Attitudes to the Body in Fourteenth-Century English Mystical Literature

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ABSTRACT

There is a stereotype, common to textbooks, of the Middle Ages as ‘dualistic’ – that is despising or fleeing ‘matter’ or ‘the body’. Common sentiment is that mystical or ascetical literature is the most culpable expression of this and that this tendency reaches its culmination in the fourteenth century. According to Jacques Le Goff, for example, in the spiritual culture of the Middle Ages “a clash between the physiological and the sacred resulted in an effort to deny the existence of biological man”.¹ By looking at the English writings of Richard Rolle, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich I will show that late medieval mystical writing, at least in England, was not as 'anti-body' as popular, and some scholarly, perceptions have seen it. In fact these writings show an active concern to make sense of the body as an important part of the spiritual life. Far from accepting a dualistic anthropology the concern of these writers is the integration of the human person whereby body, along with soul, is a place for encounter with God.

English mysticism in the fourteenth century consciously subverts any penitential practice antagonistic to the body, self-injurious behaviours, or dualistic discourse about the spiritual life. Where they affirm asceticism, which they do, it is only so that the body can play a positive role in the spiritual life. By looking at fourteenth-century mystical texts this thesis shows: 1) The anthropological models they worked with involved an integration of body and soul. 2) Attention to flesh and decay characteristic of the period is not a ‘flight from’ but more a ‘submersion in’ the body. 3) Gendering of the body as ‘female’ in the late Middle Ages because it was seen as ‘passive’, ‘negative’ and ‘irrational’ is over-simplistic and inaccurate to the complexity of gender symbolism and corporeal understandings of the time.

My thesis is that their actual concern is the integration of body and soul in a way that takes attention away from outward ascetical practice. Spirituality for them was not a matter of bodily practice, but nor was it something irrelevant to the body. They all endeavour to demythologise the use of body as a metaphor arriving at a ‘realist’ attitude to the body as something tangible, perceptible, locatable. Yet at the same time they saw a helpful and theologically meaningful attitude to the body coming about as a fruit of the spiritual life.

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to my wife Silvia for patience, inspiration
and for keeping me sane
and to God, who prompted all
that is of real value in this thesis,
the rest, for what it is worth, is mine.
### ABBREVIATIONS for frequently cited Collected Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>EMMA</td>
<td><em>English Mystics of the Middle Ages</em>, ed. Barry Windeatt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press),</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMR</td>
<td><em>Feminine, Masculine and Representation</em>, ed. T. Threadgold &amp; A. Cranny-Francis, (Sydney: Allen &amp; Unwin 1990)</td>
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</table>
**MMTE I-VII**  

**ODEE**  

**OED**  

**RRPV**  

**SSPGWC**  

**STRCS**  

**TBGTI**  
Theology and the Body: Gender, Text and Ideology, ed. R. Hannaford & J. Jobling, (Hertfordshire: Gracewing, 1999)

**VBBR**  

**WJN**  

The Modern English translation of the Middle English texts is given throughout in the ‘Appendix’ under the relevant small case Roman numeral.
Introduction: Body as Locus of Divine-Human Encounter

There were many ‘bodies’ in the Middle Ages: dead bodies, living ones, ill bodies and healthy ones, spiritual bodies and fleshly bodies, bodies of carnal transience and angelic bodies. There was a body of Divine Incarnation, a Eucharistic body, bodies that became relics, and concupiscent bodies that decayed and corrupted. There were male bodies and female bodies, of various ages, levels of functioning, and diverse non-generic characteristics. There were metaphorical bodies of thought or nations and sensual bodies made up of biological processes. The ‘body’ to which Middle English mysticism referred could take many forms. This can be seen in the distinct use of the terms *caro* and *corpus* in the Middle Ages. *Caro* or ‘flesh’ involved in some sense a lack or an excess of body in relation to the abstract precision of *corpus*. In the Middle Ages this ideal was not so much the classical cult of bodily perfection but a sense of corporate belonging: the Church as the body of Christ, the guilds as bodies of professionals with co-ordinated economic interests, the state as a set of legal and chivalric obligations between vassal and lord. In medieval Latin, *corpus* could denote, amongst other things: a group of buildings, the hull of a ship, a corporation or body politic, the nave or congregation of a church, a source of revenue, or a collection of writings.¹ All of these implied a sense of cohesion, co-ordination, commonality, solidity, reliability, certainty. This idea of bodily harmony was less dominant by the fourteenth century due to divisions within the Church, the rise of an entrepreneurial merchant class using their own capital and the rise of more national and civic forms of political polity that displaced agrarian feudalism.² In its place the awareness of the actual fleshly human body as an imperfect and unstable, ambivalent, transient and uncertain fact of experience became dominant. There was a new realism to the body.³

The age of social, political, religious and intellectual change in the fourteenth century coincided in the middle of that century with a time of acute physical anxiety due to the Black

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¹ DMLBS II, pp. 497-499.
³ There was one idealised body that did keep its place in the later Middle Ages, even became increasingly dominant; the Eucharistic body of Christ. Still this became a much more tangible projection of corporate completeness and perfection. The Eucharist in the fourteenth century was increasingly felt as a bodily thing, both in terms of the transubstantiation of the elements and in the body effects of its reception, or more often, its perception (there was an increased emphasis on ‘seeing’ the host). Eucharistic mysticism in the later Middle Ages often overflowed in striking bodily effects. See Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, (London & NY: Routledge, 1993), pp. 45-76. There was of course a reaction to this in Wycliffite theology and the Lollard movement it inspired. See ‘Wycliff’s Confessions on the Eucharist’, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997), pp. 17-19, with note on p. 142.
Death. No respecter of social position or religious piety, the plague created a new sense of common corporeal vulnerability and anxiety about basic bodily existence. It is one of the synchronicities of history that a century of social and theological displacement found its corporeal expression in the trauma of the plague which, in England as elsewhere, killed a third of the population in the years around the middle of the century. The body as an unavoidable fact of experience was an increasingly dominant theme in late medieval religious texts. The uncomfortable encounter with bodiliness helps explain much of the negative attitude to the body in religious writing at this time.

The concern for the body in the texts I consider oscillates between an affirmation of, and a distancing from, the body in the face of a destructive experience of suffering. The dominant religious and artistic metaphor of late medieval Europe is the body in pain, especially through depictions of Christ’s passion. This expression of the body as object in religious devotions was a way of making sense of, and sharing, personal suffering. The late-medieval focus on the humanity of Christ (especially in his infancy and death) provided a communal medium for the sharing of bodily experience in all its vulnerability and suffering. It offered theological consolation; bodily suffering was emphasised as an aspect of Divine experience rather than a punishment from God.

The body was affirmed as integral to the human person yet there was an impulse to separate from it as an object of pain. In either case the place of bodily issues and metaphor in fourteenth-century mystical texts shows that the body was insistently present to consciousness. I refer to this as ‘corporeal realism’. The substantiation of faith in corporeal experience (pilgrimages, relics, physical manifestations of holiness (like the stigmata), extreme asceticism, real bodily presence in the Eucharist, etc) is a dominant feature of late medieval spirituality. The body, encountered out of a painful experience of dislocation, became both an object of horror and delight to the generations of the high Middle Ages. The mirror side of the comfort received from embodied certainty was the claustrophobia of containment within the body. The body as both a way of encountering God and a limitation to that encounter is a recurrent theme in the work of the four English authors I examine: Richard Rolle, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing, Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich. In their varied ways they show a common concern for the body in spiritual life.

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5N.b. the link of suffering and punishment in the Middle English word ‘pain’ which has its etymological root in the Latin poena meaning punishment. ODEE, p. 641.

Dualism, Asceticism and Mysticism

There is a stereotype, common to school textbooks, of the Middle Ages as ‘dualistic’ – that is despising or fleeing ‘matter’ or ‘the body’. Common sentiment is that mystical or ascetical literature is the most culpable expression of this and that this tendency reaches its culmination in the fourteenth century. According to Jacques Le Goff, for example, in the spiritual culture of the Middle Ages "a clash between the physiological and the sacred resulted in an effort to deny the existence of biological man". The writings of Rolle, the Cloud-author, Hilton and Julian demonstrate that late medieval mystical writing, at least in England, was not as ‘anti the body’ as popular, and some scholarly, perceptions have held. These writers try to make sense of the body as an important factor in spiritual life. Far from accepting a dualistic anthropology the concern of these writers is the integration of the human person. For them the body is a place for the encounter with God as much as the soul.

A number of recent scholars of fourteenth-century spirituality have seen it as a time of increased asceticism and discomfort with the body. Especially after the plague, late fourteenth-century spirituality is known for its ascetical tenor. Mary Prokes sees a shift in the fourteenth century from a celebration of the body to fear. David Tinsley speaks of “the omnipresence of asceticism in fourteenth-century descriptions of the spiritual life”. Giles Constable argues that self-inflicted punishment of the body was more severe at this time, more emotional in its character and increasingly common among the laity. Asceticism and mysticism are considered related at this time, particularly in popular thinking, while the association of holiness and bodily mortification is seen as stronger among women and rarer among men. Following Caroline Walker-Bynum, scholars have shown that increased bodily asceticism should not be understood as an attempt to separate the soul from the body or as expressive of a body-soul dualism. During the fourteenth century, an increasing emphasis was placed on Christ’s humanity, particularly as revealed in his Passion. In this the body

7 An online information site for A-Level students states: ‘During the Middle Ages, the body was seen as sinful and unclean by the church, and many sought to punish themselves through self-flagellation.’
http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-corporal-punishment.htm#lbs
became the dominant modal of the encounter with God. Imitation of Christ was increasingly read as a ‘fleshly’ imitation, which David Aers calls “the freely chosen affliction of bodily pain”. The classic presentation of this link between affirmation of the body as a (if not the) locus for the encounter with God in Christ and ascetical practice is shown in the work of Bynum.

The distinction made in the nineteenth century between mystical and ascetical theology was, as Bernard McGinn has pointed out, based on an over-rigid compartmentalisation of an earlier distinction between infused and acquired stages of contemplation. McGinn shows that the actual witness of mystical writers is that mysticism as intrinsically ascetical, the preparation for the immediate presence of God being part of the experience itself. Mysticism is a process, related to the whole of life, not peak experiences. McGinn’s reading of ‘asceticism’ assumes its literal meaning as ‘training’ or ‘discipline’ (which may be quite benign and holistic). However in post-medieval viewpoints it often carries a more negative sense as something painful or harmful. Much Reformation criticism of medieval mysticism saw it as inordinately linked to bodily practices that implied ‘salvation by works’. In the Enlightenment those practices were further read as antagonistic to the body and life. Two influential examples: Voltaire (1694-1778) wrote, “It is one of the superstitions of the human mind to have imagined that virginity could be a virtue”. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832): “The ascetic ideal developed through a false idea of utility. It grew into favour only through mistake […] We might ask the ascetic theologians what life would be good for if it were not for the pleasure it enables us to enjoy and what we can expect from the bounty of God in another world, if he has prohibited pleasure in this?”

My examination of fourteenth-century English mystical texts challenges the early modern idea that asceticism for medieval spiritual writers involved body-denial. For example, the popular mid-fourteenth-century Northumbrian poem The Prick of Conscience sees the soul, in both virtuous and sinful state, as in no way wishing to be free of the body:

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14 I will look at Bynum’s work and responses to it in chapter Five.
For thai luf ay togyder to dwelle;
Nouther of them wald other forga
Swa mykel lof es bytwen them twa;
And the mare that twa togyder lufes,
As a man and his wyfe oft proves,
The mare sorow and murnyng
Behove be at thair departyng.
But the body and the saul with the lyfe
Lufes mare samen than man and hys wyfe,
Whether thai be in gude way or ille. 19i

For the four writers whose work I consider, asceticism was seen in terms of self-discipline leading to an integration of body and soul. In this sense they confirm McGinn’s view that mysticism is a flowering of integral ascetic spirituality. However a distinction can be made with Friedrich von Hügel between ‘ordinary asceticism’ and ‘mystical asceticism’. The former is an often painful, and in some mystics’ cases severe, ‘training in self-conquest’. In some form this is requisite to all virtuous life. However ‘mystical asceticism’ for Hügel is more an ‘expansive’ than a ‘restrictive’ movement; it is about reconciling, synthesising, making peace between body and soul so as to dispose them together toward contemplation.20

Rolle, Hilton, the Cloud-author and Julian conciously promote such a ‘mystical’ approach to asceticism. The experience of the immediate presence of God was, for them, in no way dependent on any intensification of bodily practices; in their writing there is little if no emphasis on penitential practice, and even less on self-inflicted pain. In this they differ from much spiritual writing of the time. My thesis is that their actual concern was the integration of body and soul in a way that takes attention away from outward ascetical practice. The body is affirmed as a place of encounter with God through the innate link between body and soul, and not through the self-inflicted punishment of late medieval imitatio Passionis. A brief overview of late medieval spirituality shows increasingly demonstrative and antagonistic corporeal forms of ascetical spirituality. The most common ascetic practices of the Middle Ages and the early modern period were poverty, self-flagellation, fasting, waking, and other works of penitence. Bodily practices were not central to late medieval English mysticism but attitudes to the body (as both support and hindrance)

and how the body is perceived remains a major refrain. As such my study is one of ‘mentalties’.

Many flagellant movements proliferated on the Continent but also in England in response to the Black Death. A practice initially developed as a reaction against a particularly terrifying crisis became an abiding institution. Self-flagellation was, as a rule, practised along with meditations on the Passion, with the aim of imitating Christ's sufferings as in Ludolf of Saxony’s (c.1295-1377) widely read *Vita Christi*. The intensification of Christian asceticism since the twelfth century could be seen as a reaction to the practices of heretical dualists. In Catholic understanding at this time asceticism was an expression of devotion to the humanity of Christ in his poverty and suffering rather than simply a denial of the body. In this way asceticism seems from the late Middle Ages to be very closely linked to mysticism. In popular spirituality there was an increasing desire to see in others, and feel in oneself, psycho-physical manifestations that made clear a connection with the body of Christ. Ascetic practices were not generally intended to be private matters; they were supposed to be public signs, part of a contemporary worldview that saw the ascetic's suffering body as a visible demonstration of election and an exhortation to imitation. In the high Middle Ages asceticism gained a further function not previously present – the inducement of trancelike or ecstatic states with physical symptoms, like in Francis of Assisi’s stigmata.

Most mystical writers of the later Middle Ages reflected popular asceticism, bringing it to an extreme *Imitatio Christi*. However there were exceptions. As Amy Hollywood has pointed out such a link between body and suffering evoked criticism from some theoretical mystics, such as Meister Eckhart (c.1260-?1327) and Margaret Porete (died 1310). My thesis demonstrates that the English mystics of the fourteenth century were critical of ascetic

26 The term 'High Middle Ages' refers to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, 'Late Middle Ages' to the fourteenth and fifteenth.
spirituality. They were therefore counter-cultural in not emphasising self-injurious asceticism as a way to reach God. Their teaching, and the evidence of their lives show no signs of the popular penitential spirituality of the time. They neither encouraged nor practised body denial and did not see self-inflicted bodily suffering as a way to holiness. In contrast, an emphasis on moderation, concern for the body and its place in the spiritual life is a distinct quality of their writing. An important part of their teaching was an attempt to counterbalance contemporary ‘externalisation’ of spirituality by seeing the body in terms of the soul. This is a first step in their attempt to find a theological – that is God-orientated – meaning for the body.

Texts and Contexts

The mystical writers who will be our concern here are the best known part of a large body of spiritual literature produced in late medieval England. The tables below show the texts and sources I use. Rolle was writing in the 1330s and 40s firstly in Latin and then in English. From the extent of surviving manuscripts of his works it is clear that Rolle was the most read English writer of the fourteenth century. He was writing two generations (some fifty years) earlier than Hilton or the Cloud-author, maybe three generations earlier than Julian, but I include him in comparison with them because his influence was very profound on the religious sensibility of the late fourteenth century (and after). Hundreds of his works survive, most manuscript editions are post-1390.²⁰

²⁹ For other examples see Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett & Thomas H. Bestul, (NY/London: Cornell University Press, 1999). Bartlett and Bestul see this genre as products of ‘a complex transaction between authors, texts and audiences’. ‘Introduction’, p. 4. The same is true of the texts I analyse. This thesis does not look at Wycliffite writing, much of which, in its polemic on the role of images in devotion, is relevant to, though beyond the scope of, this thesis.

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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title and Date (where possible) of Composition</th>
<th>Manuscript Used</th>
<th>Estimated Date of Manuscript</th>
<th>Critical Edition Used</th>
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31 In this, and following, tables I accredit only the works made reference to in this thesis: it not exhaustive either of the writer’s full corpus or of various extant manuscript versions.

32 Despite manuscript attribution, Rolle’s authorship of various Passion meditations has been questioned. Allen accepts them as authentic, English Writings, p. 281. Ogilvie-Thompson believes they are the product of considerable later redactions, RRPV, p. xciv. In using them I am accepting the position of Claire Elizabeth McIlroy who accepts the scribal nomenclature as Rolle’s work refers truly to his original authorship..The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 28-35. In respect of different scholarly opinions I will refer to these works as ‘attributed to Rolle’. Though Ogilvie-Watson accepts the ascription to Rolle of the Passion meditation in Longleat MS 29, publishing it as ‘Meditation A’ I have not used it in this thesis.

33 The similarities between ‘Text 1’ in English Writings, and ‘Meditation B’ in RRPV convince me that the former is a root text of the version in Bodlian MS 232 given by Ogilvie-Thompson.

34 In translating I have been helped by Richard Misyn’s fifteenth century translation of Incendium and Emendatio Vitae into Middle-English modernised in M.M. Comper, The Fire of Love and The Mending of Life, (London: Methuen, 1914). Henceforth Misyn.

35 E. Arnould shows convincingly that Melos was written in the later part of Rolle’s life, after Incendium, as against H. E. Allen’s view of an early date, Introduction, Melos, ixv – lxvii.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cloud-author</th>
<th>The Cloud of Unknowing Early 1390s</th>
<th>MS Harleian 674</th>
<th>Early 15th century</th>
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<td>De Adoracione Ymagninum 1387</td>
<td>British Library MS Royal 11BX</td>
<td>Late 14th, with 15th Century additions</td>
<td>English Mystics of the Middle Ages, ed. Barry Windeatt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), As EMMA.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>On Angel’s Song 1386-90</td>
<td>British Library MS Additional 27592</td>
<td>Late 14th Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Mixed Life 1386-90 8 Chapters on Perfection 1390-96</td>
<td>Lambeth Palace MS 472</td>
<td>Early 15th century</td>
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It has been argued that the *Cloud* corpus was written by Hilton. However, differences in style and thought show that despite being influenced by each other they were different.\(^{38}\) *Cloud* was written after (containing two possible references to) Hilton’s *Scale* I.\(^{39}\) Barry Windeatt sees a mutual commentary between Hilton and the *Cloud*-author’s work.\(^{40}\) *Scale* I, written as an epistle to an anchoress, can be dated to the time after Hilton’s entry into religious life, *Scale* 2 some ten years later. The latter shows signs of response the *Cloud*, allowing us to date the *Cloud* to around 1390.\(^ {41}\)

|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Julian received her revelations in 1373. There is some debate as to when her short and long text were completed. Nicholas Watson posits a later date for the *Short Text*, between

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\(^{40}\) *EMMA*, p. 3-4.


\(^{42}\) The Almherst text is the same as that given by Watson and Jenkins (see below). I have selected College & Walsh’s critical edition as I draw more often from their commentary. However at times I refer to the critical apparatus offered by Watson & Jenkins, ‘A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman’, *WJN*, pp. 62-119.

\(^{43}\) The ‘Paris manuscript’ has a more standardized Middle English than the Norfolk dialect of the two ‘Sloane manuscripts’ dating from the seventeenth century, however, it is the earliest and, as Walsh & Colledge say, ‘the most important long-text manuscript’. ‘Introduction’, *Julian of Norwich Showings*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 21. I also refer to the seventeenth century *Sloane MS 2499*, from the critical edition *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgia Ronam Crampton, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993).
1382 and 1388, and Long Text completed in the early 1400s. He even proposes that the Short Text may have been composed after the Long Text even as late as 1410 as a version to placate heresy hunters at the time of the Lollard investigations in Norwich. However Watson later returns to thinking that the Long Text is an elaboration of the Short Text which, likewise, does not read like an abridgment. McGinn likewise believes the Long Text to be cumulative to the Short. Julian says that she meditated on her revelations for nearly twenty years before writing the Long Text. It seems clear that the Short Text was part of that preliminary meditation. I propose, somewhat traditionally with Colledge and Walsh, that that the Short Text was written soon after her near death experience, the Long Text completed roughly contemporaneously with Scale 2 in the mid 1390s.

Medieval texts have to be considered with the accruement of scribal influence and post-authorial interpretation. All the texts consulted are scribal not authorial editions. The extent to which they represent the words of the original authors is a knotty issue. There are many fifteenth-century manuscripts of Rolle’s and Hilton’s work to choose from, their popularity leading to greater variety of versions. Particularly with Scale 1 there are many amendments. As there are fewer extant copies the choice of text is easier with the Cloud-author and Julian. The lateness of the surviving copies of Julian's Long Text (even the ‘Paris’ manuscript is two hundred years posthumous to Julian) raises questions about the integrity of its transmission. However, given that all extant copies were preserved within monastic libraries and were not in wide circulation, there is little evidence for substantial emendations.

**Themes and Ideas**

Writers, and particularly medieval writers who wrote within a religious tradition, did not single-handedly generate ideas but were shaped by historical and contemporary contexts. Part of this thesis is to ask how much these writers expressed an attitude to the body representative of the spirituality of their time and how much they showed originality. In order to answer this I will examine the texts with reference to their theological and scientific background (and the amount and quality of education they had, their impetus for writing and style of discourse).

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All four writers shared a common formation and orientation in relation to the English anchoritic tradition. The *Cloud*-author is anonymous; ideas as to his identity range from Carthusian monk to Adam Easton (1330–1397), the Benedictine Cardinal Vicar.  

However one thing is clear: he wrote his epistles for a young man seeking the solitary life. Whether this was a Carthusian novice or a hermit cannot be proved. The work did however intend a wider readership so at least we can assume that what he wrote was applicable to, and took cognisance of, the vocation of anchoritic life. So all these texts spoke to, or out of, a milieu formed by texts like Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum* (written around 1159) and *Ancrene Wisse* (early 13th century). Rolle was a hermit and wrote his main books and epistles for those seeking a solitary life, as did the *Cloud*-author. It is from this small contemplative milieu that Hilton and Julian applied their message to a broader audience. Julian’s *Short Text* shows signs of being addressed to those following the contemplative life; her longer text sees the message of her revelations as relevant for her “evn Christn”. Similarly, although Hilton’s *Scale* 1 is ostensibly addressed to an anchoress, its very practical teaching soon assured it a wide readership. On the evidence of the extant English manuscripts, *Scale* 1 was more popular in the Middle Ages than *Scale* 2, which contained more advanced teaching – this despite the fact that *Scale* 2 boldly calls all Christians to “contemplation”, and not merely the avowed religious as in *Scale* 1.

All four authors did not emphasise the external forms of solitary life but highlighted the suitable interior disposition. Rolle was the major founding influence of a type of English spirituality that stressed an affective response to God in a personal rather than communal context. It did not look at the external forms of religious life but was concerned with the practice of prayer as the essence of the contemplative’s response to God. For the *Cloud*-author solitude is an orientation of the mind and affections away from earthly or material things toward God. Hilton in *Scale* 2 and Julian’s *Long Text* offer contemplative teaching without any insistence on strict solitude. In these writings the English anchoretic tradition

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49 Ibid, p. 84.  
50 In general one needs to be careful of assuming that parallels between vernacular works imply direct connection, as often a common source is another possibility, but as Watson points out there are good grounds in this case. ‘*Ancrene Wisse*, Religious Reform and the Late Middle Ages’, *A Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 197-226.  
51 There are forty-five extant English manuscripts of *Scale* 1 known, as against only twenty-six of *Scale* 2. Clark & Dorwood, *Walter Hilton*, p. 33.
moves out of the enclosure, a stance made explicit in Hilton’s treatise on *The Mixed Life*, allowing contemplative practice alongside worldly duty.\(^{52}\)

The authors’ impetus for writing was pastoral rather than scholastic, with an emphasis on affectivity. They were concerned with a person’s approach and response to God rather than ideas about God. All the texts we studied were part of the genre of *cura animarum* that arose to supply the demands of the pastoral reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).\(^{53}\)

Part of the concern of the post-Lateran confessional manuals was conformity of bodily comportment for those who take religious vows.\(^{54}\) They did not seek a categorical definition of the body’s relation to God but a resolution of embodiment and its vicissitudes at a personal level. The aim of their writing was to help their readers advance on the spiritual path. The anthropological and theological models they used were in the service of spiritual direction and guidance. The intellect alone was seen as incapable of knowing God. This anti-intellectualist stance is stronger in Rolle and the *Cloud*-author. Hilton and Julian give a stronger place to the Augustinian and Anselmian tradition of ‘faith seeking understanding’.\(^{55}\)

Solitary life was focused on an outreach of love, not on intellectual or even meditative reflection, nor on ascetical practice.

Each epistolary genre is unique.\(^{56}\) Julian, and to some degree Rolle, are passing on the import of personal revelations, write about their own mystical experience and are more autobiographical. Hilton and the *Cloud*-author are anonymous about themselves, basing their authority not on personal experiences but ability to act as a spiritual director. Hilton offers a synthesis of ascetical teaching combining the affective devotion typified by Rolle with a newfound emphasis on the apophatic spirituality inherited from the writings of Dionysius the Areopogite. The *Cloud* does the same, but with a stronger focus on the higher non-imaginative levels of prayer. The contrast between personal and impersonal modes of discourse should not be drawn too far though: Hilton, despite all his disclaimers, obviously draws from his own experience and insights. Julian, despite basing her reflections on a subjective experience, draws out theological meanings valid for all.

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\(^{52}\) *EMMA*, pp. 109-110.


\(^{54}\) Ibid, p. 72.


\(^{56}\) Their heterogeneity means they cannot be called a ’school’ of spirituality which would imply a stronger mutual influence than evident. See McGinn, *Vernacular Mysticism*, p. 331 & ‘The English Mystics’, *CS II*, p. 194.
The difference of the style of discourse may have its roots in the differing didactic authority men and women had in the Church at this time. Women had to base their teaching on direct visionary experience for they had no objective teaching role within the Church. The relationship of the genre of visionary and of psycho-physical narratives in mystical writing to theological learning in the later Middle Ages is a broad subject. Grace Jantzen sees it as a conscious tactic of those who were disenfranchised from any educational training or teaching roles at that time (i.e. women and laypeople). By the fourteenth century the validity and authority of visionary experience, Jantzen believes, was increasingly questioned by those with official theological training. Scholars like Bynum see the fact of women taking up the genre less as a reflection of sociological oppression and more as carrying a theological meaning. Not only were visionary and psycho-physical narratives the only way God’s message could be transmitted through those disenfranchised of any institutional role but it was the only way a particular message about the incarnate, bodily nature of Christ could be communicated.

Lives

We know little about the lives of either Hilton or Julian. Born around 1343, the same year as Julian, Hilton studied Law at Cambridge and probably worked in Canon Law before giving it up to become a hermit, later in 1386 entering the Augustinian priory of Thurgarton in Nottinghamshire. By the time he wrote Scale 1 and Scale 2 he shows himself well versed in both scholastic and ascetical writings with a fluent, if sometimes rather free, command of Latin. The influence of Augustine on his thought is clear. He also wrote treatises in Latin, partly in response to the Lollard controversy, and translated popular works like the Stimulus Amoris. Most of our knowledge of Julian comes from the autobiographical details in the two versions of her vision. Her Showings were given in May 1373 when she was thirty and a half years old, meaning she was born towards the end of 1342. Evidence from wills naming her as a beneficiary show her still alive in 1416. These documents and the Book of Margery Kempe

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locate her as an anchoress at St Julian’s church in Norwich.\(^{61}\) It is now generally accepted she was not an anchoress at the time of her revelations but entered after. Scholars of Julian have also proposed that she was a widow at the time of her revelations and that she only entered anchoritic life in the 1400s.\(^{62}\) Lack of evidence means that such conjectures remain hypothetical.

The question of the amount and quality of Julian’s education is more hotly debated partly due to her reference to herself in the Short Text as “a woman, leued [ignorant]” and in the Long Text as “unletterde”, partly due to the scant record of the means of women’s schooling at this time.\(^{63}\) She may have been educated with the Benedictine nuns at Carrow to which the anchoritic cell at St Julian’s was linked. Although surmises about Julian’s life remain hypotheses, her genius, ability to think creatively and her original use of the spirituality of her time are certain. Denise Baker shows how Julian was well conversed with the affective spirituality of her time and progressed in her own reflection to become a mature thinker of subtle perceptiveness.\(^{64}\) Although Short Text probably antedates Hilton’s Scale 1, their shared milieu and the conservative nature of English mysticism mean that Hilton is “the author who provides the most important context for understanding Julian of Norwich’s intellectual and spiritual formation prior to her visionary experience”.\(^{65}\)

We know even less of the Cloud-author except that he was nearly certainly a priest – a priestly blessing is given at the end of the Cloud, was well educated in Latin and the writings of many spiritual masters – his biggest influences being Dionysius and the Victorine School mediated through Thomas Gallus.\(^{66}\) He wrote for those seeking the solitary life. His main concern being the step from discursive to contemplative prayer that involved the eschewal of images and thoughts. The dialect of his Middle English shows him to have been of the East Midlands, of a similar locale as Hilton. All four writers I look at came from northern and eastern England. From surviving manuscripts of Rolle’s work this seems to be the area where his posthumous influence was greatest.


\(^{62}\)Watson, ‘Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations’, 637-83.


\(^{64}\)Baker, p. 13.

\(^{65}\)Baker, p. 30.

About Rolle we know more through the autobiographical content in *Incendium* and the Canonization service written after his death. Rolle was from Yorkshire, studied at Oxford but left before graduation to become a hermit. There is some debate as to whether he pursued theological studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. He was a master of Latin prose with a distinctive florid, alliterative style. Use of English for his later epistles makes him a pioneer of English vernacular mysticism. He became spiritual director for the nuns at Hampole in Yorkshire where he died in 1349, probably of the Black Death. His output combined devotional writing, personal mysticism and poetry in Latin and vernacular. This corpus not only helped shape the texture of English spirituality with a mixture of practicality and sublime heights, but he also pioneered the nearly tactile, natural flow of Middle English that was to flower in the writing of Langland and Chaucer. This was a language to which the common man/woman could relate; not abstract but concrete, metaphorical and yet sensual, a language where sentiment and expression were closely bound.

**Thesis and Counter Thesis**

Rolle, the *Cloud*-author, Hilton and Julian represent a distinct English approach to spirituality which eschews excess and demonstrative practices. Instead they place attention on a wholeness of body and spirit. They affirm the body as part of the soul. As the soul turns its attention to God the body finds its place by participating in the spiritual journey. It is not dislocated in extreme suffering, nor repressed through harsh discipline but integrated. As the *Cloud* puts it: “This werk asketh a ful greet restfulnes, & a ful hole, & a clene disposicion, as wele in body as in soule. & therfore for Godes loue gouerne thee discreetly in body & in soule, & gete thee thin hele as mochel as thou mayst.” The writers' differences lie in their approaches. However, writing out of an anchoritic milieu or, in the case of the *Cloud*-author, possibly out of a Carthusian eremitical life, they did not represent a discrete ‘school of spirituality’. Such an integral grouping would need stronger shared formation and mutual influence – as Franciscan, Dominican or Cistercian writers did in the high Middle Ages. However they are tied together through a shared late medieval English anchoritic/solitary culture, a pioneering use of the vernacular as a medium for religious writing, and commentary on each other’s work.

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68 *Cloud*, 44/34-36.
Rolle, as the first and most influential of the writers, set the tone for the type of English spirituality and its attitude to the body. Both the Cloud-author and Hilton commented on his work and Julian was certainly influenced by his writing. Furthermore the Cloud-author and Hilton were familiar with, and wrote their treatises partly in response to, each other. I argue that there is little doubt that Julian had assimilated much of this tradition in her own unique reflections.

As a group of very individual, even idiosyncratic, writers they can hardly be called a ‘school of spirituality’ but in terms of influence they can be seen as mutually fecund. This is nowhere seen more clearly than in their respective attitudes to the body in the spiritual life. Each has a very distinctive even different approach and yet, on closer examination, they can be seen as building on, and commenting on the influence of others. As a group of eminently pastoral writers, concerned with the practicalities of contemplation, the criterion for the body seems to have been: ‘how can it be helpful in the spiritual life?’ The diversity of their responses shows the complexity of attitudes to the body in spiritual writing at the time.

In this thesis I focus on the writers’ responses to the role of the body in prayer and their emphasis on an integration of the body as part of spiritual life. I demonstrate this according to five themes, reflected in five chapters. In chapter One I argue that the concern of the authors was the process of spiritual transformation seen as a journey into the psychophysical wholeness and transformation of the body. In chapter Two I show that although the body in this life was seen as a barrier to the beatific vision it had an important role both in the initial stages of the spiritual life and in its ultimate fulfilment in heaven. In chapter Three I will posit the link between outer and inner senses as a key to understanding the ways in which bodily sensation was analogous to perception of God, particularly in relation to late medieval optical theory and the processes of spiritual vision. The analogy is stronger than the use of similar linguistic metaphors, for the English mystics at this time it implied a real connection. In chapter Four my thesis is that the language of denial of the body needs to be understood in these writings as part of a dialectic of affirmation and negation, more concerned about what can and cannot be said about God than about any anthropological dualism. In chapter Five I suggest that the body as the locus of corporeal works and imaginative meditations was understood by these writers as a threshold for contemplation, a place of meeting between the human and the Divine.

In this thesis I draw connections between mystical writing and medical, anthropological and philosophical attitudes of the time. By understanding the context to the way the body was perceived I will show how these Middle English writers articulated a
spirituality not based on bodily asceticism. In countering a dualistic conception of the human person they were able to limit bodily discipline to a preparatory stage on the spiritual path, the aim of which was to set the body free so that it could be, in Hilton’s words; “no ellis but as an instrument and a trompe of the soule”.

Having stated my thesis it is only fair to show that a case against it can be raised from the texts themselves. A superficial reading of the texts yields that they could be interpreted as characteristically ‘medieval’, placing the writers firmly within the ascetical and dualist mystical genre. It is not surprising that the writers were not wholly independent of the influence of their time. However at times they all can seem to be classic exponents of a spirituality based on body-soul antagonism. A cursory reading might raise objections to my thesis from my proof texts themselves. For example, in Incendium Rolle urges restraint of the senses and separation of men and women; “que medici corporum et interflectores animarum conficere nituntur”. The chosen Christian is the one “quo hec terrena pro nihil reputans”.

After worldly things are renounced “deinde stricte penetencie carnem subiciunt”.

In Melos Amoris bodily desire leads to a distracted heart:

Namque nimirum minime cognoscitur canor a carne quia quassantur carnales cupidine corvina [...] Concluditur captivus in carne et cor suum non colligit ut capiat Conditorum.

This is echoed in Rolle’s English writings. In order to find delight in God the first step is “restreynynge of flesshly lust in compleccioun”. Attraction to any “bodily thyng” hinders union with God. “Thi fleishe” (with the world and the Devil) is one of the three “enemyes” to be “ouercum [...] throgh discrete abstinence”.

Hilton can use even more negative language about the body and its faculties. The senses through which the soul goes out of itself to earthly things are the five windows of the image of sin. In order to arrive at the perception of spiritual things it “bihoveth stoppe the wyndowis and spere hem”. He opens Scale 2 by saying that man is the image of God

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69 Scale 2/248/3214-3215.
70 Incendium, 8 /167: ‘People like to have things to please the body, and kill the soul in the process.’
71 Incendium, 19/200: ‘who reduces earthly things to nothing.’
72 Incendium, 28/223: ‘then they put their bodies under severe penance.’
73 Melos, 52/2-3: ‘For the song is not known at all by the flesh because carnal people are agitated by desire like restless crows’, & 53/16-17: ‘the captive in the flesh does not collect his heart to attain his creator.’
74 Desyre & Delit, RRPV, 40/9-10. ‘Complexion’ in medieval understanding meant the bodily constitution of an individual. I look at this in chapter 5, section 3 of this thesis.
75 Ego Dormio, RRPV, 28/14.
76 Ibid, 30-31/150-151, 155-157.
77 Scale 1/120/2279-2280.
according to the soul and not to the body.⁷⁸ He makes even more explicit that the image of sin in the human person has a bodily nature and is sensuality.⁷⁹ Referring to the opening of the spiritual eye he says that “there is no mene lettyng atwixe Jhesu and the soule, but oonli the bodili lyf”.⁸⁰ On the spiritual path the body is a limitation and a hindrance: “For ai there hangeth an hevy lompe of bodili corrupcioun on his soule, and bereth it doun and moche letteth the goostli gladdenesse, and that mote ai be while it is in this life.”⁸¹vi

When we turn to the Cloud there often seems to be a strong body-soul/spirit dualism. He writes:

God is a spirit; & whoso schuld be onid vnto hym, it behouith to be in sothfastnes & deepnes of spirit, ful fer fro any feynid bodely thing [...] For alle bodely thing is ferther fro God bi the cours of kynde then any goostly thing.⁸²vii

At times he seems to say that the body is not part of the spiritual life: “Euermore where thou fyndest wreteten thiself in goostlines, than it is understonden thi soule, & not thi body.”⁸³viii

If we look to Julian we see someone who prayed for physical illness so she might have an experience of Christ’s suffering.⁸⁴ In chapter 64 of the Long Text she contrasts the body and the soul starkly:

I sawe a body lyeng on the erth, which body shewde hevy and feerfulle and withoute shape and forme, as it were a swilge, stinkyng mire. And sodeynly oute of this body sprong a fulle fair creature, a litlle chiilde, full shapen and formed, swift and lifly and whiter then the lilye, which sharply glied uppe into heven. The swilge of the body betokeneth grette wretchednesse of oure dedely flesh, and the littilhede of the childe betokeneth the clennes and the puernesse of oure soule. And I thought: “With this body bliveth no fairhede of this childe, ne of this chiilde dwelleth no foulhede of the body.⁸⁵ix

To read the English mystics from these references alone would give a false impression. My thesis is that Middle English mystics were concerned with levels of spiritual growth beyond the purely ascetical. In fact they wrote little on asceticism. I argue that in their writings there was no attempt to undermine the body or deny it as part of the human person. Discipline of the body and senses is encouraged but described more as the fruit of contemplation than the condition of it. Control of the senses is a preparatory state which

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⁷⁸ Scale 2/134/1-2.
⁷⁹ Scale 2/147/345: ‘this synneful image that is the bodily kynde’; 2/153/000-501: ‘bi the lawe of the flessch I undirstonde the sensaulyte, whiche I calle the ymage of synne.’
⁸⁰ Scale 2/ 237/2879-2880.
⁸¹ Scale 2/245/3125-3127.
⁸² Cloud, 47/49/14-16, 20-21.
⁸³ Cloud, 64/10-11.
⁸⁵ LT, WJN, 325/24-31.
enables the body to participate in the orientation of the soul to God. Prayer for these writers is a process of integration, as Rolle says in his ‘Prologue’ to his English Psalter, it “makes pees bytwixt body and saule”.

Prayer was the antidote to anthropological dualism. Therefore although there is no doubt that these writers did reflect the ascetical attitudes of their time, asceticism was never an end in itself, rather it was a means toward personal integration and the opening of the whole person – body and soul – to God.

The continuous interaction of language about body and soul so evident in these writings makes more sense as ‘performative rhetoric’ than as an attempt to give the spiritual life a ‘location’. Various scholars have attributed the ‘performative’ mode of discourse that attempts to evoke an experience by recreating it in language to Rolle. The overall purpose of the texts examined was to instil and further the process of spiritual growth and transformation. In this the authors followed St Paul’s attitude to the body in his description of rapture – “whether in the body or out of the body I do not know” – which evokes rather than defines. Like Paul, the English mystical writers saw the Divine-human encounter ‘happen’ not in a place but as part of a process that was relational. I suggest that the spiritual life is ‘performed’ in the text through an interaction of discourse on body and soul. In this performance – acted out in late medieval English mystical writing – the human person was shown as a body-soul relation. In prayer the body played various roles and anti-roles, but was never simply ‘the bad guy’. The body was at times seen as an enemy to be fought, at times a distraction to be shunned, and at others as a helpmate, a companion, or as part of the soul.

**Methodology for the Body**

In looking at attitudes to the body in fourteenth-century English mystical literature both biological and theological issues are raised that necessitate a historical perspective. Two distinct questions follow: One concerns how these writers understood the body, the other is why they understood it in the way they did. These approaches require different methodologies. For the former – a question of meaning – the historical context is important but only as a background for theological assessment of the ideas of distinct writers. The question ‘why?’ is concerned more with the derivation of those ideas, conscious and

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86 English Writings, 5/13-14.
88 II Corinthians 12: 2-4.
unconscious and thus, as a historical issue, involves a much broader context of intellectual and psychological influence. My thesis will look at the first question: how do attitudes to the body in particular texts contradict dualistic interpretations of the human person? My approach uses source criticism from the perspective of theology. My methodology is based on the fact that writers’ primary concern was men and women's relation to God. Although I will not focus on the reasons that may lie at the root of the attitudes to the body, the conceptual framework these writers were working in is important for the interpretation of their work. The historical context of the mystical writings, briefly outlined at the beginning of the Introduction, formed the culture of the writers. Some of my research uncovers the underlying anthropological models that may have shaped them, recognising that in the Middle Ages ideas about the human person cannot be divorced from theology.

Discourse on the body came from various disciplines in the Middle Ages, as it does today: a medical approach was different to a mystical one. The body as an object of experience (the Cartesian *res extensa*) is today primarily felt to lie within the domain of science. In the Middle Ages the relation of body and soul, corporeal and incorporeal realities, creation and God, were the domain of theology. In mystical discourse, 'the body' is different from the perspective of academic theology of the time. It is approached not as an object of discussion but as a fact of subjective experience. The body as ‘perceiving subject’ is related to the body as ‘perceptible object’ most clearly in the practice of medicine and the visual arts. To reach a clearer understanding of the writers' attitudes to the body, I examine late medieval understandings of the body in art and medicine (see chapters Three to Five). Textual interpretation is helped by a full appreciation of the cultural discourse on the body at the time. My methodology is one of comparison between the authors, allowing me to highlight the concerns of their time rather than reading contemporary issues about the body today into their work. I take into consideration recent studies on the phenomenology of perception, gender and language in mystical discourse as ways of probing the implications of the texts. By understanding the historical, cultural and intellectual context of the time and by situating the debate among contemporaneous writers my study will be both historically specific and open to the investigative tools of some modern schools of theology, history and hermeneutics.89

Before we can understand the writers’ arguments, we need to look at what they (and their audience) meant by ‘the body’. The questions I raise are those they themselves raised. The issue of the body was both topical and unresolved at the time. In what way were the

89 For example, theology of the body, creation centred spirituality, women’s studies, perceptual phenomenology.
bodily senses related to the spiritual life? Were there such things as interior senses and how were these ‘linked’ to their corporeal counterparts? Was bodily sensation a way of knowing God or a hindrance? What was the difference between the ‘body’ and the ‘flesh’? Was the relation of the body and the soul different in a state of grace and in a state of sin? Could comportment, lifestyle, sickness, health, posture and bodily practices affect the soul’s relation to God?

Mystical writers in England at this time took their stance either affirming or denying the body as a locus of the divine-human encounter, making it the central debate on mystical experience. The variety of middle English mysticism ranging from Rolle’s concrete imagery used to describe his ecstatic experiences (‘heat’, ‘song’ and ‘sweetness’) to the vividly visual showings of Christ’s passion in Julian’s work witness the concern of the time to speak about embodiment. The desire for bodily things to mediate God’s presence, dominant in the late Middle Ages, was augmented in England by Rolle’s sensually metaphoric poetry. At the same time the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were reaching a wider audience, a reminder that the encounter with God was ultimately beyond any mediating influence. The popularity of texts like that of the Cloud and Hilton’s Scale are proof of the remarkable meeting of cataphatic and apophatic spirituality in late medieval England.

By drafting the complex ‘map’ of the body at the time, I show that stereotypes of body-soul dualism do not fit the diversity of interpretations. I demonstrate that within the variety of approaches to the body in fourteenth-century mystical writing, there was a united concern to demythologise the use of body as a metaphor. There was an attempt to arrive at a ‘realist’ attitude to the body as something tangible, perceptible, locatable, as an object of certainty in a changing social and metaphysical world. My thesis will therefore corroborate the idea that there was a rise of an individual sense of the body against the social or institutional body in the fourteenth century. This ‘fascination with the flesh’ was not just the sign of a culture in disintegration and decadence; it was rather an attempt to come to terms with the body from a theological viewpoint.

91 Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study in the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, (London: Arnold, 1950, first published 1924). Ch. 12, ‘Religious Thought Crystallizing into Images’, sees the reification of late medieval religiosity into a concern with objects, places and bodily signs as symptoms of a spent culture. For revival it needed the new impulse of Classical humanism.
Chapter One: Body as Wholeness and Transformation

In this chapter I will look at how Rolle and the Cloud-author understood the role of the spiritual senses as a link between mystical experience and the body. I will show that for authors as different as these the process of spiritual transformation was seen as a journey into psycho-physical wholeness. Asceticism is not a theme of their work but rather the transformation of the body as part of the soul. The body, understood as the outward expression of the soul, could act spiritually as the soul orientated itself towards God. This explains why, for writers like Rolle, the spiritualised sensuality of mysticism is expressed in the language of earthly sense perceptions. I will demonstrate: 1) the complexity of the attitude to the body in English mystical writing at this time; 2) that the writers were aware of the tension between body and spirit; 3) that there was a concerted effort among them to give a theological rationale to this tension; 4) that the meaning of the body was found in its spiritualization (though this was understood in different ways by Rolle and the Cloud-author). Unlike previous scholarship I show that there is a clear orientation in English mysticism at this time toward a theological understanding of the redemption of the body.

This chapter is divided into four sections, beginning with the understanding of the relation of the body to spiritual perception in the later Middle Ages and the relevance of the English mystics to this debate. In the second and third sections I look respectively at how Rolle and the Cloud-author related the language of spiritual sensation to the body. In the fourth section, I show that concern for the body of Christ and the Resurrection of the flesh disproves what a number of recent scholars have seen as a solipsistic search for personal experience in these writers. Late medieval English mysticism was both incarnate and relational. I conclude by challenging the old contrast between Rolle and the Cloud-author. Their attitude to the body shows they are working along a common trajectory toward its redemption.

There was a shift in attitudes to the flesh from the early to late Middle Ages. Awareness of the vicissitudes and potentialities of the body found a new meaning in relation to the suffering body of Christ and his Resurrection. The distinct and contrasting use of the terms caro (flesh) and corpus (body) in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) for example are tempered by a later medieval understanding of carnal love of Christ as a way of integrating fleshly affections into the spiritual life. For Augustine caro was the sinful or disordered nature of corpus. If the body is in harmony with the mind and intelligence it is a
meaningful part of the human person. It forms the ‘outer man’. However the disordered body renders it useless, meaningless and irrational, something alien and subversive of what it is to be human, something beastly. For Augustine the human compound of body and soul occupied an unstable position between the gross flesh or animality on the one side, and the idealised, fleshless body of the Resurrection on the other. For Augustine there was a hierarchy of the body from lower to higher manifestations with the lower part being the carnal appetites whose disorder created the flesh.¹

In the high Middle Ages there was a new sense of how the flesh itself played a role in the spiritual path. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was the great mystical authority of this period. To love God for God’s gifts was to love God carnally but this could be an initiation into deeper love.² In fact a new emphasis on the humanity of Christ, from the twelfth century, led to a heightened sense of his body which enabled, a fleshly devotion to Christ.³ There was also an increasing sense of the flesh being a constitutive part of the beatific vision. Debates about the place and meaning of the body in relation to the soul were linked to discussions of the Resurrection. Here, as often in the history of the Church, there is a link between the popular and academic interests of the time. The flowering of somatic miracles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries coincided with a lively interest in scholastic debate over the beatific vision and its relation to corporeal Resurrection.⁴

Late-medieval scholastic use of Aristotle meant there was a new emphasis on the human person as both body and soul. For Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) the soul was the form of the body. At the time of the general Resurrection deceased souls would receive matter again which, under the formative influence of the soul, was meant to create the person. Aquinas believed that the matter received by the soul after the Resurrection need not be the same as that during its earthly life. Matter separated from the soul is generic and lacks specificity, it is only made personal in union with the soul.⁵ However the soul is also incomplete without the ‘stuff’ of corporeality.⁶ I look at this new scholastic anthropology in

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² Bernard, One Loving God, Chs. 8 & 9.
⁵ Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk. 4, Ch. 75. Summa Theologica 1a, Qu. 75, article 4, reply to objection 2.
the second chapter, while here I focus on changes in attitudes to the spiritual senses among mystical writers.

Increasingly in fourteenth-century descriptions of souls in heaven the material senses of the body were understood as functioning in a literal way. The application of sense metaphor to spiritual experience was increasingly seen as a real activity of the body. This was an issue for the Middle English mystics. In McGinn’s view Rolle “does not divide the external senses as good creations of God from the forms of interior perception that enhance their activity in the spiritual realm”. To show something of the variety as well as the common concern of ‘the English mystics’ on the theme of the spiritual senses I make a more focused comparison of Rolle and the Cloud-author. In this I will be guided by Gordon Rudy.8

Although Rudy does not look at the English mystics, and it is unlikely that any of them were influenced by the writers he studies, the issues he raises are pertinent to our study. For instance, he questions how sensory language transcribes experience; was it a record of sensory experience or a metaphor for something else? He also questions whether his authors’ language about the body was primarily autobiography or theology, about their experience or about God? He also examines how these bodily and spiritual referents work together, whether by grace or by an innate affinity. The answers Rudy gives are problematic in that he takes his examples from across widely differing eras, language groups and religious contexts. He sees this himself and says he is not trying to illustrate broad trends but show “possible and recurring answers or types of answers to a persisting question or problem”.9

Rudy sees a shift in the language of spiritual sensation in the high and late Middle Ages which stressed the psycho-somatic unity of the human person. A more dualistic reading of the spiritual senses, as first articulated by Origen (c.184-253), continued in the late medieval university milieu but among contemporaneous mystical writers, Rudy argues, a sensual and tactile language emerged that opened the possibility that God could be known because, not despite of the body.10 Secondly, there was an inversion of traditional ranking of spiritual senses: Taste and touch were considered by most Christian theologians before the twelfth century to be too somatic and thus inappropriate to discuss how we know God. However high medieval mysticism used these senses to evoke the immediacy of mystical

7SSPGWC, p. 208.
9 Ibid, p. 112.
10 Bernard, for example, ‘distinguishes only weakly between the corporeal and spiritual senses’, they are the same senses only directed earthward or heavenward. Ibid, pp. 6, 45-48.
experience, sight and hearing implied meditation over distance and cognitive processing, while taste and touch implied an affective intimacy.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 5, 55-61, 67, 101-103.}

However by looking at the English mystics of the fourteenth century we have the advantage of a more compact group of texts with shared influences (Cistercian, Carthusian and anchoritic), shared linguistic medium (what McGinn calls “the new vernacular theology”), and common pastoral concern (for the solitary life).\footnote{CS II, pp. 194-194.} Wolfgang Riehle looks at the problem of expressing mystical experience in language saying that the Middle English mystics attempted to make their mystical themes clear by means of “sensual concrete metaphors and images”. Riehle stresses that sense language when applied to mysticism is an attempt to describe the ineffable and is therefore a form of symbolism or rhetoric, and yet sense metaphors are not haphazardly chosen but are drawn from Biblical sources and later commentaries.\footnote{The Middle English Mystics, tr. Bernard Standring, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 6-7.} The link of inner and outer meanings of scripture means that the ‘ineffable’ carries with it its own grammar. The focus on language as disguise or evocation of meaning leads to the apophatic and cataphatic forms of Middle English mysticism. As Riehle says; “if the author of the Cloud speaks mostly in abstract terms of the naked existence of God, Rolle attempts to make God sensually conceivable through his language.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 116.}

In this chapter I will argue rather that there is a real connection between sense language and the mysticism of this group of writers. Middle English mysticism accepts the ‘fact’ of embodiment as something that has to be dealt with. \textit{Apophasis} and \textit{cataphasis} are not just about language but about the way contemplation relates to the body either through affirmation or a fully conscious negation.\footnote{The ‘apophatic’ approach to God, associated with fifth-century writer known as Pseudo-Dionysius, involves recognising the limitations of thought and imagination. The ‘cataphatic’ approach attempts to express and evoke something of the Divine attributes and therefore affirms the use of thought and imagination in prayer. It is clear in Christian spirituality that these are not distinct but are complementary ‘ways’. See Philip Sheldrake, \textit{Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method}, (London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 199-206. (I use these terms, however, as a tendency toward one or another approach has implications on the way the body is viewed.)} This chapter will show that Rolle and the \textit{Cloud-author} offer respectively a \textit{via affirmativa} and \textit{via negativa} of the language of spiritual sensation. The former affirms, the later deconstructs the inherent connection of spirituality with the body. This realism comes partly though pastoral concern – helping people to pray as embodied beings – and partly through looking at the body in the light of its eternal destiny – the eschatological reconciliation of body and spirit in the general Resurrection. In this part of
my thesis I will show how looking at attitudes to the body in mysticism can better help explain the way mystical writers used the language of spiritual sensation.

### Bodily Realism and the Language of Spiritual Sensation

A number of scholars have pointed out an ‘anti-penitential’ attitude to the body in Rolle’s writings. Rolle is concerned that the body does not get exhausted; for contemplation is only open to those who “*summam quietem mentis et corporis capientes*”. The rest the mystic comes to is a rest of body as well as soul, a psycho-physical repose. This is why, at least in *Incendium*, Rolle sees contemplation as impossible for those “*seculi negociis licitis uel illicitis occupantur*” for ‘*summa quies [...] in nimia mocione corporis uel in constancia et vagacione mentis nequaquam uel accipitur uel tenetur*’. As he puts it in *Melos Amoris*; “*nam fatigato corpore, cor iam in canore non calet quietum*”.

Rolle records how he tries various postures for prayer and finally decides that sitting is the best. The reason he gives is the psycho-physical unity of the human person: “*Huis rei causa non ignoro quia si homo multum stet uel ambulet corpus eius fatigatur et sic impeditur anima et quodammodo lacescit pre onere.*” This is echoed in Rolle’s late work *The Form of Living*:

> Al that loueth contemplatif lif, thai seke rest in body and in soule [...] And I haue loued for to sit, for no penaunce [...] bot only for I knewe that I loued God more, and langar lested with me comfort of loue, than goynge or standynge or knelynge. For syttnge am I in most reste.

However, in *Incendium*, Rolle is careful to note that when the mind is reaching out to Christ then bodily rest is not fleshly sloth: “*Inanis uero homo non sedet, qui et lingua taceat, mente tamen ad Christum clamat; quia corpus carnali requie nunquam quiescit, dum mens celestia desiderare non tabescit.*”

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17 *Incendium*, 11/176: ‘take great rest in mind and body.’  
18 *Incendium*, 37/257: ‘Those occupied with worldly business, lawful or unlawful’, 35/246: ‘in much bodily business, as in unsteadiness of mind, high rest is neither attained nor held.’  
19 *Melos*, 12/15-16: ‘when the body is tired, then the heart is not able to be quiet’.  
20 *Incendium*, 14/185: ‘I am aware there is an underlying reason for this, for if a man or woman does much standing or walking their body gets tired, and thus their soul too is hindered, wearied and burdened.’  
22 *Incendium*, 28/225: ‘The man truly sits not idle the which in mind cries to Christ although his tongue be still; for the body never rests in fleshly rest when the mind stints not to desire heavenly things.’
The same is true of fasting. Rolle prefers moderation to fasting for, as he says, a sound constitution is needed for contemplation: “Melius tamen esset pro se si in modico nesciens excederet mensuram, dummodo bona intencione ad sustentandum naturam illud agat, quam si nimis ieunio deficere inceperet et pre imbecilitate corporis canere non ualeret.”

That the body must not be neglected is a refrain throughout Incendium: “Electi quippe comedunt et bibunt et tota cogitacione semper ad Deum intendunt”; “Carnalique mollicies nec queritur nec amatur.”

In Melos Amoris he puts it simply: “Sanctitas non sistit in cilicio et cinere nec in aliquo quod exterius operamur, sed in gustu gaudii amoris eterni.” Rolle insists that contemplative ‘song’ continues uninterrupted “nisi corpus percussum nimium tabescat.”

“Et inde sit cautus,” he writes, “[...] nam fervorem felicem et cantum captatum fugat fatigacio et fugere facit ministerium mechanicum vel cursus corporalis.”

Also in his English works the contemplative “sekes more to loue [God] than do any penaunce”. Moderation is especially emphasized in The Form of Living where he urges the reader to “susten har body in [God’s] seruice”. The criterion for fasting is “a good meen”, just enough to hold the flesh under the spirit without weakening it.

Concerning austerities Rolle may be more severe in his personal practice than in his teaching to others. The Vitae composed soon after his death for the cause of his canonization states that “macerauit carnem suam multis ieiuniis crebis uigiliis insistendo singultibus atque suspiris. Deserens omnem strati molliciem. Scamnum durum habens pro lecto. Breuem casellam pro dom.” However hagiographical texts often reflect popular contentions of sanctity, whereas an author’s own writing is a more reliable source for their actual practice. Hollywood has noted that late medieval hagiography tends to stress external, often bodily, manifestations of holiness, while the writing of many mystics under-emphasizes this, focusing

23 Incendium, 11/175: ‘Better to overrun the limit to sustain the body, than to fall because of too much fasting, where the body becomes too weak to be able to sing.’

24 Incendium, 1/149: ‘The elect eat and drink like everyone else, the difference is their mind is always fixed on God’. 36/49: ‘The weaknesses of the flesh are neither to be sought nor loved’. See also ‘The Form of Living’, RRPV, 4/62-65 & 8/195-202.

25 Melos, 122/9-11: ‘Holiness does not consist in hair shirts and ashes, nor in anything that we perform exteriorly, but in the taste of eternal love.’

26 Melos, 151/27-28: ‘unless the body that is struck wastes away exteriorly.’

27 Melos, 155/23-25: ‘Consequently he should be cautious [...] for fortunate favours and sort after song are put to flight by tiredness, servile labour or bodily activity.’


29 RRPV, 5/81.


31 Officium and Miracula, p. 31: ‘he mortified his flesh with many fasts, with frequent vigils, and repeated sobs and sighings, quitting all soft bedding, and having a hard bench for his bed, and for a house a small cell.’
rather on ‘inner’ experience. Hollywood sees this discrepancy as marked in comparing accounts by, and accounts of, women mystics. It could also be the case for Rolle who, as we shall see in chapter Five, shows many characteristics of ‘female mysticism’. Moreover Rolle’s ‘teachings’ are not just didactic but autobiographic; he gives his own account of how he regulated his life and urges the same to his readers. There is no reason to think he practised differently than he preached.

One mystical writer, an exact contemporary of Rolle, who showed extreme bodily asceticism was Henry Suso (c.1295-1366). Suso like Rolle was literary mystic expressing ecstatic bridal themes and devotion to the Holy Name. He was also a guide to religious women. However in their approach to asceticism they were quite different. Suso, at least in the earlier phase of his practice before he emphasized a more psychological and internal suffering, wore a nailed hair shirt and attached a nailed cross to his back to make him bleed. However somatised religious experience need not be understood solely in terms of physical ascetical practices. The body also expresses itself in sensory language. In mysticism such sensory language has theological significance as well as anthropological and sociological meaning. It has something to say about God.

A number of recent scholars have noted how Rolle focuses on the human person of Christ, his body and personality. Vincent Gillespie sees this affectivity in Rolle as ‘Cistercian’ in that Jesus (in his human nature and by virtue of the compassion we feel for his sufferings) attracts to himself the carnal affection which affective writers wished to overcome. Thus the will is set free from passion by transferring the affections onto Christ. On the other hand, as Nicholas Watson points out Rolle encouraged advanced contemplatives to move beyond the need to focus intensively on the humanity and passion of Christ. Meditation on the historical Christ is merely preparatory. However the body of Christ for Rolle was not just limited to imaginative meditation but continues as a very ‘real’ experience. Discursive reflection and devotion were left behind but Rolle did not by that propose an abstract, disincarnate or purely spiritual experience of ‘God’. The Christ of the Gospels was superseded, but the ‘external’ object of devotion was now perceived working inwardly in the

34 Bynum demonstrates a late-medieval focus on the body in mystical writing but reads it predominantly in terms of a phenomenology of physical piety.
37 Invention of Authority, pp. 55, 19.
mystic's own soul. It still remains an encounter with the human Jesus. In one of his meditations Rolle prays: “Swete Ihesu, yeve me grace to haue most deynte to the inwardly loke and thynk vpon that blessed face, and, swet Ihesu, restore the lyknesse of thy face and in my soule.”

Rosamund Allen commenting on this prayer says that the concept of the soul as an image of Christ is a way of representing the immanence of God in Christ. However, she says, usually “the immanence of God appears in Rolle’s conceptual imagery in the form of heat and taste and sound imagery, rather than visual or pictorial images”. A lot of debate has been had as to how much Rolle’s leitmotif experiences of ‘heat’, ‘sweetness’ and ‘song’ should be taken literally as psycho-physical experiences or how much as metaphor for something purely spiritual. Riehle and Allen argue for a non-literal reading of Rolle’s experiences. Riehle makes a distinction between language and the experience described; he also shows that the rhetoric and symbolism used is not poetic or arbitrary but inherent to the experience as mediated by the language of scripture and tradition. For Riehle, scripture explains the ‘realist’ nature of some of Rolle’s language.

In Riehle and Allen’s view therefore Rolle’s use of sensory language is not necessarily linked to sensory experience. Rita Copeland and Nicholas Watson in contrast believe that one cannot split rhetoric from experience. “Experientia,” Watson writes, “can become the basis of authoritas because of Rolle’s ability to defend and explain his experience, but above all because of his ability to recreate them verbally”. Watson goes on to look at the way Rolle describes his experience using sensory language. Unlike Riehle he does not see this as metaphor. He sees in Rolle’s writings a gradual shift from conventional and rhetorical sense imagery to a very realist description of a spiritual sense. Particularly in ‘song’ Watson sees in Rolle’s account a carefully defined movement from the ‘outer’ to the ‘inner’ sense. Analysing Rolle’s descriptions of his different experiences Watson believes that in ‘song’ Rolle most clearly moves from metaphor to literal experience. Metaphor becomes literal as the senses have a foretaste of heavenly joys. The capacity for interior ‘song’ becomes Rolle’s criterion for the contemplative ‘elect’ who have already ‘entered into their homeland’. The non-penitential quality of Rolle’s writing is based on his belief that experience itself regulates the passions. Once ‘song’ is acquired the contemplative can rest in ‘high repose’.

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38 ‘Meditation B’, RRPV, 72/141-143.
Riehle’s approach is problematic: on the one hand he makes a distinction between language and the experience, and yet he tries to show that the rhetoric and symbolism used are inherently linked to, and descriptive of, the experience. Riehle considers the repertoire of bodily symbolism in mystical writing to be descriptive of what happens in spiritual perception. However he does not analyse how language can be at once symbolic and literal.

Watson prefers to see the sensual nature of mystical discourse, especially as found in the writings of Rolle, as a ‘performative rhetoric’. Rolle’s ability to recreate his experiences verbally is a conscious attempt to draw the bodily senses inwardly onto spiritual things. However the problem remains: if sensory language can transcribe spiritual experience how do the mystics express that relation? Is their language about the body in mystical discourse primarily autobiography or theology? If it speaks both of the human and divine, as Rudy, Riehle and Watson try to show, how do these bodily and spiritual referents work together, by grace or by an innate affinity?

How the writers I am looking at used the language of spiritual sensation was shaped by their attitude to the body. For the English mystics, this attitude was shaped more by theological than anthropological suppositions. Rolle, and the mystical writers who followed him, returned continuously to discussion of the body of Christ and of bodily Resurrection in their discourse on the body. Inherent to the body is spatial location and boundary between the inner and outer. For Rolle these factors of embodiment were read with reference to the body of Christ experienced interiorly and yet with the bodily senses. From being an external object of devotion Christ’s corporeality is used to explain the actual bodily experience of the mystic. This cohesion of the mystic’s body with Christ’s bears fruit in bodily Resurrection. For Rolle this spiritualisation of sensation could be tasted even in this life.

