The Rooster's Egg: Maternal Metaphors and Medieval Men

by

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Submitted for conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2010

Abstract

The present study explores representations of the female reproductive body in medieval written sources, with an emphasis on the figurative language that was used to describe pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and lactation when these phenomena take place in the female body and, symbolically, in male bodies. This examination of what are herein labeled "maternal metaphors" in men, that is a comparison between a male subject and an attribute specific to women's reproductive bodies, reveals how anatomical and physiological characteristics exclusive to the female reproductive body were used to convey descriptive meaning, and considers why and in what contexts such comparisons were made. This study looks at ancient and medieval medical writing, biblical and medieval Christian religious sources, and various other texts taken from medieval secular and popular literature, where maternal metaphors were used to describe other anatomical and physiological phenomena that were not specific to women, physical and behavioural characteristics of male subjects, and intangible qualities of divine persons. This thesis argues that the female body was the site of diverse conceptual associations in medieval medical and religious traditions, and that, as a result, it proved to be a significant source for figurative analogies that could convey similarly wide-ranging meanings. When pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and lactation were used

metaphorically to describe male subjects, the variety of connotations that were transferred reflects the range of possible meanings; however, the complexity is not transmitted. Maternal metaphors in men convey meanings that are either good or bad, or occasionally neutral, depending on the context and subject.

Acknowledgments

I would like to show my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Goering, for his guidance with the writing process, insightful comments on various written drafts, and for meticulously combing through numerous Latin transcriptions and translations. I was also fortunate to receive invaluable support in the development of this dissertation from Dr. Isabelle Cochelin and Dr. Jane Abray. I am thankful for their enthusiastic interest in my topic and their advice along the way. I am grateful to Dr. Monica Green, for her questions and advice given in her external review of my dissertation and during my oral examination. I would also like to acknowledge the help of Dr. Jill Ross and Dr. Ruth Harvey, which they provided in their discussions with me relating to my dissertation topic, and Dr. Richard Greenfield, Dr. Jacalyn Duffin, and Dr. Scott-Morgan Straker, whose encouragement early in my graduate career has been unforgettable and influential.

I am grateful to all of my friends in the History Department and in the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto for continued moral support.

Over the course of this project, I have been especially grateful for the unfailing support of my family and friends. In particular, I would like to thank my parents, David and Anita Lepp, my sister Kiera Lepp, for their understanding and wholehearted interest in my studies. I have also received patience and encouragement from my grandparents, many aunts, uncles, and cousins, and the Ida family. My strongest supporter has always been my husband, Dr. Ramsey Ida.

Table of Contents

Chapter One.

Introduction.

1.1. Introduction to Maternal Metaphors.

Figurative thinking held a powerful place in medieval mentalities. Christian religious thought was shaped by an abundance of symbols. The Bible explained difficult concepts, like the nature of God, through a rich layering of literal and allegorical meanings, and taught moral lessons through the parables of Christ. Christian exegesis sought to unravel the mysteries of God's word through symbolic readings of scripture. Medieval moralists continued to teach with fables and exemplary tales. Scientific thinkers, too, attempted to determine the "why" and the "how" of the natural world through representational models. Both natural philosophers and medical writers constructed analogies in order to understand the workings of the body, the most extensive of which was the paradigm of microcosm/macrocosm which depicted the human body as a microcosm, the analogous miniature of the well-ordered universe.

This dissertation will explore the symbolism surrounding women's bodies, particularly menstruating, lactating, and pregnant bodies, which concerned theologians, moralists, and medical writers alike. Women's procreative functions were assigned a remarkable range of meanings, from sin and transgression to a feminine ability to nurture, from sickness and biological inferiority to nature's ability to regulate imbalances, from passive receptacle to creative source. With the intention of exploring the richness of secondary meanings associated with women's reproductive functions and the extent to which they were intertwined with the physical processes themselves, this study focuses on the representation of women's reproductive body parts and their functions removed from the context of the female body. Specifically, it examines how the complex meanings were transferred when women were not the subject, but rather, when the generative bodily processes particular to women were used symbolically with male subjects. In order to

provide the context out of which the "maternal metaphors" in men derived their meaning, this study also provides a background examination of common symbolic associations with women's bodies found in medical-scientific and religious writing.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define "maternal metaphors" as any figurative allusion to the processes of menstruation, lactation, or pregnancy and parturition. I use the term rather broadly to encompass any comparison between a male subject and an attribute specific to women's reproductive bodies, be it metaphor, allegory, or even an association which is taken as fact, but which is known to be impossible by modern readers, and in many cases, it can be presumed, medieval ones as well.

This dissertation presents a history of the metaphorical language associated with women's reproductive bodies in order to explore what this language tells us about medieval society's image of women and their role in generation. Moreover, in turning attention to maternal metaphors applied to male bodies, this study contrasts and compares the metaphorical usage outside the female body with examples from writing about women and examines what this can tell us about medieval conceptual boundaries between femininity and masculinity. Since the metaphors which draw upon bodily phenomena exclusive to women, such as pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and menstruation, are generally assigned meanings that emphasize woman's dissimilarity to man, maternal metaphors are often markers of difference. Thus, to say that a man is pregnant or lactating is to denote that he has some quality which is distinct from other men. Yet, occasionally, maternal metaphors are used to describe a physical or behavioural quality which all men share, in order to explain it by means of an analogy that refers to a feature specific to women's reproductive bodies.

In order to convey meaning, the composers of maternal metaphors had to draw upon widely known and accepted characteristics of various feminine bodily functions. When an author described writing as an act of giving birth to a text, or when medical writers noted that the blood from nosebleeds was functionally equivalent to menstrual blood, or when the apostle Paul was said to possess an abundance of spiritual milk, these images suggested some commonality between the reproductive bodily functions and the occurrences which they are describing by means of a figurative connection. The impact of this figurative language applied to male bodies is double; it reinforces characteristics as applied to the original,

universalized, female body, and it links them conceptually with characteristics in the individual male subject or group of subjects.

The maternal metaphors examined in this dissertation come from a variety of different sources and perform diverse functions. Particular attention has been paid to the contexts in which we find maternal metaphors being used. Many of the maternal metaphors discussed in this dissertation predate the medieval period and can be found in works considered to be authoritative sources, from Ancient Hellenistic medical writing, scriptures, and Christian Patristic writing. The prevalence of maternal metaphors in religious imagery, medical theory, and popular story-telling from the Middle Ages reveals that the rich set of meanings attached to the female body in medieval culture was widely recognized and employed. However, the contrasting meanings which were incorporated into representations of women's bodies made it possible for metaphors based on female anatomy or reproductive physiology to carry positive associations as well as to bear negative ones. The context in which the metaphors are found and the particular nature of the male subject of the metaphors largely determine whether the metaphorical association is intended to convey positive or negative qualities.

The maternal metaphors and "maternal males" analyzed in the following pages of this dissertation are valuable both for what they can tell us about medieval mythologies surrounding the female body and its generative functions by allowing us to view depictions of these physical phenomena in the unconventional setting of the male body, and for the insight into medieval beliefs about men and the male body which they provide.

1.2. Two Examples.

In order to introduce what I mean by maternal metaphors found outside the context of the female body, I will here provide two examples, taken from medieval bestiaries. Bestiaries are texts which combined scientific knowledge of the animal world with moral and religious allegory.[1] The examples of maternal metaphors presented in this section differ from the other

[1] Bestiaries, approached cautiously, can be valuable sources of knowledge about medieval ideals concerning human behaviour as well as beliefs about the laws of nature. Across the genre, however, traditional and generalized meanings given to specific animals were sometimes altered or made to relate to narrower and more explicit examples from human experience. While trends in the bestiary tradition are important, individual

examples in this dissertation in that the subjects are not men, but rather male birds: the rooster and the pelican. However, because of the symbolic character of these animal legends, these male animals and their particular maternal qualities were understood to impart moral lessons for a human audience. The legends surrounding these two birds contain some of the same elements found in maternal metaphors from scientific and metaphorical works which are examined in later chapters of this dissertation, the most important of which is the transference of secondary meanings attributed to women's reproductive processes onto the male subjects.

1.2.1. The Rooster's Egg.

The egg-laying roosters, from which we get our title, are one example of the maternal males that were found in medieval bestiaries. From the egg of a rooster was said to hatch the legendary basilisk. The basilisk, also known as a "cockatrice," was described as a venomous snake, or sometimes, as a monstrous creature with the physical features of both reptiles and roosters. Certain components of its legend are very ancient. It is mentioned in the Bible[2] as a poisonous snake, and described in late antique natural science as a horrible monster whose breath and glance are deadly to all living things, including grasses and shrubs.[3] The belief that the basilisk was born from a male rooster, however, developed later, in the Middle Ages.[4]

The origin of the legend of the basilisk's strange parentage may have developed outside of the bestiary genre, in a technical scientific work. The early-twelfth-century treatise *On Various Arts*, by Theophilus Presbyter,[5] provides one of the earliest accounts of the

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variations within the genre provide greater insight, perhaps, into social and cultural ideals. Cf. Arnold Clayton Henderson, "Medieval Beasts and Modern Cages: The Making of Meaning in Fables and Bestiaries," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 97, no. 1 (1982): 40-49; Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast: the medieval bestiary in art, life, and literature* (New York: Garland, 1999); Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[2] Prov 23:32; Isa 59:5.

