical authority. As The Soul progresses in its spiritual growth, in its *Fifth State* of being in chapter 118, she reemphasizes The Soul's return to its origin, that is, to itself in union with God. In The *Fifth State* of being The Soul is engulfed in rapture and realises that its will and self must be 'returned to where it is not, whence it came, and where it must be' (MoSS 143). This formulation further entrenches the annulment of sacerdotal mediation and the emphasis on personal and private autonomy. We could even say that The Soul's reversion is the psychological equivalent of an anchoritic retreat. Both entail withdrawal from external social factors, both function as alternatives to submitting to external social forces, and both relate to a primordial pre-birth state. The anchoress's hold is symbolic of a womb in that it is a confined, dark and almost windowless

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[152] Nolan, *Jesus Today,* p. 40.
[153] B. Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (New York: Orbis, 1999), p. 102.
[154] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. xlv.
[155] Fischer, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity', p. 542.

space with little or no access to the anchorite.[156] She experiences disablement from participation in virtues, save those she enacts in isolated contemplation. Marguerite on the other hand posits the annihilated soul in the *khora*, a pre-conception state. In these two spaces – that of the anchorite and that of the annihilated soul – there exists a new realm of possibilities. Interestingly, the words *khora* and anchorite can be linked. Plato first conceptualised *khora* to mean a metaphysical space where ideas exist in a pre-birth state and from which forms could materialise.[157] That is, it was a metaphysical space where there was the eternal existence of eternal ideas, a place of being and non-being. The similarities to the physical space of the anchorite are immediately obvious. She exists in a physical space where she can exercise new and limitless ranges of ideas, and her contemplation is of itself of a metaphysical character, that had the potential to materialize outside of her cell, given that anchorites' contemplations/work found its way outside of their enclosures via visits from pilgrims, consultations with clerks and so forth. Furthermore, Derrida uses the word *khora* as a form of negation and this immediately links it to negative theology. Negative theology implies retreat and retreat is exactly what anchorites do when they withdraw from society. The Greek meaning of the word anchorite meant a retreating movement, which in medieval times took on a spiritual dimension, and compared the word *chor* with *cor*, thus heavenly choir.[158] If anchorite links to heavenly choir (a sound not audible to us), and *khora* is a pre-birth state in which sound/vocals are not yet formed and hence is, like a heavenly choir, inaudible, it follows then that *khora* and anchorite are linked, albeit tenuously. Jacques Lacan's version of *khora* also links it to the anchorite in that he has it that the word pre-empts the freedom to create meaning away from phallocentrism .[159] This is an apt description of the negotiated space that an anchorite occupies. That is, the anchorite's cell is the *khoral* space in which she can create meaning away from patristic convention.

The annihilated soul and the anchorite occupy a place in which they are able to enact self-determination, activate agency and exercise choice. The potential for personal renewal is extant, promising and enticing. Not all anchorites lived ascetic lifestyles. Some enjoyed

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[156] L. Herbert, 'And thou to whom this Booke shall come: Julian of Norwich and Her Audience', *Approaching Medieval Anchoritic and Mystical Texts: Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research,* ed. Valerie Edden, D. Dyas, and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), p. 109.
[157] J. Manoussakis, 'The Hermeneutics of Hyphenation', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* March (2002): pp. 93–l00 (pp. 94–95).
[158] P. L`Hermite-Leclercq, 'Anchoritism in Medieval France', *Anchoritic Traditions of Medieval Europe*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010, p. 113.
[159] A. Rinhaug, 'Is the Absurd a Male-Dominated Terrain: Pessoa and Beckett as Case Studies', *Portuguese Studies* 24 (2008): pp. 41–45 (pp. 47–48).

comforts and all enjoyed the privilege of living unhindered away from mainstream society and its restrictions.[160] Most anchorites it seems lived ascetically. However, whether or not it was as an ascetic anchorite, recluse and annihilated soul were both negotiated alternatives to participation in mainstream medieval society. The anchorite's physical containment relates to personal physical space that is beyond transgression, and the annihilated soul relates to an individual's spirit that defies domination, capture and containment because it is otherworldly. Both strategies resist top-down dogma albeit the annihilated soul more so than the anchorite given that the latter is affiliated to a religious institution. Both responses indicate disenchantment with mainstream society. Both experience spiritual liberation via their withering humanity. Self-abnegation ignites auto-theism. That is, denying the human-self a platform for existence leads to automatic recognition of the present Inner-Being. Only through 'self-destructive descent' is spiritual ascent realised.[161] Furthermore, and as has already been shown, ascent is not, by Dionysian standards, a linear progression. Instead, it is through abnegation and in accordance with Dionysian philosophy that the soul draws itself out of itself/becomes detached from the ego. Ecclesiastical power was invested in influencing the social and political institutions, which is why, once having retreated into her hold, the Church's power over the anchorite ceased. That is, the church seemed to be interested in those spheres of life susceptible to external control. As an endorsed mystic, the anchorite enjoyed freedom from harassment from the Church. This was not always the case with mystics because some broke away from the Church. This brings us to *The Mirror*'s antinomian strand.

The Antinomian Strand

Again, bearing in mind that the dissent in *The Mirror* is more latent and thoroughgoing than its occasional audacious, obvious and controversial statements of dissidence such as the dispelling of the virtues, it is clear to see the stand that *The Mirror* takes regarding autonomy. To recap, the freed soul is one that does not need intermediaries when it comes to its relation and relationship with God. The freed soul neither desires nor rejects traditional Christian practices such as the Eucharist, fasting or prayer (MoSS 13, 30). Chapter 11 tells us that the

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[160] E. A. Jones, 'Anchorites and Hermits in Historical Context', *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Valerie Edden, D. Dyas, and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), p. 13.
[161] R. Lerner, 'The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages', Available URL: http://www.dhushara.com/book/consum/gnos/lerner.html, 2014/06/25.

freed soul saves itself by 'faith without works'. The freed soul is in no danger of sinning. The freed soul embraces Christ's divinity and as such no longer empathises with Christ's humanity.[162] So what does this mean in terms of how the freed soul evolves towards the supra-consciousness that is God and in so doing makes statements about autonomy? To answer this question we have to revisit Marguerite's God-the-indweller theory.

Marguerite's unorthodox perspective posits God as innate to the layperson in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense that the layperson is an emanation from God. The layperson in all variations is therefore a manifestation of evolving souls. Each soul is at its own stage of progression and in its own state of being in what appears to be a slow and deliberate progress towards God. Because God is innate, there pre-exists in the soul the desire to return to its pre-human supra-conscious state. Foremost, Marguerite sees the layperson as a spiritual being having a human experience, then as human. The layperson is simply the human conduit through which the spiritual being in answer to a primal call migrates and evolves en route to reunification with its Divine Self. We know that Marguerite holds this God-doing-God's-work-through-mankind perception because she alludes to it often in *The Mirror*. She first points it out to the audience in the prologue when she indicates that they 'must listen with great attention of the subtle understanding within [them]' (MoSS 10). She alludes to it again in chapter 15 when The Graciousness of the Goodness of Love says that 'no-one can set his foundations deep or build his house high unless he does this by using the subtlety of his considerable natural intelligence and with the intense Light of Spiritual Understanding'. In other words, the person cannot evolve or grow unless there is acknowledgement of the Divine within, and she/he heeds the magnetic, primal divine call. Chapter 23 alludes a third time to the inner prompt/the primal call/the recognition of the Divine Resident in the person. Love says about The Soul that 'through her subtlety her knowledge is very penetrating' (MoSS 44). That is, when The Soul recognises, acknowledges and finally succumbs to the magnetic primal call, her spiritual growth expands and consequently her perception becomes acute.

Chapter 110 explains and cements the aforementioned theory. The chapter is titled, *How art in the creature is a subtle instrument which is in the substance of the soul.* Love says in this chapter:

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[162] R. Cottrell, 'Marguerite Porete's Heretical Discourse; or Deviating from the Model', *Modern Language Studies* 21.1 (Winter 1991): pp. 16–21 (pp. 16–19).

> It is a subtle instrument of which perception is born, which gives knowledge in the Soul, to understand more perfectly what is said than even he who says it, however much the speaker may understand what he says; because the listener rests, and the speaker labors, and knowledge cannot endure labor without becoming less noble. The art is swift, and so it tends naturally to attain the whole of its undertaking. Its perception is nothing else than the will of God. This subtle instrument is the substance of the Soul; and this knowledge is the sum of the Soul, which knowledge is composed of the substance and of the understanding. (MoSS 133)

By this, we are to understand that God is innate and recognisable only when giving recognition to intuition, because personal intuition is God's voice, so to speak. The French version has it as '*subtil entendement'* (CC 10), '*subtilité de grant sens'* (CC 64) and '*de cognoissance par subtilité*' (CC 88), all of which hints at a deeply recessed latent higher knowing. Given the number of occasions that Marguerite refers to the subtle instrument by which we are to gain access to Divine Knowledge, we could rely on those references as Marguerite's way of directing the audience members to heed their inner voice. *The Cloud of Unknowing* has Marguerite's subtlety-of-understanding as the 'inner man' and 'the stirring'.[163] Julian of Norwich has it as 'The inward part is an high, blissful life, which is all in peace and in love: and this was more inwardly felt', 'the inward part is master and sovereign to the outward' and a 'sense-soul'. Recognising, accessing and activating intuition leads to a burst of growth that cannot abide external constraints because of its heightened and acute spiritual perception.

This leads us to *The Mirror*'s philosophical postulation: at the highest level of spiritual understanding there appears to be no wrong or right, merely a soul's experience of its humanity as it answers an internal prompt and as such evolves on its own spiritual path. Julian's conception of this reads:

> And man judgeth [looking] upon our changeable Sense-soul, which seemeth now one [thing], now another, – according as it taketh of the [higher or lower] parts – and [is that which] showeth outward. And *this* wisdom [of man's judgement] is mingled [because of the diverse thing it beholdeth]. For sometimes it is good and easy, and sometimes it is hard and grievous. And in as much as it is good and easy it belongeth

[163] Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. I. Progoff, (London: Rider and Company, 1959), pp. 193, 205.

