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Devotional reading and dissolving the self

A critical reading of the late medieval
Scottish Legendary using Kristevan theory

by Jessica Reid

Submitted to the University of Glasgow
for Scottish Literature MPhil examination
in July, 2016.

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Think how þi flesche, quhilk now is singularfed,
Salbe þe fude of werme and scorioun.

William of Touris, 'The Contemplacioun of Synnaris', p. 74, ll. 545-6.

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Devotional reading and dissolving the self

A critical reading of the late medieval *Scottish Legendary* using Kristevan theory

Abstract

The *Scottish Legendary* is a fourteenth century collection of saints' lives in Older Scots. The prologue describes the lives as 'merroure' (mirror) to readers from which 'men ma ensample ta' (people may take example). Thus, the *Legendary* sets out to reveal how the reader *is* (mirror) thereby moving her to wish to become how she should *be* (exemplarity). This dissertation argues that, rather than encouraging devotion to saints along purely dogmatic lines, the *Legendary* transforms the reader's selfhood by engaging her affectively, i.e. on an emotional and somatic level. By provoking the reader affectively, the text puts the reader into what Julia Kristeva has described as a 'semiotic state' which harks back to the reader's or listener's pre-cultural, pre-subjective self (Kristeva, 1984). Thus, the text disrupts the reader's conception of herself as a complete, hermetic subjectivity, thereby dissolving the boundaries of the reader's self. The *Legendary* most powerfully infiltrates the reader's sense of self along these lines in the moments in which female saints' bodies are tortured and dismembered. These scenes foreground the permeability of human flesh as well as its powerful influence over selfhood. Such images of abjection are, in Kristeva's words, 'opposed to *I*'; by confronting the reader with the disintegration of subjectivity in abjection, the text incites the reader to likewise experience herself as abject, i.e. disintegrable and permeable (Kristeva 1982). As I shall demonstrate, Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of the formation of the self offers a fruitful framework for understanding the processes of self-knowledge through reading that these saints' lives inspire.

Introduction

Unbelievers, mocking at our simplicity, reproach us with doing God wrong and putting Him to shame when we assert that He descended into the womb of a virgin, was born of a woman, grew, was nourished with milk and the ordinary food of man, and (to be silent on many other points, which seem unsuitable to God) that He suffered weariness, hunger, thirst, scourging, crucifixion, and death with thieves on the cross.¹

In the eleventh century, a new mode of devotion now known as affective piety took hold, ushered in by St Anselm. Anselm's teachings, which he advanced in *Cur Deus Homo?* quoted above, set Christ's humanity at the centre of devotion. Whereas the Early Middle Ages viewed the Passion of Christ as a cosmic struggle between God and the devil, late medieval affective piety interpreted the Passion as Christ's personal, human struggle for redemption against worldly temptation.² As a result, the Late Middle Ages focused on Christ's bodily and emotional experiences during His Passion. In turn, devotees engaged with the Passion of Christ in emotional and embodied ways, seeking to know Christ through *imitatio Christi*, i.e. experiencing Christ's suffering with Him by living as He lived, rather than through intellectual learning. Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* written in Latin c.1418-1427 highlights the importance of the affective, i.e. the emotional and the somatic, over the intellectual in late medieval devotion:

What good can it do you to discuss the mystery of God the Trinity in learned terms if you lack humility and so displease that God? Learned arguments do not make a man holy and righteous, whereas a good life makes him dear to God. I would rather feel compunction in my heart than be able to define it. If you knew the whole Bible off by heart and all the expositions of scholars, what good would it do you without the love and grace of God?³

According to Thomas, in order to lead a spiritual life it is actually preferable to follow Christ's example and, in doing so, feel compunction rather than to engage in intellectual discussions and debate. Thomas highlights the relationship between the affective and the devout; the daily embodied performance of devotion through *imitatio Christi* produces an intimate experience of emotions appropriate to Christian selfhood.

¹ Saint Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo: to which is added a selection from his letters* (Edinburgh: J. Grant,

² See R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Random House, 1993), pp. 209-44.

³ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* trans. by Betty I. Knott (London: Collins, 1963), p. 37.

Affective piety prized somatic and emotional experiences and provided an alternative to intellectual or learned devotion. The *Scottish Legendary* responds to, and is shaped by, this affective late medieval culture. The *Legendary* is a collection of fifty saints' lives in Older Scots. The saints' lives are largely sourced from the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1229-1298), with many passages direct translations from the Latin text. The saints are mainly those commonly found throughout Christian Europe and only two local Scottish saints are included, St Machor and St Ninian.⁴ Scholarship has consistently dated the dialect of the *Legendary* to the fourteenth century.⁵ The collection is extant in one manuscript only, Gg.II.6, which is housed in Cambridge University Library, the handwriting of which Metcalfe has dated to the fifteenth century.⁶ The present study does not discuss the manuscript itself; instead I use W.M. Metcalfe's 1896 complete edition of the lives, which is reliable on the whole in spite of being well over a century old.

The *Legendary* competes with *The Bruce* as the earliest example of Scots literature. However, whilst *The Bruce* is frequently referenced in both academic and public discourses on Scottish identity, the *Legendary* has received scant academic attention. Indeed, the text has not even been edited since 1896. Likewise, whilst Anglo-Saxon and Middle English saints' lives have received a significant amount of critical attention, on the rare occasion that the *Legendary* is the subject of critical study, such as in the work of Karen Winstead or Samantha J.E. Riches, usually only one or two lives are discussed as one of many examples of hagiography. The *Legendary* is seldom the subject of dedicated and sustained study. However, two recent PhDs that are primarily focused on the *Scottish Legendary* suggest that the collection is beginning to inspire critical attention. In 2011, Melissa Coll-Smith received a DPhil for work that studied female saints and their cults in Scotland and relied heavily on the *Scottish Legendary* for evidence. Then, in 2013, Eva von Contzen took a pragma-narratological approach to the hagiographies in her doctoral thesis as a means of delineating how the text engages with its reader.

⁴ See p. 10 for complete list.

⁵ For instance, W.M. Metcalfe, 'Introduction' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* ed. by W.M. Metcalfe, vol. 1, (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1896), pp. vii-xxxiii, p. xxii. Also Eva von Contzen, 'Of Sinners and Saints. Towards a Pragma-Narratological Approach to the *Scottish Legendary*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2012), pp.25-6 for a discussion of the problems with dating the dialect.

⁶ W.M. Metcalfe, 'Introduction, p. ix. For more recent discussions of the manuscript and dialect see von Contzen, pp. 21-8, and Melissa Coll-Smith, 'The *Scottish Legendary* and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval Scotland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2011, pp. 20-63.

The present dissertation is also an investigation into how the *Legendary* asks to be read and what kinds of interactions it invites its contemporary, fourteenth century reader to engage in. Traditionally, scholars have preferred to focus upon the *Legendary*'s authorship and place of composition, a discussion that spans from its 1878 editor Carl Horstmann to Coll-Smith's 2011 DPhil thesis. However, as von Contzen has pointed out, whoever the author may have been, the late medieval reader would have had little concept of the kind of singular 'author' as originator in the way we do today.⁷ The *Scottish Legendary* is not a neat, self-contained whole governed by an authorial voice; rather, it is woven together from many source materials (both vernacular and Latin) in at least two difficult to read hands. Furthermore, it is not designed to be a discrete, static object. As von Contzen has argued:

Their most dominant and most crucial feature is their constant dialogue with the audience, not only because of the narrator's metanarrative interventions, but also because the text itself is an open, response-inviting, and action-stimulating entity.⁸

The *Legendary* strives to overstep the boundaries of its pages through a dynamic relationship with its imagined reader. It rambles in many voices, addressed sometimes to a solitary reader and at other times to a crowd of listeners, both male and female, who are imagined to respond with devotion, disagreement, self-reflection, amusement, anger, relief. The narrating 'I' tethers the many voices of the text and provides us with a storytelling companion throughout. Yet the meaning of the *Scottish Legendary* is not entirely controlled by this 'I' but instead relies upon the disparate interpretations of its readers. Von Contzen suggests that the *Legendary*'s narrator, unusual in such a collection, indicates that the text was 'most likely written for a lay audience's private reading...'.⁹ Indeed, the *Legenda Aurea*, the *Legendary*'s primary source text has no such narrator and was rather written 'as an aid for busy priests and preachers in need of a handy source of vivid anecdote, instruction, and edification to bulk out their sermons and catecheses'.¹⁰ Perhaps, in a context in which private reading was increasingly possible, the Scottish poet partly included the narrator to replace the priest who would hitherto have guided the devotee's engagement with saints' lives.

⁷ Von Contzen, p. 79.

⁸ Ibid, p. 320.

⁹ Ibid, p. 48.

¹⁰ Eamon Duffy, 'Introduction' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. xi-xx, p. xi.

My focus differs from von Contzen's in that, where she uses narratology to describe the ways in which the text interacts with the reader, I am concerned with the reader's selfhood, specifically, the ways in which the saints' lives in the *Scottish Legendary* move the reader to explore and edify herself within the culture of affective piety.

The *Legendary's* interest in the reader's selfhood is clear from the prologue, in which the poet sets out his intentions for the collected saints' lives to be 'as merroure' (as mirror) to his readers so that 'men ma ensample ta' (people, i.e. readers, may take example).¹¹ As if looking in the mirror, the reader should reflect on herself through the text and recognise areas for improvement so that she can follow the example set by the saints. The text induces the reader to edify herself in this way by engaging her affectively with the lives of saints.

My discussion of the *Legendary* draws on the work of Julia Kristeva, specifically her theories of the semiotic and abjection, in order to describe how affectivity can inform selfhood. The semiotic describes the emotional and somatic aspects of language such as emotive body language that work in conjunction with, although they often disturb, the symbolic aspects of language that pertain to order, reason, and intellectual meaning. The semiotic dissolves the reader's sense of herself as a complete hermetic subject who is separate from the text by putting the reader into a semiotic state that is redolent of her selfhood before she entered into the symbolic order and began to imagine herself as a hermetic subject. Kristeva's idea of the subject as imagining itself as hermetic is profoundly influenced by Jacques Lacan who describes the subject in the symbolic order as 'a kind of fortress-self'.¹² The subject, thus, sees itself as ordered and contained. Kristeva's theories of the semiotic layer of language and the semiotic state draw attention to the inherent disorder that pre-dates and always underlies subjectivity and threatens to explode the subject's idea of itself as sealed and cohesive. The affective aspects of the *Scottish Legendary* appeal to this underlying, inherent disorder. By engaging the reader affectively, the text bypasses the intellectual symbolic order and, thus, powerfully arrests the reader on an intensely intimate level, putting her into a semiotic state that dissolves the

¹¹ 'Prologue' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1896), pp. 1-6, p. 2, ll. 25, 29.

¹² Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 88.

boundaries of her fortress-self. In this way, the *Legendary* works to disturb and overflow its own boundaries and infiltrate the reader's understanding of herself.

My first chapter lays the groundwork for my Kristevan discussion by first examining the notion of subjectivity and introspection in the Middle Ages before showing that the *Legendary* is concerned with moulding its reader's subjectivity. Through close examination of the *Legendary*'s prologue combined with contextualisation in wider late medieval traditions of devotional self-searching, this chapter will shed light on early readers who were ardently concerned with understanding themselves in relation to the wider world.

In Chapter Two, I draw on Kristeva's theory of the semiotic layer of language to investigate how affective modes of devotion and of reading influence subjectivity and selfhood. The *Legendary* constructs affective relationships between readers and saints that engage readers on an immediate, arational level that pertains to the semiotic.

Chapter Three will focus on a particularly powerful and prevalent emotional reaction in the *Legendary*, that induced by images of saints' perforated flesh in torture and martyrdom. By turning to Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, my investigation into the reader's affective reaction to mutilated saints' bodies argues that, far from distancing readers from the experiences of saints, torture and martyrdom draw attention to the commonality of saints and readers by foregrounding saints' fleshly permeability and changeability. On the arational level of the semiotic, female saints' permeated flesh disturbs the reader according to the psychological forces of the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject 'simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject' and is

experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject.¹³

Thus, the abject bodies of saints invoke the reader to discover that she, herself, is abject and that her claim on discrete, hermetic subjectivity is but an illusion. In this way, the reading process abjects the reader, dissolving the boundaries of her subjectivity.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 5.

As the many studies of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English saints' lives have shown, hagiography can tell us a great deal about the role of text and narrative in late medieval cultural life. Saints' lives were patently immensely popular in the period; the *Legenda Aurea* has survived in almost a thousand manuscript copies of the original Latin and five hundred in vernacular translation.¹⁴ As the only extant collection of saints' lives in Older Scots, the *Scottish Legendary* can tell us a great deal about a relatively unknown readership.

¹⁴ Eamon Duffy, p. xi.

Note on the text

The poet imagines that the *Legendary* will be both read and heard, advising his audience ‘to red ore here now/storysse of sere haly men...’ (to read or hear now stories of various holy men).¹⁵ However, in the interests of remaining focused, I refer to the reader/listener throughout as ‘the reader’. Additionally, I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun when referring to the text’s putative reader.

As an aid to the reader, I have included translations for Older Scots and Middle English passages. Aside from the translation of Julian of Norwich, these translations are my own work but are, nonetheless, indebted to the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* at <http://dsl.ac.uk> as well as Metcalfe’s glossary found in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century*, volume three.

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¹⁵ ‘Prologue’, p. 1, ll. 22-3.

Handlist of saints' lives in the *Scottish Legendary*

- (I) Petrus (Peter)
 (II) Paulus (Paul)
 (III) De Sancto Andrea (Andrew)
 (IV) Jacobus (James son of Zebedee)
 (V) Johannes (John)
 (VI) Thomas
 (VII) Jacobus (James son of Alphaeus)
 (VIII) Philepus (Philip)
 (IX) Bertholomeus (Bartholomew)
 (X) Mathou (Matthew)
 (XI) Symon and Iudas (Simon and Jude)
 (XII) Mathias (Matthias)
 (XIII) Marcus (Mark)
 (XIV) Lucas (Luke)
 (XV) Barnabas
 (XVI) Magdalena (Mary Magdalene)
 (XVII) Martha
 (XVIII) Egipciane (Mary of Egypt)
 (XIX) Cristofore (Christopher)
 (XX) Blasius (Blaise)
 (XXI) Clement
 (XXII) Laurentius (Laurence)
 (XXIII) VII Sleperis (The Seven Sleepers)
 (XXIV) Alexis
 (XXV) Julian (Julian, Bishop of Cenomanese, Julian of Brioude, Julian and his brother Julius of Novara, Julian Hospitator, Julian the Apostate)
 (XXVI) Nycholas (Nicholas)
 (XXVII) Machor (Machar)
 (XXVIII) Margaret (Margaret of Antioch)
 (XXIX) Placidus (also known as Eustace)
 (XXX) Theodera (Theodora)
 (XXXI) Eugenia
 (XXXII) Iustin (Justina)
 (XXXIII) George
 (XXXIV) Pelagia
 (XXXV) Thadee (Thais)
 (XXXVI) Ioh[a]n[e]s Baptista (John the Baptist)
 (XXXVII) Vincencius (Vincent)
 (XXXVIII) Adrian
 (XXXIX) Cosme & Damyane (Cosmas and Damian)
 (XL) Ninian
 (XLI) Agnes
 (XLII) Agatha
 (XLIII) Cecile (Cecilia)
 (XLIV) Lucy
 (XLV) Cristine (Christina of Bolsena)
 (XLVI) Anastace (Anastasia)
 (XLVII) Effame (Euphemia)
 (XLVIII) Juliana
 (XLIX) Tecla (Thecla)
 (L) Katerine (Catherine of Alexandria)

Chapter One

Introspective Reading

There is no reason to think that languages and experiences of inwardness, of interiority, of divided selves, of splits between outer realities and inner forms of being, were unknown before the seventeenth century, before capitalism, before the “bourgeoisie”, before Descartes, before the disciplinary regimes addressed in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. This is certainly not to deny that decisive changes occurred in Western societies between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries: capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, the mechanism of Nature from which the “ontic logos” was expelled. All these, in so many different ways, worked to transform our planet, our self-understanding, our societies. But any account that tells us stories of transformations, whether in the “construction of the subject” or in production for markets, will have to describe with great care, let me say it again, precisely that against which it is being alleged the changes are identifiable as decisive changes and ruptures.¹⁶

To write the history of the medieval subject is in effect to write the history of medieval culture.¹⁷

It has become a critical commonplace that the birth of the introspective subject imagined as independent from and potentially at odds with collectively designated identities is dateable to the seventeenth century or at least to sometime in the long sixteenth century. However, as critics such as David Aers and Lee Patterson have argued, medieval literature, theology and art indicate that medieval people were deeply concerned to know their inner self. This concern with an inward self represents the beginnings of individualism and is, as A.C. Spearing has argued, ‘a stage on the way *toward*...individualism’.¹⁸ The history of introspective subjectivity begins far earlier than the seventeenth century.

In this chapter, I put forth the notion that the *Scottish Legendary* is evidence of an understanding of introspective subjectivity in Scotland as early as the fourteenth century. The first part of the chapter will look broadly at late medieval conceptions of

¹⁶ David Aers, ‘A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the “History of the Subject”’ in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* ed. by David Aers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 177-202, p. 186.

¹⁷ Lee Patterson, ‘On the margin: Postmodernism, ironic history and medieval studies’, *Speculum* 65 (1990), 87-108, p. 100.

¹⁸ A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The ‘I’ of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 38.

inner selves before I move on to look at the *Legendary* in its own right as a text designed to aid the reader in overcoming the alienation of the self by inciting a mode of specifically introspective reading.

It is often argued that medieval people understood themselves through a collective hierarchy of identities based upon gender, feudal position, and occupation. Nevertheless, medieval selfhood often had a problematic and conflicted relationship with external identities. The inner self could become obscured through its relationship with the outside world. Retrieving that inner self was of the utmost importance because in the Late Middle Ages, to fail to know oneself was to fail to know God. As Patterson has explained, 'the dialectic between an inward subjectivity and an external world that alienates it from both itself and its divine source provides the fundamental economy of the medieval idea of the selfhood'.¹⁹ One must make sense of this interactive subjectivity by determining the relationship between the inner self and the divinely governed external world. In this way, the subject could overcome the alienation of her self and get closer to the divine source.

Dominant notions of subjectivity have metamorphosed since the Middle Ages. Increasingly, our notions of subjectivity are shaped by secular rather than religious concerns. To some extent, this shift towards secularity has allowed for the emergence of a more autonomous self. However, the extent to which anyone can be truly autonomous is always questionable. The idea of an inner, 'true' self that is autonomous from the world around it will always remain 'just' an idea to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, even as a concept, the inner, 'true' self as somehow independent from external identities is not contingent upon secularity. St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) urged his readers 'do not go abroad. Return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.'²⁰ Augustine's ideas were profoundly influential in the Middle Ages. Late medieval culture prized inwardness and self-searching as important means of coming closer to the truth and to God, even if, as Jennifer Bryan has shown, that culture was somewhat suspicious of inwardness and so put limitations on it.²¹ Although late medieval Christianity encouraged a certain amount of detachment from the world it, nonetheless, mediated the potential flux of self-

¹⁹ Patterson, pp. 99-100.

²⁰ Saint Augustine, 'Of True Religion' in *The Library of Christian Classics, Volume VI Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. by John H. S. Burleigh, pp. 222-83, p. 262.

²¹ Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 36-7.

definition that came to prevail in post-Romantic self-searching. In post-Romantic culture, the subject comes to know herself through empirical experience and in relation to the human universals that she deduces from such experience. By contrast, medieval texts that help the reader to look inward always do so in relation to stable Christian morality. For instance, the fourteenth century devotional treatise the *Prik of Conscience* sets out to increase its reader's self-knowledge through translations of Holy Scripture and classical and patristic authority. Thus, the reader comes to know her inner self by coming to know theology:

Therefore is this book oute blowen
Of sere materes that ben unknowen
To lewed men and unkunnande
That con no Latyn undurstande,
Hemself to make to knowe within...²²

(Therefore, this book is renowned of various matters that are unknown to ignorant and unskilled men that cannot understand any Latin, to make them understand themselves within...)

The self that the *Prik of Conscience* reader should come to know is posited 'within', tucked out of plain sight even from that reader, alluding to the notion that the subject has become alienated even from itself through the spoils of the post-lapsarian world. The *Prik of Conscience* promises to reveal and explain the true, inward self but only in relation to stable Christian doctrine. In order to gain self-knowledge, his readers must retreat inwards whilst simultaneously remaining connected with the stable Christian doctrine of the text. Thus, devotional reading in this period acted as a way of retrieving the self in relation to Christian truths.