[3] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. John Bostock, vol. V (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), 8.3, p. 282.

[4] Laurence A. Breiner, "The Career of the Cockatrice," *Isis* 70, no. 1 (1979): 35.

[5] Little is known about the author, Theophilus, except that he was a German Benedictine monk. From *De diversis artibus*, it is evident that he was well-versed on a wide range of technological practices. The work catalogues traditional fine arts, but also topics that were new, such as very recently discovered technologies, and foreign techniques used in Byzantine, and Islamic regions. Cf. Lynn White, Jr., "Theophilus," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, XII, 24.

basilisk appearing from the union of two roosters. In his chapter on how to make Spanish gold, Theophilus explains how the Arabs (*gentiles*) acquire basilisks in order to use their ashes as one of the ingredients in an alchemical process to make the precious metal:

> They have a structure under the ground, made above, below and all round with stones, with two tiny openings, so small that scarcely any light can be seen through them. In this they place two old fowls, twelve or fifteen years old, and they give them plenty to eat. When they have become plump, with the heat of their fatness they copulate and lay eggs. When these have been laid, the fowls are taken away and toads are introduced to sit on the eggs, and bread is given them for food. When the eggs are hatched, male chicks emerge like hen's chicks. After seven days they grow the tails of serpents. If the structure were not paved with stone they would immediately enter the ground.[6]

The remarkable generation of the basilisk required a number of elements to come together to replace the traditional components of sexual reproduction: a container structure within which the conception and generation would take place; two well-fed, old, male roosters, made fertile by their fatness and thus able to lay eggs; and two toads, which subsequently nurture the eggs until they are hatched.

Because Theophilus' is mainly a scientific text, it is tempting to compare the account of the coupling roosters to other scientific ideas about generation and sexed bodies which were accepted in the medieval period. In order to understand these ideas, one has to be acquainted with their basis in humoral theory. Resting on ancient authorities, such as Hippocrates and Galen, medieval medical writers held that the body was composed of four humours whose properties were mixtures of four qualities: hot, cold, dry, and wet. Although a healthful state was said to be reached by achieving a balance of these qualities in the body, it was believed that, in fact, bodies were constantly unbalanced by external conditions, such as diet, and by innate composition. Sex was understood to be one of the factors involved in humoral composition; women's complexions were characterized as colder and wetter, and

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[6] "*Habent sub terra domum superius et inferius et ex omni parte lapideam, cum duabus fenestellis tam brevibus, ut vix aliquid luminis appareat per eas; in quam ponunt duos gallos veteres duodecim aut quindecim annorum, et dant eis sufficientem cibum. Qui cum incrassati fuerint, ex calore pinguedinis conveniunt inter se, et ponunt ova. Quibus positis, eiciuntur galli et imittuntur bufones, qui ova foveant, quibus datur panis in cibum. Fotis autem ovis egrediuntur pulli masculi sicut pulli gallinarum, quibus post dies septem crescunt caudae serpentium, statimque, si non esset pauimentum domus lapideum, terram intrarent.*" Theophilus, *De diversis artibus*, trans. C. R. Dodwell (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961), 97.

men's complexions as hotter and drier. The difference in the complexions of the sexes was believed to be necessary for reproduction. Age was also said to be a factor in humoral balance. In adolescence, an individual's complexion would tend to be hot and dry, but advancing age would cause the humidity of the body to increase and the essential heat to decrease; extreme old age was characterized by a tendency towards a cold and dry complexion. Diet and exercise were factors that were believed to have an effect on an individual's complexion.[7] If we read Theophilus' account through the lens of humoral pathology, the humoral make-up of the roosters should lie in the cold and dry end of the spectrum, because of their age. Such a cold-dry complexion was associated with a low libido, since heat and humidity were said to cause desire and need for frequent intercourse.[8] Yet the complexions of the roosters would be altered by their fattening diet, since fat was considered to be both moist and hot. Theophilus identifies the heat, produced from the fat, as the catalyst which provokes copulation and the production of eggs: the roosters come together and lay eggs "from the heat of their fatness." In this carnal coupling, both of the roosters take on the female role, since they both lay eggs, and the male role, that is the more dynamic role, seems to be filled by their fat. Fat was said to be warm and thick, qualities which are shared with male sperm.[9] Thus, although a rooster laying eggs is presented as unusual, even unnatural, since it requires many contrivances to bring it about, nevertheless, there is an attempt to make it conform to accepted scientific models. Theophilus' account conforms to the paradigm of cold-less-potent, warm-more-potent, which was the basis of medieval explanations of sex difference and its role in generation.

Theophilus may have been among the first to describe the generation of the basilisk from roosters and toads; however, he drew upon ideas about these three creatures which dated long before his time. In the encyclopedic tradition, roosters and toads were associated with unusual reproductive elements. Roosters, according to Isidore of Seville, earned their name (*gallus*) from the Greek label for those who have been castrated (*gallos*), for they were

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[7] Lynn Thorndike's description of medieval complexion theory provides a good summary of the perceived relationships between humoral make-up and characteristics such as sex and age, as well as external factors like environment, exercise and diet. Lynn Thorndike, "*De complexionibus*," *Isis* 49, no. 4 (1958): 398-408.

[8] Intercourse was one way in which the excess humours and humidity could be released from the body. Ibid.

[9] Fat and sperm (as well as menstrual blood and breast milk) were said to be secretions concocted from the blood. Thus, Galen writes that, although both male and female partners contributed semen in the creation of a foetus, the male semen was more efficient because it was "*multum, ac crassum, et calidum*." Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, ed., *Opera omnia*, vol 4, 165.

believed to be the only male birds without testicles.[10] Toads were believed to be generated spontaneously out of the earth.[11] In Theophilus' account, both creatures are attributed a role in the remarkable generation of a new and unique species. The basilisk's parentage included something sterile (a castrated bird) and something deadly (a poisonous toad); therefore, its monstrosity was inborn.

In *On the Diverse Arts*, the maternal role is divided between the roosters, the toads, and the environment in which the basilisk is generated. The roosters are made maternal by their ability to lay eggs but they are not given the chance to "mother" their offspring. They are removed after they have laid the eggs and the toads are introduced to foster the eggs before they hatch. Both the role of giving birth and that of nurturing offspring were believed to be characteristically female. A third role particular to the female parent was providing a safe internal space to protect the child from coming into the world before it was developed. The container function in the generation of the basilisk is carried out by the interred chamber. These different elements of the generation of the basilisk are indicative of certain beliefs about the maternal role in conception (passive), and in pregnancy (nurturing and protective). The closed chamber also suggests that the generation of the basilisk is shrouded in mystery since it occurs outside of direct observation. It may be noted, too, that this unnatural generation takes place outside of Christian society, among the "gentiles." Thus, Theophilus' audience can only know about this maternal experiment indirectly, which adds to the sense of mystery surrounding his account of this remarkable act of generation. In this account, Muslim alchemists play a direct part in the creation of the basilisk, and are closely connected to the unusual maternal act.[12]

A moralized version of the unusual origins of the basilisk was included in the *New Natural History* (*Novus Physiologus*).[13] The unknown poet who composed this work writes

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[10] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), II: 12. 7. 50. For an English translation, see Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen Barney, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 267.

[11] Maaike Van Der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la vierge: Les théories médiévales de la génération extraordinaire* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 131ff.

[12] More explicit comparisons with the female reproductive body were made in the portrayal of Muslims by Christians (and, likewise, the portrayal of Christians by Muslims, and of Jews by Christians, *et. cetera*) in medieval religious polemic in order to feminize and degrade the other. See Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[13] The *Novus Physiologus* was a thirteenth-century version of the ancient *Physiologus* attributed to the Greek St. Ephiphanius (PL 43, 517-534). It is written in verse, most likely by a German author, and varies greatly from

that the rooster is like a faithful prelate, who feeds the immature with milk and the mature with solid food,[14] but the aging rooster who lays the tainted eggs that contain monsters represents the languor of the shepherd. By this fault, combined with the love of money, the lax prelate will bring into being a basilisk that will infect the flock.[15] The rooster, called the "castrated rooster,"[16] is feminized by the metaphors involving the engendering of offspring and feeding with milk. It is associated with prelates, who, if faithful, can be like a nurturing, caring nurse to their flocks, or, if negligent, like a mother who brings a monster into the world which will bring harm to others. The *New Natural History* also provides a moralized description of the basilisk itself. In its ability to kill from a distance, the basilisk is associated with Lucifer who, forbidden by God to touch the first humans, persuaded them to eat the apple which brought them death.[17] The poet also compares the basilisk to menstruating women on the basis of its venomous nature, since women, he argues, have the ability to expel poisonous vapours through their eyes that can make a clear mirror cloudy.[18] The basilisk, here joined symbolically to both Satan and menstruating women, is a frightening emblem of death and pollution.