> to the rightfulness; and in as much as it is hard and grievous [by reason of the sin beheld, which showeth in our Sense-soul,] our good Lord Jesus reformeth it by [the working in our Sense-soul of] mercy and grace through the virtue of His blessed Passion, and so bringeth it to the rightfulness. And though these two judgements be thus accorded and oned, yet both shall be known in Heaven without end.[164]

It is not that Marguerite or Julian advocate moral laxity. At face value, it seems that the notion of passive humility deems immoral behaviour as acceptable. However, as will be explained in the following chapter on heterogeneity, what we deem wrong in one context is acceptable in another. By Marguerite's reckoning antinomianism entails that one recognise emanations from the Godhead as souls all in various stages of being, being allowed to respond to the primal call of reunification as a soul deems fit. It is not for the freed soul or any other soul to intervene in another soul's spiritual journey other than to recognise and acknowledge that each soul is an enactment of Divine Deliberation, and that its role is a microcosmic part of a macrocosmic whole. Marguerite points out that as emanations from God these souls are oblivious to their creatureliness since they exist only in the concept of pure love. These souls, recognising their innate divinity, know that they have everything and as such do not hesitate to release themselves from that which another soul seems to need more. Hence these souls '[have] everything and [have] nothing' (MoSS 30). That is, the freed souls are in a flow state in that what they have/own/possess is theirs for as long as another soul deems it necessary to take ownership thereof. The freed soul releases the possession and allows the other soul possession thereof, thereby acknowledging the fact that the errant soul is actually a fellow freed soul in that the errant soul is oblivious to its supposed perverted state. The paradox is that a freed soul gives to another whatever it wants and the supposedly corrupt soul simply takes what it wants but the perverted soul is actually also a freed soul in that it is ignorant of its perverse state because it dwells only in the supra-conscious, i.e. Pure Love. The supposedly perverted soul here is the one who Reason calls into question in chapter 13 because it 'yields to Nature all that Nature asks with no qualms of conscience' (MoSS 30). Marguerite's use of upper case when speaking of nature elevates the concept from abstraction to personification. This leads one to see nature, as used here, as

[164] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Methuen and Company, 1901), pp. 40, 94.

synonymous with God. It follows then that God is the ultimate natural force guiding and prompting a soul. This notion is traceable to the writing of John Scottus Eriugena.[165]

In the same chapter (13) and further along Reason's lengthy discussion, we learn that the freed soul 'guided by Perfect Love [values] shame as highly as honour, and honour as dearly as shame, poverty as highly as riches, and riches as dearly as poverty'. So paradoxically, a freed soul can present as one who freely gives and freely takes without any sense of incongruity because of the fact that it resides in the Divine Will. This 'divine dichotomy' which postulates that positive and negatives exist simultaneously in the Divine and that in order for good (ethical) to exist, its counterpart, evil (unethical), has to find expression, constitutes Marguerite's antinomian strand in that she advocates that one should not only recognise the divine dichotomy but also submit to it.[166] Julian also acknowledges a divine dichotomy. She says 'Right as there is a beastly will in the lower part that may will no good, right so there is a Godly will in the higher part which will is so good that it may never will evil'.[167]

Marguerite's antinomian strand also exists at all levels of spiritual evolvement. That is to say, a higher evolved soul is equally subject to self-directed and inner prompts towards reunification with the Godhead, no more, and no less, than a lesser evolved soul. For evidence of this, we can revisit Marguerite's explanation of the blessing of the sacrament in chapter 15. There Marguerite makes clear that just because the angels, saints and Virgin Mary have evolved, it does not automatically mean that they are in divine union yet with God. Truth says:

> the angels, the saints and the Virgin Mary do not see him otherwise than we ourselves see him, and if they see him in the semblance in which we see him, it is through spiritual understanding, for to see the humanity of Jesus Christ glorified in the sacrament of the altar does not belong to the glory of those who are in glory. And so they do not see him glorified except through understanding. (MoSS 33)

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[165] D. Moran, 'John Scottus Eriugena', ed. E. N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Fall 2008). URL =http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/scottus-eriugena/

[166] N. D. Walsch, *Conversations with God: Book 3: AN UNCOMMON DIALOGUE* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. 89–91.

[167] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 76.

By this, we can understand that souls at all levels of spiritual development are subject to further refinement en route to divine union. Thus, it is in recognition and submission to knowledge of the divine dichotomy that the path to reuniting with the supra-good starts and resides. In chapter 118 in the *Fifth State* of noble being, we are told 'And the knowledge of these two natures … of divine goodness and of her evil, is the instrument which has endowed her with such goodness'. So rather than accuse Marguerite of postulating a questionable antinomianism we should recognise that what she is saying is that souls are all on an ontological journey but that each is at a different level of evolving. Paradoxically an annihilated soul can behave both perversely and morally. It is human perception that traps a soul into perceiving a wrong or a correct way. Julian calls this perception the 'bodily sight' as opposed to the 'spiritual sight'.[168] Because of human perception, a soul risks being locked off from its divine self and its own ontological progress.

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In conclusion, autonomy according to *The Mirror*'s theory means to be spiritually self-directed. This spiritual self-direction nullifies conforming to imposed rules and rituals that supposedly assist in reunification with God. Contradictory presentations are Divine Deliberation at work because God is innate to all, and all souls are heeding the Divine Will disguised as personal will. All souls are counterparts evolving towards the same destination, i.e. reunification with the Divine albeit that the journeys appear dissimilar. The antinomian strand of *The Mirror* demands that we shed human perception in favour of spiritual perception in order to understand the existence of contradictory manifestations. These postulations overturn conventional dogma, which has laity believing that contrasting manifestations cannot possibly be complementary, nor can it be Divine Deliberation at work. That is to say that the annihilated soul's direct apprehension of God bypasses law to embrace God's will immediately, and sometimes this could manifest as contrasting belief systems. Transcending law, here, does not mean condoning destructive or harmful manifestations because one is free from constraint. What Marguerite recognises is that by keeping the laity in believing in irreconcilable polarities the ecclesiastical and monarchical governance maintains control over the laity and thus keeps them in subjugation. Therefore, she reverses conventional thinking in *The Mirror* and illustrates how spiritual self-direction and

[168] Ibid., p. 18.

perception can reconcile incongruity. This leads us to *The Mirror*'s discourse on heterogeneity and the following chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CASE FOR HETEROGENEITY AND UNIVERSALISM

When discussing *The Mirror*'s argument for heterogeneity and universalism, it must be borne in mind that the subversive hints in *The Mirror* are real, and that the text's inversion of convention is latent and actually more thoroughgoing than its occasional outrageous statements about virtue and sin. Having said this, a number of issues come into play. There are the pointed references, statements and allusions concerning the diverse audience that Marguerite alludes to in the dialogue – for example in chapter 123 'for the forlorn who ask the way to the land of freedom'. There are also the hidden clues in the dialogue, the casting of characters, some of the characters themselves, the narrative trajectory, and where and how, all of this might be reflective of Marguerite's world and environment. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter and thesis, a definition of diversity as it may have applied to the medieval times and mind is necessary, prior to moving on to how Marguerite argues for heterogeneity, and where the evidence for the argumentation thereof can be found in the text. Thereafter, this chapter looks at Marguerite's articulation of the desire to accommodate variety by reflecting on how *The Mirror* exhibits some aspects of the socio-religious 13th–14th century French human-scape, and where and how *The Mirror* draws upon a number of precursor texts. That is, writing and thinking done by authors, philosophers and theologians who came before Marguerite and left academic, religious and philosophical legacies. This approach should enable us to assess Marguerite's argument for heterogeneity and universalism. In this chapter the terms evil and negative mean what is perceived as wrong or inappropriate. Whilst Marguerite reconciles opposing perceptions of right and wrong, she does not go so far as to endorse 'evil', but implicitly redefines it in what seems to be a desire of moral plenitude.

The Concept of Medieval Diversity

The following extract is a helpful departure point:

> In the modern period, diversity, which almost always means "variety in multiplicity," is a mode of description that highlights ethical problems. The ethics of description has to do with the way that diversity informs criteria or selection (race, economics, belief) with implications for both individual and group rights. In medieval English

> and French, diversity also describes variety in multiplicity; the differences among more than two objects. According to this definition, the word and its synonyms (for example, Latin nouns *diversitas* or, more commonly, *varietas*; Middle English adjectives *all manner* or *sundry*) usually refer to an aesthetic richness or moral plentitude, such as the list of flowers, birds, trees, and herbs in the *hortus conclusus,* or the virtues possessed by a saint, insofar as variety in multiplicity attests to cultural or spiritual unity. In this sense, diversity rarely applies to a group of people, except indirectly, where it describes, and nearly always with disapproval, the mixing of dialects or social classes.[169]

Relying on the extract's fuller range and depth of the concept of diversity as it may have applied to the medieval times and mind, two points relating the extract to Marguerite and *The Mirror* deserve attention. The first point, pertinent to *The Mirror's* argument for heterogeneity, relates to Marguerite's seeming desire for the accommodation of the various religious sects and practices in the human-scape of 13th century France in so far as, as the quote points out, multiplicity attests to spiritual unity. Let us consider the following statements: The Soul says in the final line of chapter 76 that 'this book is not written for different men', and in the opening line of chapter 119 she says 'you unknown ladies . . . who are in being, and are so without separating yourselves from the unknown being'. Love, in chapter 98, responds to Reason but addresses an otherwise unidentified audience with 'you will recognize your customs in this book'. These statements function as Marguerite's recognition and acknowledgement of socio-religious diversity present in the medieval human-scape, all of whom had the same end in mind, that being unity with God. What Marguerite is doing in the above quotes is giving a literary nod to the diverse religious worshippers populating the medieval landscape. Dinshaw and Wallace have it that 'The Church of the late medieval period was fractious and multiplex . . . And . . . it was heterogeneous and capacious allowing for greater local variations of practice than would be possible under later panoptical papacies.'[170] This religious worshipping diversity could have ranged it seems, from Cistercian nuns to Beguines, from Lollards to Averroists, from Cathars to Waldensians, from Franciscans to Dominicans, from Guglielmites to anchorites, and is

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[169] E. Steiner, 'Diversity and the Medieval Political Aesthetic', *Representations* 91.1 (Summer 2005): 1–22 (pp. 1–2).
[170] C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace (eds.), 'Introduction', *Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 9.

even iconographically present – from a female perspective – in the 'Ecclesias' (positive female) and 'Synongogas' (negative female) imagery.[171] We can include here the Templars and the Jews. What the aforementioned quotes do is point out that *The Mirror* does not favour one form of religious worship over another. Instead, it comfortably accommodates many in that the diverse worshippers are likely to find correlations between their religious beliefs and *The Mirror.* Marguerite does not specifically name radically alternative religious offshoots or individuals because doing so might risk endorsing opposition to the Catholic Church. She does, however, point out the tolerated actives in chapter 2, the contemplatives in chapter13, and 'the Beguines . . . The Austin Friars, the Carmelites, and the Friars Minor', in chapter 22. Thus, she covertly acknowledges religious diversity and accommodates the multifarious belief systems of the assorted religious community. In summary then, Marguerite postulates a many-virtues-one-spirit/many-sects-one-spirit-body, theory. This is, I think, what Steiner might refer to as aesthetic richness and moral plenitude, in so far as the variety attests to spiritual unity.

Another point relating the extract to *The Mirror* is the extract's mention of the disapproval of social class intermingling. This is evident in Marguerite's hierarchical stratification of the spirit world and her recognition of an equivalent system at work in the earthly realm: *The Mirror* philosophises a hierarchical ordering of souls. Evidence for this is in chapter 77. Given that the dispelling of the virtues is, by this stage in the dialogue, accepted as a necessary precondition to union with God, Reason queries when it would be appropriate to provide a soul in need with assistance. Love's response of 'give to each one what is his; not … what is not his, but what is his', implies that charity be dispensed in accordance with the recipient's station in life (MoSS, 99). This is in keeping with medieval thinking in that it calls to mind the medieval belief that there is a Divine Natural Order at work in the world, and this Divine Order places all manner of beings in a one-is-subject-to-another chain of relation – a sort of human eco-system. The *Pearl* text also alludes to this medieval construct of the chain of being. The poet laments that God 'requites each according to his desert'.[172] Linked to but different from this chain of being, is the medieval trope of the wheel of fortune in which individuals are seen as occupying specific points in life which either favour or disfavour them. The chain of being and the wheel of fortune is where Love's

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[171] A. Blamires, 'Beneath the Pulpit', *Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 154–155.
[172] M. V. Hillman, trans. *The Pearl* (Convent Station: College of Saint Elizabeth Press, 1961), p. 35.

response to Reason is situated, and is what Marguerite alludes to in the quote. That is, there is a hierarchical positioning of everything and everybody, and that one dispenses charity in accordance with position, and as fortune favours or disfavours that position. Thus, if a soul is to get only what is his, the implication is that the individual gains only what by the natural order of things is due to such an individual. At this point, we should bear in mind that Marguerite herself may have been of noble birth. This could account for *The Mirror's* sense that only members of an exclusive spiritual elite could gain access to the divine realm, and her sometimes haughty tone, as well as her hierarchical structuring of celestial beings and humans. So in answer to Reason's query then, Love is saying that one ought to dispense aid according to a natural order, which for the sake of clarity and for the sake of remaining within the medieval way of thinking finds expression in terms of both the medieval abstracts of the chain of being and the wheel of fortune.