The 130 manuscript witnesses of the *Prik of Conscience* outnumber any other Middle English poem and this is only one example from a lengthy list of vernacular works written for both the clergy and the laity that explore piety and what it means to be human in relation to the divine.²³ That so many copies of the *Prik of Conscience* survive indicates that the poet clearly succeeded in capturing the imagination of a large audience, suggesting a far-reaching contemporary interest in self-knowledge. Indeed, the *Prik of Conscience* poet posits a reasonably wide-ranging audience for his work made up of those that 'con no Latyn undurstande', i.e. those who could not have

²² *Prik of Conscience* ed. James H. Morey <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/morey-prik-of-conscience> [accessed 13.04.2015], Entre, ll.322-6.

²³ See Bryan (2008) for discussion of Middle English devotional treatises including *A Ladder of Four Rungs*, *The Scale of Perfection*, *The Form of Living*, *Book to a Mother*, *The Charter of Christ*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Prickyng of Love*, and *The Mirror of Holy Church*.

had direct contact with Latin texts. Its vernacularity indicates that lay readers might even have read it privately. Nonetheless, late medieval self-exploration was inextricably bound to the Church. Looking inward only gained such importance as a result of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council decree that everyone confess at least once a year. It thus became a requirement of the Church that one look inward.

Augustine's concept of the self that was so influential in the Middle Ages was shaped by his engagement with Plato who taught that 'to be master of oneself is to have the higher part of the soul rule over the lower, which means reason over the desires'.²⁴ For the purposes of achieving a moral mode of life, Plato separates the self into two main parts. The individual negotiates between the higher and lower parts of herself. By imagining herself as split into constituent parts, she is able to enter into a dialectic between desire and reason that is necessary for the progression towards moral perfection and collectedness.

Augustine adopts Plato's idea of doubling the self as a means of examining and improving the self in his *Soliloquies*. He adapts Plato's ideas by emphasising that self-knowledge is an objective in itself. In *Soliloquies*, Augustine explores his inward experiences and their relationship to his existence in the world. In order to reflect on himself in this way, Augustine doubles his textual voice into two parts of a dialogue: 'Augustine' discusses and is guided by 'Reason'. The opening of Augustine's *Soliloquies* sheds light on the need for doubling in the quest for self-knowledge:

When I had been pondering many different things to myself for a long time, and had for many days been seeking my own self and what my own good was, and what evil was to be avoided, there suddenly spoke to me – what was it? I myself or someone else, inside or outside me? (this is the very thing I would love to know but don't) – at any rate, Reason said to me: "Look, suppose you had discovered something: to whom would you entrust your discovery, so that you might move on to other matters?"

A: To the memory, of course.

R: And is memory so powerful that it can preserve properly everything that has been thought out?

A: That is a difficult thing to do, indeed: impossible, in fact.

R: One must, therefore, write it down. But what are you going to do, seeing that your health will not allow the hard work involved in writing? For these things should not be dictated: they demand absolute privacy.²⁵

²⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 115.

²⁵ Saint Augustine, *Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul* trans. G. Watson (England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1986), Bk: I:I, p. 23.

Augustine writes in order to find his ‘own self’ and his ‘own good’; he is concerned with how he should position himself in relation to the rest of the world, especially in terms of what his unique moral purpose might be. In order to achieve this self-knowledge, Augustine splits the unified persona at the beginning of the passage into two sides of a conversation. This doubling of the self is mysterious since he is unable to identify exactly who the second speaker within him is; it is as though this second speaker appears of its own accord and is a natural and necessary component of the processes of self-reflection. As a result of this second voice, Augustine experiences a self-objectification that allows him to reflect on himself. This self-objectification differs from the objectification he would experience in conversation with other people. Indeed, whilst later in the text Augustine acknowledges that his *Soliloquies* will benefit others, in the initial act of self-exploration, ‘absolute privacy’, i.e. a retreat from the rest of the world is key; true self-exploration hinges upon temporarily separating oneself from society. Nonetheless, Augustine sees the importance of preserving his reflections in language rather than entrusting them to frail memory. For Augustine, verbalising the self is key to moral and spiritual development as it will be key to the moral and spiritual development of others to read his *Soliloquies*. In this way, Augustine foregrounds the potential of reading and writing to reveal the self.

Augustine’s early followers were monks. However, by the late medieval period, devotional readers were not necessarily monastic. These late medieval readers took up Augustine’s tools for self-knowledge, i.e. self-objectification, retreat from the rest of the world and the ordering of personal experience in relation to texts. Like Augustine, late medieval devotional practitioners placed the utmost importance on self-knowledge because getting to know one’s inward self was the primary means of knowing and loving God. In the course of the prologue to the *Prik of Conscience*, self-knowledge is expounded in these most consequential terms:

For yif he knowe hymself kyndly
 Thenne may he knowe God almyghty
 And on his ende thinke shulde he
 And on the day that laste shal be.²⁶

(For if he knows himself innately then he may know God almighty and on his death he should think and on the last day that shall be.)

²⁶ *Prik of Conscience*, Entre, ll. 211-4.

Self-knowledge is an act of diligence, i.e. love for God. Devotional reading, then, reacquaints us with ourselves and with God, putting ourselves into perspective through our love for/relationship with God. It does so by making us think of our 'ende' and 'the day that laste shal be', i.e. impending death and judgement. This idea of the self is one that assumes that what is inside oneself is a Christian world of death and judgement day. True self-knowledge hinges on being attuned to our own incompleteness and the liminal state of earthly life, as will be discussed in more detail below. Constituted by classical and then patristic authorities, late medieval devotional reading is an exploration of the self that brings the reader closer to God and leads her to an acute understanding of the liminality of earthly life.

The saints' lives of the fourteenth century *Scottish Legendary* exhibit these particular late medieval ideas about self-knowledge and introspection. The compiler's primary source text, Jacobus de Voragine's *Historia Lombardica*, or, as it is now more commonly known, the *Legenda Aurea*, is less explicitly interested in the reader's self-knowledge than in narrativising the liturgical calendar so as to inspire veneration of saints and justify their celebration. Both poets set out their intentions in the prologue. Jacobus explains his text's organisational principle:

In order to keep the sequence of times as the Church has set it, we shall deal first with the feast days that fall within the time of renewal, which she observes from the beginning of Advent to the birth of Christ. Next we shall dwell on those that occur within the period that falls partly within the time of reconciliation and partly within that of pilgrimage – the period represented by the Church from Advent to Septuagesima. Thirdly, we shall see the feast days celebrated in the time of reconciliation, from Easter, and fourthly those within the time of reconciliation, from Easter through the octave of Pentecost. Lastly, we shall treat of feasts occurring within the time of pilgrimage, from the octave of Pentecost to the beginning of Advent.²⁷

Jacobus intended for his collection to be 'an aid for busy priests and preachers in need of a handy source of vivid anecdote, instruction, and edification to bulk out their sermons and catecheses'.²⁸ By contrast, the prologue to the *Scottish Legendary* focuses the reader's attention on herself, describing the 'storysse of sere haly men'

²⁷ 'Prologue' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 3-4, p. 3.

²⁸ Eamon Duffy, p. xi.

(stories of various holy people) contained in the collection ‘as merroure ar us to’ (are as mirror to us).²⁹

Medieval textual culture is rife with comparisons between texts and mirrors. The mirror for princes tradition, particularly prominent in late medieval Scottish literature, used fictional narratives to advise kings and, in a similar vein, the saints’ lives in the *Legendary* guide and edify the reader through narrative. Additionally, innumerable titles of late medieval texts include ‘mirror’ and ‘speculum’ so as to suggest that, like a mirror, the text absorbs and reflects the world around it accurately. The *Scottish Legendary* absorbs and reflects the world around it in narrative form but, as is indicated in the construction ‘ar us to’ which folds back on the reader, the *Legendary* is more explicitly subject to its reader’s interpretation, always centred upon the (selfhood of the) reader and her capacity to read and absorb the narratives in the intended way.

Taken literally, the idea of the saints’ lives as a mirror to the reader indicates that, as she reads, the reader should imagine that she is looking in the mirror, with her own face reflected in the pages of the text. In Christian theology, the face is the window to the soul. According to the Bible:

As the faces of them that look therein, shine in the water, so the hearts of men are laid open to the wise.³⁰

This indicates that the face reveals the inner life, the heart. If the *Scottish Legendary* is a mirror, the reader comes closer to the inner depths of her soul and the boundaries keeping her from her inner self are ‘laid open’. Indeed, within the saints’ lives of the *Scottish Legendary*, faces reflect true selves. For instance, the text describes many of the female saints as beautiful and the fairness of their faces symbolises their spiritual purity.

Reflecting on the characters in the *Legendary* as if looking in the mirror, the reader can compare her own face and true self against the other characters as a means of achieving greater self-knowledge. Indeed, according to the *Legendary* the face is not only a marker of virtue but also reveals what makes us unique. This idea can be seen in a speech made by St Andrew in his Life:

...þat þe maste merwale, þat god mad

²⁹ ‘Prologue’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 1-6, p. 1, l. 25.

³⁰ Proverbs 27:19, Douay-Rheims Bible.

“Is in þe visage of þe mane,
 þat all are lyk, and zet, nocht-þan,
 In ilke face In sum degree,
 men fyndis diuersyte
 of almen þat euir has bene
 sen þe world was, forout wene...”³¹

(...that the greatest miracle that God made “Is in the face of the man, that all are alike, and yet, nevertheless, in each face in some quality, one finds difference for all men that have ever been since the world was, without doubt....”)

According to Andrew, God made the face a marker both of the similarities between human beings and of the differences between individuals. In line with this principle, the reader, imagining her face reflected by the text should as a result become aware of both her similarities with, and differences from, the characters in the text. In looking at the face of the saint, the reader can scrutinise her own face and by comparing her own with that of the saint learn the contours of her own self, discover that which separates her and that which aligns her with the rest of humanity. Importantly, by examining herself through reading saints’ lives, the reader should recognise the gulf that exists between her own sinful nature and the saint’s virtuousness so that she can strive to emulate the saint. In the case of the *Legendary*, the idea of the text as a mirror evinces concern with an introspective self that is somewhat detached and autonomous from external identities constituted by, for instance, social standing and family relationships. The text invites the reader to access her inner self, albeit only in relation to unquestionable Christian doctrine.

The reader’s imagined mirror image performs a similar function as Augustine’s second voice in the *Soliloquies*, i.e. the projected voice of Reason. Augustine’s second voice allows him to understand himself and his place in the world through self-objectification. Similarly, mirrors reveal an objectified image of the self in its surroundings which gives the viewer at least the illusion of being able to see herself clearly, an idea developed by Jacques Lacan. According to Lacan, the mirror reveals an objectified self that has a profound formative effect on one’s consciousness of subjectivity.³² Lacan describes the experience of looking in the mirror as formative

³¹ ‘III. De Sancto Andrea.’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 63-96, p. 93, ll. 1036-42.

³² Jacques Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’ in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch and others, 1st edn. (London: Norton, 2001), pp. 1285-90.

in the development of a notion of one's subjectivity, i.e. the belief that one is hermetic, independent. This sense of independence is produced because in the mirror image we see ourselves as the sum of our parts; this objectified self seems to be the sum of our molecularised, conflicting experiences. Self-objectification makes available a sense of wholeness that is crucial to subjectivity; as the self is reflected in its surroundings, the individual is flooded with a sense of order and totality. The mirror of the *Scottish Legendary* does not reflect the actual self but a series of objectified potential selves, both ideal and contemptible. The saints represent a version of idealised subjectivity. For example, in Cecilia's legend, the saint displays unflinching inner fortitude of faith when she undergoes torture:

he gert leid meelte in menis sycht,
 & band hire faste fut & hand,
 & kest hir in þe led brynnande.
 bot of het scho feld nomare
 þane scho in a bath set þane vare,
 na changit countenance na chere,
 for ocht þat scho cane se or here...³³

(...he ordered lead to be melted in men's sight, and bound her tightly, foot and hand, and cast her in the burning lead. But she felt no more heat than if she were then set in a bath, nor changed her face nor facial expression, for anything that she did see or hear.)

This passage enumerates the saint's extreme physical torture in the utmost detail, thereby making the lack of change in Cecilia's countenance all the more poignant. Crucially, the poet conveys the steadfastness of Cecilia's faith through her unflinching face, the window to her inner self. If the reader engages with this passage as a mirror, she might recognise her own struggle to overcome her fleshly drives and her suffering through inner steadfastness. The reflected image of the steadfast Cecilia attributes a sense of order to the sometimes bewildering experiences of this world.

The actuality of mirrors in this period enhances the notion of the self as revealed at the centre of a narrative. From roughly the mid-thirteenth century, a fashion emerged for mirror cases decorated with scenes from popular romances as well as from Christ's Passion.³⁴ This fashion seems to have reached the *Legendary's* local East of Scotland audience with a thirteenth century mirror case decorated with

³³ 'XLIII. Cecile' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 368-86, p. 385, ll. 586-92.

³⁴ See Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard, *Dress accessories, c.1150-c.1450* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), pp. 358-61.

scenes from the romance *Tristram and Iseult* found in Perth.³⁵ Two almost identical examples of mirror cases decorated with the Passion of Christ indicate the use of such mirrors in considerable numbers in the British Isles.³⁶ These decorated mirror cases were likely to have pervaded popular mirror symbology. As the viewer opens the mirror case she sees herself reflected behind and within the narrative of either the Passion of Christ or *Tristram and Iseult*. Central to the Passion as well as the romance narrative is the love for another that is so powerful as to make worldly (specifically bodily) suffering tolerable. Christ's love for mankind means He is willing to sacrifice himself for their sake and Tristram and Iseult both die for love of one another. In this way, the decorations on these mirror cases occlude narcissistic engagement with one's own mirror image. Instead, the viewer might have viewed herself with these self-sacrificing values in mind, the idea that there is love (either secular or spiritual) that makes enduring worldly chaos bearable.

Although mirrors could reveal the viewer to herself with startling accuracy, they could also deceive that viewer and inspire inaccurate ideas of the self, as Sabine Melchior-Bonnet has shown in her study of the history of the mirror.³⁷ This conception of mirrors was influenced by the myth of Narcissus who, according to Melchior-Bonnet, was 'punished by Nemesis for having scorned Echo's love, for having refused the mediation of the other in the construction of the self'.³⁸ Indeed, the prologue to the *Legendary* refers to the *Romance of the Rose*, the hero of which sees the image of the rose in the mirror of Narcissus. Because, unlike Narcissus, the *Romance of the Rose* protagonist focuses on another's image and not just his own he does not become self-absorbed but his understanding of himself is informed by his love for another. The *Romance of the Rose* dictates the proper use of the mirror of love as being to fixate on someone else. The *Legendary* directs the reader towards this mode of looking in the mirror but with a sacred rather than secular love object; in the mirror, the reader sees saints and engages with her own mirror image or inner self through her relationship to the saints and the love for saints that the text inspires.

Indeed, in the prologue, the poet describes reading hagiography as an activity that a reader's 'hart mycht stere' (heart might steer), indicating that the reading should

³⁵ See Mark A Hall and DDR Owen, 'A Tristram and Iseult mirror-case from Perth', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* 4 (1998), 150-65.

³⁶ Egan and Pritchard, pp. 360-1.

³⁷ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History* trans. Katharine H. Jewett (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 100-1.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 106.

set the reader's heart in the direction of saints.³⁹ Additionally the prologue implies that reading (and in the poet's case, composing) the *Legendary* staves off 'Idilnes'. Regina Scheibe has argued convincingly that the Scottish poet takes 'Idilnes' to be synonymous with sloth, a vice which, according to Siegfried Wenzel, was understood by Thomas Aquinas as referring

...directly to man's relation to God, not to himself or his neighbour or society at large. The object of this vice, so to speak, is the love of God, not the pursuit of virtue, let alone the quest for fame, wealth, or a better society.⁴⁰

The antidote to the vice of sloth or idleness is love for God. As an activity that prevents idleness, reading the *Scottish Legendary*, then, is a kind of a labour of love for God. The act of reading allows the reader to look inward and yet avoid self-absorption because by looking inward she enacts love for God. The description of St Paul in the legend of Paul indicates the close relationship between the mirror image and God's love:

of Ihesu sic luf can wyne,
þat he is mad til ws merour,
þat na man suld for gret errour
fal in wanhope for to purches
eftir syne of god þe grace...⁴¹

(...won such love from Jesus that he is made a mirror to us, that no man should in great error fall in hopelessness to purchase God's grace after sin...)

St Paul is a mirror precisely because he has won such love from God. Paul is a suitable mirror in the sense that he shows the reader how to win God's love. Likewise, the *Legendary* as a whole is a suitable mirror because, through the self-knowledge gained by reading it, the reader comes to know and love God and the saints.

Although the reader can engage with the various narratives in the *Legendary* and reach a greater degree of self-knowledge, this self-knowledge is not adequate in itself. Indeed, the aim of self-knowledge was to change future behaviour. As Melchior-Bonnett has found, late medieval mirror symbolism was influenced by St James' likening 'the man who does not practice the word of God to one who "looks at himself in a mirror, sees himself as he is, and after having looked, goes away and

³⁹ 'Prologue', p. 1, l. 29.

⁴⁰ Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 66.

⁴¹ 'II. Paulus' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 29-62, p. 54-5, ll. 894-8.

forgets at once what he is like”⁴². St James implies that the self as seen in the mirror should be remembered and should influence future actions. Likewise, the text as mirror image should trigger real-life changes. Indeed, late medieval mirror symbolism in texts was bound up with this desire to exert long-term influence over the reader. For instance, the Cresseid of Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid* starts her journey towards self-knowledge after seeing her leprous face in the mirror:

Than rais scho up and tuik
 Ane poleist glas and hir schadow culd luik,
 And quhen scho saw hir face sa deformait,
 Gif scho in hart was wa aneuch, God wait!⁴³

(Then she rose up and took a polished mirror and looked at her reflection, and when she saw her face so deformed, if she was woeful enough in her heart, God knows!)

Cresseid sees her sin in her face. At this point, she realises that she is responsible for her own life and not the gods whom she had hitherto blamed. The mirror symbolism in *The Testament of Cresseid* comes full circle when, at the denouement, Cresseid instructs the women of Greece and Troy (and by extension the readership) to ‘in your mynd ane mirrour mak of me’ (make a mirror of me in your mind).⁴⁴ The reader should inscribe Cresseid’s life in her mind and, thus, permanently adjust her own actions. When reading is like looking in a mirror properly, the reader is permanently changed by the text-as-mirror. Like Cresseid’s mirror, the *Legendary* exhibits similar powers of revelation and could lead the reader to see herself as she is and to take action like Cresseid.

One of the ways in which the *Legendary* permanently infuses the reader’s selfhood is when it describes the reader’s activity. We can begin to understand the effect of this through Jessica Brantley’s concept of ‘performative textualities’. The term ‘performative textualities’ describes the ways in which texts reflect the reader’s activity so as to provide her with a model for reading:

⁴² Melchior-Bonnet, p. 109.

⁴³ Robert Henryson, ‘The Testament of Cresseid’ in *The Makars: The Poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas* ed. by J.A. Tasioulas (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1999), pp. 187-214, p. 202, ll. 348-50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207, l. 457.

The reader thus seeing himself in the book approaches his devotional reading with a heightened self-consciousness about his activity, both contemplation of what he is doing and careful consideration of how he is doing it.⁴⁵

The ideal reader begins to imagine her own activity in line with its depiction in the text and to make adjustments. The reader performs various roles set by the text, albeit potentially on an imaginative level. Brantley argues that the illuminations in the devotional manuscript Additional 37049 reflect the reader's activity back to her, providing a model for her reading. There are no illuminations in the only extant copy of the *Legendary*, but Brantley argues that performative textuality is not contingent on illuminations. In the *Legendary*, the text itself conveys devotion to saints within the narratives as guiding the reader's activity.

This process can be seen in the prologue itself. The prologue describes reading the *Legendary* as an action that defends the reader against sin:

thru þe vicis of ydilnes,
 gret foly, quhile, & vantones
 syndry hertis enteris withine,
 & gerris men ofte sic thing begyne
 þat þai ma nocht fra thyne be brocht,
 fra þai þare-in beset þare thocht.
 þar-for þo lordis suld nocht [sa] wirke,
 þat steris landis & haly kirke;
 zit, quhene þai hafe þare thing done,
 þat afferis þare stat, alsone
 þai suld dresse þare deuocione
 in prayere & in oracione,
 or thingis þat þare hart mycht stere
 tyl wyne hewine, tyl þai are here.
 & þe next way þare-to, I trew,
 Is for to red ore here now
 storysse of sere haly men...⁴⁶

(...through the vices of idleness great folly, deception, and wantonness enter within many hearts, and causes men often to begin such things from which they might not be brought when they there-in beset their thoughts. Therefore, though lords should not labour, that steer lands and holy church; yet, when they have done their tasks that pertain to their state, at once they should address their devotion in prayer and in oration, or things that might steer their heart to win heaven, until they are there. And the next way thereto, I believe, is to read or hear now stories of various holy people...)