The basilisk's unnatural birth was even the subject of debate in scholastic circles. In the *Prose Salernitan Questions*, which is an anonymous collection of questions primarily on topics from natural science and medicine from the early thirteenth-century, we find one scientific explanation of how this came about. To a greater extent than Theophilus, the

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the original which it was meant to be revising. Cf. "*Einführung*" in A. P. Orbán, ed., *Novus phisiologus: nach Hs. Darmstadt 2780* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1-21.

[14] "*lacte fovet teneros, pane cibat validos*." *Ibid*., 56, ll.1048. This analogy of milk and solid food is used by the apostle Paul to describe how a spiritual teacher has to provided different instruction to the spiritually immature and the spiritually strong. 1 Cor 3:1-2.

[15] *Sed de languor pastoris et eris amore / Nascitur inficiens mox basiliscus oves.*" *Ibid*., 57, ll. 1071-2. The explanation that weakness of old age and greedy indulgence led to the rooster laying an egg and its horrible results appears first in Alexander Neckam's twelfth-century encyclopedia, *De naturis rerum*. However, Alexander does not compare the senile, avaricious rooster to a prelate. Alexander Neckam, "*De naturis rerum*," ed. Thomas Wright, *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), II: 120-21.

[16] Orban, ed. *Novus Phisiologus*. 58, ll. 1101.

[17] "*Et quod tangendum vetuit deus, illu edendum / suasit, ut ex pomo morte periret homo.*" *Ibid*., 59, ll.133-34.

[18] "[*basiliscus*] *quia pestiferi per visus organa fumi, / cum procul exalant, inficiunt medium, / nube fit obsenum speculum, sic quando serenum femina conspectat, menstrua quando fluunt.*" *Ibid*., 58, ll. 1107-10. In the chapter on mankind (Chapter 1), the composer of the *Novus Physiologus* again references the sinister properties of menstruation. The belief that a build-up of menstrual blood in a woman be expelled as a deadly poison via the eyes and cause illness in another person has been studied by Salmón and Cabré, who also point out the connection with the basilisk. Fernando Salmón and Montserrat Cabré, "Fascinating Women: The evil eye in medical scholasticism," in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. Roger French, et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 53-84.

anonymous scholar attempted to explain the birth from the framework of humoural superfluities:

> Question: How is the basilisk generated from the egg of a rooster? …the rooster, as it is a melancholic and dry animal, generates little superfluity in youth, because [at that time] there is still humidity which acts like kindling to heat, and turns the refined food into its contiguous [substances]. As time passes, the heat is decreased by the decrepitude of age and the dryness is increased. At this time, because the heat of purification fades, a superfluity is generated and condenses into an egg, and since, by nature the animal has a cold complexion, this [superfluity] takes on a venomous quality. But this material, by a work of nature, transforms into a venomous animal, namely a basilisk. And this creature, from its innate power, is produced as if from the violence of nature. It appears to be part rooster, part serpent, which is a venomous animal. This egg is born in the rooster's intestines, since it lacks a uterus.[19]

This version of the basilisk's birth emphasizes repeatedly that the venomous nature of the creature is a result of its original composition from the humoural accumulations of an aged rooster. It also addresses the problem of where the egg would be formed and held in the male bird's body. The intestines form a suitable container, both because they hold the bodies' superfluities and because they are appropriately unclean for such a virulent offspring.

The legends of the basilisk suggest that the creature's monstrous nature comes from the fact that it is made from the toxic waste material of an animal that should be sterile. This is presumably what the author of the *New Natural History* had in mind when he associated the basilisk with the menstruating woman since he bases this on their supposed ability to corrupt on contact and from a distance. In this case, the feminizing association provided

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[19] "*Questio. Quare basilicus generatur ex ovo galli? . . . Ut gallus, dum sit animal colericum et siccum, in iuventute quia adhuc est humiditas que est quasi fomentum caloris, ipsum mutat ad sui subiecti depurationem, unde pauca generantur superflua. Successiva vero temporis et decrepite etatis calor minuitur et siccitas maxime intenditur. Unde quia calor depurantis deficit, generatur superfluum et inspissatur in ovum quia de natura sui animal est in complexione siccissimum, adeo etiam ut venenosam accipiat qualitatem. Sed materia talis inventa opere nature transit in animal venenosum, scilicet in basiliscum…. Hoc ovum in intestinis nascitur quia matrices caret.*" Brian Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions Edited from a Bodlean Manuscript (Auct. F. 3. 10): An anonymous collection dealing with science and medicine written by an Englishman c. 1200 with an appendix of ten related collections* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), N30, p. 298.

another dimension to the description of the monstrous creature. Menstrual blood was believed by many in the Middle Ages to be polluting; and, although it could be seen as a sign of female fertility and as the material source of the foetus in the womb, it was sometimes portrayed as a danger to an unborn foetus, causing weakness or disease, like leprosy.[20] Thus, in the *New Natural History* and *Prose Salernitan Questions*, the basilisk, composed from sterile material produced as a superfluity in a male rooster, is likened to the polluting menstrual blood.

The significance of the basilisk's birth from a rooster depends upon preexisting beliefs about the process of generation from a woman. One such belief, that conception required an active (male) contribution and a passive (female) contribution, is repeated in Theophilus' version. Moreover, the Judeo-Christian belief that the first mother, Eve, brought into existence pain in childbirth and the deadly stain which infected all future children from birth is alluded to in the *New Natural History* version. In alchemical texts, as in *On the Various Arts*, the wonderful nature of the basilisk's generation came to stand for a similiarly wonderful creative process, since the creature's ashes were used in secret procedures for transforming metals.[21] The female role in passive/active dichotomies, the association between birth and death in biblical tradition, and the mysteries that surrounded the hidden aspects of reproduction that took place in the maternal womb, all contribute to the legend of the basilisk and its unusual origins.

The maternal symbolism expressed in the legend of the birth of the basilisk from a rooster's egg chiefly creates a negative effect. The feminized roosters are portrayed as weak, in strength and self-control. Moreover, their role in generation is passive, their contribution corrupt, and the results monstrous. However, maternal imagery could also convey positive associations. This is evident in the following medieval animal legend.

1.2.2. The Pelican's Blood.

The pelican is another example of a maternal male found in medieval animal legends. According to ancient tradition, the pelican made the most devoted parent, feeding its young

[20] On menstruating women and leprosy, Cf. Susan Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 563-66.
[21] Breiner, "The Career of the Cockatrice," 36.

with blood drawn from a wound in its own chest to save them from starvation. In some versions, the pelican first kills its young and then revives them with its own blood.[22] Isidore of Seville[23] wrote: "It is said that… the pelican kills its offspring, and then mourns them for three days, after which it wounds itself and revives its young with the aspersion of its blood."[24] As blood which feeds and provides life, the blood with which the pelican feeds its offspring is comparable to forms of blood which it was believed only women shed, namely, uterine blood and breast milk. For in ancient and medieval medical theory, the mother's blood was said to nourish the foetus in the womb and, following childbirth, be conveyed to the breasts where it was purified and whitened into milk to feed the infant.[25]

In some versions of the pelican legend, it is the mother pelican which wounds herself and feeds the offspring,[26] in other versions it is the father.[27] Whether the parental sacrifice is said to be performed by the mother or father, the story is commonly composed in such a way as to symbolize Christ's sacrifice. The *Bestiary* of Philippe de Thaon[28] provides an allegorical reading of the pelican's compassionate act. The poem describes in great detail the death and revival of the pelican's young:

…and of such a nature it is,

when it comes to its young birds, and they are great and handsome,

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[22] For a summary of the different versions of the legend of the pelican, see Ignacio Malaxecheverria, "Notes sur le pélican au Moyen Age," *Neophilologus* 63, no. 4 (1979): 491-97.

[23] Isidore of Seville (*ca*. 560 - 636) was a bishop of the Church and extraordinary student of classical learning. He was a prolific writer and compiler of knowledge. His *Etymologies* is a voluminous encyclopedic work, which was excerpted and copied by later medieval composers of encyclopediae, and similar texts, including bestiaries and technical works.

[24] "*Fertur, ...* [*pelicanum*] *occidere natos suos, eosque per triduum lugere, deinde se ipsam vulnerare et aspersione sui sanguinis vivificare filios*." Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 12. 7. 26. For an English translation, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 265.

[25] Medieval medical and scientific explanations of the production of feminine bodily fluids is a topic considered in the second chapter of this dissertation. On the manner by which breast milk was said to be derived from the menstrual blood, cf. Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.6. For an English translation, see Albertus Magnus, *On Animals: A medieval Summa Zoologica*, trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell Jr. and Irven Micheal Resnick, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[26] This is indicated in Isidore's version by the feminine pronouns (*ipsam*), and is also the case in Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus; Frankfurt 1601* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), XII.