Thus, we see how Marguerite assigns every soul a place in society. This does not necessarily indicate subordination and superiority, *per se*. Instead, it emphasises the heterogeneous or rather, Steiner's, aesthetic richness, in the natural order of things for which accommodation must be made. That is, all existence was significant because each individual soul was fulfilling its role in a macrocosmic drama.[173] However, whilst each soul occupied a different place in the stratification, that place did not necessarily imply superiority or inferiority. Again, in this regard, *The Mirror* reflects Boethian philosophy. That is, Love, who is synonymous with God, holds taut, chaos and order.

Given now that we have an understanding of what might have constituted medieval diversity, for the purposes of this study, heterogeneity does not necessarily imply ethnic diversity although this does come into play. Briefly: due to their precarious social status, 13th century French Jews were an easy target for anyone looking for a means by which to secure a political, social and economic end. Philip the Fair evicted the Jews from France in 1306 for the financial gain that came with the seizing of their property. He had Jewish property auctioned off and declared himself creditor in their place. When this tactic alone failed to provide Philip with sufficient funds, he recalled the Jews and asked them to assist him in identifying their debtors, and then expelled them again in August 1311.[174] Anti-Semitic sentiment meant that in terms of ethnicity, Jews were dispensable. It served Philip's

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[173] B. Ford, 'Introduction', *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature Medieval Literature Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 18.
[174] S. R. Schwarzfuchs, 'The Expulsion of the Jews from France,1306', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 57: 482–489 (pp. 482–488).

purpose to use them as pawns in that it appeased the Catholic Church and the nobility. We can assume that some of those persons may have been in debt to the Jews. Furthermore, the expulsion of the Jews provided some distraction from Philip's unethical dealings with the Templars: when Jewish wealth alone failed to satisfy King Philip's economic needs the king sought out the wealth of the Templars. In 1307 under pressure from King Philip, Pope Clement condemned the Order of the Knights Templars and disbanded the Order in 1312. Many Templars were tortured, burned at the stake and their property seized.[175] Whilst considering the contradictory pull of diversity and hierarchy, we can assume that Marguerite had little or no exposure to a variety of ethnic groups. It follows then that whilst welcoming whoever wants to be a simple soul, Marguerite is not necessarily advocating a mingling of groups, as indicated by Steiner's fuller range of the concept of medieval diversity. By Marguerite's reckoning, as one grows in wisdom, there appears to be a commonality among the wise that supersedes definition. Richard Rohr echoes and explains this sentiment when he speaks about the similarities in the lives of enlightened persons such as 'Buddha, Ashoka, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, Sufi saints, Francis, Clare and the numerous hermits and pilgrims of Cappadocia, Mt. Athos and Russia'.[176]

The Mirror and its Mimicking of Socio-religious Variety

The Mirror is widely understood to rely on many philosophies, scriptural extracts and allusions, as well as unconventional ideologies. As such, *The Mirror*, like most medieval texts, has a syncretic character. What this means is that the enhanced meanings Marguerite arrives at intra-textually (within the text), have their roots in various philosophies, contemporary divergent beliefs and practices, as well as traditional Catholic beliefs and practices (intertextually).[177] That is not to say that Marguerite was guilty of plagiarism. Instead, what Marguerite did was she appropriated ideas from various schools of thought and applied them uniquely in *The Mirror*. Thus, she arrived at fresh and enhanced meanings. This appropriation of diverse strands of thought gives the text itself a somewhat heterogeneous character. It could even be said Marguerite's reliance on and unique adaptation of diverse sources, the result of which is a cohesive text, make the case for

[175] 'The Knights Templars and Their Fate', Available URL: http://www.languedocmysteries.info/templars.htm, 2014/04/23.
[176] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), p. 84.
[177] Intra-textually as explained in the introduction, means here that Marguerite's knowledge of various texts and philosophies might have had some influence on each other and the theories she postulates in *The Mirror*.

heterogeneity. We could even stretch this link a bit and say that *The Mirror* mirrors France in that the various sources Marguerite draws upon are – even if vaguely so – reflections of the various socio-religious people present in France at that time. Furthermore, the fact that the text pulls together various beliefs into a coherent book suggests that spiritual unity was a possibility, even in the diverse 13th–14th century French human-scape. Differently put, the diverse ideologies inherent in *The Mirror* are a reflection of the assortment of people and religious beliefs that coloured the 13th–14th century French human-scape, which despite differing and hostile views, were amenable to reconciliation.[178] Since the aforementioned statement can apply to almost any medieval book in that medieval texts were almost all composite and synthetic, what separates Marguerite and *The Mirror* from her contemporaries is that Marguerite and *The Mirror* draw upon the 'multi-religious entity' that Christian mysticism participated in at that specific point in European history. This aspect gives *The Mirror* itself a multi-religious character. Traces of Jewish, Islamic, and even Sufi mysticism are present in *The Mirror*.[179] It has been said that *The Mirror* '[asserts] a striking independence from the Christological paradigm'.[180] To illustrate this point we first have to briefly tour the socio-religious scene of the 12th–14th centuries in France because this is the time frame in which socio-religious and cultural identities would have established themselves, and led up to and into Marguerite's lifetime. Thereafter we can move on to see where and how *The Mirror* mimics the society it was borne into and in so doing, see how *The Mirror* asserts its independence from the Christological paradigm.

One of the more recognisable religious offshoots in medieval France was the Cathars who resided in the south of France between the 12th–14th centuries. This sect was a Christian movement taught by ascetic priests who held the belief that all earthly matters were perverse, and that all matters good and Godly were exclusively in the realm of the spirit world. In short, matter was 'evil' and spirit was good.[181] There were also the Waldensians. Peter Waldo, who hailed from Provence, forfeited all of his privileges to pursue a spiritual life in poverty, and thus gained a following. This group translated the bible into Provencal,

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[178] E. Colledge, J. C. Marler, and J. Grant, 'Interpretative Essay', *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* by Marguerite Porete, trans. E. Colledge, J. C. Marler, and J. Grant (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. liv.
[179] M. Sells, 'Apophasis of Desire and the Burning of Marguerite Porete', *Mystical Languages of Unsaying,* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 118.
[180] R. Cottrell, 'Marguerite Porete's Heretical Discourse: or Deviating from the Model', *Modern Language Studies* 21.1 (Winter 1991): 16–21 (p. 18).
[181] E. McCarthy, 'Imagining the Cathars in Late Twentieth Century Languedoc', *Contemporary European History,* 11.3 (August 2002): pp. 409–427 (p. 410).

held that there was no purgatory, forbade the taking of oaths, and like the Cathars, denied the authority of the Catholic Church.[182] The Dominicans – who sprouted from the intellectually based preaching of Saint Dominic who was on a diplomatic mission to France in an attempt to reform and reconcile with the Cathars – were also present in the socio-religious human-scape. Dominic witnessed forced conversions whilst on diplomatic mission to the Cathars. This inspired him to forfeit his privileged life in favour of a mendicant lifestyle. In doing so, he unintentionally established a following and thus another religious order. Also present were the Franciscans, founded by Saint Francis. Like Waldo and Dominic, Francis had a privileged background but surrendered his privileges in favour of a life of poverty. The Templars represented that part of French medieval male society who devoted themselves to protecting pilgrims, and gained official recognition in 1119.[183] Adding to France's religious landscape was the Cistercian order of enclosed monks. Founded by noblemen, this Order included lay brothers drawn from the peasantry who served as the enclosed nobly-born monks' contact with the outside world. The lay brothers did the manual labour of the Order whilst the senior noble monks spent their time enclosed in devotion and contemplation. It is important to mention this order because some opinion holds that some Templars were initially warrior Cistercians.[184] The French human-scape included a number of Beguines. Beguines were lay, semi-organised, discrete communities of women that formed an unendorsed quasi-religious, quasi-autonomous group. In their shared adversity as marginalised medieval womenfolk, grouping provided them with a sense of communal belonging and security.[185] There is debate amongst scholars as to whether or not Marguerite really was a Beguine. Currently scholarship accommodates the association. Along with the Beghards who were the male kindred spirits of the Beguines, we now have a picture of thirteenth-century France's socio-religious diversity.

This picture of socio-religious diversity is by no means complete. It also has to include mention of the 13th–14th century French Jews, and the Benedictines who enjoyed the favour of the Catholic Church. It must also be borne in mind that some of these groups were orthodox whilst others were heretical in the sight of Rome.

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[182] Gabriel Audisio, 'How to Detect a Clandestine Minority: The Example of the Waldenses', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21.2 (Summer 1990): 205–216 (pp. 205–207).
[183] 'Heretics, Heresies and the Church: Lectures on Ancient and Medieval European History', Available URL: http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture27bhtml, 2014/04/23.
[184] 'Templar: Religious Military Order', Available URL: http://www.com/EBchecked/topic/586765/Templar, 2014/06/01.
[185] C. Neel, 'The Origin of the Beguines', *Signs* 14.2 (Winter 1989): 321–341 (pp. 323–324).

Too many unregulated splinters, that is, individuals, and splinter cells, that is, (semi)organised groups, threatened the hold that the Church and monarch had over the general populace. Hence, there were attempts to contain the religious offshoots that sprouted on the French human-scape and elsewhere on the continent. The murder of Pope Innocent's legate, Pierre de Castelnau, a Cistercian like Saint Dominic, whilst on a diplomatic mission to the Cathars, set off a chain of violent repercussions.[186] Innocent III declared a crusade against the Cathars that lasted twenty years. During the course of this, the Albigensian Crusade, twenty thousand men, women and children, suffered slaughter and execution at the stake, at the hands of nobles like the fifth Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, who took up arms on behalf of the Pope, in France, during the thirteen century. Pope Honorius III eventually crushed the Cathars in a second crusade against them, aided by King Louis VIII in 1218, and Languedoc eventually ceded to the French crown in 1229.[187] As regards the Waldensians, Pope Alexander III disallowed them from preaching without the express permission of a bishop[188] and Waldo was himself excommunicated in 1184[189] by Pope Lucius III.[190] Thereafter the Waldensians were subject to brutal suppression.[191] Because they lacked official endorsement, the general view of Beghards and Beguines was one of suspicion. We find the evidence for this in the record of Marguerite's fate, and that of her only recorded supporter, Guiard de Cressonessart. Guiard, a cleric of the Beauvais diocese, thought to have much in common with the Beghards of Southern France, also suffered interrogation during the inquisition.[192] The Jews, as already mentioned, were subject to the whims of the Pope and the monarch and oftentimes found themselves at the receiving end of bias. The Templars, on the other hand, met their fates under torture and at the stakes. The Benedictines, it seems due to their ecclesiastical endorsement, enjoyed relative freedom from harassment and by the end of the 14th century this order boasted 20 popes, 7000 archbishops, 15000 bishops and over 1500 canonized saints across the continent.[193]

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[186] 'Bl. Peter of Castelnau', Available URL: www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=5303, 2014/05/14.
[187] McCarthy, 'Imagining the Cathars', p. 410.
[188] S. M. M. Bliss, *Catholic and Ecumenical: History and Hope* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 92.
[189] D. McCallum, 'The Waldensian Movement from Waldo to the Reformation', A Research Paper, Available URL: http://www.xenos.org/essays/waldo1.htm , 2014/0606
[190] Audisio, 'How to Detect a Clandestine Minority', p. 3.
[191] J. A. Wylie, *History of the Waldensians* (Brushton, New York: Teach Services, 2001), pp. 25–26.
[192] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', pp. xlii–xliii.
[193] 'The Benedictine Order', Available URL: http://www.newadvent.org.cathen/02443a.htm, 2014/06/04.