⁴⁵ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 14.

⁴⁶ 'Prologue', p. 1, ll. 17-23.

The above excerpt draws attention to the permeability of the subject: merely through idleness, sin ‘enters’ the subject. Crucially, it is the sin not the subject herself who acts, indicating that the subject is not entirely in control of her own actions. The text thus shows the boundaries of subjectivity to be fragile. Immersed in the world, an environment rife with sin, the subject can become saturated with vice. The idea that those who begin to behave in a certain way will find it difficult to remove themselves from such a way of being indicates that, according to the *Legendary*, selfhood is constituted through repeated action as performed identity is internalised (and besets their thoughts). Outward actions become internalised. The introspective activity of reading is important because it aids the reader in preventing the internalisation of the sinful influences of the external world. According to this passage, reading is a performance with an effect in that it can ward off vice. The reader is invited to imagine her devotional reading as self-purification. This passage flags up the permeability of selfhood, encouraging the reader to see herself in this way, i.e. not as hermetic but as a permeable and conflicted subject. The remainder of the collection utilises the reader’s understanding of herself as dangerously permeable to purify her and inspire contrition. This passage in the prologue importantly encourages the reader to experience herself physically through the text, to imagine her heart as being steered by the text. As such, she begins to imagine her own body in a process that will evolve through the *Legendary*. As she reads, the reader should feel her heart being steered towards God. Thus, the poet pervades the reader’s subjectivity, inviting her to experience herself through the text.

The poet’s use of ‘steer’ evokes the notion of the reader as in the midst of a journey; the reader is not a complete being but is *in medias res* and must remain mindful of her final destination. This use of journey imagery echoes the opening lines of the prologue, which prescribe that ‘quha-sa wil be/vertuise suld Idilnes fle’ (whoever wishes to be virtuous should flee idleness).⁴⁷ So, as an activity which staves off ‘idilness’, reading directs the reader in her pursuit of a final destination. The opening of the prologue centres on the theme that ‘Idilness giffis novrysingis to vicis’.⁴⁸ As the poet explains, one way to stave off ‘Idilness’ ‘Is for to red ore here now/storysse of sere haly men’.⁴⁹ The very action of reading and hearing

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 1, ll. 3-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 1, l. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 1, ll. 22-3.

hagiographies, then, is edifying in that it occludes ‘Idilness’. The direction of the heart is decided performatively; an individual’s activities have a profound effect on her susceptibility to sin.

The way in which the *Legendary* sets the reader’s heart in the right direction is by inspiring affective relationships with saints. When the above excerpt associates reading the *Legendary* with prayer and oration, the poet intimates that reading is likewise self-reflective communion with God. Indeed, the main body of the collection regularly verges on prayer. Almost all saints’ lives in the *Scottish Legendary* (forty out of fifty) bring the focus round to the reader at the end with a supplication to the saint:

pray for vs, þat ve hyne twyne
but det, schame, ore dedly syne!⁵⁰

(...pray for us, that we part from this place without debt, shame, or deadly sin!)

The reader is included in the ‘vs’. The perpetual repetition of this supplication throughout the more than 33,000 lines of the *Legendary* serves to consistently link the act of reading as an act of communion with the saint. Common to the acts of prayer and oration is that earthly relationships are stripped away and the medieval Christian is alone with God and herself. Similarly, the reader of the *Scottish Legendary* should imagine herself stripped from earthly ties to her essence to be able to see herself in communication with God, as well as with the saint.

Indeed, it is possible that the *Legendary*’s late medieval reader would actually have encountered the collection in private since solitary reading was an increasingly common activity in late medieval Britain. In any case, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has argued, even though not everyone could have read alone, this period saw the rise of an idea that reading was a solitary activity, influenced by anchoritic and eremitic reading styles. Wogan-Browne delineates the imaginative puissance of ‘a model of reading as feminine and enclosing’ as follows:

Such images of reading seem to have been attractive for both male and female medieval readers. Part of the seductiveness of enclosure comes from the way in which erasure of a historical sense of place and identity can align a romance

⁵⁰ ‘Johannes’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* ed. by W.M. Metcalfe, vol. 1, pp. 109-28, p. 128, ll. 657-8.

self with the selves of eremitic reform so much focused on in twelfth-century and later monasticism.⁵¹

Wogan-Browne describes a reader who, as she reads, imagines herself as removed from the rest of society like a hermit. The hermit has no social interaction whatsoever, remains unmarried and spends his life of solitude focused on coming closer to God through reforming him/herself. The late medieval romance reader, imagining herself as at a similar distance from her own identity and relationships, is able to make connections between herself and the characters of romance.

Whether the medieval Scot encountered the *Scottish Legendary* in private reading or as one of a number of listeners, the author encourages an imaginary isolation and dissolution of worldly ties akin to that produced for the reader of romance through the ‘erasure of a historical sense of place and identity’. Almost every legend begins by establishing the temporal and geographical setting, which is always at a great distance from fourteenth century Scotland. The narratives of the *Scottish Legendary* take place in far away times and in places such as Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome. The collection contains very few local saints. Whilst the lives of St Ninian and St Machor are included, the man credited with bringing Christianity to Scotland, St Columba is absent, as is St Margaret of Scotland, much memorialized in the names of Scottish churches and places. Instead, the poet includes the legend of St Placidus or Eustace as he is better known and who, according to Metcalfe

...is not mentioned in the Scottish Calendar, nor in the *Menologium Scot.*, nor in the Martyrum Calendar of Aberdeen, nor yet in the Arbuthnott nor Drummond Calendars; but under September 20, Adam King has, “St Eustache with his wyff ād bairnes martt. vnder Adrianus.”⁵²

That Eustace is such a rare saint indicates that the compiler is interested in lesser-known saints. Indeed, von Contzen’s recent study of the collection finds that of the fifty saints in the *Scottish Legendary*, only six are frequent objects of dedication in Scotland. Contzen suggests that this focus on less well-known saints could mean that the collection was designed

...not with a specific local audience in mind (one which venerated, for instance, John the Evangelist), but for a general Christian audience who were,

⁵¹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives & Women’s Literary Culture: Virginité and its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 37.

⁵² W.M. Metcalfe, *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* ed. by W.M. Metcalfe, vol. 3, (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1896), p. 326.

from the poet's perspective, in need of (further) education and edification concerning saints and their lives.⁵³

The poet is interested in providing wide-ranging comprehensive examples of sanctity and how fortitude and diligence can be applied in the world. By including saints that were likely to be less well known to a Scottish audience, the *Legendary* situates the reader's journey in a broader range of experiences, opening out from her usual contact with saints and imaginatively removing the reader from her surroundings. As such, the poet incites in the reader Wogan-Browne's 'erasure of a historical sense of place and identity' in the reader. The reader imagines a dissolution of the world around her, is brought right back to the 'essence' of what it means to be a Christian.

Nevertheless, the saints' difference is accompanied by a definite similarity to the reader. Almost without exception, these narratives highlight the 'high degree' of the hero or heroine. If we agree with Regina Scheibe that the *Legendary* is aimed at a literate ruling class, the saints' high social status creates a sense of commonality between the reader and protagonist.⁵⁴ Even if the *Legendary* is aimed at a broader cross-section of society, a sense of commonality is produced between the reader and the saints as the text focuses on saints' worldly struggle.

The text takes the reader on an imaginative journey, away from familiar worldly ties, that can be likened to the *Legendary*'s depiction of St Ninian's actual journey. St Ninian goes to Rome to fulfill his desire to become a preacher and teacher of Christ's works. The poet describes how Ninian 'thocht he wald pas forthymare/& be parfite in-to sic lare...' (thought he would journey faraway and become perfect in such learning).⁵⁵ The journey is necessary for Ninian's becoming perfect in learning. The poet highlights the journey as one in which Ninian isolates himself, forsakes his worldly ties:

pare-for his kyne & his cuntre
 he levit, & passit ourē þe se,
 & dressit hyme rome [for] to seke,
 gyf he mycht þare his science eke,
 & for to sek sanctis sere,

⁵³ Von Contzen, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Regina Scheibe, "'Idilnes giffis novrysingis to vicis": The Prologue of the *Scottish Legends of the Saints*' in *Literature and religion in late medieval and early modern Scotland: essays in honour of Alasdair A. MacDonald* ed. by Luuk Houwen (Belgium: Peeters Publishers & Booksellers, 2012), pp. 1-21, p. 12.

⁵⁵ 'XL. Ninian' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century*, vol. 2, pp. 304-345, p. 307, ll. 95-6.

þat plentusly in þat place were,
 fore til eke his deuocione,
 & get þe papis benysone.
 þane has he hyme redy mad.
 he tuk leif, & furth he glad,
 at his frendis & knawine men,
 þat ware til hyme *tendir* þene.⁵⁶

(Therefore, he left his kin and his country, and travelled over the sea, and prepared himself to seek Rome, to see whether he might increase his knowledge there, and seek various saints, that were plenteous in that place, so as to increase his devotion, and receive the Pope's benison. Then he made himself ready. He took leave, and forth he rejoiced with his friends and known men, that were tender to him then.)

This passage describes Ninian's purposeful stripping back of worldly ties. In order to fulfil an inner sense of his destiny, Ninian leaves the familiar and known people and culture of his homeland. The poet emphasizes that these relationships are '*tendir*'. It is notable that one of Ninian's reasons for going to Rome is 'for to sek *sanctis sere*'. Similarly, the *Legendary* encourages the reader to dissolve her ties with the world around her in order for her to experience a physical closeness with saints and to go on a mental journey. The *Scottish Legendary* encourages a dissolution of worldly ties similar to that of Ninian when it transports the reader to a distant time and place, encouraging her to dispense with the diurnal and the trivial. At this distance, the reader is freed from her everyday identities and is able to make connections between herself and the characters of hagiography in a way that is less controlled by these known identities. In this way, the text opens the reader up to the possibility of new selves, exemplified by saints who are engaged in a similar struggle against the world.

The selves to which the reader is encouraged to aspire are those of the saints. What these saints all have in common is that they are at odds with the world around them. In this respect, they are similar to the heroes of romance; both demonstrate the propensity of individual valour and virtue to overcome worldly odds. One key difference is that in saints' lives women regularly take the role of heroine and have control over their own destiny. Each legend focuses on a saint (sometimes several) who is more often than not in a small minority group of Christians in a pagan culture. Through their love for God the saint gains strength to hold onto their own identity at all costs. These are tales of individuals who stand up against cultures of sin (i.e. non-Christians). Just as the viewer is the central point of the mirror, these saints are the

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 307, ll. 99-110.

centre point of their narratives and it is clearly their characteristics (e.g. fortitude and diligence) which the reader is supposed to learn and adopt. Like the saints whose lives are delineated, the reader can determine herself through action.

As saints forsake all worldly ties, the process of reading transports the reader from her worldly situation to meditate similarly on spiritual matters and commune with God. As she reads, the reader's worldly, familiar surroundings as well as thoughts and feelings dissolve and, thus, seem less substantial. The immersive experience of reading saints' lives gives the reader a sense of distance from her known realities from which she can contemplate herself like looking in the mirror. Ultimately, however, the *Scottish Legendary* is designed to influence the future actions of its reader within the world. Specifically, the reader should come to enact devotion by taking example from the text, as the composer outlines in the prologue:

I wryt þe lyf of sanctis sere,
how þat men ma ensample ta
for to serwe god, as did þai.⁵⁷

(I write the life of various saints, in such way that people may take example to serve God, as they did.)

The reader of the *Legendary* is asked to take example from the saints in the collection, i.e. to identify and ultimately adopt virtuous behaviour in her own life. As the reader takes 'ensample' from the text, she performs her interpretation of the text beyond the act of reading. Indeed, the example is not necessarily taken directly; as examples, saints' lives give narrative form to doctrine and the reader must mediate between the text and her own life. The central exemplary figures of saints' lives, the saints themselves, often engage in behaviour that it would be unlikely or impossible for the lay reader to imitate. The recurring indicators of sanctity in the collection include performing miracles, remaining celibate, undergoing brutal torture and martyrdom, and ultimately challenging the foundational structures of medieval society: monarchy, patriarchy, marriage, and gender roles. The lay reader would most likely have been unable to mimic saints' actions directly, although some might have imitated chastity and stigmata. In her study of virgin martyr legends, Karen Winstead asks how saints who maintain their virginity can be meaningful to readers who lead radically different lives:

⁵⁷ 'Prologue', p. 2, ll. 28-30.

...because late medieval hagiographers were, to an increasing extent, addressing a lay audience, we might look for them to promote stories of holy parents and spouses, whose lives could provide more direct models than those of the virgin martyrs, who, after all, spurned marriage, family, laws, and property. What could their lives mean to lawyers, merchants, and craftspeople, householders and parents, immersed in the very world the saints rejected?⁵⁸

Winstead concludes that the hagiographers, who were usually monks and members of the clergy, accentuated saints' rejection of the world as a means of putting distance between reader and saint and, by extension, the laity and the clergy. However, in the *Scottish Legendary*, the poet explicitly hopes that 'men ma ensample ta' from the saints in the text. The *Legendary* brings the reader closer to saints through imitation, but she need not imitate the actions of saints exactly. A more inward, symbolic system of exemplarity would have allowed the reader to balance the competing concerns of eternal and worldly duties. The *Legendary* helps the reader create a symbolic self – an ideal towards which she can strive regardless of her circumstances. The reader should not necessarily forsake worldly goods entirely; as the prologue highlights, saints' lives should only be read after the reader 'hæfe þare thing done, / þat afferis þare stat, alsone'.⁵⁹ The poet emphasizes the importance of worldly duty. Nonetheless, the poet makes clear that it is important that the reader's thoughts do not become 'beset' by this world. The extreme devotion of the saints provides the reader with a sense of perspective and distance from the world around her in that saints so often forsake all worldly duty in favour of spiritual duty.

Late medieval devotional instruction in general was increasingly sensitive to the competing demands of Christian identity and worldly duties such as those of wife, husband, daughter, son, serf, landlord. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) advised Raymond of Capua to 'build a cell inside your mind, from which you can never flee'.⁶⁰ Inside Catherine's own cell, she transferred Christian symbols onto family figures: in her mind she served Christ in the figure of her father, her mother became the Virgin Mary, and her brothers the apostles. Catherine elevates the everyday through inward, symbolic, scriptural interpretation so as to balance the demands of

⁵⁸ Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 10.

⁵⁹ 'Prologue', p. 1, ll. 15-6.

⁶⁰ Quoted by Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, 'Pious Domesticities' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 262-78, p. 268.

her earthly life with that of her soul. The reader of the *Legendary* might have been expected to strike a similar balance with regard to exemplary saints.

Indeed, the collection as a whole makes room for the plurality of devout Christian selfhoods as service to God is demonstrated from a range of perspectives and in a range of circumstances depending on the individuality of the saint. In the life of Christopher, for example, the poet depicts Christopher as choosing his mode of devotion based upon his innate strengths. At first, Christopher is instructed by a monk to pray and fast. However, Christopher fails to see the point in praying and fasting so the monk suggests another mode of devotion that more aptly suits Christopher's personality:

“me think þe a ferly mane,
 þat ʒarnis þi lord til emples,
 & thole fore hyme wil na dyses!
 þu sal nocht ga ʒet sa thane.
 sene þu art a mekil man,
 & wicht Inewcht, gyf þou be gud,
 þar mony drownyt, wel I wat,
 fore þare is nothyre bryg na bad,
 to fery men oure þat flud.
 to safe þare lyfis is ful gud.
 sik seruice thankful suld be
 to criste, þat þu sa fane wald se...”⁶¹

(“I think you are a marvellous man, who yearns to please your lord, and will suffer no disease! You shall not go, thus, however. Since you are a mighty man, and strong enough, if you wish to be good, there many people have drowned, I know well, for there is neither bridge nor bank, to ferry men over that river. To save their lives is perfectly good. Christ should be thankful for such service, he whom you so willingly would like to see...”)

Christopher is able to use his personal qualities, his size and strength, to enact devotion to God by helping travellers across the river. The monk chooses a mode of devotion that responds both to how Christopher wants to show devotion as well as how he is best able to serve God based on his own abilities. The *Legendary* poet highlights that by helping people cross the river, Christopher is engaged in devotion that responds to his personality. In such a way, the *Legendary* acknowledges that devotion can be enacted in a range of ways, contingent on the personality and history of the devotee. Indeed, the poet explains that in order that the reader might take

⁶¹ ‘XIX. Cristofore’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 340-60, pp. 345-6, ll. 190-202.

example from the collection, ‘I wryt þe lyf of sanctis sere’ (I write the lives of various saints). The reader’s ability to follow the example of saints is directly linked to the diversity of the saints that the collection covers. The reader should sift through the text for the types of devotion that fit her own personality as well as her worldly duties.

The prologue to the *Legendary* sets out how the collection should be read. The collection proper provides the reader with models for how to engage with the saints and their lives. For instance, in the life of St Lucy, the eponymous heroine hears the ‘gret lose’ of St Agatha. Hearing Agatha’s legend has performed implications as Lucy is moved to take her sick mother to Agatha’s sepulchre where she is inspired to give up her worldly possessions and become a bride of Christ, following Agatha’s example. Thus, hagiography has profound implications for the path Lucy takes in her own life. The reader, seeing herself in Lucy’s position, is taken by the text on an imaginative journey to Agatha’s sepulchre. In this way, the text constructs a series of layers through which it brings its reader closer to St Agatha. The saint and the text of the *Legendary* itself act as layers through which devotional experience is made possible. This layering is echoed in Lucy’s own story; when Lucy hears of a woman cured of sickness by touching the hem of Christ’s garment, she says to her own sick mother:

“gyf þu trewis wrytine is here,
 trow agas has hyme ay present
 for quham scho sufferit herd torment
 &, þarfore, wil þu twech now
 hir fe[r]tre & ferme trew,
 I trew þu sal parfytly be
 hale of þine infirmyte.”⁶²

(“If you believe what is written here, believe Agatha has him always present for whom she suffered hard torment and, therefore, if you will now touch her reliquary and firmly believe, I believe you shall be perfectly healed of your illness.”)

Christ is ever-present to Agatha. Because Agatha has suffered hard torments for Christ, Lucy and her mother can become closer to Christ by touching Agatha’s tomb. The *Legendary* places importance placed on physical presence or closeness; Lucy travels to the site of Agatha’s bodily remains where Lucy’s mother is “mad hale” (healed) through touching. The reader most likely will not physically make a

⁶² ‘XLIV. Lucy’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 387-97, p. 388, ll. 37-43.

pilgrimage to Agatha's tomb, but is instead taken on an imaginative journey. Just as Lucy and her mother touch Christ's hem through a series of layers, the reader accesses Christ through layers of narrative. In the detail that a woman was cured of sickness by touching Christ's hem, the *Legendary* poet embellishes the *Legenda* version, which it otherwise follows closely throughout Agatha's Life.⁶³ This detail provides an example for Lucy to follow and, in this way, provides the reader with a model for her own process of following saints' examples.

In the *Scottish Legendary*, St Agatha's life occurs just two legends prior to that of Lucy so that the reader of Lucy's legend might, just like Lucy, have recently heard Agatha's life. The text foregrounds the power of its own narrativity when, later on in Lucy's life, Agatha appears in Lucy's dreams to tell her that Lucy's prayers are what healed her mother. On awaking, Lucy tells her mother she is "mad hale" because "þu trewytt to my tale" (you believed in my story).⁶⁴ In the *Legenda* version, Agatha explains that "your faith has already cured her", in other words, the emphasis is not so much on the hagiography itself.⁶⁵ The Scottish poet draws attention to the healing potential of hagiography when, ideally, its reader is credulous. The reader has been placed in a similar position to that of Agatha and should, ideally, read whilst recreating the healing power of that activity.

Agatha's hagiography is the impetus in Lucy's narrative. Having pursued and experienced closeness with the saint, Lucy goes on to take control of her own identity in her request to her mother that she be allowed to remain unmarried and that her dowry money be sent to poor men 'be hire', i.e. in the name of St Agatha.⁶⁶ Lucy's own performance of virtue is intertwined with her interaction with Agatha and Agatha's hagiography. As we read the collection of hagiographies, we imagine ourselves on a similar kind of journey through various narratives, becoming motivated by the text to take control of our own selfhood by behaving virtuously in this life to bring about metaphysical perfection. Physical closeness with saints' bodies and interpersonal interaction, albeit at some remove, plays a pivotal role in this process.

⁶³ '4. Saint Lucy, Virgin' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 27-9, p.27.

⁶⁴ 'XLIV. Lucy' p. 389, ll. 63-4.

⁶⁵ '4. Saint Lucy, Virgin', p. 27.

⁶⁶ 'XLIV. Lucy', p. 389, l. 65.