[27] Cf. Paul Meyer, "Le Bestiaire de Gervaise," *Romania* 1 (1872): 437-38. Shakespeare's King Lear alludes to this fable when he refers to cruel offspring who abuse their fathers despite the fact that the fathers "give them all" as "pelican daughters" (3.4, ll. 55, 65). Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: Norton & Company, 1997), 2398.

[28] This bestiary was written by Anglo-Norman poet, Philippe de Thaon around the year 1120. It was composed for the English queen, Adelaide of Louvain, wife of Henry I and is a notable work for being among the earliest extant Anglo-Norman texts. Cf. Philippe de Thaon, "Bestiary," in *Popular Treatises on Science Written During the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: R. and J. E. Taylor, 1841).

and it will fondle them, cover them with its wings,
the little birds are fierce, take to pecking it,
desire to eat it and pick out its two eyes;
then it pecks and takes them, and slays them with torment,
and thereupon leaves them, leaves them lying dead,
then returns on the third day, is grieved to find them dead,
and makes such great lamentation when it sees its little birds dead,
with its beak it strikes its body that the blood issues forth,
the blood goes dropping and falls on its young birds;
the blood has such quality, by it they come to life…[29]

The pelican is said to be inclined to nurture its offspring, a maternal quality, and it greatly grieves their deaths even though they have acted cruelly. The pelican parent's blood is described as having a special ability to give life. Philippe gives the following allegorical reading of the pelican and its young:

This bird signifies the Son of St. Mary,
and we are the young birds in the shape of men;
who are raised, restored from death,
by the precious blood which God shed for us,
as the little birds are which are dead during three days.[30]

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[29] "*e de tel nature est,*
Quant vent à ses oisels, & il sunt granz e bels,
E le volt joir, de ses eles cuverir,
Li oiselet sunt fer, prenent le à becher,
Volent le devorer e ses dous oilz crever;
Dunt le[s] bech e prent, si.s ocit à turement,
E puis les lesse atant, mort les lesse gisant,
Puis repaire al terz jur, mort les trove à dolur,
Dunc en fait dol si fort quant ses oisels vait mort,
De sun bec fert sun cors que li sancs einst fors,
Li sancs vait degutant sur ses oisels caant;
Li sancs ad tel baillie, par lui venent en vie."
Anglo-Norman and translation from Wright, ed., *Popular Treatises on Science*, 43.

[30] "*Cest oisel signefie le Fiz Sancte Marie,*
E nus si oisel sumes en faiture de humes;
Si sumes relevé, de mort resuscité,
Par le sanc precius que Dés laissat pur nus,
Cume li oisel funt ki par treis jurs mort sunt." *Ibid*.

Although the comparison between Christ and this maternal figure may seem strange, it was not an uncommon metaphor in medieval Christianity. Christ himself used a maternal metaphor when he said that he longed to gather to himself the children of Jerusalem, like a hen gathering her chicks together.[31]

In the story of the pelican, the maternal imagery describes the act of self-sacrifice which one performs in giving life to, feeding, and nurturing offspring. This blood is precious, not like the corrupting maternal blood described in accounts relating to the basilisk and to menstruation. The different quality of the maternal metaphors can be explained by the different contexts. The maternal roosters were said give birth to a creature with a long, legendary history as a poisonous monster and a symbol of evil. In allegory, the roosters were said to symbolize avaricious people, or unfit priests. On the other hand, the pelican's act of feeding its offspring despite their unworthiness was viewed as a sacrifice. It was almost always joined allegorically to Christ's passion. These two stories, which both portray maternal qualities in male protagonists, use these maternal qualities to emphasize further positive or negative elements. What is significant is that the range of meanings associated with the female reproductive body allows for both such extremes.

1.3. Literature Review.

The following study of maternal metaphors draws upon work emerging from two separate threads of inquiry in existing scholarly literature. The first thread runs through recent research in the study of medieval science and medicine, which focuses on the construction of sex and gender in medical writing. A second investigatory thread can be followed through studies of metaphors of the body and blood in medieval literature and religious culture.

[31] Mt 23:37. The use of maternal imagery to describe Christ is a topic explored at length in the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation. On the significance of the image of the hen and chicks in medieval religious culture, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 112ff.

A seminal work in the field of history of medieval science and medicine is *Sexualité et savoir medical au moyen âge*, by Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset.[32] Jacquart and Thomasset explore medieval understanding of sexuality through primarily medical texts. However, they suggest that medical ideas about sexuality were engaged with other aspects of culture, namely art and literature and include in their study examples drawn from these areas as well. This work emphasizes the etymology of medieval words related to sexuality, medieval theories about human physiology, and the interaction between medical knowledge and religious and cultural beliefs.

Another important study in the exploration of the topic of medieval constructions of sex is Joan Cadden's *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*.[33] Cadden focuses only on the ideas concerning sex difference which circulated in the Middle Ages, including medieval authors and their ancient Hellenistic influences. She gives consideration to varitation that existed in the medieval medical writing, taking into account works by a sizeable number of authors, including famous authors such as Constantine the African, Hildegard of Bingen, and Albert the Great, and also lesser known anonymous works. Cadden's main is that the medieval period did not contain a single, unified theory of sex difference, but rather, a variety of differing views on the gendered body which approached the topic from diverse angles. According to Cadden, these differing views could exist simultaneously, sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradicting each other. She observes the connection between scientific representation of the body and social hierarchies, examining the relationships that existed between the medical texts that are the focus of her study, and both Christian theology and secular interests, but she does not impose a singular explanation onto all of her sources.

Following after the broad studies of sex in medieval medicine of Jacquart and Thomasset, and Cadden, several studies have appeared which contributed to our understanding of connotations attached to sexed bodies by focusing on particular aspects. In 1998, two studies were published separately which examined the topic of male menstruation as a mythical condition afflicting Jews. Independently, both Irven M. Resnick and Willis

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[32] Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir médical au moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985).

[33] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, science, and culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Johnson traced the origins of the "condition" to the later Middle Ages. Jacques Le Goff had first drawn attention to the myth when he put forth the question of whether one thirteenth-century *exemplum*, which asserted that Jewish men suffered from a regular flow of blood on certain nights, denoted an intentional feminization of the Jewish male.[34] In undertaking studies of this topic in much more detail than had been done previously, Resnick and Johnson, nevertheless, differ in their answers to Le Goff's question. Resnick's study, *On the Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses*, tracing the arguments found in both theology and natural science that supported the myth that Jewish males menstruated.[35] His research reveals that scientific writers accommodated the myth by trying to come up with explanations based on medieval understanding of physiology for why Jewish men were especially inclined to suffer from haemorrhoidal flux. Resnick sees such accounts describing the flux of blood as menstruation as derogatory, making Jewish men "womanish." Willis Johnson argues, however, that before the sixteenth century, accounts of Jewish bleeding merely suggested that they were "not women-like, but sick."[36] Johnson emphasizes that haemorrhoids were viewed in medical theory as the body's way of purifying blood in order to combat illness.

Gianna Pomata's article "Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference in the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine" contributes another dimension to scholarship on the topic of male menstruation.[37] The article examines Early Modern medical writings in which male bleeding, from haemorrhoids but also from other sources, is linked with menstruation in non-Jewish males. Pomata builds upon Thomas Laqueur's[38] observations on the one-sex body and argues that men's bodies were not the sole referent in this model. She uses examples, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, in which menstruation, because of its supposed

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[34] Jacques Le Goff, "Le juif dans les *exempla* médiévaux: Le cas de l'*Alphabetum narrationum*," in *Le Racisme, mythes et sciences*, ed. Leon Poliakov (Brussels: Complexe, 1980), 209-20.

[35] Irven M. Resnick, *On Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses in Jacques de Vitry's History of Jerusalem, International Rennert Guest Lecture Series* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998).

[36] Willis Johnson, "The myth of Jewish male menses," *Journal of Medieval Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998), 273-95.

[37] Gianna Pomata, "Menstruating Men: Similarity and difference of the sexes in Early Modern medicine," in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of reproduction in literature and history from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 109-52.

[38] Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* argues that, until the eighteenth-century, the predominant system for understanding the difference between the sexes was one of hierarchical equivalence. According to this system, women's reproductive organs were simply imperfect versions of male organs. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Laqueur's work has been criticized for distorting his evidence, especially that taken from the medieval period. For an exhaustive critique see, Katharine Park and Robert A. Nye, "Destiny is Anatomy," *The New Republic*, (18 February, 1991), pp. 53-7.

therapeutic, purging effects on the body, was used to explain emissions of superfluous blood in male bodies, such as haemorrhoids, or nosebleeds. Taken together, the studies of male menstruation by Pomata and Resnick and Johnson indicate that menstruation was not a simple, single-meaning referent.