It is conceivable that Marguerite might have witnessed the autocratic containment attempts by the pope and the king which manifested itself in edicts, bulls, torture, mass slaughter, forced conversions and expulsions, all of which masqueraded as religious and social cleansing. In *The Mirror*, we find evidence of Marguerite's response to the attempts at containing socio-religious variance. Her responses take the form of an incorporation of ideas from the suppressed groups. Let us revisit the quotes 'one and the same word has two meanings', 'there are several words here of two meanings', and 'these words of two meanings (MoSS, 40, 29). I contend that by Marguerite's determination, there exists a 'divine dichotomy'.[194] What this means is that polarities coexist naturally in the divine and that the divine is characterised by inherent variances. Further to this, it also means that within the divine there is a symbiotic relationship between what is perceived as good and what is perceived as bad. The similarities between Marguerite's thinking and the doctrine of the Cathars start to become visible: Marguerite, in postulating that there are 'two meanings', is fostering a sort of double-speak – equivocation, in other words. What scholars call her gnomic style is actually Marguerite encrypting opposites/polarities in her writing. In so doing, *The Mirror* stands as an example of the concept of divine dichotomy in that there are extant juxtaposing ideas and theories in the text. Incidentally, this links to the literary theory of deconstruction in that the theory holds that meaning is determined in terms of matters relating to each other as opposites. How this links to the Cathars and their doctrine of dualism is that the Cathars recognise the polarities/dichotomy at work in their environment and have labelled it good and 'evil'. For the Cathars there is good which exists spiritually and there is bad which inhabits the realm of matter. Hence, the link between *The Mirror*/Marguerite and the Cathars lies in their recognition of the antithetical. However, they differ in their treatment of it: Marguerite incorporates Catharist thinking in her recognition of good and corruption. The given quotes imply that in order for good to exist, its counterpart – 'evil', has to find expression. Marguerite does not relegate perversity to the realm of earth and good to the realm of spirit. What she does is acknowledge, like the Cathars, that corruption and good exist. However, unlike the Cathars, she accommodates both on the earthly plane. Earthly, because we associate the concept of a word – taken directly from the extracts above – with what is spoken and/or read. However, if we believe mystical texts, the realm of God and the spirit world cannot be vocalised and furthermore, spoken and written

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[194] N. D. Walsch, *Conversations with God Book 3*: *AN UNCOMMON DIALOGUE* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997) pp. 89–91.

language lacks the capacity to express divine ecstasy or experience in the spiritual world. Hence, we arrive at the notion that Marguerite accommodates morality and perversity on the earthly plane. In *The Mirror* Marguerite makes these concepts appear fluidly pliable in that her text is open to different interpretations because of its ambiguity whereas for the Cathars perversity existed only on earth and morality existed only in heaven. Nonetheless, it suffices for this essay that traces – albeit tenuous – of Cathar thinking are present in *The Mirror*.

The evidence for the notion of a divine dichotomy being a basis for an argument for variety in multiplicity and moral plenitude, resides in the fact that the text itself holds many seemingly opposed concepts in balance. The Middle Ages itself was an era characterised by social contradictions. Piety, mass manifestations of pilgrimages and religious-emotional hysteria coexisted with secularization.[195] The latter manifested as insurrections synonymous with names such as Wilhelm Tell 1308, Jacques van Artevelde 1354, Marino Faliero 1355, the Jacquerie 1358, Michele di Lando 1378 and Wat Tyler 1385.[196] It also includes manifestations such as the luxurious and elaborately built castle for John of Gaunt son of Edward III at Kenilworth in Warwickshire in the 14th century.[197] Secularization also manifested itself in hedonism.[198] For examples of hedonism, we can rely on general records of the epicurean lifestyles of the aristocracy. From the aforementioned, in the context of Marguerite's environment, we can then draw the conclusion that what a particular section of society held as acceptable and proper, another held as abhorrent. It could be said then that Marguerite, in writing about sin being a 'nothing', was arguing for greater tolerance based on an awareness of radical ambiguity or even ambivalence in the created order (MoSS, p. 23).

Let us look at a polemic that exists in *The Mirror.* That is, one of the points Marguerite makes that has the potential to divide opinion is her assertion that in order to be at one with God, one has to discard the virtues. The point Marguerite is at pains to make in her discussion on freedom from the virtues is that spirituality and true oneness with God entails embracing both morality and perversity. That is, at the highest level of spirituality it would appear that there is an understanding that the two abstracts coexist. Judging from the rhetoric of the cast of forty-one characters, it appears that it is not for humankind (read here the

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[195] Piety practised by ascetics, pilgrimages like those done by Margery Kempe, religio-emotional hysteria like Margery's tears of compunction, and secularization here mean the move away from aristocratic and ecclesiastical control.
[196] Professor de Vericour, 'The Jacquerie', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*: *Medieval Literature*, 1072: 296–310 (p. 296).
[197] Ford, *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: Medieval Literature Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition*, p. 20.
[198] E. Ennen, *The Medieval Woman* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989), p. 16.

character of Reason), to define what is right and what is wrong. The acceptance of a dichotomous divinity finds full expression in Marguerite's discourse on the virtues, which is the vehicle Marguerite uses to argue for the acceptance of contrasting diversity. Let us see how Marguerite accomplishes this.

In chapter six Marguerite introduces the notion of abandoning the virtues. The inquisition extracted a portion of this chapter and used it against Marguerite at her trial, along with extracts from chapters eight, nine and nineteen.[199] In chapter six, The Soul, in verse, extols how she has abandoned the virtues and is free from their enslavement. Writing this particular piece of dialogue in poetry emphasises the ecstatic (re)union with God that The Soul is in the process of achieving. The shocking assertion about discarding the virtues in order to obtain union with God overshadows the underlying meaning behind discarding the virtues. However, Marguerite explains the underlying meaning behind discarding the virtues thoroughly. In chapters eight and nineteen she explains that 'souls such as she possess the Virtues better than any other creature but they do not make use of them, for they are not in their service as they once were'. The explanation continues with 'the souls of whom we speak have brought the Virtues to heel, for such souls do nothing for them: but rather the Virtues do all that such souls wish, humbly and with no demur, for such souls are their mistresses'. Lastly 'How, says Love, can Holy Church be astonished if the Virtues serve these exalted and celestial Souls? Why should they not? Are not all the Virtues praised and written about and commended because of these Souls, not the Souls because of the Virtues? Thus such Virtues are made so as to serve such Souls, and such Souls are made so as to obey God.' What Marguerite is saying – besides building a case for self-possession – is that, to hold onto the virtues means locking one's self into a human perception. If one releases one's self from the moral obligation to enact virtues, one is able to see that without self-righteous and/or virtuous intervention on the part of an individual, the Divine Order is still at work. Differently put, deliberate cultivation and practise of the virtues translates as standing in judgement of those who do not do so, and results in the failure to recognise that Divine Deliberation is at the centre of it all.

Thus, releasing one's self from the virtues means being free from human perception and attaining Divine Consciousness, and seeing that everything seemingly negative or that which is in opposition to convention is but enactment and presentation of Divine Deliberation

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[199] Colledge, 'Interpretative Essay', p. xlv.

at work. In short, what Marguerite is stating via her discourse on the virtues is that spirituality and spiritual perception is universal whereas religion, specifically organised religion of which Reason is the representative, and religious perception, is divisive. The crux of the matter is that servitude to the virtues, which might involve allegiance to a code, is divisive, whereas the freedom in which one finds that the virtues serve one is inclusive. It is not that the virtues disappear, or that one discards the virtues, it is that the virtues gain a new role.

For the Cathars the institution of the Catholic Church which perceives itself as the sole and distinct authority on God thus enabling divisiveness, and its self-indulgent clerics, fit into the perspective of being matter on earth that is corrupt. Further to this, spirituality here refers to those persons and groups seeking meaningful relationships with God albeit outside of official endorsement, such as the ascetic lifestyles led by the religiously diverse groups hereto mentioned. The real meaning behind the shedding of the virtues then is that moral significance is temporal and belongs to everyday time whereas anagogical significance is eternal.[200] What this means is that morality and values as assessed and perceived by humankind are relative only to the world of matter and bear no relevance nor significance in the realm of the spirit world where interpretation of morals and values is not bound by human definition, but is instead a matter of eternally evolving interpretation and reinterpretation. This tenet, it seems, was already embodied by some of the religiously fervent persons living on the fringes of society like the Cathars, Dominicans, Franciscans, Waldensians, Beguines, Beghards, etc.

The Mirror resonates with more Catharist ideology in its discourse on the annihilation of the soul. Again, besides being another means of advocating self-possession, one can say that the discourse on annihilating the soul is similar to Catharist sentiment in that Marguerite's annihilation discourse is the literary advocating of psychological detachment and retreat into the spiritual world where God's residence is more fully sensed than on earth. Thus, it is a move away from the earthly world where it seems perversity and corruption are more resident. The ascetic lifestyle of some anchorites and the mendicants, which involved the withdrawal from society and all things earthly in the quest to reunite with God in the spiritual realm, is the physical equivalent of Marguerite's literary discourse on the annihilation of the soul. Both are, in effect, the psychological withdrawing of the soul from society as it moves

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[200] E. Kent, Jnr., 'Foreword', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, by Marguerite Porete, trans. E. Colledge, J. C. Marler, and J. Grant (South Bend, IND: University of Notre Dame, 1991), p. xvii.

into the spirit world where God resides. Both perceptions, Catharist and Margueritist, deem retreat from the earthly realm as a precondition to union with God in the spiritual realm. One advocates it ascetically, the Cathars, whilst the other advocates it psychologically, Marguerite's annihilated soul.

Waldensian philosophy also shows itself in *The Mirror* and in Marguerite's trial record. The refusal to take oaths was central to Waldensian belief. This sect swore only to God and as such, did not swear to the bureaucracy of man. Marguerite, it is recorded, refused to swear any oaths when William Humbert questioned her. Possibly then she might have held a similar belief to the Waldensians. Even if she did not hold a similar belief, the fact that Marguerite refused to take an oath at her inquisition suggests the possibility of her familiarity with, and thus enactment of, Waldensian philosophy. Furthermore, the Waldensians translated the Bible into Provencal. Marguerite, it seems, made a deliberate choice to write in the vernacular. It is not a stretch of the imagination to think that Marguerite was in all likelihood able to write in Latin. Her intellectual style of writing, her knowledge and use of ancient philosophies such as Augustinian and Neo-Platonism as well as her knowledge of the Bible, all suggest that Marguerite might have been adequately literate in Latin. It would appear that it was a deliberate choice to write in the vernacular and in this regard Marguerite and *The Mirror* hint, not only at more Waldensian thinking at work, but also at a sympathy with a vernacular basis for spirituality. A third parallel between Marguerite and Peter Waldo lies in Waldo's refusal to cease preaching. Marguerite as we know did not submit to the Bishop of Cambrai's order to cease from involvement with *The Mirror*. Lastly, we cannot ignore the parallel between Marguerite's belittling of the Catholic Church in her reference to the institution as 'Holy Church the Less' in chapter 66, and Waldo's outright defiance of the Catholic Church's authority. The denial of the Catholic Church's authority is what caused the eventual persecution of the Waldensians and as already mentioned, Marguerite's refusal to acknowledge ecclesiastical and monarchical authority eventually led to her execution.