The *Scottish Legendary* is concerned with reacquainting its reader with her devout self in an introspective reading process, which constantly links the lives of saints as well as the surrounding characters to the selfhood of the reader. Whilst the late medieval idea of ‘selfhood’ did not aspire to the empiricism that the post-Romantic notion of the self does, nonetheless, at the core of the *Scottish Legendary* and similar texts of devotional instruction is a deep-running concern with getting to know a self that is obscured by the demands of worldly life. In line with the model of late medieval devotional reading described by Jennifer Bryan above, the *Legendary* is explicitly interested in directing readers to ‘their deepest truest and most important selves’. Recognising areas for improvement by comparing her own life to those of the characters, the reader should strive to make that image of herself live up to the array of ideal selfhoods narrated by the texts themselves.

Chapter Two

The Affective and Subjectivity

Late medieval affective piety is characterised by a focus on Christ's humanity and the interpretation of the Passion as Christ's personal struggle. Readers in the Late Middle Ages enacted devotion by performing affective responses to Christ's personal struggle on the Cross. The *Scottish Legendary* is born of this affective culture. The collected saints' lives provoke the reader to interact affectively with saints. This chapter argues that the reader's affective responses to the *Scottish Legendary* incentivise the reader to 'take example' from the saints by dissolving the reader's present sense of separateness from the text, i.e. making the reader desire to become like the saints in the text.

We can make sense of the powerful psychic sway of affective piety through Kristeva's theory of the semiotic properties of language. Sometimes known as the 'beyond of language', Kristeva's semiotic encompasses the arational components of discourse such as body language, tone of voice and affective literacies.⁶⁷ The semiotic creates meaning alongside the symbolic order of language, which comprises the logical and seemingly stable arena of meaning creation. The semiotic aspects of language appeal to what Kristeva terms the semiotic chora, the locus of instinctual drives that existed even before the subject (i.e. before the discrete selfhood) left the mother's realm and entered the symbolic order of official, cultural discourse. Although entering the symbolic order provides the subject with a sense of dependable, all-encompassing logic, the subject cannot use this logic to explain or eradicate the effects of the semiotic aspects of language. Evading reason in this way, the semiotic holds immense rhetorical puissance and often disrupts the sense of rational order

⁶⁷ 'beyond of language' in Heather Walton, *Literature, theology and feminism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 104. On affective literacies see Mark Amsler, 'Affective Literacy: Gestures of Reading in the Later Middle Ages', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001), 83-110. Amsler identifies three types of affective literacies 'One aspect of affective literacy involves the immediate somatic ways we touch, sense, perceive, vocalize, or perform a text with our eyes, hands, mouths, and bodies. Another aspect involves the emotive, noncognitive, paralinguistic things we do with or to texts during the act of reading - for example, holding a book close like a charm for comfort or protection, or touching or kissing reverentially a page in a prayer book. A third aspect of affective literacy is the range of emotional, spiritual, somatic responses readers have to a text, such as crying, laughing, becoming angry, or becoming aroused.' (p. 83).

produced by the symbolic, although the semiotic and the symbolic often act as complements. According to Kristeva:

Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax.⁶⁸

The semiotic creates meaning through the unregulated affective and somatic qualities of language and human interaction. In this way, the effects of the semiotic on the reader or listener are so immediate as to escape the reader or listener's intellectual control. By appealing to physical, deep-seated, bodily drives, the semiotic produces intensely personal sensory and emotional experiences.

The semiotic is fundamentally difficult to define; the written word obscures it because it cannot adequately contain it. Nevertheless, we *can* identify moments across the *Scottish Legendary* in which the poet presents arational semiotic interactions with saints as being at least as important as the rational and intellectual ways of being a Christian that pertain to the symbolic order. These semiotic interactions mediate the reader's encounter with the saints.

In the *Legendary's* version of the Life of Mary of Egypt the text brings the reader to the saint through the character of Zosimas the monk. At the beginning of the text, Zosimas enacts devotion within the symbolic order; he 'Ithandly had his thoct/one haly wryt, & ellis nocht' (entirely had his thoughts on Holy Scripture and nothing else).⁶⁹ This type of devotion pertains to the symbolic order in that it is focused solely on the rational, ordered meaning of Holy Scripture. Zosimas' devotion is purely intellectual. This narrative juxtaposes the devout monk Zosimas with the penitent sinner Mary of Egypt. When Zosimas meets Mary, he engages in an affective mode of devotion that pertains to the semiotic. The way in which Zosimas relates to Mary reflects and prescribes the way that one is expected to interact with Christ according to affective piety. Through Zosimas, the *Legendary* provides the reader with a model for affective, embodied devotion as complementary, if not actually preferable, to intellectual forms of devotion.

At the beginning of Mary's Life, the *Legendary* poet emphasises Zosimas' studiousness. Whereas, as the third volume of Metcalfe's edition makes abundantly

⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), p. 97.

⁶⁹ 'XVIII. Egipciane' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 296-339, p. 297, ll. 37-8.

clear, the *Legenda Aurea* is the primary source text for every single life preceding Mary of Egypt as well as for the vast majority of those that follow it, in contrast, the *Legendary* version of Mary of Egypt's Life is a close translation of Sophronius' version of the Life of Mary of Egypt.⁷⁰ We can only speculate as to why the Scottish poet chose one source text over another. Perhaps, he simply did not have access to Jacobus' version. In any case, what the Scottish poet produces based on Sophronius' version is an account of Mary of Egypt that focuses on the journey of Zosimas from intellectual to affective devotion, as guided by Mary of Egypt. The primary difference between Sophronius' version and Jacobus de Voragine's is that Sophronius foregrounds the role of Zosimas and his relationship to Mary of Egypt and the Scottish poet also foregrounds their relationship. The *Legenda* version characterises Zosimas as follows:

A priest named Zozimus crossed the Jordan and began to wander through the broad forest, hoping to find some holy father there, and saw a figure walking about naked, the body blackened and burned by the fiery sun.⁷¹

Jacobus' characterisation of Zosimas is minimal. Zosimas is merely a priest who goes on a pilgrimage. Sophronius goes into far more detail:

...he never ceased to study the Divine Scriptures. Whether resting, standing, working or eating food (if the scraps he nibbled could be called food), he incessantly and constantly had a single aim: always to sing of God, and to practice the teaching of the Divine Scriptures. Zosimas used to relate how, as soon as he was taken from his mother's breast, he was handed over to the monastery where he went through his training as an ascetic till he reached the age of 53. After that, he began to be tormented with the thought that he was perfect in everything and needed no instruction from anyone, saying to himself mentally, "Is there a monk on earth who can be of use to me and show me a kind of asceticism that I have not accomplished? Is there a man to be found in the desert who has surpassed me?"⁷²

Sophronius describes Zosimas as a learned ascetic whose mode of devotion is entirely ordered by Scripture. That he came to a monastery directly after leaving his mother indicates that he has lived the entirety of his life in the ordered regime of monastic

⁷⁰ See *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 3 for notes to individual legends regarding source materials with very preliminary information regarding deviations.

⁷¹ '56. Saint Mary of Egypt' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, pp. 227-9, p. 227.

⁷² Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem, 'The Life of our Holy Mother Mary of Egypt' <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/st.mary.html> [accessed 08.11.2015].

discipline far from the semiotic realm of the mother. The *Legendary* poet follows Sophronius closely in characterising Zosimas:

...for sa enmornyt þat man was
 in monklyke vorke, vord, & ded,
 fra þe tyme of his 3outhede,
 þat he to god al gevine vas,
 & til his name had 3ozamas.
 his flesche sa dayntytyt he had,
 þat to þe saule subiet he It mad.
 þane sere men for Informacione
 þare come of his conuersacione,
 þat Ithandly had his thoct
 one haly wryt, & ellis nocht.
 for he had sic infusione
 of godis illustracione,
 þat he saw godis priwete.
 & we sal trew þat at mycht be;
 fore god hyme-selfe in haly vryt
 sais, & suthfaste thing Is It,
 þat þai at are of [h]art clene
 sal ofte se god forowte vene.
 sone eftyre hym come to thoct,
 þat parfytar he na be mocht;
 for he trewyt na man ware,
 quham-of hyme nedyt til have lare.⁷³

(...for that man was so adorned in the work, word, and deed of a monk from the time of his youth, that he was entirely given to God and he had Zosimas as his name. He had so subdued his flesh that he made it subject to the soul. Then many men came there for information from his conversation, he who entirely had his thoughts on Holy Scripture and nothing else, because he had such infusion of God's enlightenment that he saw God's secrets. And we shall believe that that might be; for in Holy Scripture God himself says, and it is a truthful thing, that they who are of clean heart shall often see God without doubt. Soon after, he came to think that he could not be any more perfect; for he believed there was no man from whom he needed to learn.)

Like Sophronius' Zosimas, the *Legendary* Zosimas has dedicated his life to Holy Scripture. Additionally, the *Legendary* poet adopts Sophronius' characterisation of Zosimas as believing himself to be as learned as possible. However, whereas Sophronius' Zosimas is tormented by this belief, the *Legendary* Zosimas is not. In this way, the *Legendary* poet attributes to Zosimas less insight into the limitations of his own experience, thus emphasising the need for the experience of affective, performed devotion that he gets with Mary of Egypt to complement his intellectual mode of

⁷³ 'XVIII. Egipciane', p. 297, ll. 28-50.

devotion. Through his relationship with Mary of Egypt, whose devotion is based entirely on personal experience and who has never read any Scripture, Zosimas experiences a new kind of devotion, one that foregrounds the bodily and the affective and engages with Christ beyond reason.

In line with Sophronius' version, the Scottish poet uses an anonymous voice to show why Zosimas needs to embark on the journey in which he meets Mary of Egypt:

“sa *parfyt* is nane, þat na he
 suld ay be downtand for to fal,
 sene thinge to *cum* we myskenne al
 bot gyf þou zarnis to vyt þus,
 how many ways of hele þare Is,
 pase fra þi kithe owte of þe land,
 ane abay til þu fynd nere hand
 þe flume Iordane.”⁷⁴

(“No one is so perfect that he should not always be fearful of falling, since we all misapprehend what is to come. But if you yearn to know how many ways of salvation there are, leave your familiar acquaintances and go out of the land until you find an abbey nearby the River Jordan.”)

The voice indicates that, although Zosimas is learned to the point of perfection, he is still imperfect. When Zosimas goes to the abbey he follows the pattern of the other monks by taking a solitary retreat in the desert where he comes across Mary, so ultimately the anonymous voice directs Zosimas to Mary. Zosimas sets off on his journey so that he might learn the many paths to salvation other than that which he has chosen and his meetings with Mary of Egypt in the desert fulfil this objective. Through his relationship with Mary, Zosimas experiences devotion on an embodied, semiotic level.

The importance of the semiotic to Zosimas' relationship with Mary is clear from their initial meeting in which they communicate primarily with affective body language. In the course of their meeting, Mary and Zosimas mirror one another's emotions and actions: when Mary expresses shame at being naked, Zosimas likewise responds with shame. Then they look alike when, on Mary's request, Zosimas gives her some clothes. When Mary asks Zosimas why he has come to the desert and whether he came to see a sinful woman, rather than using actual words to explain, Zosimas responds with an affective performance:

þane to þe erde he fel sone done,

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 297-8, ll. 58-65.

& askyt hyr hyr benysone.
 & scho to erd fel als þat tyd.
 &, lyand say one athyr syd,
 Ilkane askyt vthyr benysonis
 ful mekly, & þar oracionis;
 sa ves *nocht* ellis hard
 bot “blyse me, blyse me” – sa þai ferd.⁷⁵

(Then he fell immediately down, and asked her for her benison. And she also fell to the earth at that moment. And, lying so on either side, each one asked the other for their benisons perfectly meekly, and for their orations; so nothing else was heard except for “bless me, bless me” – so they behaved.)

Unlike that of his fellow monks, Zosimas’ reason for coming to the desert is not to eschew all human contact, although he does not articulate this. Rather, in going to the desert, Zosimas is able to engage in a more affective mode of devotion beyond the static surety of scriptural study. By responding to Mary with an affective performance rather than verbal explanation, Zosimas embraces the semiotic state of devotion that he derives from their relationship. When Mary mirrors this performance, she binds them together on an arational, somatic level. Mary and Zosimas mutually redeem one another: Zosimas redeems Mary through his theological learning and ability as a monk to forgive her sins and Mary redeems Zosimas by supplementing his perfect learning with affective piety. They have a symbiotic relationship through which Zosimas welcomes Mary into the order of the church and Mary engages Zosimas affectively and somatically with her sinner-redemption narrative. The poet conveys their symbiotic relationship in the above passage as the actions of monk and sinner come to mirror each other so closely that the two become as one. First Zosimas falls to the ground then she falls to the ground. Prostrate, they both perform the same actions, asking one another for their benisons until with one voice they say “blyse me, blyse me”. This speech act is not ascribed to either one individually so that the affectivity of their relationship and its intimacy erases the boundaries of Mary’s and Zosimas’ distinct subjectivities.

Although the first meeting of Mary and Zosimas is quite similar in the *Legendary* and in Sophronius, the episode is markedly different in the *Legenda* in which Zosimas prostrates himself and Mary blesses him before rising from the ground. The *Legenda* version inscribes distance between devotee and saint whereas Sophronius and the *Legendary* poet highlight the shared affective experiences of

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 304, ll. 287-94.

Mary and Zosimas so as to underscore their mutually complementary qualities. The *Legendary* version inscribes the closeness between Mary and Zosimas throughout her Life as they regularly cry together. This intimate, affective and physical performance of faith puts Mary and Zosimas in a semiotic state. This semiotic state defines itself by challenging the symbolic order's creation of boundaries between subjectivities. As such, the semiotic state works to dissolve the previous self to make way for edification towards a state of being which is closer to God.

The reader is invited into this semiotic state of devotion through the character of Zosimas who is the reader's eyes and ears in the text. As Mary tells Zosimas the story of her sinful life, the reader is in a position akin to Zosimas, either hearing or reading her tale. The text cues the reader's affective response to Mary's story through Zosimas' reaction:

qwhene þis was sad, zozimas ran
to kes hyre fete but abad þane,
& sad to hyre *with gretand stewyn*:
“blissit ay be oure lord of hewyn,
þat ferlys wyrkis hyme ane,
quhare-of nowmer ma be nane!
& also, lord, blissit þu be,
þat has deygnit to schaw me
quhat reward, & quhat-kine med
þu gyfis to þame þat vil þe dred;
for, quha-sa-euir sekis þe,
but helpe þu wil nocht lat þam be.”⁷⁶

(When this was said, Zosimas ran to kiss her feet without delay, and said to her with a tearful voice: “Our Lord of Heaven is always blessed, Who alone works wonders, which are innumerable! And also, Lord, blessed are You, Who has deigned to show me what reward, and what kind of gifts You give to those that will fear You; for, whoever seeks You, You will not let them be without help.”)

The *Legendary* version exaggerates the emotional reaction of Zosimas found in Sophronius' rendition who writes merely that ‘with tears the elder exclaimed’.⁷⁷ Through Zosimas' outburst the Scottish poet directs the reader's interpretation of the moral of Mary's Life, i.e. that whoever seeks God will receive help and whoever fears God will reap rewards. This ethical explanation is crucially complemented by Zosimas' outpouring of emotional interaction with Mary as he kisses her feet. In this

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 326-7, ll. 1049-60.

⁷⁷ Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem, ‘The Life of our Holy Mother Mary of Egypt’ <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/st.mary.html> [accessed 11.08.2015].

response to her story, Zosimas disturbs the boundaries between his own subjectivity and Mary's. Additionally, in his outburst that explains the moral of the story, he speaks with 'gretand stewyn', i.e. with a tearful voice. Thus, semiotic expression both deepens and corrects rational deduction through the tenor and emotive aspects of voice. The character of Zosimas guides the reader's affective engagement with Mary by demonstrating the proper symbolic interpretation and semiotic response to the story.

In the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, the Scottish poet makes a series of decisions as to what to include and what to exclude from his source text(s) that demonstrate his concern with semiotic modes of enacting devotion. The semiotic qualities of the *Legendary* engage with the reader's selfhood and are, thus, integral to the text's exemplarity. Indeed, as Elizabeth Allen outlines in her study of medieval exemplary literature:

...it is crucial to recognize the degree to which exemplary literature is by definition wedded not just to narrative particularity but to affective response. In practice, exemplary texts make an array of different kinds of demands upon readers, including sensory and emotional ones, which are deeply contingent upon individual circumstance...⁷⁸

Examples are effective didactic tools because of the space they give readers for a range of personal interpretations. The 'sensory and emotional' demands that exemplary texts make put the reader or listener in a semiotic state. As the text gives religious and secular morals human form, the reader interacts with the emotional arc of the characters in the text, to empathise, criticise, align, reject and, as a result, to feel alongside the characters. Because exemplarity allows for a range of personal emotional and sensory responses, the reader's engagement with the text is intimately connected with her own selfhood prior to entering into the symbolic order and prior, even, to subjectivity so that her cultural self dissolves.

In similar ways, the *Scottish Legendary* version of the *Life of Mary Magdalene* demonstrates the semiotic state exemplary texts can induce. In this *Life*, the *Legendary* poet has followed the basic arc of the *Legenda Aurea* version. Like Jacobus de Voragine, he begins with Mary Magdalene's redemption before discussing her interactions with sinners.⁷⁹ However, the Scottish poet departs from the *Legenda*

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 14.

⁷⁹ Metcalfe agrees that the *LA* is the primary source text: vol. 3 p. 185.

firstly in focusing attention on the reader's relationship to Mary Magdalene, and secondly by emphasising the intimate, affective relationship between Mary Magdalene and Christ. These alterations by the Scottish poet make for a reading experience that is more focused upon an affective relationship between reader and saint than is the case in the *Legenda Aurea* version.

The exemplarity of Mary Magdalene's life works by first providing the reader with the moral that the reader can deduce from the life:

als sais god þat mare Ioy is
 with angelis In hewyne blyse
 of a sinful, penance dowand,
 þane nyne and nynte vnsymmand.⁸⁰

(As God says, that is more joy with angels in Heaven's bliss of someone sinful doing penance than ninety-nine committing no sin.)

Next, the poet focuses his attention on the reader's response, explaining his reasons for discussing sinner-redemption tales:

& þis I say to comfort all,
 þat in vanehope na man fal;
 for mar is mercy þan mysded,
 In syndry placis as we red.
 bot a sampill I set certane
 þat fel in þe magdalane,
 þat fyrst hyre gaf til al delyt,
 & [syne] was of a gret meryte,
 as men fyndis in haly wryt,
 quha zarnis for to se It...⁸¹

(And this I say to comfort all, so that no man falls into despair; for there is more mercy than sin, as we read in many places. I cite only one certain example that occurred in the Magdalene, who first gave herself to all delight and then was later of great merit, as one finds in Holy writing, whoever yearns to see it...)

The poet invokes the reader, as one of the 'all' who read what the poet 'say[s]', to take 'comfort' from what he says. Achieving such comfort is possible when the reader draws comparisons between her own life and that of Mary Magdalene and imagines herself on a similar trajectory of redemption as Mary Magdalene. Thus, the opening focuses the reader's attention on linking the Life of Mary Magdalene with her own

⁸⁰ 'XVI. Magdalena' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 256-84, p. 257, ll. 31-4.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 257, ll. 39-48.

life. The reader must be willing, however; she is invited, through reading to become one of those ‘quha zarnis for to se It’. If, in order to see God’s mercy, the reader must yearn then she must experience a strong sense of longing or desire in reading to understand Mary Magdalene’s sinner-redemption narrative; thus, she must experience herself as incomplete, to be completed through reading. The reader should ideally see her reading activity as productive, directed towards scripting her own redemption narrative akin to Mary Magdalene’s.

The text makes Mary Magdalene’s example of redemption accessible to the reader by delineating the affective processes behind her contrition. The poet provides his reader with a step-by-step affective guide for contrition which fulfils the prologue’s promise to steer the reader’s heart by inviting the reader to experience the emotions of contrition alongside Mary Magdalene’s emotions. Firstly, Mary Magdalene is moved to meet Christ because ‘god hire harte Illumynyt sa’ (God so enlightened her heart).⁸² Mary Magdalene is not entirely the agent of her own redemption because God directs her will towards contrition. Likewise, the reader’s affective response is not entirely her own but is, rather, manipulated by the text. An emotional yearning, beyond the intellectual realm of the symbolic, inspires Mary’s devotion to Christ. Mary’s yearning mirrors the reader’s yearning ‘for to se It’, i.e. to witness Mary’s sinner-redemption journey. Although she wants to meet with Christ, ‘scho had gret rednes til apere’ (she had a great amount of fearfulness to appear) and when she does come to Christ she does so ‘schamfully’ (filled with shame).⁸³ Mary Magdalene experiences her own lowliness affectively. Only having cleaned Christ’s feet, abjecting herself and, thus, relinquishing her previous selfhood discrete from Christ does she ‘vaxand syne mar hardy’ (then grew more bold).⁸⁴ Mary Magdalene experiences a greater sense of self in her relationship with Christ, which, nonetheless, requires her to embrace an abject state. Indeed, this boldness is coupled with self-abjection as Mary Magdalene ‘one kneys done cane scho ly,/ & kissit his kneis richt tendirly’ (lay down on her knees and kissed his knees most tenderly).⁸⁵ In this final image, Mary enacts her love for Christ through her body language; she is prostrate, demonstrating a contrite Christian selfhood that is appropriately abject in the face of God.