**Resurrection and the Body of Christ**

The use of bodily parameters to describe spiritual experience was, for Rolle, not metaphorical or rhetorical but descriptive. Spiritual sensation for him really was corporeal. Rolle’s use of physical imagery for spiritual experience is not just a ‘muddle of terms’ but has a clear directionality behind it. In each of Rolle’s psycho-physical experiences there is an orientation from the body and outer senses to the soul and inner sensation. In the debate over Rolle’s writings, scholars have not adequately stressed that he understood his ‘sensations’ as an encounter with the inner Christ. Rolle urges the contemplative in *The Commandment* to
“Sek inwardly”.\textsuperscript{42} This, I believe, helps explain Rolle’s attitude to psycho-physical experiences as a movement from Christ as an external object of devotion to one that is ‘felt’ within his own sensibility. With this goes a corresponding movement from the outer physical senses to the inner spiritual senses. For Rolle the inner Christ he experienced was still an encounter with the body and sensuality of Christ in his resurrected form. The resurrected presence of the human body of Christ within him, mind and body, became the theological basis for Rolle’s idea or experience of the ‘spiritual senses’. The ‘spiritual senses’ for Rolle are therefore the resurrected sensuality of Christ working ‘internally’, within the soul of the mystic. The theme culminates in \textit{Melos Amoris}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Circumvolvat eterna charitas interiorem hominem nostrum et incedat illum igne dalcifluo, redigat in aliam gloriam ac transformet in sue nature similitudinem, quodammodo deificans illum, ut absorpta substantia spiritualis fervore increato […] ipsi bona spiritualia et corporalia non cessat adoptare.}\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

The spiritual senses can ‘feel’ very much like the outer senses. Rolle at the beginning of his experience of ‘heat’ mistook the one for the other, interpreting the internal as external. Psycho-physical experience is not therefore an end in itself, something to be sought after, nor is it merely a metaphor unrelated to real embodiment. Rolle stresses that there is a movement from body to soul and yet the whole person (body and soul) is brought into the experience.\textsuperscript{44} The body is not left behind but is caught up in the soul. This is an incarnate experience and therefore Rolle uses physical imagery to describe it as ‘real’ not ‘imaginary’. The body is in a sense transcended as it is caught up into the soul but for Rolle the outer senses are not left behind, they are transformed into spiritual sensation. This is the paradox in Rolle’s teaching that what cannot be felt externally can be inwardly as Christ enters the soul: \textit{“O bone Ihesu, quis michi de t ut senciam te, qui nunc sentiri et non uideri potes? Infunde te in viscerebus anime mee.”}\textsuperscript{45}

This combination of spatiality and interiority is one of the defining characteristics of Rolle’s description of spiritual sensation. He begins \textit{Incendium} with a description of an

\textsuperscript{42} RRPV, 36/94.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Melos}, 158/9-12,19-20: ‘May Eternal Love totally envelop our interior man, inflaming him with His sweetly flowering fire. May Love introduce him to a new glory and transform him into a true likeness to His own nature, as it were deifying him, so that his spiritual substance may be absorbed by uncreated fire […] from this he will not cease to wish for spiritual and physical benefit.’
\textsuperscript{44} McGinn agrees that for Rolle spiritual sensation engages the bodily senses. \textit{Vernacular Mysticism}, pp. 356-357.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Emendatio}, p.57: ‘O Good Jesu, who shall grant me to feel thee that may neither be felt or seen. Shed thyself into the entrails of my soul.’
experience of heat in realistic, sensual terms.\textsuperscript{46} His concern right from the beginning is to convince the reader that this experience was ‘real’ and not ‘imaginary’: “Admirabar magis quam enuncio quando siquidem sentiui cor meum primitus incalescere, et vere non imaginarie, quasi sensibile igne estuare.”\textsuperscript{47} What Rolle means by ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ will be important when we come to compare him with the Cloud-author. For now I only want to point out that Rolle puts across the realness of his experience by describing it as a very ‘physical’ sensation. At any rate this is the case with ‘heat’: “Sed sicut si digitus in igne poneretur feruorem induere sensibilem, sic animus amare quemadmodum predixi succensus, ardorem sentit veracissimum.”\textsuperscript{48} Later in the same text he says that: “Cor eodem modo amore ardere non estimatiue sed realiter sensitur. Cor enim in igne conversum sensum prebet incendii amoris.”\textsuperscript{49}

Rolle therefore describes an experience of devotion as a physical sensation and yet not ‘actually’ physical: Note the use of “\textit{quasi}” and “\textit{sic}” (‘as if’) and how he uses “\textit{ignis spiritualis}” in various places. At times he also explicitly refers to ‘fire’ as a metaphor for ‘burning love’: “flamam quam sub metaphora ignem apellau, eo quod urit et lucet”.\textsuperscript{50} Love then is a fire because it purges the soul from sin as a body is burnt up by fire and also because it enkindles devotion in the soul – distractions, he says, cause the person praying to ‘grow cold’.\textsuperscript{51} Lastly he writes; “sepius pectus meum si forte esset feruor ex aliqua exteriori causa palpitaui” and concludes that “non esset a carne illud incendium amoris, et concupiscencia, in qua continui, quod donum esset Conditori”. it came, he says, “ex interiori solummodo efferbuisset”.\textsuperscript{52}

Not only is the ‘real’ distinguished from the ‘imaginary’ by portraying it as sensually conceivable but at the same time the ‘material’ or ‘physical’ is distinguished from the ‘internal’. Rolle stresses the ‘reality’ of his experience by using concrete sensual imagery while also balancing this with an internal reading of the sense experience. In this stress on

\textsuperscript{46} This autobiographical account takes pride of place in Rolle’s work right at the beginning, and, as Wolters rightly points out, the whole rest of the book can be seen as a defence of this primary experience. \textit{Fire of Love}, p. 9. 

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Incendium}, Prologue/145: “I cannot tell you how surprised I was the first time I felt my heart begin to warm. It was a real warmth too, not imaginary, and it felt as if it were actually on fire.”

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Incendium}, Prologue/146: “It was as it were if thy finger was put into a fire and was clad with sensible burning, so, the soul set afire with love truly feels most very real heat.”

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Incendium}, 14/185: “The heart is not hopingly but verily (Missyn, Wolters has; ‘real not in imagination’) felt to burn. For the heart turned into fire gives the feeling of burning love.”

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Incendium}, Prologue/146: “the flame which under a figure I call fire, because it burns and lightens.”

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Incendium}, Prologue/146-147 & 20/203 (c.f. also 8/166, which describes the fire of love as a purgative fire).

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Incendium}, Prologue/145: ‘keep feeling my breast to make sure there was no physical reason for [the heat] [...] This fire of love had no cause material or sinful but was the gift of our maker [...] entirely from within’.
interiority Rolle is following Augustinian paradigms that were becoming central again to theological and mystical writing from the twelfth century.\(^{53}\) However neither Riehle nor Watson point out that Rolle turns around the classic Augustinian criteria for the discernment of ‘visions’. For Augustine ‘corporeal vision’ – using the bodily senses to form mental images of physical objects – is, at the supernatural level, a hallucination, a perception of things that are not physically there. Augustine rates this form of vision below a ‘spiritual vision’ where what is beyond the range of sense perception is made present through the imagination and then finally ‘intellectual vision’ where eternal truths are contacted immediately without images.\(^{54}\)

Rolle’s concern to evoke an affective rather than an intellectual response to God, and his concern to highlight the reality – and thus objective validity – of his experiences, both incline him to use the language of corporeal vision. The bodily nature of the experience of ‘heat’ shows that it is not imaginary, nor is it merely a spiritual non-bodily experience clothed in conventional bodily metaphor, nor is it simply an intellectual realisation. Bodily language is used to show that God comes to meet us in the body.

However this ‘movement from within to without’, identified by McGinn in Rolle’s mysticism, is not consistently held.\(^{55}\) In Rolle’s psycho-physical experience of ‘song’ for example the corporeal element is quickly interiorised. The whole emphasis is that the ‘outer’ song which is initially perceived is soon transformed into, or understood as, a harmony within the soul so that ‘thought’ could be ‘turned into song; and the mind changed into full sweet sound’.\(^{56}\) Song is perceived outwardly (or rather ‘above’); “uel pocius canencium supra me ascultau”, but is soon read as spiritual not bodily.\(^{57}\) Rolle defines the surest sign that a contemplative is called to ‘inner’ song by the fact that he or she feels distaste for outward song:

\[
\textit{Istud canticum spirituale [...] cum exterioribus canticis non concordat, que in ecclesiis uel alibi frequen\texttildetilde{t}atur. Dissonat autem multum ab omnibus que humana et exteriori uoce formantur, corporalibus auribus audienda.}\]


\(^{55}\)\textit{Vernacular Mysticism}, p. 357.

\(^{56}\)\textit{Incendium}, 14/185. Translation from Missyn, p. 67.

\(^{57}\)\textit{Incendium}, 15/189: ‘above my head here was a joyful ring of psalmody’.

\(^{58}\)\textit{Incendium}, 33/239: ‘The inner song accords not with outer song, the which in Kirks and elsewhere are used. It discords much with all that is formed by man’s outward voice to be heard with bodily ears’. 12/277-278 Rolle speaks of song as ‘a secret music’. The same distinction is made in ‘The Form of Living’, \textit{RRPV}, 17/574-576.
In his later work *Melos Amoris* he clarifies that the distinction (between outer and inner sensation) is not ontological, they are not distinct modes, but is qualitative: “*per corporalia intelligi docens spiritualia, quia omnino suavior est concentus animi quam oris*”. Thus Evelyn Underhill is right in distinguishing ‘song’ from ‘heat’ as a psycho-physical experience that is perceived primarily in mental and not physical terms.60

‘Sweetness’ as well, the third of Rolle’s ‘experiences’, is more obviously a metaphor synonymous with devotion and affectivity. It usually comes with images of taste, often as a pronoun to other images; for example song is “the sweetness of angels” and heat is “honey sweet flame”, and there is a “delitabilte sauour of heuyn”.61 However it is interesting to note that images of sweetness appear most often, and in a particularly sustained way, when Rolle is speaking of the body of Christ. For example in the *Meditations on the Passion*, ascribed to Rolle, this quality is evoked with every mention of Christ’s body. Christ’s body is a “hony combe” which “may nat be touched without yeld of swetnesse; so, swet Ihesu, thy body is ful of cellys of deuocioun, that hit may nat be touched of a clene soule without swetnesse of lykynge”.62iii Or again, and this time sweetness is portrayed by an image of smell rather than taste, he writes:

Swet Ihesu, thy body is lyk to a medew ful of swete floors and holsome herbes: so is thy body fulle of woundes, swet sauorynge to a deuout soule [...] Now, swet Ihesu, I besech the, graunt me swet sauoure of mercy.63iv

Could Rolle’s sense of sweetness therefore be seen as a psycho-physical encounter with Christ’s body? In typical Rolle fashion the image is described as literal but obviously the parallel is a metaphor. However there does seem to be a link between sweetness and the physical in Rolle’s experience of Christ’s body. There might be some analogy with the Eucharist here, especially when he speaks of Christ’s body as “halowes food”.64 However there is no overt reference to the Eucharist in Rolle’s writings and the encounter with Christ’s body seems to have been through his private meditations rather than by means of the sacrament. On this point Rolle’s devotion to the body of Christ contrasts with that of many women mystics on the continent at this time who shared the same devotion but centred it eucharistically.65 Certainly Christ’s body is a real presence for Rolle though and is therefore

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59 *Melos*, 139/13-15: ‘Spiritual things can be understood through corporeal things, although the concert of the soul is altogether sweeter than that of the mouth.’
62 *RRPV*, 74/227-231.
63 Ibid, 75/246-249.
64 ‘Ego Dormio’, *RRPV*, 30/191.
spoken of in physical terms even though it is encountered ‘internally’ in thought and meditation.

For Rolle drawing the senses inward prepares for a ‘real’ not ‘imaginary’ encounter with Christ. In chapter 1 of *Emendatio Vitae* Rolle writes of the beginner in contemplation: “*Immo in Deum se totum dirigens, pene exteriores sensus amisit, totus intus colligitur, totus in Christum eleuatur.*” However as *Emendatio Vitae* develops Rolle shows that the last stage (of ‘eleuatur’) is a bodily meeting. The contemplatives’ own body participates in the soul’s experience of an embodied Christ: “*Amor autem amantem animam non in se manere sinit, sed extra se rapit ad amatum, ut magis sit ibi anima ubi diligit quam vii corpus est, quod per illam sentit et viuit.*” Here Rolle is saying more than the scholastic commonplace that the body is alive because of the soul. He says that the body “lives and feels” the soul. If the soul is on its journey to God away from the body then the body is able to experience God indirectly through its link with the soul. Psycho-physical experiences for Rolle therefore are soul experiences that have physical manifestations. As McGinn puts it, in Rolle’s writings, “what starts with a gift of God felt within and described in sensate language is meant to flow outward towards, and be transformative of, ordinary physical sensation”.

Sweetness is more than a side effect though; it is essential to full redemption. It plays a clear integrative role on the body (similar to the role of the Eucharist in other writers). In *Incendium* Rolle says that love’s sweetness and usefulness comes from “*carnem et sanguinem constringit*”.

For Rolle, it is only because of sin that the body is a hindrance to the soul. In *Incendium* he says that “*deuotus pauper cum angitur pre defectu [...] incipere digneris grave iugum quod impositum est super corpus meum, unde et animam meam deprimere non tardat.*” Wolters wrongly translates this as ‘the grievous yolk of the body’ but “*impositum est*” is a passive verb, not ‘of the body’ but ‘imposed on the body’. Rolle moves from using *corpus* (in the previous sentence) to *caro* which usually expresses the fallen state of the body but for him retains its positive role as the soul’s companion. The failing of the flesh does not further but rather hinders the spiritual life: “*Defecit enim caro mea in erumpnis huius uite,*

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66 *Emendatio*, 35/67-69: ‘always addressing himself to God he puts away his external sensuality, is wholly gathered within and thus is wholly lifted up into Christ’.
67 *Emendatio*, 57/33-36: ‘Love truly suffers not the loving soul to bide in itself but ravishes it out to the lover, that the soul is more there where it loves, than where the body is that lives and feels it.’
68 ‘Late Medieval Mystics’, *SSPGWC*, p. 208.
69 *Incendium*, 41/275: ‘binding together flesh and blood’.
70 *Incendium*, 16/191: ‘The devout man is annoyed because of his defects [...] behold the grievous weight that is put upon my body, and therefore doesn’t delay to cast down my soul.’
71 *Fire of Love*, p. 95.
The paradox at the heart of Rolle’s teaching is that though the attention of the soul when directed to God moves away from the body, the body moves with it. On the one side there is a dualism, and Rolle longs for bodily death, on the other a holistic conception of the human person. Rolle cries out: “O mors cur tam tarde uenis?” He writes that “corpus quod corrumpitur aggrauat animam”, but continues the same sentence stressing that it is not just the soul but the senses that are oppressed: “et terrena habitacio deprimit sensum.”

Missyn correctly translates ‘sensum’ as “owr sensalyte”. However Underhill, confused by the apparent contradiction, amends this to “our mind”. Wolters likewise. In doing so these modern translators miss the meaningful paradox of this sentence; that in prayer the senses reach their freedom as a foretaste of Resurrection. In prayer sensuality is not left behind, the ‘outer senses’ are in fact ‘realised’, made real, by finding their proper meaning in God. In Desire and Delight Rolle speaks of the “turnynge of the sensuali te to the skyll”, so that it is “al set and vset to God”. This is what Tugwell picks up on when he notes that “it is precisely in the seat of lust that Rolle locates the sweetness which God gave him: ‘Now I receive sweet sound where before the liver of lust lay’. Divine love engages Rolle’s sexual energy redirecting it from unruly passions.” This is because what is encountered is not just ‘God’ disincarnate but ‘God in Christ’ who redeems the body in the soul. As Rolle says near the end of The Form of Living: “wondreful praisyng is in the soule, and for abundance of ioy and swetnesse hit ascendeth in to the mouth, so that the hert and the tonge acordeth in on, and body and soule ioyeth in God lyuyng.”

This is clearly illustrated by a passage in Incendium that few scholars of Rolle have not commented on. In chapter 37 Rolle speaks of two sorts of raptus: Firstly a ravishing “out of fleshly feeling” which he sees as a visionary or ‘out of the body’ experience:

\[ Uno quidem modo quo quis extra sensum carnis ita rapitur, ut penitus tempore raptus non senciat quicquid in carne uel de carne agatur. Ipse tamen non est mortuus sed uiuus quia adhuc anime uiuificat corpus. \]

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72 Incendium, 16/191: ‘My flesh truly fails in the griefs of this life, wherefore also spiritual virtue (or strength) is made weary.’
73 Incendium, 16/192: ‘Death why do you delay?’
74 Incendium, 37/256: ‘This corruptible body grieves the soul, and this earthly dwelling casts down our senses.’
75 Missyn, p. 164, note lvi, p. 258.
76 Fire of Love, p. 168.
77 RRPY, 40/18-19 & 24.
78 Tugwell, p. 163.
79 Wolters likewise.
80 The exceptions are Hope Emily Allen who draws attention to the passage in her ‘Introduction’ to English Writings, xxviii-xxix, and McGinn, SSPGW, p. 208 & Vernacular Mysticism, pp. 366-367.
This is a form of rapture common to both saints and sinners and consists in being lifted up to heaven (like St Paul) or having visions of heaven or hell. But then he goes on to describe a second ravishing, open only to “perfect lovers of God”, as a “lifting up of the mind to God by contemplation” which he describes as an ‘in body’ experience: “Iste modus multum desiderabilis est et amandus.” The reason: Better to meet God in the body for that is what Christ did:

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\text{Nam et Christus simper habuit diuinam contemplacionem, sed numquam corporalis regimini subtraccionem. Aliud est amorserapi in sesu carnis, aliud a sensu ad aliquam visionem, uel terrentem uel blandientem. Ego meliorem estimo raptum amoris.}\]

For Rolle the rapture of love is “in sensu carnis” which is contrasted with ‘visionary’ rapture. Rolle’s critique of disembodied ‘visions of God’ does not involve a downgrading of the visual sense itself. He points out it was Christ’s state to have the beatific vision without loss of his senses.\(^{83}\) The superiority of ‘in-body experience’ is as a foretaste of the future glorification of the body. It is not just a vision of heaven but a bodily experience of it.

McGinn sees Rolle as “a witness to forms of mystical language that are concretely sensate in expression and that teach that the unification of the inner and outer dimensions of the person is the goal of the mystical life”.\(^{84}\) Such a goal is achieved in the incarnate God whose body, soul and divinity are one and undivided. And, as we have seen, it is ‘in Christ’ that body-soul integration is achieved; it is also deeply eschatological in the sense that the full attainment of the bliss of the corporeo-spiritual unity will not be realized until the Resurrection of the body. However Rolle hints that this process is under way even in this life as the senses are reformed by the action of grace.\(^{85}\)

The body-soul split that was part of medieval spirituality was tempered by reference to the wholeness of the human person, to Christ’s taking on of our humanity and to the fact of bodily Resurrection. Whether the Resurrection could be experienced in this life was debated. Some mystics, like Rolle, felt that in contemplation one was already lifted to heaven so that one’s existence was already more there than on the earth and he felt that the body likewise

\(^{81}\) *Incendium*, 37/254: ‘One way is when a man or woman is rapt out of all physical sensation, so that at the time of their rapture their body quite clearly feels nothing. They are not dead of course, but alive, because their soul is still vitalizing their body.’

\(^{82}\) *Incendium*, 37/255: ‘This way is to be greatly desired and loved. Truly Christ had always the contemplation of God, but never the withdrawing from bodily governance. Therefore it is diverse to be rapt by love in the feeling of the flesh, and to be rapt from bodily feeling to a joyful or dreadful sight. I think the rapture of love is better.’

\(^{83}\) I will look at this in chapter Three, section Five.

\(^{84}\) *SSPGWC*, p. 208.

\(^{85}\) See McGinn, *Vernacular Mysticism*, p. 357.
could join in this movement of the soul. In *Melos Amoris* he writes that “Nempe per divinam dileccionem gloriām gustamus eciam in carne commorantes”.

The body follows physically where the soul has gone spirituality. Thus he felt that a penitential attitude to the body was not the main means of its control, the experience of contemplation itself would regulate the bodily passions.

This holistic approach to mystical experience, made possible ‘in Christ’, and the eschewal of physical asceticism are themes echoed by Hilton and the *Cloud*. However there is no rapture of the flesh in their language. They are careful to make a distinction between the inner and outer senses. In this life the latter are not able to work spiritually though they may feel an overflow and even express outwardly the effect of the soul’s work. It is to their work that we must turn to see the contrast more clearly.

**Language of Spiritual Sensation in the *Cloud* and Epistle**

The criticism of Rolle as a mystic among modern scholars is made in relation to his psycho-physical emphasis. Scholars like Oliver Davies and Simon Tugwell use the *Cloud*’s critique of such experiences and apply them to Rolle. Certainly in the *Cloud* there is a concern to differentiate between the physical and the spiritual. How much is this a response to Rolle? Watson argues that it is not Rolle as such that the *Cloud* is critiquing but the popularization and subsequent misunderstanding of Rolle among those who followed him. Certainly the *Cloud* author sees a concern with the sensory manifestations of mystical experience as a danger for beginners who become confused when they try to ‘feel inwardly’ by means of the ‘outward’ physical senses:

Forthi that thei knowe not whiche is inward worchyng, therfore thei worche wronge. For thei turne theire bodily wittes inwards to theire body agens the cours of kynde; & streynyn hem, as thei wolde see inwards with theire bodily iyen, & heren inwards with theire eren, & so forthe of alle theire wittes, smellen, taasten, & felyn inwards. & thus thei reuerse hem agens the cours of kynde, & with this coriousthe thei trauayle theire ymaginacion so vndiscreetly, that at the laste thei turne here brayne in here hedes. & then as fast the deuil hath power for to feyne sum fals liyt or sounes, swete smelles in theire noses, wonderfull taastes in theire

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86 *Melos* 169/37–38: ‘Now even while dwelling in the flesh we taste glory through Divine love.’
88 *Invention of Authority*, p. 261.
mowthes, & many queynte hetes & breynyns in theire bodily brestes or in theire pryue members. 89vii

Is the Cloud’s concern merely pastoral or is there an underlying critique of a certain type of spiritual language? Copeland and Riehle argue that the verbal minimalism of the Cloud involves a demythologising of spiritual language, especially spatial imagery and the language of physical sensation. 90 The problem is inherent in language. Material expressions and physical words are necessarily employed to imply spiritual things but they should be interpreted spiritually.

Speche is a bodely werke wrouyt with the tonge, the whiche is an instrument of the body, it behoueth alweys be spoken in bodily wordes. Bot what therof? Schal it therfore be taken & conceyuid bodely? Nay, it bot goostly. 91viii

It is not just beginners but, as the Cloud-author says; “Thou & I, and many socche as we ben, we ben so abyl to conceyue a thing bodily, the whiche is seyde goostly.” 92ix The Cloud-author is not trying to undermine Rolle’s authority but he is cautious about ‘Rollean’ rhetoric. Their styles as mystics are quite different.

In contrast to the influential writings of Rolle a generation before, the Cloud-author does not try to describe spiritual experience, nor does he try to recreate that experience through the rhetoric of language. However three techniques are used to orientate the reader toward contemplation: 1) the creation of a negative language like ‘unknowing’ and ‘being nowhere’ asking the contemplative to “unfele” and “unbe”, 2) the minimalization of language by using a single phrase in prayer like the word ‘God’, without any discursive reflection on its meaning, and 3) the use of rich concrete imagery that is plainly physical so as to avoid “ghostly conceit”. 93 The first two techniques of negation and brevity are the Cloud-author’s attempt to create a language of the spirit, the last makes sure this is not confused with the ordinary purposes of language and the physical world is given its own integrity. 94

In seeing the body as a barrier to the higher stages of contemplation the Cloud-author is re-iterating this emphasis on the intellectual quality of supernatural vision in Book 12 of Augustine’s Literal Commentary on Genesis. Like Augustine the Cloud-author points out that corporeal vision, using the bodily senses, is quite natural when dealing with physical things

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89 Cloud, 53/31-42. There are other examples of critique of what looks like a distortion of Rolle’s experiences in 47/20-39 & 58/26-36.
91 Cloud, 63/32-35.
92 Cloud, 63/53.
93 For the Cloud-author this is the inability to respect the distinction between the bodily and spiritual realms and observe the differing properties of each.
but cannot grasp the supernatural, an intellectual vision of the truth as more real than any physical or imaginary representation of it. The Cloud-author proposes this scale of ascent in a characteristically apophatic way: The contemplative is to put all created things and their mental images beneath a cloud of forgetting and is to reach out to God blindly, without any attempt to conceive God in creaturely terms. In the Cloud’s analysis of the faculties of the human person the imagination gathers images from sense perception. It cannot deal with spiritual things. Before the fall of man, we are told the imagination was ruled by reason.

Bot now it is not so. For bot yif it be refreinid by the liyt of grace in the reson, else it will never sese, sleping or wakyng, for to portray dyuerse vnordeynd ymages of bodely creatures; or elles sum fantasye, the whiche is nouyt elles bot a bodely conseyte of a goostly thing, or elles a goostly conseite of a bodely thing. & this is evermore feynid & fals, & anexte vnto errour.\textsuperscript{95}

The link of the imagination to the body for the Cloud-author means that all discourse about the spiritual path is in danger of being misunderstood. He offers rather a sustained negation of the language of spiritual sensation. Contemplation of God involves forsaking images of creatures, hence his uneasiness with language as an instrument and repository of creaturely perceptions. For the Cloud-author, language is intrinsically unsuitable for the expression of spiritual things. The expression of an idea in the spoken or written word involves a physical activity: therefore language will inevitably express ideas in physical terms 1) because spatial referents are established in terms of the body and 2) because words are formed by a bodily member, the tongue:

Beware that thou conceyue not bodely that that is mente goostly, thof al it be spokyn in bodely wordes, as ben thees: UP or DOUN, IN or OUTE, BEHINDE or BEFORE, ON O SIDE or ON OTHER. For thof al that a thing be neuer so goostly in itself, neuertheles yit yif it schal be spoken of, sithen it so is that speche is a bodely werk wrouyt with the tonge, the whiche is an instrument of the body, it behoueth alweis be spoken in bodely words.\textsuperscript{96xi}

Certainly the Cloud-author sees a concern with the sensory manifestations of mystical experience as a danger for beginners who become confused when they try to ‘feel inwardly’ by means of the ‘outward’ physical senses. However the Cloud’s concern is not just pastoral, he offers an underlying critique of a certain type of spiritual language. The verbal minimalism of the Cloud involves a demythologising of spiritual language, especially spatial imagery and

\textsuperscript{95} Cloud, 65/25-31.
\textsuperscript{96} Cloud, 63/28-34. (Capitals his). Certainly the idea that words are formed by the tongue rather than in the mind or as written script reflects a culture where language was still predominantly an oral and audial culture. Reading was done out loud, or at least under the breath and much writing was dictated. For interesting reflections on the transmission to a written culture of language at the end of the Middle Ages, with the resulting ‘disembodiment of language’. See Ivan Illich, \textit{In the Vineyard of the Text}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 51-93, 123.
the language of physical sensation. This is clearly the reason why the Cloud-author is so concerned that any spatial categories such as ‘inner’ or ‘above’ are immediately understood as metaphor and not confused with their spiritual referents. He calls such a form of naive realism ‘bodily conceit’. He states clearly that the problem is inherent in language: “Bodely wordes” are necessarily employed to imply spiritual things but they should be interpreted as merely evocative.

The Cloud-author is not trying to undermine Rolle’s authority but he is cautious about ‘Rollean’ rhetoric. Their styles as mystics are quite different. However as I have shown in the case of Rolle, their different attitude to language cannot be separated from their experience of God. Rolle’s rhetoric was not just poetic metaphor but had its own logic behind it. He uses bodily imagery to emphasise that his experiences are ‘real’ and not ‘imaginary’. At first sight the Cloud-author seems to use language in exactly the opposite way; the ‘physical’ and ‘imaginary’ are equated: “Bodely and fleschely conseyttes of hem that han corious & ymaginatyue wittys ben cause of moche errour.” Later he says that imagination and sensuality (as distinct from reason and will) “worchin beastly in alle bodely things, whether thei be present or absent in the body, & with the bodely wittes”, and because imagination is linked to the outer senses or “bodely wittes” such “behouldyngs” must be”put doun”. When the imagination is not “obedient vnto the reson” as a servant it gives rise to “conseyte”. In “conseyte” the Cloud-author sees a confusion of the distinct epistemological roots of corporeal and intellectual vision. He is doubtful of Rolle’s use of the language of corporeal vision. By attempting to describe his experience of God by way of concrete bodily metaphors he felt that Rolle’s style encouraged the imagination.

It could be argued that at root Rolle and the Cloud-author are trying to say the same thing in different ways. Both are concerned to differentiate between ‘true’ and ‘imaginary’ experience. Rolle’s linguistic device is to relate ‘true’ to ‘real’ and ‘real’ is expressed physically. For the Cloud-author ‘true’ is ‘spiritual’ which is defined by him as non-physical. However, as we have seen, Rolle, by using bodily imagery, was not just saying that his experiences were ‘real’ but also that they engaged the whole person, body and soul. The senses of the body are drawn into spiritual sensation. Is the Cloud’s scholastic and apophatic language trying to describe a more strictly non-bodily experience?

Kate Greenspan, for example, has argued that the Cloud-author is not only saying that the ‘outer senses’ cannot reach God, but that the senses of the soul, being a ‘metaphorical or

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97 Cloud, 52/31-32.
98 Cloud, 64/27-30 & 18/33.
spiritual body’, must also be left behind: “The body and the body bound properties of the soul are stripped away leaving a *nakid intent*.99 Greenspan shows that the *Cloud*-author recognises the fact that there are ‘inner senses’ but these deal specifically with the imagination, that is the psychic images generated from the physical senses. In the apophatic experience of God these must be transcended.100

Greenspan is right in so far as she goes. The *Cloud*-author says that “feelyngs” such as sweetness of devotion, warmth or the encounter with created spiritual powers like Angels, are less than God.101 This is all part of his belief that the root of our separation from God is not just the exteriority of worldliness but consciousness of ourselves or of any other being, even angelic, even in the end Christ’s human nature. The fact that the mystic has to get rid of the conscious knowledge of his own being lies at the root of his whole critique of psycho-physical experience.102 However Greenspan misses the fact that in the *Cloud* there is an ascending scale of perception of God. The author of the *Epistle of Privy Council* makes allowances:

> For rudeness in thi goostly felyng, therefore, I late thee climbe therto by degree [...] For thof al I bid thee in the biginnyng, because of thi boistoust & thi goostly rudeness, lappe and clothe the felyng of thi God in the felyng of thiself.103

In time the “goostly feelyng” is not discarded but matures into “a naked entent directe vnto God, withouten any other cause then himself” by being stripped of the feeling of self.104 In this later work our author sees “goostly felyng” as purified rather than transcended.

Even in the *Cloud* the ‘inner senses’ serve a preparatory function in contemplation:

> Whan thou felist the mynde ocupied with the sotil condicions of the mytes of thi soule and theire worchynges in goostly things [...] then thou arte withinne thiself & even with thiself. Bot euer when thou felist thi mynde ocupied with no maner of thing that is bodely or goostly, bot only with the self substaunce of God [...] then thou arte abouen thiself & vnder thi God.105

Notice that the *Cloud*-author continues to use spatial imagery. Once he has made clear that they are metaphor he continues to speak of being “benyth”, “withinne” and “abouen”, very similar to Rolle’s movement from ‘outward’ to ‘inner’ perception and then ‘up’ to God. The *Cloud*-author does not deny the spiritual senses but makes a much sharper division between them and physical sensation:

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100 See *Epistle*, 83/5-10. Also Riehle, p. 65.
103 *Epistle*, 89/3-4, 8-10.
104 *Epistle*, 75/20-21.
105 *Cloud*, 66/37- 67/7.
God is a spirit; & whoso schuld be onid vnto hym, it behouith to be in sothfastnes & deepnes of spirit, ful fer fro any feynid bodely thing [...] For alle bodely thing is ferther fro God bi the cours of kynde then any goostly thing.106

There is a strong body-soul/spirit dualism here; at times he seems to say that the body is not part of the spiritual life: “Euermore where thou fyndest wretten thiself in goostlines, than it is vnderstonden thi soule, & not thi body.”107

However it is important to remember that he is saying that the body is “ferther fro” but not removed from the spirit. The Cloud-author underlines that the human spirit is closer to God than the body and therefore to focus on bodily things renders the vision of God opaque. However he does not mean to imply that the body is separate from God to whom all things are equally present:

God forbede that I shuld departe that God hath couplid, the body and the spirit; for God wil be seruid with body & with soule, bothe togeders, as semely is, & rewarde man his mede in blis bothe in body & in soule.108

This understated ‘holistic’ side of the Cloud-author’s teaching, like with Rolle, is rooted in the scholastic commonplace that for the body to be alive it must be linked to the soul. The soul both transcends and includes the body: As the soul/spirit moves away from the body, the body moves with it: “Sekirly as verrely is a soule there where it louith, as in the body that leueth by it, & to the whiche it geveth liif.”109 For the Cloud-author the process of contemplation has psycho-physical implications. As the Epistle puts it:

It is helpe to al the freelte & the seeknes of fleche, & worthily; for sith al seeknes & corupcion fel into the fleshe whan the soule fel fro this werke, than schal alle helthe come to the fleshe whan the soule [...] riseth to this same werk agein.110

Though body and soul are not divided there is in the Cloud corpus a strong concern for the right ordering of the body-soul continuum. Sensuality must be “obedyent vnto the wille – vnto the whiche it is as it were seruant” for ‘bot yif it be reulyd by grace in the wille [...] [elles] that alleoure leuyng schal be more beastly & fleschly then outhers manly or goostly”.111 Therefore, although stated negatively, the Cloud-author affirms that the faculties of the senses can be integrated. Do we have here the ‘spiritualised sensuality’ that we found in Rolle affirmed alongside a criticism of its excesses? Certainly, for the Cloud-author, the outward appearance of the body and its physical health is affected by contemplation. The

107 Cloud, 64/10-11.
108 Cloud, 50/15-17.
109 Cloud, 62/35-36.
110 Epistle, 83/31-35.
body is rendered peaceful and quiescent, but this is precisely so that it does not affect or influence contemplative experience. This explains why the Cloud-author is less concerned with bodily rest, posture and avoidance of outward activity than Rolle:

& thof al that it be sumtyme cleped a rest, neuertheles yit thei schul not think that it is any soche rest as is any abiding in a place withouten removing therfro. For the perfeccion of this werke is so pure & so goostly in itself, that & it be wel & truely conceyuid, it schal be seen fer lengthid fro any steryng & fro any stede [...] For tyme, stede, & body, these thre schuld be foryeten in alle goostly worching. 112xxii

Concern with the outward state of the body is a hindrance in prayer. The body is to be kept fit and well not so much to enable sweet feelings as to take the attention off the body. As Tugwell puts it; “the Cloud author, like Rolle is aware that it takes a lot of energy to sustain prolonged ‘sweet feelings’, but, unlike Rolle, he sees this as a reason for not leaning on them too much for fear of feebleness.” 113

At the end of Emendatio Vitae Rolle emphasises psycho-physical unity by saying that contemplation has strange effects on bodily bearing: “Hoc ideo fit, quia mens amore Christi funditus inflamnata penitus gestum mutat corporalem [...] et corpus segregans uelut alienatum uirum Dei reddit.” 114 The Cloud-author says that the pseudo-contemplative confuses the physical and spiritual spheres and is given to unnatural, histrionic gestures. 115 For him contemplation has a more ordering effect on the body. The contemplative does not look mad but becomes pleasing to behold: “It sculd gouerne him ful semely, as wele in body as in soule, & make hym fulfauorable vnto iche man or womman that lokyd apon hym.” 116xxiii

For the Cloud-author the spiritualization of the body is limited only to outward appearance. The body is not encouraged to feel anything going on in the spirit. The effects of prayer on the body are physical, not spiritual and should not become an object of focus. In his view, the body does not become spiritual but it behaves spiritually within its own sphere – i.e. externally. The body, being sensual, is oriented outwards, although he says that the “subieccion of the body to the spirit may be in maner verrely conceiued” that ‘maner’ is external observation. 117xxiv It can be seen, not felt. That “the body follows physically what has been done spiritually” only means that it stands up more straight following, in a physical way,
the ‘uprightness’ of the soul. The body reflects the soul outwardly, but the soul does not reflect the body, it reflects God. For the Cloud-author there is an ordering of relationship: “For alle bodely thing is sogette vnto goostly thing & is reulid therafter, & not ayensward.” In contemplation the epistemological spheres of body and soul remain distinct but at the same time body follows the soul not vice-versa.

Here I believe is the distinction between Rolle’s attitude to the body and spiritual sensation in prayer and that of the Cloud. For Rolle the posture of the body is important as the senses are involved in contemplative experience. He relates the bodily senses to the sensitive faculties of the soul. The Cloud-author keeps a greater tension between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ senses, without rejecting the body. In this life, the Cloud author believes, the senses are not able to work spiritually though they may feel an overflow and even express outwardly the effect of the soul’s work. Even when he does develop a holistic conception of the human person with a body-soul continuum he is careful to show that there is no overlap of these two spheres. Rolle’s belief that ‘outer’ senses could be ‘caught up’ or transformed into ‘inner’ senses so that they could be deployed towards God is questioned implicitly by the Cloud-author who keeps them distinct. He constantly shrinks from saying that the body has any way of experiencing the spirit and that contemplative life – as it moved beyond discursive and imaginative prayer – has any need to refer, even metaphorically, to the experience of the body.

Resurrection and the Body of Christ in the Cloud and Epistle

Carmel Bendon Davis argues that for Rolle and the Cloud “the body is both necessary and unnecessary, and mystical experience is both embodied and disembodied: embodied as it requires a body as initiator and conduit but disembodied in that the experience is spiritual, not physical”. Davis does not unpack this simultaneous embodiment and disembodiment of mystical experience nor does she show that there is a tension, even contrast, in the writings of Rolle and the Cloud-author. For Rolle the soul, because of the presence of the resurrected humanity of Christ within it, is a meeting place of body and spirit. For him the encounter with the ascended body of Christ draws the bodily senses inward and ‘up’ to God. The contemplative participates in Christ’s spiritualised sense experience. On the other hand, there

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118 Cloud, 63/23-24.
119 Cloud, 63/3-4.
is no ‘rapture in the flesh’ in the Cloud’s language. This difference is not just rhetorical – or due to the Cloud’s deconstruction of metaphor – but is based on a different rationale of the body-soul continuum. The theological model for psycho-physical overflow in the Cloud is not, as in Rolle’s thought, based on the resurrected body of Christ. In chapter 59 he counters an argument that may well have derived from Rolle:

Yif thou sey ouyt touching the assencion of oure Lorde, for that was done bodely & for a bodely bemenyng as wel as for a gootly, for bothe he assendid verrey God & verrey Man: to this wil I answere thee, that he had ben deed, & was clad with vnheedelines, & so schul we be at the Day of Dome [...] Bot now thou mayst not come to heuen not bodely, bot goostly. & yit it schal be so goostly that it schal not be on bodely maner.121

The author makes a distinction between our bodies now and after the day of judgement when “we schul be maad so sotyl in body & in soule togeders, that we schul be than [as] swiftely where us liste bodely, as we ben now in oure thouyte goostly”.122 Until then our bodies cannot follow the spirit.

& therefore bewar in this werke that thou take none ensaumple at the bodely assencion of Criste [...] Bot yif thou schuldest assende into heuen bodely, as Criste did, than thou miytest take ensaumple at it; bot that may none do bot God [...] & therefore lat be soche falshede; it schuld not be so.123

If we cannot be ‘taken up in Christ’ in this life does the Cloud-author think there can be no true psycho-physical experience of God? At first it seems so. However in chapter 48 he defends the validity of psycho-physical consolations. This chapter starts with a discussion of devotion to the name of Jesus. This was a devotion associated with Rolle which, by the time the Cloud-author wrote, had become very popular. The young man he is writing to seems to have practised it. The Cloud-author accepts that it is quite appropriate to use vocal exclamations “for habundaunce of deuocion [...] as ben thees: Good Iesu! Faire Iesu! Swete Iesu! ”124 These are typically Rollean expressions. If one savours the name of Jesus then “hit shal be in thyne ioy, in thy mouth hony”, he says.125 Moreover “Iesu” for Rolle was an invocation of the humanity of Christ on which he justified spiritual sensation. In Christ’s Ascension his body becomes present to the soul of the contemplative in a way that transcends time and space.

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121 Cloud, 61/14-18, 22-24. Concern for bodily Resurrection in the later Middle Ages has been noted by Bynum, however, she locates this mainly in scholastic debate and surprisingly, for one who writes much about the mystics, does not see it in differing views on the body in mystical discourse of the time.
122 Cloud, 61/18-20.
123 Cloud, 62/1-2, 5-7, 12-13.
124 Cloud 50/10-13.
125 ‘The Form of Living’, RRPV, 18/613.
The *Cloud*-author likewise goes straight from discussion of the Holy Name to psycho-physical experience. He agrees that “sumtyme [God] wil enflaume the body of a deuoute seruaunt of his here in this liif – not onys or twies, bot perauinture riyt ofte, & as him likith – with ful wonderful swetnes & confortes”\(^\text{126xxx}\). Not only does he defend the validity of spiritual sensation but he bases this on a very similar argument to Rolle’s; experiences “not coming fro withoutyn into the body bi the wyndowes of oure wittys, bot fro withinne, rising & spryngyng of habundaunce of goostly gladness, & of trewe deuocion in the spirit” are genuine.\(^\text{127xxxi}\) “Counfortes, sounes, & gladness, & swetnes, that comyn fro without sodenly […] I prey thee haue hem suspecte.”\(^\text{128xxxii}\) This is a reminder of Rolle's experience of warmth: Rolle was initially suspicious but then realised it came “ex interiori solummodo efferbiisset et non esset a carne illud incendium amoris, et concupiscencia”\(^\text{129}\).

The *Cloud*-author is moving toward recognising spiritual sensation as a premonition of future bodily Resurrection. There can be valid psycho-physical consolations in this life because of body-soul unity at creation and the body’s restoration to the soul on the Day of Judgement. However there is less stress in the *Cloud* corpus than in Rolle on the body of Christ as a continuing physical phenomenon. This may be because meditation on the humanity of Christ – and the psycho-physical experience concomitant with it – is separated from the higher stages of prayer. The Ascension of Christ is not, for the *Cloud*-author, a model for human participation but, at the end of the *Epistle*, an example of Christ’s transcendence of human limitations:

For whi, yif it so had ben that ther had ben none heir perfeccion in this liif bot in beholding & louyng of his manheed, I trowe that he wolde not than haue assendid vnto heuen whiles this woreld had lasted, ne withdrawn his bodely presence from his special louers in erthe. Bot for ther was an hier perfeccion, the whiche man mat haue in this liif (that is to sey, a pure goostly felyng in the loue of his Godhede) therefore he seide to his disciples, the whiche grocheden to forgo his bodely presence (as thou thi queinte sotyl wittes) that it was speedful to hem that he went bodely fro hem.\(^\text{130xxxiii}\)

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\(^{126}\)*Cloud*, 50/14-21.

\(^{127}\)*Cloud*, 50/21-24.

\(^{128}\)*Cloud*, 50/27-29. ‘Wyndowes of oure wittys’ refer to the outward senses through which physical things are imprinted on the mind which looks out to the world. Medieval perceptions of visuality will be looked at in chapter Three.

\(^{129}\)*Incendium*, Prologue/145. ‘This fire of love came entirely fro within and had no material or sinful cause.’

\(^{130}\)*Epistle*, 98/8-18. The *Cloud*-author’s teaching here has Patristic presidents, see for example Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* II, XXXVIII, 4: Christ says ‘unless you cease to see me in the flesh, you will never learn to love me spiritually.’ *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great*, tr. and Commentary Terrence G. Kardong, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), p. 141.
Although ‘spiritual senses’ are still linked to devotion to Jesus in the Cloud-author’s work, the encounter with the human Christ opens up into “a blynde steryng of loue vnto God for himself” experienced “in derknes & the cloude”. Bodily experience in this life is separated from the highest stages of mystical prayer. What counts in spiritual affection is a right orientation of the will and not the sensation that may, or may not, come with it. For the Cloud-author the will, not the feelings, is the faculty of affection. The “goodly will” is the “substaunce” of perfection, feelings are “accydentes”. However spiritual sensations are not accydentes’ in heaven “for their”, the Cloud-author says, “thei be onyd with the substaunce withouten departing, as schal the body in the whiche thei worche with the soule”. In heaven the body and soul will be one, on earth as a separate faculty the body does not affect the spiritual will. The latter, on the other hand, can affect the body. Psycho-physical consolations therefore, for the Cloud-author, are a premonition of a future body/soul union, a foretaste of heavenly reward, but in no way a prerequisite for perfection in this life.

Rolle’s attitude to the body is underpinned by a theology of the Resurrection centred around the humanity and corporeality of Jesus, a corporeality which continues to exist through the transformed sensibility and sensuality of the contemplative. The Cloud-author’s concern is to draw the contemplative beyond an affective response to the humanity of Jesus, tied as it is to imagination dependent on sense experience. However the movement of the soul away from sense experience is a strategy that brings the body into a co-operation with the work of prayer and, post-Resurrection, this co-operation becomes a full participation in beatific vision. In the Cloud corpus there is less stress on the body of Christ as a continuing physical phenomenon and less emphasis on the spiritual senses as the ‘glorified senses’ of his body. However, psycho-physical consolation is a natural fruit of the right ordering of body and soul and a foretaste of future bodily Resurrection.

The Cloud’s distinction between body and soul in spiritual sensation is therefore causal not ontological. The soul effects the body but not vice-versa. The apophatic mysticism of the Cloud does not ‘negate’ the fact that the body is part of the ‘process’ of mystical transformation and ultimately capable of God but is concerned 1) that Rolle’s language is not taken literally, and 2) that Rolle’s ‘ambiguous’ distinction between the physical and spiritual is clarified in such a way that the body is not merged with the spirit but made subject to it, all the while not ceasing to be body. The author offers a critique of bodily metaphor as

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131 Cloud, 18/9-10.
132 Cloud, 65/9-11.
133 Cloud, 51/23-30.
stimulative of imagination and of the epistemological value of sense perception when applied to the spiritual. Rolle offers a *via affirmativa*. The *Cloud* a *via negativa*. But, either through affirmation or fully conscious negation, both take the physical and metaphorical ‘placing’ of the body very seriously.

**Bodily Feeling and the Critique of Experience**

The *Cloud*-author wrote forty or fifty years on from Rolle. The influence of the writings of Dionysius the Aeropagite in the *Cloud*’s spirituality mean that scholars have often contrasted his ‘apophasis’ with Rolle’s focus on illuminative personal experiences. A recent scholarship has shown that the *Cloud*’s apophasis is distinctively affective, combining Rolle’s prioritising of love with the language (not dialectic) of Dionysius’s darkness. However looking at their *via affirmativa* and *via negativa* in terms of the body there may be more commonality between their approaches than has been appreciated. Not only does the *Cloud* prioritise love over thought in a way that reflects Rollean affective mysticism but he also is equally unconcerned to promote physical asceticism:

In etyng & in drynkyng, & in slepyng, & in kepyng of thi body fro outrageous colde or hete, or in comouyng in speche, in alle thees scalt thou kepe discretion, that thei be notuer to mochel ne to lityl [...] Beware with seekness as moche as thou maist goody, so that thou be not the cause of thi febilnes.

The author urges his reader to redirect his attention from bodily to spiritual concerns not to encourage neglect of the body but to give peace of mind, trusting either that bodily needs will be provided for, or that the body will be strengthened in frugality.

The *Cloud*-author further downplays bodily austerities by foregrounding the cognitive aspect of *ascesis*. “To forgete alle the creatures” is not a corporeal practice but the purgation

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135 See Turner, *Darkness of God*, pp. 198-204. Turner sees Dionysius’s apophasis as not simply a denial of thought and image but as transcendence through alternating affirmations and negations. He argues that the affective and anti-intellectual element in the *Cloud*-author’s reading of the apophasic tradition comes from the influence of the Victorine school, especially Thomas Gallus. However, given the shared geographic audience, concern for the solitary life and use of vernacular in Rolle’s writing, it is surprising that Turner doesn’t look closer to home for the underlying influences and outlooks of the *Cloud*. I have argued in ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’, *Journey to the Heart*, ed. Kim Nataraja, (London: Canterbury Press, 2011), p. 257 that the *Cloud*-author attempts to marry the affective, devotional, holistic spirituality inherited from Rolle with the call to self-transcendence in which self-conscious experience of God is left behind.

136 Cloud, 44/18-22, 31-32.

137 See comment on Cloud, 57/11-15 in Davis, p. 49.
of memory and imagination. The body, as created, must be forgotten but it is no more a distraction than any other object of perception. The problem is not in sensuality but in the desire which works within imagination. Reading imagery in too “fleshly and bodily” a fashion lays spiritual discourse open to misunderstanding. This may be why the author, despite regarding affectus as the point of contact with God, uses ‘intellectual’ imagery of sight and hearing rather than the usual ‘voluntarist’ expressions of touch, taste and smell. Turner argues that for him visual and aural perception implied a more detached and carefully discerned ‘contact’ with God than tactile and fleshly metaphors.

Likewise in order to check any ‘materialistic’ or ‘bodily’ understanding of affectus the Cloud-author sees traditional spatial metaphors of introversion and ascent as having only provisional significance. Language of ‘inner’, ‘outer’ and ‘above’ necessarily refers to the body. The Cloud-author explains that – among the faculties of the soul – only sense and imagination work with corporeal reality. The turning of these inward or toward spiritual things is therefore against nature:

For alle thoo that setten hem to be goostly worchers withinne, & wenen that thei scholen outher here, smel, or see, taast or fele goostly things, outher withinne hem or withouten, sekerly thei ben deceyued & worchen wronge agens the cours of kynde. For kyndely thei ben ordeynid that with hem men schuld haue knowing of alle outward bodely things, & on no wise by hem com to the knowing of gostely things.

In terms of these bodily faculties of the ‘outer self’ we must be nowhere. The body is confined strictly to sensory epistemic. However the language of interiority is not so constrained: The ‘inner self’ is ‘everywhere’ spiritually.

However, as we have seen for Rolle, intimate imagery can also imply surety. The bodily ‘closeness’ of spiritual experience guarantees its authenticity. The visual is latent with the possibility of deception and hallucination. It is only the ‘tangible’ presence of Christ that can justify spiritual sensation. Rolle says there must be “continual heat [...] comfort must never depart”.

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138 Cloud, 9/15-16. I will be looking at this in chapter Four of this thesis.
140 Cloud, 47/20-26. Such terminology shows that Cloud-author’s spiritual anthroplogy remains, as McGinn says, strongly Augustinian. Vernacular Mysticism, p. 416.
141 Cloud, 67/37. Tugwell argues that “because of Rolle’s straightforward identification between the sensation of loving God and the reality, he cannot help but make the sensation something to be aimed at and cultivated; we are to ‘try to feel his love’. And the feeling in turn becomes the guide: we are ‘led by sweetness’, and this guidance is taken as infallible.” p. 164.
uideor desolatus, dum sensum illum ignis interni, cui cuncta corporis et spiritus applaudunt, et in quo secura se sciunt, non habeo ut solebam.”

The ‘fire’ is distinguished as ‘ghostly’ and yet having an effect on the body.

This is not very different from the Cloud’s ‘causal’ but not ‘ontological’ distinction between body and soul in spiritual sensation. However Rolle is ‘attached’ to this experience whereas the Cloud-author proposes detachment from all consolations as criterion for the discernment of grace writing in the Epistle:

For wite thou riyt wel that, thof God sumtyme withdrawe these sensible swetneses, these feruent felynys & these flaumynyg desires, neuertheles he withdraweth neuer the rather his grace in his chosen [...] For grace in itself is so heiy, so pure & so goostly, that it mat not be felt in oure sensible partye. The tokens therof mowen, bot not it [...] The thenkith his comyng [by thees sensible felynges], thof al it be not so.

Focusing on the body’s future glorification the Cloud-author accepts spiritual sensation anthropologically but pastorally he is concerned that the contemplative should not get attached to them. Their cultivation is not the purpose of spiritual life: “For a loue that is chaste & parfite, thof it suffer that the body be fed & counfortid in the presence of soche swete felynges & wepynges, neuertheles yit it is not gruchyng, bot ful wel apayed for to lacke hem at Goddes wille.”

One of the main distinctions between Rolle and the Cloud-author’s attitude to the body therefore is not the validity or invalidity of psycho-physical sensation, but the attitude of mind in which it should be approached.

The picture of Rolle as one who cultivates continuous consolations comes from focusing on Incendium Amoris. In Meditations on the Passion (Cambridge MS Ll. i.8) Rolle shows himself – or is portrayed as – cultivating an equal concern for grief as an expression of compassion and of repentance: “Woundys of reuthe is al my desyr [...] I have appetite to peyne.”

While it could be argued that Rolle is still longing for sensate experience of another sort, at one point in the Meditations he qualifies his longings with an implicit awareness that grace is not quantifiable by feelings. In fact, he knows that grace comes soonest when feelings are stripped away:

Quikne me, Lord Jhesu Crist, and gyf me grace, that I may fele som of the savowre of gostely swetnesse. Lene me of thine lyt, that I may somewhat syyt

144 Incendium, Prologue/146: ‘As it were abiding grievously cold I think myself desolate until the time when the flame comes again, whiles I have not, as I was wont, that feeling of ghostly fire which applies itself gladly to all parts of the body and soul, in which they know themselves to be secure.’
145 Epistle, 96/24-27, 34-36.
146 Cloud, 52/6-9.
147 English Writings, 23/145, 147-148.
have in soule my thryste to kele. But wel I wot this, that I have rad, that whoso yernyth and sekyth aryte, thow he fele the nouyt, he hath that he wot nouyt, thi love of Godhede; it hath us dytt, this speche, and swyche othere: that yef a man no savowre fynde, thenh himself owtcasynge and rebukynge and revylynge and, seyngh lys weykenesse and yeldyngh himself unworthy devocion to have or ony swyche specialte of oure Lord God, whansoevere he may no devocion fynde, thennhe he scal gete sounest the gyfte of hys grace.\textsuperscript{148xxix}

Rolle shows he is aware of the teaching in the contemplative tradition that if the heart is humble then the absence of feelings and insights is no hindrance. On the contrary, it is an excellent preparation for grace. He does not emphasise this point but he shows he is able to critique his experience through reference to what others have written.

This puts the lie to Mark McIntosh’s picture of Rolle as a ‘self-preoccupied’ mystic for whom community and social responsibility were distractions to the interior life.\textsuperscript{149} McIntosh believes that concern with experiences and their description leads to a focus on fixed states of consciousness rather than real growth in relationship.\textsuperscript{150} He proposes a way of ‘bodily knowing’ in mysticism based on community and passion mysticism counteracting ‘apophatic negation’ of the historical and physical. He proposes Julian of Norwich as an example of “those mystical writers for whom bodiliness is not a progressively grasped ‘creatureliness’ that obfuscates the Divine reality, but is rather a medium of communication.” Language mediated by the senses, McIntosh argues, acts as an extension of the body in the public sphere, creating communal theological speech.\textsuperscript{151} McIntosh’s critique of Rolle and of the apophatic tradition is however too simplistic. Communicating his message was very important to Rolle. He purposively used realist bodily language to emphasise his experience was not just subjective and personal but open to everyone. He became a teacher of experi entia through his ability to evoke and recreate it through language.\textsuperscript{152} Likewise McIntosh fails to remember that Rolle is one of England’s greatest exponents of Passion mysticism. Lastly, as we have seen, the apophatic mysticism of the Cloud does not ‘negate’ the fact that the body is ultimately capable of God nor that it is outside the ‘process’ of mystical transformation.

Certainly Rolle explains the failure or loss of spiritual sensation as a result of the physical body which draws us down to the earth; “\textit{dum in carne mortali manere cogitur, illa ineffabilis gloria perfecte non uidetur.”}\textsuperscript{153} This means that absence of ‘feeling’ or sensible

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 25/204-216.
\item \textsuperscript{149} \textit{Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology}, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 74.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Ibid, pp. 67-68.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid, p.79.
\item \textsuperscript{152} See Watson, \textit{Invention of Authority}, p. 140.
\item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Emendatio}, 65/87-88: ‘while the soul bides in this mortal flesh that wonderful joy is not perfectly felt’. There are many other examples.
\end{itemize}
consolations was for Rolle a necessary impediment in this life because of the purely physical and mortal aspect of the body. Sensuality had to be spiritualised before the sweetness of heaven was sensed. However this did not imply a rejection of the body, as McIntosh mistakenly tried to prove, or an unhealthy concern for interior states. For Rolle there was one body – that of Christ – which could be wholly accepted. In the encounter with that body the mystic's own senses could be caught up into immortality. The physical nature of the body may be an 'obfuscation of the Divine reality' but for Rolle it was also the means whereby that reality became manifest. It may be a source of temptation but it could also share in the impassibility of Christ's glorified body.

The body, though remaining a source of temptation for the Cloud-author, was also, in its weakness, the school in which humility could be learnt.\textsuperscript{154} Despite the Cloud-author's call for detachment from sensation it would be wrong to see it as having no place in his spiritual programme. In fact he emphasises the alternating absence and presence of sensually perceivable consolations as a process by which the contemplative is made ‘flexible’ (“blithely bowing & so plesauntly pliing”) to God’s will.\textsuperscript{155} To have a ‘feeling’ of God’s presence is what “wal norishe & fede thi spirit to last” and to have a sense of his absence “wole he propirly proue thi pacyence”.\textsuperscript{156} The author reads the failure of ‘feeling of grace’ in typical mystical dialectic as both the product of pride and the remedy for it: “Euermore whan the felyng of grace is withdrawen, pride is the cause: not euer pride that is, bot pride that shuld be, ne were that this feling of grace were withdrawen.”\textsuperscript{157}

Being stripped of sensible consolations is therefore seen by the Cloud-author as a positive purificatory process because ‘feeling’ can make the contemplative think and believe they are in heaven before they deserve to be. The spiritual path for the Cloud-author, in contrast with Rolle, involves a theology of psycho-physical consolation and a theology of absence. He has room for a ‘clothyng’ in sensible feeling and a stripping ‘nakid’ into the bare existence of God.\textsuperscript{158}

\begin{multicols}{2}
\textsuperscript{154} In the most influential book in the Middle Ages after the bible, \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict} says that body and soul are the two (one supposes equal) sides of the ladder on which humility is learnt. Ch. 7, para. 3.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Epistle, 97/6-13(9)}.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Epistle, 97/5 & 96/37}.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Cloud, 74/1-3}.
\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Epistle 97/7-8,18}.
\end{multicols}
Conclusion

The *Cloud* and its related works show an attempt to bring a popular tradition of English devotional mysticism that stemmed from Rolle into line with two developing streams of medieval thought: scholastic discussions on the faculties of the soul and their relation to the body and the newly emerged interest in the apophatic tradition of Christian mysticism. The *Cloud*-author was not so much a critic of Rolle as a commentator on Rolle and a justifier, with qualifications, of his enduring influence at the end of the fourteenth century.

Rolle and the *Cloud*-author shared a common concern for the place of the body in prayer. Both believe that inward contemplation effects the outward appearance of the body. The *Cloud*-author expresses a much stronger need to focus away from the body but this, I have shown, is a pastoral response to Rolle’s ongoing influence in the eremitic life and *not* a denial of the body-soul continuum. The *Cloud*-author was concerned that Rolle’s language not be taken literally and that Rolle’s rather ambiguous distinction between the physical and spiritual be clarified in such a way that the body was not merged with the spirit but made subject to it, all the while not ceasing to be body. The *Cloud*-author also sought to give a surer theological grounding for spiritual sensation and psycho-physical experience. This he did in reading the resurrected humanity of Christ as an archetype of a future glorification in the body at the general Resurrection. However for him the bodily Christ experience is set within a trajectory of mystical prayer that ends in a spiritual union of the will with God. On this journey, bodily consolation had a place and role but was not the aim, thereby he was able to give a more positive reading of physical and emotional dryness as a creative stage on the way to God.

The paradox we have seen in Rolle’s attitude to the body lies in the fact that the body is both renounced as an object of temptation but is also ‘caught up’, finding its place in the experience of God. Grace builds on nature. For Rolle grace transfigures nature. The paradox of the *Cloud*-author’s relation to Rolle’s ‘school of devotion’ is that, alongside all his reservations and qualifications, he accepts this. Despite his constant concern to distinguish the physical and the spiritual he still understands relationship with God as a holistic, body-spirit encounter. The physical/spiritual dualism (to safeguard against misinterpretation of Rolle’s style and to stress right ordering of body and soul) is stronger in the *Cloud*-author’s works. The bodily senses cannot ‘feel’ the Spirit. Though, when it is rendered quiescent, the body reflects (within its own sphere of outer appearance) the work of the spirit. This transparency of the body in spiritual work is, for the *Cloud*-author, the root of its placeless-ness. He wants
to move away from self-conscious experience (associated with Rolle) into a self-forgetting encounter with God who is himself hidden behind a ‘cloud of unknowing’. In imageless prayer God is de-objectified, but the body is also ‘physically nowhere’. However within this corporeal self-effacement we see here and there the continued presence of Rolle’s affective and sensual mysticism breaking through. As the Cloud-author says, the cloud is sometimes dispersed by “a beme of goostly liyt [...] Than schalt thou fele thine affeccion enfaumid with the fiire of his loue”.

The endeavour of this group of fourteenth-century English mystics to present a positive role for the body in prayer has parallels with a group of writers living at the same time on Mount Athos in Greece who affirmed the body in the context of Hesychastic prayer. Their main spokesman Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) was a direct contemporary of Rolle and like him influenced many followers. Parts of his Triads express exactly the attitude to the body that was being forged among the English medieval mystics of his era:

What pain or pleasure or movement is not a common activity of both body and soul? [...] There are indeed blessed passions and common activities of body and soul, which far from nailing the spirit to the flesh, serve to draw the flesh to a dignity close to that of the spirit, and persuade it too to tend toward what is above [...] For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to soul and body, since he has deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it also accomplish the works of God; so similarly, in spiritual man, the grace of the spirit, transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of things divine, and allows it the same blessed experiences as the soul undergoes [...] When the soul pursues this blessed activity, it deifies the body also; which, being no longer driven by corporeal and material passions [...] returns to itself and rejects all contact with evil things. Indeed, the body then inspires its own sanctification and inalienable divinisation, as the miracle working relics of the saints clearly demonstrate.

In the following chapter I compare the writings of Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton to see how their attitudes to the body can help us understand further the dynamics of Middle English mysticism at this time.

159 Cloud, 34/31, 34-35.  
Chapter Two: Body as Boundary and Barrier

In this chapter I compare attitudes to the role of the body in the writings of Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton. I will look particularly at the different anthropological models they used – how they described the human person as an amalgam of body and soul, and how these aspects were engaged in a response to God. I will show that at times there is a conscious – ‘explicit’ – anthropological model, at times it is merely a presupposition and the understanding of the constitution of the human person is ‘implicit’ to a theological concern. The rationale for ascetical practice is different for each writer, and yet for both the body is not an impediment to spiritual life but is something spiritually positive. For Hilton disciplining of the body serves the removal of distracting thoughts and therefore is the entry point for contemplation. For Julian bodily ascesis is a way of preparing the body itself for an encounter with God. Asceticism for both writers involves a purification that is not understood as a denial of, or detachment from, the body but as a process of freeing the body from disordered desire or self-centred attachments. In this it corresponds to Kalistos Ware’s typos of “positive asceticism” which disciplines but does not destroy the body.¹

The English mystics’ approach to the body is not only moderate, it is integrative. Ascetic purification was not viewed only as preparatory for contemplation. The body played a role all the way from early stages of prayer to the beatific vision. Both Hilton and Julian transcend the domination of the body which sees it as “spiritually important until it is defeated”.² The role of the body is not limited to a preparatory role in the spiritual life. Purification of the body was important because it participated in the person’s journey to God. The inner and the outer person were closely linked. They urged right-relation with the body rather than denial. In this they correspond to Hügel’s idea of “a truly human spirituality” as “a spirituality which ever requires some non spiritual material in which to work, and by working in which the soul itself, not only spiritualizes it, but increasingly develops its own self”.³

My aim in this chapter is to uncover the anthropological stance of these two English mystical writers to show that a holistic sense of the human person underpins what otherwise would look like extreme forms of body denial. In my individual, and subsequently comparative, analysis of Julian's Showings and Hilton's Scale, I uncover the patterns in

³ Mystical Element of Religion, p. 128.
English mysticism regarding their description of bodily functions and bodily parts to see whether this expresses an ‘explicit’ or ‘implicit’ anthropology. Does their description of the body effect their attitude to the body in prayer and in the ascetical life? How much does their attitude to the body relate to the central pastoral concerns of their writing? An anthropological reading of medieval devotional texts reveals that the writers' attitudes to the structure of the human person, especially the relation of body and soul, cannot be understood outside of the Christological framework they see as constitutive of human flourishing. Contemporary scholars of these texts who look for a fixed view of ‘human nature’ as an unchanging continuum err in trying to distil such a view from the texts themselves. For both Hilton and Julian the human person is in a state of change. To be human is to be potentially less than human, bestial – where the body dominates the soul – or spiritual, where soul and body are open to God. The relation of the body to the soul is different in a state of sin, in a state of grace, after death and also after the bodily Resurrection.

As both Hilton and Julian (and the other authors I am looking at) are writing pastorally it is possible, while taking into consideration the theological orientation of the humanum, to look specifically at the way the human person is pictured in the ‘process’ of integration and disintegration. The authors' attitudes to the body were formed in this context, emphasising the importance of ‘placing’ the body in Middle English mystical writing. The integration and disintegration of the human person situated the body on the spectrum from bestial to angelic life.

The chapter opens with an analysis of Julian’s Showings according to the following themes: 1) how was a bodily knowing of God made possible through the Incarnation and particularly in a shared experience of the Passion? In this I will be asking why the body is so strongly linked to devotional states, how sensation was linked to sensibility; 2) the place Julian’s attitude to the body plays in her understanding of human relation to God (does her ‘bodily theology’ match up with the way she refers to bodily parts and functions?); 3) the relation of corporeal body to the body anticipated in the Resurrection – this remains a neglected aspect of Julian’s attitude to the body in scholarship; and 4) Hilton’s attitude to the body and bodily knowing as a way into contemplation in order to see how he more strictly defines a hierarchy of body and soul, before offering a comparison of the two writers on this theme.

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During this chapter I will engage with the work of various ‘Julian scholars’ who, for the sake of clarity, I will introduce here. First there is a debate over the ‘apophatic’ and the ‘cataphatic’ aim of Julian’s Showings: David Aers argues that Julian’s search for meaning involves “a sustained abstraction from the visual”. He sees in the interaction of image, exegesis and reflection in Julian’s Showings a number of strategies which draw one to a ‘detached’ perspective that encourages the mind to move from meditation on the humanity of Christ to contemplation of Divine truths. For Aers the visions carry a teaching rather than any attempt to compose an *Imago Christi* as a suffering, wounded and bleeding body. Ellen M. Ross on the other hand argues that Julian was part of a distinct late medieval spirituality which saw suffering and pain as a way to God. The ‘contrition, compassion and longing for God’ that Julian prayed for as a young woman show that she sought a close identification with Christ’s Passion. For Ross the content of Julian’s Showings centre on Christ’s body as a somatic manifestation of divine love to humanity.

Secondly there is the question how Julian treats the role of asceticism: Caroline Bynum argues that Julian shares with other female mystics of her time a focus on the humanity of Christ as physicality. She shares much of the same imagery; wounds, blood, Christ as a feminine body that gives birth and nurtures. However the practice of food asceticism and imagery of feeding though they dominate much female mysticism in the late Middle Ages are totally absent in Julian’s writing. Grace Jantzen goes further arguing for Julian’s complete non-ascetical evaluation of the body and sensuality: “Rather than being left behind or *mortified* in spiritual progress, the body is cherished and enfolded in the love of God, and reintegrated in a spiritual whole-making”.