Traces of Cistercian order thinking are also present in *The Mirror*. Started by three noble monks, this order eventually established themselves in 1098, south of Dijon in the village of Citeaux in eastern France. They had as their core belief the desire to replicate in the literal sense, the life of Saint Benedict. To this effect, the order renounced all forms of income, lived on subsistence farming, a private cell enclosed each monk, and at rare intervals

from religious observances, monks took walks and communicated with each other.[201] The parallels between the Cistercian way of life and the Beguine associated life of Marguerite start to reveal themselves. Like the Cistercians, the Beguines and presumably Marguerite formed communities devoted to Benedictine labours. The Cistercians were probably more Benedictine in practice than were the Beguines, but the similarity is present. Like the Cistercians, the Beguines appear to have been self-reliant and somewhat autonomous. Like the Cistercians, some Beguines were of noble birth, came mostly from the middle classes, and, both movements were not exclusive to those of noble birth.[202] There the similarities seem to end. However, closer inspection of Marguerite's hierarchical ordering of the spirit world and the earthly world reveals Cistercian thinking at work. Let us look at the following extracts to provide us with the necessary evidence: Love is patronising in her address of 'You little ones' in chapter 22, and the same haughty tone and imperious thinking can be found in chapter 98 when Love speaks about unannihilated souls and their place in the hierarchy. She says:

> those, who are not so, were not so, will not be so, will not experience this state of being or know it. This they cannot do, nor shall they. Know well that they in no way are of the lineage of which we speak, no more than the angels of the first order are Seraphim, or can be, for God does not give them the Seraphim's state of being; but those who are not yet so, although they are so in God and therefore they will be so, will know and experience this state, because of the lineage of which they are and will be descended, more fully still than they have ever known and experienced. And such people, of whom we speak, who are and will be so, know well, will recognize the lineage of which they come as soon as they hear it. (MoSS 122–123)

Placed into an environmental and historical perspective, this could relate to the fact that up to 300 lay brothers could be part of a Cistercian Order. However, these lay brothers never attained superiority.[203] The Cistercian Order was, in effect, an elite class of nobles with a flood of lay brothers doing the manual labour. Like Marguerite's unannihilated souls who

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[201] Audisio, 'How to detect a Clandestine Minority', pp. 179–207.
[202] N. Carol, 'The Origins of the Beguines', *Signs*, 14.2 (Winter 1989): 321–341 (pp. 321–324).
[203] W. A. Parker-Mason, 'The Beginnings of the Cistercian Order', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (1905): 169–207 (pp. 189–190).

could never achieve superior status in the divine realm, the Cistercian lay brothers could never access the higher echelons of the Cistercian order because of their commoner status.

There is also a parallel between the intellectual style of teaching favoured by St Dominic and *The Mirror*. In order to reveal the Dominican threads in *The Mirror* we have to bear in mind the obstacles mentioned in the chapter on proto-feminism, that medieval women had to overcome as regards their literary endeavours.[204] This is necessary because the imposition placed upon Marguerite by convention forced her and other medieval women to renegotiate the literary space. In doing so, Marguerite's *Mirror* overlaps with Dominican tenets. To recap: Marguerite's style of protest fuses religion, mysticism and philosophy that together enable her articulation of literary activism against social marginalisation. Her approach achieves a number of things. Firstly, it facilitates Marguerite's gnomic style of writing. Secondly, it imparts an ambiguous character to the text that allows Marguerite to circumnavigate social and theological prescription. Thirdly, Marguerite's approach allows *The Mirror* to rely on a blend of Neo-Platonic, Boethian, Pseudo-Dionysian philosophies, typical medieval-style allegory, imagery, romance tradition and Biblical referencing to create a highly conceptualised, fluid and extended textual conceit. In other words, *The Mirror* displays Marguerite's high regard of her own ability, imagination, intellect and importance as an individual. Marguerite uses a complex logic that juxtaposes, usurps and manipulates typical medieval literary images such as the mirror, and ideas, such as the medieval romantic ideal, to invite the audience into a more sophisticated understanding of the soul, and its relation to God and others. In this sense, *The Mirror* reflects Dominican intellectual theology and teaching-preaching style. There are two important points to bear in mind here. The first is *The Mirror*'s intertextuality and the second is the fact that 'the spirituality of the Dominican Order was the formative influence on many female mystics in Dominican convents'. It is therefore plausible that Marguerite may have been familiar with Dominican proselytizing. Let us look at the links between Marguerite's *Mirror* and the Dominicans.

Bearing in mind that Marguerite and the Dominicans did not necessarily use the same text, we can however trace Dominican-style proselytizing in *The Mirror*. We find it in Marguerite's frequent use of scripture and Biblical anecdotes to expound her theories – the first call of duty for Dominicans was the study of the Bible. This resulted in their preaching style resting on parables and scripture. Dominican proselytizing is present in Marguerite's appropriation of philosophical and theological writings – study of theological and

[204] I mention the obstacles in the introduction, and in the chapter on proto-feminism.

philosophical texts was an important part of the Dominican undertaking. Dominican proselytizing is present in Marguerite's assertion that the soul belongs not to one institution but that the individual be self-composed – for the Dominicans souls belonged to the universe of Christendom and were not bound to one abbey. Dominican style is present in the didactic thrust of *The Mirror* – Dominicans were to focus on study, preach, teach and literary production. Dominican style is present in Marguerite's insistence on telling her truth – preaching truth was fundamental to Dominicans. Dominican style is also present in Marguerite's leading by example in that what she wrote she stood by even though it brought about her execution – a Dominican tenet was to lead by example. Furthermore, it is present in Marguerite's obsession to save the soul – St. Dominic focussed on the salvation of souls. Marguerite disregards strict observance to mass – piety and mass were subject to the Dominicans' choice and they exercised it in privacy during devotions. [205] Hence, we could tentatively say that *The Mirror* displays characteristics of the Dominican Order. These links are tenuous, but they do accumulate. However, in an effort to cement it somewhat, let us look at an example of a Dominican tenet present in *The Mirror*. Marguerite's resolution to 'say nothing but what is true, even though [she] would die for it' (MoSS 13), resonates with the Dominican tenet of preaching truth as well as their tenet of leading by example.

Lastly, there is even correlation between *The Mirror* and Judaism. The Augustinian religious philosophy that postulates man's complete and utter dependence on God has its roots in Judaism.[206] In *The Mirror*, we find traces of this in chapter 30 when Love, talking about The Soul, explains to Reason that 'she does not find anything anywhere without finding God there', and again in the same chapter when the character *Love speaks to the Soul* says:

> that all creatures, no-one excepted, who dwell and will dwell in the vision of the sweet face of your spouse, have understood less and will understand less of him, compared with how it befits him to be known and loved and praised, and with what he knows of himself: less than one can truly say that one can know or love or praise anything in him.

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[205] P. Mardonnet, *St. Dominic and his Work*, trans. by M. B. Larkin (London: B. Herder Book Company, 1948), pp. 63, 73, 75, 109, 168, 173, 175, 186.
[206] A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen and Company, 1986), p. 213.

The fact that there is a character named *Love speaks to the soul* even suggests an enhanced affinity between a soul and Love/God: until this point in the dialogue, Marguerite treats Love and The Soul as separate interlocutors. Here, Love and The Soul fuse as one character, thus implying and emphasising unity. Furthermore, the bulk of chapter 30 expounds on the aforementioned Judaic root. Another pertinent correlation between *The Mirror* and Augustinian religious philosophy that also happens to stem from Jewish scripture is the notion that the human soul is an image of God.[207] We have already discussed the medieval tropes of mirror, book and painting all being different objects but all representing reflections of a unifying oneness in the introduction and in the chapter on proto-feminism. I mention it here to point out how well Marguerite uses these medieval tropes to emphasise the accommodation of socio-religious multiplicity and the fact that the varying sects can indeed 'recognize [their] customs' in *The Mirror* as Marguerite claims in chapter 98. Finally, whilst these connections are all plausible, I use them tentatively and only as a means to testify to an array of possible influences on Marguerite.

The Mirror and Theological Philosophies

Having ended the previous sub-heading with mention of St. Augustine, let us start this new subheading by exploring how Marguerite appropriates Augustinian philosophy to build a case for the accommodation of heterogeneity. Augustinian religious philosophy holds that:

> Love . . . is not only the driving force of individual, but also of social life. All societies and communities . . . are constituted by a common desire. Those who seek the same object necessarily form a society to attain it; and it is the nature of the end which determines the character of the society. The great division of mankind . . . is between those who desire their proper end, God, above all else, and those whose desire is perverted so that they choose earthly goods as ends instead of means. And these two groups necessarily form two societies … which divide the human race between them, the City of God and the Earthly City, or City of the Devil.[208]

[207] Ibid., p. 215.
[208] Ibid., p. 221.

It is easy to see then how Marguerite distinguishes between 'Holy Church' (MoSS, 148), and 'Holy Church the Less' (MoSS, 51, 87). Like Augustine's City of God, Marguerite's Holy Church is the end where all annihilated souls arrive at whilst Holy Church the Less might be the earth-bound Catholic institution. Augustine's ideal Earthly City is the representative of the City of God and is thus endowed with supernatural holiness. However, as Augustine points out, not all the Earthly Church's members are true citizens.[209] In other words, Augustine acknowledged the potential for distortion and the actual decay of clerics and humankind. Marguerite's Holy Church the Less is thus Augustine's Earthly City complete with its potential and actual corruption. For evidence of this, we can read chapter 62 as Marguerite's disguised commentary on corruption. The title of the chapter reads 'Of those who are dead to mortal sin and born into a life of grace' (MoSS, 83). Given Marguerite's 'employment of riddling language', we can apply two levels of understanding.[210] One level of understanding has us consider that Marguerite is referring to the freed soul. However, *The Mirror*'s latent social critique also allows us to consider that corrupt persons of authority are dead to mortal sin and are born into a life of grace. These individuals have questionable conduct, but because of their lineage and status, they enjoy the grace of comfortable and privileged living standards. These same 'little ones', says Marguerite in chapter 62 'have no reproach or remorse of conscience, so long as they satisfy God'. In other words, over and above referring to the freed soul as being in a state of absolute purity, and it therefore being above error, this statement also relates to the unaccountability of persons of authority for erring, and their being able to justify their conduct according to the vindication of divine providence. If we look past the obvious spiritual meaning in chapter 62, Love's introductory passage actually reads like a tirade against corruption. The rest of Love's introductory paragraph reads as follows:

> They dearly want honours, they are upset when they are despised, but they keep themselves from vainglory and impatience, which lead to death and sin. And they love riches too, and lament that they are poor. And if they are rich, they lament that they are poor. And if they are rich, they lament when they lose their riches, but always they keep themselves from death in sin, since they do not wish to love their riches contrary to the will of God, whether they lose or increase them. And they love

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[209] Ibid.
[210] Kent, 'Foreword', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. liv.