A dominant trend in recent literature points to a recognition of the complexity of medieval representations of the sexed body. One example of this approach can be found in Margaret Miles' study of artistic representations of the breast, in *A Complex Delight*.[39] Miles argues that between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries there was a movement away from an appreciation of the female breast as religious symbol, based on an association with its maternal qualities, towards more medicalized and eroticized representations. Miles is careful to emphasize that the religious/maternal and medical/erotic representations of the breast were both in evidence throughout the time period she covers in different geographical locations, and she stresses that what she is tracing is a "subtle" and "gradual" change, highlighting the fact that premodern society was not uniform in its beliefs about the body.

The second relevant thread that runs through the scholarly literature considers metaphors surrounding the sexed body in the Middle Ages. An influential work in the study of the metaphors surrounding the body and bodily processes is *Illness as Metaphor*, by literary critic, Susan Sontag.[40] Sontag's book, which was published in the nineteen-seventies, examines the metaphors that surrounded tuberculosis in the nineteenth century and cancer in the twentieth, and the mythologies of illness to which they contribute. More recently, scholars have expanded upon the idea that metaphors and myths shape both the conception and experience of illness, and have examined metaphors of various other illnesses and of the parts of the body and physiological functions.

Caroline Walker Bynum's essay, "Jesus as Mother"[41] considers the use of maternal imagery as it was applied in representations of Christ and of abbots in twelfth-century Cistercian and later mystical writings. The maternal imagery in Bynum's study involves corporeal metaphors of the female body which carry with them associations with

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[39] Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: The secularization of the breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
[40] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
[41] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*.

characteristics that were considered female. She includes examples of how the wound of Christ was viewed alternatively as a womb, a protective space, or as a lactating breast, the site of life-giving nourishment. She argues convincingly that maternal imagery in Cistercian writing was a part of a general process of the feminization of religious language but also served different functions, such as associating the subject with attributes of nurturing and affectivity. Bynum's subsequent studies have explored further somatic imagery and gender in medieval religious writing. For example, in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Bynum explores the connection between women's bodies and food made by female religious writers, and reveals that Christ's flesh was frequently associated with woman's flesh because he was formed from the flesh of his mother, Mary.[42]

With the rise in scholarly interest in gender and the body, a great deal of attention has been given to metaphors involving the female role in reproduction. In *La couleur de la mélancolie*, a study on the self-perception of fourteenth-century poets, Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet considers the use of metaphor to represent the act of writing. She illustrates how several of the fourteenth-century poets that she studied imagined the creative process of writing in terms of the Incarnation and placed themselves as the Virgin Mary, not God, adopting the passivity of the female role to describe their part in the writing process.[43] Through this maternal analogy, the poets defined creation as construction from already existing material. Cerquiglini-Toulet contrasts this feminized model of invention/writing with the masculine model of the seed-sower.[44] Kathleen Crowther-Heyck's study of creation metaphors for describing human generation in Reformation Germany also identifies the two models of mechanical construction and agricultural production for representing generation.[45] Crowther-Heyck explains that the construction metaphor depicts the female contribution to generation as a material one, like the wood of a carpenter, and the male contribution as an operational one, like the tools or carpenter who shape the wood. In this case, women's

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[42] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 263ff. See also, Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[43] Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La couleur de la mélancolie: La fréquentation des livres au XIVe siècle, 1300-1415* (Paris: Hatier, 1993).

[44] Reproductive analogies for writing and desemination of words are discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

[45] Kathleen Crowther-Heyck, "'Be fruitful and multiply': Genesis and generation of reformation Germany," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002), 904-36.

contribution is a passive one. In the agricultural model, Crowther-Heyck shows, the woman's role is more important since she must provide the appropriate nutriments, warmth, and moisture to the growing foetus, just as the soil and natural environment provide all that is necessary for a fruit to grow on a tree. Katharine Eisaman Maus' essay entitled "A Womb of His Own" examines another Early Modern use of metaphors involving the reproductive capabilities of women. Maus argues that male writers who adopted metaphors of pregnancy for artistic creation took for themselves not only the positive attributes of the womb as the site of conception, but also the disturbing qualities that it was believed to possess.[46] She points out that the anxiety-inducing secrecy surrounding the hidden nature of women's parts contributed to the metaphor the added idea of a politically useful ability to hide some self-attribute from public view. While in women, an unseen interior was a symbol of female unreliability, in men, it seems, it could be viewed as an admirable demonstration of controlled privacy.

Roberto Zapperi's *The Pregnant Man*[47] and Sherry Velasco's *Male Delivery: Reproduction, Effeminacy and Pregnant Men in Early Modern Spain*,[48] are both extensive studies of the topic of male pregnancy in pre-modern literature. Zapperi's book examines the idea of the pregnant man in Christian imagery and folklore from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Using his examples of various folktales and an alternative reading of the Christian creation myth, which emphasizes Eve's origin from Adam's side, he argues that the concept of paternal birth is connected to late medieval interests in authority in all its forms, parental, ecclesiastical, and political. He argues also that the pregnant man frequently appeared as a comedic folk character meant to satirize authority figures. Velasco considers the figure of the pregnant man in Early Modern drama. Her study draws connections between cultural concerns, in particular, about paternity and patriarchal authority, and the representation of pregnant men on stage or in pamphlets. Drawing upon recent scholarship on masculinity, Velasco examines how the idea of male pregnancy touched upon sixteenth-century Spanish society's anxieties about gender roles, reproductive practices, sexuality, and the monstrous.

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[46] Katharine Eisaman Maus, "A Womb of His Own: Male Renaissance poets in the female body," in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 89-108.
[47] Roberto Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, trans. Brian Williams, 4th ed. (Chur: Harwood Academic, 1991).
[48] Sherry Velasco, *Male Delivery: Reproduction, effeminacy, and pregnant men in Early Modern Spain* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).

The works in the abovementioned two strands of scholarship which touch upon the material covered in this study illustrate the wide variety of contexts in which we find maternal metaphors. The scholars' approaches to the study of these metaphors have been equally varied, examining the significance in fields such as literary studies, gender studies, medical history, and cultural history. These studies introduce a number of questions about how various metaphors have been used, and their answers have been beneficial to our understanding of the particular circumstances in which we find feminine corporeal imagery in premodern writing, but few historians have attempted to bridge between different genres. This study aims to fill this gap by examining together the different occurrences of maternal metaphors involving pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and menstruation, and analyzing how the metaphors work in different contexts. By doing so, I hope to supply a more complete picture of the relationship between the ideas about women that existed in medieval society and the secondary characteristics ascribed to their reproductive functions.

1.4. Overview.

The female body and its unique functions attracted attention from medieval writers with medical, scientific, and religious interests. Sometimes it was portrayed positively, as the nurturing container for new life and source of essential food and protection for the offspring, sometimes negatively, as the site of dangerous sexuality, painful and troublesome childbirth, and gynaecological diseases. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the various understandings of the female reproductive body in medieval writing in different contexts, and the diverse meanings that came to be associated with it and its particular functions. I begin with two chapters that provide a background summary of some of the main conceptual paradigms about women that circulated in medical-scientific and religious literature in the medieval period, and follow this with two chapters which investigate accounts that describe, metaphorically or otherwise, male bodies that are pregnant, giving birth, or generating uterine blood or breast milk.

In examining female bodily functions in a new locus, the male body, we can determine how the secondary meanings that were symbolically attached to the female

generative functions were transferred onto male subjects. Does a man who is said to lactate and feed others have other qualities associated with maternal nursing, such as a nurturing love? Does a man who suffers from periodic bleeding take on other attributes associated with menstrual blood? Consequently, is male periodic blood polluting? And if so, is this always the case? Do metaphors of pregnancy and childbirth in men draw upon the range of meanings associated with these phenomena in medieval writing, or is the pregnant man always a positive, or a negative, figure? By asking these questions, I attempt to understand to what use the female reproductive body was put as a referent in medieval analogous thought, and which conventions were applied to its use.

Metaphors involving the female reproductive body transfer characteristics taken from the inventory of all possible qualities and meanings that were associated with it. These characteristics could be based on the physical features of pregnancy, which were generally observable or understood: the womb's shape and container function; the growth of the abdomen in pregnancy; pain in birth; the development of a foetus into a newborn person; *et cetera*. However, frequently, maternal metaphors are derived from secondary characteristics connected with the female role in generation; abstract or intangible qualities, such as "creation," "nature," "nurture," "sacrifice," or even, "pollution," "sin," and "death," were conveyed as part of the symbolism derived from the physical processes of pregnancy, menstruation, and lactation.