Lastly there is the relation of ‘sensuality’ to ‘substantane’ in Julian’s thought: Sandra McEntire argues that the cohesion of these two aspects of human nature in Julian’s thought comes specifically through Julian’s acceptance of the feminine body. The ‘impulse to union’ in body and soul is linked to motherhood for giving birth, nurturing and feeding are, in McEntire’s view, fundamentally both physical and spiritual attributes. However Cynthia Masson points out that ‘outward’ and ‘inward’ of sensuality and substance remain for Julian at the human level, two contraries. Masson argues that Julian does not postulate their union

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5 Aers, p. 86.
6 *The Grief of God*, pp. 31-40.
7 *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 186. Bynum does not seem to notice that it is food that the servant is sent out to prepare for the master in the parable in *LT, WJN*, 281-282/ 157-170.
8 *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, p. 151.
9 ‘The Likeness of God and The Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich’s Showings’, *JNBE*, pp. 3-34.
on any anthropological ground but on the uniqueness of the person of Christ as the “poynte” which enables the crossing over of the human and divine.  

Hilton’s anthropology has also been looked at by recent scholars and is often judged as ‘dualistic’ or ‘negative’ in relation to the body. Denise Baker reads Hilton’s view of sanctification as a ‘suppression of sensuality’, seeing in Hilton’s approach a permanent conflict between the soul and the body. Similarly Tarjei Park argues that for Hilton spiritual perception meant detachment from sense experience. In order to waken what Hilton calls the ‘ghostly eye’ the mind’s fixation to embodiment must be abandoned. However I will argue that, as with Julian, Hilton is writing about the transformation of the human person and is not attempting to give a ‘fixed’ view of the human person. The relation of body to soul changes with the action of grace. At the purgative level of prayer there is a conflict between body and soul, the ascetical task demands the body’s subservience. However such language should not be read ontologically as a description of the human person. For both Julian and Hilton the integration of the human person happens in Christ. At this level anthropology is derived from Christology. The harmony between the two natures of Christ becomes the model of redeemed humanity.

Julian of Norwich: A Theology of the Body?

The debate over apophatic or cataphatic typology in Julian’s Showings carries with it all the problems of trying to categorise ‘distinct’ spiritualities from texts which show that the use of images and their negation have, in Christian spirituality, nearly always gone together. However in the High Middle Ages a new trend in western spirituality – associated with Francis of Assisi – emphasised the Jesus of history as the presence of God in the created world. This new ‘concrete Christocentrism’ could be contrasted with spiritualities which stress a world-transcending view. Meditation on the humanity of Christ was possible because of a shared experience of corporality. This teaching on prayer actually goes back at least to Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century but a new sense of the imitation of

10 The ‘unity in difference’ of sensuality and substance is based on the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ. ‘The Point of Coincidence: Rhetoric and the Apophatic in Julian of Norwich’s Showings’, JNBE, pp. 153-181. ST, 226/1: ‘I sawe god in a poynte by whilke sight I sawe that he es in alle thynge.’
Christ’s humanity certainly became prominent in the thirteenth century. Imagination built on sense perception, so as to enter into the scenes and feelings of Jesus’ life. The process of contemplation involved a moving with and through the humanity of Christ into the divinity, leaving behind imaginative meditation, and the sense perception on which it was dependent, and becoming one with the divinity. Some scholars have seen in the fourteenth century the beginnings of a split between discursive, imaginative meditation and contemplation per se. As imaginative meditation became increasingly common for lay people (outside the contemplative peace of the cloister) it became an end in itself and didn’t lead on to the imageless prayer that writers like Bernard saw as its conclusion.

Julian’s evocation of Christ’s tortured, bleeding and dying body appears to belong to this late medieval tradition of *Imaginatio Passionis*. She sees Christ at various stages of his passion. However Aers sees in the interaction of image, exegesis and reflection in Julian’s *Showings* a number of strategies which draw one to a ‘detached’ perspective that encourages the mind to move from meditation on the humanity of Christ to contemplation of Divine truths. Julian’s aim, he maintains, is not to arouse affective but rather cognitive responses. The images make sense of and give meaning to suffering. The example Aers uses is that when her visions “vanyssched” she considered that as important as when they “contynued”. The reader is often nudged from any affective identification with the image toward a speculative consideration of its meaning. Likewise the reader is kept in the position of an observer by acutely pictorial, even aesthetic, descriptions. At times Julian clearly does abstact from the visual object. When Julian sees a vision of all things that are made as “a little thing the quantity of an haselnot, lying in the palme of my hand” Julian is not seeing an object but a quality – littleness. This quality infers a message; the insufficiency of created things. Certainly Julian does read an apophatic lesson that “no soule is reste d till it is noughted of all thinges that is made”.

However by stressing the ‘apophatic moment’ Aers gives too linear a reading to the interaction in Julian’s *Showings* of ‘bodily vision’, ‘imaginative vision’ and ‘words formed in my understanding’. Unlike ‘the hazelnut’ the more emotive images of Christ’s body are closely related to the responses of compassion and shared suffering in her illness. As Julian

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17 Aers, p. 86.
18 LT, WJN, 139/7-8.
19 LT, WJN, 141/26.
20 Watson calls this “a polyphonic complexity”. ‘The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich’s Showings’, *JNBE*, p. 67.
says; “his paynes ware my paynes”. There is a movement from literal ‘seeing’ to figurative ‘understanding’ but there is also a corresponding movement that affirms what is seen bodily. Julian refuses to take her eyes off the cross so as to raise them to heaven. Even in ‘the showing of the “haselnot” the theological meaning – detachment from created things – goes alongside an affirmation of creation as sustained eternally by God’s love.  

**Showings** is undoubtedly both a work of theology and devotional meditation. The many levels are more an attempt to express an integrated – and integrating – act of divine communication than a tidy progression away from the concrete. Julian’s theology is Christocentric and in affirming the bodily nature of Christ she affirms the human body as the locus for divine encounter. In Julian’s case there is a close link between the physical suffering of Christ and her own bodily illness. Julian’s prayer for three wounds of contrition, compassion and longing for God root her in the spirituality of her time, particularly women’s spirituality. She asked for these spiritual graces along with two more extraordinary, “not the commune”, requests conditional on God’s will: for “bodily sight” of Christ’s passion and for “bodily sicknes” that might purge her from sin. The three wounds are therefore a reflux upon the soul of corporeal transformation effected through bodily events.

Though Julian asks for “bodilie sight”, the eye here is not simply an avenue of perception but of communication and communion with Christ’s pains, “wherin I might have more knowinge of the bodily paines of our saviour, and of the compassion of our lady”. Perception is really imitation, producing in one’s own body the same salvific suffering. The Virgin Mary was understood as the paradigm for this vicarious sharing in Christ’s suffering. To ‘see’ with the body is therefore something more than what has become known as the spiritual senses. It was a physical seeing which had a somatic effect. Likewise “bodilie sicknes” is not just purgative of sin, but also a form of imitation. “The wound of very contrition, the wound of kind compassion, and the wound of wilful longing to God” are a

21 *ST*, 210/4.  
22 *LT*, WJN, 139-140/7-24.  
23 There is surely a parallel here with Gregory the Great’s account of St. Benedict’s vision of the whole world collected in one ray of sunlight. *Dialogues* II, XXXV, 3-6. The theological message Gregory glean from this image is also the same as Julian’s interpretation of the ‘haselnut’ in the palm of her hand: i) created things are small in comparison to the Creator, ii) the contemplative becomes greater the whole world so they are able to see the whole world concentrated before them, iii) heaven and earth are not shrunk but the soul is expanded, iv) creation is perceived as contained/sustained in God’s light.  
24 See Baker, *Vision to Book*, pp. 15-23. The gender issue will be looked at in chapter Five.  
27 *LT*, WJN, 127/10-11.  
28 I will show in chapter Three that scientific understandings of visuality had an influence in Julian’s understanding of ‘seeing’ as having bodily repercussions.
spiritualised version of the somatic identification with Christ sought in the first two ‘gifts’. As metaphor ‘wound’ expresses this root in *imitatio passionis*. Julian therefore links affective and cognitive responses. As ‘passion’ expresses Divine love through a body, ‘compassion’ is the wound that body inflicts on the soul through vision.

Ross takes Julian’s ‘wound prayer’ as evidence that Christ’s body plays more than a didactic role. More than giving meaning to suffering it is an image that demands emotive response: ‘contrition’ for being the cause of that pain, compassion through empathy with it, ‘longing’ to share in the love it expresses. It was particularly among women’s mimesis of the passion – because of their theological, biological and social identification with the body – that, according to Ross, the Divine was seen to manifest through their bodies. As public embodiments of the Divine their bodily suffering was seen as intercessory. Drawing attention to portrayals of Jesus that used ‘feminine’ characteristics Ross sees the double gendered Jesus as “the root metaphor for an entire epoch”. For Julian, the association of her own suffering with that of Christ was the unifying bond that enabled bodily suffering to be read not as the result of sin but as its cure, that which purged sin from the body.

However Ross does not look at why – specifically in the works of Julian – the body is so strongly linked to devotional states? How is affectivity a bodily response? Is it distinguishable from the general focus on the physicality of Christ and the possibility of human participation in that body which finds expression widely at the time through devotion to the Eucharist as Corpus Christi, pilgrimage to the land of Jesus’ humanity, to shrines and to mortal remains of the saints. The cult of relics as physical deposits of Divine presence was ubiquitous in the later Middle Ages. In all these practices devotion is linked to sensation. In much religious writing also, in the high and late Middle Ages, there was a new emphasis on the psycho-physical wholeness of the human person: the body participating in the experiences of the soul. Likewise emotions were understood to have physical manifestations. This is reflected in Julian’s writings in that sensory perception of Christ’s passion leads to an increase in compassion, and bodily sickness externalises and manifests this inner compassion. We can agree with Ross that bodily sight is the backdrop to all of Julian’s ‘ghostly’

29 *LT*, WJN, 129/34-36.
30 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Alters: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 238-244, shows how devotion to the wounds of Jesus was one of the most popular cults of late medieval Europe. Duffy notes how for Julian in her tenth revelation it has the significance of giving access to the heart as a place of refuge.
31 Ross, pp. 31-40, 131.
revelations. However this does not make Julian unique. The two somatic gifts of ‘sight’ and ‘sickness’ are particularly indicative of women’s mysticism of the time.

Julian’s uniqueness seems to lie more in not making the further step from ‘embodied spirituality’ to practicing or encouraging a self-generated asceticism. Turner sees in Showings an ascetical concern; “self-disciplining of the body” helps to realign “sensualite” to the soul’s “substaunce”. However, in the Showings we find no comment about ascetical practices, nothing about chastity, no cautions about sexuality or any other form of bodily need or desire. There is little reference to the Eucharist. The only mention Julian makes of the value of physical penance, among which she includes bodily sickness ‘sent by God’, is not in the context of mystical experience or preparation for the Eucharist, but as a way of keeping humble, as part of the sacrament of confession. Purgation does come through sickness but it is not chosen, it is given. Although Julian prayed for illness she never made herself ill. Bodily imitation of Christ is received (and dependent on God’s will), it is not something achieved. This fact shows that the emphasis on bodily suffering in women’s mysticism need not be the self-inflicting of a harmful gender stereotype that associated the feminine with the flesh. The Incarnation or Passion of Christ was a self-giving rather than a self-harming.

The debate over the nature of Julian’s asceticism focuses on how her bodily illness corresponds to the purgative stage of the spiritual path. The gift of bodily sickness, Julian writes, “come to my mind with contricion [...] for I would be purged by the mercy of God and after live more to the worshippe of God because of that sicknes”. Is the body’s involvement solely at the foundation of the spiritual path? If illness corresponds to the purgative stage for Julian do her visions, as Maria Lichtmann prosposes, correspond to the illuminative, and her understanding of their meaning to unitive wisdom. Certainly Julian never intended suffering but not for its own sake but “that [Christ] walde fulfylle my bodye with mynde of felunge of his blessede passyon”. Julian shows that bodily suffering was for her a participation in the salvific effect of these events. In this Julian’s attitude fits with Bynum’s thesis that medieval women’s mysticism made creative appropriation of the Divine kenosis. However the full distinctiveness of the affirmation of the body in Julian’s Showings vis-a-vis women’s mysticism is not drawn out by Bynum. Women’s mysticism tended to denigrate the physical

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34 LT, WJN, 241/11-14.
35 LT, WJN, 128-129/17, 24-26.
37 ST, 210/ 2-3.
except as a way of communing with Christ’s flesh. Julian sees this communion as an affirmation of human embodiment in all – and maybe most especially in its feminine – forms. Jantzen puts it like this: “Given her awareness of Jesus’s body, and of her own in her visionary experience, her account of spirituality will need to take bodiliness into account in a way quite unusual for medieval spiritual writers. Julian does not speak of spiritual growth as a mastery of the flesh, or even of a transcending of the flesh. Rather she speaks in terms of the unification of substance and sensuality.”

It is to the relation of substance to sensuality that we must turn. We have seen how, for Julian, the humanity of Christ is not just an object of devotion but a way of knowing God through the body. If Julian does not give so much emphasis to bodily practices it is to her reflections on the structure of the human person that we must turn.

Substance and Sensuality

Julian’s Showings have much to say about what it is to be human in relation to God, presented in terms of the creature-Creator relationship. The positive acceptance of her own creation keeps Julian from describing that relationship in terms of abjectness and servility and preserves her from protestations (common to much mysticism of the fourteenth century) of her ‘nothingness’ or dissolution into the Divine. Much of the revelation concerns the value of the human soul as God created it. The created nature of the soul far from being a hindrance to union with God is expressed positively as the ground for continual affirmation of the human person even in union with its source.

Likewise “sensualite” for Julian expresses not so much an aspect of human nature in itself but an event within God’s creation of humanity as ‘ensouled bodies’. How does the soul relate to the body though?

In chapter 46 Julian first uses the term “sensualite”. She writes that “oure passing living that we have here in oure sensualite knoweth not what oure selve is but in our faith”. It is important to note here, as many commentators on Julian have shown, that “sensualite” for Julian is not the body per se but is the faculty of the soul concerned with the body and temporal matters. For Julian our “substaunce” is the essence of our humanity rooted in God,
our “sensualite” is our God-given “independence as psychosomatic beings in a physical world”. As the union of consciousness and embodiment (often called ‘the lower part of the soul’) sensuality can participate in the knowing of God not by direct self-awareness but ‘by faith’. So this statement, in chapter 46, introduces us to the distinct epistemological modality of sensuality and substance – as different ways of knowing in the human person – but also their ultimate integration in God as the object of knowledge.

Julian’s primary concern is to affirm the soul as the image of God. The substantial and sensual parts of the soul have, respectively, a direct and an indirect way of knowing their source. In Julian’s anthropology there is a complex interplay of the aspects of the human person and God’s action. For Julian “feyth”, which originates in “substaunce” and yet works in “sensualite”, effects the integration of the two parts of the soul. She writes:

Oure faith is a vertu that cometh of oure kinde substance in to oure sensual soule by the holy gost [...] And what time oure soul is enspired in oure body, in which we be made sensual, as swithe mercy and grace beginne to werke [...] In which werking the holy gost formeth in oure faith hope that we shall come againe up aboven to oure substance.

The image of God for Julian is therefore not just in the higher faculty of the soul but also in that part which deals with sensory perception. This, moreover, is not in spite of embodiment but because of it: “For in the same point that oure soule is made sensual, in the same point is the citte of God.”

The human soul had long been understood as created in the image of Christ. However Julian emphasises that “we be doubel of Gods making”: our substantial and our sensual capacities reflecting the Divine and the human natures of our prototype. Moreover Julian emphasises the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection not so much as exemplars of spiritual ascent but more as exemplary of the human condition as a whole and more specifically as the process whereby the ‘sensual’ part of the soul is raised. It had long been agreed that the ‘sensual soul’ was linked to the body in its role in dealing with material objects. This led Augustine and his medieval commentators to conclude that the human body as such was not the image of God. Partly this was a rhetorical manoeuvre emphasising the dignity of the soul, but generally, drawing on a neo-platonic hierarchy of being, it emphasised the stages of

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46 LT, WJN, 297/22-23 & 299/13-16.
47 LT, WJN, 299/21-22.
48 LT, WJN, 307/32.
creation and the right ordering of the human person in their return to God; the hierarchy of influence between body and soul proceeds from higher to lower capacities.49

There was a shift in the scholastic theology of the High Middle Ages which used the Aristotelian notion that every living body must be of a composite nature, the soul being the ‘form’ that actualises the potentialities of matter to create an ‘ensouled body’.50 Aquinas for example argued that the body is necessary for a soul to exercise all vital capacities, since (almost) all vital functions are the functions of body and soul together. The sensitive soul requires a body, since the acts of sensation, of seeing, for example, require bodily organs. Similarly, the act of intellection, which is proper to humans alone, requires sensation, and sensation in turn requires a body.51 Alongside this, in popular spirituality the High Middle Ages saw increasing devotion to the humanity of Christ and his bodiliness. The greatest inspirer of this devotion, Francis of Assisi, in his Admonitions pointed out that, bodily, we are in the image of God incarnate: “[God] created and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body and to His image according to the spirit or inner man.”52 Likewise for Julian; the fact that salvation comes to meet us in the body means that at least potentially the body can be the active principle working on the soul. Moreover, in Julian’s thought, the development of bodily life over time contributes to the increase of God’s image in the human person:

All the gyftes that God may geve to the creature he hath gevyn to his Son Jhesu for us, whych gyftes he, wonnyng in us, hath beclosed in hym in to the tyme that we be waxyn and growyn, oure soule with oure body and oure body with oure soule. Eyther of them take helpe of other tylle we be brought up in to stature as kynde werkyn.53iv

Prayer therefore for Julian reconciles “sensualite” and “substance”. Their mutual action leads to a “wonnyn” (which has already been achieved in the person of Christ).54 The question of the union of the body and soul is certainly one of the most important contributions Julian makes to a tradition of reflection on the human person as the image of God. In classic Augustinian anthropology ‘image’ was understood as relation, so that the higher part of the soul, the mens or “substance” in Julian’s terms, was orientated to God and therefore took that image. The lower part of the soul, spiritus or “sensualite”, orientated to the

51 Summa Theologica 1a, 76, 1.
53 LT, WJN, 297/9-12.
54 Lichtmann, “Bodilye syght”, 16
world, was the image of God through its relation to the higher part, together they made one
soul. However, as Joan Nuth points out; “insofar as the ‘sensual soul’ is linked to the body,
Julian’s use of the term ‘sensualite’ can at times be interpreted to include the body itself.”

Julian does not go so far as to say that the body itself is the image of God. However Julian
emphasises the fact that God has become body in Christ and therefore the sensory soul is able
to relate directly to God through its orientation to bodily things. Moreover Christ’s
motherhood means that the female body is also part of the imago Dei.

How does this theology relate to real bodies? Julian does not give a systematic
analysis of the structure of the human person, rather she attempts to see the human person as
an integrated whole. We must turn to the way she describes the body in her work giving a
phenomenological study of Julian’s attitude to the body to assess the place and value it has in
her theology.

In chapter 53 Julian makes a distinction between the body and the soul in their created
origins:

And thus I understode that mannse soule is made of nought. That is to sey, it is made
but of nought that is made, as thus: whan God shulde make mannys body, he toke the
slime of the erth, which is a mater medeled and gadered of alle bodely thinges, and
thereof he made mannnes body. But to the making of mannys soule he wolde take right
nought, but made it.

However it is important to note that Julian does this in the context of a radical affirmation of
the dignity of the soul. She contrasts the source of the soul’s creation with that of the body by
an inventive and subversive reflection on the traditional doctrine of creatio ex nihilo.

Passages like the above could be read dualistically were it not remembered that Julian is
making a comment about the dignity of the soul, rather than degrading the body. In mystical
writing the body is often used as a foil in their attempt to underscore the dignity of the soul.
Negative language about the body should in some contexts be seen more as a rhetorical
antithesis, acyually describing only a comparative scale of value. Julian in this way sets up
a dialectic between “substance” and “sensualite” as two parts of the soul working within
different epistemic fields. “Sensualite” is therefore not the antithesis of cognition but is the
process whereby physical objects are known.

55 For Augustine on the two parts of the mind see The Trinity, tr. McKenna, pp. 345-346. Its influence
permeated Scholastic theology e.g. Peter Lombard, Sentences, 2:24. See Edward Howells, ‘Spiritual
Transformation in Augustine’s On the Trinity’, STRCS, pp. 95-103.
57 See Jantzen, Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism, p. 303.
58 LT, WJN, 295/34-38.
59 See Margaret Miles, Augustine on the Body, AAr Dissertation Series 31, (Missoula Montana: Scholars Press,
In other parts of her writings, the body is closely connected to God. She sees the concern of God in the natural processes of digestion and defecation. She compares the body to a purse which in the course of nature, and not through conscious action, opens up and closes befittingly:

A man goeth upperight, and the soule of his body is sparede as a purse fulle fair. And whan it is time of his nescessery, it is openede and sparede ayen fulle honestly. And that it is he that doeth this, it is shewed ther wher he seith: “He cometh downe to us, to the lowest parte of oure need.” For he hath no dispite of that he made, ne he hath no disdaine to serve us at the simpliest office that to oure body longeth in kinde, for love of the soule that he made to his awne liknesse. For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skinne, and the bones in the flesh, and the harte in the bowke, so ar we, soule and body, cladde and enclosede in the goodnes of God. 

Julian subverts the notion that the body (and particularly in the late Middle Ages the female body) is excrement. The body is a “purse”, it contains something valuable. It is not abject, God’s love is demonstrated through it. Not only is God present and active in the structure and functions of the human body but Julian describes the beatific vision in terms that seem to include ordinary human perception. For her the spiritual senses are not mere metaphor but are related in a real way to sense perception. Through the strengthening of nature beyond itself, there is even in this life an orientation of created sense faculties towards the uncreated:

And we endlesly be alle had in God, him verely seyeng and fulsomly feling, and him gostely hering, and him delectably smeling, and him swetly swelwing. And than shall we se God face to face, homely and fulsomely. The creature that is made shall see and endlesly beholde God which is the maker. For thus may no man se God and live after, that is to sey, in this dedely life. But whan he of his special grace will shewe him here, he strengthe the creature aboven the selfe.

The body therefore for Julian was not so much a barrier to contemplation but a place of encounter with Christ. Julian’s discussion of her experience of pain in illness shows how the senses, which usually move outward to created objects, can be deployed in a different way. She describes the outward part of her nature – her mortal flesh – as suffering and regretting the illness. However her inner part consciously chooses to relate her suffering to that of Jesus. “The inward party”, she says, “is master and sovereyn to the outward, nought

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60 LT, WJN, 143-144/29-37. This stands in marked contrast to The Prick of Conscience which links defecation with the degenerate state of the body after the Fall: ‘From then oure foule fleshe produces dung.’ ed. R. Morris, pp. 17-18.


62 LT, WJN, 259/41-46.
charging or taking hede of the willes of that”. 63 Instead of seeing the soul as orientating itself away from the flesh – thus splitting itself in two – Julian sees the soul as drawing the outward part:

That the outward party sholde drawe the inward to assent was not shewde to me. But that the inward party draweth the outward party, by grace, and both shalle be oned in blysse without ende by the vertu of Christ, this was shewde. 64vi

In chapter 64 this distinction of the outward and inward parts of the human person is expressed more dualistically and not in terms of their ultimate resolution. Julian seems to contrast the “ful fair creature” of the soul with the “hevy & ogyley body”. 65 ix However “wretchynesse of oure deadly flessch” should be read in a pastoral context as dealing with sickness. Scholarship on Julian often fails to situate her pastoral concern in relation to the Black Death. 66 Julian was born in the middle of the fourteenth century, at the time when the bubonic plague was at its most virulent in England. Her revelations were responding to a need to make sense of the trauma. This trauma was felt physically by a whole generation who had seen loved ones and neighbours die in ways that correspond with Julian’s description of the wretchedness of the flesh. However Julian would be the first to admit that the trauma of ‘sensualitie’ (if not on a personal level at least collectively) reflects that of the soul. Julian did use language common to the time, correlating weakness of the body and tendency to sin. The ‘Fall’, for Julian, led to a dislocation of sensuality. Moreover plague was felt psychologically as a punishment from God. 67 However Julian’s revelations serve to reveal that God looks ‘with pity, not with blame’. 68 In contrast to a tendency to split from the body after a traumatic experience she reaffirms God’s action and grace within sensuality. 69

The above passage must therefore be read in terms of the lesson that is drawn from it. Julian writes that “it is fulle blesfulle, man to be taken fro paine, more than paine be taken fro man. For if paine be taken fro us, it may come againe”. 70 x In other words she attempts to give

63 LT, WJN, 189/27-29.
64 LT, WJN, 189/30-32.
65 Full quotation on p.26 of this thesis.
66 The exception is Jantzen, Julian of Norwich, pp. 145-156.
69 I discuss these two psychological approaches to trauma and their relevance to mysticism in my essay on ‘Attitudes to the Body in Fourteenth Century English Mystical Literature’, STRCS, pp. 117-118: ‘The other approach to the body in the face of trauma is to dis-identify with it so that attention is put on the soul. This dis-identifying with bodily experience, in the form of sickness or psycho-physical consolation, is often stressed in mystical discourse to emphasize the self-transcending nature of the spiritual path. This approach goes hand in hand with a more dualistic body-spirit anthropology.’
70 LT, WJN, 325/31-33.
pastoral guidance to those who had seen or lived with people who died of the plague despite prayers for God’s intervention and healing. It is a passage which highlights the salvific value of death, not as a punishment but as a permanent release from the suffering inherent in bodily life.\textsuperscript{71} The text therefore is both an accurate description of what many had seen and also a rhetorical highlighting of the corruptibility of the flesh. Thus bodily realism serves a didactic role highlighting death as part of God’s compassionate action.

However in relation to all the above examples it is not only human body parts and functions which are understood as under the providential care of God and capable of responding to that presence. Julian also uses bodily language to refer to divine action. Firstly in relation to bodily functions, a number of commentators on the Showings have drawn attention to the birthing and gestation imagery applied to the action of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{72} This is particularly focussed in Christ. Having given birth to the godly will from all eternity, Jesus incorporates that \textit{imago Dei} in a physical body creating what McGinn calls a ‘temporal expression of substance’\textsuperscript{.73} The link with the female flesh in the Incarnation means that the maternal qualities of Christ take a new embodied form in the nurture and protection of the sacraments until the Christian is born back into the bliss of the Father. As a mother gives her child milk to suck, through the sacraments Jesus feeds us with himself. Jesus is thus three times a mother – in creation, in redemption and in restoration – all closely associated with the human body.\textsuperscript{74}

A number of commentators have highlighted how Julian uses feminine bodily metaphor for Christ’s action in a way that affirms women’s experience: outwardly through bleeding, lactating, giving birth, and inwardly in terms of the womb, enclosure and protection. The ebb and flow of Christ’s blood in the fourth Revelation is reminiscent of the menstrual cycle.\textsuperscript{75} The “walowyng and wrythyng, gronyng and monyng’ that is the ‘labour’ of Christ in the Incarnation and the Passion is reminiscent of giving birth.\textsuperscript{76} Other commentators have read Julian’s blood imagery in the light of medieval medical practices of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{71} McAvoy sees this passage as expressing ‘not dualism but metamorphosis’, the shedding of the flesh enables embodiment with a redeemed body. p. 145.
\textsuperscript{73} Vernacular Mysticism, p. 447.
\textsuperscript{74} Chs 59, 60 & 61. For a discussion of woman’s body as food in late medieval spirituality see Bynum, \textit{Holy Feast}, pp. 269-276.
\textsuperscript{75} LT, WJN, 167/3-8. See Blandford, \textit{Verely God is oure Moder}, TBGTI, pp. 157, 160.
\textsuperscript{76} McEntire, ‘Likeness of God’, JNBE, pp. 17-18. Julian uses these descriptive verbs to describe the ‘fall’ of the servant that is both Adam and Christ. LT, WJN, 273-274/12-13.
\end{flushleft}
purgation. The letting of blood in natural healing the medical equivalent of the salvific effect of Christ’s Passion. Alternatively, in the light of medieval physiological theory, blood processed into milk in the woman’s breast becomes food, a symbol that links the Passion with the sacramental life of the Church. However ‘blood’, ‘lactation’ and ‘labour pains’ are common scriptural symbols. The imagery itself is not new. However Julian does use them as central evocations of Christ’s work and with a graphic physical realism giving them a radical efficacy. In order to understand how subversive these images could be for God, if taken literally, one has to remember that this was a time when both menstruation and giving birth necessitated a time of purification before full participation in the liturgy could be resumed. For Julian, the human body, in all its states, is not so much a barrier to contemplation but a place of encounter with Christ.

Julian’s descriptions of the body confirm the positive role she gives it in her theology. It is necessary now to look at how, in Julian’s thought, it is not only the “godly wyll” that has never been separated from God but also the “dedely flessch” that is capable of union with God. For Julian the materia of the body – taken by Christ – is the active means of its own restoration. However in what sense can the Christian share in Christ’s transformation of the flesh? The question returns to the possibility of a spiritualised sensuality that anticipates the body’s Resurrection.

**Anthropology and Christology: Julian and the Heritage of Augustine**

We have seen how Julian stresses the human person as an ‘ensouled body’, the body not separate from the soul. However it is important to remember that her anthropology deals with the human person in three conditions: as created, as fallen and as restored. All of these are related to her concept of the motherhood of Christ. In creation Christ unites our substantial nature to a body, thus creating the sensual part of the soul. The fall for Julian happens in this sensual part of the soul; “in oure sensualite we faile”. However “sensualite” is not the source of sin. It is sin which creates a misalignment between the two parts of the soul (in themselves both good). However with Julian the not uncommon late medieval image of the motherhood of Christ carries a new anthropological significance,

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77 Barratt, 'Lowest Part of our Need', *JNBE*, p. 244.
79 See for example Rev. 7:14 & Heb. 9:22, Prov. 5:19, Rev. 12:2.
81 *LT, WJN*, 303/6-7.
expressing the integration of the human person.\textsuperscript{82} When Christ himself takes a human body, the integral self is re-established. Motherhood is not merely evocative of love and mercy but expresses a theology of creation and restoration. It is from “our Moder sensual” that the child’s physicality comes and from whom its wholeness is made possible. The proof text is from chapter 58:

I saw that the seconde person, which is oure moder substantially, the same derewurthy person is now become oure moder sensual. For we be doubel of Gods making: that is to sey, substantial and sensual. Oure substance is the hyer perty, which we have in oure fader God almighty. And the seconde person of the trinite is oure moder in kind in oure substantial making, in whom we be grounded and roted, and he is oure moder of mercy in oure sensualite taking. And thus oure moder is to us diverse manner werking, in whom oure pertes be kepte undeperted.\textsuperscript{83}\textsuperscript{xii}

The motherhood of Christ as well as working in creation and redemption opens up a further eschatological role: the possibility of bodily immortality. As the sensory soul was created double by embodiment in a mortal body so its restoration, for Julian, involves liberation from physical death as well as spiritual:

For the worshipful oning that was thus made of God between the soule and the body, it behoved nedes to be that mankind shuld be retored fro doubil deth. Which restoring might neve wre into the time that the seconde person in the trinite had taken the lower party of mankind.\textsuperscript{84}\textsuperscript{xiii}

Such restoration happens in Christ. In order to understand the full inclusivity of Julian’s attitude to the body we need therefore to bear its Christological and eschatological context in mind. The bodiliness of the contact between the human person and God is confirmed in the general Resurrection. Like Dante Alighieri (c1265-1321) before her, Julian saw the bodily senses reaching their full capacity in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{85}

Scholastic debate abounded in the later Middle Ages on the relation of the beatific vision to the Resurrection of the body. Beatific vision was dependent on the severing of body and soul at death. And yet, this severing was not the ultimate fulfilment: the culmination of the experience of God awaited the bodies rejoining with the soul on the last day at the general Resurrection.\textsuperscript{86} Scholars claimed this made human contemplation distinct in comparison with

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{82} See Bynum, \textit{Holy Feast}, pp. 266-267.
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{LT}; \textit{WJN}, 308-309/30-38.
\item \textsuperscript{84} \textit{LT}; \textit{WJN}, 299/36-39.
\item \textsuperscript{85} ‘[In heaven] much is granted which is here denied to the human senses [...] Since for all joys that shall delight us then the body’s organs will be rendered strong.’ \textit{The Divine Comedy}, 3, Paradise, tr. Dorothy L. Sayers, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 54, line 55, & p. 179, line 58. See again quotation from \textit{LT}; \textit{WJN}, 259/41-46 on p. 69 of this thesis.
\item \textsuperscript{86} See Bynum, \textit{Resurrection}, pp. 283-291.
\end{enumerate}
the angels.\footnote{Ibid, p. 243. Also Fragmentation and Redemption, pp. 203-209.} For Aquinas the body with all its particular characteristics was understood as carried by soul or ‘form’. Matter was personalised by the soul, so that Aquinas believed at the general Resurrection any matter could be appropriated and formed by the soul into body. There was a conflict here between Scholastic and popular understanding. The latter emphasised the particularity of body matter and its preservation in the cult of relics and in burial practices.\footnote{Bynum, ‘Why all the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s perspective’, Critical Enquiry, 22:1, (Autumn 1995), 21-32.} Popular belief by the fourteenth century held that the body was the person, leading to a pathological fear of bodily mutation, decomposition and decay.\footnote{Bynum, Fragmentation, pp. 269-270 & Piero Camporesi, The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore, trans. Tania Croft-Murray & Helen Elmsion, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 106-110.}

Aquinas’ teaching on the personal non-specificity of matter separated from the soul was a subject of debate because it implied that the material continuity in the human person was not necessary. However his Aristotelian argument that the body was not a separate part of the human person but was contained in the soul (the soul being the form of the body) had, by the fourteenth century, triumphed. The popular anonymous mid-fourteenth-century poem _The Prick of Conscience_ agrees with the scholars that on judgement day body and soul must give account jointly.

For thes clerkes that gret clergy kan
Calles man bath Inner man and utter man.
Inner man onence the saule anely
And utter man onence the body.
Bot the body and saule bytwene them twa,
Makes bot a man and na ma,
Therfor men sal yhelde account ioyntly
Of bathe togyder, the saule and the body.\footnote{Prick of Conscience, ed. Morris p. 158, lines 5844-5841. See also p. 157, lines 5814-5816 & p. 158, lines 5831-5843.}

There was, however, a conflict between traditional teaching on the impassable _stasis_ of the beatified state and the late-medieval emphasis on desire in the spiritual life. Scholastic reflection on the soul’s natural connection with the body – as form and matter – meant that, after death, and before the general Resurrection of the flesh, the soul ‘longed’ for its body. The separated soul was retarded in its final enjoyment of God.\footnote{Bynum, ‘Fuss about the Body?’, 25-27.} This certainly seems to be the case with Aquinas who believed that there was but a single soul in humans: “Sic ergo...
The ability to sense is rooted in the soul and flows from it, but in itself is an action not of the soul alone but of the embodied soul. The soul has its own act of existence which it communicates to the body; without the body, the soul is not a complete substance (since it has an essential relation to the body). In the Christian Aristotelianism of the Scholastics the ‘sensitive’ and ‘nutritive’ faculties, under the influence and in combination with the ‘intellective’ soul, are rendered incorruptible. Hence the ‘sensitive soul’ survives death and can exist in separation from the body, but in a state of incapacity. Without the body it cannot exercise any of its natural activities. Thus, the rational soul can exist without the body, but it cannot do anything in, what is for it, an unnatural state. The separated soul, then, needs God to reunite it with its body. Sensory powers cannot be actualized in a soul that exists apart from a body.

This attitude is reflected even at a popular level in poetical accounts of the afterlife. Dante, in *Inferno*, argues Dante argues that souls “will be more perfect” and therefore “the more keen whether for pleasure’s or for pain’s discerning” after the Last Judgment because they will then be reunited to their bodies. Closer to England and the fourteenth century *The Prick of Conscience* says:

When the saule sal fra the body wende;
A doleful partynge that to telle [...]
And that is for many a sere skylle.
A skyl es, als yhe sal now se,
Why thai wald ay togider be;
For-thy that God, als says haly writ,
First body and saul togider knyt;
Another for the tane may noght do
Bot if tother help thar-to;
The thred for thai bath togider sal come
Byfor God at the day of dome;
The ferthe, for when thai er comen togider,
Thai sal ay after duel togider.
Thairfor thair payne and sorow es mare
When the tane sal fra tother fore.

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92 *Summa Theologiae* Ia q.76 art.3, Vol. 11, ed. Timothy Suttor, (London, NY: Blackfriars, 1970), p. 62: ‘Thus we maintain that the nutritive soul, the sensitive soul, and the intellective soul are numerically the same in a human being.’ See also *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.58.
93 *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.68.
However, as Bynum points out, writing about desire and beatitude becomes even more complex among late medieval mystics where “desire is not only for bodies, it is lodged in bodies”: “In devotional writing, as in medieval love poetry, body and desire are connected. Thus not only do we see that body (in the sense of particular identity) is packed into soul by the theories of the scholastics; we also discover in the mystics a hint that passionate and ever unfolding love of God lodges fully in souls only when they get their bodies back.”

In the medieval imagination women were particularly dual in their nature. McEntire observes that the gendered nature of Augustinian anthropology meant that women were associated with the lower part of the soul, spiritus or ‘sensitive soul’, which dealt with bodily things. For this reason, she says, it was generally believed that women must wait for the Resurrection of the flesh before there could be a full restoration of her humanity. Only then could her body and soul be orientated toward, and thus expressive of, her rational soul or mens. However in Julian’s thought Christ’s birth travails express what McEntire calls “a realised eschatology”. The female body gives birth to the new creation – the union of substance and sensuality in the integrated human person. Julian’s undercuts the gendered metaphor that associated the feminine with mortal flesh. McEntire associates this with Julian’s intention to equate bodily and spiritual experience, ranking them – in terms of the human person – on an equal level.

However in many ways McEntire puts the cart before the horse. Instead of basing Julian’s soteriology on the anthropological significance of gender inclusion it seems more likely, given the Christological root of the mother image, to see the acceptance of female sensuality as a result of the Incarnation. As McGinn points out; for Julian sensuality from the beginning was created for Christ and Christ is the root of her anthropological holism. It is Jesus specifically who is referred to as mother and carries maternal traits. “Oure sensualite is only in the seconde person, Crist Jesu”, Julian writes, and it is only “in hym” that we are “blisefully oned to oure substance”. As the female body was particularly associated with materiality only the Word made flesh could redeem it. As if to disprove McEntire’s reading of ‘realised eschatology’ purely in terms of what it is to be human, Julian states that any proleptic foretaste of heaven draws the contemplative beyond his or her human nature:

97 ‘Fuss about the Body?’, 26.
98 ‘Likeness of God’, JNBE, pp. 3-34.
99 Vernacular Mysticism, pp. 443, 449, 454.
100 LT, WJN, 309/53-56.
For thus may no man se God and live after, that is to sey, in this dedely life. But whan he of his special grace will shewe him here, he strenghthe the creature aboven the selfe. Thus Julian safeguards the supernatural origin of her Showings. Spiritual sensation is rooted in the capacity to receive God. Julian speaks of the ‘increase’ of natural goodness toward a divine capability:

And thus in oure substance we be full and in oure sensualite we faile; which failing God wille restore and fulfil by werking of mercy and grace [...] and the kinde goodhede that we have of him ableth us to receive the werking of mercy and grace.

Such an increase of sensual nature necessarily involves a de-habituation of the body, making sensuality malleable to mercy and grace. The rationale behind bodily practices in manuals of Christian devotion is the belief that it is that it is possible to proceed from the body to the soul. Though in Julian’s case bodily illness played the catalytic role for the opening of “sensualite” to grace her perspective on the body and the breaking of its natural pride is not ascetical. Transformation of the flesh is not based on ‘exercises’ but on an insight into the role of Christ. This insight came to Julian twenty years after her showings were given and are recorded in the Long Text chapter 51. In the parable of the master and the servant – who is both Adam and Christ – flesh is depicted as clothing. Both Adam’s fall and Christ’s passion involve a rending of the garment of the body, a vulnerability or permeability which allows mercy and grace to re-integrate body and soul. Christ puts on the fallen flesh of Adam, and these tattered clothes are glorified:

And oure foule dedely flesh, that Goddes son toke upon him - which was Adams olde kirtel, straite, bare, and shorte - then byoure savioure was made fair, new, whit, and bright, and of endlesse clennessse, wide and side.

By giving a purely ‘natural’ reading to the spiritual senses McEntire misses the crucial role of Christ in opening sensuality to grace. By contrasting Julian and Augustine on purely anthropological grounds McEntire fails to note that the gender contrast is maintained by Julian by seeing the feminine in God in precisely that aspect of the Trinitarian life that is embodied in Jesus. It is in fact only through the Incarnation that Julian is able to subvert the body-soul distinction and separation that Augustine images through sexual duality. Whether or not body and soul are as distinct for Julian as they are for Augustine I will assess in the

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101 LT, WJN, 259/44-46.
102 LT, WJN, 303/6-8, 9-11.
104 LT WJN, 287/259-261.
concluding part of this chapter. However it is clear that Julian does not use a gendered metaphor for the difference between “substance” and “sensualite”. She stresses rather the kenotic, or self-emptying nature of Christ’s action. The ‘feminine’ ministry of Christ is such that the ‘lowest bodily need’ becomes the sphere of God’s presence and action. It is by taking the lower place that Christ raises sensuality to the dignity of substance. Only after the action of Christ is the gendered metaphor, that noted their distinctive roles, no longer valid.

This is Masson’s point that, because Julian accepts the fallen state of the natural body, in purely anthropological terms sensuality and substance remain for Julian two contraries.\(^{105}\) It is only the action of Christ “oure Moder senual” that allows them to be “onyd”. This Coincidentia Oppositorum of sensuality and substance, Masson argues, is based on the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ.\(^ {106}\) Certainly holding together the tension of opposites is a necessary part of theological reflection.\(^ {107}\) Julian’s method of propositional ‘either-ors’ resolving into ‘both-ands’ finds its prototype in the humanity of Christ. Christ is, for Julian, the “poynte by whilke sight I sawe that [God] es in alle thynge”.\(^ {108}\) The fluctuation of pain and joy in the life of “sensualite” is made meaningful in relation to Christ’s Passion and Resurrection. The beatific vision is therefore seen by Julian not as freedom from the body – and thus an ending of suffering – but as the restoration of the original wholeness of the human person that had been fractured by sin. For Julian the wounds of suffering in this life become marks of honour in the next.\(^ {109}\) Her concern to understand the Resurrection of the body echoes the Scholastic theology of her time but she puts real flesh and bone on the final ‘and’ that reconciles body and soul. Human wholeness is realised eschatology only through grace. Left to ourselves “in oure sensualite we feyle”. That far she remains a child of Augustine. Before I assess the ways in which she shows different views on the body than Augustine it is good to compare her with a contemporary who was even more strongly Augustinian, by religious vocation and by his message, Walter Hilton.


\(^{106}\) Other feminine mystical writers make the same point. Howells shows that for Teresa of Avila “the interior and the exterior parts of the soul are united in a single activity in a manner analogous to the Divine and human natures of Christ”. *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*, (NY: Herder-Crossroad, 2002), p. 87.


\(^{108}\) *ST*, 226/1-2.

\(^{109}\) *LT*, *WJN*, 237/1-8.
Walter Hilton: Body as a Preparation for Prayer

A particular genre of late medieval spiritual writing is the dialogue of body and soul, which personifies two components of the human person (Soul and Body). The emphasis of these texts is ascetical rather than theoretical. A dualistic anthropology is used (rather than the more usual tripartite Body-Soul-Spirit model) for rhetorical effect. The soul in this genre wins by disciplining the demands of the body. However the Body also wins the debate in its claim that evil is lodged in the Soul’s willing, not in the Body’s senses. Hilton translates such a dialogue in his Middle English version of James of Milan’s thirteenth-century work, the Stimulus Amoris. Hilton’s translation of this very popular work contains a number of important changes though which illustrate a different perspective, particularly removing from James of Milan’s work sections on physical penance and adding passages that urge moderation in these matters.

In the dialogue entitled “A complaining of the Flesh to the Father of Christ; and the answer of the Father to the Flesh” Hilton uses James of Milan’s dialogue whereby ‘Flesh’ complains to God the Father that her (sic) ‘soul’ has been wooed by Jesus away from her so that her Soul “taketh none heed what she hear or see, smell or taste, handle or feel”. God accuses ‘Flesh’ of enthralling ‘Soul’ to her demands and thereby subverting the right order of the human person. From such a thraldom to ‘Flesh’ Jesus must rescue ‘Soul’. However Hilton omits a section of James’ text which contains a violent condemnation of ‘Flesh’. He also adds his own moderating reflections to the dialogue. The first addition, not included in James’s original, is an explanation that this thraldom of ‘Soul’ to ‘Flesh’ is the result of sin and not the original relation between the two parts of the human person. In Hilton’s words the Father says to ‘Flesh’ that “at the beginning thy soul was made sovereign over thee, and thou for to be a maiden, subject to her, aye buxom (obedient) and ready to fulfil her will”. The second addition has God giving the offer to ‘Flesh’ that if it suffers patiently its neglect and obeys the reasonable biddings of ‘Soul’ then, God says; “I shall ease thee here in thy travail” and after this life be “married with thy soul for evermore”.

Hilton takes a classic ascetic text and softens its anthropological dualism. The emphasis is on the right order of body and soul, not on their separation. The soul, in its response to Jesus and not noticeably through its own ascetic practices, is drawn away from

112 Goad of Love, pp. 182-186.
the flesh but the flesh is invited to co-operate with that movement through patient acceptance of its own displacement. By doing so it is given a foretaste in this life of its post-humus heavenly union with the soul in bliss. This is echoed in Scale 1 where Hilton says that though bodily consolations are secondary and possibly deceptive they could also be “a schadewe of the glorifyynge of the bodi which it schal have in the blisse [of heaven]”.113 If grace initiates contemplative practice by drawing the soul to God, grace also completes it by drawing the flesh toward the soul. The flesh, by taking the humble role, passes through the stage of patient faith to a partial feeling of God’s love.

This movement from ‘faith’ to ‘feeling’ is the guiding direction of Hilton’s Scale where they correspond to the stages of ascetic purgation and passive illumination.114 Hilton continues Rolle’s emphasis on ‘sitting’ and ‘bodily rest’ as the best way of disposing oneself physically for contemplation.115 In Scale 1 he writes that the higher part of contemplation may not be had ne halden, but of thoo that aren in grete reest of bodi and soule, the which bi grace of Jhesu Crist and longe travaile bodily and goostli fele rest of herte and clennesse in conscience, so that hem liketh nothyngne so mykil for to do as for to sitte stille in rest of bodi anf for to alwey pray to God.116xx

The “travaile bodily and goostli” refers to the asceticism Hilton sees as necessary for the early stages of contemplation, as preparatory for “to sitte stille in reste of bodi” which disposes for the beatific vision.

Hilton also urges “discrecion [...] in alle maner bodily penance [...] for the mene is the beste”.117xxi Temperance is preferred to fasting.118 He is careful to stress that the spiritual sins of pride and vainglory for example are much more dangerous than carnal sins like gluttony and lechery.119 Care for the body is important. When it comes to food he encourages his reader to

agensonde unskilful stirynges of fleiscli desires. But agen the ground of it that is need , as kyndeli honger whiche thou scal nedelynges fele and tente thertoo in tyme, and helpe thisilf agens it bi medicyn of mete as thou woldest helpe thisilf resonabli agens bodili sikenesse, that thou might ete and the more freli serve thi God bodili and goostli.120 xxii

113 Scale 1/42/261-262.
114 Goad of Love was nearly certainly written between Scale 1 and Scale 2. See Kirchberger, ‘Introduction’, p. 35.
115 Incendium, 14/185.
117 Scale 1/56/599-604.
118 Scale 1/234-235/2788-2814.
119 Scale 1/116-117/2179-2221.
120 Scale 1/117-118/2218-2221.
When Hilton says that penance and sickness causing bodily pain can be a help in devotion, he contrasts this with the truly contemplative life where it is only a hindrance. This shows that bodily experience plays a role at the beginning of the Scale, becoming progressively less central.

In Scale 2 Hilton divides the “reformynge of a soule” into four stages or “tymes”; “callynge, rightynge, magnifyyng and glorifyynge”. At the time of “callynge” there are bodily consolations, perceptible inspiration. However at the time of “rightynge” these are taken away. In this second stage the soul “scal it be mortified and pyned in sensualite”:

The seli soule bi feelynge and berynge of the wrecchid bodi scal so be pyned, for it schal not wite where ne how that it schulde not mowen suffer for to ben in the bodi, ne were that oure Lord Jhesu kepith it therinne [...] But the suffrynge of this manere pyne is not but purgatorie, and therefore he suffreth it gladly, and he wolde not putte it awai though he might, for it is so profitable.

Sickness at this stage can also be beneficial as a means of correcting and purification. However the grace of contemplation only really comes at the next stage which is a “tyme of grete reste”. Once this stage is reached a sound disposition of body and soul is to be cultivated. This is for Hilton a state of sobriety where both the consolations and desolations of psycho-physical experience are transcended. The right kind of food is urged even “the beste mete and most of price that is undir sunne’ so that he/she ‘mai kepe the bodi in strengthe’.

The way the contemplative relates to physical experience and the role it plays in spiritual transformation is indicative of the stage of progress on the path. The body is the mirror of the soul: it receives consolation because the new convert needs reassurance, it is tested and mortified due to the residue of the soul’s sinful disposition, it enters into rest because the soul is no longer swayed by the vicissitudes of the carnal nature and it has a foretaste of beatitude because the soul already has its homeland in heaven. All along the path there is a non-duality of body and soul. This is why the contemplative “seketh oonlynesse of bodi, for oonlynesse of bodi moche helpith to oonlynesse of soule”.

The stage of “magnifying” is entered into as the soul becomes detached from psycho-physical consolation and desolation:

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121 *Scale 1/118/2223-2233.*
122 *Scale 2/201/1822-1824, 1826-1828.*
123 *Scale 2/234/2803, 2797-2798.*
124 *Scale 2/239/2953-2954.*
This chaungeablete of absence and presence of Jhesu that a soule feeleth is not perfeccioun of the soule, ne it is not agens the grace of perfeccioun or contemlacioun; but in so moche, perfeccioun is the lasse.\textsuperscript{125xxvi}

The feeling of grace in the body and the stripping of that feeling in desolation are both preparatory for an integration of the body in the stability of the spirit.\textsuperscript{126} The frailty of the body can help to serve spiritual growth but as the soul is “magnifyyd” it is lifted above this purgation and in doing so the body itself is made strong. At this stage, Hilton says,

[Grace] quikeneth the soule wondirli and maketh it so hool that he feelith no peynful disese of the bodi, though it be feble or sekely. For whi, thane is the bodi mightiest, most hool, and most resteful, and the soule also.\textsuperscript{127xxvii}

Dissociation from the carnal nature means that the soul becomes master of the body but this does not render the body merely quiescent. It becomes “no ellis but as an instrument and a trompe of the soule”.\textsuperscript{128} In the “magnifyyd” state ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are integrated so that the flesh itself becomes an “instrument”, a means, of salvation. The flesh itself encourages rather than inhibits detachment.\textsuperscript{129} ‘Instrument’ and ‘trumpet’ implies the making of music. In a treatise he translated soon after 1383 Hilton says that in the third (of five) degrees of contemplation the soul “thenketh that al the lymes of the bodi, and alle the makynge of the world with alle the creatur es is as a melodie of the harpe”.\textsuperscript{130xxviii} Bynum gives examples of religious women who spoke of striking music from their flesh through extravagant asceticisms such as flagellation and self-mutilation.\textsuperscript{131} For Hilton there is a music of the soul that is played by the body when in “sovereeyne reste”\textsuperscript{132}. However this does not happen at the time of correction and purification, nor through the quiescence of the body, but through the magnifying of body with the soul. In the process of these stages the body is

\textsuperscript{125} Scale 2/243/3069-3071.

\textsuperscript{126} Howells observes a similar situation in the mystical anthropology of John of the Cross where the relation between the senses and the spirit is stronger after the stage of union of the soul with God than before. At this level each shares what the other receives. The senses receive ‘quietude’ but also ‘fortification’ and an ‘overflow’ of joy. Likewise for Teresa of Avila, union with God overcomes the divisions between the interior and exterior orientations of the soul. For Teresa the overflow of mystical ‘union’ – a stage higher than ‘rapture’ – into the bodily senses does not result in psycho-physical experiences but in bodily works of service. \textit{John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila}, pp. 34–35, 89.

\textsuperscript{127} Scale 2/240/2984-2986.

\textsuperscript{128} Scale 2/248/3214-3215.

\textsuperscript{129} Cf. Bonaventure’s vastly influential \textit{Life of St. Francis}, (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1988), p. 131: ‘Such was the harmony between [Francis’s] spirit and his flesh, and such the obedience of the flesh to the spirit, that in his efforts to obtain perfect and complete sanctity, the flesh not only made no resistance to the spirit, but even aided it.’

\textsuperscript{130} ‘Eight Chapters on Perfection’, \textit{EMMA}, p. 142. Translated from a text (no longer extant) of Lowis de Fontibus who was in Cambridge in 1383.


\textsuperscript{132} 8 Chapters on Perfection, \textit{EMMA}, p. 142.
transformed so that it is capable of God. Hilton, as clearly as Rolle, sees ‘song’ as a psycho-
physical experience.

The purification of sensation is for the cultivation of spiritual sensation, but it also
involves the healing and integration of the body. The sensual appetites are redeemed as the
body discerns God within created things. This is put nowhere more clearly than in Hilton’s
treatise *On Angels Song*. This treatise affirms Rolle’s paradigm of spiritualised sensuality
while at the same time urging discretion and discernment. When genuine, the hearing of
angelic music, for Hilton, is a sign that the whole of the human person, body and soul, is
captured in contemplation; “nought anly inwardly”.133 Created things, including the influence
of angelic natures, are no longer seen as a distraction from God but “al that [the
contemplative] heres, or sese, or felis be any of his wittes, turnes hym to comforth and
gladnes, and the sensualite resayves newe savour and sweetnes in al creatures”.134xxx The
process of spiritual transformation involves a reciprocity between body and soul:

Sen the saule es punyshed in the sensualite and the flesche es parcener of payn, that
efterward the saule be comforthed in sensualite, and the flesch be fellow in joyand
comforth with the saule, noght fleschly bot gastly, als he was felow in triulacion and
payne [...] In this maner wyse a saule es mad gastli in the sensualite.135xxx

So we can say of Hilton that 1) he encourages no extreme asceticism, 2) where bodily
suffering exists, it is seen as a means not an end, a stage on the journey, 3) sensual
detachment leads to a higher stage of peaceful integration, a healing of body and soul, 4) in
this state the flesh encourages rather than opposes the discipline imposed on it, and 5) a
spiritualised sensuality is made possible. In this light we seem far from Baker’s picture of
Hilton’s stark anthropological dualism. There is another side to Hilton which gives a more
negative impression. Hilton’s idea of the body as instrumental on the spiritual journey must
be balanced with his strong concern for a right ordering of body and soul.

133 *EMMA*, p. 132. In this Hilton reflects Bernard’s teaching that angels ‘translate’ spiritual reality into that
which can be apprehended by the bodily senses and the imagination. ‘Sermon 41:3-4’, *On the Song of Songs*, 2,
tr. K. Walsh & L. Edmonds, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publishers, 1979), p. 207. A source Hilton may well have
known especially as the section was quoted in the highly popular *Meditatione Christi* (written in Latin by an
Italian Franciscan in the second half of the thirteenth century and translated into English toward the end of that
century and circulated widely). *Meditations on the Life of Christ, An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth

134 *EMMA*, p. 132. In *Scale* 2/257/3474-3476 Hilton says that Jesus is present in bodily creatures though he is
more beautiful still in spiritual creatures and in 2/259/3549 that ‘bi knowyng of creatures is known the
creatur’.

135 *EMMA*, pp. 132-133.
Hierarchy of Body and Soul

In playing up the priority of spirit, and the necessity of the body’s subservience, Hilton sometimes reaches a rhetorical pitch which can seem to annul any spirit-body connection. Imprisonment in sense perception is equated with idolatry. The body in this state becomes an idol. The rhetoric can take the form of encouraging his reader to go beyond imaginative meditations. A carnal love of God (through an imaginative response to the humanity of Christ) was conceded as a way into contemplation, as Bernard had taught, but for Hilton this is only preparatory. The true contemplative is urged to move quickly beyond. Attention must be taken away from bodily feeling and from material things. As the soul lifts its gaze to God there seems, in Hilton, to be a dissociation of the spiritual and sensual perceptions. If the body is a boundary it is one that must be crossed over. Ecstasy or union with God is understood as a ‘ravishing out of bodily feeling’:

I hope that soule that is reformed in feelynge by ravyschynge of love into contemplacion of God may be so feer fro the sensualite and fro the veyn imaginacion, and soo feer drawen oute and departid from the fleischli feelynge for a tyme.

Hilton’s view of sanctification has been read as a ‘suppression of sensuality’. Due to the permanent conflict between the soul and the body in his view self-knowledge can be read as a movement of the soul away from bodily nature. Where Julian sees the spiritual life as a path of psycho-physical integration, Hilton emphasises the soul alone as constitutive of rational being. Sensuality is “comoun to man and to beest”. However scholarship has ignored that Hilton’s reflection on the human person switches to a tri-partite division of the soul in which the part of reason that deals with the sensory world acts as an intermediary that links the spiritual part of the soul with sensuality. Like Augustine, Hilton gives gender imagery to ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ reason. The purpose of the gender image is to emphasise a hierarchy and right ordering of the faculties of the soul: woman as subject to man. Lower reason, when functioning properly, enables the contemplative “to use [ertheli things]

discreteli aftir need and for to refuse hem whanne it is no need”. It should also have its “iye

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136 Hilton refers directly to Bernard on this theme affirming ‘the fleischli love of God, as Seynt Bernard callith it, in as mikel as it is set in the fleischli kynde of Crist.’ Scale 1/68/919-920.
137 Scale 1/90/1482-1485.
138 Scale 2/153/485-487.
140 Scale 2/159/659-660.
141 McGinn, Vernacular Mysticism, p. 382 sees Scale 2 chapter 12 as evident of Hilton’s ‘stripped down anthropology’ but doesn’t give cognizance to the more nuanced elaboration in chapter 13.
upward [...] to folwe” higher reason, so as to yoke flesh to the spirit. However when it fails to play its role, when sensuality is “unskilfulli and unordynateli rulid” – that is “not rulid aftir resound”, then the body loses its moorings in the higher faculties and becomes an “idol”, a sign that the faculties of the human person are not in alignment.

The contemplative should not try to look for the soul in the body, Hilton says, for it is the soul which gives life to the body. However if the soul is the life of the body how does Hilton, in other parts of the Scale, go so far as to equate the bodily members directly to the “image of sin”? The five windows of the “image of sin” are the senses through which the soul goes out of itself to earthly things. This, for Hilton, is not just rhetoric but a call to the ascetic task of ‘guarding the senses’ – restraining what senses receive and reach out to – and purifying the imagination from corporeal content:

Cese for a tyme from alle bodili werkes, from al outeward besinesse as thou mai wel. Thanne schalt thou drawe into thysilf thi thought from thi bodili wittes, that thou take noo kepe what thou heerest or seest or felist, so that the poynt of thyn herte be not ficchid in hem. Aftir this drawe inner thi thought from al ymaginyng, yif thou mai, of ony bodili thyng, and from alle thoughtis of bodili dedis.

Hilton’s use of the term “windows” for the senses parallels the phrase in the early thirteenth-century Ancrene Wisse which takes the metaphor for guarding the senses from the advice for covering the windows of the anchoritic cell. Like Hilton’s works the Wisse was written in the Midlands and maybe by an Augustinian Canon. Hilton shares that author’s fascination with the boundary which separates the cell from the world, but also shares his use of metaphor which continuously breaks down the distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, as the same laws are applied to both.

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142 Scale 2/159/668-669.
143 Scale 2/159/ 660-662.
145 Scale 1/126-127/2428-2451. Scale 2/147/344-345, speaks of ‘the fleischli feelynge of this synneful image that is the bodili kynde’.
146 Scale 1, Chs.78-79.
147 Scale 1/90/1482-1487.
Know it to be true that the more that the senses spring outward, the less they go inward. The more the recluse stares out [of her window], the less inner light she has from our Lord—and the same is true of the other senses.\textsuperscript{150}

As Jocelyn Price puts it “[the Wisse’s] figurative language is not a-corporeal or anti-corporeal, but demands a physical and spatial engagement founded on the fact of physiological being as well as cognitive and emotional response”.\textsuperscript{151} Hilton seems to share this concern with body-soul integrity. A recluse’s retirement from the outer world demands an internal withdrawal from the senses as well as the proper regulation and management of the body. In the Wisse this mutuality of body and soul does not alter the fact that the shared stance is defensive: in Part 2 on ‘Custody of the Senses’, the anchoritic cell and the anchoritic body “are both configured as fortresses, always dangerously permeable constructions that must be defended against whatever would penetrate them.”\textsuperscript{152} Hilton too considers the senses as windows onto a world which is a source of temptation.

Though bodily asceticism is not an end in itself when speaking of recollection the working of bodily senses are seen as antagonistic to interiority. Unlike with Rolle there is little emphasis in Hilton’s work that the senses become spiritualised in the soul. McGinn sees the inner and outer senses as two distinct sets in Hilton’s work.\textsuperscript{153} In line with certain scholarship it is possible to distinguish two streams of spirituality in fourteenth-century England: one emphasizing bodily participation and the other detachment from sense experience.\textsuperscript{154} Hilton and Julian could be seen as offering two different epistemological grounds for spiritual perception. For Julian there is a greater emphasis on the interpenetration of body and soul. For Julian, “sensualite” is located within the soul, in the lower part of reason. Julian uses the metaphor of physical sight for many levels of spiritual insight. Seeing God comes through pondering images that carry a nearly sacramental meaning, being physically realistic and mediatory of hidden truths.

Hilton also uses optical imagery. The soul is a mirror. But ‘seeing’ God means turning the mirror upward, away from earthly things. In order to waken the ‘ghostly eye’ the mind’s fixation to embodiment must be abandoned. Sin, for Hilton, is the result of the soul’s orientation toward the body while ascetical work makes the body subordinate to the spirit.

\textsuperscript{150} Anchoritic Spirituality, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{151} “Inner” and ‘Outer’: Conceptualizing the Body in the Ancrene Wisse and Aelred’s De Institutione Inclusarum’, MEREL, pp. 192-208 (206)
\textsuperscript{153} Vernacular Mysticism, p. 390.
Reason is the image of God in the soul, while the life of the flesh is the image of sin. A person ready for contemplation must be in a sense dislocated and disembodied. The body’s spacio-temporality limits absorption in the Divine. For Hilton the process of contemplation is a reflection of the Incarnation, but as in a mirror (Hilton’s favourite image for the soul) that reflection is a reversal. Jesus’ taking on of bodily nature enables the Christian to move out of bodily centring. In the Incarnation the image of God is activated within the soul, an awareness of which only comes when the body is rendered quiescent. Christ as Logos Ensarkos actually plays a protective role, enabling ‘lower reason’ to act as a boundary between the higher cognicentric faculties that orientate toward God and the flesh which orientates toward the physical and profane world.

Therefore what for Hilton is seen as a protective boundary serves for Julian as a bridge between the flesh and the spirit. However to compare Hilton’s and Julian’s writings solely on anthropological grounds also neglects the different genres through which they expressed their teaching. Hilton writing a treatise on prayer and the contemplative life (in Scale 1 expressly for professed religious) emphasises enclosure. Julian, despite her personal vocation, gives a teaching for all “even Cristens” and therefore plays down the necessity of bodily enclosure. Moreover by focusing on the strikingly dualist and rhetorical statements of Hilton especially as expressive of a fixed anthropology gives a one-sided reading of Hilton, neglecting his affirmative statements about the body. Hilton’s analysis of the stages of the spiritual journey, as we have seen, makes possible a positive assessment of the role of the body, even allowing for a sensuality working in tandem with the spirit. For Hilton contemplation is a process and the different voices within his writing on the body reflect different stages. In conversion from the world the body is used pejoratively as a foil to focus attention on the soul. In Scale 1, mostly written for an anchoress, the external form of the body is the image of sin while the image of God in the human person is purely internal. As the reader’s attention is drawn inward, in particular in Scale 2 which is no longer addressed to an enclosed audience, Hilton gives a more holistic reading. Here ascetical detachment from the body does not imply dissociation from it, but rather a right ordering of affection.

Hilton admits that although the image of sin is explicitly located within sensuality, it is not flesh as flesh – i.e. matter in any Manichean sense, but the fleshly appetite that must be subdued and rendered quiescent. The soul, in other words, is affected not by the physical but by the fallen-ness of the physical. The body rightly ordered carries out its work without distracting the mind from its heavenly ascent. Hilton gives some positive space to a purgative role for the body in the process of detachment. He sees sickness both as a sign of the fall and
a remedy for it: The body is rendered unstable and loses its tranquillity but breaking down of fleshly poise helps to separate the soul from love of sensuality. Moreover he points out that once bodily tranquillity is achieved then the body ceases to be a barrier in the contemplation of God. This last statement remains hypothetical though, as complete sensual quiescence is impossible in this life.

With both Julian and Hilton, anthropology is derived from Christology. It is important to recognise that Hilton’s mixed attitude to the body is reflective of his shifting attitude to the humanity of Christ. Hilton is often considered Christocentric in contrast to the Cloud works. However it is clear that Jesus for Hilton is primarily understood in terms of his Godhead. The manhood of Christ is only valuable in relation to his divine origin. In fact Hilton abstracts Jesus as much as he can from any anthropological particularity.\(^{155}\) There is a strong non-physical emphasis. This is reflected in his reading of the body generally as only finding its value when in right relation to the spirit. To focus in itself on the particularity of the individual being – especially that most forcibly localised and instantiated as the enclosure of our own body-matter – is, in Hilton’s view a self-centring which must be transcended in the contemplation of God. However on the other hand Hilton does concede that meditation on the humanity of Christ is acceptable, precisely because it does not involve our flesh but is located in the fleshly nature of Christ. This bodily form and substance is worthy of contemplation because of the lack of sin active in Christ’s flesh.