> too to take pleasure in ease and rest, but they keep themselves from excess. Such men have died to mortal sin, and are born into a life of grace. (MoSS, 83–84)

Each phrase in this paragraph can be broken down into an explanation of how it applies to a corrupt medieval institution/individual but in the interest of time and space it is probably enough to consider that the little ones who are addressed in the introductory lines are more likely to be the corrupt authority officials than Marguerite's elite annihilated souls. Cementing this notion is the response to Love's speech by The Soul when The Soul says, 'Ah, truly, says the Soul set free, such men are small upon earth and very small in Heaven, and it is ungraciously that they save themselves' (MoSS, 84). It is interesting that the freed Soul speaks this line. What this means is that The Soul is already en route to heaven but cannot recognise in her fellow itinerants men such as those described by Love.

Marguerite acknowledges the Catholic Church's marginalisation of persons and groups in her society, when in the text Reason points out that there are explanations for actives and contemplatives, and for ordinary people who wish to attain the divine state (MoSS, 29). Further to this, in the same way that Augustinian philosophy recognises that various groups form each for their own purpose and for the sake of the attainment of the same unifying goal – that being union with God (MoSS, 152), Marguerite gives a literary nod of acknowledgement to various communities and individuals. The evidence for this is the pointed references and direct address to actives, contemplatives, ordinary persons, Beguines and, ladies 'who would recognise their customs', as well as the 'priest and clerics, the Preachers, The Austin Friars, the Carmelites, and the Friars Minor' (MoSS, 29, 122, 152), in *The Mirror*. Even further along this train of thought Marguerite, in recognition of the many sects, is like Augustine in his recognition of the differences in character of the groups. Belief systems that have Neo-Platonic undercurrents, that is, those which draw on any one or any combination of the philosophies of Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas and Origen, and which will have been around during Marguerite's time including amongst others the Waldensians and Cathars, would also be able to recognize their concepts in *The Mirror*. Marguerite's imploding soul reconnecting with God reflects the Neo-Platonic belief that holds that 'inwardly turned love and contemplation is the essential Divine activity and all God's actions on the creatures he calls into being are secondary'.[211] The discarding of the virtues reflects this Neo-platonic thought in that dynamic enactment of the virtues is secondary to

[211] Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, p. 212.

contemplation of the Divine because the pull and submission of the human soul in answer to the magnetising call of the Divine Soul overrides everything else. Thus mendicants, whether or not they were associated with an order, might find value and meaning in Marguerite's discourse on the discarding of the virtues, inward turning and recognition of God in self and others irrespective of differing presentations. If we link this contention to any 13th century French sect, the Carthusians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Waldensians, the Beguines and the Beghards, all fit the mould in that in varying degrees, they enacted and embodied the passive humility that goes with the discarding of the virtues, as well as the concentrated mental and psychological effort of living an ascetic lifestyle. Since I have already argued that the practices of these groups are reflected in *The Mirror*, here I deal specifically with their theological and philosophical modes of thought rather than their practices and emphases. Sects with Pagan Platonist undercurrents would be able to grasp Marguerite's contention when in her discussion on the sacrament she contends that:

> the angels, the saints and the Virgin Mary do not see [God] otherwise than we ourselves see him, and if they see him in the semblance in which we see him, it is through spiritual understanding, for to see the humanity of Jesus Christ glorified in the sacrament of the altar does not belong to the glory of those who are in glory. And so they do not see him glorified except through understanding (MoSS, 33).

This statement is in line with Pagan Platonist thinking in that it acknowledges that eternal beings are all Divine but that they differ in their degree of divinity.[212] The idea of differing in degrees of divinity originally stems from Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* (Colledge, footnote, MoSS, 99). There are 'the Thrones' whose job it is to aid perfection, the 'cherubim' whose job it is to provide knowledge, and the 'seraphim' whose job it is to provide purification (MoSS, p. 100). This mimics what occurs in the earthly realm. The quote 'on earth as in heaven' taken from The Lord's Prayer springs instantly to mind. If there are stations in the spirit realm, then in all likelihood the same phenomenon exists in the realm of matter. Again, in line with the medieval mind, the natural order at work, and held in balance by Love/God, is what Marguerite shows us. In relation to the earthly and heavenly cities mentioned earlier, this translates as chaos in taut balance with order on the earthly

[212] Ibid., p. 210.

plane, whereas in the heavenly city, balance is in place due to souls occupying stratified spaces according to how evolved they are.

Inter-textually speaking, and in what is probably an ingenious way of making an argument for universality, Marguerite fuses Bonaventura's philosophy with that of Thomas Aquinas in *The Mirror.* These two scholars and theologians shared some commonalities but ultimately differed in their systems of thought. Relying on Richard McKeon's succinct description only, and not necessarily on his opinion of the two philosophers and their works, let us explore the two philosophies. Bonaventura was Franciscan. Aquinas was Dominican. Both taught a two year long theological course at the University of Paris on Peter Lombard's *The Book of Sentences*, which was a collection of authoritative points on interpreting scripture and which was meant to provide a medieval commonplace understanding of God and what constituted theology. For Bonaventura theology was a 'dogmatic reaffirmation of accepted opinions', the intellect was naturally conjoined to God and God was the Principal Operative discernible in all that was known, done or felt. In other words, God is innate. By this understanding, knowledge of God or unification with God was independent of human experience. For Aquinas, theology was a search for 'objective truths that underlie and support all truths of knowledge and statement'. In other words, Aquinas' departure point was that God is a given and does in fact exist but is external to humans, and is therefore treated as subject matter that humanity has to strive towards via embodying and enactment of Christian values. For Aquinas unification with God meant that one had to live the experience of Christian values. Bonaventura and Aquinas' opposing ideologies became the model for medieval theological study, the method of which relied on 'opposition and proof' and became the 'scholastic method'.[213] Let us explore how Marguerite fuses these two divergent philosophies whilst arriving at her own enhanced meaning of what it means to know God and reunite with Divinity.[214]

By Bonaventura's reckoning, God is innate. His philosophy claims that knowledge of God is within us. If there is doubt about God's presence in humans, then the fault is human not Divine because 'the veils of concupiscence sometimes blind us and we sometimes fail to reflect'. To prove that God is innate Bonaventura uses inquiry as his departure point and as a

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[213] R. McKeon, 'Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36.3 (July–Sept. 1975): pp. 193–212, (pp. 389–393).
[214] The explanation that follows will seem, at first, to rely heavily on McKeon's given writing. However, the reliance is only on the succinct descriptions of the two philosopher's works and not on McKeon's opinions thereof.

tool. His method relies on 'scrutiny and reason', after which, conclusions about God's innateness are derived via argument.[215] In quite a literal sense this is exactly how the character of Reason functions in *The Mirror* given her constant interrogation of The Soul's and Love's conjectures. However, Reason has multiple roles. At some points in the dialogue, she plays the role of the fool as in chapter 11. There Reason is given the opening lines to ask for clarity on what the 'nine points' of annihilation are that were mentioned in chapter five. In the rest of chapter 11 however, Reason's dialogue reduces her to a dim-witted character in that the only speech she is allowed is to ask no fewer than six times 'Ah for God's sake . . . what does this mean?', and in a seventh and eighth query the same question is phrased only slightly differently. As has already been mentioned, Reason is also symbolic of institutionalised and suppressive masculine dogma. Further to this, as the narrative trajectory unfolds, and we see Reason's journey in the dialogue as well as the development of her character, we come to realise that Reason is also on an ontological journey. She is in fact an itinerant who functions as Bonaventura's investigator. Reason is the embodiment of Bonaventura's method of inquiry and her place in the plot mimics Bonaventura's philosophy. Here is how it works:

Investigation, as has already been mentioned, is exactly what Reason does in all of her interrogations of Love and the Soul, just as Humbert does with Marguerite at her inquisition – a statement worthy of the repetition because it emphasises the social reality Marguerite and *The Mirror* call into question. If, as Bonaventura claims, we question God's inherence in ourselves, it is a human fault and not a Divine error. This then explains the affective manner in which Reason responds to Love and The Soul during the course of the dialogue, because Reason's inquiry is relative to Reason's state of mind (read here human logic). Bonaventura's philosophy, also referred to as 'the affective way', has it that 'commonplaces of inquiry . . . transform adversary opposition into the suggestive recognition that the attainment of the vision of God may be analysed in terms of operations of faculties of the mind or in terms of inspirations of things perceived'.[216] This statement encapsulates Reason's ontological journey in the text. That is, Reason scrutinises via human logic, all that The Soul and Love put forth, and in doing so uses a range of emotions that include curiosity, bewilderment, patronising cautioning and confusion. Love and The Soul have equally

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[215] R. McKeon, 'Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas', pp. 394–395.
[216] Ibid., p. 398.

emotional responses to Reason's interrogations. Those range from irritated annoyance to resigned tolerance of Reason's interrogations. Eventually during the process and as the dialogue unfolds, Reason's human logic is converted by Love's and The Soul's suggestive explanations, arguments and counter arguments, all of which culminate in Reason shifting from adversary to convert. Having thus travelled and fulfilled the role of convert, and simultaneously having thus internalised that God is innate, Reason is no longer necessary for plot development and dies. One could even go so far as to say that recognising that God is innate results in Reason's obliteration/consumption by the Divine Intellect. It follows then that in a sense Reason has participated in the ultimate act – that of perfect charity– by surrendering her human logic to that based in the Divine Realm, and as such has undergone annihilation.[217] By further extension, Reason's expulsion from the plot means that she also extracts from the world of matter, which is exactly what Marguerite's annihilation discourse encourages. Mention has already been made of the act of charity in which the soul surrenders itself completely to God that in Marguerite-speak is the annihilation of the soul. By Augustinian definition, this charity, this complete giving over of the soul, is what the character of Reason undergoes, when she submits to Love and The Soul's philosophy. This then, illustrates how Marguerite appropriates and applies Bonaventura's philosophy and his affective way.

Further proof is in the fluidity between poetry and prose in *The Mirror* that, one can say, is also a possible indicator of Marguerite's state of mind and emotions at the time of authoring *The Mirror*. One could even go so far as to say that *The Mirror* mimics liturgical structure: at the start of Mass (the procession), a song is sung – even before the prologue, Marguerite provides us with a poem. The priest's greeting at the start of Mass signifies the presence of God – Marguerite does this after the table of contents by writing 'Explicit./Thanks be to God' (MoSS, 8). At specific intervals during Mass there are hymns – at intervals in *The Mirror* there are poems. Mass includes Consecration and the Eucharist – *The Mirror* delves into discussion of Consecration and the Eucharist as early as chapter 15. There is also much discussion about bread and wine and the body of Christ, professions of faith and mention of peace that run throughout *The Mirror*, all of which are associated with Mass. Marguerite even concludes *The Mirror* with what appears to be a short prayer and an 'Amen' (MoSS, 175). In other words, *The Mirror* loosely mimics the rites of Mass. What

[217] The concept of Perfect Charity is explained in Approach under the subheading Annihilating the Soul as a Means to Reclaim Autonomy.

this indicates is Marguerite's state of mind – the affective way – in her mystical dialogue, and her adroit concealment of social critique within her mystical treatise.