⁸² Ibid, p. 259, l. 101.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 259, ll. 104, 106.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 259, l. 110.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 259, ll. 119-20.

Mary Magdalene offers a model of redemption achieved primarily through affection rather than through intellectual assent to the doctrine of salvation. The text teaches the reader not to think but to feel. The life of Mary Magdalene in the *Scottish Legendary* takes the reader through the affective journey which led her to sainthood. The reader is thus able to relate to and empathise with Mary Magdalene and is better equipped to take example from the saint's sinner-redemption narrative.

With the same intentions, the *Legendary* poet embellishes Jacobus de Voragine's description of Mary Magdalene's relationship to Christ, describing it in far more emotionally-stirring terms. Where the Scottish version of Mary Magdalene legend takes sixty-six lines of iambic pentameter to convey Mary Magdalene's first meeting with Christ, the *Legenda Aurea* does so in two sentences:

Being a sinner she did not dare mingle with the righteous, but stayed back and washed the Lord's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with precious ointment. Because of the extreme heat of the sun the people of that region anointed themselves regularly.⁸⁶

Next, Jacobus describes in great detail Simon's surprise and disdain that Christ would allow a sinner to touch him. By contrast, the Scottish version largely skips over this interaction, being far more interested in conveying Mary's affective development and the close relationship Mary Magdalene creates with Jesus. With little focus on Simon's intervention, the reader experiences Mary Magdalene's interaction with Christ more immediately and directly, and, since secondary characters are largely absent, the text invites the reader into the affective interactions of that intimate moment with minimal distraction by the intervention of others.

In the Scottish version, as Mary Magdalene communes with Christ, in reading the Life of Mary Magdalene the reader is able to imagine herself as also communing with Christ. This sense of intimate communication with Christ is inscribed at the beginning of Mary Magdalene's Life:

Ihesu cryst, lowyt þu be,
þat for þine Inborne pitte
denzeit of voman to be borne,
to sawfe mankynd þat wes forlorne!⁸⁷

⁸⁶ '96. Saint Mary Magdalene' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, pp. 374-83, p. 375-6.

⁸⁷ 'XVI. Magdalena', p. 256, ll. 1-4.

(Jesus Christ, You are loved, that for Your innate pity deigned to be born of woman so as to save mankind that was lost!)

Though He is not physically present, He is ever-present on a spiritual level. As the reader reads the above excerpt, she addresses Jesus. By reading, then, the reader aligns herself with Mary Magdalene and communes directly with Jesus so that the reader is in a similar position to Mary Magdalene. The reader vividly imagines herself interacting with Christ like Mary Magdalene, experiencing the shame of sin alongside the hope of redemption. When, in the climactic moment of Mary Magdalene's contrition, Christ shows love for the sinner Mary Magdalene, the reader, too, imagines that she herself is likewise capable of receiving His love because she has experienced the emotions of contrition alongside Mary. Christ's love for Mary Magdalene is described as follows:

sik takine of lufe he til hyr lend,
& gret, quhene he saw hyr gret.
sike lufe til hyre had Ihesu swet.⁸⁸

(Such a sign of love He bestowed upon her, and cried when He saw her cry.
Such love for her had sweet Jesus.)

Christ mirrors Mary Magdalene's emotional performance, i.e. when He sees her crying He cries too. The poet provides this mirroring as proof of Christ's love. Likewise, as the reader reads introspectively, she imagines performing her own contrition within this paradigm of mirroring emotions. When Mary Magdalene experiences shame, the reader should likewise, and when the reader mirrors Mary's weeping over her sinful life, she imagines that Christ and Mary Magdalene cry, too.

Affective devotion puts the devotee in a semiotic state, which dissolves her sense of herself as a complete, discrete, subject. This state harks back to the pre-symbolic state, which Kristeva describes as follows:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are “energy” charges as well as “psychical” marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 260, ll. 164-6.

⁸⁹ Kristeva, p. 93.

In the semiotic state, the devotee accesses a pre-cultural self whose sensory experiences are instinctual and somatic. The devotee experiences her body in a way that momentarily dispenses with the constraints of culture and, indeed, of subjectivity. Thus, the semiotic state dissolves the devotee's established notions of herself and opens her up, on an emotional and embodied level, to new notions of herself. In the *Legendary's* rendition of the life of St Theodora, the poet provides the reader with a model for reading that foregrounds this semiotic state. In the course of her redemptive arc from sinner to saint, Theodora reads the gospel and responds with an emotional performance:

quod scho: "laydy, þan gyf me
 þe text of þe ewangile for to se,
 þat þar ve[r]lyly fynd I may
 of me þat quhat sal fal be assay."
 þe priores gert bryng þe buk,
 & scho It opnyt & can luk,
 & fand þar wrytine in hy
 þir wordis: "*quod scripsi scripsi*."
 þane went scho hame with hart sare,
 in mekil murnyng & in care,
 bannand þe tyme scho wes born
 þat sagat had hyr-self forlorne...⁹⁰

(She said: "Lady, then give me the text of the gospel to see, so that there by attempting I might truly find what shall happen to me." The prioress ordered the book to be brought, and she opened it and looked and found written there these words in haste: "What I have written, I have written." Then she went home with a sore heart, in much lamenting and distress, cursing the time that she was born, [she] who had destroyed herself in such a way...)

This passage links the affective response elicited by the act of reading to self-knowledge and, ultimately, edification. The specific section of the gospel that Theodora reads is Pontius Pilate's response to the Jewish community's objections to his inscription on Jesus's Cross that He is King of Jesus, i.e. 'quod scripsi scripsi' ('What I have written, I have written.').⁹¹ The saint extrapolates these words from the text and sees her own life through them as a history that cannot be unwritten, fulfilling the *Legendary's* instructions to its readers to read (or hear) as if looking in the mirror. Theodora exemplifies the type of reading in which the reader should be engaged, self-reflectively in such a way that is connected with her own life on a

⁹⁰ 'XXX. Theodora' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 100-23 p. 110, ll. 389-92.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 110, l. 388.

deeply emotional level. The act of reading dislodges Theodora's long-held conception of herself. Through reading, Theodora sees herself as 'forlorn', i.e. lost or destroyed; reading introspectively destabilises Theodora's sense of wholeness or completeness. Ultimately, the sense of incompleteness that reading invokes motivates Theodora to change her behaviour as she goes on to take control of her own selfhood by disguising herself as a man and becoming a monk. This highly affective passage contrasts with the *Legenda Aurea* version in which Theodora 'went home and, one day when her husband was away, cut her hair, put on men's clothing, and hurried to a monastery.'⁹² Jacobus de Voragine does not elaborate any further on Theodora's emotional response to the text. The *Legendary* poet follows the *Legenda's* narrative arc but with affective embellishments and descriptions of Theodora's performance of distress designed to stir the reader's emotions.

If the reader is reading introspectively, as if looking in a mirror, she has seen herself in Theodora's sinful life. Indeed, as Theodora is described as reading the words 'quod scripsi scripsi', so does the reader read the same words in the text of the *Legendary*, so that the reader literally imitates Theodora's reading. In this way, the text closes the gap between reader and saint. Crucially, what Theodora has read inspires her to take control of her own destiny and identity; she disguises herself as a man and lives as a hermit. If the reader sees herself as imitating Theodora, reading and reflecting on herself as the sum of previous actions, she likewise learns that, like Theodora, her previous life cannot be unwritten but if she can imitate Theodora's contrition she has the potential to reform and take control of her own selfhood as Theodora does. However, the exemplarity does not work literally; the poet does not imagine that his female readers, for instance, leave their husbands and live as monks. Rather, the *Legendary's* reader might take the example inwardly, experiencing a sense of inner distance between themselves and the demands of their worldly relationships through the narrated distance between Theodora and *her* worldly life.

The *Legendary* poet sets out to reveal the reader to herself (like a mirror) and to prompt her to imitate saints (by taking example). At the centre of this process of self-realisation is the reader's affective engagement with saints. By engaging affectively, beyond reason and intellect, the reader goes into a semiotic state. This semiotic state bears the traces of the subject before she entered into the symbolic

⁹² '92. Saint Theodora' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, pp. 365-8, p. 366.

order and began to consider herself as a discrete, hermetic subjectivity. In this way, the boundaries of the reader's subjectivity dissolve so that the boundary between reader and text blurs. The *Legendary* thus oversteps the boundaries of its pages to edify its readers on the intimate level of the emotional.

Chapter Three

Affective Piety and the Permeable Flesh

The *Scottish Legendary* makes use of the semiotic aspects of language, i.e. those that appeal to the arational, emotive, and somatic. In this respect, the *Legendary* responds to, and is shaped by, late medieval affective piety which foregrounded the arational experiences of the flesh. This chapter will highlight the significance of the flesh to late medieval devotion in general before looking at the importance of the flesh in the *Legendary* itself.

The Middle Ages considered the flesh to be the seat of sensuality, the passions, and the appetites. Crucially, the flesh was highly permeable in a way that bypassed judgment and so it was an easy route for sin to enter into the body and spirit. Indeed, the flesh was the cause of original sin and therefore the Middle Ages viewed the flesh as potentially corruptive and treated it with suspicion. We can see these views of the flesh at work in the life of St Agatha in the *Scottish Legendary*. A tyrannical prefect, Quincyane, pursues Agatha and sends her to a brothel in order ‘to change hir purpos & wil’ (to change her purpose and will), instructing the women at the brothel to ‘quhyle/hir flesch far hir to begil’ (from time to time to beguile her fair flesh).⁹³ According to this passage, the flesh holds immense influence over human willpower. If one’s flesh can be beguiled, it can be enthralled in a way that confounds reason. Indeed, it is not even the person herself that is beguiled, but rather it is her very flesh; she herself does not have a say in it.

Late medieval culture viewed the flesh as an easily penetrated boundary between the self and the world that had an immense influence over subjectivity. Affective piety attempted to harness that influence, channeling the experiences of the flesh by means of devotion that was embodied and appealed to the passions (both sensory and emotional). If human beings are pervious to worldly influences anyway then it makes sense to turn that perviousness to good by infusing them with piety.

⁹³ ‘XLII. Agatha’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 358-67, p. 359, ll. 45, 53-4.

Those who engaged in affective piety imagined Christ's Passion as a human, personal struggle and focused upon Christ's permeated flesh as the main symbol for this human struggle. Thus, devotees enacted devotion to Christ's very flesh. In turn, late medieval Christians came to value the experiences of their own flesh. In her seminal work *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Caroline Walker Bynum concludes that, rather than denying the influence of the flesh, late medieval penitents harnessed that influence as a powerful means of *imitatio Christi*. In Bynum's words:

The extravagant penitential practices of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the cultivation of pain and patience, the literalism of *imitatio crucis* are...not primarily an attempt to escape from body. They are not the products of an epistemology or psychology or theology that sees soul struggling against its opposite, matter. Therefore they are not – as historians have often suggested – a world-denying, self-hating, decadent response of a society wracked by plague, famine, heresy, war, and ecclesiastical corruption. Rather, late medieval asceticism was an effort to plumb and to realize all the possibilities of the flesh. It was a profound expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation: the doctrine that Christ, by becoming human, saves *all* that the human being is.⁹⁴

Since Christ saved 'all that the human being is', this includes the body and the flesh. Although the body and the flesh are the primary sites through which sin enters the spirit, they are necessary and irrefutable components of humanity. The Late Middle Ages began to see the experiences of the flesh as being an important means of enacting devotion.

Bynum describes a view of the body and the flesh that is more in line with the Aristotelian than the Neo-Platonic view that Augustine of Hippo (350-430) propagated. Augustine believed that the flesh, having overtaken the will, was responsible for putting the body at odds with the soul so that the body was the soul's prison. With death, the soul discarded the body and ascended to its original home in heaven.⁹⁵ However, this view was destabilised with the rediscovery of the Aristotelian view of the body, notably adopted by St Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle considered the soul to be the form of the body, i.e. that which attributes life to the body's matter; one was inseparable from the other because the body and the soul constitute one

⁹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women* (California: University of California Press, 1988), p. 294.

⁹⁵ See Saint Augustine, *The Greatness of the Soul and The Teacher* trans. by Joseph M. Colleran (New York: Longmans, 1950).

substance.⁹⁶ Indeed, Aristotle celebrated the inextricable relationship between the soul and the body. Following Aristotelian thought, Aquinas argued for a more holistic view of selfhood in his *Summa Theologiæ*:

...one and the same man perceives himself both to understand and to have sensations. Yet sensation involves the body, so that the body must be said to be part of man.⁹⁷

Here, Aquinas attributes value to the body and especially its sensory experiences by virtue of the fact that these are inextricable components of mankind alongside the intellectual soul. Aquinas' adoption of Aristotelianism meant that, although the late Middle Ages treated the flesh with suspicion, the flesh came to be elevated alongside the body as holding spiritual potential because of its close relationship with the body.

This relationship between flesh and the body was as follows: the flesh was a disorderly boundary that could lead to the debasement of the body and spirit. As Karma Lochrie has shown, the 'passive, corruptible, physical body' was at the mercy of unruly, permeable flesh that could be tempted to sin.⁹⁸ Recognising the flesh's immense influence over subjectivity, late medieval affective piety did not outright deny these experience but rather attempted to direct those experiences towards pious ends.

Both Aristotelian and Platonic views of the body were at play in the Late Middle Ages, complicating the ways in which late medieval people experienced their body and flesh and how they valued the experiences of the flesh. Additionally complicating matters was the body's resurrection. In her study of resurrection, Bynum examines material and cultural evidence from late medieval religious practice and concludes

...that a concern for material and structural continuity showed remarkable persistence even where it seemed almost to require philosophical incoherence, theological equivocation, or aesthetic offensiveness. This concern responded to and was reflected in pious practices of great oddness; without it, such late medieval curiosities as entrail caskets, finger reliquaries, and miracles of incorrupt cadavers are inexplicable. The materialism of this eschatology expressed not body-soul dualism but rather a sense of self as psychosomatic

⁹⁶ See Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. J.A. Smith in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* ed. by Jonathon Barnes, vol. 1 (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 641-92 as well as Elizabeth Robertson, "Souls that Matter: Gender and the Soul in *Piers Plowman*" in *Mindful Spirit: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth Kirk*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 165-186.

⁹⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* vol. 11 (London: Blackfriars, 1964), p. 43, Ia q. 76 a. 1.

⁹⁸ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (U.S.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 3-4.

unity. The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity – and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation. Despite its suspicion of flesh and lust, Western Christianity did not hate or discount the body. Indeed, person was not person without body, and body was the carrier or the expression (although the two are not the same thing) of what we today call individuality.⁹⁹

Importantly, Bynum highlights the ability of late medieval people to live with philosophical and theological contradictions. Most likely, the average devotee would not have been interested in the conflicts between Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian views of the body. What Bynum finds is that the body was not seen purely as the soul's vessel which was to be discarded, as it was in Neo-Platonism. Rather, though it is material and is, therefore, changeable, the body is a continuous entity that, along with the soul, is the carrier of personal identity. In the quotation above, Bynum describes a holistic view of the devotional self in which body, flesh, and soul must work together to reject sin and show love for God. Whilst it must be acknowledged that the Late Middle Ages did not wholly abandon the Neo-Platonic view of the body as the soul's prison, the body's resurrection gave weight to the Aristotelian model of the body, flesh, and spirit as inextricably bound together. Augustine's model of the body, soul, and flesh remained influential and the Late Middle Ages still viewed the flesh as sin's primary route of corruption. However, as Bynum has argued, there was an increased sensitivity to the role of the flesh in humankind's redemption. Indeed, the *Legendary* even seems to suggest that the flesh is resurrected alongside the body, asserting in the *Life of the Seven Sleepers* that 'we sal ryse one domys day/In þe sammyne flesch we haf now', thus suggesting that the flesh will be resurrected along with the body and the soul.¹⁰⁰

Late medieval culture associated the flesh with irrationality and saw it as a potentially disruptive mode of sense perception. However, since the flesh was inextricable from the human, the flesh's changeability meant that it kept body and soul open not only to corruption but also to healing. Indeed, Lochrie has argued that in the Middle Ages the flesh was seen as 'not by its nature evil unless it is

⁹⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ 'XXIII. VII Sleperis' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 426-440, p. 426, ll. 4-5.

unmastered'.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the view that the flesh was to be denied and reviled, Lochrie finds that it was not only possible but, indeed, of great importance for late medieval Christians to master the flesh and harness its powers for virtuous ends. If humankind was by nature tied to the flesh, it would be counterproductive to deny the flesh's influence. Crucially in the context of the *Scottish Legendary*, affective piety ordered rather than subdued the experiences of the flesh.

We can begin to understand the role of the flesh in affective piety in the commentary on the Song of Songs by St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153):

I think this is the principal reason why the invisible God willed to be seen in the flesh and to converse with men as a man. He wanted to recapture the affection of carnal men who were unable to love in any other way, by first drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love.¹⁰²

Along with St Anselm, Bernard played a major role in ushering in late medieval affective piety. Bernard writes that Christ appears as a man in order to appeal to humankind's carnality, i.e. fleshliness (carnal from Latin *carnālis* meaning fleshly), and to inspire fleshly love that ultimately paves the way for higher, spiritual love. It is significant that Bernard perceives the importance of mankind seeing Christ 'in the flesh' to their ability to love Him because mankind is 'unable to love in any other way' than through the flesh; in order for humankind to be redeemed, they must enact love for Christ in such a way that is appropriate to their fleshliness. Bernard understands that Christ appeared materially because this was the only way that the affections of inherently fleshly men could be 'captured', i.e. directed and ordered. By engaging humans on their own level, that of the flesh, Christ prepares devotees for a more lofty, spiritual love.

The literature of this period conjures up Christ 'in the flesh' by focusing on His Passion and the permeability of His human flesh. 'Amang Thir Freiris, Within ane Cloister', usually attributed to William Dunbar (c.1456-1513), is a dream vision in Middle Scots of Christ's Passion that invites sensory engagement with Christ's pierced flesh:

Quhen he was bendit so on breid
Quhill all his vanis brist and brak,

¹⁰¹ Lochrie, p. 20.

¹⁰² Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs I*, trans. Killian Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series 4 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), p. 148.

To gar his cruell pane exceed
 Thay leit him fall down with ane swak,
 Quhill cors and corps and all did crak.
 Agane thay raist him on hie,
 Reddie may turmentis for to tak,
 O mankynd, for the luif of the.¹⁰³

(When He was stretched so fully until all His veins burst and broke, to cause His cruel agony to increase they let Him fall down with a thud, until cross and body and all cracked. Again they raised Him up high, ready to endure more torments, oh mankind, for love of you.)

This passage illustrates the humanity of Christ in disturbing terms by conveying the pain endured by Christ as His flesh is torn to pieces. Dunbar draws upon the aural aspects of language beyond the level of symbolic meaning. The alliteration on the violent plosive of [b] (in Scots [b] often appears in words relating to violence) along with the onomatopoeic ‘swak’ and ‘crak’ draw on the intimacy of the semiotic aspects of language to make readers powerfully imagine the violence with which Christ’s flesh was penetrated. The text appeals sensorily, i.e. on the level of the arational flesh. The immediacy of the plosives is such that the reader experiences a sensory penetration of their own subjectivity, which mirrors how Christ’s body is penetrated. Reading Christ’s permeable flesh in this way induces the reader to experience herself as also permeable through the flesh.

In a similar vein, Robert Henryson’s (c. 1460-1500) poem on the bloody sark vividly imagines Christ’s permeated flesh:

Unlusum was his likame dicht,
 His sark was all bludy;
 In all the world was thair a wicht
 So peteous for to sy?¹⁰⁴

(His body was made unlovely, His shirt was all bloody; in all the world was there a creature so piteous to see?)