It is this nuanced reading of Hilton’s attitude to the body which needs to be remembered if we are not to be swept along by the forcefulness of his rhetoric and accuse him of an ontological dualism when his concern is to emphasise a strict hierarchy between body and soul. The concern Hilton shows for the body belies any idea that the earthy body is null and worthless. His preoccupation with the place of the body in the spiritual life means that he does not assume the indifferent distance to it that most modern commentators on him imply. The ascetic paradoxically embodies denial of the body, he or she therefore, even while trying to take attention away from the body, constantly points to the body. This tension of heightened sense of the body’s importance even while trying to negate it is characteristic of Anchorite spirituality. Enclosure may be a form of entombment but it raises awareness that it is a body that is buried. The daily life the Anchorite is based on the mutual dependence of body management and the transcendence of the body. Likewise the reciprocity of discipline of and detachment from the body is, I believe, key to the ambiguities of Hilton’s writings.

\(^{155}\) See McGinn, Vernacular Mysticism, p. 394.
That ambiguity does not originate with Hilton. It may be so clear in his work because of the strong influence of Augustine on his thought.\textsuperscript{156} It is a strong influence in Julian’s thought as well.\textsuperscript{157} By looking at the way they work with that heritage we may understand a little more of how their anthropological models hold together.

**Hilton, Julian and the Heritage of Augustine**

Augustine’s theory of sensation involves a clear distinction between the object perceived and the sensation we have of it. ‘Sensation’ is a soul experience, the objects of sensation are related to the body. Augustine is working with a model of perception based on a hierarchy of influence between body and soul that proceeds from the higher to the lower. For Augustine action by the body on the soul is not possible. When the active powers of the soul (memory, reason and will) do not pay attention to the objects related by physical sensation then, in effect, no sensation occurs. Spiritual experience and contemplation of ideal forms is based on this fact that the faculties of the soul are able to work independently from sense perception.\textsuperscript{158} Augustine does not emphasise the ‘single sensorium’ of bodily feeling of God like later medieval thinkers, in this way he is closer to Origen.\textsuperscript{159}

However Augustine was aware that the problem with such a monistic account of sensation is how to bridge the gap between a spiritual soul and a material body. Augustine addresses the issue by making a distinction between \textit{spiritus} and \textit{mens}. \textit{Spiritus} is the part of the soul which deals with sense perception enabling the intellect ‘\textit{mens}’ to act independently. The anthropological model inherited from Augustine is therefore tripartite; the higher reason (\textit{mens}), lower reason (\textit{spiritus}) and the bodily senses.\textsuperscript{160} Augustine was the great theological authority of the Latin west in the Middle Ages. In his \textit{De Trinitate} (Book XII) he says there are two parts of the soul: the higher and lower reason. The higher part \textit{mens}, engaged in the contemplation of eternal things, could achieve wisdom (\textit{sapientia}), the lower part, directed towards action in the temporal world, can achieve only knowledge (\textit{scientia}). These two parts were gendered by Augustine and the higher part (male) was the place where the Image of

\textsuperscript{156} See Clark, \textit{MMTE} (1982), pp. 102-126.
\textsuperscript{157} Certainly Julian seems to be acquainted with the principles of Augustinian psychology as presented in \textit{De Trinitate} Book XII, at least in the simplified form in which they are also found in the Cloud-author’s disquisition on the powers of the soul (Chs. 63-66), or in Hilton’s \textit{Scale} 2 Ch. 13 or the teaching on the ‘godly will’ in \textit{LT} Ch. 37.
\textsuperscript{158} Miles, \textit{Augustine on the Body}, pp. 12-15.
\textsuperscript{159} cf. Rudy, \textit{Mystical Language}, pp. 36-8.
\textsuperscript{160} Miles, \textit{Augustine on the Body}, pp. 18-28.
God strictly speaking existed in the human person.\textsuperscript{161} The spiritual path was understood as involving a movement away from sense perception.

It has been argued by Baker that Julian modified Augustinian anthropology so as to include “sensualité” within the soul in a way that Hilton, sticking to the stricter tripartite division of the human person, did not.\textsuperscript{162} Julian raises “sensualité” to the level of lower reason and, at the same time, locates the ‘image of God’ not just in higher reason. So while for Hilton soul and body are in conflict, Julian sees them as complementary. Holiness, for her, is their integration.\textsuperscript{163} However Baker’s claim for the originality of Julian’s anthropology overstates its originality and ignores its derivation. Using Augustine as an example of ‘dualism’ is questionable. Likewise Baker’s reading of Hilton as a negative foil to Julian’s anthropology is oversimplified.

To deal with these in turn: Firstly, the human person in medieval philosophy and theology was nearly always understood in a tripartite way with spiritus linking and connecting the activities of corpus and anima.\textsuperscript{164} In fact Scholastic discussions of the human person often drew a sharper distinction between levels of the soul than between soul and body.\textsuperscript{165} Moreover the integration of substance and sensuality, as we have seen, is precisely not the normal human experience but is achieved in and through Christ. Baker does not give adequate recognition of the Christological roots of Julian’s anthropology. Secondly, although Augustine sometimes uses the body as a foil to the soul this is more of a rhetorical technique so as to emphasise the dignity of the soul than any vestige of Manichean anthropology.\textsuperscript{166} Moreover for Augustine the moral conflict takes place essentially in the ordering of the will rather than the suppression of the flesh.\textsuperscript{167} Human relation to created things, when it has its ‘end’ in God, is made spiritual and is consistent with the activity of the image of God. For Augustine the distinction between parts of the soul is between temporal and eternal orientations of that image. It is true that, for Augustine, the image proper is identified with the latter. But it is never contrary to the temporal. Similarly Augustine does believe that it is possible to contemplate God within bodily things as the spiritual source of these things. Thirdly, as I have shown Hilton’s reading of the body is nuanced rather than negative. A

\textsuperscript{161}This was accepted in much theology of the Middle Ages: Lombard, \textit{Sentences} 2:24, Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologia} I: 1 Q 75-6.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, pp. 45-47, 53.
\textsuperscript{164} See Bynum, ‘Fuss about the Body?’, 13.
\textsuperscript{165} Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}, pp. 226-227.
\textsuperscript{166} See Miles, \textit{Augustine on the Body}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid, p. 70.
disciplined body is a help to the soul. Hilton does say that the image of sin is located within sensuality, but it is not the body as such which is “an intractable ground of sin”, rather it is the ‘fallen-ness’ of the physical. The body rightly ordered carries out its work without distracting the mind from its heavenly ascent. Moreover Hilton’s continuous refrain is that God is within the soul, there is no need to go on pilgrimage, to imagine anything, or even to think of our own sinfulness.  

I would rather see Julian’s ‘integral anthropology’ as reflecting a moderate assimilation of the move within high medieval scholastic theology that stressed a single activity of the human soul, assimilating the ‘sensitive soul’ to the intellect. Her use of the term “substance” for the higher faculty of the soul is reminiscent of Aristotelian language - though Julian reads the term not in its ontological meaning as the generic condition of existences but in the light of mystical theology as the essence or apex of the soul.  

“Substance” always remains created though, and in need of redemption. For Julian “substance” comes to fulfillment through the Incarnation of Christ into human “sensualite”. However “sensualite” as the faculty of the soul which deals with bodily things is close if not identical to Scholastic ideas about ‘the sensitive soul’.  

The first and most notorious of all the medieval philosophers who denied the real distinction between the sensitive soul and the intellective soul was Aquinas. This approach continued into the fourteenth century. John Duns Scotus (1265-1308) made only a formal not real distinction between the sensitive and intellective souls: “Sensi tua autem et vegetativa in homine, eadem anima est cum intellectuia.” However Julian’s anthropology sees this as a fruit of Christ’s action. The Fall, for her, has caused fundamental divisions within the soul destroying any ‘natural’ unity between “sensualite” and “substance”. Her emphasis on the necessity of grace in restoring what was broken, and creating human wholeness, shows she is still rooted in Augustinian anthropology.  

Hilton shows less influence from Aristotelian models. He was himself an Augustinian, part of an Order that usually championed the Augustinian stance against the ‘new Aristotelian theology’. Though he had University training in Law, his writings are quite untouched by Scholastic terminology. Augustine remains the dominant, but not the exclusive, theological

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170 Point made by McGinn, Vernacular Mysticism, p. 450.
171 Opera omnia, ed. Luke Wadding, (Paris: Vivès, 1891-95), XX, p. 164: ‘The sensitive soul and the vegetative soul are, in humans, the same as the intellective soul.’
teacher for Julian. For both writers it is the Christological root of their anthropology which propels them away from a dualistic reading of the human person. This too reflects the development of Augustine’s own thought. Augustine initially saw the hypostatic union in Christ as a union of predominance whereby the Logos subsumes the mortal body and becomes the one principle of action. The anthropological model for this emphasised the higher reason in humanity as the locus of the spiritual life. The body is rendered quiescent, participating in the spiritual life only as the passive partner through its link to the soul. However in Augustine’s later reflections on the Incarnation the unity of God and man in Jesus was seen increasingly as a unity of activity. The model of body and soul used to illustrate this saw them as *Una Persona* through an integration of being and activity.\(^{172}\)

Even in Augustine’s earlier writings negative attitudes to the body were partly a rhetorical manoeuvre to highlight by contrast the dignity of the soul as spiritual substance.\(^{173}\) The relation of body and soul for Augustine demanded primarily a response in the soul, but this led to a right ordering of body-soul that enabled a harmony of activity. Acceptance of the active role of the humanity of Christ meant that, for Augustine, sensual nature was not merely subsumed and rendered quiescent. In his later thought the body was seen to have a formative influence in the spiritual life. The whole experience of humanness, including the corporeal, participated in redemption. So in Augustine there is a shift from an early tendency of body-soul dualism to a strong emphasis on ascetical co-operation and, in his last writing, their eschatological unity.\(^{174}\)

There are certainly many echoes here with Hilton’s and Julian’s thought. However there is something of an ambiguity in Augustine’s thought between his theory of *sensation* – which emphasised a unity of predominance whereby the body could not have an effect on the soul, and his teaching on *asceticism* which he saw as a two way process, bodily discipline affecting the soul. Augustine wrestled with his experience that the energies of the body have to be bonded to the soul and thus integrated through the practice of asceticism.\(^{175}\) This paradox of separation from the body, while at the same time integrating it, in turn shapes Augustine’s view of the beatific vision. Beatitude would reach its fullness with the bodily Resurrection, but Resurrection was dependent on a prior separation from the body at death.\(^{176}\) Scholars have considered that Augustine’s writings on the body-soul relation could lead to

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\(^{172}\) Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, pp. 92-95.

\(^{173}\) Ibid, p. 46.


\(^{175}\) Ibid, p. 55.

\(^{176}\) Ibid, pp. 69, 109.
confusion about where he speaks of ascetic struggle and where he defines the metaphysics of humanity. Increasingly in his later works the contrast of body and soul came to be seen in terms of a moral conflict within the soul, not as an opposition of spirit and flesh as different opposing substances.\(^{177}\)

With so many rich seams of Augustinian reflection it seems both Julian and Hilton were able to pick up different strands. Julian emphasised creating the wholeness of the human person, Hilton emphasised the ascetic task was still necessary for that wholeness. Julian is maybe primarily a theologian – she looks for the meaning of her experiences. She approaches the relation of ‘sensualite’ and ‘substance’ from a theological perspective – from God’s view. Hilton is primarily a spiritual director – encouraging his reader from notional ‘faith’ to experiential knowledge of God in the soul. He approaches the relation of soul and body from an ascetical perspective – how the struggle seems and is best practised in the fallen human condition. So Julian develops Augustine’s view that sensation is an activity of the body and the soul together while Hilton clarifies the ascetic task emphasising Augustine’s view that the body cannot act on the soul but can affect it.

For Augustine, because the soul is fallen it gives its attention to the body and is affected by what affects the body. Hilton picks this up: the spiritual life is lessened because of the distracting burden of the body when it is in a state of sickness, weakness or even hunger and thirst. The soul will find it easier to govern the body in a state of health. The more difficult the body is to govern, the more attention is required on the part of the soul and the more distracted it is from its primary task of contemplation.\(^{178}\) Hilton, picking up on Augustine, emphasises that it is the ‘disorder’ in the body, or rather the disorder in the hierarchy between body and soul that is the problem, not simply the fact of embodiment. The disorder competes for attention – rather than the body being a distraction per se. This divided attention in the spiritual life, for Hilton, comes from the desire for bodily consolations rather than spiritual feeling.\(^{179}\)

Augustine’s teachings on the nature of visions – in his *Literal Commentary on Genesis* Book 12 – possibly influenced Hilton more on his idea of the body as a barrier to contemplation than the dualist anthropology claimed by Baker and McEntire. Hilton’s concern is with prayer, while theology serves only as a premise to contemplation. In seeing the body as a barrier to the higher stages of contemplation he is laying emphasis on the

\(^{177}\) Ibid, p. 70.

\(^{178}\) This is Augustine’s view in *Sermons*, III/8, Sermon 277, (ed. John Rotelle, tr. Edmund Hill, (NY: New City Press, 1994), p. 37: ‘To live in the body and to feel nothing of its being a burden that is what health is.’

\(^{179}\) *Scale* 2/244/3097-3099.
intellectual quality of supernatural vision. Augustine’s view was that corporeal vision – using the bodily senses – was quite natural when dealing with physical things but could not grasp the supernatural. If we see spiritual realities corporeally then it is a form of hallucination. The first step in spiritual vision is to recognise that the object of supernatural truth is conceived in the mind through the imagination and memory. From there, Augustine says, we rise to an intellectual vision of the truth as more real than any physical or imaginary representation of it. This explains Hilton’s description of prayer as “wakeful sleep”. What sleeps is the physical eye, what wakes is the mind which ‘knows’ by a co-naturality with God.

At the level of intellect Hilton is willing to accept a thin boundary between human and divine perception, at this level we can, as he says; “know all things spiritual and material”. That boundary becomes more and more opaque as we try to know through natural (discursive) reason, through imagination and finally through sense perception. This increasing opacity of the means of perception is what creates a barrier to divine illumination. Hilton tends to categorise perception into ‘bodily sight’ and ‘ghostly sight’. The bodily connection creates ‘imagination’ but God is known in ‘understanding’. Meditation on the humanity of Jesus is the bridge between the two. It uses the imagination but draws it toward an understanding of the Divinity. Gospel reflection draws perception from the bodily through the representation of the Divine in the human. This culminates in the knowledge of Jesus in the soul.

This gradual ascent is not as clear in Julian’s writings. Riehle draws attention to “the inconsistency’ of Julian’s use of Augustinian ‘visionary’ terminology”. The boundary between visio intellectualis and visio imaginativa is somewhat fluid, and can be considered an intended imprecision. For Julian, he says, the visio corporalis has intellectual significance. ‘Bodily sight’ is not an end in itself but serves as the starting point for some theological abstract knowledge. ‘Seeing’ and ‘knowing’ are therefore synonymous. The mystical path for Julian does not end with the vision of God but with God’s vision of the world. The Showings give a glimpse from God’s point of view. To see the predicament of fallen human sensuality with pity and not with blame is therefore at the heart of Julian’s inclusion of corporeal vision in the same ‘seeing’ as theological reflection. The ‘seeing’ she was given was intrinsically theological in that it showed how God sees.

180 Scale 2/240/2991-2997.
181 Scale 1, Chs. 10-11, Scale 2, Chs. 43-46.
183 Riehle, pp.126-127.
As Watson observed, Julian has a tripartite division of visionary experience, namely “bodily sight”, “words formed in my understanding” and “ghostly sight” combined, he says, in “a polyphonic complexity”. ‘Sight’ is used flexibly in a variety of ways that blur the boundaries between the figurative and the literal.¹⁸⁴ Watson argues that the fluidity of Julian’s use shows that the process of abstraction from her visionary material to the theological interpretation she gives is all part of her revelatory experience. Her commentaries are part of the ‘seeing’. The intellectual and corporeal aspects of vision occur together in an integrated act of Divine communication.¹⁸⁵

What both Riehle and Watson show is that Julian’s subversion of the classic Augustinian visionary distinctions serve to show that the boundaries between human perception and Divine ‘seeing’, between her own reflection and Revelation, are subtly deconstructed.¹⁸⁶ This is all part of her acceptance that God is in our sensuality and her respect for human reason. However, neither Riehle nor Watson make the link between Julian’s inclusive ‘sensual-cognitive’ use of sight and late medieval scientific and scholastic understandings of visibility. In the next chapter I show how bodily perception was understood as closely bound to mental processes.

Conclusion

There are differences between the attitude of Hilton and that of Julian towards the body. Most of these can be explained by the fact that Hilton is writing about the practice of prayer and contemplation whereas Julian is giving theological reflections that come out of a very bodily mystical experience. Hilton stresses that in prayer the body must be disciplined, Julian emphasises that God comes to meet us in the body. Hilton’s work takes a moderate but clearly ascetic view of the body. The relation he presents with Christ is affective but not physical. Julian sees the body as a locus of encounter with Christ. There is not so much emphasis on the disciplining of the affections, as for Julian the ‘will’ is always orientated

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 73-74
¹⁸⁶ There may be sociological reasons for this approach, women not having the credentials to teach apart from those conferred by personal, direct revelations. Petroff, p. 20. Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 249 and ‘Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages’, CS II, pp. 121-139. Certainly the question of authority can explain differences in the form in which a spiritual teaching is given but does not really explain the content. Both Julian and Hilton believed their teaching to be applicable to both men and women (Julian writing for her ‘even Christian’, Hilton for his ‘spiritual sister in Christ”).
toward God.\textsuperscript{187} For Julian the emphasis is on the integration of the sensual part of the soul back into the soul’s substance. This is achieved not by detaching from sense experience but by allowing the motherhood of Christ to work its healing in the flesh. Her mysticism is based on a participation in the sufferings of Christ and dwells on the implications the Incarnation has on the possibility of a bodily knowing of God. Hilton sees bodily suffering as a stage on the journey which ends with detachment from sense experience.

However, beneath the differences, there is an underlying continuity between the two writers in their relationship to the body. Firstly, asceticism and a penitential attitude to the body is described only as a preparatory stage on the spiritual path. Secondly, even when the body is seen as a limiting factor and a barrier to the beatific vision it still plays an important role at the entrance to contemplation and also in its fulfilment. In this they were expressing high medieval devotion to the humanity of Christ as a way of knowing God through the body. They were also, in a pastoral form, expressing the scholastic position which was being argued in the universities at the time. The culmination of the experience of God was dependent on the body’s eschatological destiny. For both Julian and Hilton it is reflection on the Incarnation that gives the human body a role as a way into contemplation. Reflection on the general Resurrection gives it a place and role at the end, in the \textit{Visio Dei}. To contrast the anthropological models of the two writers one needs to take into account that for both the reintegration of body and spirit is part of the redemptive work of Christ.

The assumption that the spirituality of late medieval Western Europe was one of denial and even hatred of the body is often based on an overly ontological reading of ascetical or rhetorically dualistic body-soul language. The “clash between the physiological and the sacred” in mystical writing precisely did\textsuperscript{188} not try to “deny the existence of biological man”. Though the English mystics did not prioritise bodily practices where they spoke of the role of the body in prayer it was with the intention to integrate and include it. In the cases of Julian and Hilton the dialectic of body and soul served to orientate the spiritual life away from concern with external practices toward an interiority. However favouring the soul over the body did not exclude the body but created a right relationship whereby the body could find its place \textit{within} the soul. We have seen, especially in the writings of Julian, but also in those of Hilton, the tension of body and soul goes hand in hand with an ultimate resolution. Even when the body is read as a barrier or at least limitation to the beatific vision or journey to God

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{LT WJN}, 293/9-17. Julian refers to ‘the godly wille’ as ‘a substance which might never be parted from [God].’

\textsuperscript{188} Le Goff, p. 83.
these writers read it in a pastoral sense. They try to make clear that it is sin, not the body as such, which holds the contemplative back, if the body is ruled according to reason then it is no hindrance. They also make clear that the fragility of body is the school in which the contemplative learns humility.

This chapter has shown in two examples of Middle English mystical writing that there is a functional but not an ontological dualism between body and soul. In this sense both writers saw the body less as ‘barrier’ than as ‘boundary’. The body and spirit are distinguished but not ultimately divided. What the English mystics show clearly is that a relationship to the body was important for spiritual formation, not just exterior corporeal practices. The humility rooted in the limitation of the body was the way to experience and understand the kenosis of Christ. For Hilton the humanity of Christ as an object of devotion was a boundary that had to be traversed in the higher stages of apophatic prayer, but without that personal encounter there could be no development from ‘faith’ to ‘feeling’. The lessons learnt in that ‘school of humility’ remained the door to contemplation. For Julian the suffering of Christ gave meaning and shape to her own sickness and was the boundary she dared not cross. She would not raise her eyes to contemplate the Father in heaven “for I hadde levr hafe bene in that payne to domysdaye than hafe comen to hevene othere wyse than be hym [...] Me lykede non othere hevene than Jhesu”.

In the next chapter I will look at how high medieval Scholastic understandings of perception influenced Julian’s discussion of visionary experience. In this she shows some independence from her Patristic mentor. Here she parts company with her contemporary Hilton who adheres strictly to Augustine’s categorisation of visionary experience.

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189 ST, 236-237/66-68, 2.
Chapter Three: Body as Sight and Sensation

In chapter One I showed that for both Rolle and the Cloud-author the body moves with the spirit in the contemplative life. In this chapter I look at how, for Julian and Rolle, spiritual insight is related to sense perception. In order to assess how this is actually ‘of the body’ or merely metaphor I demonstrate how, in late medieval psychology, perception was related to the body and how a post Cartesian sense of mind-body dualism was alien to these authors.¹

In comparison to Rolle, the physical/spiritual dualism is stronger in the Cloud-author’s works but there is a continued presence of holistic sentiments. Bodily devotion remains an issue within the Cloud-author’s focus on non-corporeal and imageless prayer. In chapter Two I showed that both Julian and Hilton offer an ultimately holistic anthropology. The disciplining of the body in the contemplative life implies a functional but not an ontological dualism. In comparison to Julian's work, Hilton’s takes a moderate but clearly ascetic view of the body. The relation he presents with Christ is affective but not physical. Julian, emphasizing the Incarnation, sees the body as a locus of encounter with Christ. For both, the dialectic of body and soul goes hand in hand with an ultimate resolution.

In the next three chapters, I focus on how the body and soul were tied together in the understanding of the Middle English mystics by analysing the texts with reference to the cultural, intellectual and conceptual context in which they lived. My approach here is broadly in line with the Annales school of historiography, looking at ‘mentalités des temps’.² The attitude to the body among spiritual writers was shaped by the general late-medieval attitude to the body. I look at the way in which their thought was original in relation to thoughts of the time, taking into consideration that late-medieval understandings of the body were not the same as ours.

In the next two chapters I analyse the relation of mystical vision to corporeal sense faculties. To do that I uncover the epistemological assumptions underlying medieval notions of perception and visuality in the philosophical science of the day and in popular understanding. I examine how the practice of devout visualisation at this time may be related to optical theories and show how in the fourteenth-century the debate over the role of external

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² The Annales medievalists Le Roy LaDurie & Le Goff looked mainly for such mentalities in folk culture, I will be looking mainly at academic culture of the time as the writers I study clearly come from and write for a literate milieu.
images was related to internal imaginary visualisation. The function of images, especially the image of the crucified body of Christ, was influenced by the way optical theory was developing.

Rolle’s and Julian's positive accounts of vision and audition in their encounter with God help us understand the link between physical and spiritual sensation. Here, I illustrate how sensation is understood in their writing. In chapter Four, I focus on blindness and look at how Hilton and the Cloud-author relate apophaticism and sense perception and how they understand the body in relation to imagination and contemplative prayer. The relation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ sensation helps explain how, despite the epistemological distinctions they make between physical and spiritual sensation, the body and soul are ‘tied together’ by these authors.

In this chapter I am concerned with the body as an organ of perception and the way ‘vision’ became the dominant model for contemplation of God in the later Middle Ages and involved the body as whole in the writings of Julian and Rolle. In chapter Four I will show that even for the Cloud-author and Hilton, who use occlusive apophatic language – speaking of the obstacles to the vision of God – there is still a background of optical theory in their work that relates the journey to God to sense perception. The mystical writers gave attention to scientific understandings of the functioning of the senses. This is another example of their concern for the role and place of the body in prayer. These understandings were used to integrate body and soul showing that the body had a positive place in the spiritual path. Far from despising or fleeing ‘matter’ or ‘the body’ the Middle English mystics, to present the spiritual path, make much use of bodily paradigms that are not specifically religious.

The connection between Christ’s body as an external object of perception (through any of the senses – sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell) to its assimilation in ‘inner’ or subjective experience brings us back to the subject of the spiritual senses which we addressed in chapter One. The closeness of the link between outer and inner senses is key to understanding the role of the body and its importance in fourteenth-century English mysticism. For both Rolle and Julian, as the previous two chapters have shown, the link was through awareness of the body of Christ. For both writers, spiritual perception was the fruit of union with the body of Christ. For Rolle, in his Latin writings, the language of inner and outer sensation centres around heat, sweetness and song – i.e. touch, taste and hearing. The Middle-English Meditations on the Passion ascribed to Rolle use sight. For Julian the dominant motif is ‘sight’, her revelations are ‘showings’.
In order to understand how sense faculties were considered to work contemplatively in the later Middle Ages I will look at the relation of devotional images to imaginative visualisation and of written text to words ‘formed in the understanding’. I will also look at medieval models of perception to explain the close relation between outer and inner sensation and how, in Julian’s and Rolle’s writings, they work together to create ‘embodied contemplation’.

**Seeing, Hearing and Feeling in Julian’s Showings**

The primary sense metaphor in both *Short* and *Long* texts is sight, but there is also an auditory mode to the revelations. She recounts “worde formede in my understondi” and “this worde with owtynn voyce and with owte openynge of lyppes formede in my sawlle”, describing thus what was ‘dictated’ to her interiorly. These are locutions but they are heard mentally, inwardly. They are always words that explain something of the showing, and reassure. For both Julian the senses of sight, hearing and feeling are part of cognitive and affective responses. In fact when she doubts her senses and believes she “hadde raued that daye” she loses both the understanding and the consolation of her revelation.

Julian’s use of the visual reflects the devotion of her time. A number of devotional manuals from fourteenth-century England encourage the meditator to ‘see’ the narrative of the Passion as if they were really present and to try to elicit feelings for the suffering Christ. This meditative seeing used images from illuminated manuscripts, or more commonly from Church paintings and sculptures, to create an inner visual theatre. Simultaneously, a predominantly oral culture shows growing confidence in written records towards the end of the thirteenth century, creating a new emphasis on the written word. These two influences may explain Julian’s preference for the embodied visual image and for words formed in her understanding rather than audible words. It is as if she were reading an illustrated text. Art historian Michael Camille has argued that the increasing use of illumination in late medieval texts meant that written words were received as ‘sensible’ images, as visual objects of

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4 *ST*, 266/8 & 227/21-22.
5 Kiekehefer, pp. 102-103.
perception.7

Mary Carruthers in her studies on medieval memory has shown that the link between *Picturae* and *Litterae* was intimate in the late Middle Ages. Writing at this time was understood as *parole* (in that it was often read aloud) and *peinture* (in that script was necessarily a visual medium). In fact in medieval understanding letters were “signs of sounds which in turn signify things”.8 In medieval reading, in other words, the sensory gateway was always dual. Seeing and hearing, however, was also linked in Julian’s *Showings* to the haptic sense. Julian describes how she ‘feels’ Christ’s pain. The body of Christ is seen, heard and felt. Yet as with her visions and locutions, so her ‘feeling’ has its source within the soul and is the fruit of compassion. As Carruther’s points out, in medieval understanding, images received into the memory are affective in their nature. What is seen, heared or felt is derived from the senses but their continuation in memory is due to the emotional charge with which they are vested.9

Perceptual categories are used to describe cognitive and affective powers of the soul because they play a causal role. The soul ‘perceives’ through understanding and compassion but these responses are activated through what is seen, heard and felt. Like with Rolle the close analogy with physical sense perception is characteristic of Julian’s mysticism and the close relation between outer and inner sensation in Julian’s *Showings* shows how the body played an important role in her mysticism.

Julian was shown a crucifix by her curate when she was dying and this visual image became the outer catalyst for her showings. Contemporary imagery probably shaped Julian's visions owing to the way her meditation practice had trained her power of visualization.10 Kathleen Kamerick in her study of popular piety and art in fourteenth-century England points out that the significance of holy images among devout medieval women was not due to

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7 Camille, ‘Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval literacy’, *Art History*, 8, (1985), 26–44. See also ‘Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing’, *VBBR*, p. 216: ‘In the fourteenth century seeing and reading were part of the same bodily operation, involving perception and cognition in the search for knowledge’. This second article by Camille I will look at in section Two of this chapter. ‘Sensible’ is the Middle English adjective implying something capable of being sensed or felt, apparent to the senses, perceptible; tangible; material. *MED*, S-SL, p. 434.
9 Ibid, p.75.
10 Baker, *Vision to Book*, pp. 50–51. On this theme McGinn points out that there was a ‘major debate’ in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries around the relation of vision and visualisation. The classic Augustinian distinction between supernatural ‘vision’ and imaginative ‘visualisation’ was challenged and also defended. ‘Visions and Visualisation in the Here and Hereafter’ *Harvard Theological Review*, 98: 3, (July 2005), 227-246.
presupposed illiteracy, but rather to a devotional emphasis on ‘seeing’, or ‘beholding’.

Kamerick observes that although Julian distinguished between the devotional image/object and the ‘bodily’ image of Christ, the crucifix still functioned as the corporeal medium of her vision. The tendency of late medieval religious art to unashamedly emphasise the materia from which an image is made did not impede the idea of the image coming to life. There was no attempt to hide the fact that the object of contemplation was made of matter (wood, stone or parchment), and therefore medieval art was not an illusionistic art practice. However, according to Bynum, the coming to life of a work of art was not necessarily something miraculous but was the raison d’être of late medieval religious aesthetics.

Apart from what is seen, Julian’s showings also contain much that is heard. The locutions she received were illustrated – even led by the pictorial showings – although they are still described as audible sounds. The words themselves are not seen as pictures, they are ‘heard’. This may be more of an echo of the auditory nature of reading that continued through the Middle Ages, the practice of reading by hearing aloud. Likewise medieval writing was associated with dictating aloud rather than moving a pen. The Cloud-author associated the formation of words with the movement of the tongue. This may explain why in Julian’s ‘writing’ of her Showings (whether she employed a scribe or not) the dynamic of composition and the imagery used for the transfer of words, is one of speaking and hearing from God.

Though her showings are mediated through what she perceives in the senses Julian, like Rolle, always emphasises that they happen internally within the soul. Julian’s showings witness a shift toward internal hearing – “with owtynn voice and with owtenn openynge of lyppes” – that also echoes the change in high medieval reading practice toward silent reading. The locutions are received in the understanding. The words of Christ, and Julian’s responses, are predominantly shown as within the mind rather than externally heard. Julian’s text, though it was formed in a specific literary culture that used external image and word...
seems to insist on an inner field of receptivity. The spiritualisation of sensuality involved a movement from the grossly physical sensation to sensation within the soul.

An initially clearly ‘visionary’ genre of mystical writing in Julian’s Showings contains an anti-visionary emphasis. Julian makes clear that it is the content of the visions (God’s love, our response) that is important, not the visions themselves. Julian blurs the boundaries between intellectual and imaginative vision in her Showings. However her ‘bodily’ and ‘ghostly’ showings are purposely combined in a variety of ways to make clear that her revelatory experience is in the interpretation as well as the visions. There is a process of abstraction from the visual to the theological in her writing. She has visions about the limitations of vision: despite her requests for sight in Revelation 2 sin is purposively not shown and in Revelation 11 Mary is not allowed to be seen ‘bodily’. The bodily realism in her visions is thus combined so that both more and less is shown than meets the eye. This is the tension between the cataphatic and apophatic in Julian’s Showings.

Julian’s use of images is not the usual imaginative passion meditation. Early on in her Showings Julian rates a direct awareness of God’s goodness above any devotional intermediaries or “meanes”. The only “mene” she herself uses is her own bodily experience of being “enclosedde in the goodnes God”. This playing down of the common objects of affective devotion opens up a new immediate and physical intimacy with Christ. In chapter 19 Julian says that there is nothing between the cross and heaven. As Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross observe “the crucified Christ offers no hindrance to her apophatic beholding”. They see the transformation of Julian’s suffering Christ into a radiant and beautiful Christ in Revelation 9 (Chs. 21-23) as analogous to her own journey from outer bodily sight to inner ghostly sight; “physicality becomes a pathway to the apophatic”.

However Gillespie and Ross do not explain how bodily sight is both a fallen, lower state of vision, and also immediate ‘mene’. How is the body a catalyst for intellectual vision? Specifically, how does it bypass the usual imaginative or, in Augustinian terms, ‘spiritual’ vision to become an immediate ‘mene’?

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17 Ibid, 243. See for example LT, WJN, 153/1: ‘For the shewing I am nott good’.
18 Watson shows that an ever increasing variety of phenomena are assimilated by Julian into the categories of sight and showing. JNBE, p. 67.
20 LT, WJN, 143/1-8.
21 LT, WJN, 145/37.
22 MMTE (1992), p. 76.
23 Ibid, pp. 66-71(66).
Again Carruthers helps by showing how image, in medieval understandings of perception, is composed within the imagination from information gathered from all the senses and then stored in memory. However it is possible for an image to speak directly to the imagination (and from there to memory) through “verbal pictures”. A literary work presents an already constructed mental picture through words, thus bypassing sensation. Julian’s vision of Christ may be just such a ‘fictive’ construction in that – though derived from sensation – it is presented as an interpretative tool that gives meaning to what she (and her reader) perceives. Christ’s body plays an apophatic role in that it takes the place of the imagination.

Julian makes use of the fact that ‘seeing’ can be literal as well as figurative, it is both a perception and a cognition verb. Julian is not original intaking this ambiguity into consideration. Augustinian debates on visions, as Barbara Newman says, “bequeathed more questions than answers to [their] medieval readers”. Medieval reflections on mystical visions particularly focussed on ‘spiritual vision’, Augustine’s intermediate category. This type was particularly ambiguous: it was not bodies that were seen but images of bodies. In the twelfth century, through the renewed influence of Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy*, rapture was seen in terms of angelic perception. Angels make known what they see and feel. For Bernard, angels were understood to translate spiritual reality into that which could be apprehended by the bodily senses and the imagination. Even in thirteenth-century scholasticism, ecstasy involved appropriating the senses of heavenly bodies. In Middle English mysticism this is clear from Rolle’s description of contemplation in terms of hearing the ‘angel’s song’, tasting the ‘food of angels’, or (in a lesser form) ‘seeing into heaven’. The theme was also taken up by Hilton who in *Scale 2* writes that “al this goosteli wirkynge of wordes and of resoune broughte to the mynde, and such fair liknesse, aren maad bi the ministerie of aungelis [...] the lightnynges that clene soulis perceyven thorugh favourable felawschipe of blissed angeles”.

In bodily sight the catalyst of Julian’s visions was the crucifix. How does this translate into understanding? At the end of her *Long Text* Julian is able to distil the meaning

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26 *On the Song of Songs*, tr. Walsh & Edmonds, p. 207.
28 *Scale 2/259/3539-3543.*
of her showings, the quality that is impressed in the Passion, as love. We are saved not so much by the sufferings of Christ, she says, as by the love that is revealed in those sufferings. How is a salvific quality distilled from a physical image and what is the relation between the two?

The relation of Julian’s vision to the figure of the crucifix has been studied by Christopher Abbott, who highlights that the visions were of an actual devotional image, the cross held in front of her eyes. The Showings were not an independent vision of Christ’s Passion but were of a physical artefact mysteriously animated. This indication of an object, Abbott believes, is made clear by Julian’s use of the definite article: “the hede”, “the face”, “the body”, “the dereworthy bloude”, “the swete flesh”. Certainly Julian uses the bodily synonym of ‘seeing’ for mental meditation with images and affective responses (encouraged in late medieval popular devotion for example in the Passion meditations associated with Rolle). However, Abbott wishes to highlight that for Julian ‘vision’ is both triggered by, and plays upon, an actual object in the external environment. Julian’s evocations of Christ’s Passion are ‘iconic’ rather than ‘narrational’. The peculiarity of this visionary ‘mene’ in turn leads to an intense and biographical focus on Julian as a viewing subject rather than the construction of a detailed ‘story’ of the Passion. Abbott argues that the vivid pictorial images Julian describes, with her use of domestic similes, help to emphasise that this is a bodily vision not an imaginative one.

However Abbott, alongside Gillespie and Ross, believes that in Revelation 9 the showings turn from bodily sight (which lasts from chapters 4-21) to ghostly sight (22 onwards). Certainly in Revelation 9 there is no bodily showing of Christ’s Resurrection. The crucifix remains an icon of the Passion but a ‘ghostly sight’ opens up a new way of viewing Christ. The Christ figure is no longer seen as an external object but is entered into. She no longer gazes on Christ but is led into the wound in his side. She no longer hears words, but words are formed in her understanding. There is a new emphasis embodied in reciprocity and dialogue. Whereas the personal subjective emphasis – rooted in her earlier bodily sight – reifies both the object seen and the viewing subject, the ghostly seeing of her later showings becomes an ‘ecclesial’ experience. Julian takes her place within Christ’s body, the Church. The emphasis from here on is not on her personal experience but on the meaning the showings have for her “even Christen”. Abbott sees Julian’s showing of the Lord and the Servant (Ch. 51) as the culmination of this trajectory to ghostly seeing. This ‘sight’ is no

31 LT, WJN, respectively 147/10, 157/1, 167/1, 167/15 & 179/12.
longer linked to the external object of the crucifix but is quite clearly an image within the mind and as such transferable to others.\textsuperscript{32}

So Abbot, along with Gillespie and Ross, shows the movement in Julian’s showings from bodily to ghostly perception. In this they understand bodily sight as an intermediary stage.\textsuperscript{33} A ‘mene’ is not an end. They consider how Julian combines both cataphatic and apophatic forms of mysticism and try to make sense of this variety by positing an increasingly ‘internal’ or ‘intellectual’ reading of vision.

Certainly the fluidity of Julian’s category of ‘sight’ is not a confusion of terms. However, to read a linear progression from bodily to ghostly sight does not do justice to Julian’s continuous weaving together of these two ways of seeing. Already in her first Revelation (long before Revelation 9) the Passion of Christ reveals the qualities of the Trinity before turning back to a view of the suffering Christ. Furthermore, the sublimation of the object in the viewers’ subjectivity does not correspond with late-medieval understandings of the relation of external and internal perception.\textsuperscript{34} The internal or cognitive processing of perception was felt to affirm ocular objectivity, heightening receptivity to what is seen. In the intromission model the perceived object imprints its image actively in the viewer, either by species or qualitas (depending on thirteenth- or fourteenth-century models). The movement from glance to gaze occurred because the viewer increasingly felt to be the receptive partner in vision. In this sense bodily vision became the perfect model for contemplative seeing where, by grace and in stillness, the qualities of God were admired and received. Julian draws on this analogy by using ‘sight’ as both a perceptual and a cognitive faculty. In doing so she highlights the integral quality of her showings – that they engaged her whole person, body and mind – and the objective quality – that they were not about her, or her virtue, but about divine love.

In order to understand how mental images could continue to be bodily I will present an analysis of medieval optical theory. My purpose is to show how, according to this model, narrative as well as iconic images were understood to stimulate the deliberative and affective faculties and aid the process of mnemonic retention. I will show that the faculties of understanding, will and memory were seen as ‘spiritual’: they were the means by which the

\textsuperscript{32} Abbott, pp. 91-2.


\textsuperscript{34} I use the word ‘sublimation’ according to its meaning as ‘to transmute into something higher’. OED, p. 3119.
human person knows God. I will thereby show how ‘spiritual sensation’, for both Julian and Rolle, takes the ordinary epistemology of sensation one step further. Interior contemplation for them becomes contemplation of the divine which, as Julian says, is the inmost centre of the soul.\textsuperscript{35} Their conscious or unconscious appropriation of medieval optical theory helps explain the unbroken continuity of ‘bodiliness’ even in their accounts of spiritual sensation.

**Medieval Optical Theory as a Model for Mystical Vision**

Early medieval visual experience of the divine was understood as an ‘instantaneous powerful glance’ that struck the heart, corresponding to an ‘extramission’ model of vision in which the eye of the viewer emits a visual ray that encounters its object, is shaped by it, and returns to the eye.\textsuperscript{36} The movement from glance to gaze, to a prolonged absorption in the image, corresponds to the ‘intromission’ model of vision which was in the ascendancy in the late medieval period. In the earlier ‘extramission’ theory of vision, the eye sends out rays or ‘species’ which grab hold of the object and bring it back into the eye through its corresponding effect on the visual ‘species’. In the intromission model, the viewer is not the only entity that could emit rays, for the object or the image could also emit visual ‘species’ that interacted directly with the viewer’s sense organs.

‘Species’ are physical entities. Augustine speaks of “the ray from our eye, with which we touch whatever we behold. What you see after all is what you touch with the ray from your eye [...] It belongs to our body, it is emitted from our flesh”.\textsuperscript{37} In intromission theory these rays are seen as travelling both to and from the eye. In medieval understanding it is these intermediary rays which allow a corporeal form to be communicated to the incorporeal soul. The sense organs transform what is received externally into internal ‘visual species’ which are processed by the mind. The memory faculty of the mind gathers information by being ‘impressed’ by these internal rays that carry the form of what is seen.

This could be applied to the vision of God. In the early medieval period the object or image of devotion such as the cross was iconic and served to ‘cue a memory in the faithful viewer’. In late medieval visual experience it became a narrative image enmeshed in a complex internal visual and imaginary world.\textsuperscript{38} While vision was the primary metaphor for describing the attainment of divine knowledge in the medieval period, in the early medieval

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\textsuperscript{35} *ST*, 268/8: ‘In myddys of this cite [of the soul] sittes oure lorde Jhesu’

\textsuperscript{36} See Cynthia Hahn, ‘*Visio Dei*; Changes in Medieval Visuality’, *VBBR*, pp. 174, 188.

\textsuperscript{37} *Sermons*, III/8, pp. 38-39.

\textsuperscript{38} Hahn, ‘*Visio Dei*’, *VBBR*, p. 183.
period bodily sight itself seemed to be less essential than other bodily practices such as prostration, saying prayers, touching/being touched by holy people or objects. However late medieval descriptions of divine illumination show it analogous to ‘bodily light’ i.e. shaped by visual rays.\(^{39}\) This increasing confidence in the possibilities of *visio Dei* through bodily sight reflects the late-medieval shift ‘from glance to gaze’ with an increasing emphasis on the subjective experience of the human eye and body of which it is part as the locus for the encounter of corporeal and spiritual things.\(^{40}\)

Late medieval visual experience was understood not only as a physical process, but also as one which had an intrinsically spiritual dimension. In the medieval model of vision, the act of seeing involved three phenomena: 1) an object to be seen (in the vision of God-as-*object* the ‘activity’ of the inner eye was understood to be its purity), 2) an active eye with the desire of its intention as its focus and 3) ‘visible species’ or ‘rays’ that in medieval theories of bodily seeing linked the object and subject of perception (here the spiritual analogue was with Angels who were understood to play the intermediary role, ministring grace). For writers like Julian, the analogy between bodily and spiritual seeing was not merely metaphorical.

The thirteenth-century thinkers Grosseteste (1175-1253) and Bacon (1220-1292) can be considered representative of late medieval visual theory in their emphasis on the mediatory role of ‘species’. By the fourteenth century this position was being challenged by the Ockhamist emphasis on direct intuitive contact with an object. For Ockham (1288-1348) the *qualitas* of an object, its colour, shape, sound etc., were impressed on the sense organ. The actual characteristics of the object, rather than semi-physical emanations, could be impressed on the senses and stored in the mind even in the object’s absence.\(^{41}\) This fourteenth-century turn substantiates Cynthia Hahn’s thesis that intellectual seeing was more closely linked to physical sight. There is also a return to the object itself as causal of what is perceived. It was not just semi-independant ‘species’ that pass from external objects through the medium of the body into intellectual existence but the qualities that differentiate the object itself.

These late medieval debates show different ways of understanding Avicenna’s theory of perception based on Aristotle. The concern was the transmission of externally received

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\(^{39}\) Already Gregory the Great (540-604) had said that ‘to the light that lights things for the exterior eyes, there corresponds an interior light in the mind’. *Dialogues* II, XXXV, 7.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, pp. 186-188.

\(^{41}\) This was part of Ockham’s ‘nominalist’ position that the ‘idea’ of an object, though existing in the mind does not pre-exist perception but is created from the characteristics of individual forms. See Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250-1345*, (Leiden, NY, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1988), pp. 131-132.
impressions into internal images and the link between the bodily senses and the imagination. The fruit of sense perception is the creation of interior images which are preserved in the memory. If we look at Julian’s polyphonic use of the ‘seeing’ – visual, imaginative, cognitive – we see that she is expressing the scientific understanding of her time. The internal steps of deliberation, recombination and the ‘affective’ evaluation of images were all part of the act of ‘seeing’. The fourteenth-century turn toward the *qualitas impressa* is deeply embedded in Julian’s showings, with realistic details used to describe objects in terms of qualities; size and shape – “the quantity of an haselnot [...] as rounde as any balle” and colour, “the blewhed of the clothing betokeneth his stedfastnesse”. Julian is constructing a mental picture which can be assimilated in the imagination and thus memory of her reader. In her vision of the Lord and Servant Julian is told that meaning can be seen through the details of colour, placing, expression. This reflection on the particular qualities of her vision meant that over twenty years she was able to distil further meaning from what she remembered: ‘The bodily sight styntyd,’ she writes, ‘but the gastely sight dwellyd in myne vndyrstandynge’. How did educated people in late medieval England understand the process of seeing? We are helped in this by a document that shows scientific understandings of the process of perception that would have formed the background to our authors' own views. The affective subject of late medieval vision was clarified in an early fourteenth-century English manuscript which gives a diagram of internal faculties pictured inside the head. This manuscript was copied widely and editions have been found in medical, monastic and lay libraries from the later fourteenth century. It represents an informed but popular non-specialist synopsis of the way perception and its relation to the bodily senses was understood. It is a valuable text that gives a sense of what would have been familiar to our English mystical writers.

The diagram shows an understanding of the brain function as taught by the Islamic polymath Avicenna (c.980-1037) whose work by the thirteenth century was studied in European universities. It demonstrates how the data of sense perception passed through the brain. According to the diagram, the first internal faculty in the anterior of the head was

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42 *LT*, WJN, 139/7-8 & 281/130.
43 *ST*, 218/19-20.
44 Camille, ‘Before the Gaze’, *VBBR*, pp. 202-210. Copyright not given. This diagram is also discussed by Carruthers who points out that the manuscript, though English in provenance, is in Anglo-Norman and therefore not as ‘accessible’ as Camille believes, still she admits that it is representative of understandings of the time. *Book of Memory*, p. 67.
45 The document shows a Thomistic development of Avicenna’s psychology similar to the understanding of the faculties of the soul in the *Cloud*, 64/22-40.
called *sensus communis*. It is directly linked to the two eyes by the optic nerves, and its role was to relate the *species* – or physical emanations of an object as received by the different sensory organs – and from this to constitute a compound image of the object. From there this compound of sense perceptions was passed to a secondary faculty, the *ymaginatio vel formalis*, which preserved the impression and inscription of these perceptions as an internal image. In relation to this second faculty were two interpretative faculties: the *cogitative vel formalis* and the *estimative* faculties, which respectively distinguished forms from the mixed data and evaluated their implications vis-à-vis the perceiving subject. Finally there was a fifth faculty *memoria*, at the back of the head, which took the deposit of these interpreted sense impressions in the storehouse of memory.

Avicenna’s optical theories had been transmitted through universities among English scientists in the thirteenth century like Grosseteste and Bacon, leading to a new emphasis on the process of vision ‘behind the eye’ in the imaginative, deliberative and receptive faculties of the brain.46 This late-medieval understanding of perception put an emphasis on the assimilation of diverse stimuli into a composite image and the formation of that image within the brain. Sense perception moved from the external object to internal representation and from multiple stimuli to a single imprint within the memory. The emphasis was on subjective reception of sense impressions that were shaped by the affective and deliberative response of the subject. This implied a shift from understanding sense perception as an outward movement to an external physical object to an ‘intromission’ model of perception.47

How does this model of intromission reveal how mystical writers in the fourteenth century probably understood the process of perception? Oxford, where Grosseteste and Bacon had taught continued to be central to debates on perception in the fourteenth century, in particular with Ockham who would have been teaching when Rolle was at Oxford. Debates on how perception worked had relevance to mystical theology and were a very popular topic for *quaestios*. They would have been well known to anyone with a university education in the fourteenth century. Grosseteste and Bacon had explained vision scientifically in terms of ‘species’. These were quasi physical emanations that carried representations of an object into the eye creating an image within the eye which in turn was carried by the ‘intelligible species’ of the eye into the cognitive faculties of the mind.48 In terms of optics Ockham’s position in the fourteenth century was to deny the existence of ‘species’ passing

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47 These terms will be further explored in the section Five of this chapter.
48 See Tachau, pp. 3-25. By *qualitas* Ockham meant the ‘characteristics’ of the object as they could be conceived in the mind, e.g. shape, colour, size.
from the object of vision. Ockham, accepting the possibility of action from a distance, emphasised an immediate contact with the object that required neither the transmitting medium of ‘species’ or the necessity of a ‘representation’ or ‘image’ within the senses or the intellect. As Katherine Tachau puts it, for Ockham, “all that is required in the sense is an impressed quality (qualitas impressa) and, not being a sensible species, no intelligible species or phantasms are extracted from it”. 

This optical debate was so dominant in English thought by the fourteenth century that it affected debate on mystical experience. The realist position was that the comprehension of God, and templates of created things known as ‘universals’, was distinct from sense knowledge. Spiritual knowing worked directly on the inner or intellectual faculties of the mind. The Nominalist view was that even spiritual knowing was dependent on physical causation. It was the action of an object mediated by the senses translated into phantasmata or images. Following the Aristotelian dictum, the nominalist stance held that whatever was in the intellect was first in the senses. Ockham held that sensory awareness, while not sufficient for God, was the beginning and root of all cognisance. The knowledge derived from the senses was also unmediated. Action could be effected without physical cause and was not reliant on images for its assimilation.

Sense perception in the fourteenth century came to be seen as a close approximation to spiritual knowing. Two examples that frame the period we are studying help to justify my approach in seeing an influence of thought on bodily sensation in mystical discourse: Bonaventure (1221-1274) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). These great Italian and German mystical theologians made no direct influence on the thought of the English mystics (Cusa lived after them) but a brief look at their thought on the relation of corporeal and spiritual sensation shows that this was part of the intellectual milieu of the time: Thought on bodily sensation influenced mystical discourse.

In Bonaventure’s *De reductione artium ad theologiam* he makes a clear evocation of the analogy between the corporeal and the spiritual senses exclaiming: ‘Behold how the Divine Wisdom lies hidden in sense perception and how wonderful is the contemplation of the five spiritual senses in the light of their conformity to the senses of the body’. In the *Itinerarium* the connection is elaborated – the spiritual senses apprehend, enjoy and judge spiritual objects in the same way as the corporeal do natural ones. The former are acts of

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49 Ibid, pp. 130-135 (131).
50 Ibid, p. 135.
grace, the latter acts of nature but the latter still provides ‘vestiges in which we see our God’ and a model for spiritual knowing. As Gregory LaNave writes, Bonaventure “speaks of a proportion and a conformitas between spiritual senses and the corporeal senses. Given his broader point that ‘the wisdom of God is hidden in all knowledge’ we are justified in seeing a great deal of continuity between different forms of cognition. The remarkable point of Bonaventure’s doctrine is thus that we can and must speak of five spiritual senses because there is something about their grasp of truth that is very like the grasp of truth in the corporeal senses.”

At the other end of our era Cusa synthesised the Aristotelian doctrine of the sensus communis and the sensus interioris with the Origenist doctrine of sensus spirituales. Corporeal sensation, in particular ‘sight’ provided a model or pattern for every stage of intellectual and mystical ascent. The model was that vision itself stands above the objects seen; sight itself as an internal faculty is not observable. The sense faculty is therefore isomorphic to the intellect’s own invisibility to what is intelleced. Cusa used Aristotelian ideas of sensation to show that the same theological principles are working in the structure of physical sensation as in spiritual knowing.

These examples show how the cross-pollination of ideas about bodily sensation and reflection on mysticism was much in vogue in the late Middle Ages. The optical perception offered by Camille's diagram was conservative in that it used the role of species and of internal images. Ockham’s position was not fully accepted and the diagram, in all likelihood – proved by the breadth and variety of its transmission, shows a more popular understanding. In the following section I discuss the diagram's relation to ‘extramission’ and ‘intromission’ optical theory, how it uses ‘Ockhamist’ models within a traditional framework in order to show its links with the epistemological understanding of the English mystics.


54 Garth Green, ‘Nicholas of Cusa’, SSPGWC, pp. 210-223.

55 Ibid, pp. 215-221. As Green puts it, “The frustration of visio is propaedeutic to the frustration of ratio.”

56 Sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism continues this concern about the relation of bodily and spiritual sensation but describes them as two distinct, even exclusive, epistemological systems. See Howells, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, pp. 15, 22-25, 75. According to Howells, however, even John of the Cross believes that spiritual knowings are ‘patterned on that of the bodily senses’. There is for John a structural similarity and symmetry within the cognitive structure of the human subject though they do not overlap (29-31, 34). For John, Howells writes: ‘Spiritual knowing [...] uses neither the same senses nor the intelligible forms that are essential to natural knowing.’ In John of the Cross’s case the strength of this distinction proves the medieval coherence of corporeal and spiritual knowing for, as Howells admits, this was the unique contribution of John’s mystical anthropology.
Camille does not make any link between the model of sensation in the diagram he presents with contemporaneous spiritual writing. However a number of parallels can be drawn with the way the English mystics integrated physical and spiritual sensation: 1) The *sensus communis* acted as a faculty that gathered diverse sense perception into a compound image, 2) this integrative faculty was specifically linked with the faculty of sight (the optic nerves), 3) an ‘internal image’ was created through a composite sense impression, 4) this in turn was appraised through understanding and subjective response and 5) the critically assimilated image was retained in the memory. I will look at these consequentially drawing out their relevance and implications for fourteenth-century English mysticism.

**Unified Sensorium in Rolle’s *Raptus Carnis***

A number of scholars have commented how there was an increasing privileging of sight over alternative modes of both secular and religious experience in the later medieval era. Beatific vision was increasingly emphasised over the banquet of heaven or the music of the spheres. Rolle was an exception to this. In *Emendatio* Rolle’s account of rapture use taste and smell as much as sight: “*Tu [charitas] enim es sapor condiens, odor redolens, dulcor placens, feruor purificans, […] ianuam celi aperis, […] Deum ostendis uisibilem.*” His one reference to spiritual vision in *Incendium* stresses the ‘eye of understanding’ rather than the bodily eye. ‘Sight’ is initiatory to heat, sweetness and song, a preparation not a culmination. It is described as an active contemplation not as a received grace:

\[\text{Uires uiriliter exercens, primo quasi aperto celo supernos ciues oculo intellectuali conspicit, et postea calorem suauissimum, quasi ignem ardentem sentit. Diende mira suauitate imbuitur, et deinceps in canore iubilo gloriatur.}\]

If Julian shares in the dominant ‘visual’ motif of late medieval mysticism Rolle is different in putting a greater emphasis on the locution than on what is seen. For Rolle, the locution is ‘song’, or music, rather than words: “*Sonus enim ad canticum pertinet, non ad carmen quod cantatur.*” And yet, like Julian, the emphasis is on internal hearing within the

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58 *Emendatio*, 62/180-183: ‘Thou [Charity] art savour well tasting; sweetness well smelling; and pleasant odour; a cleansing heat […] heaven’s gate thou openest; thou makest God to be seen.’
59 *Incendium*, 19/202: ‘Manly using his might, first, the heaven as it were being opened, with the eye of his understanding he beholds the citizens of heaven; and afterward he feels sweetest heat as it were a burning fire. Then he is imbued with marvellous sweetness, and henceforth he is joyed by a songly noise.’
60 Another example of the dominance of ‘word’ over ‘image’ is Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1980).
61 *Incendium*, 32/237: ‘Tune pertains to song, not to the ditty that is sung.’
mind: “cogitatus in canticum convertitur, et mens in mellifluum melos immoratur.”

‘Song’, for Rolle, is not made outwardly as with the singing in the Church. He did not sing in Church because it interfered with the interiority of his ‘song’: Those who believe that “omnes debere modulari corporaliter coram Conditorem, et musicam exterioris uocis personare” judge him.

He does not answer them “quia qualiter melos ad mediatorem emisi, et dulces edidi modulos, omnino ignorantab. Estimauerunt autem neminem spiritualia cantica percepisse, quia ipsi qua racione talia euenirent intelligere nequieuerunt”. Ghostly song “cum exterioribus canticis non concordat [...] Dissonat autem multum ab omnibus que humana et exteriori uoce formantur, corporalibus auribus audienda”.

If ‘song’ transcends bodily hearing Rolle says it is also given “ut subleuuarer supra altitudinem omnem uisibilium”.

‘Sight’ is used more extensively in Meditations on the Passion attributed to Rolle – which reflect the visual, affective and imaginative tone of late medieval spirituality – but it is clear from his more didactic treatises that this form of meditation was a springboard for more mystical motifs of heat, sweetness and song. McGinn argues that the ‘eye of the heart’ for Rolle is not inferior – or just preliminary – to the other spiritual senses but in fact precedes them only causally. The activation of the visual sense of heaven is the ascent that makes the following ‘descent of graces into the senses’ possible. The raptus visionis may therefore be catalytic to the raptus carnis for Rolle. In this Rolle shows similarities to the mysticism of his time. There a significant increase in the accounts of visions of God and celestial beings that began in the late twelfth century and grew apace in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

It was increasingly not ‘with the eye of the understanding’ but literal. The Augustinian eschewal of images at the level of intellectual vision was questioned. There was a growing defence of visualization as a practice of imaginative reflection and of supernaturally given visions which included pictorial representations.

However for Rolle mystical ‘vision’ is the one sense that is always qualified as ‘quasi’, not literal. In this he shares the reaction to this proliferation of visionary narratives in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries inspired by the revival of Dionysian theology and through

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62 Incendium, 14/185: ‘Thought is turned into song, and the mind is changed into full sweet sound.’
63 Incendium, 31/232: ‘Each man is bound to sing bodily before his Maker, and yield music with his outward voice.’
64 Ibid: ‘For they knew not how I gave forth melody and a sweet voice to my maker, but because they could not understand by what way, they believed that no man might have ghostly song.’
65 Incendium, 33/239: ‘accords not with outward songs [...] It discords much from all that is formed by man’s outward voice to be heard with bodily ears’.
66 Ibid: ‘that I should be raised above the height of all things seen.’
67 Vernacular Mysticism, pp. 358-359.
68 See McGinn, ‘Visions and Visualization’, 228-229.
69 Ibid, 235-239.
an enforced *discretio spirituum* (especially with regard to women).\(^70\) Rolle’s downplaying of sight may also have been not just temperamental but a critique of the visual as prone to imaginative illusion.\(^71\) As seen in chapter One bodily realism was used as a way of denying that an experience was imaginary. However his ultimate preference for the distance sense of audition shows he did not limit himself to haptic metaphors.

The strong emphasis on interiority in the English mystics moves toward the apophatic in their denial of the usual understanding of word and image as manifest externally. However, despite taking attention away from external form, they continue to use the language of sense experience, of sight and hearing in spiritual sensation. The outward senses are not left behind but re-orientated inwardly onto a spiritual object – Christ. The fact that they are the same senses deployed spiritually is shown by Julian’s continual use of them, engaging the senses in remembrance of Christ’s Passion. In Rolle their outward use – speaking, hearing – detracts from their inward use. If the spiritual senses were a quite separate faculty why would the engagement of the bodily senses in worship be a distraction for Rolle? It seems because he is engaging the bodily senses in an inner liturgy.

For Rolle all bodily activity was distracting: Walking, for example, was not felt to be as conducive to contemplation as ‘sitting’. In stillness the senses could be drawn inwards, allowing the body to participate in the spiritual journey. The body is drawn to the soul. The outer senses continue to function outwardly but are now ordered according to the spirit. Although different, Julian’s way of drawing the bodily senses by using them and Rolle’s way by not using them, have the same end: the wholeness of the human person.

Julian’s and Rolle’s emphasis on interiority may be part of their espousal of the solitary life, of personal prayer over communal. Words and images were in some sense interchangeable in medieval perception because the practice of *hearing* a devotional text happened in contexts (both domestic and ecclesial) in which audiences were connected to specific devotional images and artefacts. The most emphasised practice of *seeing*, the elevation of the Eucharist in the Mass, happened in a context of Church music and chant. The juxtaposition of hearing and seeing (shown positively or cataphatically in Julian’s showings, and negatively or apophatically in Rolle’s) expressed the devotional milieu of their time. Emphasis on the interior working of bodily senses also reflects Scholastic concern with the ‘mental’ aspect of perception.

\(^{70}\) Ibid, 139-141. I deal with this in chapter Five.

\(^{71}\) See McGinn, *Vernacular Mysticism*, p. 268-269.
Firstly, the model of the integration of sense experience looked at in the previous section sheds light on the juxtaposition of distinct sensual metaphors in Rolle’s writing. Rudy calls it a ‘rhetorical synaesthesia’, it occurs in much late medieval mystical writing. However the similarity of the unified sensorium that we see in this model of bodily perception with the synaesthesia in Rolle’s description of spiritual sensation shows that Rolle’s use of terms like ‘melodious food’, ‘sweet tasting song’ or ‘honey sweet flame’ may not just be rhetorical. Likewise, the integration of visuality and audition in Julian’s experience is also indicative of the unified sensorium common in both mystical and bodily descriptions of sensation. As Riehle shows the use of synaesthesia in mystical discourse helps to stress that sensual metaphors transcend the logic of any particular form of perception. Spiritual sensation is able to achieve a co-incidence of sense receptivity that is impossible with distinct bodily faculties. He draws attention to Rolle’s employment of several sense concepts at the same time.

However Riehle’s thesis of the uniqueness of mystical discourse depends on a distinction between physical and spiritual sensation which is anachronistic to the fourteenth century. Medieval scientific and popular understanding did not have episteme of distinct bodily sense faculties working independently of each other. It is only with Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) in the early modern era that light and colour were understood to be immaterial and the notion that sight was a form of touch became untenable. In medieval understanding the object seen always contacted the eye and out of that ‘touch’ an interior image was created. To say that the inner world of phantasmata was distinct from physical sensation sets up a dichotomy anachronistic to the Middle English mystics. What was perceived as image ‘within the soul’ was always an imprint of an external object. We must look at medieval understandings of perception to see how a unified sensorium, and a movement from outer to inner sensation, may actually be much more ‘of the body’ than has previously been assumed: Physical sensation, dependent on the five discrete sense organs, was believed to create a synaesthetic image in the soul. For the medieval mind therefore spiritual sensation in transcending the compartmentalisation of discrete sense organs is not different from the way normal bodily sensation works. Camille’s fourteenth-century diagram shows that this synaesthesia was not just mystical rhetoric – intending to imply the transcendence of spiritual sensation from the distinct epistemologies of the bodily sense organs – as Riehle and Rudy

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72 Rudy, p. 14.
73 Riehle, pp. 7, 120. On the different senses and their combinations see pp. 107–119.
believe. Rather the unified sensorium has its roots in medieval understandings of the process of perception, whereby the senses were more closely linked than in the modern notion of separate sense faculties. Taste, for example, was seen as a form of touch.\textsuperscript{75} The Middle English word ‘savor’ could mean taste or smell.\textsuperscript{76} Aquinas, for example, believed that it was not the sense faculties themselves but the sensus communis which discerned between sensations and enabled sense perceptions to interact and synchronise.\textsuperscript{77}

The notion of a compound sense image behind the eye resonates with that of a unified sensorium in English mystical writing at this time. It explains the use of synaesthesia and of descriptions of God by way of bodily sense stimuli in Rolle’s writings as literal, not just an imitation of the language of the Song of Songs. This language was consistent with medieval understanding of bodily perception. Astell observed that Rolle’s approach to the Song of Songs is markedly non-allegorical. For Rolle “the transfiguration of the physical begins in this life [...] In his ‘reliteralization’ of the Song of Songs he mimetically expresses the personal union of body and soul which results from contemplative unitas with God”.\textsuperscript{78} Astell, correct as she is in her appraisal of Rolle’s originality, could further substantiate her claim by recognising Rolle’s creative use of perceptual understandings of the time which already orientated sense knowledge toward the soul.

Rolle downplays sight as a mystical sense of ‘infused contemplation’ though it is shown strongly in Meditations on the Passion as a practice of ‘acquired contemplation’.\textsuperscript{79} He achieves his sight of heaven (“manly using his might”) in his understanding – sight is cognitive and active – but heat, sweetness and song are gifts of God’s grace or, even more strongly, qualities of God himself that are for Rolle felt rather than understood. Rolle keeps ‘sight’ at the level of imaginative meditation because of its association with memory (where images are stored) and understanding and will (where they are deliberated and chosen). At one point in the Meditations on the Passion attributed to him, Rolle is recorded to use an optic

\textsuperscript{77} Passau, p. 192. Aquinas’ logic for the ‘comparative’ role of the sensus communis, as against the individual senses, is that ‘a capacity to discern between two things exists only if it apprehends both’.
\textsuperscript{78} Astell, p. 107.
\textsuperscript{79} Drawn from a later Carmelite tradition these categories are used as equivalents not definitions. McIlroy argues that Rolle permits imagination a fairly crucial role for acquiring contemplation but is clearly less ‘imagistic’ in his more sophisticated ‘mystical’ works. English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle, pp. 28, 34. This does not mean, however, that the Passion meditations concern a low level of spirituality but that, in McIlroy’s words, ‘the practice of imaginatio has different functions in different Rolle texts’, p. 35. McIlroy is one of the commentators who accepts the nomenclature of the Meditations on the Passion as authentically that of Rolle.
motif to show the shift from objective vision to inward vision, and subsequently to union with what is seen:

Swet Ihesu, I yeld the thankynge for [...] thy face, that swete myrroure and bodilye blis of heuyn, vpon whiche angels and seyntes haue deynte to loke. Nowe, swete Ihesu, yeve me grace to haue most deynte to the inwardly loke and thynk vpon that blessed face, and, swet Ihesu, restore the lyknesse of thy face in my soule.80iii

The last step is rare in Rolle’s imaginative meditations. Even here the cognitive assimilation of an image (“to inwardly loke and think”) is a preparation for the further grace of union. Again the linking of ‘sight’ with knowledge in late medieval discourse remains key to its appropriation in mystical writing.