For further evidence of Marguerite's state of mind, we can look at the times Marguerite uses poetry in the dialogue. The Soul – we might consider as synonymous with Marguerite, given the parallels between the two – is the character assigned the most poetry, and this occurs at times when she is expressing deep emotion which flows as an outpouring of a song when The Soul is finally annihilated, and engulfed in God's love in chapter 122. At other times when the topic is contentious, such as the dispelling of the virtues in chapter six, Marguerite relies on poetic expression. This is probably because, during the Middle Ages, it was prudent and easier to mask polemic contention in verse, than it was to do so in prose. The only other characters allowed poetry are divine abstracts such as Love in chapter 10, Pure Graciousness in chapter 86, and Holy Church and The Holy Trinity in chapter 122. From all of this we can conclude that when The Soul/Marguerite is most in touch with her emotions, and by Bonaventura's reckoning thus tuned into God, the dialogue moves in poetry, and does so again when Marguerite assigns divine concepts ontological speech. This then is Bonaventura in literary action within *The Mirror.* Thus, it is we see how any sect or individual that held similar undercurrents in their belief system could, as Marguerite claims, find *The Mirror* agreeable. But how does Marguerite reconcile Aquinas' philosophy with Bonaventura's? To answer this question we have to turn our attention to a number of aspects in *The Mirror.* First, an attempt to provide a condensed and rudimentary understanding of Aquinas and his philosophy:

For Aquinas, God was superior knowledge that existed outside of the realm of human knowledge. The only reason that man held any knowledge of God in the first place was due to revealed evidence found in scripture and in the texts of saints. These texts and Biblical scripture were handbooks for the practice of Christian values. What has been termed the 'demonstrative way' was, for Aquinas, a practical Christian way of life on earth that was supposed to be a means to the eventual attainment of Divine Knowledge and reunification with God. For Aquinas, God was the Divine Subject cognizable by inspiration and with whom reunification was possible via principled living. For Aquinas the inquiry into the existence of God, and man's relation to and relationship with God was an issue of faith. By his determination the human mind could be led towards a practical Christian lifestyle and thus eventually towards God via the interpretation of scripture, metaphysics, symbols and the

use of parables.[218] Humans were beings belonging to what Aquinas called natural law, but were also participants in Divine Law. As created being in the image of God man is perfect human nature, a single entity made up of a body and a soul.[219] The soul can exist independently from the body even after death, but the body is necessary for resurrection.[220] For Aquinas the humanity of Christ best illustrates this distinction between body and soul.[221] That is, Jesus was human and therefore had a body. However, after his death his soul lived on but needed the human body for resurrection so that he could ascend to heaven. The duality, that is, the separation of man into two parts, namely his body and his soul – inherent in Aquinas' philosophy – has been termed by commentators and scholars on Aquinas work, as 'double bookkeeping'[222] or, 'two truths'.[223]

That Aquinas' philosophy is traceable in *The Mirror* is indisputable. Too many traces of his theological presence in the text disallow us from dismissing this notion. To reveal Aquinas' philosophy in *The Mirror* we have to turn our attention to a number of textual aspects. One of these is the fact that Marguerite names three cast members after what Aquinas identifies as the theological virtues. They are Faith, Hope and Charity.[224] Another is the fact that Marguerite kills Reason and then resurrects her. That is, despite dying, Reason makes three after-life appearances, as well as an appearance via a role-play, done by The Soul. There is also a parallel between Aquinas' double truths and Marguerite's double speak as well as the fact that Marguerite utilises scripture and Biblical anecdotes in the dialogue which is a form of ministry that Aquinas believed assisted the human mind in progressing towards God.

Let us start with Aquinas' three theological virtues. Faith, Hope and Charity are by Aquinas' reckoning distinct from other virtues in that they are 'supernatural' and relate directly to God. By contrast, moral and intellectual virtues are those that relate to the human mind.[225] Marguerite treats the characters of Faith, Hope and Charity as Aquinas'

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[218] McKeon, 'Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas', pp. 394–398.
[219] B. Kent, 'Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-76)', ed. S. J. Pope, *The Ethics Of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: University Press, 2006), pp.116–130. The abbreviation used by Kent 'qq' refers to 'questiones'.
[220] 'St. Thomas Aquinas: Saints and Angels', Available URL: http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?_id=2530, 2014/06/01.
[221] Kent, 'Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49-76)', pp. 116–130.
[222] J. Fomens, 'Aquinas and the Five Ways', *The Monist* 58.1 (Jan. 1974): 16–35 (p. 22).
[223] U. Eco, 'In Praise of Thomas Aquinas', *The Wilson Quarterly* 10.4 (Autumn 1986): 78–87 (p. 84).
[224] S. Drefcinski, 'A Very Short Primer on St. Thomas Aquinas' Account of the Various Virtues', University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Available URL: http://www.uwplatt.ed~drefins/233Aquinas.html, 2014/04/24.
[225] Ibid.

supernatural beings and assigns Reason to play the role of the moral and intellectual police, so to speak. I have made sufficient mention of how Reason functions as human logic. Hence, it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that Reason, in yet another layer of character trait and function, is also the embodiment of Marguerite's appropriation of Aquinas' moral and intellectual virtues. That is, she infuses Reason's debates with The Soul and Love, with issues about moral obligation, and fuels Reason's rhetoric with intellectual thinking. Here, whilst Reason's presentation differs from Bonaventura's affective presentation of Reason, Reason's moral and intellectual interrogation is, nonetheless, accompanied by Bonaventura's affective way. That is, Reason's emotional responses to the answers given to her intellectual interrogation is one way in which Marguerite fuses Aquinas' and Bonaventura's philosophies. For example, we can find evidence for Reason's moral obligations (Aquinas' demonstrative way) in her shocked response (Bonaventura's affective way) to the notion of abandoning the virtues in chapter eight, and we can find evidence for her intellectual thinking (Aquinas' demonstrative way) when in chapter 56 the Virtues lament their abandonment fate. The fact that Marguerite personifies, as a single character, the Virtues, in what is actually any given number of abstract values, is a sophisticated intellectual approach in itself. Compounding this Aquinas' styled intellectuality is the fact that the virtues have a voice and plead (emotional/affective way) their own case. Hence, we have another example of fusing the two philosophies.

As for Faith, Hope and Charity, evidence for the fact that they are treated as Aquinas' supernatural virtues which are directly related to God can be found in chapter four, which states, not only in title, that charity defers to no-one but God, but also expounds on this notion in the short paragraph that is chapter 4. Furthermore, Chapter 14 tells us that the character of Faith is intimately familiar with God, and chapter 19 has Faith, Hope and Charity speaking firstly in unison, and secondly declaring their divine status in the phrase 'these three divine virtues' and thirdly, speaking directly with Love/God only (MoSS, 38). Nowhere else in the text do these three virtues make any further appearances in the dialogue except for Faith, who has a brief line in chapter 15 which deals with the issue of faith, and how it operates in matters such as the sacrament, that is, an issue pertaining to Christian tradition (Aquinas' lived practical means to reaching God). Faith's appearance here, and presence in *The Mirror*, lends itself to linking the presence of Aquinas in *The Mirror* in that the Christian tradition such as the blessing of the sacrament was held by Aquinas as a custom which must be

honoured because it was rooted in 'revealed' truths as recorded in the Bible.[226] In fact, The Soul and Love make specific mention of revealed truths in chapter 53. It follows then that by Aquinas' reckoning, one had to have faith in the word of God, as written in the Bible, and one had to practice the faith via enactments such as the sacraments. As such, participation in Christian ritual such as the sacrament was not only a means of honouring Christ's humanity and God, but the belief therein was rooted in faith. This leads me to think that the significance of Faith as a character in *The Mirror*, especially since she appears twice separately from the other two supernatural virtues/interlocutors, Hope and Charity, is that her character resonates with one of Aquinas' strongest tenets, that of having faith in the revealed word of God as contained in the Bible. The roles of Reason and Faith in *The Mirror* we now see are complementary. By Aquinas's reckoning, the truths cannot contradict each other.[227] Therefore, by assenting to the truths that Love and The Soul impart to Reason, Reason regains faith, not Faith the personified abstract, but faith the philosophical and intangible religious belief, and as soon as she does that, she dies or, as it were, annihilates – on a literal level from the plot. The prologue actually spells it out for us when in the third stanza it predicts Reason's conversion in chapter 13 and states that it is only through Love/God and Faith (read here the regaining of faith) that Reason comes alive again. The inversion is obvious: when Reason regains her faith, her human logic dies. This signals the expulsion of human logic from the plot. The expulsion of logic from the plot rejuvenates the soul. The soul's absence of logic, and consequent rejuvenation, reunites it with God. Thus, Marguerite's mystical way reconciles two superficially opposing truths, that is, Reason is a synthesis of the demonstrative and the affective ways, and, the character reveals the paradox of death and resurrection.

Let us look once more at Reason's literary resurrection in the text to see how this functions as a reflection of Aquinas' philosophy. Aquinas' philosophy holds that the existence of God is deducible through reason. In a literal sense, this is how Reason arrives at an understanding of a soul's annihilation of self in complete surrender to God. That is, via her interaction with The Soul and Love as the dialogue progresses, Reason regains her faith. However, by Aquinas' reckoning, specifics relating to how one arrives at an understanding of God's existence can only be gained through the understanding of the 'special revelation of

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[226] R. McKeon, 'Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas', p. 398.
[227] Eco, 'In praise of Thomas Aquinas', pp. 84, 86.

Jesus Christ'.[228] So how does Marguerite accommodate this aspect of Aquinas' philosophy? As a character extension to Reason she introduces us to Reason's Understanding in chapter 12 who functions purely as a means of conveying Reason's progress of comprehension. There is also the character of Understanding of Divine Light in chapter 75 who also functions to convey a sense of comprehension but this time complements The Soul's, and possibly the audience's, comprehension. These two characters, I contend, play the role of revelation. Reason's request in chapter 13 for further explanation so that 'ordinary people' might attain the state of being in unison with God would have us consider the aforementioned as a possibility (MoSS, 29). The dialogues assigned to Reason's Understanding and Understanding of Divine Light, albeit very brief, and their presence in *The Mirror*, are as pertinent to plot and character development specifically for Reason and The Soul, and maybe even for the ordinary people. The brief dialogue assigned to them functions as a pause in narrative trajectory, so that the characters, and ordinary people/audience, are able to reflect on and grasp, the revelatory discourse. The pause is necessary because the dialogue given each character deals specifically with two of Aquinas' pertinent tenets. Understanding of Reason touches on the duality in the dialogue (read here Aquinas' double truths), which in turn could relate to *The Mirror's* ambiguous character. Understanding of Divine Light is engaged in a conversation relating to the transfiguration of Jesus. Reason's death in chapter 87 and then resurrection via role-play by The Soul in chapter 88, and then three more after life appearances in chapters 89 and 98, are eerily similar to Christ's crucifixion and three days later, resurrection. Christ's humanity and then transfiguration was principle to Aquinas theology. This aspect of Aquinas' philosophy plays itself out in Reason's ontological journey, death, and resurrection, in *The Mirror.*

We now move on to Aquinas' double truths by which he reckoned that Christ was Divinity but expressed in human form. As such, duality was inherent in nature/humanity. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas expounds on this theory and arrives at two truths. That is, the notion that one truth exceeds human reason and comprehension and deals specifically with the nature of God whilst the other pertains to human reason and is concerned with the being of God. These are the truths of faith, and the truths of reason.[229] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to draw too many parallels between *The Mirror's* truths and Aquinas' tenets.