In this excerpt, Henryson invites his reader to enact devotion by imagining seeing Christ’s bloodied shirt, which symbolises His human penetrability. Henryson directs the reader towards a specific affective response to this image of Christ’s perforated flesh; readers should feel piteous when they see Christ’s blood. Pity has close

¹⁰³ William Dunbar, ‘Amang Thir Freiris, Within ane Cloister’ in *The Makars: The Poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas* ed. by J.A. Tasioulas (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1999), pp. 488-94, p. 491, ll. 73-80.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Henryson, ‘The Bludy Serk’ in *The Makars: The Poems of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas* ed. by J.A. Tasioulas (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 1999), pp. 224-9, p. 226, ll. 61-4.

etymological ties with piety; both are originally found in Middle English in the sense of ‘compassion’. In this instance, pity instances compassion and the imagination of shared suffering that enacts piety. If Henryson’s image of Christ’s body inspires pity in the compassionate sense of the word, the image creates a sense of shared suffering in the reader, i.e. *imitatio Christi*. To see piteously in Henryson’s poem, then, denotes a type of seeing that closes the distance between the viewer and the viewed object; through compassion the reader experiences Christ’s Passion with Him. Christ’s fragmented flesh foregrounds His humanity; through it, He is very much ‘a wicht’, a creature, who is grounded ‘in all the world’ and its attendant worldly corruptions and temptations. By seeing and feeling pity for Christ’s mutilated flesh, readers experience their own flesh as likewise permeable and fragile, prey to the same corruptions and temptations.

‘Amang Thir Freiris’ also explicitly guides the reader’s affective response to the vision of Christ’s Passion, describing the violence done to Christ as ‘sorrow for to se’ and the blood gushing out of His body as ‘pietie for to se’.¹⁰⁵ The reader is made to see and to feel pity and sorrow for the suffering of Christ. The distance between witness and victim of violence closes after Christ’s death, when Dunbar turns the dreamer’s emotional responses to the Passion into allegorical figures who attack the dreamer like Christ’s persecutors attacked Christ in the first half of the poem:

Methocht Compassioun, wode of feiris,
 Than straik at me with mony ane stound,
 And soir Contritioun, bathit in teiris,
 My visage all in watter drownit,
 And Reuth in to my eir ay rounde:
 “For schame allace, behald, man, how
 Beft is with mony ane wound
 Thy blissit salvatour Jesu.”

Than rudelie come Remembrance
 Ay rugging me withouttin rest,
 Quhilk crose and nalis, scharp scourge and lance,
 And bludy crowne befor me kest.
 Than Pane with passioun me opprest,
 And evir did Petie on me pow
 Saying, “Behald how Jowis hes drest
 Thy blissit salvatour Chryst Jesu.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Dunbar, p. 489, l. 22 and p. 491, l. 62.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 492-3, ll. 97-112.

(It seemed to me that Compassion, angry of manner, then struck me with many a pang, and sorrowful Contrition, bathed in tears, drowned my face all in water, and Pity constantly whispered into my ear: “For shame alas, behold, man, how with many a wound your blessed saviour Jesus is beaten.”)

Then Memory came roughly always pulling at me without rest, who cast before me cross and nails, sharp scourge and lance, and bloody crown. Then Pain with violence oppressed me, and Pity ever did pull on me saying “Behold how Jews have treated your blessed saviour Jesus Christ.”)

The assault of Compassion mirrors the attack on Christ by Judas and the Jews at the beginning of the poem so that a symbiotic relationship manifests itself physically on the devotee in a similar vein to stigmata. This mirroring continues with Contrition drowning the dreamer’s face in a way that bears traces of the description of Christ when the ‘flude of blude blindit his ene’ (flood of blood blinded his eyes).¹⁰⁷ Dunbar’s use of ‘passioun’ to describe the dreamer’s feelings seals the sense that the dreamer’s experience of his emotions mirrors the physical attacks on Christ. The passage entwines the physicality of the dreamer’s emotions with the dreamer’s visual mode of engaging with the Passion: Remembrance presents the dreamer with the *arma Christi* and Pity orders the dreamer to behold. Dunbar, like Henryson in ‘The Bludy Serk’, constructs a mode of devotion in which the devotee visualises (by reading) and, through visualising, imagines that she physically experiences the permeability of Christ’s flesh in the Passion.

Late medieval devotional practice often involved the devotee literally penetrating the flesh as Christ’s flesh was penetrated. This practice of stigmata harnesses the influence of the flesh over the subject by closing the gap between devotee and Christ. This type of devotion is prevalent in *Shewings* by the mystic Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-1413). The text details Julian’s visions of Christ. At the beginning of the text, Julian describes her desire to dissolve the boundary between herself and Christ by imagining His pierced flesh in such a way that her flesh is likewise pierced:

I desyrede thre graces be the gyfte of god. The fyrst was to have mynde of Cryste es *passioun*. The seconnde was bodelye syeknes, and the thryd was to haue goddys gyfte thre wonndys. For the fyrste come to my mynde with devocion; me thought I hadde grete felynge in the passyonn of Cryste, botte zitte I desyrede to haue mare be the grace of god. Me thought I wolde haue bene that tyme with Mary Mawdeleyne and with othere that were Crystes loverse, that I myght have sene bodylye the *passioun* of oure lorde that he

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 490, l. 47.

sufferede for me, that I myght have sufferede with hym as othere dyd that lovyd hym, not withstandyng that I leevyd sadlye alle the peynes of Cryste as halye kyrke scewys *and* techys, *and* also the payntyngys of crucyfixes that er made be the grace of god aftere the techyng of haly kyrke to the lyknes of Crystes passyom, als farfurthe as man ys witte maye reche. Nouzt *withstondyng* alle this trewe be leve I desyrede a bodylye syght, whare yn y might have more knowyng of bodelye paynes of oure lorde oure savyoure, and of the *compassyom* of oure ladye and of alle his trewe loveise that were be levande his paynes that tyme and sythene; for I wolde have beene one of thame and suffrede *with* thame.¹⁰⁸

(I asked for three graces of God's gift. The first was vivid perception of Christ's Passion, the second was bodily sickness and the third was for God to give me three wounds. I thought of the first as I was meditating: it seemed to me that I could feel the Passion of Christ strongly, but yet I longed by God's grace to feel it more intensely. I thought how I wished I had been there at the crucifixion with Mary Magdalene and with the others who were Christ's dear friends, that I might have seen in the flesh the Passion of our Lord which he suffered for me, so that I could have suffered with him as others did who loved him. Nevertheless, I firmly believed in all the torments of Christ as Holy Church reveals and teaches them, and also in the paintings of crucifixes that are made by God's grace in the likeness of Christ's Passion, according to the teaching of Holy Church, as far as human imagination can reach.

In spite of all this true faith, I longed to be shown him in the flesh so that I might have more knowledge of our Lord and Saviour's bodily suffering and of our Lady's fellow-suffering and that of all his true friends who have believed in his pain then and since; I wanted to be one of them and suffer with him.)¹⁰⁹

In her devotional practice, Julian enacts contrition primarily through her permeable, changeable flesh. First, she asks God to have a vivid perception of Christ's Passion, i.e. of His human, suffering flesh. She wishes to conjure up Christ's Passion in her mind so as to imagine that she was there along with Mary Magdalene and Christ's other friends. By seeing Christ's suffering, Julian hopes to suffer with them. Julian's second request is that she becomes sick, i.e. that her flesh changes. Thus, she harnesses the very changeability for which the flesh was mistrusted, becoming ill as a means of relinquishing her claim on hermetic, contained subjectivity and closing the gap between herself and Christ. The gap is further closed in Julian's final request that she is given three wounds. These wounds are stigmata which mirror Christ's wounds on the palms of His hands and in His side. Julian relates to Christ through a physically experienced interaction that hinges on her flesh coming to mirror His.

¹⁰⁸ Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* ed. by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), pp. 201-2.

¹⁰⁹ Translation by Elizabeth Spearing in *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 3-4.

In the saints' lives in the *Scottish Legendary*, sinners are brought to contrition through the permeability of their flesh. The importance of this permeability can be seen from the life of St Laurence which includes a tangential narrative about a sinner named Stevyne who dies not long after deceitfully gaining three houses that held altars of St Laurence and St Agnes. When Stevyne is being judged, rather than being cast down to hell, he is sent back to his earthly body to make amends at the request of St Laurence, St Agnes, St Projectus, and the Virgin Mary:

þe Iuge þane at þe prayer
 of þire fowre, I spak of here,
 granttit þat his saul in hy
 suld agayne til his body
 fore thretty days, til þat he
 of his synnis mycht clengyt be.¹¹⁰

(The Judge, then, at the prayer of these four I speak of here, granted that his soul should immediately return to his body for a period of thirty days, so that he might be cleansed of his sins.)

Stevyne's soul is sent back to Earth where it will be cleansed through his body. That the body can be cleansed indicates that its boundaries are surmountable through the flesh. By association, the soul is likewise pervious to outside influences and is subject to the desires of the flesh. The Scottish poet shows how the flesh's permeability can be used positively. Following the judgement on Stevyne

& quhene þe saule was suthly
 cummyne agane to þe body,
 he fand his harme sa sare & wa
 þat nere of wyt It gert hym ga;
 fore it was lyk, quha had [it] sene,
 brulyt in a fyre to haf bene.¹¹¹

(And when the soul had truly come back to the body, he found his wounds so painful and woeful that it nearly caused him to leave his wits; for it was like, whoever had seen it, it had been broiled in a fire.)

Stevyne experiences the damage he has done to his soul through his body. He is reformed through physical pain and suffering. The *Legendary* is less interested in rational, intellectual modes of knowing God than in flesh-based modes of reform that lead to greater understanding of the self in relation to God. Stevyne's narrative is

¹¹⁰ 'XXII. Laurentius' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 403-25, p. 421, ll. 665-70.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 421, ll. 675-80.

largely a translation of a passage in the *Legenda Aurea*. The added dimension is that in the *Legenda Stevyne*'s body is burned when he returns to life 'as if he had suffered this in the flesh' whereas in the *Scottish Legendary*, Stevyne continues to experience the pain whilst he is alive; his physical experience is key to his metaphysical redemption.¹¹² Stevyne returns to his body as a means of purification.

The idea that permeating the flesh is instrumental in contrition recurs in the *Legendary*'s rendering of the Life of St Christopher. Christopher posthumously converts the pagan king who persecuted him when that king puts Christopher's blood in his eye in the hopes of regaining his sight:

þe kinge tuk þan a lytil we
of þe fresche blude, & vet his ee,
sayande: "in name of Ihesu
& sanct *christofore* I tweche þe nov."
þane of þire wordis be þe mycht
bath fare & clene he gat þe sycht.
& alsa þane of godis grace
of Inwart licht Illumynt he vas,
as of *christofore* thru þe mycht
he had gottyne ovtwart sycht.
þe kinge crystis treutht has tane...¹¹³

(The King then took a small quantity of the fresh blood and wet his eyes, saying: "in the name of Jesus and St Christopher I touch you now." Then by the might of these words he got sight that was both clear and clean. And also then due to God's grace he was illuminated with inward light just as through the might of Christopher he had obtained outward sight. The King embraced Christ's truth...)

This interaction dissolves the physical boundaries between two subjects and engages the King on a physical level so that his sense of completeness is disturbed and he is ready to see the truth. Christian truth becomes visible to the King through the permeation of the fleshly boundary which separates St Christopher and the King. Thus, the interaction between saint and devotee is based upon penetrating the flesh of both saint and devotee.

The lives in the *Legendary* regularly foreground the importance of fleshly devotion. Innumerable Christians enact devotion to Christ throughout the text through martyrdoms, every one of which is in imitation of Christ's Passion. One such martyr,

¹¹² '117. Saint Laurence, Martyr' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, pp. 449-60, p. 455.

¹¹³ 'XIX. Cristofore' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 340-60, p. 357, ll. 605-15.

St Agnes, enacts devotion to Christ by mirroring Him physically throughout her life. She begins this process when she becomes a bride of Christ, describing betrothal to Christ as follows:

“& first, in takine of weding
 he erlis þaim *with* his ryng,
 of fele *vertuse with* syndrynes
 he clethis þame, & *neuir-þe-les*
with þe fare blud of his passione
 taknys þar chekis vpe & done,
 & cuplis þaim *with* hyme til hand
 of luf þat *euir* is lestand,
 & rychtis þame *with* þe tresoure
 of hewinly Ioy...”¹¹⁴

(“And first, as a wedding token, He rewards them with His ring, He clothes them with many diverse virtues, and nevertheless He tokens their cheeks up and down with the beautiful blood of His Passion and couples them with Him by the hand of love that is everlasting, and cures them with the treasure of heavenly joy...)

Christ uses the blood of His own passion which symbolises His humanity and the fragility of His flesh to colour her cheeks. Thus, Christ infiltrates her flesh with His permeable flesh and blurs the physical boundary between them. Likewise, devotees mirror Agnes in their engagement with the saint herself; after Agnes’ death, a priest named Paulyne, tempted by a devil, is losing grip on his vow of chastity. The Pope gives Paulyne a ring and tells him to take it to the image of Agnes that was ‘richt wele payntit’ (really well painted) in Paulyne’s kirk:¹¹⁵

þan vent he to þe ymag in hy,
 & mad hire prayere deuotely,
 & tald syne hou þe pape bad
 gif hire þat ryng he þare had.
 & he proferyt hire þe ryng,
 & lo, þare fel a ferly thing,
 for scho put furth þe fyngir þare,
 & he put one þe ryng but mare,
 & drew in hire hand, & sone he
 of fleschly fanding ves al fre.¹¹⁶

(Then he went quickly to the image, and devoutly made prayers to her and told her then how the Pope had bidden him to give her the ring that he had there.

¹¹⁴ ‘XLI. Agnes’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* ed. by W.M. Metcalfe, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1896), pp. 346-57, p. 347, ll. 25-34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357, ll. 385.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 357, ll. 387-96.

And he presented the ring to her and, lo, there befell a wondrous thing, for she put the finger there forth and he put the ring on it without further ado and her hand drew in and soon he was free of all fleshly temptations.)

Paulyne overcomes the temptations of his flesh by interacting with St Agnes in such a way that mirrors Agnes' betrothal to Christ. Just as Christ put a ring on Agnes' finger, so does Paulyne. The poet underscores the physical closeness of Paulyne and Agnes's relationship when her image comes to life and she reaches out her hand to him. In this way, Agnes's image oversteps its boundaries, entering Paulyne's physical space. Similarly, the reader should engage in a relationship to Agnes such that she enters the physical space of the reader through her legend.

Female Saints' Abject Flesh and the Reader

Saints' flesh is central to the *Scottish Legendary*, especially in the lives in which the saint is female. Over half the female saints in the collection undergo long excruciating torture scenes which foreground their fleshly permeability. These lives include: Margaret of Antioch, Eugenia, Agnes, Agatha, Cecilia, Lucy, Christina of Bolsena, Anastasia, Euphemia, and Juliana, ten of the nineteen female lives in the collection. Throughout their lives, these saints endure threats to their physical and spiritual integrity so that reader engages with them primarily on the basis of their permeability. Often the heroine must defend herself against an idolatrous suitor (e.g. in the life of St Agnes) who is prepared to torture her when she refuses him. In some cases, the saint pursues her own martyrdom (e.g. Euphemia). Sometimes, as in the case of Christina, almost the entire text is taken up with the description of the saint's torture as a pagan challenger attempts to overcome her willpower.

The remainder of this chapter will reconcile the *Legendary's* focus on self-reflective reading with its preoccupation with tortured female flesh. By analysing moments of torture and martyrdom, I will illustrate how reading about permeable and penetrated female saints' flesh permeates the reader's subjectivity and dissolves her sense of herself as a separate, discrete subjectivity, bringing her an acute awareness of the contestable boundaries between herself and everything else. Although many of the collection's male saints undergo protracted scenes of torture and martyrdom, late medieval culture understood male and female flesh differently (in that it associated

men with the soul and women with the flesh), so the reader's response to male saints' flesh in the *Legendary* warrants a separate study. Indeed, the *Legendary* treats male and female flesh in markedly different ways. In the majority of male saints' lives, the permeability of the saint's flesh is merely a component of the narrative. By contrast, the majority of female saints' narratives are driven by the penetrability of the saints' flesh as the narrative is driven by themes of sexual promiscuity, marriage to Christ, the threat of rape and torture, lengthy torture scenes, and gory martyrdom. As a result, the reader engages with female saints overwhelmingly in relation to the permeability and changeability of the saints' flesh.

The *Legendary* itself provides a clue as to the effect on the late medieval reader of imagining specifically female flesh. In the lives of Thais and Pelagia, the poet shows how specifically female permeable flesh could impact upon not only the female herself but, in turn, could disrupt the subjectivity, i.e. contained, discrete selfhood, of those who see, touch, or imagine her flesh. Both Thais and Pelagia are courtesans who turn their lives around when they realise the damage their promiscuous behaviour has done to their souls. Rather than merely recognising their own lost souls, both women take responsibility for having corrupted the souls of those with whom they sinned. Thais is informed by Pannicius that she has ““mony saulis tynte”” (lost many souls).¹¹⁷ Likewise, in the life of Pelagia that follows Thais's legend, the saint laments how

“men but *nombre* als haf I
gert synk in-[to] þe suelth of syne
throu my entysing, & fra god twyn.”¹¹⁸

(“I have also caused innumerable men to sink into the abyss of sin through my enticing, and from god to sever.”)

Like Thais, Pelagia identifies herself as the source of the corruption of others. Thais and Pelagia corrupt themselves and others by penetrating the boundaries of their own flesh in a specifically feminine way. Thais is introduced as ‘richt brukil of hyre flesche’ (completely breakable of her flesh).¹¹⁹ By engaging in sexual activity with her male admirers, Thais breaks her fleshly boundaries. As a result, Thais not only

¹¹⁷ ‘XXXV. Thadee’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century*, vol. 2, pp. 215-22, p. 217, l. 77.

¹¹⁸ ‘XXXIV. Pelagia’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century*, vol. 2, pp. 204-14, p. 209, ll. 180-1.

¹¹⁹ ‘XXXV. Thadee’, p. 215, l. 4.

causes herself to become wayward but also causes many other souls to be lost. The lives of Thais and Pelagia underscore the inherent power of the easily broken female flesh to influence not only the woman herself but also those who have sexual contact with her. Thus, the *Legendary* indicates that the specifically feminine permeability of a woman's flesh means that not only the woman herself is more susceptible to outside influence but also that those who come into contact with her might potentially become lost or sunk in the abyss of sin. The Lives of Thais and Pelagia show that the *Legendary* poet understood female flesh as having the potential to infiltrate and corrupt others so that permeable female flesh not only makes the woman herself more susceptible to sin but also ultimately increases the permeability of those around them.

We can understand the pollutant effect of Pelagia and Thais's female flesh in terms of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in her seminal psychoanalytical work *Powers of Horror*. Kristeva's abject is that which official culture jettisons because of the threat it poses to boundaries between subject and object. Breast milk, for instance, is jettisoned in contemporary Western culture partly because it blurs boundary which separates the mother and her child and, therefore, draws attention to the frailty of the boundaries of subjectivity in general.

It is evident that female flesh belongs to the realm of the abject within late medieval culture because this culture often sought to disempower it by containing and disguising it. Lochrie has argued that women were understood as being 'pervious, excessive and susceptible', i.e. the boundaries of their subjectivity were imagined to be frail.¹²⁰ As a result of this idea of women, they were associated with 'that principle of disruption in the human psyche, the flesh'.¹²¹ Thus, it would seem that women's flesh has the potential to disrupt not only the individual herself but also the human psyche in general by drawing attention to the permeability of subjectivity. In the case of Thais and Pelagia, the saints' flesh is so influential that not only does it corrupt the women themselves, but it also corrupts those who come into contact with them. Unrestrained, female flesh could hold powerful influence over the subjectivities of others. Indeed, as Kristeva has shown, in the act of jettison, rather than erasing or even disempowering the abject, official culture merely serves to recognise the abject's power.

¹²⁰ Lochrie, p. 4.

¹²¹ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

The Middle Ages saw female flesh as polluting because women's bodies seemed to be physically less contained than men's; typically, women menstruated, gave birth, breastfed, and could be sexually penetrated. All of these activities not only disturb the woman's corporeal boundaries but also those of the other people who engage in these activities with her. As a result of the late medieval model of the female body having looser boundaries and more permeable flesh than men, late medieval people would have experienced female flesh as disruptive to the boundaries of selfhood. As such, female flesh poses a threat to the stability of the categories of subject and object as well as to the boundary that is imagined to separate them. Female flesh is like Kristeva's abject or 'jettisoned object[s]', which in some cultures includes human waste, discharge, corpses, breast milk.¹²² Because these objects lay some claim on the realm of the human subject and, indeed, often were once part of the human subject, the subject cannot quite separate herself from them. Due to the threat the abject poses to the subject's notion of herself as contained in the manner of Lacan's fortress-self, the subject rejects the abject ('abject' comes from the Latin *abiacere* = to throw away).