If the inner and outer processes of sensation (visual and cognitive) were seen as increasingly integrated in late medieval discourse the question remains: How could this embodied knowing be related to God, an object unlike any other? In the case of Rolle and Julian (as for all mystical writers) the gap between what was perceived through the body and what was conceived in the mind was only preparatory for the gap that opens up when trying to perceive something non-corporeal and beyond understanding. Furthermore how could that ‘object’ itself bridge the gap to transform the mind and body of the contemplative? From the perspective of ascetical practice, how could the ordering of bodily sensation toward a spiritual object involve both a drawing of the senses inward and an overflow of grace from within that could transform ordinary physical sensation?

The issue remains regarding the extent to which spiritual sensation – as distinct from the internal aspect of bodily sensation – is understood by these writers to be a vision within the soul of a corporeal object. I have shown that, for Rolle and Julian, the use of the senses for the knowing and experience of God is based on a close analogy with the processes of corporeal sensation. However we must ask whether, when applied to spiritual sensation, the bodily element becomes merely a metaphor for these writers? In what sense is the body actually involved? In the next two sections I will show how Julian and Rolle extricated themselves from a circular and ambiguous argument for spiritual sensation which would like to have all the resonances of something bodily, but cannot actually involve the body by being more literal about the place of the body in relation to God. As, in chapter One, I have looked at Rolle’s use of the spiritual senses. I will focus in this on Julian’s understanding of sight and show how outer and inner perception are linked for her.

80 RRPV, 72/138-143.
Discretio Spiritum in Julian’s Showings

This tension between the internal and external in Julian’s showings comes out most strongly in chapters 21-23 of the Short Text. When she doubts what she has seen, heard and felt, the same senses, which previously are turned toward God, are tormented through an encounter with the Devil. This is a unique showing involving an encounter with a negative spiritual force. However it is no different from her earlier showings in that it is felt and perceived in the body:

And in my slepe atte the begynnynge me thought the fende sette hym in my throte and walde hafe strangelede me, botte he might nought. Than I woke oute of my slepe [...] And on ane a lytelle smoke come in ate the dore with a grete hete and a fowle styneke. I sayde: Benedicite dominus! Is alle onn fyre that is here? And I wened it hadde bene a bodely fyre that shulde hafe brenned us to dede. I asked thamn that ware with me yf thaye felyd any styneke. Thay sayde naye, thay felyd nane. I sayde: Blissee be god! for than wiste I wele it was the fende was commenn to tempest me.

Here the olfactory (foul stench and the smoke) and the haptic (the strangle and the great heat) dominate Julian’s more usual experience of vision and audition. Julian uses the word ‘fel’ – to feel – to express olfactory and haptic experience, a word she doesn’t use for sight and hearing that work over distance. However the cognisance that it was the Devil assailing her comes from a realisation that this sensual immediacy and realism was purely subjective.

It is clear that none of her showings were outwardly observable by others. Why in this vision does this fact give evidence of diabolic origin? The message of her mysticism is dependent on the ‘realness’ of what she has seen, heard and felt. When a priest visits her she says “I have ben raunig”. In the delirium of her illness Julian believes that her experiences were purely imaginary. By doubting the corporeal content of her Showings Julian jeopardises what God is trying to show her and leaves herself open to the demonic attack which follows. Julian’s vision of the Devil occurs in her sleep – that is, purely within the imaginative faculties. On waking her vision manifests in physical signs but when investigated (by asking those with her) she realises that there is no actual external cause of the disturbing stimuli. This confusion of imaginary and bodily categories is, in the Cloud’s terminology, a ‘spiritual

81 I use the Short Text as the description of her bodily experience is more immediate than in the longer text. This may be because it was written closer to the time of her revelatory illness. The experiences described in Chs 21-23 of the Short Text give the personal and corporeal basis of Julian’s more abstract and universal understanding of soul and body in the Long Text, while the reflections of the mature Julian on this theme are rooted in the ascetical exigencies of the experiences recorded in her early work.

82 ST, 267/26-28, 30-36. Julian strangely uses the nominative Dominus instead of the vocative.
conceit’. Julian recognises this, immediately understanding that an external reading of spiritual sensation is against nature.

This approach to discernment of spirits has parallels with Rolle who in *Incendium* continually uses the haptic sense of ‘feeling’ to describe his encounter with heat, ‘sentire’, ‘sensitur’, ‘sensibile’. However he discerns the validity of his experience of ‘heat’ by first eliminating the idea that it had an outward or physical origin: “Sepius pectus meum si forte esset feroer ex aliqua exterioire causa palpitau.”83 The fact that it arose “ex interiori solummodo efferbuisset” for Rolle meant that it was from God: “Non esset a carne illud incendium amoris, et concupiscencia, in qua continu, quod donum esset Conditoris.”84 For the discernments of spirits Rolle focuses fully on these ‘internal-external’ criteria and makes no reference to conformity to scripture or consequential ‘fruits’ as a justification for his experience. The internal locus of a sense experience is important for Rolle, for as we have seen in chapter One, spiritual sensation was for him a soul experience that draws the bodily senses. Spiritualised sensuality had its origin in the soul. The participation of the body was possible because the process of sensation was understood as moving ‘inwardly’ from body to soul.

At the same time for Rolle this *inward* movement orders the behaviour of the body by controlling the outward movement of the senses. As McGinn puts it: “[Rolle] does not divide the external senses as good creations of God from the forms of interior perception that enhance their activity in the spiritual realm. What starts with a gift from God felt within and described in sensate language is meant to flow outwards and be transformative of ordinary physical sensation.”85 The body was therefore able to follow physically where the soul has gone spirituality, allowing *raptus carnis*. We have seen in chapter One that the Cloud-author was critical of such a stance, mainly because of the danger of confusing the distinct epistemologies of corporeal and intellectual vision. Such a confusion would give rise to either ‘a spiritual conceit’ – a hallucination, reading an inner experience outwardly, or a ‘bodilie conceit’ – reading psycho-physical symptoms (that occur through the outer senses) as spiritual.86 Julian combines the two positions by accepting that you can have a corporeal vision of a spiritual object but what authenticates that vision is its *telos* toward imaginative and intellectual assimilation. When the direction and purpose of a corporeal vision becomes

83 *Incendium*, Prologue/145: ‘I keep feeling my breast to make sure there was no physical reason for it (the heat).’
84 Ibid: ‘entirely from within’, ‘this fire of love had no cause material or sinful but was the gift of our maker’.
85 ‘Late Medieval Mystics’, *SSPGWC*, p. 208.
86 See chapter One, section Three, of this thesis.
increasingly physical it is against nature. When she learns that the strongly physical things she experiences are internal, subjective and imaginative, then she understands that spiritual temptation is bound up with the misinterpretation of bodily experience.

The cause and symptom of delirium in scholastic understanding was that images stored in the mind became confused as actual external objects. However, as Carruthers points out, in the monastic milieu of the earlier Middle Ages there was a “weak distinction between meditative reading and visionary experience”. One of the texts she uses to illustrate this is the Life of St. Benedict, by Gregory the Great (540-604); very familiar devotional reading in the later Middle Ages also. Gregory recounts the story of one of Benedict’s monks who, doubting his monastic vocation, leaves the monastery and outside has a vision of the Devil as a dragon, this was just a subjective vision – when the other monks came out in response to his cries they saw nothing. Carruthers comments that the cause of seeing the dragon may have been the monk’s guilty conscience but the form of its appearance emerged from his memory of dragon stories in the cautionary tales of monastic literature. However in medieval understanding memories were stored physically in the brain, recollection was a physical activity; therefore the fictive image was experienced as real by the monk and, in Gregory’s story, was described as corporeal.

When Julian recognises that corporeal seeing can be subjective and that a mental image can carry corporeal presence then, like the monk in Gregory’s story who returns to the monastery, she recognises her mistake. In both cases the diabolic vision, though ostensibly very real had been caused by an inner experience of doubt (the monk of his monastic vocation, Julian of her supernatural revelations). Julian responds immediately, assenting to her earlier showings. With instant effect the counterfeit one disappears. Julian’s belief that she had raved in delirium brought on by physical pain meant she dismissed her showings as ‘bodily conceit’. While she was having her visions she knew they were from God. Afterwards, overcome by suffering, she downgraded her experience to symptoms of bodily illness. This misinterpretation is followed by a graphic illustration of her ‘temptation’ by the Devil who seems to throttle her in her sleep. When she wakes, the image is gone but the symptoms of his presence continue to afflict her senses. She thinks the place is on fire.

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87 Passau, p. 283.
89 The story is from Dialogues II, XXV, 1-2.
90 Carruthers, Craft of Thought, pp. 185-188, also 194.
There is another story in Gregory’s *Life of Benedict* which Carruthers does not mention that may well have been a root memory text here for the nature of Julian’s experience. As Watson and Jenkins point out there is a strong possibility Julian prior to her anchoritic life was a Benedictine nun at Carrow.⁹¹ Gregory tells the story of how a bronze idol *seems* “in the eyes of all the monks” to cause fire in the monastery kitchen. They make a great uproar trying to put it out but then Benedict, hearing the noise, comes to investigate:

He saw that the fire existed only in the eyes of the brothers and nowhere else. So he bowed his head first in prayer and then he recalled the brothers to proper vision, for he saw that they were deluded by a false fire. So they saw that the kitchen building stood unharmed, and the flames fabricated by the old enemy disappeared.⁹²

Julian’s description of her experience quoted above (*ST*, 267/26-28, 30-36) echo this narrative: idol, fire, fear of burning, calling out, realising through the comments of another that what she saw was subjective. If the location of this experience was indeed her anchoritic cell then the adjacent room to where she lay would have been a kitchen/parlour.⁹³ It may even explain why she uses the nominative *Dominus*; because she is not so much calling on God as recognising the authority of St Benedict on this issue of discernment – “*Benedicite dominus!*”⁹⁴ Hearing from her companions that her experience is subjective she is confirmed in her remembrance of this story from Gregory. Nowhere else in her *Showings* does Julian use Latin, it is as if she is remembering something in her reading. When she discerns the spirit she returns to the *Showings*’ usual language of prayers making the proper vocative exclamation “Blissede be god!”

The experience of stench and heat is for Julian a waking dream. Reading her inner state of temptation into outer manifestations is, in the *Cloud*’s terms, ‘a spiritual conceit’. Like with all the English mystics this can only be clarified by distinguishing that which is ‘inner’ and ‘outer’. When Julian recognises what she is experiencing is internal, i.e. something happening in her soul, she knows that what she confused as ravings brought on by bodily suffering were ‘showings’ – spiritual visions in her imagination brought about by God.

For Julian the distinctiveness of a showing ‘from God’ and one that is ‘demonic’ in content is not an issue simply of interiority or subjectivity – both are soul experiences – but of how inner and outer relate, that is how the body is engaged in spiritual sensation. Emphasis on

⁹¹ *WJN*, Introduction, p. 4.
⁹⁴ Watson & Jenkins note how *Benedicite dominus* recalls the greeting formula used between Benedictine monks and nuns, in which the junior religious says, *benedicite* (bless me), and the senior replies, *Dominus te benedicat!* (May the Lord bless you). *WJN*, Introduction, p. 4.
sense experience assimilated within authenticates the divine source of her showings. The spiritualisation of sensuality involved a movement from the grossly physical sensation to sensation within the soul. Some of Julian’s showings are described as purely inner or spiritual visions but the encounter with Christ is shown engaging the outward senses drawing them inward so that Julian is able to find spiritual meaning in what she sees, hears and feels. Corporeal vision (using Augustine’s term) is orientated toward spiritual-imaginative vision and subsequently intellectual vision. Julian’s concern that body and image are in close relation is parodied and inverted in her experience of the Devil where a disturbance in the soul manifests in bodily symptoms.

Julian uses humour to temper any dualistic or Manichean sense of the power of the Devil even over the flesh. The Devil afflicts Julian but she “lughy myghttelye, and that made thamm to laughy that were abowte me; and thare laughynge was lykynge to me” when she sees that “alle that god suffers hym to do turnes vs to ioye”. The bodily act of laughing frees her from an oppressive sense of sin and draws her into a sense of connection with others. For Julian it is a physical expression of the insight that “alle manner of thing shalle be wel”. Similarly a story from the Vita composed after Rolle’s death shows him using earnest humour to wave away the anchoritic rule that solitaries should not touch. Margaret Kirkby, a close disciple of Rolle’s who suffered from epilepsy, was held by him during one of her fits. On her recovery Rolle says that “truly I thought that even if thou hadst been the devi I should still have held thee”. Mikhail Bakhtin has shown how in the late medieval world view, laughter always implicates the body: “laughter degrades and materializes”. By ‘degrade’ Bathkin means that laughter brings down to earth and back to the body. Humour is used to overcome an over rigid ‘labelling’ of experience as sacred or profane.

An easy and comfortable relation to the body is, for these authors, symptomatic of health of soul. As Nancy Caciola has pointed out, language of bodily transgression and confusion of soul was central to scholastic discussions of demonic possession. Such a discussion tried to explain how a demon can seem to control a person while also being unable to penetrate the seat of the soul or affect the individual’s free will. They concluded that an unclean spirit could only penetrate the perimeter of the body. However, even though demons remain outside the soul, they still could disrupt two important functions of the human spirit:

95 See chapter Three, section Six, of this Thesis.
96 ST, 228/36, 41-43.
98 Officium and Miracula , ed. Woolley, p. 20.
its control over the senses, and its role as an informational conduit between the soul and the body. In Julian’s Showings the account of the Devil’s spiritual impotency (in Revelation 5) precedes her demonic attack (Revelation 7) thereby assigning supremacy to the physical threat of the Devil’s presence.

Following on this ‘demonic’ showing Julian is given another that seems to direct attention away from the body. The contrast between the sensory encounter with the Devil and that with Christ is marked by a move to interiority and spaciousness after the claustrophobic physicality of her previous vision. The influence of God is made manifest through a ‘freedom’ and ‘movement’ for the soul, against the imprisoning, closing-in effect of the Devil who limits experience to the confines of the body. In chapter 22 Julian emphasises the soul as an expansive place of encounter:

Bot than lefte I style wakande, and than owre lorde openedere my gastely eyen and schewyd me my saule in the myddys of my herte. I sawe my saule swa large as it ware a kyngdome; and be the condicions that I sawe therin me thought it was a worshipfulle cite. In myddys of this cite sittes oure lorde Jhesu [...] He sittes in the saule euene right in pees et reste.

Julian goes on to dwell on the posture of Jesus in a way that is reminiscent of Rolle’s love of ‘sitting’. Rolle’s approach to prayer was to bring the body to rest so as to still the soul. In turn the physical senses would cease to be occupied outwards and would be drawn inward to spiritual sensation. Julian, however, is given a vision of Christ ‘sitting’ in her soul and this brings her soul to the same state of peace and rest. This is not a sensation of a spiritual thing which is drawn outwardly for the emphasis is always on the soul. This ‘sitting’ of the soul confirms for Julian that her previous visions were no hallucination:

And the saule that thus behaldy, it makys it lyke to hym that is behaldene, and anes in reste et in pees. And this was a singulere ioye et blis to me that I saw hym sitte [...] for the behaldynge of this sittynge schewed to me [...] sothfastly that it was he that schewed me alle befo.\footnotemark

The other sign she is given is that both the visual and aural have a noted non-bodily quality. She moves from language of feeling to showing. The soul is perceived architecturally

\footnotetext{[100]} Caciola, ‘Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42:2, (2000), 283-285. For example: Aquinas, *Quodlibeta*, q. II, art. 8: ‘As for the soul, the devil cannot inhabit a human being substantially [...] The Holy Spirit, indeed, can act from inside, but the devil suggests from outside, either to the senses or to the imagination [...] As for the body, the devil can inhabit a human being substantially, as in possessed people.’ Quoted p. 285.

\footnotetext[101]{Point made by Tinsley, p. 182.}

\footnotetext[102]{ST, 268/1-8.}

\footnotetext[103]{ST, 268/17-22.}
as “a fine city” not as a bodily image, and the locution she receives is in ‘wordys’ that are silent and still:

Than schewed oure lorde me wordys fulle mekely, with owtynn voice and with owtenn openynge of lyppes, as he hadde done before, and sayde fulle soberlye: Witte it welle, it was na rauynge that thowe sawe to day.\(^{104}\)viili

It may seem this lies in contrast to the physical ‘realness’ of the diabolic vision. However, her earlier showing had also been physically graphic and potentially disturbing – depicting the sufferings of one she loved. However in chapter 22 Julian is being shown now the spiritual source of her earlier more bodily images. Again for Julian it is not that corporeal vision is wrong but it must recognise that which it expresses. Julian says clearly “owre lorde openedde my gastely eyen”. The Christ she sees is not seen in a series of changing images on an external object – the crucifix placed in front of her eyes – and in suffering as before, but is now sitting peacefully in the centre of her soul. It is however the same Christ. She is told that her earlier visions were “na rauynge”. Corporeal vision is affirmed but it needs to be connected with its meaning. Even the physical realness of her encounter with the Devil is itself a revelation. The affirmation of “alle before” and all “that thowe sawe to day” includes her diabolic showing, which ‘shows’ how a negative spiritual force affects the body: Its effects are not what they appear to be, this reveals its nature as temptation.

However the question remains: how can the body involved in a good way in relation to God, and in a bad way in relation to the Devil? The difference between these two ‘engagements of the senses’ needs clarification. Firstly, for Julian, the Devil is neither illusory, nor imaginary. The powerlessness of the Devil is not seen in his illusory nature but in the fact that God turns everything he does to the good. In fact after the confirmation of the reality of her showings (recorded in chapter 22) the Devil (in chapter 23) does not disappear but again assails Julian. However this time she recognises him from a repeat of the unpleasant effect he has on the senses:

After this the fende comm agayne with his heete and with his stynke, and made me fulle besye (‘restless’). The stynke was so vile and so paynfulle, and the bodely heete also dredfulle and trauaylous; and also I harde a bodely iangelynge and a speche [...] I comforthede my sawlle with bodely speche, as I schulde hafe done to another person than my selfe that hadde so bene travaylede [...] My bodely eyyen I sette on the same crosse that I hadde sene comfort in before that tyme, my tunge I occupied with speche of Cristes passion.\(^{105}\)ix

\(^{104}\) ST, 269/23-26.

\(^{105}\) ST, 270/1-4, 8-13.
Again the modalities of this embodied encounter shift among the olfactory (vile stench), the haptic (pain and heat), emotional (fear and oppression), but this time also include the auditory (noises in Julian’s ears). Julian is left only with the visual (Julian’s gaze) and the motor-auditory (Julian’s impulse to speak back).

In response to this corporeal attack Julian counters the engagement of her bodily senses by redirecting them back to Christ. She ‘fixes her eyes’, ‘occupies her tongue’ and listens to her telling of the Passion. She saturates the visual and aural senses with remembrance of Christ. The antidote for disorder in the senses is Christ’s Passion. For Julian spiritual vision does not involve a disengagement from sense experience but a Christocentric focussing of the sense faculties. The symptoms of demonic vision, felt to be in the body, are countered by bodily action. The senses are not to be transcended – which would leave them open to demonic attack – but are re-engaged with the humanity of Christ as their proper object. This task of sensual realignment here is the ascetic equivalent to Julian’s reflection, made only in her Long Text, on the raising of “sensualite” into “substance” through the motherhood of Christ. The possibility of a spiritualized sensuality is opened up when God in Christ takes on a human sensation. The Short Text shows that the root of Julian’s theology lay in her experience of ascetic urgency at a time when “sensualite” was greatly afflicted.

In this drama Julian comments on the proper working of spiritual sensation. This is not received passively by the body from an overflow of the activity of the soul but is actively engendered by the body in interaction with the soul. The body acts; Julian fixes her eyes on the cross and narrates the story of the Passion with her tongue. Not only does bodily action through the orientation of perception calm the sense faculties but such action impacts the soul: “I comforthed my sawlle with bodely speche.” Noticeably Julian does this as if her soul were another person. For her the way to engage the “besye” exteriority of “sensualite” was to be “besye” in love of God and love of neighbour.106 The only reliable context, in other words, through which the bodily senses are able to engage with spiritual objects such as God or the soul is through the compassion awakened by Christ’s suffering and the needs of her “even Cristens”. 107 Without that catalyst the physical senses remain gross and, as the Cloud-author also pointed out, prone to diabolical illusion. However, instead of taking attention away from sense perception as the Cloud-author advised, Julian favours a re-directing of the

106 Julian may well be playing with the double meaning of the Middle English word ‘besye’ which can mean restless but also activity or diligence. MED, A-B, p. 902.
107 Julian of course saw these as connected as the Church fathers did. cf. Gregory the Great: ‘Christus et ecclesia una persona est’ (Moralia XIV xlix 1; PL 75 1068), the persona which Augustine had called ‘duo in carna una’ (Enarrationes, Psalm 140.3; CCSL 40 2027).
senses through compassion. To speak, see, hear and feel with love is to have spiritual perception.

There is a mutuality of causation in Julian’s showings in that the state of soul enables embodied contemplation which in turn effects the soul.\textsuperscript{108} When the heart is pure and the intention loving, then the Christian is able to speak and hear the Word of God, and see God’s Image. However, as McGinn shows, in mystical writing this is often a reflexive seeing.\textsuperscript{109} For Julian the humanity of Christ as ‘Image of God’ is mirrored in the human sensuality as well as substance. Chapters 21-23 of the \textit{Short Text} show that this understanding is rooted in an ascetical paradigm which allows a bodily response to God and neighbour to have an effect on the soul. Julian does not reject the popular spirituality of her time, the externalism of devotions and ‘works’ that were believed to be salvific, the saturation of the reified religious object and action that Huizinga identifies with distaste.\textsuperscript{110} Julian’s thought has a strong emphasis on interiority, on the ‘beclosed’ assimilation of sense perception, as we have seen, but her continued emphasis on the validity of bodily acts subverts any contrast with ‘exterior’.\textsuperscript{111} In this she is part of the anchoritic tradition of the \textit{Ancrene Wisse} which, as R. Ackerman points out, is distinct from other monastic rules in the attention it gives to precise bodily gestures and postures.\textsuperscript{112} Like the \textit{Wisse} Julian does not favour interiority at the expense of exterior practice. Even more than the other English mystics the body for Julian not only accompanies but is conducive and expressive of the inner life.

\textbf{Embodied Interiority}

Interiority was part of late medieval understanding of sensation. This brought together body and soul in a shared work. There was also, as I have shown, an epistemic overlap in that bodily sensation was understood to imprint the soul (as a seal does wax), and the soul’s cogitative and estimative faculties were able to interpret and evaluate what would otherwise be a confusion of mixed data. In terms of sense information this medieval model favoured a one way flow. To project internal images onto the physical world involved an inversion of the

\textsuperscript{108} ‘Mutual Causality’ exists in cases where two or more events are each a cause of the other. These have been called ‘feedback examples’ in which there can be ‘symmetrical relation of mutual dependence’. Such cases challenge a strictly linear understanding of causality as cause to its effect. See Lois Frankel, ‘Mutual Causation, Simultaneity and Event Description’, \textit{Philosophical Studies}, 49:3, (May 1986), 361-362.

\textsuperscript{109} ‘Humans as Imago Dei: Mystical Anthropology Then and Now’, \textit{STRCS}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{110} See ‘Introduction’ to my thesis, note 81.

\textsuperscript{111} On this, but from a different angle see Turner, \textit{Julian of Norwich: Theologian}, pp. 196-197.

process of sensation and was counted as hallucination. Here I examine the relation of the bodily and the spiritual faculty of vision to ask whether this normative direction of interiority involved an ultimate transcendence of the body. If, in psychological understanding, the focus of seeing shifted from the perceived object to something that happened within the viewer one would expect an increasing abstraction from the senses and an increasingly cognitive understanding of perception. An internal trajectory for perception could, although in fact did not, imply a movement away from outer sensation. The fact that inner was not conceived as a rejection of outer may have shaped Rolle’s and Julian’s use of the spiritual senses as interior forms of sensation that did not imply a neglect of the body. For them the bodily senses not only work with the soul but are contiguous with spiritual perception.

In late medieval theories of bodily sensation, the body was understood as closely related to the internal faculties of memory, understanding and will. However this direction of interiority in late medieval sense theory did not involve a negation of the body. By examining popular practices of religious visualization in the fourteenth century it becomes clear that an emphasis on inner receptivity led to a heightened awareness of the body as the place of contact and interaction with real physical objects. ‘Seeing’ (and particularly religious seeing) became more bodily. The internalisation of sense perception increased the sense of the perceived object as real, and of body as the primary locus of interaction with it. The implications for this in understanding the attitude to the body in Middle English mysticism can be considered according to: 1) the interior processing; 2) the affirmation of the object perceived; and 3) the new emphasis on interaction between the two. To do this we must look further at the epistemological assumptions underlying the medieval notions of perception in relation to the body, particularly the faculty of sight.

In the manuscript studied by Camille the two stages of sense reception beyond sensus communis further emphasise the connection between the internal processing and external stimuli. As an art historian, Camille’s main concern is the relation of bodily vision to the creation and preservation of mental images. His conclusions are: 1) that the activity of vision was understood not as a passive process but one that involved data from all the sense organs through the active processing of the brain, and 2) that the ‘seeing’ was not just about visual perception of an external object but involved four stages of ‘internalization’: the integration of variously received sense data, the construction of a compound image, its further differentiation and analysis, and its ongoing preservation within the mind. This process of ‘impressing and inscribing’ of the compounded sense data on the faculty of imagination and then memory, Camille shows, was correlated with the popular medieval practice of image-
making for wax seals. Late medieval intromission theories were therefore not like the photographic model we have today. The contact between the object perceived and its reception in the brain was seen as physical like a wax imprint. Wax seals, unlike mirror images, are physical and permanent.

Camille’s concern is with medieval art. He does not apply his studies to mystical writing although the model is equally applicable to the process of visionary and aural reception and recall. The next two steps in the assimilation of sensory stimuli help explain the way devotional reflection on image or text was practised. If the transmission of externally received impressions into internal images explains the link between the bodily senses and the imagination then the next step of deliberation, recombination and ‘affective’ evaluation of images shows that interpretation was all part of the act of ‘seeing’. This corroborates how Julian sees interpretation and affective response as all part of the Showings. Images, pictures, words, are all combined with feelings, interpretations and interrogations in the dialogue set up in her Showings, both in what is perceived objectively as vision and her own response to it.

In the diagram studied by Camille the path between the imaginative and the memory faculties of the brain is a two way process. This means what was seen or sensed was affected by what had been seen or sensed in the past. Memoria involved not just the imprint of images at the back of the brain but the capacity of imaginative recall which enabled remembered impressions to be replayed in different ways, re-evaluated, and responded to. The flow of compound images between the imaginative and memory faculties meant that concrete images came as much from the processing of previously received perceptions as from the present experience of external objects. This also helps explain how Julian could store up the memory of her experience and reflect on it as something vividly present over the process of twenty years between her near death experience and the writing of her Long Text. Imagery formation from experience (Short Text) and memory (Long Text) are both ‘showings’ for Julian. However the rumination on memory carries a certain ripeness which may explain why, in the Long Text, she calls what she sees not a “shewing” but a “revelacion”.

The emphasis in medieval optical theory on both realism and subjectivity implies that what the late medieval viewer saw was something that both entered the eye from a ‘real’ external object and was created by the rays emanating from the viewers’ own perception and

113 LT, WJN, 123/1.
affectivity. Arguably, an increasing sense of interaction between object and subject in late medieval models of perception found religious expression in the cultivation of imagery, e.g. statues, paintings. These served to mediate the gap between what was perceived through the body and what was believed in the mind. The intermediary role of images, received by the senses and yet held in the mind, is key to understanding the reciprocity between perception and cognition.

However, at the same time, there is evidence in the later Middle Ages that physical objects were increasingly felt to be external and thus ‘other’ to the seeing subject. The older ‘extramission’ model of vision involved a projection of internal archetypal patterns into the world. It implied an active seeing subject directing visual rays towards the object. The ‘intromission’ model involved an inference taken from the external world. It implied a passive subject receiving rays from the object. Early medieval images were therefore perceived as created by the viewing subject, while late medieval images were felt to ‘come in’. Camille has argued that here was a close relation here between theory and practice. This new ocular objectivity could therefore also imply new distance between the viewer and the object seen. Visual rays or ‘species’ were no longer understood to grasp hold of physical things themselves but only the images that emanated from an object as form. This rift or gap between perceiver and perceived may have helped foster the desire evident in late medieval expressions of vision: the unattainable belle dame of courtly love literature as well as the longing for physical contact in apparitions of Christ.

It is possible to overemphasise the historical shift in views of perception. Even in terms of optical theory – let alone popular appropriation of it – extramission and intromission models of vision are not strictly exclusive mechanisms. Extreme forms of ‘intromission’ theory, which argued that no ray came from the eye, did not dominate Scholastic understandings of vision in England in the fourteenth century. Certainly in popular understanding subject and object were connected bi-directionally. The act of sight was both the extension of the sensitive soul towards the object and the reception of forms into the brain. In fact the co-existence of different schemas of vision may have helped create the dynamic, reciprocal understanding of late medieval vision. 

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116 Tachau, pp. 130-135. Though favoured by Grosseteste and Bacon complete ‘ocular objectivity’ was opposed by Ockham.
At a more popular level the eye was described as receptive, passive, vulnerable to sensations, as well as roaming, grasping and piercing its object. In devotional writing the eyes were often seen as windows that needed to be guarded, as conduits that allowed the external to enter the soul. They were a source of temptation as well as information. They were also seen to affect others directly: the lustful or venomous look (the ‘evil eye’) was seen to influence the external object right through the Middle Ages. A compassionate look could heal. One of the Meditations on the Passion attributed to Rolle thanks Jesus “of that lokynge that thou lokyd to thi decyple that the hadde forsakyn, seynt Petyr [...] thorow thi blessydlokyng may we turne to thi grace”. A sorrowful sight received by a compassionate eye would also deeply grieve the soul. Rolle evokes the mutual gaze of Jesus and his mother: “A, Lord, the sorewe that fel to thi herte, when thou on thi modur caste thine eyen [...] so [in syyt] was youre sorewe eyther for other waxenge manyfold.”

The continuation of extramission theories of perception (the eye affecting things) combined with the interplay of the unified sensorium and imagination (visual images felt in all the bodily senses) meant that perception was still felt to initiate not only with the eye but also from the body, as an activity of the body. It was not only the eye that reached out but the whole body contacted and engaged with an object encountered through any sense. Sight was a physical act but it involved the extension of the soul to the object seen and the reciprocal impression of the object on the body and the soul. Moreover Aristotle believed that perception was associated with a change in the sense organ caused by the object of perception. Scholastic discussion likewise affirmed that the creation of a mental image involved a partial refiguring of the sense organ.

This closer link between the physiological and the mental in the late Middle Ages could imply that ‘seeing’ at this time was more material. Attention to naturalistic likeness became important for the practice of image making at this time. Since in the intromission model it was increasingly felt that the object of vision could emit visual rays or ‘species’, the

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118 For domestic, non-academic culture see Woolgar, p. 2. Also Dallas G. Denery, Seeing and Being Seen in the Late Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 120.
119 Biernoff, p. 4.
120 Text 1, English Writings, 20/31-33, 39. See also from ‘Meditation B’ in RRPV, 72/121-125.
121 Text 1, English Writings, 22/99-100 & 109-110.
122 See Biernoff, p. 43.
image was experienced ‘staring back’ at the viewer. Passion images were there to be sensed. In the thirteenth century, images could become relics. In the fourteenth century, crucifixes became both naturalistic and, at the same time, mannered to evoking specific devotional responses from the viewer. Likewise the Host at this time was felt to be both an image and a real presence, a visible thing capable of becoming and not just signifying its prototype. Vision became a form of communion previously participated in only through taste. Now to see the Host was enough. In the Mass, at the elevation of the Host, the communicant could consume the body of God simply by looking and being looked at.

The materiality of vision could also come through an emphasis on the affective quality of cognition. The interactive gaze inclined the subject to be deeply affected by what they saw. This became crucial to forms of mystical devotion in the fourteenth century. A new openness to exterior sensations led to a hypersensitivity of the person meditating on an image of the passion to ‘every bleeding gash and open orifice of God’s broken body’. The object ‘entered’ the viewer by its rays. What was seen was permanently stored in the memory through its influence on the senses. The dominant model for perception in the later Middle Ages became the imprint of a seal on wax, rather than that of a mirror, which favoured an internalised image, a form taken without the medium of matter. Seeing still remained a physical act that was expressed somatically through the language of imprinting. The common important use of seal and wax for personal identification on and in letters and official documents meant that it was a resonant metaphor in popular culture. A seal meant literally ‘leaving your mark’; it implied a personal ‘impression’, which has its echo in the affective response of late medieval devotion to the visual image.

Religious ideas became reified in the art of the late Middle Ages due to the desire for bodily contact that was engendered by visual objectification. The proliferation of visual images in the fourteenth century meant that an emphasis on real presence led to the increased role for external objects in religious life. The rise of intromission theory where the object

124 Camille, ‘Before the Gaze’, VBBR, p. 217: ‘The view that medieval art was somehow more spiritual and a rejection of the corporeal never seems strong in the light of the somatic and sensational psychology of perception.’
126 Camille, Gothic Idol, p. 9.
128 Ash, ‘Discursive construction of Christ’s body’, FMR, p. 81. Christopher Joby in ‘The extent to which the rise in the worship of images in the late Middle Ages was influenced by contemporary theories of vision’, Scottish Journal of Theology, 60:1, 40, notes the ongoing use of ‘extamination language’ in late medieval Eucharistic devotion to heighten the sense of contact: ‘A visual ray would be emitted by the worshipper’s eyes, ‘touch’ the host and return to imprint an image of the host on the worshipper’s soul.’
started to play a more dominant role in vision also led to a desire for a personal, bodily contact with a reality that existed independently from the act of perception. Despite the evidence of the senses, the Eucharist was not bread. The desire to reify belief fuelled late medieval devotions to the ‘corpus sanctus’ in its various forms: Eucharist, relics of saints, the power of art to evoke affective response, stigmata, physical manifestations of mysticism, bodily visions and imaginative visualisation of Gospel scenes, sacred places, etc. Huizinga saw this as an autumn of medieval culture as it lost confidence in its beliefs and needed external proofs.\textsuperscript{131}

In late fourteenth-century England a crisis of the overproduction of images and relics, like any inflation, led to a debasement of their value and the Lollard criticisms of images as well as the push toward an interior spirituality even among the Orthodox.\textsuperscript{132} Images, however, had an important place in the culture and were felt to be alive. Late medieval art and the internal imagination it encouraged is notable for two seeming contradictory impulses: 1) An ‘insistent materiality’ which draws attention to the texture and tactility of the image, to the substance from which it is made, and 2) the attempt to make images lifelike and interactive.\textsuperscript{133} The image remained part of the matter it was made from and yet was animated to have a psychological effect. Sense and sensibility were closely combined.

From this two things are clear: 1) ‘seeing’, and particularly religious seeing became more bodily at this time, and 2) the impact of vision was understood to be closely linked to the viewer’s response. Because of the increasingly psychological understanding of the act of seeing it could be argued that seeing became more internal and in a sense less bodily in the late Middle Ages. However this was not the case. It led instead to 1) an increased sense of the reality of the object, 2) a new sense of interaction and openness between object and subject of perception and 3) the cultivation of specifically religious imagery that could mediate the gap between what was perceived through the body and what was believed in the mind. This led to an increasing sense of the realism of religious symbolism, reified in ‘objects’ and the cultivation of an intense personal receptivity, even vulnerability, to them. Body and soul were thus closely linked in religious sensibility.

This explains the extreme forms of asceticism in the late Middle Ages. The body was not so much fought against as a source of temptation (as in Stoic ascesis), or denied as an aspect of God’s creation (as in Manichean), but was considered as a substance, like wax,


\textsuperscript{132}See Camille, \textit{Gothic Idol}, pp. 219-220, 224, and Bryan, pp. 35-38.

\textsuperscript{133}Bynum, \textit{Christian Materiality}, p. 106.
which needed to be made receptive to the impact of God. If necessary, it needed to be manipulated into a state of receptivity, as wax must be made soft in heat. The explosion of religious imagery and bodily practice, to which the Lollards so objected, played the role of keeping the senses saturated with religious stimuli while at the same time cultivating an intense devotion. This was defended with scientific understanding of the assimilation of images: a strong desire or fear felt in the bodily senses was considered to create a strong imprint of the image within the soul. Seeing with longing imprinted the beholders' heart and memory with a permanent image of the object beheld.\textsuperscript{134}

This can be seen in the affective mysticism of the time: the bodily eye in the Middle Ages was understood more as a vehicle of desire than as an instrument of observation.\textsuperscript{135} Sight was tied to volition. As late medieval confessional treatises show, the subject was culpable for ‘sins of the eye’: One saw what one chose to see. ‘Sight’ therefore provided the dominant sensual metaphor for the affective spirituality of the time. It seems clear that this shaped the way vision was treated in the mystical texts examined. When Rolle writes of “looking into heaven” he is talking about the direction of his desire.\textsuperscript{136} It is at the root of Julian’s prayer to have “sight of the passion”.

Julian describes what she ‘sees’ as Rolle described 'hearing', 'feeling' (of heat) and 'tasting' in a bodily way. Her use of naturalistic imagery to create vivid pictures is not primarily a way of creating ‘a distance between the Christ figure as an object and her as a subject’.\textsuperscript{137} Rather Julian uses descriptions of everyday life as a way to connect ‘domestic’ or profane bodily experience with her ‘supernatural’ vision. The didactic purpose it serves is not so unlike Rolle’s use of realist bodily language for spiritual perception. To describe the details of Christ’s face Julian uses the colours, graphic images and metaphors drawn from daily life. Her illustration is more empirical, even scientific, than that of meditations shaped by purely religious imagery:

The gret droppes of blode felle downe fro under the garlonde like pelottes seming as it had comen oute of the veines. And in the coming oute they were browne rede, for the blode was full thicke. And in the spredi ng abrode they were bright rede. And whan it came at the browes, ther they vanished. And notwithstanding the bleding continued tille many thinges were sene and understonded [...] The plentuoushede is like to the droppes of water that falle of the evesing of an house after a grete shower of raine, that falle so thicke that no man may nomber them.

\textsuperscript{135} See Biernoff, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{‘Ego Dormio’}, \textit{English Works}, 31/ 212-215.
\textsuperscript{137} Abbot, p. 67.
with no bodely wit. And for the roundhede, they were like to the scale of hering in the spreding of the forhede.\textsuperscript{138xii}

Despite the everyday images, sensation here is described in a very ‘un-normal’ way by Julian. Her detached observation at this point and the juxtaposition of rather disconnected imagery; the eve of a house, scales of herring, wooden pellets, give the picture a surrealist quality that is not really ‘domestic’. The blood, though flowing continuously, always vanishes surreally at the eyebrows. In this strange vision of Christ’s face “many thinges were sene and understanded”. The emphasis on sight may explain why the blood vanishes at his eyes: Christ’s Passion echoes her suffering and yet despite her pain her seeing is not blurred. Her seeing is claeer but what she sees points to something more. In the missing line of the quotation above there is a discrepancy between the Paris and the Sloane Manuscript (British Library 2499). The former has the rather tautologous statement that “the fairhede and the livelyhede continued in the same bewty and livelines” (merely juxtaposing synonymous words).\textsuperscript{139xiii} Sloane has a much more gnomic line, that "the fairehede and the livelyhede is like nothing but the same".\textsuperscript{140} This curiously apophatic line subtly negates the images she has presented. It implies that the qualities she perceives of beauty and vitality cannot be described in what she sees but only in those qualities themselves.

Later in Revelation 4 Julian sees the whole body of Christ bleeding, it reaches the extremities of his body and then it vanishes. The blood is abundant, but only flows over his body. Though the body of Christ as the focal point of her vision, the ‘vanishings’ make clear that what she sees – though physically vivid and real to the senses – are still pictures, they are images that do not need to follow the laws of nature. Their function is to impress a quality, in this case abundance:

This [bleding] was so plentuous to my sight that methought, if it had ben so in kinde and in substance for that time, it shulde have made the bedde all on bloude, and have passe over all about.\textsuperscript{141xiv}

Though what she sees does not obey natural laws it does more than create analogies that initiate a journey inwards.\textsuperscript{142} Julian’s physical imagery does not just illustrate or point to spiritual meaning but expresses it within the spatio-temporal peramators of bodily sight. In her visions Christ’s body acts as a quasi-sacrament, revealing qualities of God’s love to her senses. The qualities (beauty and vitality in chapter 7, abundance in chapter 12) are evoked

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{LT, WJN}, 147/10-15, 17-20.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 147/15-16.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Shewings}, ed. Georgia Crampton, p. 47, lines 247-248.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{LT, WJN}, 167/6-8. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{142} Gillespie and Ross, \textit{MMTE} (1992), p. 66.
by what is seen but divine qualities are more than what meets the eye and must be contemplated in themselves. Julian uses the visual, but abstracts her meaning from it. The meaning of her visions comes not so much in but rather out of what she sees.

This relation of image and meaning reflects the emphasis on *qualitas impressa* in medieval perceptual theory: cognitive assimilation of sense perception meant the qualities of any object were received in the mind. There is a strong connection between the real external object and the estimative and deliberative processes of the mind because the liminal image within the mind is not a purely mental construct but is a real representation of what is perceived. In Julian’s story of the master and the servant (in chapter 51) she says that the meaning is deduced from the specific details, “the privities of the revelation be hid therein.” However this learning by image is, she says, “the beginning of an A. B. C., whereby I may have some understanding of oure lorde’s meaning”. Imagery is the grammar of cognition. The image of the servant and the master is the least perceptual of Julian’s showings. No longer linked to the bodily sight of the crucifix, the story appears as a mental showing. Yet it continues to be as precise in terms of visual detail as the earlier Passion showings. The inner image is as real as the outer one. Because it is an inner image though it is – in terms of process – closer to noetic aspect of sensation. This may be why it is in this showing that Julian garners her deepest theological insights.

The showing itself is concerned with the redemption of bodily experience. The servant’s tattered clothing is symbolic of human flesh under the conditions of the fall. This garment of flesh is assumed by Christ in his Incarnation. The tearing of Christ’s flesh in his Passion makes way for a new bodiliness signified by a luxurious new robe:

> And oure foule, dedely flessch that Goddys Son toke upon hym, whych was Adam’s old kyrtyll, streyte, bare, and shorte, then by oure Savyoure was made feyer, new, whyt, and bright, and of endless clenenesse, wyde and seyde, feyer and rychar than was the clothing whych I saw on the Fader. For that clothing was blew, and Crystes clothing is now of feyer, semely medolour, whych is so marvellous that I can it nott discryve, for it is all of very wurschyppe.

“Blew” symbolised heaven. “Medolour” implies ‘mixture’: The middle English word is a technical term derived from the clothing workshop; it refers to cloth made of wools dyed different shades of colour and mingled before being spun. The implication is that cloth made from mixed wools (in this case shades of white) is “fairer and richer” than that which is

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143 *LT WJN*, 285/230.
145 *LT*, 51/78-79
146 *MED*, p. 209.
dyed after being made. Theologically it is saying that the Resurrection body (being still physical body) carries an added richness to a body that is purely spiritual, even that of God the Father.

Similarly Julian’s Showings are also richer in their ‘mixing’ of bodily and spiritual sight, a mixture which continues into heaven. The visual details, the naturalistic metaphors and the emphasis on actual bodily sight is not something that is superseded by ghostly seeing but continues ‘mixed in’. This “medolour” is the vision of Logos ensarkos. Julian makes good use of the ambiguities between physical and intellectual seeing in the later Middle Ages: she emphasises that her inner and personal vision is real – objectively meaningful – not a projection of her psyche; and she evokes the apophatic – that which is beyond image – through the superabundance of possibilities latent in the language of ‘sight’. The quality of God’s love shown in the cross is greater than the mind’s ability to conceive: “I can it nott discryve, for it is all of very wurshyppe.”

Conclusion

The spiritual senses as presented in the writings of Rolle and Julian insist on a movement of interiority which is not different from the understanding of physical sensation at their time. It is another example of how for these writers the ‘spiritual senses’ are connected with their bodily counterparts, not just metaphorically. The internal processing of bodily sensation is in fact quite natural. It is against nature, a “bodilie conceit”, to have a corporeal vision of a mental image but not vice-versa: bodily sight necessarily results in a mental image. Julian’s and Rolle’s approach to spiritual sensation is therefore closely analogous to that of bodily sensation. When Julian experiences a spiritual force ‘outwardly’ through her senses, she knows there is something wrong. It is demonic and unnatural. Whereas to appropriate an image or text through the bodily senses, and interpret and store it within the soul, is within the right ordering of physical sensation.

The difference between spiritual and bodily knowing for Julian is not in the interiority or immateriality of the mode of perception but in the quality of what is perceived – that is, the image’s ability to convey meaning. Julian continually grounds her vision in physical images that at least to some degree are able to carry and express the qualities of love. The cross, however, is an inexhaustible ground of meaning. It is not an image that is superseded by
understanding but is a sacrament.\textsuperscript{147} Hence Julian’s belief that her book “is uncomplete as far as I see yt”. For the quality expressed in the cross is endless: “Yf I might suffer more I would suffer more”, Christ says, for though the suffering is finite, the love revealed is infinite. This is why the cross can never be a distraction for Julian for, as she says, “I chose hym for my heven”.

There is a more apophatic tone with Rolle regarding the relation of inner and outer sensation. For him, if the senses are to be deployed spiritually they must be drawn inward. Outwardly, song is a distraction, bodily discomfort lessens the ‘high rest’ of contemplation. His use of sensual language for contemplation is not metaphorical or rhetorical but describes how sensation enjoys its orientation towards God. The first step inward is toward a sensus communis which gives rise to the unified sensorium of synaesthesia. ‘Sight’ as a mystical sense for Rolle – except on rare occasions – does not express the quality of union. As a mediated sense dependent on image it does not carry the haptic quality of heat and sweetness, nor does it have the interior and transcendental quality of song. This is because for Rolle ‘sight’ involves and engages the active faculties of imagination and understanding. Rolle in his more mystical work endeavours to emphasise a direct contact with God – the only mediation being the ministration of angels not imaginative or discursive thought.

For Rolle’s purpose all the senses – including ‘sight’ in its inner or mystical sense – offer immediate “mene”. They bypass the practice of active imagination in contemplation. The bodily senses acting in the soul made possible a real ‘feeling’ of God’s love: “\textit{non estimatiue sed realiter sensitur}”. ‘Song’ for Rolle is this feeling experienced cognitively. Mind and thought are turned into song. But as vision for Rolle is not in images, song is not in words. This does not stop Rolle from trying to express ‘song’ in his writing. He can only hint at it though in his alliteration and ecstatic exclamations. The impression of those words, Rolle believes, carries the quality of heavenly music. As a poet he wishes to convey a rhythm that has a transcendental referent. His ecstatic poetry does more than try to describe ‘song’ it tries to invoke and express it. In this sense his words serve the same symbolic, even sacramental, role for him as Julian’s images do for her. Where Julian is a pictorial artist, Rolle is a poet. For the former bodily sight carries and shows Divine meaning, for the latter the sound of words (in their passionate and extreme alliteration) expresses the sound of Heaven.

\textsuperscript{147}See Riehle, p. 3: ‘The images [in spiritual writing] which relate to the actual mystical \textit{unio} [...] taken from the field of sensual contemplation and experience do not merely serve as signs which indicate and suggest, but they contain in themselves an intensive, dynamic effectiveness, since they are to reflect the process and achievement of the mystical union.’
In the next chapter I will look at the place of images and imagination in Hilton and the *Cloud* author. How is the internal processing of sense perception linked to their bodily and spiritual sensation? Do they make the same connections as Rolle and Julian or do they show a different appraisal of the body in its relation to God?
Chapter Four: Body as Dialectic and Denial

This chapter will look at how Hilton and the Cloud-author relate apophaticism and sense perception, how they understand the body in relation to imagination and contemplative prayer. I focus on their ‘darkness’ as purgative and, paradoxically, illuminative. Hilton and the Cloud use apophatic imagery in different ways. For Hilton darkness is seen as a negative, or at best, preparatory stage for ‘seeing the true light’. For the Cloud-author it is the place of encounter with God. I propose that this difference is related to their attitudes to the body. The anthropological equivalent to apophatic darkness is ‘blindness’. Hilton’s affirmation of sight as closely connected to understanding or insight into spiritual things stands in contrast to the Cloud-author’s cultivation of a “blynde steryng of loue” as a way of coming to God by ‘unknowing’. Hilton uses blindness either as an expression of sinfulness, or when used positively, as a way of expressing the guarding of the senses. His use of the term shares much with the ascetic motifs of the English anchoritic tradition. However the Cloud-author, coming (possibly) from a slightly different Carthusian stance, extends this term to describe the stripping of internal images in contemplation.

The fourteenth-century English writers whose work I examine combine eremitical and mystical genres. Within my overall thesis – that the body is integrated in the spirituality of all the four authors that I am looking at – there is something specific in the case of these two apophatic writers which shows a particular kind of concern for the body. The distinction between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ person is not used by them to express anthropological dualism but rather the bi-directionality of bodily sensation. These categories – inner and outer – were not meant to make a distinction between the body and the soul as such. They refer rather to the body as externally orientated in relation to the world, and the body as personally experienced and known with the responses of memory, imagination and will. For Hilton and the Cloud-author both aspects of body are important. Here I examine the degree to which these aspects of sensation are distinguished.

Arguably, the ascetical discourse against the body in the Middle Ages is not against the body as such but against the movement of the senses towards objects (the world) and itself as object in relation to others (the flesh). Certainly for anchoritic literature the extraversion of the body is synonymous with caro, flesh. The emphasis on the enclosure of the body and sealing of the senses in English anchoritic writing – and in the ascetical side of Rolle’s and Hilton’s writing – may not be a negation of the body as such but a curtailing of
sensual externality. By giving no object to the senses, they are drawn within and find their relation to the soul. The senses are thus disciplined and disposed for imaginative meditation. The prerogatives of bodily enclosure are concerned with the outward movement of sensation, i.e. the relation of the body to the world.

The demand of mystical blindness is to restrain the inner processes of sensation that create images and the cognition that is based on those images. Sense deprivation used mystically concerns the relation of the body to the soul rather than the ascetical demands of enclosure. High medieval understandings of the distinct epistemological roles of external and internal perception meant that, for the writers we are considering, the body experienced through the sensation of external objects differs from that which is cognised through memory understanding and will. One feels the exterior world the other feels the body from within. The relation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ sensation articulated by Hilton and the Cloud-author helps explain how – despite the epistemological distinctions they make between physical and spiritual sensation – the body and soul are ‘tied together’.

Firstly I analyse how the image of darkness is used by both authors as a liminal place between the soul and God. The differences in Hilton and the Cloud-author's use of this image illustrate how apophaticism can have an ascetical and a mystical usage. Secondly I examine how these two usages relate showing how both authors use the ascetical motifs of English anchoritic literature to show the limits of devout visualizations. If the bodily senses were distracting, so too was the imagination, which worked with sense impressions stored in the memory. Thirdly, I look at how Christ’s humanity relates to the transcendence of images and how the Cloud-author uses the body dialectically. Despite its role as the negative pole of a body-soul dialectic, the Cloud-author does not conclude that the body is incapable of God nor that it is outside the ‘process’ of mystical transformation. I illustrate this in the fourth section by analysing the Cloud-author's use of the image of bodily nakedness in a positive way. The last section shows how Hilton’s portrayal of sin in Scale 1 as a bodily image is not a denigration of the body per se, but of the image making faculties dependent on sense perception within the soul.

Despite the fact that God is beyond the capacity of human sensation and cognition, the search for God, as presented by the Cloud-author and Hilton, works through the creaturely conditions of embodiment. The demands of self-knowledge (which eschews any illusion that we are angels), and the fact of God’s self-expression in human form (which eschews the need to become angels) both affirm the body as an aspect of spiritual life. ‘Darkness’ is a leitmotif of apophaticism, expressing the transcendence of God. However its
anthropological equivalent ‘blindness’ normally expresses the fallen condition of human consciousness. There two motifs are taken from bodily experience. By analysing the Cloud-author and Hilton’s use of these terms I will show that their use of these terms differ, but that neither uses them merely as a linguistic analogy but link them to actual bodily experience. In the second half of this chapter I will show that for the Cloud-author and Hilton different ways of understanding the body are mapped onto ascetic discourse depending on what aspect of sense perception is being emphasised. Only then will we be in a position to see how a dialectic of body and soul is set up on a premise of sensual denial.

**Darkness and Blindness in the Cloud and Hilton**

Like Julian in her *Showings*, Hilton and the Cloud-author used sensual images drawn from domestic life, in their case the experience of darkness and blindness, to express their message. For an understanding of the inner sense of mystical writing it is helpful to look at how the outer images that express it are used – or else one may stretch the language beyond what it is intended for. Hilton’s use of stories to illustrate and explain the contemplative journey shows how the outer and inner senses were closely linked in late English medieval mystical writing. He uses similes drawn from domestic life to illustrate his teaching to give an inner meaning both to scriptural parables and scenes drawn from contemporary experience. For example, the late fourteenth-century passion for pilgrimage for Hilton illustrates a spiritual journey, although it is ‘inward’: Jerusalem – the destination – is not an outer place but the peace of contemplation. The journey is not by foot but in the intention of the soul. Another example, despite his insistence that it is a metaphor, is his recurrent use of the sun as an image of God. For Hilton bodily metaphor in Scripture justifies its use in spiritual writing both for beginners, who can only understand in a fleshly way and need figurative images, and for proficients whose ‘inner eyes’ are open to see the ghostly meaning behind bodily words.

One analogy used by both Hilton in *Scale* 2 and the Cloud-author is that of bodily sight and blindness. In chapter 32 Hilton tries to illustrate his use of the term ‘darkness’ by the

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1 For the parameters set by medieval exigetes reading the Song of Songs see Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, (Kalamazoo, Mas: Cistercian Publications, 1995), pp. 159-174.
2 *Scale* 2/176/1129-1131.
3 *Scale* 1/87/1429-1431: ‘It nedeth not to renne to Rome ne to Jerusalem for to seke Hym there, but turne thi thought into thyn owen soule, where He is hid.’
5 *Scale* 2/215-216/2236-2265.
example of three men standing in the light of the sun. One of the three is blind, another can see but has his eyes shut, the last ‘looketh forth full siete’. The blind man represents someone reformed in faith but not in feeling, he believes but has no way of knowing that he is in the sun. The one with his eyes shut does not see clearly for his eyelids hinder him. Hilton says that the eyelid represents his bodily nature which is ‘a wall atwixt his kinde and the kinde of Jhesu God’. However by grace he is able to see somewhat through this wall. The thinner the eyelid the more he is ‘departyd from fleshlihode’ and the more he is able to feel God’s presence. The one with eyes open no longer lives by faith but by vision. This last state is reserved for the blessed in heaven who ‘withouten any wall of the bodie or of sin seeth openly the face of Jhesu’.  

As with its physical prototype, blindness as a spiritual state is traditionally interpreted negatively. Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: Ascetique et Mystique, for example, says that ‘L’aveuglement spirituel est un état d’âme caractérisé par la privation, au moins partielle, de la vue des vérités et des lois destinées à inspirer notre vie religieuse et à diriger notre vie morale. Cet aveuglement, au sens large, est synonyme d’ignorance ou d’erreur.’ If this is the way Hilton uses it, the Cloud-author uses the image of blindness quite differently. In the face of God’s incomprehensibility it is helpful: ‘Be blynde in this tyme, & shere awey couetyse of knowyng therin’. In fact the Cloud corpus offers an extensive meditation on mystical blindness equating it with the highest levels of contemplation. The Cloud-author’s positive use of this sensual disability has prototypes and yet as a central and highly developed motif it is, as Bryan says, ‘outstanding among medieval devotional writing’. As with Hilton the (implicit) image for the Cloud-author is of God as the sun: the ‘cloud of unknowing’ lies between the contemplative and God rendering God ‘un-see-able’. Knowing and seeing are equated. Both are denied any purchase on God. However this ‘disability’ serves to liberate and strengthen the affective powers of the will which are able to encompass God:

Beter thee were for to haue [soche a blynde steryng of loue] & for to fele it in thin affeccion goostly, then it is for to haue the iye of thi soule opened in contemplacion or beholding of alle the aungelles or seyntes in heuen, or in hering of alle the mirthe & the melody that is amonges hem in blisse.
Similarly the ‘cloud of forgetting’ – between the contemplative and all created things – is part of the disorientating experience of being ‘physically nowhere’ that the contemplative must accept. Darkness is positive:

I had leuer be so nowhere bodely, wrastlyng with that blynde nouyt, than to be so grete a lorde that I miyt when I wolde be euerywhere bodely, merily pleying with al this ouyt as a lorde with his owne.\footnote{\textit{Cloud}, 68/7-10.}

All ‘beholdyngs’ are put down.\footnote{\textit{Cloud,} 15/31, 16/2 & 34/14-16.} Imaginative seeing depends on the sense faculties to provide images. These images, grounded in a specific time and place, are held in the storehouse of memory. As Bryan points out there had been a practice since the twelfth century to ‘localise’ sin in contrite meditation, replaying its circumstances.\footnote{\textit{Looking Inward,} p.100.} For the Cloud-author even meditation on the Passion is dangerous because, leading on to reflection on personal sin, the mind moves into imagining the time and place when it happened. Memory and self-reflection are therefore tied to the finite. They are a stumbling block to contemplation.\footnote{Ibid, p. 27.}

The ‘cloud’ itself is an image of the darkness which stops the faculties of thought and imagination from working. This is, however, a luminous darkness: the limiting of thought leads to the increase of love. The ‘cloud’ is therefore the catalyst for contemplation. Hilton reads ‘darkness’ with its standard Augustinian connotations of spiritual deprivation and alienation.\footnote{J. P. H. Clark holds that Hilton’s use of darkness has no apophatic tones at all, tracing his use to ascetic motifs developed from Augustine by Gregory the Great. \textit{‘The Lightsome Darkness – Aspects of Walter Hilton’s Theological Background’}, \textit{Downside Review}, 95, (April 1977), 98-101, 106-109. At least at times, however, the apophatic \textit{language} seems to exist in Scale 2 without its usual Dionysian meaning. This may be another sign of the influence, at least linguistically, of the Cloud-author’s work on Hilton.} Hilton in \textit{Scale} 1 defines the ‘nothing’ that arises with the withdrawal of sense perception as ‘a lackynge of love and of light’.\footnote{\textit{Scale} 1/91/1512-1513.} In this context ignorance (‘unconynge’) and blindness (‘ghostli blindnes’) are not used paradoxically but according to their accepted pejorative meanings. It represents the opacity caused by sin. It is the ‘blake stynkande clothis’ that the soul wears.\footnote{\textit{Scale} 1/90/1497.} At best we must ‘abide and traveile in this goostli merkenesse’.\footnote{\textit{Scale} 1/91/1528.} This represents the purgative stage of the spiritual life – always with the intention of passing through to the sight of Jesus:

\begin{quote}
Not settyng the poyn of thi thought in that ilke nought, but in Jhesu whiche thou desirest, as thou woldest bere it doun, and goo thorugh it. Thou scalt grise
\end{quote}
and lothe this nought right as it were the devyl of helle, and thou schalt despice it and al tobreke it.\textsuperscript{19vi}

In other words in \textit{Scale} 1 Hilton describes the purgative path with language which the \textit{Cloud}-author reserves for the heights of contemplation.

At least in terms of a positive image of darkness Alastair Minnis is wrong to see Hilton as ‘much more affirmative of the imagination’ than the \textit{Cloud}.\textsuperscript{20} In \textit{Scale} 1 Hilton seems to actively critique apophatic imagery: it may be sparser than imagery of the humanity of Christ but ‘cloud’ and ‘darkness’ is still related to sense perception. If the Devil could appear as an angel of light (or as a burning heart, angel song, visions of heaven, or sweet tastes) could he not appear under the guise of darkness? In \textit{Scale} 2 ‘darkness’ (though still difficult) is seen as having a more positive purgative role. In taking the contemplative out of the false day of ‘worldly thoughts’ and ‘material things’, it becomes ‘good’, ‘luminous’ and ‘fruitful’, even ‘peaceful’ as ‘idle imaginings’ cease.\textsuperscript{21} Instead of fighting it Hilton says:

\begin{quote}
Use thee for to wonen in this merknesse, and bi often assaiynge to be hoomli thereinne, and it schal soone be maad resteful to thee and the trewe light of goosteli knowynge schal spryngen to thee; not al at oonys, but pryveli bi litil and litil.\textsuperscript{22vi}
\end{quote}

Light of understanding remains the goal and expression of contemplation. Darkness remains the result of fallen human nature. Now, in \textit{Scale} 2, however, it is also part of the process of purification. Still it is not used to describe the incomprehensibility of God. Blindness continues to be used pejoratively: ‘blynded with wordli love’.\textsuperscript{23} In the \textit{Cloud}’s terms ‘darkness’ in \textit{Scale} 2 plays only the positive role of the ‘cloud of forgetting’ – to detach affection from created things – never the ‘cloud of unknowing’ which directs that affection, stripped of cognition, toward God. Though now playing a positive role it still retains a ‘bitter’ quality.\textsuperscript{24} It is for Hilton an intermediary stage; the true light appears for those in darkness, who have passed out of the false light of the world.\textsuperscript{25} It is not the ambiance in which one meets God.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Scale} 1/92/1535-1538.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Scale} 2/188/1459-1468.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Scale} 2/189/1482-1485.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Scale} 2/239/2957.
\textsuperscript{24} See Clark, ‘The Lightsome Darkness’, 99-100.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Scale} 2/193/1605-1610. See also 2/198/1749-1751: ‘He schuld first be as he were blynd and seen right nought; but yif he wole abide awhile he schal mowe soone seen aboute him, first grete thingis and aftirward smale, and sithen al that is in the hous.’
Darkness in *Scale 2* is a preparation for the opening of the ‘spiritual eye’ which gives insight into all things. At the end of *Scale 2* Hilton opens up a great and detailed cognitive vision: ‘Whanne I biholde the kyndes and causis of bodili creatures [...] lokynge with the innere iye on Jhesu in bodili creatures’. He continues:

> With helpe of aungelis, yit the soule seeth more. For the knowynge riseth aboven al this in a cleene soule, and that is to bihoolden the blissed kynde of Jhesu. First of His glorious manheede, hou it is worthili highed above angelis kynde; and then aftir of His glorious Godheede, for bi knowyng of creatures is knowne the creatour. And thanne bigynneth the soule for to perceyven a litil of the privetees of the blissid Trinite. It mai weel inowgh, for light of grace gooth bifore sche schal not erren as longe as sche houldeth hire with the light.

As we have seen angels ‘translate’ spiritual reality into that which can be apprehended by the bodily senses and the imagination. In Hilton’s treatise *On Angels Song* this ministration is accepted in the context of hearing the music of heaven. In *Scale 2* it plays a role in spiritual vision. Throughout the last chapters of the *Scale*, the emphasis is on spiritual vision as unencumbered sight. If, as is likely, *Scale 2* was written partly in response to the *Cloud*, then these last chapters represent a rejection of the *Cloud’s* wholesale refusal of the visual. For Hilton, the soul’s intuitive knowledge of all it sees is still a version, however cognitively expressed, of the seeing associated with images.

Towards the end of the era during which visionary writing proliferated (twelfth to fourteenth centuries), there was a popular desire to share in this type of experience. In the fourteenth century we see a great rise in ‘scripted visions’ for the laity and manuals on ‘how to visualise’. Meditations on the life of Christ influenced by the visions of Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) along with imaginary reflections, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, attributed to Bonaventure, encouraged the newly literate laity to relive in imagination as if they were seeing in reality. Parallel to this popular devotion based on imagination there was a growing learned religious critique of ‘acquired vision’ as presumptive of grace, as an un-spontaneous, and therefore false, imitation of supernatural vision. It was criticised as both dangerous and as driven by desire. Geert Grote (d.1384), the leading teacher of theology at Paris and like Hilton an Augustine friar, wrote strong critiques of these practices in the years prior to Hilton’s writing of *Scale 1*. Grote wrote in his treatise *De quattuor generibus meditablium*:

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27 *Scale 2*/257/3472-3476.
28 *Scale 2*/259-260/3546-3552.
29 See p. 110, note 121 of this thesis.
30 As Windeatt comments, Hilton’s warning against ‘naked mynde’ in *On Angel’s Song* (*EMMA*, p. 136) might be read as a comment on the *Cloud*-author’s teaching, *EMMA*, p. 3.
31 See Newman, ‘What did it mean to say I saw?’, 25-29.
It is in the nature of images and species firmly pressed upon the mind, especially when they are consciously projected as present, to return to their origins in the external senses. Then the visualised image is made real, as if it were in our very presence, and the fantasy is taken up by our external sense organs. Thus a simple man will believe that he can sense the very corporeal presence of Christ; or seem to see him with his eyes or hear with his ears, or touch some saint he has imagined. Such deceptions are not without danger.32

Hilton would no doubt have been as aware of this contemporary debate within spirituality as he was of the debates over use of images in worship. He drew on the contemporary use of imaginary vision and its critique in his construction of the ‘merk’ image in Scale 1. However closer to home than Hilton’s fellow Augustinian the English author of the Cloud offers an equally strong critique of the cultivation of imaginary visions and does so in a letter of spiritual direction in the same language and of similar genre to Hilton’s writing.