This dissertation looks at a wide array of sources. Medical and scientific writings have made up a large proportion of this study. They provide the background to understanding the ways the female role in reproduction was depicted, and are also sources of analogy which make use of the female body's generative functions to explain other physiological phenomena in men. Since medieval medicine was conservative at heart, my research extends back well beyond the period defined as the Middle Ages to late antiquity, and considers the writings of Ancient Hellenistic writers, whose works proved influential to medieval humoral pathology, anatomy, and explanations about the differences between the sexes and their roles in generation. Sources for medical and scientific understanding include philosophical works, instructional texts for medical specialists, gynecological works, encyclopediae, and scholastic writing. Biblical scripture and patristic theology provide the background for many of the maternal metaphors from Christian religious sources. The religious sources examined here

include theological works, confessional and moral writing, saints' *lives*, religious autobiographies, sermons, and *exempla*. I have also considered popular sources, such as legends, romances, and travel literature which include maternal metaphors.

The first half of this dissertation looks at representations of women's generative bodies in both medical and religious contexts. The primary purpose of these chapters is to pave the way for Chapters Four and Five which explore maternal metapors in depth. In order to make sense of the metaphor "A is B," it is important to understand what qualities of B the composer of the metaphor assumes an audience will comprehend and be able to apply to their understanding of A.[49] Thus, I have taken care to present a wide array of primary sources that discuss the female reproductive body in order to provide a solid basis for subsequent examination of metaphors that are formed from it. Additionally, I have drawn attention to analogies that were used to form a conceptual understanding of the female body to underline the particular importance of figurative language in the organization of medieval scientific and religious thought.

Chapter Two surveys medical and scientific depictions of the female reproductive body, highlighting the symbolic associations that were attached to them. It provides a background into the ancient Greek medical and scientific authorities whose paradigms for understanding the female body were influential to medieval writers, as were their methods of explanation, which relied on establishing dichotomies and comparisons in order to deduce what could not be otherwise observed or known. I point out the symbolic comparisons that were made, in ancient and medieval medical thought, in order to explain the womb and its functions, as well as the nature of uterine blood and breast milk. I examine how different analogies, used to compare the womb to various containers, make different implications about its function in pregnancy. For example, comparing the uterus to a container, such as a cast which gives its shape to a molded object, suggests that the organ plays a formative role in generation of the offspring. I also analyze metaphors used to illustrate the function of the fluids associated with reproductions: uterine blood and breast milk. Comparisons between these fluids and food, or male semen, or earth, *et cetera*, convey very different impressions

[49] For an extensive study of how metaphors function as a basis for language see, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors are concepts (p. 6), and that they are not just linguistic flourishes but essential markers of how we understand the things they describe (p. 5).

about their defining qualities. These differing qualities associated with the uterus and female generative fluids reflect the great variation of ideas that existed about women in general.

Chapter Three examines representations of the female reproductive body in Christian religious writing. It first considers biblical descriptions of pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menstruation, and then examines how scriptural themes are reflected and adapted in Patristic and medieval religious writing. Two models of maternity will be considered: the idealized mother represented by the Virgin Mary and imitated by saintly women; and the bad mother, represented by the first mother, Eve, and revealed in the physical experiences of femininity and motherhood of all subsequent women, save Mary. As in the previous chapter, the focus is shifted towards the imagery used to depict the female uterus, breasts, and their issues, in both idealized accounts and baser ones. Again, a different set of images was associated with the pregnant body, childbirth, uterine blood and breast milk in the contexts describing the ideal and in contexts in which average women were the subjects of discussion.

The second half of this dissertation examines maternal metaphors outside of the female body. Metaphors based upon conception, pregnancy, and childbirth are considered in Chapter Four. The first section of the chapter explores medical analogies which compare the womb to other bodily organs, namely the brain, heart, stomach, and bowels. These analogies are based on perceived similarities between these organs and the uterus in terms of their structures and physiological functions. The rest of the chapter examines metaphors that compare the behaviour or activity of a not-pregnant subject to certain aspects of pregnancy and birth as a way of depicting some particular characteristic of the subject. I have divided these metaphors into two categories: those which are positive in their description of the subject and those which are negative. I will explore the commonalities between the various examples within each of these categories, and the differences between the two categories.

Chapter Five is arranged similarly to Chapter Four. It examines metaphors based upon the fluids associated with the female reproductive body, namely uterine blood, in the forms of menstrual blood, postpartum blood, breast milk, and the material for the foetus. The chapter begins with an overview of medical analogies which treated uterine blood as comparable to other bodily excretions, such as facial hair, semen, and haemorrhoidal blood. This is followed by several sections examining different expressions of maternal metaphors involving the various kinds of uterine blood. These include examples which treat feminine

blood as a positive referent and those which treat it as a negative one. I then draw some conclusions about the different ways that female reproductive blood was used figuratively.

Chapter Two.
Women's Bodies I:
The Female Reproductive Body in Medieval Scientific and Medical Writing.

2.1. Introduction.

This chapter presents ancient and medieval medical and scientific representations of the female reproductive system *in situ*. It briefly reviews the theoretical background which explained the maternal body from a physiological point of view, and examines the conceptual framework built around women's corporeal experience which attached multiple layers of meaning to the phenomena of pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and lactation.

Medieval theories and explanations concerning the body and the natural world were, to a large extent, based on conceptual paradigms set up in ancient scientific and medical literature. Two of the most common forms of ancient Greek explanatory reasoning, the classification of things by pairs of opposites and by analogous characteristics, were detailed at length by G.E.R. Lloyd, in his study, *Polarity and Analogy*.[1] A familiar example of a Hellenistic schema based on opposition is the theoretical understanding of the universe as composed of two sets of contrasting elements: hot and cold; wet and dry. Many ancient Greek writers, Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen among them, believed that the body, like everything else in the universe, was composed of combinations of the two pairs, tending to be more hot and wet, cold and dry, hot and dry, or cold and wet. Lloyd explains that the qualities of hot and cold, and wet and dry, did not innately possess positive or negative values, but they were ascribed such significations by association.[2] In the case of hot and cold, hot was always seen as a positive quality which was associated with life, and cold was

[1] G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two types of argumentation in early Greek thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 66-7.
[2] *Ibid*., 46.

always a negative quality which was frequently associated with death; moreover, when either the wet or the dry quality was associated with heat, it acquired positive connotations, and likewise, when associated with cold, it acquired negative ones.[3] Thus, context and previously defined associations contributed to the construction of meaning which was conveyed when sets of opposing characteristics were used in order to describe natural phenomena. This is evident when examples in which this schema of elements was grouped together with another set of opposing labels, that of "male" and "female." Lloyd explains that the "belief that the male sex is hotter than the female reflects… preconceived notions of the superiority of *male* and *hot* and cannot be said to have any verifiable empirical basis."[4] Because of the tendency in ancient Hellenistic thought to separate attributes into pairs of opposites and to arrange these dichotomies together, there were perceived relationships between positive attributes, such as "hot," "right," "superior," and "male," and between negative attributes, such as "cold," "left," "inferior," and "female."[5]

Another important way in which ancient authors explained the natural world was by analogy.[6] In ancient medicine, it was common for writers to explain difficult to discern anatomical and physiological functions by comparing them with objects and phenomena that were known and could be observed.[7] In particular, Lloyd notes, ancient medical treatises "appeal extensively to analogies with things outside the body to explain the hidden changes which take place within the body."[8] Thus, women's internal genitalia were compared with men's genitalia, the process by which an embryo was formed was associated with creation in technological and agricultural contexts, and the function of the uterus was related to the uses of different similar-shaped objects. Medieval medicine and science inherited many of the Greek explanations for understanding the female body through these early modes of deduction which were based on contrasting and similar relationships.

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[3] *Ibid*.
[4] *Ibid*., 60.
[5] The conceptual joining of these pairs of opposites is encapsulated in ancient and medieval embryology in the belief which held that an embryo would be male if the paternal semen came from the right testicle, or if it developed on the right side of the uterus, because the right side of the body was believed to be hotter and able to more perfectly nourish the foetus. Galen's explanation of this can be found in Galen, "*De usu partium corporis humani*," in *Hapanta. Opera omnia. Vol. 4*, ed. Karl Gottlob Kühn (Leipzig: C. Cnobloch, 1821-1833), 14.7, 163-75. Cf. Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir*, 70.
[6] On the use of analogy in ancient medical theory, see Mark J. Schiefsky, "Commentary," in *Hippocrates On Ancient Medicine: Translated with introduction and commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 111-43.
[7] Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, 345.
[8] *Ibid*., 355.

A third important type of symbolism was used in premodern scientific reasoning and explanations of the female body: synecdoche. Much of the medieval writing about women's bodies which we examine in this chapter engages on some level or another in synecdochical thinking, that is, thinking which allows the whole to stand for the parts, or the parts for the whole. The physicians' tendency to equate women with their reproductive organs is evident in the overwhelming emphasis in "women's medicine" on the diseases of the womb, and on fertility, birth, and postpartum concerns. Moreover, what are held to be essential truths about "woman" are, likewise, believed to be true about her reproductive body parts, and vice versa. Cultural assumptions about women, especially those drawn from Hellenistic and European-Christian traditions, influenced medieval depictions of their reproductive parts, as will be explored further in this chapter.