Late medieval culture often attempted to throw away or disguise female flesh. For instance, the 'Lives' of Thais and Pelagia end with the containment of their disruptive female flesh. When Thais and Pelagia employ the disruptive powers of their abject female flesh sinfully, the narrative jettisons and confines that flesh; Thais confines herself to a cell so that she literally quarantines her flesh, limiting its effect on others, and Pelagia disguises herself in man's clothing and lives isolated as a hermit. However, the virgin martyrs' lives within the *Legendary* foreground the feminine permeability of the saints' flesh, directing its emotive power over the reader towards pious ends. Through long and protracted scenes of torture and martyrdom that emphasise that flesh's vulnerability, the poet draws upon the disruptive power of female flesh to disturb the reader's sense of self. For instance, in the following scene from the life of Agatha, a prefect named Quincyane tortures the saint by violating her corporeal boundaries:

pane quynciane gert hir hyng
 one hicht, & syne hyre dyng,
 & in hir pap wirk hir way,

¹²² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

& syne ryfe it quhyt in twa.¹²³

(Then Quincyane ordered her to be hung from a height and then had her beaten and her breast removed from her and then torn completely in two.)

In cutting off and shredding Agatha's breasts, Quincyane sets out to destroy what makes her female. In doing so, Quincyane disturbs the boundary between male and female, categories upon which late medieval culture ordered itself. However, in this moment of abjection Agatha draws upon the power of her permeable female flesh to make a powerful challenge to Quincyane:

“tyrand fel
& prentyse of þe feynd of hel!
to fra me ryfe has þu na schame
sic as þu swkyt of þi dame?
bot zet had I my papis hale
in my sawle, & euire sal.”¹²⁴

(“Cruel tyrant and apprentice of the fiend of Hell! Have you no shame to tear from me those such as you sucked of your mother? But yet I have my breasts, whole, in my soul, and always shall.”)

Agatha draws comparison between her own breasts and those at which Quincyane fed as an infant. In this way, she turns Quincyane's attack on her femaleness into a symbol of the life-giving power of specifically female flesh. She reminds Quincyane that what he sees as a sign of her sexuality is at the same time a powerful sign of life-giving nurturance. Agatha evokes an image of breastfeeding that foregrounds the permeable boundaries of the female body and, indeed, mankind in general, since everyone was born of this permeable boundary. Thus, Agatha uses her female permeability as a powerful means of resistance. Indeed, in describing Quincyane being breastfed, Agatha highlights that the pervious female body, in turn, has the power to pervade others; to breastfeed is to blur the boundary between seemingly discrete human subjects. In this way, Agatha uses the permeability of female flesh and its abjection in the act of torture to highlight the essential abjection of those around her. When Agatha says that she still has her whole breasts in her soul, she draws attention to an essential femaleness that is beyond Quincyane's sword and any other influence of this world. Agatha draws upon the powers of her abject female flesh to resist pagan culture.

¹²³ ‘XLII. Agatha’, p. 363, ll. 177-80.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 363, ll. 181-6.

The lives of Pelagia, Thais, and Agatha demonstrate that, because late medieval culture viewed the female flesh as being more permeable than men's, late medieval people experienced female flesh as disturbing. Likewise, in line with the *Legendary's* overall project of inspiring the reader to link how she is to how she should be, the permeable flesh of female saints in the *Legendary* has a disruptive effect on the reader's selfhood. This disruptive effect has its origins in the abjecting powers of female flesh. Kristeva describes these powers as follows:

When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*. The object is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-ject ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest for desire. What is object is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The object has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*.¹²⁵

By describing the subject as 'beset' by abjection, Kristeva highlights the intense threat experienced by the subject when faced with abjection. What is so powerful about the object is that it evokes a range of emotional responses that are 'twisted', i.e. difficult to disentangle or extricate oneself from. Kristeva's notion of the object is based upon the idea that our understanding of ourselves as hermetic and complete is only possible when we are faced with an object which is clearly separate from us and against which we can, therefore, define ourselves. The object is powerful because it insists on commonality with both the subject and the object, encroaching on the subject's personal space by refusing to be separable and distinguishable as 'something else'. Because the object lays claim to the realm of the human subject in which we imagine ourselves to exist, it always calls attention to our similarities with the 'jettisoned object'. When the subject is faced with the broken boundaries of the object, the corporeal boundaries from which the subject gets a sense of wholeness or completeness are thrown into question. A crucial part of the object's power is that it is not self-contained but overflows; we struggle to separate it from ourselves completely so that it perturbs our own sense of containable, complete, and hermetic subjectivity. The subject experiences the object as disturbing in such a way that she cannot disentangle it with logic. Ultimately, we experience the object as disruptive because it alludes to the idea that at our very core we are all object, i.e. permeable, disintegrating.

¹²⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 1.

The lives of female saints draw upon the corruptive powers of female flesh to disturb the reader's sense of separate or complete subjectivity. Experiencing herself as incomplete, the reader is aware of her need for contrition. In its themes of female sexuality and the 'brukil' or breakable female flesh, the *Legendary* confronts the reader with the abject, producing a dissolution of the reader's subjectivity by refusing to allow that reader to remain 'detached and autonomous'.¹²⁶ The *Legendary* besets the reader with images of abjection in the permeated female flesh on display throughout the *Legendary*. Through these images of abjection, the *Legendary* opposes 'I', i.e. the reader's sense of hermetic subjectivity as detached from the text. Through the torture scenes of female saints, the reader imagines the pain of permeated flesh so that the reader experiences her own abjection on a visceral level. The poet's primary method of disturbing the reader's sense of separateness is by emphasising the pain endured by saints as their assailants permeate their corporeal boundaries, thus invoking the reader to feel with the saint. For instance, in the scene of Agatha's martyrdom, the poet enumerates her pain:

pane bad he schellis & brymmand cole
 straw in þe floure, herd to thole,
 & nakyt þare-one hire rol,
 til scho of ded had quyt þe tol.¹²⁷

(Then he bade that shells and burning coal be strewn on the floor, hard to suffer, and thereon roll her naked, until she had paid the debt of death.)

The poet aims to make the reader imagine vividly the pain experienced by Agatha as she undergoes martyrdom, as is clear from the construction 'herd to thole'. The effect on the reader of Agatha being stripped is that the reader understands the saint's humiliation as well as extreme pain. Stripped naked, the boundaries of her flesh are exposed so that she is more vulnerable to the pain of the hot coals. The poet calls the reader's attention to the contestable boundaries of Agatha's flesh through description of the intense pain she endures as these boundaries are disturbed. The reader's visceral response to this pain is grounded upon the acute sense of the vulnerability of the flesh that the image conjures up. By compelling the reader to imagine Agatha's pain, the text refuses to allow the reader to experience herself as a self-contained 'I' separate, detached and autonomous from the text. The text invokes the reader to experience herself as abject as her experiences of her own flesh mirror those of

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 1.

¹²⁷ 'XLII. Agatha', p. 365, ll. 253-6.

Agatha. In this experience of abjection, the reader comes to experience herself through the text as physically permeable, changeable, fleshly. Thus, this passage destabilises the reader's sense of herself, preparing her to follow the saint's example.

The female saints' lives in the *Legendary* are often dominated by the lengthy and detailed description of torture. For instance, almost the entirety of St Christina's Life is taken up with her father's attempts to kill and torture her for having converted to Christianity. The poet describes her tortured body in the utmost detail:

þane commandyt he to perse hir flesch
 with scharpe naly, þat teyndir was,
 & hire lymmys to draw in twine,
 til ony lyf ware hire in.
 þane cristyane of hire flesch can pul,
 þat rywine wes, a handful,
 & kyste [it] in hire fadire face,
 & sad tyl hyme, þat angry wes:
 "þu tyrand, þat þi flesch can get
 of þi body, now It ete!"
 hir fadire þane but ony hone
 gert hir on a quhele be done,
 & fyre vith oyle þar-on gert he
 be mad in gret quantyte.
 þane þe gret lo[w] scalit on heid,
 & slew fywe hundire in þat sted;
 bot til hire it did na lath,
 in body, na 3et in clath.¹²⁸

(Then he commanded to pierce her flesh that was tender with sharp nails and to draw her limbs in two, until there was no life left in her. Then Christine pulled a handful of her torn flesh and cast it in her father's face, and said to him who was angry: "You tyrant, your flesh begot that of your body, now eat it!" Her father then without any delay ordered her to be put on a wheel and he caused great quantities of oil to burn over a fire. Then the great fire blazed headlong and slain five hundred in that place; but to her it did no harm in body, nor yet to her clothes.)

Christina's flesh is pierced and torn. The text engages the reader on the level of abjection by describing her flesh as tender, i.e. vulnerable. Thus, the reader is invited to imagine the texture and tactility of Christina's flesh as a means of understanding its permeability and frailty. The tactility of this description brings the reader to imagine touching Christina's flesh and the physicality of its permeation. Thus, the text engages the reader on the immediate, affective level of the semiotic, disrupting the

¹²⁸ 'XLV. Cristine' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 398-406, p. 402, ll. 153-62.

reader's sense of separateness from the text so that, as Christina is permeated, the reader, too, experiences a penetration of her subjectivity at a sensory level. Christina provides the reader with an ideal for embracing and even taking control of the disintegration of subjectivity. Christina's father attempts to push her to her limits by challenging the corporeal boundaries of her subjectivity and her steadfast self. However, in the course of her torture, Christina takes control of the fragmentation of her own flesh, willfully abjecting herself by tearing off a piece of her own flesh and throwing it at her father. Christina provides a literal instantiation of the concept of 'ab-iacere', of throwing her subjectivity away and dissolving the boundaries of her fortress self. When Christina describes the flesh as that which originally came of her father's body, she draws upon the power of abjection to disrupt the containment of everything around it. Christina highlights for the reader the possibility of self-definition even in fragmentation, providing the reader with a model for a Christian selfhood that embraces its abjection and is, as a result, empowered. Indeed, the notion of Christina's father eating her flesh calls to mind the Eucharist and the idea that, through His own passion, Christ fed the faithful with His own blood. Although the image of Christina flinging her flesh in her father's face serves to disturb the reader and invoke a sense of horror, in the act's association with the Eucharist the reader learns to embrace this moment of abjection and become empowered by it, just as Christina embraces it.

The gore of the torture scenes in the *Legendary* repulses the reader. At the same time as the reader is repulsed, however, the saints' virtuousness encourages the reader to embrace the abject bodies of saints. The reader thus experiences a conflict of emotions in line with medieval Christian practice in which pieces of saints' dead bodies were kept as relics. The corpse is the most potent, disturbing symbol of abjection, as Kristeva argues:

But it is the corpse – like, more abstractly, money or the golden calf – that takes on the abjection of waste in the biblical text. A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic – the corpse represents fundamental pollution. Without always being impure, the corpse is “accursed of God” (Deuteronomy 21:23): it must not be displayed but immediately buried so as not to pollute the divine earth...In other words, if the corpse is

waste, transitional matter, mixture, it is above all the opposite of the spiritual, of the symbolic, and of divine law.¹²⁹

All corpses confront us with our own abjection, which is ultimately what makes their odour so repugnant. Saints' relics likewise have the power of pollution through smell. However, this is not pollution but healing. For instance, when Magdalene's soul leaves her body

...a swet sawoure fulfyllt
þat place & al þat vare in hyr
plentuysly, fyve dais & mare,
& heylit al sek þat come þare.¹³⁰

(...a sweet smell filled that place and all that were in it plenteously, for five days or more, and healed all the sick that came there.)

The scent of Magdalene's body pervades all those that are nearby, physically altering them with its healing power. Saints' flesh contaminates their devotees and makes them experience the abject such that the latter are healed. Devotion to saints, then, orders the devotee's experience of her permeable flesh. Saints' flesh is not like everyone else's but manifests their virtue, which, though an immaterial energy, is nonetheless manifested materially. As a result of their virtue, saints' dead flesh has the power to redeem those who encounter it. As André Vauchez has explained

...before being a quality of the soul or a spiritual state, sainthood, in the popular mind, was first an energy (*virtus*) which expressed itself through a body.¹³¹

Whilst late medieval Christianity stringently keeps the bodies of ordinary people hidden and separate, it displays saints' corpses in reliquaries, sometimes even kept close to the bodies of devotees by being worn in jewelry.

Late medieval piety embraces the pollutant powers of the flesh, directing the permeability of the flesh towards pious ends. Nonetheless, the disturbing effect of images of dismembered saints' bodies is not denied. Even Henryson's description of Christ acknowledges the repulsiveness of Christ's bloody, violated body as 'unlusum', i.e. unlovesome or unloveable.¹³² Yet it is paradoxically through this

¹²⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 109.

¹³⁰ 'XVI. Magdalena' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 1, pp. 256-84, p. 283, ll. 959-62.

¹³¹ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 427.

¹³² Henryson, p. 226, l. 61.

repulsiveness that readers learn to see Him piteously and show love for Him. Indeed, whose stomach would fail to be turned by the *Legendary*'s rendition of Margaret of Antioch's torture:

þe tyrand gert *hir* flesch ryf
with irne camis þat scharp schare,
 þat hyre rybbis ware mad bare,
 & flayne of hyre sa wes þe skyn
 þat men mycht se hyr wame *with-in*.
 eftyre sown þe blud fel
 als clere of hyre as of a wel
 as does *watir* one wyntir day.¹³³

(...the tyrant ordered her flesh to be torn with iron rakes that shredded sharply so that her ribs were revealed, and the skin was so flayed off her that people could see her belly/womb within. Immediately after the blood fell as clear off her as water does from a well on a winter's day.)

The tyrant literally reveals what Margaret is made of. Readers are made to see, along with the 'men' in the text, Margaret's insides, her viscera. This image elicits horror in the reader through its disruption of the corporeal boundaries through which we develop a sense of ourselves as contained, hermetic human subjectivity, i.e. the boundaries which separate 'me' from everything else. Margaret is bereft of what makes her a self-contained human, namely her corporeal wholeness. In this way, the line between subjectivity and objectivity – in the Kristevan sense - is blurred. Indeed, the impossibility of Margaret's survival of this torture means that thenceforth, Margaret is neither dead nor alive. The effect of Margaret's fragmentation on readers is guided through the depiction of the reaction of onlookers who variously cry and take pity:

þane of hir cors in sic fusion
 þe blud ran in stremis done,
 þat mony gret þat cane It se,
 of hyr payne hafand sic pyte;
 for of hyre flesche *tendir* & clere
 rywine & rent fel *pecis sere*...¹³⁴

(Then off her body in such a profusion the bloody ran down in streams, so that many cried that saw it, they had such pity for her pain; for very many pieces of her tender and clear flesh, torn and lacerated, fell down...)

¹³³ 'XXVIII. Margaret' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 47-68, pp. 56-7, ll. 337-45.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 55, ll. 287-92.

As the onlookers cry, what is inside comes outside, so that their tears (and thus the onlookers) mirror the abjection of Margaret in their affective response to the sight of her blood and her insides. The onlookers are not Christians; indeed, they plead with Margaret to renounce her faith so that she might avoid such brutality. That they react with pity underscores the basic human response that her suffering elicits. The reactions of these onlookers guide the reader's reaction who, through the text's vivid imagistic description of Margaret's torture, is effectively also an onlooker. The reader should react in a similar manner, experiencing herself as abject, perhaps dissolving in tears.

Margaret's liminal state between death and life exemplifies properly abject Christian subjectivity: the devotee should be constantly mindful of the afterlife and experience her flesh as disintegrating. The abject is powerful because it is not assimilable into the symbolic order of language; it 'disturbs identity, system, order' by not respecting 'borders, positions, rules'.¹³⁵ The description of Margaret's torture, above, has such a profound effect on the onlookers, the reader included, because in torture Margaret disturbs boundaries and order: she is somewhere between life and death, undergoing dismemberment that would kill an ordinary person. Through Margaret's torture and martyrdom, the *Legendary* poet harnesses the power of abjection to draw us towards a better understanding of our own abjection and of the transitory nature of worldly life.

Indeed, within the text, the poet provides examples for how witnessing martyrdom leads the viewer to embrace her own martyrdom. For instance, in response to witnessing martyrdoms in her town, St Euphemia machinates her own martyrdom:

quhen *scho* saw hou *cristine* men
 one syndry wys var torment þene,
 to þe lug þane of þe ton
 scho sped hire, þo he ves fellone,
 & one hye voice sad hyme to,
 þat cristis *seruand* hal ves scho,
 & syne to crist sic vitnes bare,
 þat hartis of fele, þat þan var
 red for of payne þe bittirnes,
 scho strent^{hit} of hire stedfastnes.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

¹³⁶ 'XLVII. Effame' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 417-23, p. 417, ll. 5-14.

(When she saw how at that time Christian men were tormented in various ways, she then hastened to the judge of the town, though he was cruel, and in a high voice told him that she was wholly Christ's servant, and then to Christ bore such witness that many hearts that had become frightened by the bitterness of pain, she strengthened with her steadfastness.)

Euphemia's conversion is directly caused by her witnessing the torment of Christians at pagan hands. Her faith is built on witnessing permeated and abjected flesh; she sees common humanity between herself and the martyrs and realises that she can help them because of her own steadfastness. On this basis, Euphemia willfully joins up with these condemned Christians, complaining to the judge that she should be martyred first because she is of noble birth:

...eufame, þat sic payne sene had,
 abasit ves nathing, na red,
 bot ay þe mare stedfast ves scho,
 þe hardare payne þai zed to...¹³⁷

(...Euphemia, that had seen such pain, was not dismayed, nor frightened, but was all the more steadfast the harder the pain they went through...)

Like Euphemia, the reader witnesses pain throughout the *Legendary* and especially in the virgin cycle. Rather than becoming dismayed, witnessing the torment of Christians should move the reader to become steadfast in the face of death and the disintegration of the flesh like Euphemia. Witnessing death and pain moves Euphemia to embrace a death and pain which mirrors that which she has witnessed. The abjection of others inspires Euphemia to inhabit a position of abjection willingly. Likewise, Euphemia should inspire the reader to embrace her own essential abjection, i.e. the permeability and disintegration of her flesh that means she is always moving from human subject to dead object. On approaching Euphemia, several of her aggressors are converted in such a way that brings the act of conversion together with embracing death and physical disintegration. Firstly, an unnamed aggressor approaches her, making to touch her when suddenly he is 'sa tane of a *parlesy*,/þat as half ded stil *can* he ly' (so taken of a paralysis, that he lay still as if half dead).¹³⁸ Touching Euphemia has paralysed the man who has no power over his own body and is now somewhere between life and death. The reader might experience something

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 417, ll. 19-22.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 421, ll. 129-30.

similar when she approaches saints through their legends, understanding herself as half dead already. The next man to approach Euphemia:

...ves conuertyt at þe last,
 & askit hir *pardone* mekly,
 syne hynt a swerd in hand *in* hy,
 & to þe Iug sad, þat he
had lewar *with* þat suerd slane be
 þane he wald hand one hir lay,
 þat godis angel kepyt ay.¹³⁹

(...was converted finally and meekly asked her for her pardon, then quickly seized a sword in his hand and said to the judge that he would rather be slain with that sword than lay a hand on she who was always defended by God's angels.)

Although the reader of the *Legendary* almost certainly already would have been Christian, she can, nonetheless, mirror the man's conversion, (*convertĕre*, to turn round) through contrition in which she turns her self from sinful behaviour to behaviour that would make it possible for her to gain entry into heaven.

Like Euphemia, the reader witnesses death and should come to inhabit her own essential abjection through this act of witness. Indeed, Peter Mills has described how the tortured body of female saints points to the uncertainty of the boundary between life and death, i.e. whether and where that boundary exists:

The sufferings of martyrs...take place in a suspended, threshold zone...the sufferings do not represent death, as such, in all its meaningless horror, but a space *between* two deaths: the natural death that allows the saint to escape her earthly shackles and the ultimate annihilation that should follow as a result. This second, definitive death never comes in hagiography...in written saints' lives, the martyr dies only in the literal sense: she continues to live on through her cult and through the dissemination of her sacred relics.¹⁴⁰

Prior to their martyrdom, saints undergo and survive torture that would kill ordinary people. Their ability to survive such torture foregrounds their constant liminality between this world and the next, their habitation of the threshold zone between life and death. In their hagiographies, often saints not only are never fully dead, they are never fully alive in our sense of the word either. Indeed, in the *Legendary*, we read of the death of some saints at the beginning of their hagiography. When the text depicts saints in a state of what Mills refers to as 'suspended animation', i.e. between life and

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 421, ll. 134-40.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: pain, pleasure and punishment in medieval culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p. 120.

death the reader's attention is drawn to the fragility of the boundary that separates life and death, and of the liminality of worldly life.¹⁴¹ Embracing the liminality of worldly life is central to the poet's concerns throughout. Saints' bodies always exist somewhere on the boundary between sentient subject and dead object.

The *Legendary* is consistently interested in reminding readers of the afterlife, as is clear from the supplication that is included at the end or near the end of almost every saint's life in the collection, a variation on the following:

nov lucy, quham god of hewine
 þis wrocht for þe, ore þu went hyne,
 þu purchas ws sic grace, þat we
 oure lyf led [her] in sic degre,
 ovt of þis warld þat ve ma twyn
 but schame, det, & dedly syne.¹⁴²

(Now Lucy, for whom God of Heaven did this before you went hence, you purchase us such grace, that we live our lives here in such a manner so that we may part from this world without shame, debt, and deadly sin.)