The Cloud-author speaks respectfully of the ‘book’ but also offers a subtle critique of Hilton’s peculiar use of apophatic language. For the Cloud ‘nought’ is not the image of sin – only the outer man calls it so, the inner man calls it ‘all’.33 In Scale 1 the unknown object is the human soul, in the Cloud, God is unknown. There is a stronger degree of unknowability with the Divine object, the Cloud uses the term ‘derknes’ rather than ‘merkenes’ for something that cannot be fully known – a subtle difference as to the degree of opacity. Where Hilton uses the term in Scale 1 as the covering of an image, the Cloud is concerned with de-materialising spiritual experience. There is no material image implied or hidden beneath the metaphor:

For when I say derknes, I mene a lacking of knowing; as alle that thing thou knowest not, or ells that thou hast forgotyn, it is derk to thee, for thou seest it not with thi goostly ighe. And for this skile it is not clept a cloude of the eire, bot a cloude of unknowing, that is bitwix thee and thi God.34

Darkness for the Cloud-author is therefore not just an intermediary stage, a preparatory ‘mene’, but a direct way of knowing God that bypasses the use of thought and imagination. When the author talks about ‘menes’ he refers to ‘redyng, thinking & preiing. Of these thre thou scalt fynde wretyn in another book of another mans werk moche betyr then I

33 Cloud, 68/2-10.
34 Cloud, 13/18-22.
can telle thee’. However the *Cloud*-author is concerned with ‘blynde felynges’ that are ‘withoutyn any menes of redyng or heryng coming before, & withoutyn any special beholding of any thing vnder God. ‘Blynde felynge’ therefore plays the same role as bodily sensation does for Julian and Rolle: it offers an ‘immediate mene’. The linking of categories of sight and knowledge in late medieval discourse, observed in the last chapter, is key to the dismissal as well as the assimilation of this sense in mystical writing. Like Rolle in his Latin works, the *Cloud*-author downplays sight. Because of its association with memory – where images are stored, and understanding – where they are deliberated, sight was understood to be closely bound to cognition.

Hilton’s *Scale 2* was influenced by the *Cloud* and tried to respond to the author’s implicit criticisms. *Scale 2* is different from *Scale 1* in a number of ways. In *Scale 1* the dialectic between ‘image of God’ and ‘image of sin’ in the human person hinges on embodiment. The image of God is understood in terms of the spiritual faculties of memory, understanding and will within the soul that are covered and obscured by corporeal identification. However in *Scale 2* the image of sin is not shown as a body but as ‘a nowt’, a nothing. Looking into the soul (through a practice of introspection) Hilton does not find a Trinitarian likeness but a ‘dark nothingness’. In *Scale 2* the image of Jesus as a bodily presence takes a more central place. Alongside this, the use of *apophatic* language changes: In *Scale 1*, Hilton uses the imagery of darkness in a purgative, not an illuminative sense. In *Scale 2* it becomes the good and bright darkness in which Jesus can be discovered. Hilton speaks of a ‘liytsom derknes’ or ‘liyty merkne’, a ‘gode niyt’ and a ‘riche noyht’. Darkness is not just illustrative of sin but also of the process of adjustment to Divine grace and restoration of the image of God in the soul.

This change may have been in response to *Cloud*’s more positive use of the language of darkness as the place where God hides. However even in *Scale 2* darkness remains a means to enlightenment, not a state of contemplation per se. For Hilton the ultimate stage is associated with the image and person of Jesus in the soul. The *Cloud*-author sees ‘shinyng derknes’ as ‘soueryn’ for which a sense of the presence of the humanity of Christ was only preparatory. As darkness for the *Cloud*-author is a synonym for unknowing, ‘sight’ for

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37 *Cloud*, 40/17-19.
38 *Cloud*, 68/14-16: “This nouyt may betir be felt then seen; for it is ful blynde & ful derk to them that han bot lityl while lokid therapon.”
39 *Epistle*, 119/18.
Hilton expresses spiritual understanding. However for Hilton ‘seeing’ Jesus in his human nature is not a vision cultivated in the imagination. It is ridiculous that ‘as some wenen [...] the iye of a clene soule [...] myght see bi imaginacioun thurgh the skies abouen the firmament, how oure Lorde Jesu sitteth in His maieste in a bodily liyt as mikel as an hundred sunnes’. Hilton uses apophatic language not to express God’s presence in darkness but to safeguard the spiritual quality of the image of Jesus in the soul. To ‘see’ Jesus at the right hand of the father in heaven one must negate all images of worldly things. Even the firmament and the light of the sun are bodily.

Hilton allows the use of imagination for beginners. His deference to those still in need of visualisation practices continues in Scale 2 which, unlike Scale 1, was purposely written for a mixed lay and religious readership. Scale 2 therefore has a less specialised audience than the Cloud, which was written for solitaries. In comparison to Scale 1 it no longer emphasises the enclosure of the body, or the blocking of the windows of the senses. The image of sin is no longer given bodily form. Hilton’s more positive use of bodily metaphor is yet more clear in a short treatise written at the same time as Scale 2 on The Mixed Life. In this Hilton sees the Church as the body of Christ which needs looking after. Contemplation must be balanced by corporeal acts of mercy:

Thou art bisi to worschipe [Christ’s] heed and his face, and araie it faire and curioseli, but thou levest his bodi, his armes, and his feete ragged & rente, & takest noo keep thereof.

In conclusion: for Hilton darkness purifies vision so that the contemplative is able to see things in God, for the Cloud-author it is the place where God is encountered. The image of the ‘cloud’ illustrates much more than the distance between us and God, more even than the ‘unknowability’ of God, it is a symbol of God’s presence. Like the cloud on Mount Sinai it plays a mediatory role between God and the contemplative. In New Testament terms the ‘cloud’ carries a Christological density. No one comes to God except through the ‘cloud of unknowing’. In what sense is darkness related to the body though? Here we have to look more closely at its anthropological equivalent: ‘blindness’.

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40 Scale 2/214/2222-2225.
42 EMMA, p. 116.
43 See Riehle, p. 3: ‘The mystics realise full well that a language using sensual analogies cannot communicate the full reality of the mystical unio, but it must also be noted that this language does point in the direction of the achieved experience.’
44 Exodus 24:15-16, also 16:10, 19:9.
Enclosing the Windows of the Body

The Cloud-author uses scriptural stories to draw attention away from what can be seen. His favourite is the Ascension, where Jesus’ bodily presence is taken away from his disciples. The Cloud-author uses this to illustrate that imaginative reflection on the humanity of Christ based on images of bodily things must be left behind before true contemplation can begin.\textsuperscript{46} He also evokes the figure of ‘the penitent Magdalene’ as the archetype for contemplation. However, for the Cloud-author this is not because she weeps for her sins but because she ‘loued so mochel’.\textsuperscript{47} The one who loves no longer sees themselves but only the one whom they love. However this ‘occular objectivity’ is also stripped of any bodily and biographical particularity: ‘Sche had bot riyt lityl special beholding unto the beute of his precious & his blessed body.’\textsuperscript{48} Mary does not ‘see’ Christ’s outward form at all. Contemplation, for the Cloud-author, therefore involves taking attention away from any biographical sense of self and even Christ’s humanity through a radical focus on God.\textsuperscript{49}

The story of Mary the contemplative illustrates both the ‘cloud of forgetting’ – in that she does not ‘see’ herself nor recognise the demands of bodily works necessitated by the fall – and the ‘cloud of unknowing’ – she does not hear the teaching of Christ, nor ‘see’ his person. She is blind, deaf and dumb (in the sense that it is Christ who has to reply and justify her to her sister). The Cloud’s use of the loss of sense faculties as a positive metaphor for contemplation is counter cultural. As a bodily condition blindness, deafness or the loss of any sense was regarded as shameful in the late Middle Ages. There are numerous accounts of people in England trying to hide the fact that they could not see, also evidence that such disabilities were regarded as a punishment from God.\textsuperscript{50} Blindness was also seen as a form of cognitive deficiency because it was felt to be first in value in the ranking of the senses. ‘Sight’ was felt to be most active in gathering information (other senses were often considered passive receivers). Therefore the blind person was seen as disabled in knowing.\textsuperscript{51}

Because of the close connection between sight and knowledge there is evidence that the Cloud-author uses this disability with purpose as the contemplative’s desire to know God is a hindrance to affective contemplation. In the Epistle (sequel to the Cloud) the sign that one

\textsuperscript{46} Epistle, 98/8-24.
\textsuperscript{47} Cloud, 25/25.
\textsuperscript{48} Cloud, 26/2-3.
\textsuperscript{49} Hilton, by contrast, follows his mentor Augustine not only in his emphasis on ‘seeing’ but also on the searching of memory through examination of conscience. Hilton bases his account of the spiritual path on this introspective model – the image of sin must be seen and recognised in the soul.
\textsuperscript{50} See Woolgar, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, pp. 23, 29.
is called to contemplation is called ‘a blynde longyng of the spirit’. This longing that bypasses
cognition is, he says, similar to the autonomic nervous system that enables sensation and
movement without any activity of the will or of deliberation:

The desire be a werk of the soule blynde in itself – for riygtsis the desire of the
soule as groping & stepping is of the body; & bothe ben groping & stepping
blynde werkes of the body, thow wost wel thiselv.\textsuperscript{52xiv}

As sensation and motion are often unconscious activities, so contemplation happens without
cognitive and imaginative ‘menes’. The blind person who senses and responds to things
without visual image is particularly illustrative of ‘blynde feelyng’.

It seems that the \textit{Cloud}, though not written for a specifically anchoritic milieu, is
indeed drawing on anchoritic literature which already used the language of sensual disability
to express enclosure within an anchorhold. The \textit{Ancrene Wisse} urges the containment of the
outward movement of the senses in terms of becoming ‘blind’, ‘deaf’ and ‘dumb’.\textsuperscript{53} Aelred’s
\textit{Rule for Recluses} says the anchoress must meditate on and imitate Christ when in his Passion he is
blindfolded.\textsuperscript{54} In this literature the senses combined appetite with openness. The eye was seen
as both permeable and libidinous. As Biernoff has argued, the dividing line between sensation
and sensuality was faint in the later Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{55} In anchoritic circles to have your senses
enclosed or blocked was positive for the cultivation of spirituality. There was a close analogy
between bodily enclosure and mortification of the senses. In a literal sense, the anchorage was
seen as a tomb, the liturgical rite for the enclosing of an anchorite was a burial service. If not
completely dead, the senses were understood as the place of spiritual conflict: ‘the senses are
the heart’s guardians and must stay in the house.’\textsuperscript{56} In the \textit{Wisse} the recluse’s body is shown as a
castle, ‘the battlements are her house’s windows’.\textsuperscript{57} The three windows of the anchorhold –
looking out into the Church, the street and the domestic area (where meals were prepared for
her) – were a source of temptation.\textsuperscript{58}

Anchoritic spirituality may well have influenced the use of the same analogy of body
and cell among the fourteenth-century English mystics.\textsuperscript{59} Hilton for example writes:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Cloud}, 94/27-31.
  \item \textit{Anchoritic Spirituality}, ed. Savage & Watson, p. 82.
  \item \textit{De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions}, ed. John Ayto & Alexandra Barratt, (London: Oxford
  \item Biernoff, pp. 41-45, 54-6.
  \item ‘Ancrene Wisse’, \textit{Anchoritic Spirituality}, ed. Savage & Watson, p. 86.
  \item Ibid, p.70.
  \item Ibid, pp. 66,71,74.
  207-208. Watson points out that the analogy can be traced back further, however, to Bernard of Clairvaux’s \textit{De
  Gradibus humilitatis et superbiae}.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{itemize}
Deeth cometh in bi oure wyndowes. Thise wyndowes aren oure fyve wittes, bi the whiche oure soule gooth out from himsylf and siceth his delite and his feedynge in erthli thynges, agens his owen kynde: as bi the sight, for to se corious and faire thynges; bi the eere, for to heere woondres and newe tydynges; and so of the othere wittis.\textsuperscript{60xv}

Or, as the Cloud-author puts it: ‘kepe thou the windows & the dore for flies and enemies assailing’.\textsuperscript{61}

Sensation in this model is an outward movement. Through their affections the senses are able to extend beyond the reach of the body through both the windows of the anchorhold. Hilton’s contrast of the flesh as ‘outer’ to the ‘inner’ spiritual self only serves to highlight the body as the locus of enclosure. The contemplative even in the mixed life of action in the world is enclosed within her body. For Hilton the contemplative must submit to this enclosure by not allowing the senses to be absorbed in what lies beyond the self. The senses must be drawn within. The cultivation of self-reflective, ‘inward’ spirituality in late medieval England was created and maintained through an obsessive attention to the borders of the body.\textsuperscript{62}

Blindness as a ‘sight metaphor’ was therefore particularly suited to express not only the sealing of the senses from any external influence but also a stilling of the cognition (both imaginative and deliberative) that used images. If no image was seen no image could be stored in the memory. ‘Sight’ was not the only sense to be restrained though. Increasingly the silence of the tongue was emphasised as a form of enclosure that could be practised outside the anchorage. However ‘sight’, of all the senses, was particular liable to traverse and transgress as it was the most able to penetrate space, to reach out and grasp what was ‘outside’.

The negation of the senses in our fourteenth-century writers has a mystical as well as an ascetical usage. The Cloud-author uses language of bodily enclosure as a way of expressing the transcendence of God. If the bodily senses were distracting so too was the imagination which worked with sense impressions stored in the memory. The Cloud-author is adamant that restraint of the senses is not enough to stop the ‘stering & rising of synne’ for sin is not ultimately a problem of the body:

\textsuperscript{60} Scale 1/120/2274-2278.
\textsuperscript{61} Cloud, 9/6-7. For Gregory the Great ‘Flies’ express carnal desires, see Hodgson, ‘Commentary’, Cloud, p. 158. The image is also used in Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines, an Anglo-Norman book written by Henry of Grosmont (c.1310-1361) Duke of Lancaster, to express the temptations which irritate the senses and limbs of the body when they are wounded by sin. In this text the guarding of the senses is expressed in terms of ‘bandages’ that the Virgin Mary’s joys place over the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands/arms, feet and heart. tr. M. Teresa Tavormina, Cultures of Piety, ed. Bartlett & Bestul, pp. 30-36.
\textsuperscript{62} Bryan, pp. 45-62.
Fast thou neuer so mochel, wake thou neuer so longe, rise thou neuer so eerly, ligge thou neuer so harde, were thou neuer so scharp, ye, & yif it were leueful to do – as it is not – puttest thou oute thin yyen, cutest thou oute thi tongue of thi mouth, stoppest thou thin eren & thi nose neuer so fast, thoy thou schere awei thi preue members & dedest al the pine to thi body that thou miytest think: alle this wolde help thee riyt nouyt.\textsuperscript{63xvi}

For Hilton likewise bodily enclosure is quite inadequate if the senses are allowed to continue to act within the imagination. In a way reminiscent of late medieval optical theory he speaks of corporeal images coming from within the self. By bodily enclosure the windows to external impressions are ‘stopped up’ and yet, he says, one is not secure for ‘you have not stopped the privy holes of imagination in thy heart’:\textsuperscript{64xvii}

For though thou see not me with thi bodili iye, thou may see with thi soule bi imaginacioun; and so mai thou doo of alle othere bodili thinges [...] sothli though thi soule be withinne as for thi bodili wittes it is nevertheless ful feer withoute bi sich veyn ymaginacion.\textsuperscript{64xvii}

This ‘apophatic turn’ of the\textit{Cloud}-author and Hilton is not simply Dionysian theology in Middle English dress, as Jennifer Bryan reads it.\textsuperscript{65} On the contrary, Hilton is arguably un-Dionysian. He uses the language of darkness (even when positive) solely in a purgative sense. He is much more Augustinian in his emphasis on self-knowledge. Even the\textit{Cloud}-author, though a disciple of Dionysius, adapts his apophasic to a dominantly affective rather than intellectual impulse.\textsuperscript{66} Both Hilton and the\textit{Cloud}-author offer commentaries on – and adaptations of – the affective spirituality popular in the fourteenth century. Both, from the standpoint of contemplative prayer, question the dominance of meditative practices using physical images or imaginary corporeal visualizations. Hilton, even when he uses the visual motif to describe panoramas of contemplative insight in his late work, gives a clear subordinate role to spiritual exercises associated with the body. The\textit{Cloud}-author is consistently apophatic in both theology and praxis. Far from being concerned with bodily boundaries he contrasts spiritual and bodily ‘beholdyng’. The body is better regulated by taking attention away from it than by making it an object of focus:

& therefore I miyt gete a wakyng and a besie beholdyng to this goostly werk withinne the soule, I wolde than haue a rechelesnes in etyng & in drynkynge, in sleping & in spekyng & in all myn outward doynges. For sikirly I trowe I shuld

\textsuperscript{63}\textit{Cloud}, 21/18-24.
\textsuperscript{64}\textit{Scale} 1/122/2322-2326.
\textsuperscript{65}\textit{Looking Inward}, p.101. Nor does the evidence of surviving manuscripts substantiate Bryan’s view that they were ‘specialist’ treatises, un-influential on popular devotion. Alongside forty-five contemporaneous copies of\textit{Scale} 1 and twenty-six of\textit{Scale} 2, seventeen versions of the\textit{Cloud} and ten of the\textit{Epistle} survive. See Clark & Dorwood, \textit{Walter Hilton}, p. 33 & Hodgson, ‘Preface’,\textit{Cloud}, ix.
\textsuperscript{66}For the\textit{Cloud}’s particular brand of ‘affective’ apophaticism see Turner,\textit{Darkness of God}, pp. 200-204.
rather com to discrecion in hem by soche a rechelesnes than by any besy beholdyng to the same things, as I wolde bi that beholdyng set a merke & a mesure in hem.\textsuperscript{67-68}

Hilton’s continued emphasis on the humanity of Christ meant that the solution to the distracting and ‘transgressive’ nature of sense and imagination was not through a pure ‘interiority’ that rejected human carnality. Sensory scattering was healed rather by the directing of desire and imagination toward God’s Incarnation. Hilton’s devotion to the salvific power in the name of Jesus was coupled with the remembrance of his person. Bryan’s reading of the language of enclosure in late medieval devotion as solely expressive of ‘inwardness’, stripped of the earlier anchoritic concern for embodiment, is therefore not accurate for Hilton. But also not for the Cloud: the negation of aural, vocal and visual modalities in the Cloud corpus is a critique of the ‘inwardness’ project, rather than the creation of an ‘inner world’ of private devotion and self-reflection. The idea of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ the Cloud-author points out are essentially corporeal categories and are liable to encourage the imagination.\textsuperscript{68}

The Cloud-author does not urge his reader to turn ‘inwards’ and yet he uses the language of sense negation, not as a form of ascetic control but as a way of understanding relation to God who even in his incarnate form has passed beyond the grasp of the senses. As in theology so in praxis: the tongue is silent not because human discourse is a form of temptation but because words in prayer have limited purchase on God who ‘cannot be thought’.\textsuperscript{69}

As we have seen in chapter One (section Three) the form of ‘hearing’ and ‘vision’ the Cloud-author is most wary of is that directed to spiritual things: ‘ghostlie conceit’. The expression ‘blind’ is used more commonly in the Epistle than in the Cloud. It is used both to express the naked awareness of the self and of God’s existence. It implies a radical stripping of image and thought, a rejection of visualization practices in any form. Imaginative beholding, particularly of Christ’s suffering, may be the ‘door’ to contemplation but one must pass quickly through that door.\textsuperscript{70} It is a means which, if clung to, proves self-defeating.\textsuperscript{71}

In order to understand the way contemplation relates to the body for these authors it is necessary to look at how Christ’s humanity relates to the transcendence of image. The different approach of the Cloud corpus – emphasising Christ’s ascended bodily nature – and

\textsuperscript{67} Cloud, 45/8-14.
\textsuperscript{68} Cloud, 63/28-30.
\textsuperscript{69} Cloud, 63/32-35.
\textsuperscript{70} Epistle, 91/25 & 92/2.
Hilton’s continued devotion to Christ’s humanity shapes the way they use the language of bodily enclosure.

**The Humanity of Christ: Imagination and Apophasis**

Some scholars, basing their interpretation of the *Cloud* on the limitations he implies in devotional and corporeal-based meditations, have concluded that his approach is primarily Theocentric rather than Christocentric.\(^{72}\) Other scholars have pointed out that the examples the *Cloud* uses of the contemplative’s transcendence of Christ’s body (Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet lost in his divinity while Martha is busy with his humanity, the Ascension, etc.) are taken from the human life of Jesus. According to them, it is only through meditation on Christ’s humanity that one comes in time to the apophatic path.\(^{73}\) Certainly to say that Christ’s humanity and memory of his bodily sufferings are the ‘door to contemplation’ but that one has to pass ‘through the door’ is at best, as Tugwell observes, ‘an ambiguous attitude’.\(^{74}\)

Karl Heinz Steinmetz distinguishes the *Cloud* corpus from much devotional literature of late medieval England in that the author uses no illustration or picturesque allegory from Christ’s life. Compassionate response to a picture of the crucified Christ is not emphasised, he opposes any ‘fantastic worchyng of the imagynacion’. The *Cloud*’s reserved, inward pattern of beholding Christ was uncommon among fourteenth-century ‘visual mysticism’. His emphasis on Christ’s hidden presence draws on an earlier medieval tradition of a ‘chaste’ Christology. Christ was encountered within self-awareness. This discovery of another at our centre is a further unclothing in which the sense of one’s own being is stripped away.\(^{75}\) Imageless prayer for the *Cloud*-author remains patterned on the *kenosis* of Christ.\(^{76}\) Taking up Christ’s cross not as imitation of, or compassion for, an external model but a process of self-*kenesis*. He speaks of ‘becomyng thiself a cross to thiself’.\(^{77}\)

Steinmetz also distinguishes this from Hilton: the *Cloud*-author focuses only on the *inner* effect of Christ’s Passion. For Hilton Christ’s Ascension illustrates a gradual process –


\(^{74}\) *Ways of Imperfection*, pp. 171-172.

\(^{75}\) Steinmetz, ‘Thiself a cros to thiself’: Christ as *Signum Impressum* in the *Cloud*-texts against a background of Expressionistic Christology in Late Medieval Devotional Theology*, *MMTE* (2004), pp. 140, 142-143.

\(^{76}\) *Ibid*, pp. 136-139.

\(^{77}\) *Cloud*, 46/44 & 47/1, and specifically *Epistle* 89/23 & 90/7.
passing through meditation on Christ’s humanity to a love of his divinity. For the Cloud-author it marks a radical shift away from any beholding of the humanity of Christ – visual or imagined. Christ did not require visualisation because his sense of God was immediate to himself. To ascend with Christ to God is the experience that the Cloud-author invites his reader. Steinmetz does not develop these distinctions from the perspective of attitudes to the body. They would imply that meditations using images derived from sense experience and applied to the body of another are for Hilton a means to contemplation whereas for the Cloud-author they are an obstacle.

However, from the perspective of attitudes to the body Steinmetz is wrong in reading the Cloud-author’s use of Christ’s Ascension as a model for the contemplative’s own experience. As we have seen in chapter One (section Three) he uses it rather as a contrast: Christ was dead, so he was able to go to heaven bodily, this the contemplative hopes to do on the day of judgement but not before. The Cloud-author clearly warns against taking this example, for bodily Ascension ‘may none do bot God’. The Cloud-author’s reading Christ’s Ascension as illustrative of ‘an hier perfeccion, the whiche man mat haue in this liif (that is to say, a pure goostly felyng in the loue of his Godhede)’ comes only from his later work, the Epistle. However, even here, Christ’s transcendence of his own bodily limitations is not so much an invitation to that selfsame experience as a critique of the contemplative’s attachment to his body. The Ascension implies that Christ’s presence is no longer manifested solely, or even predominantly, through his body but rather through his Spirit. It is for this reason, as the Cloud-author says, ‘[Christ] seide to his disciple, the whiche grocheden to forgo his bodely presence (as thou thi queinte sotyl wittes) that it was speedful to hem that he went bodely fro hem’.

The contemplative’s transcendence of the body of Christ, in other words, does not necessarily imply the transcendence of their own body. To understand this I would like to extend Steinmetz’ analysis of the possibility of a direct Christ-centeredness within self-awareness to the Cloud-author’s view of the body. In what sense can self-reflexivity be an embodied experience? Once we have established this we can look at how experience of another can be felt subjectively as part of the self. This is possible insofar as Christ is the

79 Cloud, 61/17-25.
80 Cloud, 62/6-7.
81 Epistle, 98/12-14.
82 Epistle, 98/14-18.
centre of the self. In what way can the ‘inner Christ’ working in the Cloud’s practice of self-emptying be seen as an embodied presence? How can this indwelling be corporeal?

As I argued in chapter One (section Four) the Cloud’s distinction between body and soul in spiritual sensation is causal and not ontological. In heaven body and soul will be one. Though the body is a separate faculty and cannot affect the spiritual will, even in this life contemplation of God can, and normally does, affect the body. Moreover an awareness of the limitations of the body propels the contemplative ‘fer lengthid fro any steryng & fro any stede [...] For tyme, stede, & body, these the schuld be foryeten in alle goostly worching’. 83xx Awareness of the body plays a role in the forgetting of self, albeit a dialectically negative one. For the Cloud-author the main impediment to contemplation – the ‘wetyng & felyng of alle maner of creatures’, is causally dependent on sense perception and cognition: ‘On the wetyng & the felyng of thiself hangith wetyng & felyng of alle other creatures’. 84xxi There is an implicit affirmation of the centrality of the body even in this negation. As Turner states generally for apophatic mysticism: “There can be no negation where there is nothing to negate”. 85

The logic of the Cloud-author’s apophaticism therefore has its thesis in negation of the body. However, following a dialectic of paradox the author moves on to an antithesis of that position, negating the initial negation. As Turner has shown it is a classic apophatic approach to ‘negate the negation’. 86 Turner’s reading of the Cloud is that the Dionysian metaphysic of first and second order negations (negating something and then negating that very negation) is replaced by an emphasis on affectivity. The role of the will is affirmed in antithesis of intellect. 87 However – in a way not noted by Turner – the Cloud-author does apply a strict dialectic to the role of the body in prayer. The Cloud-author makes anthropological use of the Dionysian metaphysic of ‘similar’ and ‘dissimilar’ similarities. If material things are ‘less similar’ to God than spiritual things then the body as the ‘outer material self’ is less capable of contemplation than the soul. This ‘negative’ stance on the body sets it up as a foil for the soul: ‘Alle maner of bodely thing is withouten thi soul & benethe it in kynde’. 88xxii He then negates what is ‘more similar’ to God: ‘Withinne in thiself in kynde ben the miytes of thi soule [...] [but] abouen thiself in kynde is God’. 89xxiii God, in other words, is beyond the denials and the

83 Cloud, 61/35-36, 38 & 62/1.
84 Cloud, 45/39 & 46/1.
85 Eros and Allegory, p. 55.
86 Darkness of God, p. 22.
87 Ibid, p. 204.
88 Cloud, 63/43, 64/1.
89 Cloud, 64/6, 9.
assertions of both the body and soul. In contemplation of what is above the self both outer and inner aspects of the human person are negated. In the Cloud’s terminology the whole person is ‘stripped’.

The apophatic mysticism of the Cloud, despite its use of a negative dialectic, does not conclude that the body is incapable of God nor that it is outside the ‘process’ of mystical transformation. The Cloud-author uses the body dialectically. If the popular stance was that bodily meditation (use of the carnal affections and imagination for meditation on the humanity of Christ) was a valid, even mystical, way to God the Cloud agrees: ‘God will be servuid with body & with soule, bothe togeders, as seemly is’. However the Cloud also affirms the antithesis: ‘Bot now thou mayst not come to heuen not bodely, bot goostly. & yit it schal be so goostly that it schal not be on bodely maner’. At the beginning of the Cloud, the author states that a position held at one point is counterbalanced at another. He is clearly worried about a one-sided reading of his work for ‘yif a man saw o mater & not another, perauenture he miyt liytly be led into errour’. In terms of the body the tension propels toward a synthesis – a mystical stance. For the Cloud-author this has much to do with the relation of inner and outer sensation.

In chapter 70 of the Cloud Dionysius is invoked as an authority for all that the author ‘seyde or shal sey, fro the biginnyng of this tretis to the ende’. The immediate context of this deference is a critique of the working of bodily sensation when applied to spiritual things which shows the author at his most strongly apophatic. For the Cloud-author the fourteenth-century turn in perceptual theory toward qualitas impressa shapes his view of what is received – and what cannot be received – in an act of sensation. It is by the absence of distinct noetic characteristics that a spiritual object is recognised:

For by thin iyen thou maist not conceyue of any thing, bot yif it be by the lengthe & the breed, the smalnes & the gretnes, the roundnes & the swarenes, the fernes & the neernes, & the colour of it [and so with the other senses]. & Trewly neither hath God ne goostly thinges none of thees qualitiees ne quantities [...] [Yet] by theire failinges we may, as thus: when we rede or here speke of sum certeyn thin ges, & therto conceyue that oure outward wittys kon not telle us

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90 This fits with Turner’s understanding of first and second order negations in apophasis: ‘To know what something is like is to know what it contrasts with. As comparisons fall away, therefore, so, logically, must contrasts.’ Eros and Allegory, p. 63.
91 Cloud, 50/15-16.
93 Cloud, 1/28-29.
94 Cloud, 70/8-9.
95 See chapter Three, p. 115 of this thesis. Ockham the actual ‘qualities’ of an object, their colour, shape, sound etc., were impressed on the sense organ. Tachau, pp. 131-132.
bi no qualitee what thoo thinges ben, than we mowe be verely certefied that thoo thinges ben goostly thinges, & not bodely thinges.⁹⁶xxvi

The *Cloud*-author derives his critique from 1) the bodily senses as a medium of spiritual perception, 2) the attempt to work inwardly with those senses, and 3) the attempt to perceive God with cognitive senses, distinct from any relation to bodily senses. When applied to God, the author negates all possibilities and understandings of ‘the spiritual senses’:

leue thin outward wittes, & worche not with hem, neither withinne ne withouten. For alle thoo that setten hem to be goostly worchers withinne, & wenen that thei scholen outhere here, smel, or see, taast or fele goostly things, outhere withinne hem or withouten, sekerly thei ben deceyued & worchen wronge ayens the cours of kynde [...] On this same maner goostly it farith within in our goostly wittys, when we travailen aboute the knowing of God himself. For haue a man neuer so moche goostly vnderstondyng in knowing of alle maad goostly thinges, yit may he neuer bi the werk of his vnderstondyng com to the knowing of an vnmaad goostly thing, the whiche is nouyt bot God. Bot by the failing it may; for whi that thing that it failith in is nothing elles bot only God.⁹⁷xxvii

God is known in the failing of all facultes. The critique of bodily knowing is set within a negation of the knowing of spiritual things. The author is particularly critical of the attempt to turn outward senses inward, echoing Rolle’s and Julian's stance. If this is the negative pole of the *Cloud*-author’s argument in what sense, if at all, is the body affirmed? How, if at all, is this negation negated?

Arguably, expressions of the outer and inner person in spiritual writing may not be making a distinction between the body and the soul but between the body as externally orientated in relation to the world, and the body as personally experienced and known with the responses of memory, imagination and will. The inner person is self-reflexive – interiority is the capacity for self-reflection. The outer self is concerned with the movement of the senses towards objects. The concern of much medieval spiritual writing is that when the soul gives attention to the body the soul’s powers are not caught and dispersed in external sensation but are able to draw the senses inward, redirecting the body into the soul.

This seems to be the position of Aquinas. At the risk of a brief *excursus* it is helpful – as a formative figure in late medieval spirituality – to see how for Aquinas the dominant role of the soul in sensation *involves* the body. At least it offers an illustration of how a dialectical relation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ is built on what seems an initial premise of denial of the body. It also opens up the discussion of how there may be different ways of understanding the body in scholastic anthropology that play yet more distinct roles in late medieval spiritual writing.

⁹⁷ *Cloud*, 69/24-29, 37-end &70/1-4.
Peter King argues that “[for Aquinas] the capacity to sense is rooted in the soul, but can only be realized in the embodied soul. Put another way, souls confer the power to see on bodies, yet souls need bodies to exercise the conferred power.” Aquinas argues that the soul and body *together* make the act of sensation, and yet have different roles. The bodily senses are tied to the object of sensation as ‘passive capacities’ receiving external information. Sensation is ‘actualised’ in the soul’s faculty of ‘common sense’ before it is cognised in memory, understanding and will. ‘Common sense’ is therefore the hinge between the cognate and sensate roles in sensation. This faculty is not a sense organ and has no proper ‘object’ of sensation. Its role is not with the external world but with the processing of impressions within the soul. Sensation becomes self-reflexive. Its role is, in Robert Passau’s words, “not to sense a sensible quality but to sense one’s sensing of that sensible quality”. Or, as Aquinas observed:

> The common sense also perceives sensory intentions, for example when someone sees that they are seeing. For this cannot take place through the proper sense, which has cognition only of the form of the sensible thing that makes an impression on it. In this impression seeing is completed, and as a result of this impression another impression follows in the common sense which perceives the seeing.

Yet Aquinas says that this faculty within the soul is the source and the terminus of all bodily sensation. Body and soul therefore work together; one sensing, the other bringing sensation to awareness. For Aquinas these stages are consecutive – common sense’s operation occurs after and as a result of bodily sensation – and yet are mutually affecting. Through the ‘actualising’ of the capacities for sensing within the sense organs those sense organs became part of the conscious processing of sense stimuli. The soul knows not just with but in the senses. On the other hand, the body is also involved in second-order sensation. In his Commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima* Aquinas confirms that reflective sensation remains perceptual in its content, rather than conceptual: ‘The capacity that sees that something is seeing is not outside the genus of visual capacity.’ The awareness of the activity of sensation is therefore, for Aquinas, not purely cognitive. It is not just the lower faculties of the intellect but the body itself which is involved. Passau glosses that “Aquinas supposes that a

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99 Passau, pp. 61, 193.
100 Ibid, pp. 190-191.
101 Quoted in Passau, p. 193, from *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q.78.4 ad 2.
102 Passau, pp. 195-197.
103 Averroës confines *sensatio* to the aftermath of an act of sensing. Aquinas also applied it to what occurs during the act of sensing. See King, *FM*, p. 191.
104 Quoted in Passau, p. 195, from *In DA*, III. 2.
second-order perception of one’s perceiving must involve the perception of the same sensible qualities found in the first order perception. The power through which one sees that one is seeing, for example, must itself be able to see colour."105

‘Sensation’, for Aquinas, was therefore constituent of the act of sensing and could never be unconnected with its physiological incarnation. Thinking and choosing are mental operations that do not require any bodily organ, whereas for sense:

Some operations that belong to the soul are carried out through bodily organs, such as seeing (through the eye), hearing (through the ear), and likewise for all other operations of the nutritive or the sensitive part. Hence the powers that are the sources of such operations are in the compound as their subject, not in the soul alone.106

The soul thinks and chooses; the compound body-soul sees and hears. The capacity to sense is rooted in the soul, but can only be realized in the embodied soul. As Carruthers points out, perception in the late medieval era was understood to change the sense organs: emotion, derived sensorially, in turn causes movement or change in physiology.107

Aquinas’s anthropology is known for its close assimilation of body and soul. However the tension between the distinction of the outer and the inner ‘parts’ of the process of sensation – as understood in the later Middle Ages – and their mutual dependence, runs through much spiritual and scholastic writing. Closer to England and the fourteenth century, John Duns Scotus (1226-1308) in his Quodlibeta while investigating whether God could bring it about that an angel inform matter, argues that the act of sensing is an act grounded in the animated sense organs of a living creature. In his view ‘sensation’ is not strictly physical, for non-living organic bodies do not have it; nor is it what we should call strictly mental, for disembodied souls do not have it. Instead the cognitive and volitional processing of sensations are actualizations of sense-organs, and therefore are always linked to the physiological processes that originated them.108

From within the English anchoritic tradition the classic expression of this dual aspect of the spiritual life is in Aelred’s Rule for Recluses and the Ancrene Wisse both of which divide their teaching into the categories of the ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ life. The Outer parts of these rules concern the form of the anchoress’s life, the prayers she has to say vocally, how to inhabit her cell (e.g. how to cover her windows), dealing with visitors, not keeping animals, managing her maid, etc. In other words they deal with the actions and dispositions of the body

106 Quoted in King, FM, p. 198, from Summa Theologiae 1a, q.77.
107 Book of Memory, pp. 69-72, 85.
108 King, FM, p. 194.
externally. The parts of these rules that deal with the ‘inner’ life also deal with body, but in a different way. Parts 2-7 of the Ancrene Wisse include a detailed elaboration of the five senses, how they must be guarded and mortified by being brought into relation with Christ in his Passion.

These aspects of ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ rule work together in that the “the putatively external rules are the very means by which a body becomes practically orientated in the world and learns to constitute itself as such.”109 The body is not denied, only the external movement of the senses is. Restraint of the senses is only so that they can begin to work inwardly in an imaginative response to Christ. This dialectical relation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ is made clear in part 7 of the Ancrene Wisse:

> And know it to be true that the more these senses spring outward, the less they go inward. The more the recluse stares out, the less inner light she has from the Lord – and the same is true of all the senses.110

This ‘inwardness’ therefore remains corporeal in two ways: 1) it is the same bodily senses which are being redirected, and 2) the inward movement is constructed around the body of Christ in his Passion. Restraining the outward movement of the senses moves sensation from external ‘bodies’ onto an internal ‘imaginial body’ that is both self and Christ.111 Formed out of ascetical practice and identification with the suffering Christ this ‘imaginary anatomy’ provides a ‘threshold’ linking mind and body.112

To put this in medieval psychological terms: ‘common sense’ directs sense impressions toward the memory where images are formed from the leftover of sense contact. Though not physically within the reference of outward perception these internal images of bodies, or ‘phantasms’, remain the products of sense experience.113 The body is involved in the reconstruction because whatever is left behind as an after effect of sensation (as image) must already be present in the act of sensing itself.114 The inner working of sensation remains dependent on the bodily senses. Ascetic literature is concerned that the inner image is not confined within the parameters set by outer perception. Since images persist in the absence of the sensed object the act of sensing cannot be identical to outer sensation. Moreover internal

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110 Anchoritic Spirituality, ed. Savage & Watson, p. 82.
111 ‘The anchoress encounters the crucified Christ as the Other, who is at the same time the internal condition of her identity.’ Beckwith, ‘Passionate Regulation’, 817.
112 Ibid, 818.
113 See Passau, pp. 278-280.
114 King, FM, p. 191.
images are cultivated through the restraint of the bodily organs, rather than denial, or there 
would be no internal images.

The Cloud-author writing for a solitary who would have been trained in such practices 
is undoubtedly using a similar motif but with a further apophatic emphasis. The ‘inner Christ’ 
that is discovered in self-emptying is the Christ who emptied himself. Christ’s Passion is 
therefore not only the exemplar for kenosis but the Christ who is ‘found’ is a continually 
deconstructed image. From the perspective of cognition and imagination, in the ‘cloud of 
unknowing’, Christ is not an image but a continuous effacement of the self. In what sense, 
however, is this encounter with Christ an embodied encounter if it is not an image derived 
from bodily perception? The model continues to be linked to the physical Passion where the 
image and likeness of God was stripped of its glory. The author urges the contemplative to 
‘streyne up his spirite in this werk goostly […] as oure Lorde did his body on the cros’\(^\text{115xxviii}\) 
But it not only exemplifies but also effects ‘goostly oneyes’. Christ’s offering of himself in 
his Passion ‘knit alle men to God as effectuely as himself is’.\(^\text{116xxix}\)

The stripping of the senses and sense-based imagination is therefore both 
metaphorically and causally dependent on Christ’s embodiment. The image of Christ 
discovered in self-awareness includes bodily awareness. However in what way is this 
awareness of a bodily ‘other’ related to the contemplative’s own embodiment? To understand 
this we must look at how the movement to ‘inner sensation’ is related to the soul’s sensation 
of the body and how the ‘stripping’ of external sensation is expressed in terms of ‘nakedness’, 
the unclothed self, in the Epistle.

**Corpus and Caro: The Naked Body**

Whereas Julian used the imagery of clothes to describe the enfolding nature of Divine 
goodness the Cloud says we must be ‘stripped bare’ so as to enter a direct and ‘naked’ 
contemplation of God. The image of nakedness used dominantly in the Epistle is closely 
related to blindness in the Cloud. They are paired in variable collocations:

*the blynde beholdyng of thi nakid beyng [...] nakid blynde felyng of thin owne 
beyng [...] thi nakid blinde beyng [...] nakid siyt & blynde felyng.*\(^\text{117}\)

\(^{115}\) *Cloud*, 33/36-38.  
\(^{116}\) *Epistle*, 80/8.  
Like blindness, nakedness carries a positive meaning for contemplation. In the Cloud (as distinct from the Epistle) it carries a purgative meaning – to be stripped of self-seeking. A ‘nakid’ intent in the Cloud implies a desire for God himself, not for ‘relesing of peyne, ne encreesing of mede’. This detachment from subjective sensation (‘nouther he rechith ne lokith after whether that he be in peyne or in blisse’) frees the will to love God for himself. Likewise to love creatures nakedly is to love them for God and not for their relation to the self. Nakedness is therefore to be stripped of any self-referentiality. In the Epistle the positive use of the terms ‘naked’ and ‘being stripped’, though obviously drawn from passion meditations, has a purgative and a cognitive meaning. The closing down of the sense faculties stills the production of images in the mind. The Cloud-author recommends a meditative practice that is unclothed in any religious imagery or pious reflection: ‘loke that [thee] nothing leue in thi worching mynde bot a nakid entent streching into God, not clothid in any specyal thouyt of God, how he is in hymself or in any of his werkes’. However the main use in the Epistle is a novel approach to the awareness of self: ‘this nakid entent [...] schal be nouyt ewlles to thi thouyt & to thi felyng bot a nakid thouyt & a blynde feling of thin owne beyng’. To see oneself ‘nakedly’ is to see oneself ‘withoutyn any lokyng to eny qualite of thi beyng’. The characteristics of ‘what we are’ are sheared away into a simple awareness ‘that we are’. This is blind because in the fourteenth-century understanding of perception, only the qualitas impressa of an object that are received into the mind. The same paradigm is used for self-knowing as for perception: outside the noetic categories of size, colour, sound, shape, no external form is seen. Likewise, without thinking about the characteristics of self - ‘whether thei be clene or wrechid, gracyous or kyndely, godli or manly’ - only a naked self is known.

The author’s positive use of ‘nakedness’- like ‘blindness’- in a non-purgative sense is also counter-cultural. There were two forms of nakedness in medieval art; the nakedness of purgation, symbolised usually by the Crucifix, and the nakedness of fleshly desire or carnal

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118 As Clark points out in the Cloud corpus nakedness can refer to God himself or to human contemplation, blindness is only used in the latter sense never to describe God. ‘The Lightsome Darkness’, 96-97. Hilton also but less frequently uses nakedness to express ‘poverty of spirit’ but doesn’t make the link with blindness. Ibid, 105.
119 Cloud, 32/25.
120 Cloud, 32/26-28.
121 Cloud, 33/24-25.
122 Epistle, 75/18-21.
123 Epistle, 75/23-25.
124 Epistle, 75/27.
125 Epistle, 77/37-38.
worship, depicted by the fully naked sensual form.\textsuperscript{126} In the later Middle Ages there was a movement toward naturalism in religious art. The naked body had a spiritual as well as a carnal meaning. As Camille points out crucifixes (showing a very nearly naked body) in the fourteenth century became more and more lifelike and naturalistic.\textsuperscript{127} The body here was positive because it was in a state of purgation. Francis taking off his clothes in Assisi to divest himself of family possessions was viewed as a pious and not a scandalous act.\textsuperscript{128} However, strictly naked bodies outside of this penitential context were seen as nearly idolatrous. Pictorial representations of ‘idols’ – that is profane images, in the Middle Ages were always depicted naked. Medieval paintings of the Last Judgement nearly always show the saved as clothed and the damned as naked. Nakedness implied erotic provocation as well as shame and vulnerability. Liberation and celebration of the body as a natural good begins later in Italy in the 15th century.\textsuperscript{129}

The \textit{Cloud}-author uses a condition and state considered in both religious and popular culture as negative in an affirmative way. The question remains whether the logic of physiological typology that makes nakedness analogous to a spiritual state is merely metaphorical or whether there is an ‘analogy of proportions’ whereby the physical ‘maps’ or ‘models’ what it represents?\textsuperscript{130} How far does the mental state proposed in the \textit{Epistle} involve physical or spiritual awareness?

Nakedness seems to be an apophatic rather than an ascetic metaphor; the main \textit{kenosis} seems to be cognitive rather than sensual. The \textit{Epistle} affirms that a naked awareness of the self is not acquired by learning or even natural intelligence but is a state prior to all cognition. It is compared to a state that even animals are capable of: ‘For this is pleynli proprid to the lewdist kow or to the moste vnresonable beest [...] for to fele the owne propre beyng’.\textsuperscript{131}\textsuperscript{xxvi} Aquinas and later scholastic theologians had argued that the human soul differs from the animal soul with regard to mind. In terms of ‘sensation’ humans and animals were the same.\textsuperscript{132} The \textit{Cloud}-author contrasts meditations arrived at by ‘werk of the wittys’ with those which come by ‘naked felyng’.\textsuperscript{133} The former is limited to distinct characteristics or ‘qualitees

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{126} See Camille, \textit{Gothic Idol}, pp. 88, 94.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid, pp. 213-215.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Bonaventure, \textit{Life of St Francis}, pp. 20-21.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} The idea that physical states may be dissimilar yet proportional I take from Turner, \textit{Eros and Allegory}, p. 128.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Epistle}, 76/39 –77/1.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Passau, p. 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Epistle}, 78/1-10.
\end{itemize}
of thi beyng’. The latter enables a ‘hole worship [by] offeringe up vnto [God] pleynly & holy thin owne self’. The self taken ‘generaly & not specly’ contains body as well as mind and is ‘the first of thy goostly or bodely qualitees’.

This first characteristic of ‘beyng’ includes the body but also includes further characteristics of the self ‘hangyn alle vpon it’ as clothes do on the body. The imagery reinforces the idea that sense bodily awareness is at least part of the foundational awareness of self. In contemplation this ‘nakid beyng’ must be left ‘vncloyhid with eny qualite or special beholdyng’. This is important for the naked self is a stepping stone to the feeling of the God without ‘qualites’; ‘lappe & clothe the felyng of thi God in the felyng of thysel’.

But at the midpoint of the Epistle the author makes clear a further stage of ‘stripping’ whereby the naked self is clothed with God. ‘Nakedness’ therefore serves the same role as ‘the cloud of unknowing’ does in the earlier work. It is the ambiance in which the contemplative meets God. It plays the same Christological role. The image of nakedness and stripping is reminiscent of Christ in his Passion. The body of another is encountered within apophatic denial. In this second work the ‘felyng of thysel’ allows the experience of another to be felt as constitutive of the self.

In order to understand how self-reflexivity can be an embodied experience and how that can relate to the experience of another I draw on recent work of philosophical phenomenology. Recent phenomenological anthropology has pointed out that a distinction can be made between the physical body as an external object of perception – another person’s body which is perceived through the outward movement of the senses, and the physical body perceived subjectively – one’s own body where the senses give information only about themselves. In the former other-centred knowing the body is an intermediary, a means but not an object of knowing – we do not see the eye when we see an object, or hear the ear when we hear a sound, smell the nasal tissue or taste the taste buds when we eat. This transitive body – perceiving with and through the senses – is external to the processes of cognition. The senses are occupied with the object perceived. In this normal functioning of perception the

134 Epistle, 78/15-16.
135 Epistle, 78/32-33.
136 Epistle, 78/34,38.
137 Epistle, 79/30,32-33. See also 86/24-31.
138 Epistle, 89/9.
139 ‘nakyn, spoyle & utterly vnclouthe thiself of al maner of felyng of thysel, that thou be able to be clothid with the gracious felyng of God self.’ Epistle, 89/11-13.
subjective body is not only transitive but is effaced. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, to be aware of the body in the context of the world, the body as a felt sense must be sublimated: “Insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses.”

The subjective body is therefore self-reflexive. It is tied up not with objects but with the experience of pleasure and pain. The senses in themselves are in fact only experienced in a state of malfunction or delight. We speak about things delighting the eye, pleasing the ear, tasting good. Likewise things can be painful to see, hard to hear, bitter to taste. The body can feel its own pain. What is communicated is not information about the object but the sensibility of the subject. The senses involve an emotive, affective or evaluative response. They are, in other words, integral to cognition. Could it be that ascetical discourse against the body in the Middle Ages is not against the body as such but against the movement of the senses towards objects (the world) and itself as object in relation to others (the flesh)? Certainly for anchoritic literature the extraversion of the body is synonymous with caro, flesh. The emphasis on the enclosure of the body and sealing of the senses in English anchoritic writing and in the ascetical side of Rolle’s and Hilton’s writing may not be a negation of the body as such but a curtailing of sensual externality. By giving no object to the senses, the senses are drawn within and find their relation to the soul. The senses are thus disciplined and also disposed for imaginative meditation.

When we move from ascetical to mystical discourse the language of bodily enclosure is not used to draw tight bodily boundaries but, on the contrary, to set them free from bodily preoccupation. When the outward movement of the senses is reined in, as the Cloud-author observes, ‘you are nowhere physically’. In this reflexive sense knowledge the body is linked to soul and gives rise to a sense of self as corpus. In terms of the external world therefore the self-reflexive body is absent. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Hans Jonas argues that the outward movement of the senses give us not only a sense of the world but also a sense of our body as an object in the world. The body is the orientational centre for the fields of sense perception: sight, sound, touch, even smell (though not taste) give a sense of up, down, far, near, left right. It is these spatial categories that the Cloud author says cannot be applied to perception of God:

143 Butler, p. 258.
Beware that thou conceyue not bodely that that is mente goostly, thof al it be spokyn in bodely wordes, as ben thees: UP or DOUN, IN or OUTE, BEHINDE or BEFORE, ON O SIDE or ON OTHER.\textsuperscript{145xxxviii} The absence of the body is not a denial of the body per-se but of external bodily reference. It is part of the dialectic the Cloud-author (and Hilton) use to direct attention to the ‘otherness’ of God.

The writers I am looking at are likewise concerned with the body as an object of experience in the first person, theirs or their reader’s. The only third person body that is important is the body of Christ. It is in relation to this ‘other’ body that the subjective experience of the audience of these mystical texts is orientated. As we have seen in section Three, this ‘other’ body was experienced inwardly in the contemplative’s own sensibility. This was possible through a tension of image and apophasis. The self-effacement of Christ means that the ‘other’ is both the catalyst for the contemplative’s own self-emptying as well as the always hidden condition of her ‘qualitative’ identity. The ‘imaginative’ pole is more present in the work of Rolle and Julian, emphasising their own body and that of Christ, where Christ is encountered inwardly. The ‘apophatic’ pole is stronger in the Cloud corpus and in Hilton. But denial of the body in the first person is tempered by a continued emphasis on embodiment as a foundational factor in self-awareness. The denial of embodiment in the third person (Christ) is because this body is a ‘door’ to the divinity and the condition for entry therein.\textsuperscript{146}

In the Cloud-author or Hilton apparent denial is an expression of the ‘transient’ and ‘transitive’ nature of the body. The body is the model for ‘other-centeredness’ as the senses give information about external objects. It is also a model for self-effacement, or humility, in existing for the sake of another. The ‘body’ can therefore be seen as a perfect image of absence, of apophasis. To see, hear or feel something externally the body becomes transparent and disappears. To feel the body itself denies the object. The Epistle’s naked sense of self – which includes a sense of embodiment – is the best way the author proposes to undercut any objectifying of the self in relation to ‘the world’. As an object of reflection the self has qualities and characteristics (shape, colour, size, etc) which are by nature comparative. ‘How may a man more forsake himself & the woreld [...] then for to dedein for to think of eny qualite of here beinges?’ asks the Cloud-author.\textsuperscript{147xxxix}

\textsuperscript{145} Cloud, 63/28-30, Capitals his.
\textsuperscript{146} Epistle, 91/3-25.
\textsuperscript{147} Epistle, 88/36-38
The paradox of finding yourself through losing yourself is of course closely linked to the contemplative’s relation to the person of Christ. In relation to the qualities of his being the contemplative self finds her identity.\(^{148}\) This other-centredness involves a further kenosis of self. To be ‘clothed’ with Christ, the contemplative must be stripped of his naked sense of self. As the Epistle puts it; ‘late him spoyle hymself of himself yif he wil be verely clothid in me’.\(^{149}\) The tension between the naked sense of self and the sense of ‘another’ as constitutive of self is held by the author of the Epistle until the end when he finds a mystical synthesis in Christ’s human transience and transitivity. The complete nakedness of Christ’s self means he is no longer the object of the contemplative’s awareness: Christ is the door one passes through to God, he is the one who ascends to the Father.\(^{150}\) Christ is the root of the self which has undergone the passion of self-emptying.

The transience of Christ as an object is a second order negation which negates both the sense of self and the sense of Christ as another. At this stage the Epistle asks the reader to ‘forgo the felyng of thiself [...] er thou maist be onyd to God in felyng of himself’. But the feeling of God’s self is not supplied by the humanity of Christ; ‘it is speedful to thow that [Christ] go bodely from thou’.\(^{151}\) The state of oneness with God opens up when the felt sense of ‘self’ and of ‘other’ which are the two referential poles for bodily perception are transcended. As the Epistle puts it: ‘Now arte thou in the goostly see, to my licnes, schipping ouer fro bodelines into goostlines’.\(^{152}\) However it is only through the body – self and other – that the body is transcended. The author of the Epistle does not foreshorten the process but adheres to a strict dialectic.

**Soul in Form of the Body: Hilton’s Image of Sin**

In this last section I return to Hilton to show how awareness of the body plays a role in self-knowledge. Like with the Cloud-author there is the paradox of something negated still holding a central role. Initially for Hilton it appears the body plays a purely negative role in the self. To uncover the image of God within the soul, the contemplative must first uncover the image of sin. This occlusive image is made up of corporeal experience.

\(^{148}\) Epistle, 91/13-19, 92/1-2.
\(^{149}\) Epistle, 89/20-21.
\(^{150}\) Epistle, 98/18-21.
\(^{151}\) Epistle, 90/5-7 & 98/18-19.
\(^{152}\) Epistle, 96/2-3.
A few caveats need to temper the association of sin with corporeality in Hilton’s thought: 1) those following the Augustinian tradition of interiority (as Hilton does) often use the body as a foil for the soul, the value of the soul is emphasised at the expense of the body in order to encourage ascetic endeavour but this rhetoric should not be taken as an expression of anthropological dualism;\textsuperscript{153} 2) the image of sin for Hilton was not just in the recalcitrant nature of the body, tied as it is to sensual experience, but in the disordered psyche. In spiritual sensation the body is raised to work with the soul;\textsuperscript{154} and 3) Hilton’s continued emphasis on the humanity of Christ counteracts any stress on a non-corporeal interiority. The solution to the distracting and ‘transgressive’ nature of sense and imagination came through directing them toward the incarnate Christ.

In this section I argue that in Hilton’s \textit{Scale} the influence of the body on the soul, even in its negative role, provides a key for self-knowledge. The body’s sensations are for him analogous to the affections of the soul. The ‘fleshly’ soul, for Hilton, was created through internalised forms of outward things. The effect of the body on the soul is to produce images based on sense perception. Thus the ‘image of sin’ in the soul is dependent on carnal sensation. In the same way as something that arises within the soul, the ‘image of sin’ is not an object that can be perceived with the senses. It is purely part of the interior processes of sensation. The ‘image of sin’, though bodily in form, was for Hilton more of a state of mind and heart than the body per se. Hilton’s approach to bodily discipline is based on the distinction between needs and desires. By setting the affections of the soul toward God the body is more able to live within, and be content with, what is adequate to its natural needs. A corporeal sin like gluttony is less culpable because it has some grounding in bodily need. The image of sin is for Hilton consistently located within the soul and its inordinate affections.

So ‘sin’ is not so much an image of the body but an image of the soul in the form of the body. This for Hilton is an inverted image because the soul should itself ‘form’ the body, not be formed by it. He points out that ontologically the soul is not in the body but it is the body which gives life to the soul.\textsuperscript{155} The ‘image of sin’ which has a bodily form represents the faculties of the soul – memory, understanding and will – trapped within carnal existence.

As with the \textit{Cloud}, Hilton’s critique of the body is to do with its role in cognition as the creator of images. We must look more closely at how Hilton shows the ‘image of sin’. At the end of \textit{Scale} 1, sin is represented as a parody of a devotional object, an obscene and

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{153} Chapter Two, p. 75.
\bibitem{154} Chapter Two, pp. 103-104.
\bibitem{155} \textit{Scale} 2/205/1945-1947.
\end{thebibliography}
carnal idol. Sin having a body and members is more than a metaphor. Hilton in Scale 1 urges the cloistered anchorite he writes for to confront her carnal nature and her idolatrous identification with it. As if sin was a body one could turn upside down looking at its hidden parts he writes: ‘Lifte up this image and loke wel al aboughte’.

He speaks of finding ‘a fals ymage, that men calle a mawmet, in mysilf’. It has members: pride is the head, the back and back-side are covetousness, the breast is envy, the arms are wrath, the belly is gluttony, its private parts are lechery and its feet are sloth. By the grace of Jesus this image of sin must be destroyed and broken down. The movement towards interiority in Scale 1 defiantly involves an ascesis of corporeal experience, a breaking of bodily identification to find the image of God in the soul.

Watson sees this dislike of images as part of a late-medieval reaction to the proliferation of representational piety. He sets Hilton’s writing within the context of the ‘Lollard’ debate over the role of images in late medieval worship. He sees Scale 1, written in the 1380s, and much of Hilton’s early thought, as ‘spiritually iconoclastic’. Despite Hilton’s critique of Lollardy he shares in the same iconoclastic suspicion of an image. Sin is seen as a false image with tactile, bodily form. There is some truth in this: in Hilton’s early Latin letters ymagine is a metaphor for peccati. He seems to use some of the contemporary reaction to images not to condemn objects of devotion but to instil distaste, even horror, for the self-love that orients outwardly to bodily gratification.

However there is another aspect to Hilton’s writing which takes cognisance of the Incarnation. Part of Jennifer Bryan’s argument for the ‘inwardness’ of late medieval devotion in England, the focus of the next chapter, is what she sees as the ‘collision between a newly revived interest in Augustinian radical reflexivity and the strong affective emphasis on the particularity of the human person of Jesus’. It is in this tension that Bryan sees the shift in emphasis between Scale 1 and Scale 2 away from an Augustinian trust in the soul itself as an image of the Trinity to the soul as an image of Jesus. In Scale 2 the purified soul is reformed...
in the image of God-incarnate, without whom the soul remains in darkness.\textsuperscript{163} In Hilton’s Latin polemical works he argues that the Incarnation endorses the use of material images in worship:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Quia licit ymagines ecclesiæ non possunt representare oculis intuencium scilicet aliquam similitudinem divinæ nature in seipsa, possum}i T representare tamen et significare similitudinem humane nature assumpte, in qua Deus operatus est salutem humanam.\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

Images are to be revered because of what they represent, ‘\textit{ut signa venerantur, non ut res}’.\textsuperscript{165} Christ’s assumed humanity expresses God. A right ordering of \textit{res} and \textit{signa} gives meaning to the \textit{signa} of the body. The same is true for the human body generally which for Hilton, as we have seen in chapter Two (section Four), was able to express God. The problem of sin is not in the body but in the disordering of the soul that is not in the image of Jesus. In \textit{Scale 2} Hilton argues that just as the soul is the life of the body, so Jesus is the life of the soul.\textsuperscript{166} If the soul is darkened, so is the body. Hilton therefore calls the ‘image of sin’ the ‘merk’ image. As Jesus is restored in the soul, the image of sin is revealed – as a greater light that shines on a body reveals its shadow.\textsuperscript{167} The painful path of self-knowledge initiated by Christ results in the breaking down of the shadow image.\textsuperscript{168} Though Hilton does not make the further connection, a body that has no shadow internally is completely bathed in light.\textsuperscript{169}

The ‘image of sin’ for Hilton, exists in the soul, although its form as body is derived from sense impressions. Its existence is within the internal faculties of sensation. In the terms used by Aquinas it is a second order perception. The ‘image of sin’ is not tied to an object as the bodily senses are; it is perceptual rather than cognitive in that ‘common sense’, memory, understanding and will work with images that are products of the senses. It is a reflection of bodily sensation – a construct of images of bodies left over – in the soul.\textsuperscript{170} Hilton remarks that the image of sin only emerges when external bodily perception is stripped away. To read the ‘image of sin’ with Watson as a physical idol gives inadequate attention to the fact that the murky image appears when attention is taken \textit{away} from the outer body. Hilton introduces the ‘merk’ image in chapter 52 of \textit{Scale 1} where he describes leaving aside bodily

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, pp. 69-71.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{De Adoratione Ymaginum}, Latin Writings, 1, p. 199: ‘Even though the images of the church cannot represent to the eyes of onlookers any semblance of divine nature in themselves, nevertheless they can represent and signify the semblance of an assumed human nature, in which God brought about man’s salvation.’ For the case for Hilton’s authorship of this text see Stanbury, p. 54, note 56. The treatise was written sometime between 1385 and 1395, for a discussion of Hilton’s arguments see Minnis, 359-362.
\textsuperscript{165} Latin Writings, p. 199. ‘as symbols, not as things’.
\textsuperscript{166} Scale 2/244/3108-3109.
\textsuperscript{167} Scale 2/207-208/2026-2030.
\textsuperscript{168} Scale 1, Chs. 86-89.
\textsuperscript{169} See Mathew 6:22, Luke 11:34.
\textsuperscript{170} See Passau, pp. 278-284.
activity, outward business, drawing thought away from the bodily senses, taking no heed for what one sees, hears and feels. The ‘merk’ image appears when all imagining of bodily things or deeds disappear. Far from being corporeal in Scale 1 the ‘merk’ image fills the gap opened by the evacuation of bodiliness. In the same chapter Hilton describes the seven deadly sins not as members of the body but as ‘black stinking clothes’. Sin is something added to the body. The idol is not bodily sensation – absent at this stage – but the self-love which orientates the soul to the body.

Does this absent or evacuated body in Scale 1 serve the same apophatic role as in the Cloud corpus? Watson is aware that the language used to describe sin in Scale 1 is drawn from apophatic theology but stresses that this use of negative phraseology is purely ascetical and does not emphasise the imageless transcendence of God. It is used to describe an idol which is stripped of any outward bodily identity. The image itself can only be ‘seen’ when the obfuscation of the physical body has been at least in part removed. Hilton’s use of apophatic language for the ‘merk’ image implies a transcendence of the image from its physical prototype. It is a mnemonic body in that its corporeality exists only as an image in the soul. The carnal nature of the soul is harder to see than that of the body. Spiritual sins, Hilton says, are worse than bodily sins and are harder to root out. Still all the seven deadly sins are the result of undue identification with the body.

There is for Hilton, as for the Cloud-author, a clear tension between the body and soul. This tension propels toward a synthesis connected to the relation of inner and outer sensation. For the Cloud-author the breaking down of the soul’s identification with bodily images comes through a spiritual kenosis that is modelled on Christ’s Passion. Christ himself as the exemplar of this self-emptying is removed as an image. For Hilton there is less stress on absence and more on the image; ‘darkness’ carries a purgative rather than an illuminative role. The image of Jesus continues as both the means and end of the soul’s transformation. Could this role of ‘image’ in Hilton’s thought – the image of sin in the form of the body and the image of God in the form of the soul – be mapped onto expressions of the outer and inner person in spiritual writing? Hilton is not making a distinction as such between body and soul for the images are both in the soul. But one – the image of sin – is the soul externally orientated in relation to the world, and the other – the image of Jesus – is the soul restored to itself within the responses of memory, imagination and will. The ‘image of sin’ is constructed

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171 ‘Et que est huius ydoli materia?’, Images, Idolatory and Iconoclasm, ed. Dimmick, Simpson & Zeeman, pp. 98-104.
172 Scale 1, chs 73-74.
173 Ibid, chs 78-79.
through the movement of the senses towards objects. The ‘image of Jesus’ is self-reflexive in that, in classical Augustinian fashion, it arises as a restoration of charity within the workings of the soul.174

Hilton’s two images reflect the ascetic concern of much medieval spiritual writing: when soul gives attention to the body it is not caught and dispersed in external sensation. It also reflects the incarnational emphasis of his work: by drawing the senses inward the body is redirected into the soul.175 Hilton’s understanding of sin as ‘of the body’ and yet not ‘in the body’ shows a dialectic similar to that of the Cloud corpus. The difference lies in that the resolution for the Cloud-author is in an apophasis of body and soul and for Hilton it lies in an understanding of the role of ‘image’ as a meeting place between the corporeal and cognitive aspects of sensation, created by the body yet existing in the soul.

Sarah Stanbury notes that by yoking the terms ‘dark’ and ‘image’, Hilton not only creates an unusual metaphor using Dionysian and Augustinian language but also an ambiguous one.176 The material body is stripped away and the soul is found in the image of the body. The bodiliness of the soul is the image of sin, not the body itself. Stanbury recognises the double negation of body and soul in Scale 1 but believes that, given the anchoritic context of Scale 1 the ‘merk’ image remains a figure for the carnality which must be renounced. As a figure for ‘flesh’ it is an object of disgust, evoking the sort of feelings the Lollards felt for external images, but directed inwardly. Stanbury believes that this ‘hybrid’ nature of the image of sin, as physical and metaphorical, reflects the contemporary concern to worship not the image itself but the idea the image represents. What the image of sin is cannot be known to the bodily senses but Hilton tries to evoke it, even picture it. As Stanbury observes “the drama of Scale 1 lies in the desire to see, know and touch the image. It feeds on our longing for things in bodiliness”. By the end of Scale 1 the image has become quite tactile and visible; it can be lifted up and observed.

Stanbury’s insightful analysis of Hilton’s presentation of the imago peccati in the context of iconoclastic debates does not give enough attention to the concurrent debate among late medieval writers on mysticism about the place of imagination in prayer. Though the debate over the value of external images was more political in the later Middle Ages, for mystical writers the debate over the value of internal images was in many ways more

174 See Howells, ‘Spiritual Transformation in Augustine’s On the Trinity’, STRCS, pp. 95-103. Howells shows how, for Augustine, knowing God is like self-knowledge in that both are ‘relational’ – that the self is constituted in relation to another – in God this ‘relationality’ is the Trinity, through God’s self-giving in the Incarnation the soul is restored as an image of charity.
175 Looked at in chapter two, section Four of this Thesis.
immediate and pertinent to their genre of writing. The ‘distaste’ the reader is made to feel for this image is not just because it is a figure of carnality but also because it is a spiritual or imaginative vision that blocks the true vision of God in the soul.