Many types of metaphors were used to describe the uterus. Container metaphors were frequently used in order to depict the uterus' role in pregnancy. Some container metaphors suggest that the maternal womb's function is merely to be a passive receptacle for holding the foetus: for example, the metaphor of the "womb as jar." Other container metaphors indicate that the womb has a role in the shaping of the foetus which it contains, such as the "womb as oven" metaphor, which suggests that the quality of the heat of the womb has an impact on the development of the foetus, or the "womb as mold," which suggests that the shape of the womb affects the formation of the foetus. Container metaphors that compare the womb to buildings, like houses and sanctuaries, convey associations with the safety and protection which those buildings afford. Container metaphors that compare the womb to latrines, on the other hand, convey associations with the elimination of pollution and waste. The analogy of the "womb as cupping-glass," which draws in fluids, highlights the therapeutic function of elimination that the organ was believed to perform. Some container metaphors are also agricultural metaphors. Frequently, the models of the "womb as a field" or the "womb as a tree" emphasize the earth's ability to hold onto plants, or a tree's ability to hang on to its fruit in addition to emphasizing the womb's function of supplying the nutriments which were required for the foetus to grow.

The fluids associated with reproduction, namely, uterine blood and breast milk, were also understood through a variety of comparisons and associations. Both menstrual blood

and breast milk were sources of nourishment for offspring, according to the popular belief that menstrual blood fed the child in the womb just as breast milk did after it was born. They were both compared to other foods, both good and bad. Both fluids were, at times, extolled as being essential for infant growth, but they were also feared as having the potential of being food gone bad—as rotting food or even poison. Additionally, both uterine blood and breast milk were compared to earth, in that it was the source of nutriment for plants. To Aristotle, however, uterine blood was not food for the foetus, but rather an unconcocted seminal fluid, which had a role in generation distinct from male semen because it was bloody and less refined. He compared female bloody seed to passive "matter" which is worked upon and formed by the tools of the active male seed. With respect to their function in women's health, both breast milk and uterine blood were viewed as healing purgations with the ability to evacuate a woman's body of built up humours. They were not, however, viewed as equal substances. Uterine blood, especially menstrual blood, was frequently associated with toxicity and impurity, while breast milk was usually associated with purity. This is not to say that uterine blood was always portrayed negatively. Menstruation was sometimes associated with fertility and labeled metaphorically as women's "flowers." And, postpartum blood was sometimes portrayed as a symbol of sacrifice.

The imagery that was attached to the uterus, uterine blood, and breast milk in medieval medical and scientific texts communicates more than just simple explanations of their form and function. In describing the physical phenomena by means of comparisons, the authors add secondary meanings to the definitions of the womb, blood, and milk, and also to the idea of woman and mother. This chapter attempts to identify certain types of conceptual symbols used repeatedly throughout ancient and medieval medical and scientific literature to illustrate and explain the functions of the uterus, menstrual blood, and breast milk. It provides a background into the representation of women's bodies in the medical and scientific literature of ancient Greece, which focuses particularly on the authors and theoretical frameworks which had the most influence on the later Middle Ages. It highlights the important role played by figurative language depictions of female anatomy and physiology in Hellenistic thought. This chapter, then, examines different kinds of analogies used by medieval writers to describe the physical components of pregnancy, menstruation, and breast feeding, and explores the secondary meanings that they convey.

2.2. Women's reproductive bodies in ancient Hellenistic theory.

Medical theory in the Middle Ages was based upon comprehensive and continuous systems of understanding derived from ancient Hellenistic authorities.[9] Two main systems of thought concerning the workings of the body were handed down from the Greeks: one based on Hippocratic-Galenic theories of medicine, and another based on Aristotle's natural philosophy. However, even within these theoretical groupings, the ancient texts contained many variations with respect to questions about the human body and its generation. A significant amount of disagreement comes from questions that were raised about women's reproductive bodies. Thus, we use the designation of these separate theoretical systems loosely. Additionally, one significant Greek medical text on the topic of women's bodies, the *Gynaecology* of Soranus, was written by a physician whose understandings of the body fell outside of both of these systems of thought. This section examines theories about the female reproductive body drawn from ancient Hellenistic sources, which were influential in the Middle Ages, and highlights some of the descriptive analogies used by the ancient authors to depict the functions of women's generative organs and their fluid by-products, uterine blood and milk.

Hellenistic theories of sex difference and generation entered medieval thought at different times and in different ways. Although Aristotle's works on logic were available to the Latin-speaking world throughout the Middle Ages, his natural philosophy and theories on generation were unavailable to the West until late in the twelfth century.[10] During the same period, only a small number of the works of Galen and Hippocrates, generally those texts which had been part of the medical curriculum at the schools of Alexandria, circulated. This small body of texts contained works that were useful for teaching practical medicine, such as the Hippocratic *Aphorisms* and *Prognostics*, as well as Galen's *Art of Medicine* and his

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[9] Good introductory works on Ancient Greek medicine and natural philosophy include Roger French, *Ancient Natural History: histories of nature* (London: Routledge, 1994); Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2004). On representations of women in Greek medicine and science, see, particularly, Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the female body in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Suzanne Saïd, "Féminin, femme et femelle dans les grands traités biologiques d'Aristote," in *La Femme dans les sociétés antiques. Actes des colloques de Strasbourg (mai 1980 et mars 1981)*, ed. Edmond Lévy (Strasbourg: 1983):93-123.

[10] Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147.

treatise *On the Pulse*.[11] In the field of gynaecology, the writings of Galen's contemporary, Soranus, were known more broadly.[12] We know of two partial versions of Soranus' *Gynaecology* that were produced in Latin in this period. The first translation, by Caelius Aurelianus, which dates to the fifth century, contains selections of only the diagnostic and therapeutic parts of the text; the second translation, composed in the early sixth century by Mustio, was an illustrated catechism directed at midwives.[13] The relative popularity of this text compared to similar works by Hippocrates and Galen is indicative of the appeal which practical texts held over theoretical works of medicine for the translators of the early medieval period.

In the period between the sixth and twelfth centuries, in the Latin-speaking West, Galen's theories of generation and female anatomy were transmitted incompletely and indirectly, as part of compilation works. In Late Antiquity, encyclopaedists like Isidore of Seville and the Byzantine Alexander of Tralles had incorporated much of the existing medical thought into general works which were used mainly in monastic communities, or by clerics.[14] These compilers did more than copy select material; they added new ideas and excised parts of the old material and reconciled them with Christian ideas about the body, sexuality, and disease. During the same time period, in the East, however, many of the works of Galen were preserved and copied in their entirety. In Byzantium, physicians had access to the texts in their original Greek, and had greater access to Galen's theoretical works than their western counterparts.[15] In the Arabic-speaking world, Galenic medical theory dominated from the ninth-century, when Hunayn ibn Ishaq (Johannitius) translated a large number of Galen's works along with other ancient Greek texts from Byzantine collections.[16] Some of the most famous Arabic medical writers from the period, including Rhazes, Al-

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[11] Faith Wallis, "Signs and Senses: Diagnosis and prognosis in Early Medieval pulse and urine texts," *Social History of Medicine* 13, no. 2 (2000): 266.

[12] Henry E. Sigerist, "The Latin Medical Literature of the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 13 (1958): 134.

[13] Owsei Temkin, "Introduction," in Soranus, *Gynaecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956) *xlv*.

[14] Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine Volume V. Medieval Medicine* (Omaha: Horatius Press, 2003), 173.

[15] For a brief comparison of the states of Latin and Byzantine medical knowledge, see Gerhard Baader, "Early Medieval Latin Adaptations of Byzantine Medicine in Western Europe," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Vol. 38, Symposium on Byzantine Medicine*, ed. John Scarborough (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984).

[16] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998), 131ff. Emily Savage-Smith, "The Exchange of Medical and Surgical Ideas between Europe and Islam," in *The Diffusion of Greco-Roman Medicine into the Middle East and Caucasus*, ed. J.A.C. Greppin, E. Savage-Smith, and J. L. Guergian (New York: Caravan Books, 1999), 31.