This prayer along with its many variations throughout the collection serves to reinforce at regular intervals the notion that the reader's activity is ultimately directed towards her own eternal life. The flesh is liminal, yet its experiences and ability in its permeability both to corrupt and cleanse are crucial to the development of the reader. Ideally, the reader should come to inhabit her own flesh in such a way that she experiences it as liminal, changeable, directed towards leaving this world, just as the saints do.

The *Legendary* confronts its reader with images of abjection to draw her attention to the friable boundary between life and death, subject and object. The reader's sense of horror and revulsion at images of torture should ideally lead her to an understanding of her own flesh as permeable and disintegrating; ultimately, the text leaves its reader with a sense of the impermanence of this world. The torture scene in the Life of St Juliana exemplifies these ideas powerfully. The local prefect sets out to prove he can overcome Juliana through torture:

quod he: "3et prowe sal we
 gif þu ma ourcumine be."
 a quhele þan he gert sone dycht,

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁴² 'XLIV. Lucy' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp.387-97, p. 397, ll. 354-9.

rycht awful to manis sycht
 & one hit gert hir be done,
 & stent hir þar-one but hone
 vith cordis stark one Ilke syd,
 til bath þe flesch raf & þe hyd,
 & syne hir banys sa to-quassyt,
 þat þe self merch out passyt.¹⁴³

(Said he: “Yet we shall prove if you may be overcome.” He then ordered a wheel to be prepared immediately, that was very awful to see and on it caused her to be put and put her in position thereon without delay with strong cords on each side until both the flesh tore and the skin, and then her bones so completely smashed that their marrow came out.)

This excerpt creates a visual spectacle of Juliana’s materiality. We are brought into close imaginative contact with the material of Juliana, the ‘merch’ or marrow of her bones leaking out. Within the text, those who witness Juliana’s torture and martyrdom convert to Christianity and are subsequently martyred by the tyrant. The reader also witnesses Juliana’s martyrdom, albeit imaginatively. Through witnessing the abjection of Juliana’s body, ideally, the reader is opened up to the idea of martyrdom, i.e. to embrace the liminality of worldly life.

Late medieval culture viewed the flesh as being permeable and associated with the irrational. This view of the flesh had two important repercussions. Firstly, due to its permeability, the flesh was an open boundary through which sin could infiltrate the body and the soul. Secondly, in its association with irrationality, the flesh’s influence confounded reason and intellect. Combined, this permeability and irrationality meant that the flesh held immense influence over the self and could be powerfully corruptive. However, the permeability and irrationality of the flesh meant that it could equally influence mankind in redemptive ways. The *Scottish Legendary* orders the reader’s experience of her own flesh by moving her to respond to the abjection of saints. Abject saints’ bodies produce a symbiotic relationship between reader and saint. These saints harness the powers of abjection so as to disrupt the pagan status quo and their effect on the reader is also disruptive as they defiantly display their Christian subjectivity in spite of their physical deterioration. Rather than denigrating and denying the flesh, these virgin saints powerfully inhabit their fleshliness; though they are celibate, we engage with them on the grounds of their fleshly permeability. As the disintegration of worldly flesh is depicted in gory detail, readers are influenced

¹⁴³ ‘XLVIII. Juliana’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 424-31, p. 428, ll. 152-61.

to experience their own flesh as disintegrating, and indeed, even to embrace that disintegration.

Conclusion

For the vernacular works of spiritual guidance evince an abiding concern with the processes of self-envisioning, self-knowledge, and affective and rational self-transformation... They map the boundaries of the heart and script the affective life of the soul, amplifying and reorienting desire through the passionate rhetoric of devotional meditation. They provide mirrors for self-reflection, identification, and imitation. They advise readers to “labor in themselves,” using reading to “profit” themselves inwardly. And they attempt to balance detachment from and accommodation to “the world” against which readers are to define their quests for self-understanding and self-betterment.¹⁴⁴

The *Scottish Legendary*, like the vernacular works described above by Jennifer Bryan, is acutely interested in setting its reader’s heart in the right direction, i.e. in teaching her how to feel as opposed to teaching her how to think. This dissertation has highlighted the *Legendary*’s interest in engaging readers on an affective, arational level. Affective modes of devotional reading serve to harness the arational psychic sway held by the reader’s flesh. By engaging the reader affectively, the *Legendary* dissolves her sense of herself as a contained, hermetic subjectivity so that she experiences herself as abject and her subjectivity as permeable. Thus, the act of reading dissolves the reader’s previous self so that she more readily edifies herself.

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to suggest that the *Legendary* is entirely affective and uninterested in engaging its reader on an intellectual level. Indeed, the final two lives in the collection, Thecla and Catherine of Alexandria, lead the reader from abject modes of devotion to a kind of reasoned faith. These two lives conclude a cycle of ten virgin saints’ lives in which the text’s overall focus on permeable flesh intensifies (legends XLI-L). The cycle includes, in order of appearance, the lives of Agnes, Agatha, Cecilia, Lucy, Christina of Bolsena, Anastasia, Euphemia, Juliana, Thecla, and Catherine of Alexandria. These lives constitute the majority of the lives discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain an ordering principle for the collected lives of the *Legendary* as a whole, the manuscript compiler clearly grouped the lives in the virgin cycle together deliberately. Indeed, the individual legends in the cycle refer to one another and the saints sometimes even make cameo appearances in each other’s lives. In the virgin cycle, there is a clear shift

¹⁴⁴ Bryan, *Looking Inward*, p. 3.

in thematic focus from the life that directly precedes it, that of St Ninian, which is largely dedicated to describing the saint's education and the various miracles he performs. By contrast, the lives in the virgin cycle explore issues of celibacy, marriage, rape, torture, and martyrdom, all of which point to an overarching thematic interest in the permeability of female flesh. As a whole, they explore the flesh's propensity for becoming a site of resistance against evil. Through images of permeated and disintegrating flesh, these lives draw upon the unique affective powers of the abject to direct the reader towards an experience of her own selfhood as abject, i.e. permeable and incomplete. Through repetition and deviation, the virgin lives strengthen and augment one another with images of abjection that disturb the reader who experiences a dissolution of the boundaries of her own subjectivity in line with abjection, as has been detailed in the previous chapter.

That the compiler concludes the collection with such an intense focus on abjection indicates that he clearly believed in its importance to his overall project of influencing the reader's self-perception. However, towards the end of the virgin cycle, the poet moves from besetting the reader with abjection to providing her with a model for devotion that is reasoned, eloquent, and emotionally contained. This shift is fully realised in the final Life of Catherine of Alexandria. Whereas the other saints in the virgin cycle are challenged by pagan tyrants who find they are unable to change the women's will using physical pain, Catherine's opponent, Maxentius, is unable to overcome her intellectually. As Maxentius himself perceives, '...he resist *mycht* *neuir* a dele/agane hir wyt...' (...he could never be a match for her wit in any way...).¹⁴⁵ Catherine's 'wyt' denotes her intellect and ability to think reasonably. Whereas the first eight saints in the virgin cycle exhibit their strength over paganism by enduring torture, Catherine's strength is an intellectual and rational one. Thus, Catherine's faith pertains to the symbolic order. Maxentius acknowledges that he could use brute force to make her sacrifice to his idols (like all the previous pagan tyrants in the virgin cycle have done) but he prefers to "conclud hir *with argument*" (use argumentation to silence her).¹⁴⁶ Catherine performs the strength of her faith by using reason to defeat Maxentius and his team of wise men. Unlike the other saints in the virgin cycle, Catherine performs her faith rationally rather than in performances that engage

¹⁴⁵ 'L. Katerine' in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 442-77, p. 448, ll. 226-7.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 450, l. 286.

the reader affectively. Catherine's reasoned arguments convey the quality of her intellect but do not communicate her emotions, as the poet makes explicit. The Scottish poet makes a point of the emotionally contained manner in which Catherine reacts to witnessing Maxentius' use of fear to make Christians sacrifice to idols:

quhen scho saw þat, hire hert was sare;
 þane to þe emprioure but mare,
 or Radnes, or but abaysing,
 scho zed and sad til hym: "sir king,
 Resone requeris, and dignite
 Of þi hie stat all wald, þat we
 hayliste þe fare, with-þi þat þu
 knaw þi malyes & with-draw now
 sic seruice fra þis goddis fals,
 þat þe dissawis, & þame als
 þat trewis in-to stok or stane;
 for þar ma be na god bot ane,
 þat hewine & erth mad & all thing,
 & Is but end and begynnyng..."¹⁴⁷

(When she saw that, her heart was sore; then she went to the Emperor, without further ado or fear or humiliation, she went and said to him: "Sir King, reason requires, as does the dignity of your high state, that we salute you becomingly, provided that you acknowledge your wickedness and now withdraw such service from your false gods who deceive you and also those who believe in stock or stone; for there may be but one God who made heaven and earth and all things, and is without end and beginning...")

In the *Legenda* version Catherine is merely 'deeply grieved by what she saw...'.¹⁴⁸ The Scottish poet embellishes the *Legenda* version by enumerating the emotional responses Catherine does not perform so as to emphasise the collectedness of her body language when she speaks to Maxentius. She is not void of emotion; her heart is sore at the sight of these frightened Christians, but she does not communicate this outwardly. Instead, she engages Maxentius rationally. Indeed, in the course of their reasoned debate, Catherine rebukes the Emperor for his inability to contain his emotions:

"I pray 3ou, sir,
 þat þu be nocht ourcumyne with Ire;
 for Ire distroblis sa the thoct,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 444, ll. 67-80.

¹⁴⁸ '172. Saint Catherine' in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, pp. 720-7, p. 720.

þat suthfastly deyme ma it nocht...’’¹⁴⁹

(“I pray you, sir, that you are not overcome with anger; for anger so disturbs the thoughts, so that they might not truthfully give judgement...”)

If anger ‘distroblis’ (disturbs) judicious thought processes then excess emotional involvement impedes one’s reason and intellect. According to Catherine, in order to speak truthfully one must overcome one’s emotions as Catherine herself does. This excerpt implies that Catherine’s reasoned, intellectual faith is contingent on her ability to contain her emotions.

The emotionally-contained, reasoned faith of Catherine is introduced in the preceding *Life of Thecla*, though it is not fully realised until the *Life of Catherine*. Thecla is a pagan who happens to hear St Paul through her window as he preaches. From then on, ‘at þat wyndou scho set stil...& for nocht vald *part* away, / bot set stil bath *nycht* & day’ (she sat still at that window...and would leave for nothing but sat still night and day).¹⁵⁰ In a departure from the vivid performances of the first eight women in the virgin cycle and their theatrical attacks on their bodily integrity, Thecla signifies her faith by sitting still and listening. When Thecla’s pagan husband grows angry because of her behaviour:

þane tecla spak na word þan,
bot beheld paule, þe haly man.
hir modire þane, theodya,
þat saw hir douchtir stil stand sa,
Cryit loud, þat al mycht here,
“tak my douchtir & bryne hir here,
þat al weman ensampil ma ta
þus þare spouse to *part* fra!”¹⁵¹

(Then Thecla spoke no word, but beheld Paul, the holy man. Her mother then, Theodya, who saw her daughter standing still in this way, cried loud so that all might hear, “Take my daughter and burn her here [i.e. right now], that all women might take example to part from their spouse in this way!”)

The poet reiterates the fact that Thecla sits still. Her silence and stillness symbolise her steadfast faith in contrast to her husband’s and mother’s anger. Like the other virgin saints, Thecla performs her steadfastness through her body but rather than having her flesh permeated along with the other virgin saints, Thecla’s body language

¹⁴⁹ ‘L. Katerine’, p. 487, ll. 211-4.

¹⁵⁰ ‘XLIX. Tecla’ in *Legends of the saints in the Scottish dialect of the fourteenth century* vol. 2, pp. 432-41, p. 433-4, ll. 23-6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 433, ll. 45-52.

is that of containment and is, thus, more ordered and still. Thecla's mother wants to destabilise this physical intactness by burning her at the stake. However, Thecla overcomes her pagan enemies and avoids torture and martyrdom with her body intact. Whilst it is not unusual for virgin saints to survive of and/or recover from torture and martyrdom, it is unusual for the saint to evade torture and martyrdom altogether and to live the rest of her life in peace, as Thecla does. Thecla's Life, thus, takes the reader from the abjecting modes of devotion typified in the torture scenes of the first eight lives in the virgin cycle and guides that reader towards the emotionally-collected faith of Catherine.

Although Thecla does not engage in the reasoned debates of Catherine, at the end of her life she has become a preacher and, thus, becomes like Paul whom she originally heard preaching. Women were not allowed to preach in the medieval period so that doubtless one of the appeals for the female reader of female saints' lives in which the saint preaches is the sanctioned presentation of women preaching. Thecla enters into a more masculine form of faith. In the source to the *Legendary* version of Thecla's Life, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Thecla converts lots of people but the source is not as explicit about her preaching and her sermons as the *Legendary* is. Also, in the *Legendary*, unlike in the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Thecla converts her mother. That Thecla converts the very woman who ordered her to be burned at the stake underscores the power of her still, silent, steadfastness.

Every other life in the virgin cycle is primarily sourced from the *Legenda Aurea*, as are most lives in the collection as a whole, with many passages close translations of the Latin text. Thecla's life is not even included in the *Legenda Aurea*. Had the Scottish poet just been looking for another virgin saint's life to add to the virgin cycle, he would have had plenty to choose from in the *Legenda Aurea*. His decision to include Thecla's life as the penultimate legend in the collection was a deliberate deviation from the pattern of the rest of the virgin cycle. Thecla differs from the first eight saints in the virgin cycle in that she becomes a preacher and, thus, acts as a stepping-stone towards Catherine's reasoned debate. Also, whilst the first eight saints in the virgin cycle undergo excruciating torture, Thecla and Catherine do not. Firstly, Thecla's persecutors set wild beasts upon her but she escapes and eventually dies a peaceful death that is testament to the power of her emotional containment and preaching. Whilst the first eight saints' lives in the virgin cycle describe the saints' deaths in long excruciating detail, Thecla's death is barely

reported, she merely ‘in pece endyt’ (died in peace).¹⁵² Here, the Scottish poet departs from the Acts of Paul and Thecla to make Thecla’s death all the more peaceful. In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Thecla is almost raped before angels take her to heaven. The Scottish poet’s deviation provides a greater contrast with the deaths of the previous virgin saints in the *Legendary*, many of which come about as a result of their refusal to marry a pagan and sacrifice to pagan idols, i.e. Agatha, Agnes, Lucy, Anastasia, and Juliana. Catherine also evades the torture that the other virgins in the cycle endure. Only when Maxentius, Catherine’s opponent, sees he cannot defeat her with reasoned debate does he order her to be killed. Although Catherine is martyred like the first eight saints in the virgin cycle, her death is markedly more peaceful. Whereas the first eight saints’ lives include long and disturbing torture scenes, the wheel on which Catherine is supposed to be tortured is destroyed before she is tortured on it and Catherine makes a long prayer for the souls of her followers that expresses her readiness to die for her beliefs before angels convey her body to Mount Sinai.

With the life of Thecla, at the end of the collection, the *Legendary* poet moves towards providing the reader with examples of contained performances of faith. With Catherine, the shift is far more pronounced. The life of Thecla acts as a link between the highly affective imagery of tortured flesh that abounds in the virgin cycle from Agnes to Juliana, and the educated arguments of the life of Catherine. The arc of the virgin cycle mimics the reader’s process of self-realisation through reading: in the first eight lives of the cycle, the reader is immersed in affective, abject gore so that her sense of self is powerfully disturbed at the arational level of the flesh. Then, in the course of Thecla and Catherine’s lives, the reader comes to speak with the certainty of reasoned faith.

However, reasoned faith does not supplant affective piety, rather, the two complement one another. The Life of Catherine includes one of the most abject modes of devotion to be found in the entirety of the collection in the death of Maxentius’ wife who performs devotion to Catherine in her death. Maxentius’ wife endures torture akin to that of the other saints in the virgin cycle. The Empress challenges her husband’s persecution of Catherine and in the face of his threats to torture her tells him “do *quhat-euir* þou will,/for I sall *neuir* concent þe till.” (“Do

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 441, l. 313.

whatever you want, for I will never acquiesce to you.”).¹⁵³ The Empress dies a painful death for her devotion to Catherine. The Empress goes against what her husband wants her to do and, thus, she defines herself through her devotion to Catherine. When the Emperor begins to torture his wife, she looks to Catherine for strength:

pane lukit scho to sanct *katrine*
 full pytuisly, & sad hir syne:
 “haly virgine, for me þu pray
 to god, for quhais *nam* þis day
 I ame heire enteryt in-to strife,
 & for hyme tyne þis *temporale* life,
 þat he me graunt sic will þis day
 þat I ma *trastly* but effray,
 Thole ded for hyme, & at þat ma be
 In stede of baptysing to me.”¹⁵⁴

(Then she looked very piteously to St Catherine, and said to her next: “Holy virgin, pray to God for me, for whose name I am entered into strife here this day, and for him lose this temporal life: may he grant me such will-power this day that I may confidently, without fearfulness, suffer death for him, and that that may be instead of baptizing to me.)

It is unclear whether the Empress’s look either expresses pity or inspires pity in Catherine. In this way, the poet underscores how the Empress’s affective devotion to Catherine blurs the boundaries between them. The Empress’s death is bloody and provokes a sense of horror in the reader through her abjected body:

pane lurdannis hir lightly lacht,
 & harlyt hir furth, as þai war tacht,
 & of hir clothing mad hire bare;
 bot scho was couerit *with* hir hare.
 þane hir papis þai raf *hir* fra,
 & syne þai strak hir nek in twa.
 of *martirdome* eftire sic end
 scho past *with Ihesu criste* to lend.¹⁵⁵

(Then bullies contemptuously seized her, and dragged her forth, as they had been taught, and made her bare of her clothing; but she was covered with her hair. Then they tore her breasts from her, and next they struck her neck in two. With such an end of martyrdom she left to dwell with Jesus Christ.)

The Empress’ death scene includes many of the tropes of abjection found elsewhere in the virgin cycle, i.e. she is stripped of her clothes, her hair grows excessively, her

¹⁵³ ‘L. Katerine’, pp. 469, ll. 946-7.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 469-70, ll. 952-61.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 470, ll. 976-83.

breasts are cut off, and she is beheaded. Melissa Coll-Smith has argued convincingly that Catherine ‘is given a surrogate in the Empress’, i.e. that the Empress endures the torture and martyrdom that, as a virgin martyr, Catherine should. Indeed, the Empress’ abject death echoes that of the first eight virgin martyrs. Coll-Smith puts the Empress’s surrogacy down as ‘testament to the efficacy of [Catherine’s] educated sort of faith’.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, that a surrogate in the Empress is necessary at all highlights the importance of the affective moment of torture in the overall effectiveness of these narratives. Although Catherine’s life seems to be concerned primarily with rational argument, the importance of visceral responses and abjection is undeniable. If we take the Empress’s martyrdom for what it is, an act of devotion to Catherine, it is among the bloodiest acts of devotion to a saint to be found in the entirety of the *Legendary*, in spite of the Life of Catherine as a whole clearly being interested in reasoned faith. Thus, it seems that in the *Scottish Legendary*, reasoned faith and affective devotion are necessary complements to one another.

From the outset, the *Scottish Legendary* is acutely concerned with the effect reading will have on its readers. As such, the collection can shed light on a readership about which relatively little is known, in terms of how they might have read, the expectations they might have brought to a text as well as their understanding of themselves.

The purpose of the present dissertation has been to contribute to the understanding of the significance of the *Legendary* within late medieval Scottish vernacular literature as well as its huge research potential, especially in our understanding of affective literacies. As possibly the earliest surviving example of Scots literature, the paucity of research on the *Legendary* is surprising. However, Coll-Smith’s thesis has demonstrated ways in which the collection can contribute to the history of gender in Scotland and von Contzen has taken a narratological approach to make sense of the complicated and dynamic relationship between text and reader. The present dissertation has also focused on the ways in which the text interacts with the reader. Rather than taking a narratological approach, however, I have shown how the *Legendary* responds to the culture of popular, affective devotion within late medieval Britain.

¹⁵⁶ Coll-Smith, p. 254.

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the closely associated theory of abjection provide us with a fruitful theoretical framework through which we can understand the impact of late medieval affective texts on subjectivity, i.e. the ways in which these texts dissolve the reader's sense of herself as a complete, hermetic subject. I suspect Kristeva's theories have a great deal more to offer when it comes to the study of textuality in late medieval affective piety as well as to studies on the development of subjectivity from medieval to modern.

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