Hilton’s ‘image of sin’ seems to emerge from the inner recesses of the soul through a probing desire for self-knowledge. At the same time the aversion that Hilton instils for the ‘merk image’ makes it an increasingly real presence, yet according to the outward senses it is not there. In *Scale 2* the same process is repeated with the desire to see Jesus. However in this case it is the attraction of the image which allows its uncovering or imprinting within the soul. In both cases the act of ‘seeing’ is driven by the affective response of the viewer. Hilton, like the *Cloud*-author, is aware of the danger of reading spiritual vision, literally, in terms of bodily sensation. Because spiritual objects are un-see-able to the bodily eye, desire would then give rise to imagination. The *Cloud*-author criticises those who would look into heaven, ‘make a hole in the firmament, [...] make a God as hem lyst, & clothen hym ful richely in clothes, & set hym in a trone’, with their bodily sight. This is echoed in *Scale 2* where Hilton, linking sight to affectivity – where clearer sight means clearer love – critiques a literal or imaginative interpretation of visual desire:

The openynge of hevene to the iye of a clene soule, of the whiche holi men speken of in here writynge [is] not [...] as yif a soule myght seen bi imaginacion thorh the skies above the firmament, hou oure Lord Jhesu sitteth in His majeste in a bodili light.

In terms of attitudes to the body the important thing is that Hilton does not reify sin as the body, but in the form of the body. The ‘merk’ image arises in the mind or soul of the one who has passed, at least temporarily, beyond bodily identification. By using apophatic language for this bodily image Hilton is implying that it is not perceivable within the sensory field. Spiritual sensation, for Hilton, involves the movement of the body and its faculties toward spiritual things, the ‘members’ of the image of sin invert this order showing the soul becoming bodily and ultimately beastly. Likewise the inverted image, which the reader is urged to examine carefully like an object, is a parody of the internalised image of the body of Christ. This internalised image of Christ in his humanity, as we have seen, was a frequent

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177 At the end of *Scale 2* the ‘image of sin’ is reified further reappearing as a vision of the devil, the vision remains spiritual though: ‘The soule biholdeth hym, not bodily but goostli, seynge his kynde and his malice, and turneth him upsodoun, or spoileth him and rendeth him al to nought’, 2/258/3496-3497.
178 Julian put it clearly: ‘The saule that thus (i.e. intensely) behaldys, it makys it lyke to hym that is behaldene’, *ST*, 268/17-18.
179 *Cloud*, 58/26-33.
180 *Scale* 2/214/2221-2224. By ‘Holy men’ Hilton could be referring to Rolle. This deference is, however, ambiguous. Unlike the *Cloud*-author Hilton says that ‘this maner of sight is suffrable to symple soulis, that kunne no betere seke Hym that is unseable’, *Scale* 2/214/2222-2229.
trope of devotional writing in the fourteenth century. Hilton himself uses Christ as the image of the soul in Scale 2.

The creation of a negative image of the body within the soul was therefore not just an internalised idol for Hilton. The awareness of the ‘merk’ image is positive in that it makes us aware of the roots of sin within the soul. The carnal nature of the soul must be faced and there is no better way to do this than to create a carnal image within the soul. This is a deeper ascesis than any denial of the flesh because it instils a painful self-loathing. Through our negative reaction to this internal ‘image of sin in bodily form’ the soul is redirected to God. The engagement of imaginative desire is appropriate for the work of self-knowledge, but not for contemplation per se. It is the imperfect who need imagery, those who have reached the heights of the scale of perfection do not. Hilton’s portrayal of sin as a bodily image in Scale 1 is not dissimilar to the Cloud’s critique of spirituality based only on imaginative visualization.

Hilton also has a nuanced approach to internal image of the humanity of Christ. Such a bodily image can take one further up the ladder than the self-knowledge of the image of sin because it engages affection as well as understanding. Through a positive response to this bodily image our soul is raised toward God. At the lowest level this image is instilled through religious art. In De tolerandis imaginibus Hilton argues that it is useful and proper for an absent friend – in this case Christ – to be remembered by a mnemonic sign that both teaches and moves the affection.

In Scale 1 Hilton’s concern is the recovery of Jesus within the soul. A mental image of Christ’s humanity becomes the way to reformation in feeling as well as in faith. Meditation on the humanity of Christ is the ‘door’ to contemplation. This image is not cultivated in the imagination but is the fruit of grace. It must be a bodily image that is seen spiritually:

Sodeynli thi thought is drawen up from alle worldli and fleischli thinges, and thee thendeth as thu seigh the in thi soul thi Lord Jhesu Crist in bodili liknesse as He was in erthe [...] Thanne whanne the mynde of Cristis passioun or ony poyn of His manhede is thus maad in thi herte bi siche goostli sight, with devout affeccioun answerynge therto, wite thou wel thanne that it is not thyn owen werkyng, ne feyngynge of noo wikkid spirit, but bi grace of the Holi Goost, for it is an openynge of the goostli iye into Cristis manhede.

181 Hilton never particularly encourages bodily penance. See Scale 1/56/ 599-607, Scale 2/234-235/2792-2814. 182 See ‘De tolerandis imaginibus’, Latin Writings, 1, pp. 198-199, and discussion in Minnis, 360-363. An affectionate relation to both the ‘bodily’ signs of the sacraments and those of religious representations is for Hilton the test of true devotion rather than the hypocrisy of heretics. 183 Scale 1/68/902-904,915-919.
The image of Christ displaces all other images. Like in the Cloud-author’s Epistle Christ has corporeal content but serves a kenotic role. The body for Hilton in Scale 1 is drawn into the soul as an image but only when that image is rejected and broken by grace working in the soul, is the contemplative capable of discovering the internal image of Jesus. The presence of Jesus involves the deconstruction of all images because they have their source in the carnal self. It would seem therefore that in contemplation the body as the source of external images and creator of internal imagination is left behind. However in Scale 2 Hilton explicitly says that the soul has two kinds of feelings: outward and inward, with the inward senses being the powers of the soul (mind, reason and will). If, as Hilton says, human identity is a rational soul then the vestiges of corporeality within the inner senses are without doubt the images of a fallen nature and as the soul moves away from external bodily awareness the process of painful self-knowledge begins. However that same bodily nature is restored in the Incarnation. In the spiritual sight of Jesus a body is still perceived within this ‘inner feeling’, though it is, as Hilton says, ‘not thyn owen werkynge’. Jesus is the same image restored as a mirror of divine grace. As the seven deadly sins are the members of the image of sin, so the seven gifts of the spirit are the members of the body of Christ working within the soul.

For Hilton Jesus is not the soul but an image within the soul, and as such – because of the relation of image to corporeality in the process of sensation – Jesus is bodily. In terms of contemporary perceptual phenomenology the body as an object of experience in the first person is displaced by one in the third person, the incarnate Christ. The human body plays a transitive role for the sake of the object but the object remains bodily. In Hilton’s thought there is a greater tension between image and apophasis than in the Cloud-author. The ‘image of Jesus’ once restored in the soul is not ‘transient’: it does not disappear in a further self-emptying of the Passion. It is not transitive either: it does not point to or require an imageless God. The ‘image of Jesus’ is itself ‘the experiential knowledge of God in the soul’. It constitutes the identity of the soul and the end of the spiritual path. The sense of self as separate from Christ is negated by Hilton. But this was always an ‘imaginial self’, never part of corporeal experience. Unlike the Cloud-author, Hilton does not make a second order negation of Christ’s alterity: Christ is not made a self-reflexive experience but remains ‘other’. Thus for Hilton the two key referential poles for bodily perception – felt sense of ‘self’ and of ‘other’ – are affirmed as real not imaginary.

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184 Scale 2/211/2122-2125.
186 Scale 2/155/2455-2456.
187 Scale 2/244-245/3108-3115.
Conclusion

Despite the differences between the Cloud-author’s and Hilton's use of apophatic motifs, some common themes have emerged regarding attitudes to the body. For both authors, cognisance of the body is part of the strategy for approaching the Divine transcendence. We have seen that for both God is not an object of perception and imagery; even that which expresses occlusion is drawn from sense perception. Therefore for both authors ‘corporeal’ and ‘spiritual’ vision – use of the bodily senses and of images derived from physical objects – cannot grasp God’s essence. ‘Intellectual’ vision alone can. However insofar as God is revealed in the ‘economy’ of salvation the invisible God has an image and is made flesh in Jesus.\(^{188}\) Both Hilton and the Cloud-author work with this tension, coming close to saying that there are two ways of relating to God. However instead of leaving it as paradox both authors set up a dialectic that hinges on the relation of image to body.

Firstly both accept that nothing can be said about the spiritual journey without the use of metaphor – even apophatic language is metaphorical. Secondly, they say that such language, not referring to physical things, must be read non-literally. ‘Apophatic language’ speaks only to the image-making faculties of the mind. However as all images are grounded in sense perception Hilton and the Cloud-author have to evolve strategies for keeping the noetic quality of spiritual imagery clear. The Cloud-author does it by a verbal minimalism, Hilton by reading scriptural stories as allegories for the spiritual life. Moreover by accepting God in bodily form both authors find a way out of the conundrum of the reciprocity of body and image. Images themselves may not be obstacles to contemplation as Christ acts as a true image of God in the flesh. How this image is appropriated again varies between the authors. The Cloud-author understands it is reflexive to the contemplative’s own awareness of their ‘naked self’ – an experience that is more sensate than conceptual. Hilton understands it as a mirror of divine grace which reflects the one image which is not dependent on fallen sense perception but comes from ‘above’.

Both writers, in describing redemption, link the body to the soul rather than to external objects. For the Cloud-author the sense of body – felt subjectively and stripped of qualities that relate to the ‘world’ – could be a stepping stone to the sense of God’s essence (felt intimately and yet beyond the reach of mental reflection). For Hilton the breaking down of the carnal self (that moves toward external objects) is the condition for finding the true self – body and soul – whereby sensuality is open to the spirit. As the fleshliness of the soul makes

\(^{188}\) Colossians 1:15, John 1:14.
the body merely into an expression of disordered desire, an ‘image of sin’ (which ultimately has no real existence), the restoration of the soul frees the body to act dispassionately – and thus harmoniously – within the episteme of sense perception. The warring of body and soul, for Hilton, could never be resolved by asceticism alone (asceticism is another form of conflict). However as a gift from one whose bodily life was always at the service of God harmony is restored by grace. Christ’s senses always dwelt within his soul, as such his ongoing corporeal presence is able to indwell every redeemed soul.

So, for these writers, there are two ways of being bodily. One way is denied, i.e. the one that involves the movement of the senses toward objects (the world) and itself as object in relation to others (the flesh). The other way of being bodily is accepted, i.e. the one which involves the movement of the senses toward the internal construction of images, and their processing within the mind. Their concern is the restraint of mental images but they achieve this through a denial of the outward movement of sensation. Both writers are at pains (the Cloud more so) to show that God is not arrived at through a turning of the physical senses inward. As physical they are naturally occupied with the physical world. Even to know things we have not seen comes through the combination of images gained from what we have. However by restraining their outward movement the inherent internal activity of the senses comes to the fore. The denial of external faculties of sensation means that the body becomes paradoxically the perfect image of apophasis. Its absence creates the possibility for God to be felt within, and sometimes at special moments, in the body itself.
Chapter Five: Body as Threshold and Meeting Place

In the previous four chapters we have seen that in Middle English mysticism there is a notable concern about the body. However bodies are different and the most obvious difference is gender. If the body shapes our approach to mystical experience, do men and women know God differently because they are differently embodied? This question can be answered in one of three ways: 1) the gendered body is irrelevant to spiritual matters; 2) one sex is intrinsically more suited to the spiritual quest; or 3) the gendered body shapes mutually distinct spiritualities. In this chapter I explore how spiritual experience might relate to gender difference, a concern that has dominated much recent writing on medieval mysticism. After an initial survey of scholarship, I focus on the gendered nature of the body through the writings of Rolle and Julian. This opens up a question regarding the relation of the apophatic and cataphatic traditions in this era, whether this has anything to contribute to the query about gendered knowledge of God. Can apophatic experience despite its eschewal of bodily ‘ways’ to God still be gendered?

In this chapter I will show that women mystical writers in the Middle Ages did not create a separate spirituality but drew out the possibilities that were implicit in popular devotion of the time. It is true that female mysticism in the later Middle Ages was identified with the body in a particular way. Women were associated in popular cultural consciousness with body as flesh. Medieval ideas about the body involved ideas about ‘form’ – either the outer form of the body that approximated to ideas about the soul, or the internalised forms of outward things that arose within the mind and heart because of corporeal sensation.¹ ‘Flesh’, Latin: caro, on the other hand, referred to the body as the seat of the passions to the body as the seat of passions. It nearly always implied a sense of lack or an excess in relation to the rationalised body, Latin: corpus.² Ascetical writers in the Middle Ages saw the body as under the shadow of the flesh. The body was made carnal through the passions which inflamed it. The Resurrected body on the other hand would be purely corpus, harmonious with the soul as the soul was free from passions. Women as body therefore signified receptive matter (either passive or desiring) but also the potential for completion and perfection within a well ordered whole.³ Much mystical writing by women, especially in the late Middle Ages, was orientated toward corporeal experience as a way to know God. Instead of emphasising the soul as the

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¹ Bryan, pp. 35-38.
² Bourreau, pp. 7-8.
³ Biernoff, pp. 34-37.
rationalising principle that bridges body and spirit they saw the flesh as a direct instrument of salvation. Through relation to Christ the carnal affections of the soul were made spiritual.4

The fact that the criterion for the veracity of women’s spiritual experience was often felt to be bodily quiescence shows the divergence between women’s self-perception and the dominant theological anthropology of the time. Scholars have debated whether this was the result of the social conditioning of the era or whether it was a stereotype constructed more by medical attitudes to physiology. Others have observed that female mystics were able to use their association with the body to emphasise the incarnate quality of their contact with Christ. The late Middle Ages was a time when the body was associated with God in a very real way. Physical experience could be in some sense a privileged way of contemplation. The similarities of Rolle and Julian in their emphasis on the body, show that this was true not just for women but for the whole culture of the time.

The question as to whether this distinctively bodily quality of women’s mysticism is due to an essentialist or a conditioned gender difference is, in a sense, anachronistic. It is a modern concern that is read into earlier tests. This may be helpful in highlighting the nature of gender distinction in the Middle Ages but a study of Rolle’s and Julian’s writings shows that the important issue for them was the validity of the Via Carnis. It also does not take into account the impulse of some mystical writing, like that of Rolle and Julian, to cross boundaries and reconcile opposites. There is little concern in their writing to analyse or compartmentalise religious experience along gender lines.

The question in this chapter is linked to the previous four. In chapter One I discussed sensory language in mysticism in the writings of Rolle and the author of the Cloud. The division into a Via Affirmativa and Via Negativa in relation to the body and its ‘place’ in the practice and understanding of contemplation allowed questions to arise regarding the use of sensory language for mystical experience and its negation as gendered paths: the feminine as affective, emotional and visionary and the masculine as speculative, intellectual and anti-visionary. In chapter Two I showed that the anthropological models used by Hilton and Julian, while distinguishing body and soul, work toward their resolution and integration. Bodily participation and detachment from the senses played a role in their mysticism: Hilton emphasised the functional dualism between body and soul that is part of the ascetic disciplining of the corporeal by spiritual practice, Julian emphasised the ontological wholeness of the human person – God is encountered in body as well as in soul. Their

differences could also be influenced by gender, the feminine being the holistic, incarnate, sensory, the masculine being the dualistic, transcendent and ascetic. In chapter Three I showed how bodily perception was understood as closely bound to mental processes. The relation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ sensation helps explain how, despite the epistemological distinctions they make between physical and spiritual sensation, the body and soul are ‘tied together’ by these authors. In chapter Four I explored how this perceptual model shaped writers like Hilton and the Cloud author through their use of blindness, nakedness and the deconstruction of images as a way to God. The closing down of ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ sensation opens a way for doing justice to God’s transcendence, although the body itself is not denied, its relevance continues as an image of apophasis – the naked self that consists of simple biological existence without the accretion of desire or self-consciousness.

Gender, as an embodied fact, was important to Rolle and Julian. In terms of the soul outside the experience of embodiment, neither made a distinction between male and female approaches to God. In the context of recent scholarship on gender, I firstly examine the tension between the mystics’ own accounts and hagiographical and/or inquisitorial accounts of the place of the body in prayer. Secondly, I analyse the connection between gender and the late-medieval fascination with the corporeal effects of spiritual life. The close link between ‘vision’ and the bodily senses in the writings of Rolle and Julian stands in contrast with contemporary theories of rapture which stressed bodily insensibility. In the third section I explore how Rolle and Julian describe a bodily encounter with Christ that is much more complex and cannot be fitted simply into distinct male and female gender ‘spiritualities’. In the last part, I broaden the gender issue to demonstrate how the integration of the body in mysticism created a ‘language of inclusion’. This subverts the polarities of late medieval culture around which religion understood itself.

The meaning of gender in the late Middle Ages was not limited to the difference between men and women. The physical body of both sexes was understood to share varied ‘gendered’ constitutions. Mystical writers, in particular, understood gender more in terms of the body than the different sexes. Hence men could share – even physiologically – feminine characteristics, and women, masculine ones. The cultural understanding of gender overlapped with the medical one. In terms of religious practice a gendered reading expected that women would do ‘external practice’ in that their ascesis was predominantly in the arena of the flesh. Men were not expected to evidence bodily signs of redemption as their practice was understood to be more ‘internal’, although the mystical writers I study challenge this stereotype. Rolle, for example, witnessed mystical experiences with physical manifestations,
while Julian constantly pushed through from the corporeal and imagistic content of her visions to the inner meaning they expressed.

Mary Douglas writing on the socialising function of religion maintains that “it is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created”\(^5\). Rolle’s and Julian’s writings subvert this order. If one looks at their attitudes to the body in relation to gender dualities we soon see that the body is a meeting place for opposites in many other categories as well. The body serves as a threshold, a place where the inner and outer world meets. It is the ambiguating influence of the body as both external and internal, heavenly and earthly, male and female, dangerous and helpful that enables these writers to present a vision of the human person that is capable of union with a God who does not have an opposite.

The body therefore becomes a key tool for breaking down the perceived dualities that order and classify human experience, thus opening it to contemplation of God who is beyond all human distinctions. The body becomes a tool for apophatic theology. In human experience it is the place where differences meet and it is this corporeal threshold when we pass from one world to the other that Rolle and Julian use to show the Christians’ non-duality with Christ. In this chapter I will show – pace Douglas – that these texts do not serve the socialising function of religion. As mystical texts Rolle’s and Julian’s writing describe an encounter with a God who does not fit with spatial, gender or even ethical categories that only exist in relation to opposites. In sociological terms the experience of God they describe is not dependent on exclusion.

**Mysticism and Gender: Recent Scholarship**

There are two streams within Middle English mysticism: one draws on what Beckwith has called ‘the late-medieval obsession with incarnation’, the other reaches out to an apophatic contemplation of God where images of Christ are removed as the bodily sense perception from which they derive is negated.\(^6\) Bynum is the leading writer on the specific characteristics of female mysticism in the later Middle Ages and reads these differences along gender lines. Medieval women made creative use of their cultural association with the body whereas male writers had a mistrust of psycho-physical phenomena in mysticism: “Women

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\(^6\) *Christ’s Body*, p. 17.
were more apt to somatise religious experience and to write in intense bodily metaphors, women mystics were more likely than men to receive graphically physical visions of God."

She gives a number of historical reasons for this: 1) outside any institutional teaching role in the late medieval Church their charismatic experiences gave them an authority direct from God, 2) linking spirituality to the body counteracted Cathar dualism, 3) their exclusion from scholastic discourse and use of vernaculars that were often shaped by love poetry and romantic stories, 4) both culturally and biologically women were associated with bodily issues.

A number of problems arise from reading this contrast as too marked and as expressive of gender difference. Firstly, as Hollywood observed, to see the difference of cataphatic and apophatic mysticism as gendered does not fit the evidence. In polarising types of mysticism that normally coexist, the problems are further compounded by linking ‘types’ of mysticism with gender. In fact, the association of feminine mysticism with the body and male mysticism with the disembodied soul is called into question in the late Middle Ages.

Bernard or Francis of Assisi, for example, were pioneers in their devotion to the humanity of Christ and its incorporation into mystical understanding. If one takes a gendered reading of mysticism, Rolle shows a ‘feminized mysticism’. On the other hand Margaret Porete in the fourteenth century was critical of corporeal and imaginative visions and Meister Eckhart’s strongly apophatic theology was influenced by the Beguine movement of which Margaret was part. Visionary literature, often associated with women, moves toward a sense of the ineffable.

The field of Women’s Studies – especially in twentieth-century literary theory – has emphasised that most texts about women are written by men and, at least until the mid-twentieth century, automatically assumed male readership making an androcentric perspective the default viewpoint on the world. In the field of medieval mysticism Hollywood critiques Bynum’s stress on the difference between male and female mysticism in the later Middle Ages. She points out that it is in hagiographical descriptions of women (by men) and not women’s mystical writings themselves that the emphasis on psycho-somatic experiences and bodily asceticism is highlighted. Hollywood looks at the writings of a thirteenth-century

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7 Fragmentation and Redemption, pp.194-215 (194).
9 See also Beckwith, Christ’s Body, pp. 14-16.
11 Sensible Ecstasy, pp. 6-13.
mystic from the low countries, Beatrice of Nazareth, to show that the distinctions between ‘external’ bodily, visionary or at least visibly symptomatic manifestations of mysticism with their corresponding emphasis on external practices and ‘internal’ self-naughting in response to the transcendence of God are constructed less from actual mystical texts than from hagiographies.  

In a later work, however, Bynum notes that in women’s writing in the later Middle Ages the ‘somatic’ and the ‘apophatic’ approaches to God were not read anthropologically but subsumed into a cosmic expression of divine-human relations. The male signifies the divinity and the female the humanity. In the person of Christ these are brought together. This, Bynum argues, is one of the reasons why female mysticism emphasises its relation to the humanity of Christ. It was this sense of humanity as entailing bodiliness (although not reducible to it) that women expressed in expanding the male/female dichotomy from spirit/flesh to divine/human.”  

Bynum points out that although medieval thinkers expected women’s expressiveness to be more physical and physiological than men’s this was not necessarily misogyny as they associated the body with God. Christ’s flesh was seen as feminine, coming from Mary, and showed characteristics culturally and biologically tied to women like nurturing, bleeding, etc.  

Bynum believes that the feminine in the later Middle Ages went through a symbolic morphing from an association with flesh-caro, to body-corpus and then to humanity-homo, and then, through the humanity of Christ to God: “To women, the notion of the female as flesh became an argument for women’s Imitatio Christi through physicality. Subsuming the male/female dichotomy into the more cosmic dichotomy divine/human, women saw themselves as the symbol for all humanity [...] such usage tended both to obscure any sense of body/soul dichotomy (for both body and soul were human) and to imply that humanness intimately involved physicality.”  

Bynum sees women writers as playing their part in a general movement within late medieval intellectual and religious culture. The late-medieval concern with physicality was prompted by ecclesial reaction to dualistic heresies: “All religiosity of the period was animated in deep ways by the need to take account of (rather than merely to deny) matter, body, and sensual response”.  

Bynum also points out the parallelism between devotion to the Eucharist as the Corpus Christi and to relics at this time. “More than any other factor”, she writes, “it was the cult of the saints that introduced into Christian theology and practice a

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14 Holy Feast, pp. 263-264.
15 Ibid, p. 204.
16 Ibid, pp. 251-253 (253).
sense of the power of the body”.

Mirroring this, theological writing of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries came to treat the relationship between body and soul as much tighter and more integral than previously. The human person was seen as a psychosomatic unity. Female writers and, in general, medieval thinkers, used gender imagery fluidly rather than literally, while associating the body with women. The soul, for example, was constantly seen as feminine because of its relation to God. Men often expressed their conversion to monastic life in terms of gender reversal because of the renunciation of worldly power and prestige.

This general religious background raises another major issue of contemporary Women’s Studies: is gender – i.e. ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as opposed to biological sex – partly or entirely a social construct? Both Hollywood and Beckwith argue that women’s mysticism of the time was conditioned by culture rather than gender. They see Bynum as favouring too ‘essentialist’ a gender difference. Beckwith argues that it was new devotional focus on Christ’s birth and passion and not any gender attributes which highlighted two moments when the claims of the body were emphasised.

Other writers like Elizabeth Robertson and Karma Lochrie argue that Bynum does not give enough attention to how women’s spirituality at this time was rooted in the specificity of their bodies. Robertson argues that it was women’s bodily functions that became the dominant cultural metaphor for a relationship with God. Mystical and bodily processes were superimposed. This is not only true in such obvious roles of giving birth, bleeding and feeding imagery but also of the soul’s longing for God. Woman in medieval medical literature was perceived as carrying excess moisture, as cold, wet and as incomplete. The desire of women, often seen as insatiable, was considered to have its root in bodily need. If this was true of eroticism it was also true of spirituality; union with Christ’s suffering body allowed woman to realise her perceived biological needs.

Thus Robertson writes that “female spirituality (at this time) is expressed not only through the body, as Bynum argues, but also through those parts and activities of the body that are understood as ‘essentially’ female”.

Robertson agrees with Bynum that the female body was not a prohibition in mysticism, although she draws attention to the way in which the body conditioned the form

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17 Ibid, p. 255.
18 Fragmentation and Redemption, pp. 222–229.
20 Jesus as Mother, pp. 68-74.
22 ‘Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the Ancrene Wisse and Julian of Norwich’s Showing’, FABML, pp. 142-150.
23 Ibid, pp. 149-150.
that mysticism took. In other words the 'construction' of women’s mysticism – the focus on the physical and sensual in female spiritual works – was an internalisation or reaction to prescriptive medical discourse about women’s bodies. Robertson agrees that moisture, the physical and the flesh could be adopted as meditative concerns for men as well, but because the very nature of the male soul was perceived as separate from the body, these meditations were only part of a progress, an ascent to God, that ultimately transcended the flesh. Women, because of the biological roots of their desire, were seen as unable to transcend the flesh. This, Robertson argues, led to the notion, forwarded both by and for women, that their experience of union with Christ – and the bodily metaphors in which it was described – had to be literal and concrete. Robertson questions whether among women mystical writers the exaggeration of this *via carnis* may be a subtle form of subversion by overdoing, of mockery by hyperbole.

Lochrie likewise agrees that women at this time were not identified with the body but with the flesh. She argues that while medieval notions about the body intersect the theological function of the *Imitatio Christi*, the ‘flesh’ was understood, by writers like Augustine and Bernard, as ‘self-will’, not just passivity but ‘the principle of disruption in the human psyche’. Women were seen, in both anthropological and medical perspectives, as pervious, excessive and susceptible to external influences. The ‘flesh’, Lochrie observes, was as much a moral category as a physical one. The senses follow the will, and vice-versa. As the combination of the senses and the recalcitrant will, *caro* was a heterogeneous merger of body and soul. This fluidity of boundaries was part of the disharmony the condition expressed.

The distinction of ‘flesh’ and ‘body’, Lochrie believes, differentiates the mystical practices of male and female at this time. Though there may have been a general movement toward passion mysticism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, similar bodily practices among men and women were rendered different through gendered ideology: “Men begin from a position of the spirit”, Lochrie writes, “women from the flesh”. The pervious, excessive and susceptible nature of sensuality made those particularly associated with it especially liable to perversion and in need of redemption. However at the same time it gave the feminine *Imitatio Christi* a quality of sensual realism that gave them, paradoxically, a position from which to speak and write. “The woman writer”, Lochrie says, “potentially occupies the site of

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24 Ibid, p. 158.
26 Ibid, pp. 24-27.
27 Ibid, p. 23.
rupture, where excess and unbridled affections threaten the masculine idea of integrity of the body”.

The corporeal aspect of women’s relation to God in rapture and in mortification was clearly *not* metaphorical or symbolic. It manifested a distinctly physiological and often literal conformity to Christ’s humanity.

Hence in Lochrie’s analysis women’s mysticism takes two forms: a self-generated asceticism aimed at controlling the flesh and an involuntary participation of the redeemed flesh in para-mystical phenomena. In Lochrie’s view the fluidity of boundaries between the inside and outside of the body and between body and soul meant that in the late Middle Ages the first impulse took the form of enclosure, the sealing of the body (and speech). The second resulted in a search for fleshly transformation, for perfection from the place of disruption.

The shades of approach of these scholars depend on how they see the interaction between the sensory content of mystical experience and the cultural context that shapes its interpretation and expression. This is beyond the scope of this study, although for the purposes of analysing attitudes to the body in late medieval mysticism, a number of relevant points have been raised: 1) the tension in late medieval mysticism between the spiritual and the corporeal dimensions of experience cannot be read simply along gender lines because of the variety of women’s and men’s writings; 2) there seems to be a cultural association between women and the body which influences mystical writing. Such conditioning must be carefully examined through distinguishing what women themselves wrote about their experience and how it was portrayed by others; 3) gender was given wider symbolic and theological content than just the body, although the root of this symbolism was still closely associated with how physiological processes and constitutions were understood; 4) the physiological in turn was read according to a theological narrative that affected the way women’s spirituality in particular was practised; 5) the body became in late medieval piety an increasingly important focus of regulation and identification.

Ascetic ideologies did not imply the neglect or denial of the body but a deeper absorption into it. The regulation of the body required a great deal of attention, indirectly elevating and affirming its importance. Likewise late medieval religiosity in its orthodox form focused on images of Christianity – the crucified Christ and the Eucharist – that were

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28 Ibid, p. 4.
recognised as intensely physical. Faith and bodily feeling were drawn closely together. This is clear in the writings of both men and women. I demonstrate this in the next section when I compare the Passion mysticism of Rolle and Julian in the light of recent scholarship on gender difference in mysticism by examining their attitudes to bodily pain and healing. In doing so I demonstrate how medieval medical attitudes were relevant to mystical descriptions of the body.

**Bodily Sanctity as Spectacle in the Later Middle Ages**

From the twelfth century asceticism intensified in Western Europe. This may have been an attempt to outdo – and thereby evangelise – those who combined asceticism with dualistic teachings about the evil of the material world. The Cathars (Albigensians) fasted three days every week and an additional forty days every year over and above what the Catholic Church asked. Such asceticism was to free the ‘light soul’ from the prison of ‘dark materiality’, from a world that was not only evil but unredeemable (in that it was created evil). Catholic asceticism from the high Middle Ages was closely linked to mysticism. A number of late medieval ascetics – particularly women, were able to live entirely without nourishment. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) died from her ascetic ordeals. However applying the modern medical diagnoses of ‘anorexia’ to medieval fasting as Rudolf Bell does, despite similar destructive symptoms, is anachronistic to medieval understandings. For the mystical writers Bell looks at, bodily penance was an expression of devotion to the humanity of Christ in his poverty and suffering, not simply a denial of the body. Catholic asceticism affirmed the body in relation to Christ.

As Drew Leder has pointed out in a recent phenomenological study of the human body, physical pain makes the body present to lived experience. Augustine had already seen

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31 In England there was however also a popular reaction to this in Lollardy. A movement which had its genesis in scholastic debate. See *Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Hudson, p. 142: ‘That Christ is not in the sacrament of the altar identically, truly, and really in his proper corporal presence.’

32 An extreme form of nutritional deprivation, the *endura*, was practised as well: terminally ill sect members would fast themselves to death; sick babies would be deprived of their milk, a practice that was called ‘preparing a good end’. Ladurie, pp. 223- 230.


34 Both the *Miracoli* composed contemporaneously in 1374 and Raymond of Capua’s *Legenda Maior* written at Catherine’s death, give testimony that she practised complete abstinence from the age of twenty-three, that she wore a hair shirt and stayed up most of the night in prayer and whipped herself until she drew blood. *‘Miracoli of Catherine of Siena’, Dominican Penitent Women*, ed. & tr. Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, (NY: Paulist, 2005), Chs. 8, 9, 11. ‘Legenda Maior De S. Catherina Senensis’, *Acta Sanctorum*, (Paris: Palme, 1866), pp. 876-880.


health as ‘sensing, feeling nothing’. The extreme asceticism of the later Middle Ages could therefore be read not as a flight from the body but further immersion in it. Certainly Catholic ascetic practices were not understood as an escape from an unredeemable world, or as private matters, but were part of the Church’s mission to the world. Through penance the soul was not only purified but other souls were saved. As a collective practice disciplina (whipping) was institutionalized in fourteenth-century Dominican convents in southern Germany. Self mortification was codified in the hagiography of St Dominic where he was shown scourging himself with a chain and wearing an iron shirt in the heat. Also the even more influential model of Francis who, according to Bonaventure, “called his body Brother Ass, saying that it was to be laden with heavy burdens, beaten with many stripes, and fed with poor and scanty food”. The mendicant Orders helped to spread such ascetical ideals to the laity.

Popular spirituality in the late Middle Ages was moving toward the outwardly visible and tangible: relics, holy places, devotion to the Eucharist as the ‘real presence’, bodily miracles, supernatural effects on the body (stigmata being only one of many), asceticism that went beyond ordinary human capability, intensely physical visions and visualisations of the body of Christ. Even Hollywood admits that in fourteenth-century women’s writings, women take on a close identification with phenomena of the outer body. Hollywood argues that the popular interest in corporeally demonstrable forms of sanctity in the later Middle Ages is linked to, and develops from, the increased use of bodily metaphor in religious writing. The body of holy people (and those whose holiness and orthodoxy was suspect) became the focus of both hagiographic and inquisitional attention. Hollywood has pointed out how there was a tendency to focus on psycho-physical manifestations in hagiographical accounts of women mystics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Women’s use of bodily metaphors for their inner or spiritual experience was transferred onto the outward body by those who promoted the cause of their holiness to an audience that was interested in outwardly visible manifestations of holiness. Hollywood notes the irony that while the mystical texts of the women themselves at this time do not want to place the body as the sole or prime arena of

37 Sermons, III/8, p. 36.
38 Such is the conclusion of much of Bynum’s work.
40 Early Dominican Selected Writings, ed. & trans. Simon Tugwell, (NY: Paulist, 1982), pp. 73, 76.
41 Life of St Francis, p. 49.
42 Tinsley, p. 3.
43 Soul as Virgin Wife, p. 22. Hollywood uses Julian as an example of a mystic who emphasised real bodily sufferings and its redemptive capacities.
Divine action, the hagiographic writers like to give somatic evidence to authenticate the holiness of the mystic. Bodily metaphor is read in terms of paramystical bodily phenomena. Visionary and auricular mysticism that rose to a peak in late Middle Ages was reported in language of the senses. Hollywood argues that this bodily language was increasingly taken as literal by fourteenth-century mystics and their audience because of a demand for physical manifestation for holiness. Alongside this, and among some mystics, there was an apophatic critique of anagogical use of bodily language for spiritual things. These (Hollywood gives the example of Eckhart and Porete) emphasise direct experience unmediated by image. Hollywood writes of Julian as a mystic inhabiting both paradigms, and therefore one who suffers greatly from the tension: “The image she contemplates causes suffering because of its subject matter – Christ on the cross, and also because, as an image, it is always at a remove from the Divine presence.” The mystic must make this image of the suffering Christ real by suffering in imitation. Realist bodily language about Christ, in other words, needs real bodily suffering to substantiate it. The contemplative has to become the bodily icon of that image for it to be ‘true’.

The visionary mode of mystical writing has a built in bias in that vision is connected to imagination which, in medieval understandings of psychology, is linked with the senses. The mystic’s suffering hinges on the fact that in ascetical literature the bodily senses are traditionally seen as extremely limited if not quite incapable of perceiving God. According to Hollywood the late medieval mystic has to go down one of two avenues: through the senses, accepting the suffering implicit in limitation, or denying the senses, image and vision and therefore taking the path of apophasis. “Imagination and apophasis”, she says, “are two divergent means of dealing with absence and suffering.” In the former path – of visionary mysticism – because the bodily senses are being stretched beyond their normal capacities in their orientation toward spiritual realities, they suffer. The soul of the visionary mystic suffers because it cannot break free of its dependence on the body. This is why, according to Hollywood, some late thirteenth-early fourteenth-century mystical writers like Eckhart and Porete rejected ‘somatic’ visionary experiences. This is a gender issue because such experiences were perceived to be particularly ‘the path’ for women.

45 *Soul as Virgin Wife*, pp. 22-23.
If we look at the figure of Richard Rolle though we see that this was not just a path for women. In chapter One we saw how in Rolle’s ecstasies his emotional and affective response to God involved the corporeal senses. His language of near equivalence – ‘as if’ the senses were occupied with a corporeal object when in fact they are engaged with God – shows that, for him, sense experience follows the movement of the soul. Holiness, as well as sinfulness, has bodily manifestations. The body that paradigmatically shows holiness of soul is that of Christ. In the attributed Passion meditations the experience of pain and sensual deprivation is likewise given visible, tangible form in the body of Christ. Both voluntary and involuntary pain is used in religious praxis as a way to insight. Rolle does not give a personal account of physical suffering but he constructs an imaginary body that expresses pain. For Rolle the image of Christ in his passion plays the role of an angel, translating spiritual reality into that which can be apprehended by the bodily senses and imagination, consoling subjective pain and drawing the sick soul into a healthy relation with the body.

The mediatory role of the bodily images of Christ in Rolle’s Meditations show that, for him, the purpose of religious imagination is not to distract from physical suffering but to give meaning to it. As the socio-psychologist Elaine Scarry has shown, there is a strong link between the experience of pain and the use of imagination. Scarry’s theory is that discomfort in the senses propels the person away from the body, while pleasure attracts us to our senses. Because pain is aversive it is the most inchoate sense, eluding and undermining the language used to describe it. Imagination, according to Scarry, enables pain to be objectified. In pain the mind naturally uses images to express and explain an experience which, left without referal content, would be be destabilising and potentially destructive of a meaningful sense of self. In medieval terminology – not used by Scarry – the soul uses images to reassure and console precisely because images, though not within the sphere of bodily sentience, engage the emotive and affective faculties of the mind that respond to sense stimuli.

There is a difference in genre between the Passion meditation in texts associated with Rolle and those of Julian in her Showings. The former draw on many traditional motifs and images. If various Meditations on the Passion did not circulate in manuscripts along with Rolle’s work it is debateable how distinctively Rollean they are. They are traditional in

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46 Fite speaks of Rolle’s ‘feminized spirituality’, 13-29.
48 He opens his Meditations with a prayer: ‘[Christ] be myn help in al myn angwysch and my fondynges by sendyng me, Lord, the angel of red and of comfort in alle my nedys that I myghte turne […] owt of al sekenesse of soule into lyf of hele of body’. ‘Text 1’, English Writings, 19-20/12-16.
50 For something of the debate see page 15, note 32 of this thesis.
relation to other Passion meditations of the time. Julian shows some indebtedness also to this tradition of ‘constructed’ visual meditations. However she emphasises that what she was shown was not an imagine construct but was a super-natural vision. Much of the content of the Passion images are highly original and the way she describes what she sees is very distinctive. With these caveats in mind it is still possible to compare the texts associated with Rolle and those written by Julian: as attempts to articulate and give meaning to human suffering.

Julian, in an even more vivid way, uses the image of the body of Christ to lift her from her personal suffering to a meaning valid for all her ‘evyn Christens’. Like with Rolle, Christ’s sufferings offer a hermeneutic which transforms pain into heavenly insight:

He sheweth us chere of passion, as he bare in this life his crosse, therfore we be in disees and traveyle with him, as our kind asketh. And the cause why that he sufferereth is for he wille of his goodnes make us the eyers with hym in his blisse. And for this litille paine that we suffer heer, we shalle have an high, endlesse knowing in God, which we might never have without that [pain].

The mode of imagistic meditation in Julian’s Showings is ‘the distance senses’ i.e. sight and hearing in contrast to the immediate senses of taste and touch. These are, as Scarry argues, natural analogues for the imagination in that, through them, the perceiving subject is released from the prison of the body. They are normally exclusively bound up with their object rather than their bodily location. Only in the experience of malfunction – ear ache, pain in the eye, etc. – do we become aware of the sense in itself. Interestingly Augustine also sees ‘sight’ as dependent on distance: ‘unless there’s some interval between the eyes of the seer and the body being seen, it cannot be seen at all; because if, by moving the eyes (which something is seen by) too close you touch them with it, by eliminating any space you forego any sight.’ From the twelfth century, as Rudy has observed, mystical writers, following Bernard, used imagery of taste and touch to imply an immediate and experiential contact with God. This contact was also reciprocal; touch or taste always affects the object sensed, in a way sight and hearing need not.

However in Julian’s case there is a close reciprocity between the image of Christ and her own bodily experience. Not just the imaginative faculties of her mind but her senses

52 For general background see Baker, Vision to Book, Chs 1 & 2.
53 See Watson and Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, WJN, p.3.
54 LT, WJN, 193/20-24.
55 Scarry, p. 165.
56 Sermons, III/8, p. 42.
57 Rudy, pp. 5, 55-61, 67.
engage in the vision and her body itself is healed. In this, her Showings unlike Rolle’s Meditations, are a vision rather than a visualisation practice. In Julian’s emphasis on bodily participation in Christ’s suffering, her approach is more similar to Sigmund Freud’s who understood bodily pain not as an impulse to psychological projection but as a precondition for bodily self-discovery: “Pain seems to play a part in the process, and the way in which we gain new knowledge of our organs during painful illness is perhaps a model of the way by which in general we arrive at the idea of our own body.” Hence what Scarry and Rudy see as sense faculties that ‘flee’ or at least ‘distance’ the body become for Julian a way into the body’s experience.

Rolle uses touch and taste in his more ecstatic Latin writings. The context of this use is to show that his experiences are not imaginary; they are caused by no external object and yet they involve the bodily senses. Pleasurable experiences (Scarry might say) have no need of external displacement through an image. In Meditations on the Passion ‘sight’ is emphasised. The context here is clearly that of imaginative meditation. This need for an external image is tempered by the fact that Rolle encourages it to be contemplated inwardly. In this movement of interiority the image, like with Julian, becomes increasingly subjective and personal. Rolle prays that the likeness of Christ’s face (that he sees spat on and mocked in the Passion) be restored in his soul. Julian says that “the chaunge of his blisseful chere changed mine”.

For both the use of imaginative vision and audition is not a displacement of sense perception but a participation in Christ’s suffering. Here the parallel with Scarry’s study of the body in pain ends – for the roles are inverted – the suffering image is not an objectification of personal pain but is actually the cause and substance of that pain. Julian’s illness is a somatic expression of what Christ suffers; she prays that “my body might be fulfilled with mind and feeling of his blessed passion [...] that his paines were my paines”.

Certainly, as Ariel Glucklich argues, Scarry’s thesis of pain as an impulse to imagination is, for the mystics, just one method among others for making meaning of pain. Religious discourse just as often describes it as a way of empathy, or even playing a vicarious role for others. In Rolle’s and Julian’s case that ‘other’ is Christ. For Rolle and Julian, an emphasis on spiritual vision and locution (within the context of prayer that uses the imagination) does not involve a detachment from personal sense experience. The type of

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59 ‘Meditation B’, RRPV, 72/142-143.
spirituality they show lends itself to the expectation of bodily effects. The solitude that Rolle practices and preaches is appropriate to the state of his soul which seeks God alone. His experience of bodily heat expresses the warmth of his devotion. His love of silence, the cultivation of the heavenly song in his soul. Julian’s bodily sickness manifests her prayer to share in the sufferings of Christ. Her healing is the bodily result of the love of which Christ’s sufferings are themselves illustrative. The fact that bodily manifestation was common to both Rolle and Julian shows that such phenomena cannot be rigidly tied to a specific gender.

One aspect of body based mysticism that had a greater impact on women than on men was the way external manifestations of mystical experience became an increasingly important criterion for the discernment of spirits. The medieval debate over the testing of spirits focussed with particular intensity on women. The interpretation of bodily signs became central for the diagnosing of a particular mystic’s rapture as authentic or the result of demonic possession. As Nancy Caciola points out, “The result of the devotional practices of late medieval women was an experience of identification with the suffering body of the human Christ so intense that it often was said to be somatically manifested in the woman’s own body. Paramystical transformations such as immobile and insensible trances, reception of the stigmata, or uncontrollable fits and crying were commonly reported of women visionaries, and were understood by them as the physical side effects of their spiritual union with the divine. These forms of devotion also inspired heated controversy. This new cultural idiom – with its emphasis upon union with God through the interior penetration of His spirit into the body – provided a uniquely apt parallel to the already existing concept of demonic possession.”

The body was read for signs that could distinguish rapture that was divinely caused from that caused by other influences. Although the vision could not be verified by others, the physical effects of a trance such as rigidity, immobility or insensitivity, were considered proof that an individual was in a true state of rapture. From these texts about ‘discernment of spirits’ Caciola sees that a common metaphor was that the body ‘clothed’ the spirit like a garment or cloak that could be temporarily cast off or put on again. The reason why complete insensibility was a criterion for true rapture was that they believed that in such a state the spirit was literally absent from the body.

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63 Hollywood, Sensible Ecstasy, pp. 246, 256.
64 Discerning Spirits, p. 15.
65 Ibid, p. 64.
66 Ibid p. 66.
What Caciola does not point out is that a certain ambiguity in the relation of mystical rapture and the body was an issue of scholastic debate in the later Middle Ages. *Quaestio’s* focused on whether the spirit can be ‘out of body’ and the body still live. Is the idea of being ‘out of the body’ real or a metaphor?\(^{67}\) Augustine, using a tripart model of the soul, thought it possible that the *Nous* could leave the body while the body could still be animated by the *Mens*.\(^{68}\) However, Aquinas, showing the Aristotelian influence of the later Middle Ages, argues that the soul, as the substantial form of the body, does not have parts and is reluctant to see the soul leaving the body except at death.\(^{69}\) There is a certain flexible agnosticism on this issue in writing on mysticism going back to St Paul: ‘Whether in the body or out of the body I do not know.’\(^{70}\)

It is this ambiguity in the understanding of rapture current in the later Middle Ages which allows two sets of criteria to be applicable to male and female mystics. In chapter One I established this difference when comparing the attitudes to rapture *in* and *out* of the body in the writings of Rolle and the author of the *Cloud*. Women’s mysticism at this time tended to experience the body as a locus of Divine encounter, although the criteria for evaluating this mysticism became increasingly that it should be completely non-bodily phenomena. Looking at the history of this debate from a phenomenological point of view, Nelson Pike argues that a distinction has to be made between the fact that the body is dependent on the soul for its existence and the *feeling* that ordinary sense perception (and concomitant self-consciousness) is completely stilled in states of rapture.\(^{71}\) Such a distinction between ontology and psychology was implicit in medieval debates and therefore tended to emphasise rapture as subjective – the way the mystic felt their body to be – rather than as an actual state.

Women’s record of their mystical experience tells a different story. The difficulty of discerning inner experience was compounded by the fact that women’s mysticism, like that of Julian, overwhelmingly witnessed to the feeling of being ‘in the body’. Female mystics emphasised the body, and in particular the female body, as a locus of encounter with God. They described their senses as actively engaged, not rendered passive or quiescent. ‘Experience’ is a difficult category to define, as recent scholars of mysticism have pointed

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\(^{68}\) Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, Bk. 2, Ch. 5, para. 14.

\(^{69}\) Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 11-11, Q 175, a. 5 + 6.

\(^{70}\) See II Corinthians 12: 2-4.

\(^{71}\) Pike, pp. 31-32.
However if we follow McGinn in keeping together descriptions of experience with the interpretations given them, we can safely say that women mystics at this time neither understood nor described their encounter with God as an ‘out-of-body’ state, they felt God as much in and through the body as in a purely spiritual way.\textsuperscript{73}

For women’s mysticism therefore the ‘stilling’ of the body needed to be external, hence the emphasis on enclosure. The practice of enclosure, so common in late medieval England, is seen by Jennifer Bryan as symptomatic of a dominant concern for the ‘inner self’ created and maintained through obsessive attention to its borders.\textsuperscript{74} Enclosure of the body was paradigmatic; from physical incarceration to the emphasis on the silence of the tongue. If the body, even in rapture, was felt to be alive, objectively demonstrable forms of discipline and control were expected. The rite of enclosure for an anchorite was a funeral rite. It was also an increasingly feminine vocation in the later Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{75} The fact that bodily mysticism affirmed the coherence of \textit{feeling} and bodily fact – that the body was alive – meant that the subjective and the objective aspects of the body – the psychological and the biological – were in harmony. This experience undoubtedly shaped the integrative anthropology evident in Julian’s thought. As we have seen in chapter Two, with the example of Julian, there was an attempt among women mystics to link feminine bodily experience to the experience of God.

However this also shows the difference between women’s self-perception and the dominant theological anthropology of the time. This is a gendered issue as the male body was often considered to be in the image of God through the immediacy of its creation and through the Incarnation of Christ as a man. The issue as to whether women’s bodies, as well as their soul, were in the image of God was debated and often answered in the negative. Positively it was understood as the ‘glory of man’ rather than the ‘image of God’.\textsuperscript{76} It was for this reason that women could not represent Christ as priests at the altar.\textsuperscript{77} They had to image holiness in other demonstrable ways, often in extreme forms of denial. The feminine body as such, having not been assumed in the Incarnation, could not be a point of contact with God.


\textsuperscript{74} Bryan, pp. 45-48.


\textsuperscript{77} See Caciola, \textit{Discerning Spirits}, pp. 136-139.
light it is not surprising that the criterion for women’s mystical union became complete corporal quiescence: enclosure was a way of making the body invisible but in a publically visible way – anchorages from the thirteenth century tended to be attached to churches in the big towns.\(^78\) Fasting stilled or even annulled processes like digestion and menstruation.\(^79\) Julian’s affirmation of sensuality as an integral part of the human person, and of biological processes like defecation as illustrative of God’s activity within sensuality, is therefore markedly counter-cultural to the dominant image of feminine holiness as being preternatural.\(^80\)

So far, we have seen that Rolle evidenced a ‘feminine’ type of mysticism showing that the meaning of gender in the Middle Ages was not limited to the difference between men and women. Despite the individuality of distinct writers, imaginative or visionary forms of mysticism were, however, associated with women. We have seen this type of mysticism – for both sexes – did not involve a displacement of the senses. In the case of Rolle and Julian identification with the humanity of Christ substantiated their bodily experience. Bodily pain was given meaning by expression in Passion imagery. Because the object of vision was felt to be physically real its explicative role did not displace the individual’s sense experience but gave it a truly objective and therefore inter-personal reference. The image of Christ for Rolle and Julian was not, in psychological terms, a projection but a source of imitatio. Compassion was the catalyst for this shared physical sensibility. Likewise ecstasy was not seen by Julian or Rolle as an ‘out of body’ experience but as a participation in Christ’s bodily Resurrection. In other words the connection of sensation and image evidenced in these writers’ work reflected in their own experience the Communicatio Idiomatum which in theological terms predicated Christ’s bodily nature to the Logos and vice versa. Alongside this, the bodies of mystics were increasingly in the later Middle Ages expected to give an external expression of holiness. Or rather, in the case of women’s mysticism, the body was expected to conform to ideals of insensibility which, as evidenced in accounts like those of Julian, were often alien to their own experience.

Next I examine the way Rolle and Julian described the body in prayer in the light of medieval physiological understandings of gender.

\(^{78}\) Jones, pp. 9-10.
\(^{79}\) Bynum, Holy Feast, p. 214.
\(^{80}\) C.f. chapter Two, section Two.
In their descriptions of the experience of prayer and encounter with the body of Christ both Rolle and Julian use language that evoked the medieval understanding of the four ‘humours’. The relation and relevance of medieval medical theory to mystical writing has received inadequate scholarly attention. I will be using Rolle – who was a highly influential spiritual writer for those of Julian’s generation – to show how Julian develops and expands his use of the language of bodily humours for spiritual experience. Some scholars have commented on Julian’s use of the medical motif of purgation. Frederick Bauerschmidt and Elizabeth Robertson both see the release of excess moisture as the dominant purgative metaphor in Julian’s vision. However they differ in their interpretation of this. Where Robertson sees this purgation of moisture as redemptive Bauerschmidt interprets it as not leading to physical healing but to a further purgation. The body of Christ become medically ‘a failed body’ that has gone to the other extreme of dryness.81

Bauerschmidt is right that in Julian’s vision of Christ moisture is followed by dryness but he doesn’t note how heat and cold are also included in the corporeal experience Julian describes. Purgation is not linked to healing. However purgation of moisture (and the whole process that follows it) does result in the healing of Julian’s body. It is to the medieval understandings of humours that we must look to understand what Julian is trying to express and how her visions result in both spiritual meaning and physical healing. The linking of language about spiritual sensation with that of the body was an equally strong theme in Rolle’s writings. In order to understand the tradition Julian was working with, and her own originality, I will set her in dialogue with Rolle’s use of humeral motifs. Rolle uses the physical senses to describe his encounter with God. However both his ecstatic experiences and his evocations of the Passion of Christ retain a metaphorical and symbolic distance to the body. Julian through her illness and the given-ness, rather than constructed nature, of her visions means she expresses a strongly realist link between what is happening in her soul and in her body. The meaning of her Showings – that all things will be well – is substantiated in her own physical healing.

According to the medieval theories of materialism, all of creation was formed from the four universal elements of fire, air, water and earth. These were arranged in a hierarchy with the more immaterial elements (first fire and then air) taking priority over the grosser substances (water and, lastly, earth). Regardless of gender, all four elements were present in the composition of the human body, though in varying proportions. In medical terms, the four universal elements were said to be carried by the four humours, or physiological fluids: yellow bile (in which the element of fire was dominant), blood (dominated by air), phlegm (primarily water), and black bile (mostly earth). The balance of the four humours within the body was determined partly by gender: males usually being dominated by yellow bile and blood; women characterized by a high admixture of phlegm and black bile.  

Each bodily humour or fluid was aligned, not only with a particular element in the chain of universal matter, but also with a set of four physical qualities: hot, cold, moist and dry. Thus yellow bile, containing fire, was primarily hot and secondarily dry. Blood, dominated by air, was primarily moist and secondarily hot. Phlegm, which was mostly water, was primarily cold and secondarily moist. Lastly, black bile, containing earth, was primarily dry and secondarily cold. The balance of the four humours resulted in a particular combination of the four qualities, the resulting admixture was known as a person’s complexion. Thus the masculine complexion was primarily hot and dry, while the feminine complexion was primarily cold and moist: they are opposites.

The use of the word ‘heat’ by Rolle to describe warmth of devotion, and the bodily realism with which he uses the term, therefore carries a meaning that is related to popular physiological understanding. In psycho-physical theory ‘frigidus’ represents a proclivity towards ‘the flesh’. Likewise in Rolle’s writings:


83 Caciola, Discerning Spirits, p. 143.
84 Caciola, Discerning Spirits, pp. 144-145.
85 Incendium, Prologue/146: ‘The filth of the flesh flows in to tempt slothful minds. And bodily need, and the weak desires of man, and the anguish of this wretched exile sometimes lessen this heat... but I, stone cold and desolate, await its return. When I have it not, I once more experience that feeling of fire deep inside, permeating my whole being body and soul [...] I busy myself warming up my soul, pierced with icicles as it is.’
From this we see that ‘heat’, for Rolle, is not an aspect of natural constitution but is a grace increased through the effort of devotion. We also see that although it comes from within the human person it affects the ‘exterior’ as well as ‘interior’ senses.

In the Passion meditations which carry Rolle’s name the dominant motif is wetness. Generally in late medieval devotional writing cold is seen as a negative state but wetness was associated with tears, blood, saliva and wounds: The gift of tears was closely related to the wounds of Christ in the later Middle Ages and the spittle of contempt he received in his Passion. Bernard of Clairvaux said that Christ wept with every part of his body not just his eyes.\(^86\) In Rolle’s ‘Meditation on Christ’s Passion’ in *Ego Dormio* the skin of Christ is rendered porous and moist:

My keyng, that water grette and blode swette;
Sythen ful sare bette, so that hys blode hym wette,
When their scowrges mette.
Ful fast thai gan hym dyng and at the pyler swyng,
And his fayre face defowlyng with spittyng [...] 
Naked es his whit brest, and rede es his blody syde;
Wan was his fayre hew, his wondes depe and wyde.
In fyve stedes of his flesch the blode gan downe glyde
Als stremes of the strande; hys pyne es noght to hyde.\(^87\)

This is connected to medieval medical theory where it was believed that the purgation of excess moisture was beneficial for physical health. Such imagery, maybe through the influence of Rolle, was used in Middle English devotional writing in the later fourteenth century. *The Book of Holy Medicines* written by Henry of Gosmont (c.1310-1361) in 1354, some five years after Rolle’s death, uses medical allegories for the spiritual regimen. Moisture plays the key role in healing: Those wounded by sin must drink the milk of the Virgin Mary, must be cleansed with the bitter vinegar of her tears and cooled in the rose water bath of her tears, then their wounds must be treated with the medicinal ointment of the Saviour’s blood. The wounds of sin in all the senses and bodily limbs – ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands/arms, feet and heart – are poulticed with blood from corresponding wounds afflicted on Christ.\(^88\)

A little later *The Chastising of God’s Children*, a highly popular guide to the spiritual life (probably written soon after 1382 by an anonymous author), draws out specifically the analogy of the humours:

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\(^{87}\) *EMMA*, p. 29.
In [God’s] absence we bein al cold and drie, swetnesse haue we noon [...] thanne drawith the the sunne the humours vp into the eir, of the whiche cometh dew and reyn [...] In the same maner, whanne the cliere sonne,oure lord iseu, is lift in oure hertis aboue al other thinge [...] if uertues, whiche I call goostli humours, then cometh a sweete reyn and an heuenli dew of swetnesse of the godhede.89iii

The sensual concrete language notable in the writings of Rolle show a fusion of carnal and spiritual meanings. The body of Christ has a healing effect, first on the soul but then also on the body of those who contemplate it. Rolle prays that he ‘myyte turne thorow that swet [of Christ] owt of al sekenesse of soule into lyf of hele of body’.90iv In both cases of heat and moisture, the same process is at work whereby an exaggeration of a particular bodily complexion becomes anagogic for spiritual transformation. In Incendium the contemplative orientation is from coldness to heat, whereas in the passion narratives it is from dryness of heart to the moisture of devotion. Both, however, are an encounter with the body of Christ.

It is also related to gender difference. In this understanding the quality of temperature was of singular importance because it differentiated the masculine complexion, dominated by two ‘hot’ humours, from the feminine, dominated by two cold.91 ‘Heat’ was physiologically desirable for both sexes but, as a female had less of it, her need for it was perceived to be greater than that of the male. This, as Robertson observes, is the physical root of the medieval belief in the insatiability of women’s desire.92 ‘Coldness’ was associated with women and perceived as a predictive sign of moral instability and sloth which led, in a corresponding way, to greater sensual attachments. The fact that the dominant image in Incendium is ‘heat’ and in the passion writings ‘moisture’ could be explained by a gendered audience: the English writings being specifically written for women.93 According to medieval physiology the male mystic has an advantage in the quest for ‘heat’ since he is by nature already in possession of it.

However Rolle’s use of ‘heat’ has strong feminine connotations.94 Rolle evokes reproductive characteristics of both genders. In medieval medicine heat was regarded as

90 ‘Meditations on the Passion: Text 1’, English Writings, 20/15-16.
91 Jacquart and Thomasset, p. 59.
92 Robertson, FABML, pp. 146-147.
93 Ibid, p. 149. ‘Given the fact that heat is more important physiologically to men than moisture, it is not surprising that the work of Rolle’s that is probably most clearly intended for male readers, Incendium, should focus primarily on the heat of desire rather than on moisture.’ (note 36, p.165)
94 Anne Astell observes that Rolle’s writing ‘bears eloquent testimony to the inner marriage that has taken place within him, reconciling him to his own feminine otherness’, The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages, p. 118. See also Patricia. Fite, ‘To Sytt-And-Sing-Of-Luf-Langyng: The Feminine Dynamic of Richard Rolle’s Mysticism’, Studia Mystica, 14, (1991), 13-29. Neither Astell nor Fite draw out the physiological implications of Rolle’s gender inclusivity.
essential for conception; but this could be either the heat of the male seed or the warmth of the uterine environment. For Rolle ‘ardour’ is used just as much to express the object of devotion as it is of the experience. The insatiable desire of ‘ardour’ is not a natural state, in fact nature collapses under this longed-for gift:

_Deficere denique oporteret pre dulcedine et magnitudine superferudi affectus et inestimabilis utique ardoris nimirum hoc auide amplecteretur atque ardentissimo exoptaret anhelitu._

This eroticism of ‘heat’ reflects of the influence of the _Song of Songs._ However if there is a sexual or nuptual connotation to ‘heat’, ‘sweetness’ or ‘song’ it is in their fecundity. Rolle has little place for unfulfilled longing in his spiritual itinery. The _eros_ of ‘heat’ is orientated toward conception, the infusion of grace. Ecstasy, for Rolle despite his critics, is not an end in itself. The gift of ‘song’ coming nine months later has parallels with giving birth:

_Sedebam quippe in quadam capella, et dum suauitate oracionis uel meditacionis multum delectarer, subito sentiiui in me ardorem insolitum et iocundum. Sed cum prius dubitando a quo esset, per longum tempus expertus sum non a creatura sed a Creatore esse, quia feruencior em et iocundiorem inueni. Flagraunte autem sensibiliter calore illo inestimabiliter suauil usque ad infusionem et percepcionem soni celestis uel spiritualis, [...] dimidius annus et tres menses et aliquot ebdomade effluxerunt._

Scholarly commentary on Rolle has given inadequate attention to the physiological root of his language about mystical experience. The gestative eroticism of his Latin writings and the fluid porosity of the Passion Mediations are driven by Rolle’s concern that both body and soul together are lifted up to God. There is a physiological need for the redemption of the flesh which is fulfilled in contemplation. As seen in chapter One _raptus carnis_ is understood by Rolle as an invitation to participate here on earth in the wholeness of Christ’s resurrected body. The gift of Christ’s body comes in ‘heat’ and in ‘moisture’ not just as imagery but as a response to real physical need. As ‘heat’ and ‘moisture’ the catalytic effect of Christ’s body engages engages the complexions associated with them: predominantly male ‘heat’ drives out

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96 _Incendium_, Prologue/146: ‘In the end he must collapse under the huge sweetness of emotion and the pressing desire must eagerly be embrased and most ardently wished for, with panting breath.’
97 See Astell, p. 108.
98 _Incendium_, 15/189: ‘I was sitting in a particular chapel, delighting in meditation and prayers sweetness, when suddenly I felt within an unusual and pleasant heat. At first I wondered where it had come from. Yet I soon realised that it had not come from any created thing, but from the creator himself. I was, I found, more strong in my love and more happy than I had ever been. Yet it was another nine months before a conscious and incredible sweet warmth came alight in me. Then I knew the infusion and understanding of heavenly spiritual sounds.’
feminine ‘coldness’ but feminine ‘moisture’ counteracts the masculine preponderance to
dryness. The first – as recorded in *Incendium* – is an ecstatic experience, the second, for
Rolle, is a deeply painful one. Moisture, as a feminine characteristic, is accepted by Christ in
his Passion when, by accepting the female condition, he becomes ‘unworthyest of alle mennys
haldyng’.
Such an experience is painful for Rolle, but according to the Passion meditations
associated with him this is a pain which will moisten his soul:

> Woundys of reuthe is al my desyr, peyne and compassyoun of my Lord Jhesu Cryst. Werste and unworthyest of alle mennys haldyng, I have appetyte to peyne, to besekte my Lorde a drope of hys reed blod to make blody my soule, a drope of that watur, whiche he swet at hys scourging, to waschyn it with.

It must have been a passage such as the above which Julian had been reading when
she desired from God the gift of three wounds: contrition, compassion and genuine
(‘wylfulle’) longing for God. Rolle’s influence on devotion in the later fourteenth century is
clear. As in Rolle’s description Julian describes Jesus’ whole body as porous and wet:

> I saw, beholding, the body plentuously bleding in seming of the scorgiing, as thus: the fair skinne was broken full depe in to the tender flesh, with sharpe smitinges all about the sweete body. The hote blode ranne out so plentuously that ther was neither seen skinne ne wounde, but as it were all blode.

However we can see here that Julian manages to bind together the two strands of
Rolle’s use of the complexions in her visions of Christ; the blood is ‘hote’ and ‘plentuous’.
The same two terms are used together by Julian to describe the bleeding of Christ’s head in
her first Showing. Christ’s body in the Crucifixion is seen as combining simultaneously the
dominant masculine and feminine complexions of medieval medical theory. Rolle’s use of
them, in describing Christ and the mystical experience, had been divided between his different
genres, his Latin works emphasising ‘heat’, his English ‘moisture’. Julian combines them as
unified in the description of her experience.

Also, unlike Rolle, Julian does not contrast the positive effect of heat and moisture
with their negations, ‘coldness’ and ‘dryness’. No commentary on Julian’s *Showings* have
read her descriptions of Christ in the light of medieval medical theory. If one does so it is
clear that the four humours, or physiological fluids, are all present in Julian’s description of
the crucified Christ. In Julian’s eighth vision, the body of Christ takes on the complexions of

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100*ST*, 206/52-53.
101*LT*, *WJN*, 167/1-4. (Also *ST*, 227/14-19). It is the ‘plenteousness’ of this precious blood which allows it to
flow abundantly into hell, freeing chosen souls there, to wash away sins on earth and to intercede in heaven.
102*LT*, *WJN*, 40/2. *ST*, 210/12.
the lower humours – phlegm, which was primarily cold and secondarily moist and black bile which was primarily dry and secondarily cold:

And the swete body waxid browne and blacke, alle changed and turned oute of the fair, fresh, and lively colour of himselfe into drye dying. For that same time that oure blessid savyour died upon the rode, it was a dry, harre wind, wonder colde as to my sight. And what time that the precious blode was blod out of the swete body that might passe therfro [...] Blodlessehed and paine dried within, and blowing of the winde and colde coming from without, met togeder in the swete body of Christ.

Julian’s Christ therefore contains the extremes of all four complexions. There is surely a link here between Christ’s redemptive work on the cross and the purging of the humours common in medical healing. According to medieval medical understanding, health of the body lay in the balance of the bodily humours. Though gender and other conditions caused one or the other to predominate, if there was an excess, illness would follow. Hence the medieval practice of blood-letting, cold baths, treatment with oils and hot presses. However for Julian this ‘thirst of Christ’ was also part of the process of redemption. Bauerschmidt sees this movement from plenitude to privation in the body of Christ as an apophatic image that points not to a physical but to a spiritual healing: “It is an image of a nowted body, a body which has been transmogrified by suffering into an icon of God’s compassion.”