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[228] 'Thomas Aquinas – Philosopher – Bibliography', Available URL: http://www.egs.edu/library/thomas_aquinas/bibliography, 2014/06/04.
[229] R. McKeon, 'Philosophy and Theology, History and Science in the Thought of Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas', p. 396.

Suffice it to say, the ambiguous character of *The Mirror* is a reflection of Aquinas two-truth philosophy at work: *The Mirror* is ambiguous in the sense that it both affirms and transcends the moral and intellectual virtues, with Reason having to die and then being reborn in order to enter a higher realm. Scholars also generally agree that *The Mirror* is 'ambiguous' and that Marguerite 'deliberately cultivated a Delphic manner.'[230] It also suffices now to say that *The Mirror*'s taut discourse balances the polarities, and is a further reflection of Aquinas' thinking in that the theologian held that the truths could not contradict each other.[231]

In closing off on where and how Aquinas is traceable in *The Mirror*, a few more correlations need mentioning. There is Marguerite's use of Biblical anecdotes like the one in chapter 86 on Mary and Martha, and that of John the Baptist in chapter 125. There are the many references to the trinity like that in chapter 14 where Love explains the concept of the trinity and incarnation, chapter 42's speech by the Holy Spirit explaining the soul's relation to the trinity, chapter 49's last line reference to the trinity, and an explanation of how the soul relates to the trinity in chapter 68. Mention is made of these specific components of Christianity resident in *The Mirror* because broadly speaking, they constitute the kind of scripturally revealed truths specific to Aquinas' tenets that can be located in Marguerite's text.

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In the discussion about the argument for heterogeneity and universalism inherent in *The Mirror*, I address a number of matters. Firstly, I make provision for a definition of the concept of medieval diversity and heterogeneity. Secondly, I show how the text mimics the French 13th and 14th century's socio-religious variance. Thirdly, I show where and how *The Mirror* reflects diverse strands of religious and philosophical thought. The second and third points illustrate two very different kinds of diversity and heterogeneity. The former links the text to its context whilst the latter describes the philosophical eclecticism inherent in *The Mirror*. What both points illustrate though is that *The Mirror* has a heterogeneous character, whilst the text simultaneously builds a case for tolerance and universality. This chapter has demonstrated the eclectic character of the material of *The Mirror*. The fact that Marguerite casts her net wider than Catholic orthodoxy suggests an appeal for tolerance and universality.

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[230] Kent, 'Foreword', *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, pp. ix, lxx.
[231] Eco, 'In Praise of Thomas Aquinas', pp. 84, 86.

It implies that if a text can cohesively hold many and various philosophies in a single book, then tolerance of many and varied beliefs can unite in the human landscape.

CONCLUSION

This thesis contends that *The Mirror* is a medieval mystical text that has an innate social critique. I do not claim that Marguerite did not have a mystical experience. Rather, Marguerite's record of her experience simultaneously comments on the norms of her time. Marguerite recorded her experience in a 'pre-feminist culture'. It seems women were expressing their dissatisfaction with patriarchal convention via mystical writing. The Introduction placed Marguerite and her *Mirror* in their historical context by outlining the conventions of the time in order to show the marginalisation of medieval women, Marguerite's response to it, and the reasons behind Marguerite's fate. The introduction also addressed current scholarly opinion on *The Mirror* as well as issues surrounding the actual manuscript, its copies, and its translations. The following chapter discussed my approach to the text and provided a working understanding of what we can consider as medieval literary protest. This chapter also considered the style of literary dissent Marguerite employs and provided an outline of the deconstruction and Marxist-feminist theoretical elements I use in my empirical analysis. Lastly, this chapter also outlined the three main concerns of the thesis under the subheadings of Subliminal Proto-feminism, Reclamation of Autonomy, and The Case for Heterogeneity and Universalism.

In chapter three I address the subliminal proto-feminist discourse of the text. There is an exploration into the inversions of two of the characters in the dialogue, viz. Reason and King Alexander, whilst simultaneously drawing on the functions of some of the other interlocutors. This chapter showed how Marguerite's appropriation and subordination of male authority figures does not further entrench female suppression. Whilst most medieval women's mystical discourse relied on the '*femina virilis* or virago', that is, the bride-of-Christ model, which bestowed on them 'honorary male' status, they paradoxically entrenched their own subjugation. By contrast, Marguerite sets her experience in the 'qua woman' mode. That means her experience, as she chose to record it, is entirely feminine in the construction of the identities of the interlocutors, the interpersonal relationships of the interlocutors and the transcendence and transmutation of the *dramatis persona*. The result is that women gain an 'exalted status in the realm of the spirit' world.[232] I show, at the primary level of analysis of the text, how this works. However, the subversive discourse of the text also compels us to

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[232] B. Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 2, 3, 5.

consider a second outcome. This second outcome exalts the status of women in the world in which Marguerite lived. That is, Marguerite and *The Mirror* call for acknowledgment of the capacity of women to be dynamic participants in the real world, as opposed to allowing themselves to be recessed into only the mystical/religious and domestic spheres. Marguerite and *The Mirror* also appear to voice the desire to be dynamic participants in their medieval social reality. That is, Marguerite's covert claim to authorship of *The Mirror* suggests the desire to be a dynamic participant in broader society and in theological and mystical discourse.

Chapter four's discourse on autonomy considers Marguerite's theory of how annihilating the soul is a means towards self-possession. This chapter addressed the seeming desire for autonomy from ecclesiastical and monarchical prescription and dogma by exploring how Marguerite asserts, inserts, and submerges her voice in the text, via the text's meta-physical features. There is discussion on the trajectories of The Soul and Reason. I show how Marguerite uses death in the psychological and meta-physical sense as a means to reclaim autonomy. The negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius was used to illustrate the text's postulation that deep inner reflection results in a psychological death which simultaneously and paradoxically brings to life a reconnection with the ultimate authority, that being God. This chapter elaborated on how *The Mirror* deconstructs external hierarchy and lays claim to an antinomian and dichotomous Divine Will-infused projection.

In chapter five I discuss possible influences on Marguerite and how *The Mirror* reflects some of those influences. This chapter also shows how *The Mirror* reflects the society it was born into. There is discussion on the similarities that are traceable between *The Mirror* and the various belief systems in France's religious community, as well as how the philosophies of Bonaventura and Aquinas are traceable in *The Mirror*. The chapter concludes that two different aspects of heterogeneity are present in *The Mirror* and that both argue for universality. One aspect of heterogeneity identified the socio-religious cultural diversity and the other identified a philosophical religious diversity, and I have argued how they reflect each other. It remains now to consider how Marguerite's story and *The Mirror* function as a continuum for modern authors and thinkers.

In using deconstructive and Marxist-feminist elements, I show how *The Mirror* presents its audience with opposites. The text juxtaposes ideas, concepts and beliefs and then

re-assimilates the opposing ideologies.[233] I recall here for example, Love's postulation that, 'one and the same word has two meanings' (Moss, 40). *The Mirror* in fact deconstructs itself in that it only provides postulations but no certain conclusions: we read about how one can go about (re)uniting with God, but we are also aware that the text draws us into the dialogue with the aim of allowing us to arrive at our own conclusions. When we read 'one and the same word has two meanings', and that the text holds 'contradictory statements', we come to realise that meaning and interpretation are open ended (MoSS, 40). In line with deconstruction theory, the text shows us only the 'lure of the abyss'. That is, what Marguerite relays is only a way out of the closure of knowledge.[234] It is up to the audience to create meaning because of *The Mirror*'s unresolved enigmas. This meaning and creation will vary from person to person and, according to deconstruction theory, will be a ceaseless and eternal process. This brings us to how *The Mirror* holds current relevance, and probably will still do so in years to come.

Marguerite's execution at the stake for her convictions and the audacity to challenge convention was not an isolated case. History is full of such stories. Women still experience prosecution for voicing their convictions as regards the disparity between male and female roles. In some parts of the world, women still experience intellectual suppression.[235] However, this is not the only area in which *The Mirror* holds modern relevance.

Counter-culture movements that espouse the importance of freedom, individualism and the right to a private life beyond state control have always been around. It seems they are 'gaining rapid traction' in our digital age. Its proponents are less geographically bound and harder to immobilise because they are 'young, computer-savvy idealists with the digital skills to invent new ways of circumventing the power of the state'.[236] Modern authors/thinkers/activists still employ sophisticated masks for social commentary, as did Marguerite and her contemporaries. Mostly, though, it seems they need only access modern technology in order to express their challenge to the status quo, and given the speed and reach of digital communication, are able to network with a wider audience within a short space of time. A university of Texas graduate who was prosecuted for the trading of illegal goods in cyber space defended himself by saying that 'The most widespread and systematic use of

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[233] Explained in the Approach section.
[234] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans. *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. lxxvii.
[235] M. Yousafzai and C. Lamb, *I am Malala: The Girl who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*, (London: Hatchet, 2013).
[236] Cadwalladr, 'How I Bought Drugs from the Dark Net', *Grazia*, 30 October 2013. Africa: MPSA, p. 42.

force is among institutions and government … The best way to change a government is to change the minds of the governed … To that end . . . I am . . . [giving] people a first-hand experience of what it would be like to live in a world without the systematic use of force'.[237] The student in this analogy is, of course, asserting his desire to defy universally accepted codes of social and moral behaviour. I am not condoning unethical expressions of the self/person, and neither does Marguerite. However, the student's line of defence resonates with the kind of libertarian ideology in which Marguerite's story and *The Mirror* function. That is, *The Mirror* communicates that there should be an understanding of freedom that is subject to the larger good of society. If authority structures define the larger good oppressively, then resistance becomes justifiable. Furthermore, the analogy serves to show how the aforementioned, in essence, Marguerite's agenda, would have been as shocking in her time as the Texas University student's agenda is today.

There is also humankind's apparent desire to understand God, humankind's relation to, and relationship with, God, as well as humankind's desire to grasp the meaning behind life. In this sense, like authors before and after Marguerite, there might always be those claiming to have had an otherworldly experience, and who for the sake of wanting to enlighten others, or for the sake of wanting to communicate the experience, will record it, whether the experience occurred within an orthodox religious framework or not. We can attribute similarities in such experiences to intertextual phenomena, as well as the fact that mystical experiences are all part of a wider dialogue concerning man's quest to make sense of his being, the world he lives in and his place in the macrocosm. In this sense, *The Mirror* functions as part of an incomplete and continuous multi-voiced, cross-cultural dialogue or perhaps even private and personal internal monologues. As regards mystical (dia)monologue, in the words of Julian of Norwich 'this boke is begonne by God's gift and his grace, but it is not yet performed, as to my sight'.[238] That is to say, for as long as mankind experiences and has a 'spiritual thirst', the mystical (dia)monologue will continue to exist and evolve, and by my reckoning, perhaps always as a counter to tacit, or enforced convention.[239] Julian of Norwich's quotation also aptly elucidates the deconstruction of her own text and that of Marguerite's. According to deconstruction theory, the process of meaning and interpretation is an ongoing dialogue. It is never complete. In this sense, *The*

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[237] R. Ulbricht, 'How I Bought Drugs from the Dark Net', *Grazia*, 30 October 2013 Africa: MPSA, p. 41.
[238] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1901), pp. 78–79.
[239] B. Windeatt, 'Julian's Second Thoughts: The Long Tradition', *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), p. 112.

Mirror and Julian's *Revelations* form part of an ongoing and wider discourse about spirituality and the experience thereof within its context.

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