If we look at this motif of dryness we see a close correlation between the physical symptoms and the spiritual meaning. Julian reads a double sense in Christ’s thirst, ‘oon bodely and a nother gostly’. The “bodely” thirst arises from “failing of moister, for the blessede flesh and bones was lefte alle alone without blode and moister”. For Christ’s “gostly” thirst the full analysis is deferred until the thirteenth revelation where it is defined as his “love-longing to have us all togeder, hole in him to his endlesse blisse”. As Sarah Alison Miller has pointed out – like its bodily counterpart – this is a desiring thirst that arises from lack, namely from the incompleteness of Christ’s body which thirsts for the unification in him of his corporeal members. As Miller puts it: “While the pain of ‘bodely thirst’ generates a ‘great onyng’ between Christ and his children through corporeal compassion, full communion, imagined here as enclosure within Christ’s body, awaits fulfillment of his ‘gostly

\[^{103}\text{LT, WJN, 179/8-14. Also ST, 233/1-13.}\]
\[^{104}\text{Bauerschmidt, Body Politic, p. 106.}\]
\[^{105}\text{LT, WJN, 181/4-5.}\]
\[^{106}\text{LT, WJN, 219/15.}\]
\[^{107}\text{Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body, (NY: Routledge, 2010), Ch. 3; ‘Monstrous Love: The permeable body of Christ in Julian of Norwich’s Showings’, p. 118.}\]
thirst’ [...] Here, Julian locates Christ’s ‘gostly’ thirst in the lacking portions of his flesh, so that even the non-bodily sense of thirst is inextricable from Christ’s corporeality.”

As Bynum has shown the ability of the physical to express a spiritual meaning was particularly charged when it came to the signification of blood for life and death in the late Middle Ages.108 Certainly Julian described the haemorrhaging body of Christ as both “hidous and dredfulle, and swete and lovely”.109 The outward flow of his blood shows Julian both his vitality and the draining of his life-force. Bynum has identified the expression of “this paradoxical sense of continuity in discontinuity” in a “curious motif of late medieval piety: the devotion to Christ’s complete exsanguination in the crucifixion”.110 As Miller points out although Bynum does not consider the function of this motif in Showings, Julian’s vision of the transformation of Christ’s supple body into a desiccated corpse is a clear example of how devotion to Christ’s blood because of its redemptive meaning, finds its fullest expression in devotion to his bloodless body.111 In this sense the desiccated body is both an apophatic image and an icon of God’s compassion, as Bauershmindt puts it. However, as Miller argues, both the bleeding and the drying of Christ’s body in the Showings serve the same role – underscoring its ‘permeability’. The ultimate purpose of this permeability becomes clear in Revelation thirteen when Christ’s ‘gostly’ thirst transforms these points of egress into points of entry.112 This permeability (we shall see in the following section) was seen as an inherently female trait.

As ‘heat’ and ‘moisture’ go together, so do ‘dry’ and ‘cold’. There is a move toward a full corporeal kenesis in Julian’s vision. Speaking of ‘the skynne and the flesshe that semyd (appeared) of the face and the body’, Julian writes:

I saw four maner of drying. The furst was blodlesse. The secunde, paine folowing after. The thurde is that he was hanging uppe in the eyer, as men hang a cloth for to drye. The fourth, that the bodely kinde asked licoure, and ther was no maner of comfort ministred to him. A, hard and grevous was that paine, but much more harder and grevous it was when the moistur failed, and all began to drye, thus clinging. These were two paines that shewde in the blissed hed: the furst wrought to the drying while it was moist; and that other, slow, with clinging and drying, with blowing of winde fro without that dryed him more and pained with colde than my hart can thinke.113a

110 Wonderful Blood, p. 163.
111 See Miller, pp. 116-117.
112 Ibid, p. 119.
113 LT, WJN, 183/31-39.
In Julian’s description of the *kenosis* of Christ the first purgation was of ‘hote blod (moyst)’ and the second of ‘dry, colde’. To favour either the ‘cataphatic’ moment of purgation, as Robertson does, or its ‘apophatic’ conclusion, as Bauerschmidt does, is to fail to notice both the integral nature of the *Showing* and its ultimate purpose. Surely what Julian is trying to express is that all the humours of Christ’s body suffered, that he took on the full human condition without any predominance of one or the other. Julian says that ‘tho paynes of Cristes passion passé all payne’, or, as Jesus puts it to her; ‘yf I might have sufferyd more, I wolde a sufferyd more’. The will is there, but the four elements that make up the human body are fully engaged in Christ’s passion. They are brought to their extremes. As a somatic expression there is nothing lacking.

Julian also relates the bodily humours in a way that subverts conventional gendered associations. Neither Robertson or Bauerschmidt see that these ‘two’ pains – dryness and coldness – are not divided along gender lines. Commonly the masculine complexion was primarily hot and dry, while the feminine complexion was primarily cold and moist. It was understood in the Middle Ages that the more perfect flesh is the more it experiences. For Jesus – the Word made flesh – every sense was acute on the cross. The catalytic effect of Christ’s body engages the dominant complexions of both genders. For Rolle both were positive even if they were experienced differently; ‘Heat’ is ecstatic, ‘moisture’ is painful. For Julian these humours were combined simultaneously. Nor were they used in contrast to the secondary complexions of ‘cold’ and ‘dry’ as in Rolle’s use. All complexions are included in the encounter with Christ.

Christ’s body is a place of meeting of all the bodily humours to an exaggerated degree. This would explain Christ’s bodily mutability in Julian’s visions. However, the important thing for Julian is that the reader moves on from there to recognise what the Passion expresses. By studying the way Julian sees the transmogrifications in Christ’s body in the light of medieval attitudes to the humours of the body, a clearer picture of the relation between suffering and theological meaning emerges in the *Showings*. It is not the suffering itself but the love revealed in the suffering which saves. The full implications of Christ’s *kenosis* are made clear in a final change from pain to joy. This ‘change of countenance’ shows

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115 LT Chs. 20 & 22, WJN, pp. 189-191, 193-197.

that, though sickness takes its natural course to death, this is not the ultimate meaning of the event. This death heals. Julian writes:

The changing of his blisseful chere changed mine, and I was as glad and as mery as it was possible. Then brought oure lorde merily to mind: ‘Wher is now any point of thy paine or of thy agrefe?’ And I was fulle mery.\(^{117}\)

Where the analogy with medieval medical practice ends is that for Julian this is not a natural healing but a foretaste of Resurrection. This heavenly state, however, shows itself in bodily terms as a miracle. A neglected aspect of scholarly commentaries on Julian’s *Showings* is that they are an account of miraculous physical healing. Christ does die, Julian in her illness mirrors completely the one she contemplates, and yet she lives. In Julian’s *Showings* there is a continuous interaction between the real physical body, its perceptions and that which is signified, that which is ‘shown’. Bodily experience and interpretation are thus very closely linked for Julian, and yet distinct, as passion is the premise of compassion. It is the sharing of suffering with Christ which gives meaning to bodily pain, and can also give actual physical healing.

It is not new to read Julian’s account of her physical sensations through a medical lens, as a narrative of illness.\(^{118}\) To try to ‘diagnose’ Julian may be helpful (though hypothetical) in so far as illness highlights the body as the catalyst and expressive context of her *Showings*, although to explain the bodily symptoms does not explain the way Julian constitutes meaning from them. Julian herself attests that her sickness was of divine origin and yet was a bodily sickness. As Paul Mollinari observes, sickness is mysterious enough to make these not incompatible, the meaning lies in the way she interprets what is happening to her.\(^{119}\) This is also the case with her ‘cure’ which she describes as miraculous.\(^{120}\) The interpretation of her illness, as Baker shows, was shaped within the context of the medieval tradition of affective spirituality and visualisation mediations on the Passion of Christ.\(^{121}\) However, by favouring devotional practice over illness as the formative influence of Julian’s visions, Baker does not give, in my opinion, adequate attention to how Julian’s narrative is a record of bodily healing. Baker favours the ‘constructed’ nature of Julian’s *Showings*. Though she shows clearly that Julian’s descriptions occur within a specific religio-cultural context,

\(^{117}\) *LT, WJN*, 193/9-11

\(^{118}\) See James T. McIlwain, ‘The Bodelye syeknes of Julian of Norwich’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 10, (1984), 167-180. McIlwain concluded that Julian’s sickness was botulism.


\(^{120}\) Se Colledge & Walsh, ‘Introduction’, *ST*, pp. 68-70.

\(^{121}\) *Vision to Book*, pp.15-51.
she says nothing with regard to Julian’s bodily perceptions which, I believe, were the primary formative influence.

This substantiates the argument of the previous section: Rolle and Julian are witness to a continuous interaction between the real physical body and the theological meanings it expresses. This is because, in both Rolle’s and Julian’s writings, the body of Christ is not just an image but a real encounter that involves physical perception. Their form of visionary mysticism did not displace sense experience but expands it beyond the inevitable limitations of individual identity. All corporeal experience was contained in the *Logos Ensarkos*. Imitation of Christ made the bodily humours of both genders fully accessible, with no need for one gender’s bodily experience to be tamed, rendered insentient, or transfigured into that of another. As the activity of the body of Christ within the contemplative’s sensibility spiritual sensation was not therefore gender specific. It expressed the anthropological implications of the *Communicatio Idiomatum* of Christ’s two natures, allowing the predication of what was constitutive of one gender to another. Masculine and feminine characteristics were applicable to all people because all bodies – not just those of women – could manifest the wholeness and therefore holiness – of the complete human being.

Julian understood her own bodily sickness as not just purgative but imitative of Christ: for her Christ’s Passion was not just a somatic *kenosis* but a ‘showing of love’. For both Julian and Rolle, Christ’s body – because it is human – is a meeting place of the four bodily humours and because it is redemptive, it integrates the masculine and feminine complexions by suffering in all of them. The meeting of the four humours is the new Adam, the full undivided human being, healing the division and disorder of sin. However the very wholeness of Christ means that when his body suffers all human suffering is taken on. God suffering in the flesh is the ultimate showing of compassion.

Both Rolle and Julian affirm the body in its porosity and fluidity with the soul, in its very fleshiness, as a way of encountering God in Christ. In particular they use the language of bodily humours but subvert their gender associations. They resist any ‘essentialising’ of gender types falling neither in the sexist position of ‘one sex more suited’, or the dualist position of ‘separate gender spiritualities’. They do this by reading gender in terms of the body, particularly the bodily humours, and emphasising ‘embodiment’ as a common ground between the sexes. Therefore the gendered body is not irrelevant to spiritual matters, but this does not mean it shapes distinct spiritualities, nor that one sex is more suited to the spiritual quest. The relevance of gender in fourteenth-century English mysticism seems to lie in the use of the bodily humours as metaphors and expressions of the spiritual life. But more than
metaphor for both Rolle and Julian, God, being incarnate, is experienced through the physical constitution of the body which was understood then in gendered terms.

In the next section I examine a second aspect of how gender understandings shaped the way experience and interpretation are related in attitudes to the body in Rolle’s and Julian’s writing. Gender affected not only the humours but also the permeability of the body to the external world and the relation of surface to interior.

**Interior and Exterior**

Medieval medical understandings of women emphasised the permeability of their bodies. Without sharp contours or boundaries, their bodies were understood as easily affected by external influences. In turn the bodily comportment of women was felt to give an accurate expression of the disposition of their soul. The body acting as the threshold between inner and outer likewise became a strong motif in late medieval mystical writing. Here, I study how in fourteenth-century English mysticism Christ’s body as an external object was understood to be assimilated within the sensibility of the contemplative subject. The ‘porosity’ of the body, in particular, makes it a threshold and meeting place between inner and outer worlds. In doing this I question recent scholarly emphasis on the ‘contained inwardness’ of late medieval piety. Likewise the relation of devotional feeling and outward practice in the fourteenth century is made much clearer by foregrounding the body and its perceptions as a place where private and public meet.

For Jennifer Bryan the dominant ‘inwardness’ in late medieval English piety is illustrated by the importance of the figure of the recluse, of whom Rolle was probably the most influential example. The model for devotional life was the hermit or anchorite who was hidden, literally out of bodily sight. Bryan looks at the rising interest in devotion among the laity and the corresponding relocation of pious practices to a domestic context – a movement away from a predominantly communal and public sphere of devotional practice to the ‘inner’ world of the private self. This, Bryan observes, brought with it an increasing split between body and mind as inward thoughts are not dependent on sense images and bodily forms. Rolle is used as an example of someone for whom there was a powerful boundary

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122 Miller, p. 18.
123 Lochrie, pp. 24-27.
125 Bryan considers Rolle, pp. 15-16.
126 Bryan, pp. 35-38.
between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ prayer: ‘No thyng that I do withowten’, writes Rolle in the *Form of Living*, ‘proueth that I loue God’.\(^{127}\) If ‘interiority’ was the motivation behind the asociality of enclosure it also became, in Bryan’s view, the paradigm for the ‘mixed life’. Newly educated laity tried to balance inner life and outer involvement by curtailing bodily/worldly activity and by detaching from sense stimuli. The devout person was encouraged to be blind, deaf and dumb.\(^{128}\) Outer ‘flesh’ was contrasted with inner devotion.\(^{129}\)

However Bryan’s reading that interiority was defined in the late Middle Ages in contrast to the body neglects the equally important contemporary theme of *Imitatio Christi*. *Imitatio* was understood in both an external and internal way. In late medieval mysticism a distinction can be made between imitation as a form of self-generated asceticism and the more involuntary form of imitation that involved para-mystical phenomena. In the ‘ascetic’ model, identification with Christ is a form of ‘idealisation’. This meant that imitation, understood as an exterior conformity with Christ’s poverty and even his suffering, was a way to union by imitating an external model, with the emphasis on the transformative influence of the object of devotion. In the ‘mystical’ model, identification with Christ is a form of ‘inscription’. This means that the transformation happens more from within, the conformity of the outer person is the fruit of shared sensibility and the emphasis is on the similarity to Christ of the contemplative’s own somatic experience.

Both forms were related to the body. In fact any dichotomy between ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ is stronger in the external forms of *imitatio*. Of course both forms can be – and in the saint normally are – together: e.g. Francis the lover of poverty is Francis the poor man, Francis the ascetic is Francis of the stigmata. However, in some contemporary scholarship, the difference between these two ‘modes’ of imitation has been read along gender lines.\(^{130}\) Women could not imitate the ideal lifestyle or even bodily form of a person of a different gender. Clare of Assisi, for example, however much she may have wanted could not become a mendicant, nor could women ‘represent’ Christ at Eucharistic alters. On the other hand, women’s bodies, associated as they were with fluid boundaries and a susceptibility to external influences, were more open to being ‘inscribed’ – that is actually penetrated and moulded into conformity with another body.\(^{131}\)

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\(^{128}\) Bryan, pp. 48-52.

\(^{129}\) Bryan, p. 62.


\(^{131}\) Examples of women’s stigmata multiply in the late Middle Ages way beyond that of men.
In the writings of Rolle and Julian, these modes should not be too sharply contrasted nor considered definitive of gender approaches in mysticism. For them, both forms of imitation are bodily. As two parts of the transformation of the body they are connected. The *imitatio* of the exterior man/woman is what renders the body malleable to union with Christ.

In Rolle’s writings there are both approaches to *imitatio*. He gives images of Christ’s body as an external object but often there is a movement from observation to participation. For example, Rolle gives metaphors for Christ’s body at the time of scourging which describe the transformative effect of this body due to its porosity; the body is a sky full of stars, a dovecote, a net, honeycomb, and a book. It is both an object of contemplation and a place to enter in, but there is also a movement from the distance (seeing) to entrance (experience).

Than was thy body lyk to hevyn. For as heuyn is ful of sterris, so was thy body ful of woundes [...] And yit, Lord, swet Ihesu, thy body is lyk to the nette; for as a nette is ful of holys, so is thy body ful of woundes. Here, swet Ihesu, I beseche the, cache me into this net of thy scourgynge [...] Efte, swet Ihesu, thy body is like to a dufhouse. For a dufhouse is ful of holys, so is thy body ful of woundes [...] I beseche the, in euche temptacioun graunt me grace of some hoole of thy woundes.132

Christ’s wounds are tokens of human sin and the Rollean *Meditations on the Passion* want reader to recognise their responsibility for them. Yet, simultaneously, they are sources of protection and healing. The blood that issues from these wounds softens the soul of those who meditate on them and make them malleable to God’s grace.133 The wounds enable a mutual inter-penetration of Christ and the contemplative, even at a physical level:

Lord, that mad me and al my lymmys, I beseche the, yeve me graes to serue the with al my lymmys, so that my lemmys be thy lemys ana al occupied in thy seruice, and euer bowe to thy biddyng, euer redy to meve or to reste at thy wille, and euer lame to the dedes of syn, and euer fresshe and redy to thy biddyng.134

Rolle speaks of a recording of Christ onto the mystic’s body that shapes its inclinations. As shown in chapter One this is described as an internal encounter with the resurrected sensibility of Christ. But it is clear that meditation on Christ produces physical effects. Synonymous with a lot of passion mysticism of the time, Rolle’s meditations centre around images that trigger an affective remembrance – images that make an impression on the sensibility – creating a body receptive to the Passion: “al thy fyve wittes occupied with peyne

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133 Rolle lies at the foot of the cross ‘tyl I be markyd therewith os on of thine owne, and my soul softyd in that swete bath’. *Ibid*, 26/229-232.
to bote the trespass of oure v wittes.  

The body in turn becomes receptive to the Resurrection. The Passion properly contemplated is felt as love and gives rise to delight which is rightly ordered by reason:

[What] maketh our delite pure [...] is turnynge of the sensualite to the skylle, for when any es turned to delit of hys fyve wittes, alson vnclennesse entreth in to his soule [...] Forthi the delit that noght hath of vnordynat styrrynge, and myche hath of heynesse in Crist, and in whiche the sensualite es al turned to the skyl, and the skyl al set and vset to God, maketh a mannes soule in reste and sikernesse.  

Julian’s request for bodily illness at the age of thirty seems a conscious imitation of the beginning of Christ’s external ministry at that age. It also involves a compassionate attempt to substitute her suffering body for Christ’s. However Julian’s suffering is one of paralysis; she speaks of an increasing lack of sensation in the lower part of her body. Her illness shows few actual parallels to Crucifixion. It imposed instead the very insentience that late medieval arbiters of mystical experience preferred to see in women. This absence of bodily feeling for Julian helps take attention away from her own suffering and opens her to a vision of Christ. The focus is no longer on her body but on what she sees.

For both Julian and Rolle it is suffering in their own bodies and that of Christ that makes these bodies porous and able to interpenetrate each other. Porosity makes the body open, accessible and able to relate. It is this ‘inter-penetrability’ which creates compassion – feeling from within – which ultimately results in union. For Julian, however, this union differentiates her bodily experience from the one she ‘sees’ creating an ocular objectivity that underlines the relevance of her showings for all people. *Imitatio* as shared sensibility becomes again a self-trancending *praxis* drawing attention to Christ. Personal revelation is ballanced by the objectivity of ecclesial tradition.

Often times our Lord Jhesu saide, I it am [...] I it am that is alle. I it am that holy church precheth the and techeth thee. I it am that shewde me erre to thee. It is not gender difference but the inter-relation of Christ’s alterity and his gratuity that, for Julian, is the stimulus for both interior and exterior imitation. The body of Christ – expressive of both individuality and self-gift – is the model but also the impulse. Love is the meaning, for love is always of another who ceases to be other.
Conclusion

A comparison of Rolle and Julian shows that to distinguish types of mysticism along gender lines does not fit the evidence.

It is true that female mysticism in the later Middle Ages was identified with the body in a particular way. Women were associated with the body and the flesh in popular cultural consciousness and their mystical writing is orientated within and toward corporeal experience. Scholars have debated whether this was the result of the social conditioning of the time or whether it was a stereotype constructed more by medical attitudes to physiology. Others have observed that female mystics were able to use their association with the body to emphasise the incarnate quality of their contact with Christ. The late Middle Ages was a time when the body was associated with God in a very real way. Physical experience could be in some sense a privileged way of contemplation. The similarities of Rolle and Julian in their emphasis on the body, show that this was true not just for women but for the whole culture of the time. Women mystical writers did not create a separate spirituality but drew out the possibilities that were implicit in popular devotion of the time.

For Rolle and Julian particular instantiations of bodiliness – such as gender, race, age and health, are accidental to the body itself. Gender may be a conditioning factor but not constitutive of embodied experience. The importance, for writers like Rolle and Julian, of the Via Carnis not only emphasised the humanity of Christ but also the human body as a substratum of human experience. The late Middle Ages was a time when the Imitatio Christi took on a new sensual realism. This meant that as a religious culture it potentially privileged that with which women were associated. We have seen that it was specifically feminine aspects of the body that became the dominant metaphor for the encounter with Christ, namely its porosity. The body as an image was literally a threshold between the inner and outer worlds but it also became the model for seeing the relation of subjective experience to the ‘otherness’ of Christ. The porosity of Christ’s body allowed for a non-dual relation with Christ which was understood to be realisable even on a corporeal level.

Bodily signs were used for the evaluation of inner experience which could only be read symptomatically in the somatic sphere. The divergence between women’s self-perception and the dominant theological anthropology of the time lay in the active role a writer like Julian gave to the body. Instead of insentience the body was felt to participate in visions. For
Julian the body is not sacrificed or left behind. Such divergence between women’s experience and scholastic arbiters of mysticism hinged on the question whether women’s bodies were – like their souls – created in the image of God. As a woman’s body was not assumed in the Incarnation it was often concluded that it could not be a point of contact with God. Mystical writing at this time, particularly women’s, did not follow this paradigm. It is clear from this writing that meditation on Christ produces physical effects. Not just in terms of outward *Imitatio Christi*. Contact with Christ’s suffering body gives healing to Julian’s body. This inversion of sacrificial imitation creates the corporeal miracle in Julian’s *Showings* revealing that “alle maner of thinge” – including the body – “shal be wel”.

As I showed through the example of Hilton’s work in chapter Two, the body, as a rhetorical foil to the soul, was considered ‘external’ to the human person. But rhetorical models are often inverted in mystical writing. The inclusivity of the audience of devotional texts in comparison with university-based theology meant that any literal reading of the body as feminine, and therefore women as incapable of encounter with God, would be ridiculous. Hilton himself wrote *Scale 1* for his “ghostly sister in Christ”. Rolle wrote his later treatises for the nuns of Hampole. Moreover, the image of the body as porous further breaches and ambiguates the boundaries between inner and outer.

In conclusion we can say that Rolle’s and Julian’s writing is not specifically feminine. Their use of the body as a locus of the encounter with God is part of a common concern of the time to integrate inner and outer experience. However these writers described embodiment in a way that transcended culturally defined ideas about the body. The body for them was a privileged place of the meeting of opposites: heavenly and human, male and female, grace and sin, so that these are not defined against each other. The relation of the body to the integration of opposites and to healing is part of medieval biological models. I have shown that this influences its use in the description of mystical experience in the writings of Rolle and Julian. ‘Heat’, for example, is both a body and soul experience. It is not just a metaphor of desire and warmth of feeling; there is an actual link to bodily sensation. Interior grace is understood to affect the outward body. Likewise, ‘moisture’ shows the link between compunction, in the shedding of tears, and purgation, the letting of blood. What we see in the writings of Rolle and Julian is that the exaggeration of a particular bodily humour becomes anagogic for spiritual transformation. The ‘realism’ of the metaphor – its close

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142 *LT, WJN*, 209/10-11.
correspondence to medieval understanding of the bodily humours – shows that experience of Christ for these writers engaged both body and soul.
Conclusion: Body as Process and Paradox

The place and role of the body is a recurrent theme in Middle English mysticism, although spirituality was not a matter of bodily practice. In this they differ from much spiritual writing of the time. For the mystics, the body was not, as with Cathar spirituality, an obstacle to the soul’s journey to God, nor was it, as with the bodily devotions of the time, a tool for manipulating extra-ordinary experiences or practising vicarious sacrifices for the sake of others. The writers I have looked at read asceticism in terms of self-discipline leading to an integration of body and soul. There is little if no emphasis on penitential practice, let alone on self-inflicted pain. Quite the opposite, they seem to take attention away from external practices and concern about the body, seeing corporeal sensation as an integrated part of the activity of the soul. The body is affirmed as a place of encounter with God but through the innate link between body and soul, not through the self-inflicted punishment of late medieval *imitatio passionis*.

These writers sought a helpful approach to the body in terms of the individual’s spiritual path. Their concern was that the body become a willing instrument of the spirit, a partner instead of an opponent. They were concerned that the body be related to positively, as an important part of the process of spiritual transformation. In this they correspond to what Ware calls ‘natural’ as distinct from ‘unnatural’ mysticism.¹ They fulfill the criteria of a ‘healthy asceticism’ as proposed by Ian Bell.²

In their distinct ways, the texts we have looked at affirm that the co-operation of the senses was essential for the higher stages of prayer. The ascetic problem was attachment to the senses, the solution a right ordering of body and soul. Such purification was not understood primarily as ‘detachment from’ the body but freeing of the body from disordered desire, removing the distraction of ‘external’ orientation so that God could be encountered within the soul. We have seen that in medieval ascetical language a distinction must be made between the orientation of the senses and the presence of the senses themselves. Ascetical language must therefore be read functionally, as part of a process, rather than ontologically, as an end in itself. Though not focusing overly on bodily practices, the Middle English mystics were concerned with the ‘function’ of the body in prayer. The body was part of the process of putting the will of God into action, within a dominantly Christological relational

dialectic. The physical and spiritual senses are related in ways that echo the unity-in-relation of the human and the Divine natures of Christ.

Late medieval devotion to God’s enfleshment is shared by much late medieval spirituality, although our writers apply the Incarnational motif to both Christ and the contemplative’s own experience. For them, the anthropological application of the *Communicatio Idiomatum* means that the physical senses could be organically linked to the spiritual senses. The Word become flesh so that the flesh could become Word. Thus *caro* as well as *corpus* can be a place of encounter with God. All aspects of the body find their redemption in relation to the soul.

Each writer proposes and describes this ‘redemption of the body’ differently, both in terms of their temperament and the distinct place they choose to occupy within the shared debate over the role of the body in prayer. The variety of their approaches is as notable as their common concern. In chapter One and Two I explored the contrasts between the writers and their common concern for the right ordering of the body-soul continuum. For Middle English mysticism *disciplina* was expressed through an orientation of the soul’s affections towards God, rather than through bodily asceticism, leading to a common acceptance that the body can influence the soul as well as vice-versa. The distinction of body and soul was read in terms of that which they experience, not in terms of the ability to effect the other. The body was understood to experience physical things, the soul spiritual. In this way the mystics I have looked at all endeavoured to demythologise body metaphors arriving at a ‘realist’ attitude to the body as something tangible, perceptible, locatable. However, they also believed that the state of the body affected the soul in the same way as the state of the soul affected the body. The soul was affected by the way the body interacts with sense stimuli and the body by the way the soul responded to God. A helpful and theologically meaningful attitude to the body was, for them, a fruit of the spiritual life.

In chapter Three I showed that English mysticism worked toward a close correlation between sensory and cognitive processes. The differences between the mystical writers lie in their approach to the degree the body, sense and imagination could influence soul experience. Among those mystics that stressed apophatic prayer, the instrumentality of the body was no longer significant in the advanced stages of contemplation, although it continued to play an

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3 This Christological term seeks to explain the interaction of deity and humanity in the Incarnate Christ. Christian orthodoxy (according to the First Council of Ephesus in 431) maintained that the divine and the human are fully unified in Jesus Christ but that (according to the Council of Chalcedon in 451) the two natures also remain distinct. The term implies that the two natures, distinct yet unified, participate in some sort of exchange.
important role as a way into contemplation. Those, like Rolle and Julian who stressed a more affirmative view of the body in prayer, saw a permeability in the epistemological boundary between physical and spiritual. Both Rolle and Julian challenged the Augustinian categorisation of visionary experience into corporeal, imaginary and intellectual; they saw epistemological categories as more fluid; and demonstrated a greater acceptance of the corporeal.

Such an acceptance of the body was part of a general movement from the twelfth century which highlighted the humanity of Christ as the way to God. It also belonged to a late-medieval concern for the discernment of spirits which focused on the visible manifestations of holiness. In apophatic discourse the body became important in defining what could and could not be said about God and the spiritual life. In chapter Four the Cloud-author and Hilton set up a complex dialectic of the body as ‘image’ to show that the visual and imaginative faculties were rooted in corporeal experience and therefore limited in apprehending a transcendent God. However the body itself, unlike its libidinous inverted image in the soul, makes no claim beyond the senses. As such, the sense of ‘self as body’ was, for both Hilton and the Cloud-author, the school where the soul learned the humility of its own limitations. The internal processes of perception could no more grasp God than their corporeal counterparts. For the contemplative to know that they were body, purified the imagination from spiritual hubris.

For the Cloud-author, the sense of self as body offered a further opportunity of knowing God stripped of attributes. Corporeal self-knowledge stripped the sense of self from the desire to be ‘this or that’. By analogy God could be loved for Himself, independently from the qualities that accrue to those desires. To know God’s forgiveness was helpful and yet dependent on a sense of personal sin which kept the contemplative locked in the contingencies of his autobiography – his life as it unfolded in time and space. To know ‘that God is’, was more helpful for the contemplative than to know ‘what God gives’. Salvation history may express God but to know God in his own self-knowledge involved a reflexive awareness. Awareness of the body held an important clue to that immediacy. Felt sense of the body is part of Hilton’s “reformyng in felyng”, a higher stage of contemplation than cognitive based “reformyng in feyth” as such a felt sense exists prior to the reflections (images) that develop from it.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Scale 2, Ch. 5.
Lastly, in chapter Five I analysed the way in which language about male and female was used in both traditional and startlingly new ways by these writers. The new ways related gender to embodiment, showing that what is involved in embodiment is much more than gender difference. Rolle and the Cloud-author give a different theological rationale for the body-soul continuum because of differing understandings of the Resurrection. This is a debate between two male writers and although the attitudes to the body are different they cannot be defined as simple gendered stances. Hilton and Julian do not give exclusive ‘male’ and ‘female’ perspectives but rather develop different strands within a common Augustinian anthropology. Each takes up a particular role of reason in relation to the body. For Hilton, the rational soul helps keep bodily and spiritual experience distinct. For Julian, reason is the place where sensuality can be deployed towards God. For both, it is the ordering role of reason, not its gendered association with the ‘male’, which make it master of the body.

The dialectic among Middle English mystical writers between an affirmation and a denial of the body shows that contemplation for them was a process hinging on paradox. The body was neither demonised nor neglected. In this they were part of their culture. Even when they seemed to be denying the flesh, late medieval people placed extraordinary emphasis on the body. Late medieval mystical writing in England is a clear example of discourse that uses paradox rather than contrast. For these writers a positive attitude to the body came as a fruit of the spiritual life. The Middle English mystics did not show much concern for external practices, although, even as promoters of ‘interiority’, they did not exclude the body. Their concern was with a right relationship of inner and outer sensation so that the body could find its place within the soul.

The tension of the body’s place in mystical life was resolved by assimilating bodily senses into the soul. The body was an important partner in the spiritual journey, at times participating actively with, and at times benefiting passively from, the work of the soul. Thus, as part of the soul, the body was no longer an obstacle to contemplation but a locus of Divine-human encounter. For the English mystics the paradox lies in the fact that the body was both renounced as an object and a source of temptation but was also ‘caught up’, finding its place in the experience of God. The body had to be disciplined and yet God came to meet them in the body. For Rolle and Julian the emphasis was on the integration of the sensual part of the soul back into the soul’s substance. Encounters with Christ that involved heat, moisture, cold and dryness were both body and soul experiences; the ‘realism’ of the metaphors lay in their close correspondence to medical understandings of the humors.
For Julian, the difference between spiritual and bodily knowing was not in the interiority or immateriality of the mode of perception but in the quality of what was perceived – ghostly vision gave the meaning behind what was seen bodily. However the exterior and interior aspects of sensation work together. Specifically, the carnal knowing of Christ in his Passion was a spiritual knowing of God’s compassion. Despite their grounding in sense perception, images themselves may not therefore be obstacles to contemplation. For Hilton and the Cloud-author reintegration of body and spirit was also part of the Christ’s redemptive work. Restraint of body in the external movements of sensation created the possibility for God to be felt as an object within the soul. Far from denying the body, freeing the physical senses from the desires of the soul allows the body to act dispassionately within its own sphere of activity. The expectation that physical objects can fulfil the soul makes the senses cling to what they perceive. The Middle English ‘discreccion’ comes from Latin discreetus, meaning ‘separate’, but also from the past participle of discernere, ‘to discern’. Separation enables the senses to give accurate objective information about the physical world.

I have argued that in terms of the human person these writers offer a functional but not an ontological dualism between body and soul. There is a distinct asceticism of the body, discretio corporalis, alongside cura anima. Body and soul are distinct. The purpose of bodily discipline was to prepare the body for an encounter with Christ. The Logos ensarkos – as a true image of God in bodily form – engaged both body and soul. The body thus became for the English mystics a key for resolving experientially the central Christian paradox of transcendence and Incarnation. Through Christ sensuality was re-integrated with substance and the two became one. Participation in transcendence and Incarnation was not only an eschatological promise reserved for the Resurrection of the flesh, it was a fruit of prayer. The ascetical path of turning from self-centered desire enabled the body to find its meaning as part of the body of Christ. The body expressed outwardly where the soul was inwardly.

5 MED, C-D, pp. 1125-1126.
Appendix: Translations of Middle English Texts.

Introduction: Body as Process and Paradox

i. They love always together to dwell;
   Neither of them would forgo the other
   So much love is between them both,
   And the more that both together love,
   As often proves with a man and his wife,
   The more the sorrow and the mourning
   Will tend to be at their departing [at death].
   But the body and the soul in this life
   Love more than a man and his wife,
   Whether they be in a good way or a bad.

ii. This work (of contemplation) demands a complete restfulness and good health and a sound disposition in body as well as soul. Therefore for God’s love discipline yourself in body and in soul so that you preserve your health as long as you can.

iii. Like nothing but an instrument and a trumpet of the soul.

iv. Curb physical desire in one’s bodily constitution.

v. There is no obstacle in the middle between Jesus and the soul, but only the life of the body.

vi. For there always hags on his soul a heavy lump of bodily corruption, bearing it down and greatly hindering the spiritual gladness, and that must always be while it is here in this life.

vii. God is spirit and whoever would be one with him must be in truth and in depth of spirit far removed from any misleading bodily thing… For by its nature every physical thing is farther removed from God than any spiritual.

viii. Whenever you find ‘yourself’ spoken of in spiritual writing understand that it is your soul that is refered to, not your body.

ix. At this time I saw a body lying on the earth, a body which looked dismal and ugly, without shape or form as if it were a swollen and heaving mass of stinking mire. And suddenly out of this body there sprang a very beautiful creature, a little child perfectly shaped and formed, quick and bright, whiter than a lily, which glided swiftly up into heaven. And the swelling of the body represents the great sinfulness of our mortal flesh and the smallness of the child represents the chaste purity of the soul. And I thought, ‘None of the beauty of this child remains (blyveth) with the body, nor does any of this body’s filth cling (dwellyth) to the child.

Chapter One: Body as Wholeness and Transformation

i. All that love the contemplative life they seek rest in body and soul […] And I have loved to sit, not for penance […] but only because I knew that I loved God more, and lasted longer within the comfort of love, than when walking, standing or kneeling. For I am most at rest in sitting.

ii. Sweet Jesus, allow me the grace to take my greatest delight in gazing inwardly and meditating on that glorious face; and sweet Jesus, restore the image of thy face in my soul.

iii. […] cannot be touched without exuding some of its sweetness. So sweet Jesus, your body is full of cells of devotion so that it cannot be touched by a pure soul without sweetness of affection appearing.
iv. Sweet Jesu, your body is like a meadow full of scented flowers; so is your body full of wounds, sweetly aromatic for a devout soul [...] Now, sweet Jesu, I implore you, allow me the sweet aroma of mercy.

v. Sensuality is directed toward reason, orientated and deployed towards God.

vi. Wonderful loving is in the soul and for the abundance of sweetness it ascends to the mouth so that the heart and tongue are in perfect accordance and body and soul rejoice in the living God.

vii. Because people do not know what this ‘interior’ work means they do it wrong. For they turn their actual physical minds inwards to their bodies, which is an unnatural thing, and they strain to see spiritually with their physical eyes, to hear within with their outward ears, and to smell and taste and feel and so on inwardly in the same way. And thus they reverse the senses against the course of nature and with this perverseness they work their imagination so indiscreetly that at the end they turn the brains in their heads. And at once the Devil is able to deceive them with false lights and sounds, sweet smells in their noses, wonderful tastes in their mouths, and many strange glowing and burnings in their breasts or in their private parts.

viii. Speech is a bodily activity of the tongue – which is an instrument of the body and needs always to be spoken in bodily words. And what of that? Shall it therefore be taken and conceived as bodily. No, but spiritually.

ix. All of us are apt to conceive what is said spiritually in material terms.

x. But now it is not so. For unless it is held in place by the light of grace in the reason imagination will never cease, sleeping or waking, to portray diverse and unlawful images of physical creatures, or else some fantasy which is nothing else than a bodily hallucination of a spiritual thing or a spiritual hallucination of a bodily thing and this is always unreal, false and linked to error.

xi. Beware that you understand not bodily that which is meant spiritually, even if it spoken of in bodily words like these UP or DOWN, IN or OUT, BEHIND or BEFORE, ON ONE SIDE or ON ANOTHER. For even if a thing be ever so spiritual in itself, nevertheless if it shall be spoken of, because speech is a bodily action performed by the tongue, which is an instrument of the body, it is necessary always to be spoken of in bodily words.

xii. Physical and sensual pretences [to spiritual experience] of those people that have inquisitive and imaginative minds are the cause of much error.

xiii. […] are physical activities, and work with the physical senses […] they work in the body with bodily instruments, which are physical activities, and work with the five senses.

xiv. For immaturity in your spiritual senses, therefore, I will let you climb to contemplation by degree. Because of your crude uncultured natural state and your spiritual immaturity I ask you in the beginning to cover and clothe the feeling of God in the feeling of yourself.

xv. Whenever you feel your mind engaged in the subtleties of the soul’s faculties, and the way they work spiritually […] then you can be said to be ‘within’ yourself and to have found your proper level. But whenever you feel your mind engaged not in any physical or spiritual matter but solely with God as he is then you can be said to be ‘above’ yourself.

xvi. God is spirit and whoever would be one with him must be in truth and in depth of spirit far removed from any misleading bodily thing […] For by its nature every physical thing is farther removed from God than any spiritual.

xvii. Whenever you find ‘yourself’ spoken of in spiritual writing understand that it is your soul that is referred to, not your body.

xviii. God forbid that I should part what God has joined, the body and the spirit. For God wants to be served with body and soul, both together, as is right, and to give us his heavenly reward in body as well as in soul.

xxi. The soul is as truly there where the object of its love is [i.e. God], as it is in its body which depends on it, and to which it gives life.
It will provide spiritual food and inner strength to body as well as to soul. For since all sickness and corruption took hold of the flesh when the soul ceased this exercise, so all health will return when the soul bestirs itself to start again.

[The body], unless it is ruled by grace in the will its whole life will be animal and physical rather than human and spiritual.

Even if it is sometimes called a ‘rest’, they must not think that it means staying in one place and not leaving it. For contemplative perfection is so fine and so spiritual in itself, that if we properly understood it, we would realise it to be poles apart from any physical movement or place […] For in contemplative praying we should forget all about time and place and body.

[Contemplation] has a good effect on the body as well as the soul, for it makes them attractive in the eyes of all who see them.

The subjection of the body to the spirit can be seen after a fashion

For all bodily things are subject to spiritual things and are ruled in that way, and not conversely.

If you are going to refer me to our Lord’s Ascension, and say that it must have physical significance for us as well as spiritual, seeing that it was a physical body that ascended, and he is true God and true man, my answer is that he had been dead, and then had been clothed with immortality; and so shall we be at the day of judgement […]. But at the present time you cannot go to heaven physically, but only spiritually. And it is so really spiritual that it is not physical at all.

We shall be so rarefied in our body-and-soul, that we shall be able to go physically wherever we will as swiftly as we can now go anywhere in thought.

Therefore beware that you don’t take the example of the bodily ascension of Christ for this work […] If you could ascend into heaven as Christ did then you might use it as an example; but no one can do that but God […] Therefore leave such falsehood, it cannot be so.

It shall be joy to your ear and honey in your mouth.

Not all of this comes from the outside into our bodies through the windows of the intellect, but rather from within, rising and springing from the abundance of spiritual gladness, and true devotion of soul.

But all other comforts, sounds, gladness, sweetness that come suddenly to you from outside please do suspect!

If it were true that there was no higher perfection in this life than to contemplate and to love Christ in his humanity I believe he would not have ascended to heaven as long as this world lasted, nor have withdrawn his bodily presence from his special lovers on earth. But because there is a higher perfection which a man may reach in this life, namely, a purely spiritual experience of the love of his Godhead, he said to his disciples, who were reluctant to let go of his bodily presence (as you your fanciful subtle senses) that it was for their good that he left them physically.

[In heaven spiritual sensation] will be inseparably united with the substance of perfection [i.e. the will orientated toward God], as will be the body in which they work be united with the soul.

In eating and in sleeping and in drinking and in keeping your body from extremes of cold and heat, or in spoken conversation, in all these you should keep discretion so that their be neither too much nor too little […] Keep yourself from sickness as much as you may do within reason, so that you not be the cause of your own feebleness.

For all those who apply themselves to work spiritually within and think that they should either hear, smell, see, taste or feel spiritual things, either within or outside them, are
certainly deceived and work in the wrong way against nature. For by nature the senses function so that we may know all external bodily things and one can in no way come by them to the knowing of spiritual things.

You ought to be quite clear about this: though God does sometimes withdraw this sense of sweetness, these enthusiastic feelings, and these burning desires, he never on that account withdraws his grace from his chosen [...] For grace in itself is so pure that it cannot be perceived by our senses. Its tokens may be, but not itself. You associate quite wrongly [Christ’s] coming with your felt experiences.

For a love that is pure and perfect, though it admits that the body is sustained when such sweet feelings are present, does not complain when they are missing, but is really pleased not to have them if that is the will of God.

Quicken me, Lord Jesus Christ, and give me grace, that I may feel some of the savour of spiritual sweetness. Grant me thy light that I might have some vision in my soul to quench my thirst. But I know this well, what I have read, that whoever yearns and seeks in the right way, even though he feels nothing of you and he has no insight into the love of thy Divine nature, it has instructed us, this and other similar teaching, that if a man finds no savour, thinks of himself as cast out and rebuked and reviled and, seeing his wickedness, and judging himself as unworthy to have devotion or such favour of our Lord God, whenever he finds no devotion, then he shall get most quickly the gift of God’s grace.

[Spiritual feeling] nourishes and feeds our spirit to persevere [...] and when you think he has left you (though of course he has not) he is really testing your patience.

Whenever the feeling of grace is withdrawn, pride is always the cause; not necessarily actual pride, but potential pride that would have arisen if the feeling had not been withdrawn.

A ray of spiritual light [...] Then you shall feel your affection inflamed with the fire of his love.

Chapter Two: Body as Boundary and Barrier

i. In our transitory life that we live here our sensory being does not know what we are except by faith.

ii. Our faith is a virtue which comes from the essence of our nature into our sensory being through the Holy Ghost [...] When our soul is breathed into our body, at the moment when we become sensory beings, mercy and grace immediately begin to work. [...] and as they do the Holy Ghost shapes in our faith the hope that we shall rise up again into our essential being.

iii. At the very point where our soul is made sensory, at that point is the city of God.

iv. All the gifts which God can give to the creature he has given to his son Jesus for us, which gifts he, dwelling in us, has enclosed in him until the time that we are fully grown, our soul together with our body and our body together with our soul. Let either of them take help from the other, until we have grown to full stature as creative nature brings about.

v. And thus I understood that man’s soul is made of nothing, that is to say, it is made, but of nothing that is made, and in this way: When God was going to make man’s body, he took the slime of the earth, which is a substance mixed and gathered from all bodily things, and from this he made man’s body; but for the making of man’s soul he did not wish to take anything at all, he simply made it.

vi. A man goes upright, and the food in his body is enclosed as in a very fair purse. And when it is the time of necessity, it (the body) is opened and closed again very properly. That it is God that does this is shown by his saying that he comes down to us in the lowest part of our
need. For God does not have contempt for what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest task that belongs by nature to our bodies, through love of the soul which he has made in his own likeness; for as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed in it.

vii. We shall all be unendingly held in God, seeing him truly, feeling him fully, hearing him spiritually, smelling him delectably and swallowing him sweetly; and then we shall see God face to face, fully and familiarly; the creature that is made shall see and endlessly contemplate God, who is the Maker.

viii. It was not revealed to me that the outward part would draw the inward into agreement, but that the inward should draw the outward, through grace, and both shall be united in everlasting bliss though the power of Christ: This is what was shown.

ix. At this time I saw a body lying on the earth, a body which looked dismal and ugly, without shape or form as if it were a swollen and heaving mass of stinking mire. And suddenly out of this body there sprang a very beautiful creature, a little child perfectly shaped and formed, quick and bright, whiter than a lily, which glided swiftly up into heaven. And the swelling of the body represents the great sinfulness of our mortal flesh and the smallness of the child represents the chaste purity of the soul. And I thought, ‘None of the beauty of this child remains (blyveth) with the body, nor does any of this body’s filth cling (dwellyth) to the child.

x. It is more blessed for man to be taken from suffering than for suffering to be taken from man; for if pain is taken from us it may return.

xi. In our sensual nature we fail.

xii. I saw that as the second Person of the Trinity is mother of our essential being, so that same well-loved person has become mother of our sensory being; for God makes us double, as essential and sensory beings. Our essential being is our higher part, which we have in our Father, God almighty; and the second person of the Trinity is our mother in nature and in our essential creation, in whom we are grounded and rooted, and he is our mother in mercy in taking on our sensory being. And so our Mother, in whom our parts are kept unparted, works in us in various ways.

xiii. Because of the glorious union which was thus made (at creation) by God between the soul and the body, mankind had necessarily to be restored from a double death, which restoration could never be until the time when the second person in the Trinity had taken the lower part of human nature.

xiv. Then (in the Resurrection) we shall all be unendingly hidden in God, seeing him truly, feeling him fully hearing him spiritually, smelling him delectably and swallowing him sweetly; and then we shall see God face to face, fully and familiarly; the creature that is made shall see and endlessly contemplate God, who is the maker.

xv. For these scholars that have great learning
  Call man both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ man.
  Inner man means the soul only,
  And the outer man means the body.
  But the body and the soul between them both
  Makes a man, and nothing more,
  Therefore man shall yield account jointly
  In both together, the soul and the body.

xvi. When the soul passes from the body;
  A sorrowful parting is that to tell […]
  And that is for many and various reasons,
You shall now see what these reasons are
Why they would always be together;
Because God, as it says in holy scripture,
First knit the soul and body together,
Next, because one of them may do nothing
But if the other helps it;
The Third, because both together shall come
Before God on the Day of Judgment.
The Fourth, because when they have come together
they shall for ever after dwell together.
Therefore their pain and sorrow is more
When one of them shall pass away from the other.

xvii. blessedly united to our essential being.
xviii. For no one can see God like this and continue to live, that is to say in this mortal life,
but when through his special grace God wishes to show himself here, he strengthens the
created being beyond its own nature.
xix. In our substance we are full and in our sensuality we are lacking, and this lack God will
restore and fill by the operation of mercy and grace […] and the natural goodness that we
have from God enables us to receive the operation of mercy and grace.
xx. And our foul mortal flesh, which God’s Son took upon him, which was Adam’s old tunic,
tight-fitting threadbare and short, was then made lovely by our saviour, new, white and bright
and forever clean, wide and ample.
xxi. [Spiritual vision] can be had and held only by people who are in great quietness of body
and soul: those who by the grace of Jesus Christ and long labour in body and spirit feel rest of
heart and cleanliness of conscience, so that nothing pleases them so much as to sit still in
bodily rest and pray to God always.
xxii. discretion in all types of bodily penance […] for moderation is best.
xxiii. Withstand the unreasonable stirrings of fleshly desires. But you shall not rise up against
the ground which is need such as natural hunger which you must feel and attend to at the
right time helping yourself against it with the medicine of food in your wish to guard yourself
rationally against bodily sickness, in order to serve God the more freely in body and soul.
xxiv. Shall be mortified and tormented in the sensuality […] The poor soul shall be so
punished by feeling and bearing the wretched body that it could not bear being in the body
were it not that the Lord Jesus keeps it there […] But the suffering of this kind of pain is
nothing but purgatory, the therefore (the chosen soul) suffers it gladly and would not put it
away even if he could, because it is so profitable.
xxv The body may be kept in strength […] the best and most costly food under the sun.
xxvi. Seeks solitude in the body, for that greatly helps toward soli-
tude of soul and the free
working of love.
xxvii. This changeability of absence and presence that a soul feels is not perfection of the
soul; neither is it against the grace of perfection or contemplation; but with it perfection is so
much the less.
xxviii. Thinks that all the limbs of the body and all the structure of the world, with every
created thing, to be like a melody on the harp.
xxix. All that [the contemplative] hears, sees or feels by any of his senses turns him to
comfort and joy. Sensuality receives new savour and sweetness in all creatures.
xxx. Since the soul is punished in the sensuality, and the flesh shares the pain, that afterward
the soul be comforted in the sensuality – afterwards the soul should be refreshed through the
senses, and the body made the soul’s companion in comfort and joy – not carnal, but
spiritual, as it was a fellow in tribulation and pain. [...] In this way a soul is made spiritual even in its sensual nature.

xxx. A lively feeling of grace wonderfully quickens the soul, making it so sound that it feels no painful disease of the body even if it is weak and sickly, because the body is then at its strongest, most whole and most restful and the soul as well.

xxxii. I hope that the soul who by the ravishing of love is reformed in feeling into the contemplation of God may be so far from the sensuality and from vain imagination, and so far drawn out and parted for a time from the feeling of the flesh.

xxxiii. Full Text: For you are to understand that the soul has two parts. One is called the sensuality: that is the carnal feeling through the five outward senses which is common to man and beast. From this sensuality when it is irrationally and inordinately ruled, is made the image of sin, for the sensuality is sin when it is not ruled according to reason. The other part is called reason, and that is divided in two, into the higher part and the lower part. The higher part is compared to a man, for by that alone the soul knows God and loves him. The lower part is compared to a woman, for it should be obedient to man, and that lies in the knowledge and rule of earthly things, to use them discerningly according to need and to refuse them when there is no need; at the same time always to have an eye raised to the higher part of reason, with reverence and fear, in order to follow it.

xxxiv. You must stop all bodily work for a time and all outward activity. Then you must withdraw your thought into yourself and away from your bodily senses, so that you can pay no attention to what you hear, see or feel and do not allow the point of your heart to be fixed on them. After this draw your thought inward if you can from all imagination of any material thing, and from all thoughts of your own former bodily actions, and of other peoples.

xxxv. For I would rather have been in pain until doomsday than to have come to heaven in another way than by him [...] I wanted no other heaven than Jesus.

Chapter Three: Body as Sight and Sensation

i. Words formed in my understanding [...] This word formed in my soul without a voice and without opening of the lips.

ii. As soon as I fell asleep, it seemed to me that the Devil set himself at my throat and wanted to strangle me, but he was not able [...] and I awoke... and then a little smoke came in at the door, with great heat and a foul stench, and I said: Benedicite dominus! Is everything here on fire? And I thought it was a bodily fire that would have burned us to death. I asked those who were with me if they felt any stink. They said No they felt none. I said: Blessed be God! For then I knew well it was the Devil who had come to assail me.

iii. [I] laughed heartily and that made those around me laugh too, and that laughing pleased me [...] Everything that God allows [the Devil] to do turns into joy for us.

iv. But I lay still awake, and then the Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the centre of my heart. I saw my soul was as large as a kingdom and the nature of it within was as it were a fine city. In the midst of that city sits our Lord Jesus [...] He sits in the soul in complete peace and rest.

v. And the soul which sees this it makes it like that which is seen, to be always in rest and peace. And this was a singular joy and bliss to me that I saw him sit, for the beholding of this sitting showed to me [...] truthfully that it was he who showed me all before.

vi. Then very humbly he revealed words to me, without voice and without opening of lips, as he had done before, and said very soberly: Know it well it was no hallucination which you saw today.
vii. After this the Devil returned with his heat and his stench and made me very restless. The stench was vile and painful, and his physical heat was fearful and oppressive; and I could also hear in my ears chattering and talking ... I comforted my soul with bodily speech, as I should have done to another person who had been so oppressed... I fixed my eyes on the same cross in which I had seen comfort before, and I occupied my tongue in speaking of Christ’s Passion.

viii. Sweet Jesus, I thank you for [...] your face, that sweet mirror and the bodily bliss of heaven, upon which the angels and saint have the delight to look. Now, sweet Jesus give the grace to have most delight to inwardly look and think upon that blessed face. And, sweet Jesus, restore the likeness of that face in my soul.

ix. All this spiritual operation of words and statements brought to mind, and such fair likenesses are made by the ministry of Angels [...] The illuminations that pure souls perceive through the fellowship and favor of Angels.

x. That look by which you looked at your disciple St Peter who forsook you [...] Through that blessed look may we turn to your grace.

xi. Oh Lord, the sorrow that descended on your heart when you cast your eyes on your mother [...] So [by this sight] your sorrow for each other was greatly magnified.

xii. The great drops of blood fell down from under the garland like pellotes that seemed to come out of the veins. And in coming out they were browny red, for the blood was very thick. And in flowing out they were bright red. And when it came to the brows they vanished there and yet the bleeding continued until many things were seen and understood [...] The abundance is like the drops of water that fall from the eves of a house after a great shower of rain, that fall so thick that no one can number them by natural intelligence. And their roundness, spreading out on the forehead, was like the scale of a herring.

xiii. the beauty and the vitality continued in the same beauty and vitality.

xiv. I saw that the bleeding was so abundant that I thought that if it had been a natural and physical event it would have made the bed all bloody and have flown everywhere.

xv. The secrets of the revelation are hid within [the particulars of the story]

xvi. And our foul mortal flesh that was taken by God’s Son, which was Adam’s old clothes, tight, threadbare and short, was then made by our Savior fair, new, white and bright and of endless cleanness, wide and ample, fair and richer than the clothing which I saw on the Father. For that clothing was blue, and Christ’s clothing is now of a fair and seemly mixture, which is so marvelous that I cannot describe it for it is all of true glory.

Chapter Four: Body as Dialectic and Denial

i. Be blind for a while and cut away any desire to know within [the darkness].

ii. It is better for you to have [such a blind stirring of love] and to feel it spiritually in your affection than it is to have the eye of your soul opened in contemplation or beholding of all the angels or saints in heaven, or in hearing all the joy and melody that is among them in bliss.

iii. For myself, I prefer to be lost in this nowhere, wrestling with this blind nothingness, than to be like some great lord travelling everywhere and enjoying the world as if he owned it.

iv. black stinking clothes.

v. put up with this darkness and endure it for a time

vi. You must not fix your thought on this nothing, but on Jesus Christ whom you desire, as if you would overcome the nothingness and pass through it. You must dread and hate this darkness and this nothingness as if it were the devil of hell, and you must despise and destroy it.
vi. Accustom yourself to dwell in this darkness, strive to become familiar with it, and you will quickly find peace, and the true light of spiritual understanding will flood the soul — not all at once but gradually.

vii. beholding the natures and causes of bodily creatures, the gifts of graces and blisses of spiritual creatures [...] looking with the inner eye on bodily creatures.

viii. With the help of angels it sees still more. For in a pure soul knowledge rises above all this, to gaze upon the blessed nature of Jesus himself — first on his glorious humanity — how it is worthily exalted above the nature of all angels — and then afterwards on his blessed divinity; for by knowing the creatures the creator is known. Then the soul begins to perceive a little of the mysteries of the blessed Trinity. It can, well enough, for the light of grace goes before, and therefore she shall not err as long as she keeps herself with the light.

ix. For when I say darkness I mean a lack of knowing; as all the things that you dont know, or have forgotten are dark to you, for you don’t see them with your spiritual eye. For this reason it is not called a cloud of the sky but a cloud of unknowing that is between you and your God.

x. The eye of a pure soul [...] as some believe [...] might see by imagination through the skies above the firmament, how our Lord Jesus sits in his majesty in a physical light as great as a hundred suns.

xi. You are busy to worship [Christ’s] head and his face, and to dress it beautifully and curiously, but you leave his body, his arms and his feet ragged and torn, and you take no care of them.

xii. She took very little notice of the beauty of his precious and blessed body.

xiii. This desire is an activity of the soul unaware of itself — for the desire of the soul corresponds to the touch and movement of the body; and you know well yourself that both touch and movement are unconscious activities of the body.

xiv. Death comes in by our windows. These windows are our five senses, by the which the soul goes out from himself and seeks its delight and its nourishment in earthly things, against its own nature; as by the eye to see curious and fair things, by the ear to hear wondrous and new tidings, and so of the other senses.

xv. Fast as much as you can, keep vigil for as long as you can, wake up never so early, lie on as hard a bed as possible, wear as sharp clothes as you can, yes, and if it was permissible to do — as it is not — put out your eyes, cut the tongue from out of your mouth, block your ears and you nose as much as you can, though you cut away your private parts and did all the torture to your body that you might think of: all this wouldn’t help you at all.

xvi. For though you do not see me with your bodily eye, you may see with your soul by imagination; and likewise with all physical things [...] Truly even though your soul is within in relation to your physical senses, it is clearly outside itself by such vain imaginings.

xvii. So that I might get a wakeful and active attention in this spiritual work within the soul, I would have indifference in eating and in drinking, in sleeping and in speaking and in all my external activities. For I do believe I would sooner come to discretion in them by such an indifference than by an busy attention to the same things, as if I would by that attention set a mark and a measure in them.

xviii. [Christ] said to his disciples who were loath to let go of his bodily presence (as you are your odd subtle senses) that it was helpful for them that he took away his bodily presence.

xix. Far away from any movement and from any place [...] For time, place and body, these three should be forgotten in all spiritual work.

xx. The knowing and the feeling of all other creatures depends on the knowing and feeling of yourself.

xxi. All physical things are outside of your soul and by nature beneath it.

xxii. By nature the powers of your soul are within you [...] [But] God is by nature above you.
xxiv. But now you may not come to heaven physically but only spiritually. Indeed it shall be so spiritual that it shall be in no physical manner at all.

xxv. If a man saw one aspect and not another then he might easily be led into error.

xxvi. For by your eyes you are not able to perceive anything except by the length and the breadth, the smallness and the greatness, the roundness and the squareness, the distance and the nearness, and the colour of it [and so with the other senses as well]. And truely neither God nor spiritual things have these qualities or quantities [...] [Still] by their lack we may understand them, in this way: when we read or hear spoken certain things and perceive there no quality by which our external senses can tell us what these things are, then we may be very certain that these things are spiritual things and not bodily things.

xxvii. Leave your outer senses and don’t work with them either internally or externally. For all who want to work inwardly and spiritually, and believe that they should either hear, smell, see, taste or feel spiritual things, either internally or outside them, certainly they are deceived and work falsely against the course of nature [...] In the same manner it happens spiritually within our spiritual senses when we try to know God himself. For even though someone had great spiritual understanding in knowing all created spiritual things, yet he may never by his understanding come to the knowledge of an uncreated spiritual thing, which is God. But by the inability it may, for that things which it is incapable of must be God.

xxviii. Stretch his spirit upward in this work [...] as the Lord did with his body on the cross.

xxix. Ties all men to God as effectively as he himself is [tied to God].

xxx. [Not for] the releasing from pain nor for the increasing of reward.

xxxi. He neither regards nor looks after whether he is in pain or in bliss.

xxxii. See that you leave nothing in your active mind but a naked intent reaching out to God, not clothed in any special thought of God – how he is in himself or in any of his works.

xxxiii. This naked intent [...] should be nothing else to your thought and to your feeling but a naked thought and a blind feeling of your own being.

xxxiv. Without considering any quality of your being.

xxxv. Whether they be pure or wretched, of grace or of nature, of God or of man.

xxxvi. For this is plainly proper to the nature of the most uneducated cow or the most unreasoning beast [...] to feel their own proper being.

xxxvii. A complete worship by offering up [to God] simply and wholly your own self.

xxxviii. Beware that you don’t conceive in a physical way that which is meant in a spiritual way, even if it is spoken by bodily words like UP or DOWN, IN or OUT, BEHIND or BEFORE, ON ONE SIDE or ON ANOTHER.

xxxix. How can someone forsake themselves or the world more [...] than to distain to think of any characteristics of their nature.

xl. Now you are in the spiritual sea, as I will depict it, sailing away from the body to the spirit.

xli. Make a hole in the firmament [...] make a God as it seems to them, clothe him in rich clothes and set him on a throne.

xlii. The opening of heaven to the eyes of a clean soul, of which holy men speak in their writings [is] not [...] as if a soul might see by imagination through the skies above the firmament, how our Lord Jesus sits in His majesty in a bodily light.

xliii. Suddenly your thought is drawn up from all worldly and fleshly things, and you feel as if you see in your soul your Lord in bodily likeness as he was on earth [...] Then – when the remembrance of Christ’s Passion or any point of His humanity is thus caused in your heart by such spiritual vision, with devout affection answering to it, then, know well that it is not your own doing, neither the pretence of any wicked spirit, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For it is an opening of the eye of the spirit into Christ’s humanity.
Chapter Five: Body as Threshold and Meeting Place

i) He shows us his suffering countenance, as he was in this life as he carried his cross, we are therefore in suffering and labour with him as our nature requires. And the reason why he suffers is because in his goodness he wishes to make us heirs with him of his joy. And for this little pain which we suffer here we shall have an exalted and eternal knowledge in God which we could never have without that pain.

ii) My king much water wept and much blood he let;  
    And was most sorely beat until his own blood ran wet,  
    When their scourges met. Most hard they did them fling  
    And at the pillar swing; his dear face smeared with spitting.  
    Naked is his white breast, and red is his bloody side;  
    Pale was his fair face, his wounds deep and wide.  
    In five holes of his flesh the blood glided down  
    As streams on a beach; his languishing cannot be hidden.

iii) In [God’s] absence we are all cold and dry and we have no sweetness [...] then the sun draws the humours up into the air, from which there comes dew and rain [...] In the same way, when our Lord Jesus the bright sun is lifted up in our hearts above all other things [...] then from the virtues, which I call spiritual humours, there comes a sweet rain and a heavenly dew of Divine sweetness.

iv) might turn through the sweat [of Christ] out of all sickness of soul into a healthy bodily life.

v) most unworthy in all men’s estimation

vi) Wounds of deep remorse are all I yearn for, anguish and sympathy for my Lord Jesus Christ. Most unworthy in all men’s estimation, I have a craving for pain, to implore my Lord for a drop of his red blood to make my soul bloody with, a drop of that water which he sweat at his scourging to wash it with.

vii) I saw, looking at the body bleeding abundantly in appearance like the scourging that it looked like this: The fair skin was very deeply broken, down into the tender flesh, sharply slashed all over the dear body; the hot blood ran out so abundantly that no skin or wound could be seen, it seemed to be all blood.

viii) And the dear body was turned dark and black, quite transformed from his own fair, fresh lively colour into parched mortification; for at the same time that our blessed saviour died upon the cross there was a bitter, dry wind that was loss of blood and pain drying him from within, and blasts of wind and cold coming from without, met together in the dear body of Christ.

ix) I saw four ways in which it had been dried up: The first was loss of blood; the second was the torment that followed after; the third, being hung in the air, as a cloth is hung to dry; the fourth that his bodily nature needed liquid and there was no kind of comfort ministered to him. Ah! His pain was hard and grievous, but it was much more hard and grievous when the moisture was exhausted and everything began to dry and shrink. The pains that appeared in the blessed head were two: The first done to the dying body while it was moist; the second a slow pain as the body dried and shrunk with the blowing of the wind from without which dried him more, and tormented him with cold as much as I can imagine.

x) The changing of his blessed expression changed mine, and I was as glad and as happy as it was possible to be. Then our Lord made me think happily, ‘where is there now one jot of your pain or your sorrow?’ And I was very happy. I understood that we are now, as our Lord intends it, dying with him on his cross in our pain and in our passion; and if we willingly
remain on the same cross with his help and his grace until the final moment, the countenance he turns on us will suddenly change, and we will be with him in heaven.

xi) Then was your body like heaven. For as heaven is full of stars, so your body was full of wounds [...] And yet, Lord, sweet Jesus, your body is like a net; for as a net is full of holes, so is your body full of wounds. Here, sweet Lord Jesus, I ask you to catch me in the net of your flogging [...] Also, sweet Jesus, your body is like a dove house. For a dove house is full of holes, so is your body full of wounds [...] I ask you, in each temptation grant me the grace of some hole of your wounds to hide in.

xii) Lord who made me and all my limbs, I implore you, give me grace to serve you with all my limbs so that your limbs may be your limbs and all may be employed in your service, and constantly bending as you direct me, constantly ready to move or rest at your command, always immobilised to acts of sin, always fresh and eager for your instructions.

xiii) All your five senses were seized with torments, in order to remedy the transgressions of our five senses.

xiv) What makes our delight pure is the reordering of our sensuality through reason; when any is diverted to take pleasure in his five senses at once impurity makes its way into the soul [...] Accordingly the delight which has no trace of uncontrolled arousal but is gently aroused by Christ’s loving, and in which sensuality is redirected toward reason, totally orientated and deployed toward God, sets a man’s soul in repose, and security.

xv) Then, with a glad face, our Lord looked into his side, and gazed, rejoicing; and with his dear gaze he led his creature’s understanding through the same wound into his side. And then he revealed a beautiful and delightful place which was large enough for all mankind who shall be saved to rest there in peace and love

xvi) Either I must look up or I must answer. I answered inwardly with all the strength of my soul and said, ‘No, I cannot, for you are my heaven.’

xvii) For the vision was shown for everyone [...] what I say of myself, I am saying on behalf of all my fellow Christians.

xviii) Just Because I am a woman must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God?

xix) I laughed heartily and that made those around me laugh too, and their laughter pleased me [...] everything that God allows him to do turns into joy for us.

xx) Oftener our Lord Jesus said ‘It is I [...] It is I who am all. It is I whom holy church preaches and teaches. It is I who showed myself to thee before.
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