Majusi, and Avicenna, repeated Galenic doctrines about the anatomy of the female genitalia, including his beliefs that female reproductive organs were analogous to male reproductive organs, and that the womb contained two cavities.[17] These teachings about the uterus later became widespread in the West when the ancient Greek and Arabic medicine was introduced to the Latin world through the translation movement beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[18]

In this scholastic period, during which learning first moved from cathedral schools to universities, and scholars sought answers to a multitude of questions from ancient and foreign sources, large numbers of medical texts and works of natural philosophy became newly available in Latin. These introduced a variety of descriptions and explanations of female reproductive organs and their functions. In medicine, works which supported Hippocratic-Galenic theory were popular. At the same time, there was an increase in scholarly interest in the natural philosophy of Aristotle. Both Galen's and Aristotle's theories of generation gained influence among medieval authors. Although there are places where the systematic theories of reproduction are obviously contradictory, this did not pose a major problem for the new students of these classical models. Medieval authors freely modified and integrated recently rediscovered texts to supplement each other and preexisting knowledge.[19] For example, Constantine the African, an early translator of Galen and Hippocrates combined the Galenic two-seed model[20] for explaining women's role in generation with Aristotelian ideas about heat as the cause for difference in male and female potency, without acknowledging the conflicting aspects of the two models.[21] This scholastic culture of the High Middle Ages did not value Soranus' *Gynaecology* for medical teaching or practice, yet the ideas about women's health and reproductive ailments contained in the work continued to circulate indirectly, appearing unreferenced in medieval texts, offering a perspective on the subjects which was neither Galenic nor Aristotelian.[22]

The ancient Greek theories of reproduction and assumptions about women's physiology, particularly those which are found in works attributed to Hippocrates, Galen,

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[17] Plinio Prioreschi. *A History of Medicine Volume IV. Byzantine and Islamic medicine* (Omaha: Horatius Press, 2004), 408-9
[18] Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir*, 66.
[19] Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 53.
[20] For Galen's reproductive theories see below, 55ff.
[21] Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 62.
[22] *Ibid*., 30.

Soranus, and Aristotle, influenced medical and scientific representations of women in the Middle Ages. The metaphors and analogies which were used by classical authorities to describe the female body and its role in reproduction were frequently reproduced in medieval medical writing, and altered by the medieval authors who adapted the texts to fit with their own cultural perceptions of women. The next section provides an overview of several of the predominant theories about the composition and function of the female body recorded in Hellenistic literature, and highlights some of the figurative language used to describe and understand it.

2.2.1. Hippocrates.

Hippocrates (*ca.* 460 B. C. E.–*ca.* 370 B. C. E.) is often credited with being the father of rational medicine and the first to adhere strictly to the system of humoural theory for understanding physiology and disease. However, very little is known about the historical figure of Hippocrates and the majority of the texts ascribed to him were most certainly authored by other writers. What we call Hippocratic medicine is based on a corpus of writing from the fourth and fifth centuries B. C. E. by a number of authors.[23] Hippocratic ideas about women are scattered throughout several areas of the corpus. Only one text, a two-volume work called the *Diseases of Women*, was dedicated to the topic of women's health concerns, but questions concerning women were treated in a number of other general medical texts, including *On Generation*, *Epidemics*, and the *Aphorisms*. The authors of Hippocratic texts were not unified in their understanding of women's bodies. Within the Hippocratic corpus, we find contradictions with regards to the role of women in reproduction and the exact relationship between male and female bodies.

Hippocratic authors portrayed women as having distinct health concerns from men because of what they perceived to be essential physiological differences between the two sexes. According to a detailed study of the representations of women in the Hippocratic corpus published by Helen King, "The Hippocratic texts never restricted women's difference

[23] For an introduction to the question of authorship for the over sixty treatises attributed to Hippocrates, see Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrate* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1992), 85ff.

[from men] to the function of childbearing and the organs associated with it."[24] King cites examples from the corpus which describe a number of physiological differences between men and women, from explanations of how they shiver differently, to a description of the *hodos* which existed only in women and was "a route extending from the orifices of the head to the vagina" with a mouth (*stoma*) on each end.[25] Hippocratic authors rationalized the reasons for women's essential difference according to the theory of the humours, by arguing that the female body was wetter than the male body. The belief that women's bodies had a natural affinity towards moisture led Hippocratic writers to describe female flesh as being soft and porous like sponges, or wool, readily absorbing excessive amounts of fluids.[26] King's study examines other analogies found in the Hippocratic corpus relating to women's reproductive bodies, some of which we will examine in more detail here.

Hippocratic authors frequently made comparisons between the parts of the body and their functions and known objects and developments both natural and man-made in order to understand what they could not observe directly.[27] Metaphors used to describe the uterus in Hippocratic texts reveal to us what the ancient authors comprehended to be women's role in generation of offspring, and how they thought the uterus affected women's health. The Hippocratic corpus makes use of container metaphors, which compare the uterus to jars or ovens, agricultural metaphors, which compare the womb to fertile land, and animate metaphors, which compare the womb to a wandering creature.

Metaphors that describe uterine blood and breast milk, both of which were perceived to be the result of an accumulation of humours, help us to see what the Hippocratic authors perceived to be the main differences between them. Both were believed to be essential purgations, required for women's health, and also to have a role in the feeding of the offspring. These functions were depicted through analogies. Both uterine blood and breast milk were compared with earth and other forms of food. Blood which was shed from the uterus was compared to sacrificial blood in order to emphasize its purifying and healthy qualities.

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[24] King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 27.
[25] *Ibid*., 28.
[26] Hippocrates, *De glandulis*, 16. Cf. Hippocrates, *Opera omnia: Graece et Latine edita*, ed. Johan Anton Vander Linden (Gaasbeek: Danielem, Abrahamum & Adrianum, 1665), I:421. Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 1. Cf. *Opera omnia*, II:417.
[27] On the use of analogy in Hippocratic thought, see Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, 345ff.; Schiefsky, "Commentary."

In order to have a context in which to examine the Hippocratic descriptions of the various parts and substances of the female reproductive body, we must understand the method by which they answered questions about anatomy and physiology on the basis of constructing analogous relationships between parts of the body and observable phenomena. Hippocratic authors were unable to observe the organs inside the living body directly, so they relied upon observations of other objects with similar shapes or textures in order to infer, by comparison, the uses of various organs. Additionally, they grouped together body parts with similar shapes or similar textures, hypothesizing that they functioned in similar ways.

This process is explained in *On Ancient Medicine*. The author lists the different structures that exist within the body and affect the body according to their innate capacities:

> [B]y "structures" I mean all the parts inside the human being, some hollow and tapering from wide to narrow, others also extended, others solid and round, others broad and suspended, others stretched, others long, others dense, others loose in texture and swollen, others spongy and porous.[28]

He argues that we can understand how these different organs function, for example whether they attract and draw moisture to themselves, by analogy: "one must learn these things from evident things outside the body."[29] He describes an experiment by which one can determine that the organs which are hollow and tapered towards the bottom draw fluids most readily: "if you hold your mouth wide open you will not be able to draw up any fluid, while if you thrust your lips forward and contract and compress them, you will draw some up; and indeed, if you go on to apply a tube to them, you will easily draw whatever you like."[30] Another example is the cupping-glass used in medicine for drawing blood to the skin, which has a strong attractive power because of its wide hollow body and narrow mouth. Thus, he reasons,

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[28] "*Figuras autem dico, quae in ipso homine insunt. Aliae enim cavae sunt, et ex amplitudine in arctum coactae, aliae expassae, aliae solidae et rotundae, aliae latae et pensiles, aliae extentae, aliae longae, aliae densae, aliae rarae et hiantes, aliae spongiformes ac molles*." Hippocrates *De veteri medicina*, 22. Latin translation of the original Greek from *Opera omnia*, I:37. English translation (from the Greek) from Hippocrates, *On Ancient Medicine: Translated with introduction and commentary*, trans. Mark J. Schiefsky (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 105.

[29] "*Quae igitur ex his trahere ad sese allicereque humiditate ex reliquo corpore maxime possunt? Num cavae et expassae, an solidae et rotundae, aut cavae in arctum ex amplitudine coactae?... Id quod ex manifestis forinsecus condiscere oportet…*" Hippocrates *De veteri medicina*, 22. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:37. English translation from Schiefsky, *On Ancient Medicine*, 105.

[30] "*Partim quidem quod ore hians nihil sane humoris attraxeris, ubi vero labra foras produxeris, contraxerisque ac compresseris, insuperque fistulam admoveris, facile sane attraxeris quicquid volueris.*" Hippocrates, *De veteri medicina*, 22, in *Opera omnia*, I:37. English translation from Schiefsky, *On Ancient Medicine*, 107.

the head, the bladder and, in women, the uterus are the structures in the body which, since they are hollow and tapered, attract the most moisture.[31] Following this method of argumentation, he determines that the breasts, like the lungs and the spleen, being spongy and porous, act like sponges: they attract fluids which they come in contact with and do not release it easily.[32] Thus, the author teaches that evidence from the capabilities of objects outside of the body can help us to understand the capabilities of body parts that appear to have similar structures.

The container metaphors used for describing the uterus by Hippocratic writers suggest different functions that the organ was believed to perform. In *On Generation*, the description of the woman's role in pregnancy was largely restricted to the ability of her uterus to act as a suitable container; the text emphasized the uterus' ability to retain seminal material and the foetus, and to be the appropriate shape and size for foetal growth. The text's author explains that, for conception to occur, the uterus has to receive the sperm released by both male and female partners during intercourse and then close up and retain it.[33] Once a child has been conceived, its development is also dependent on the uterus' role as a container. Weak children are said to be caused when either "the womb was more open than normal, and some of the child's nutriment from the mother escaped," or "the space in which the embryo is nurtured is not adequate."[34] The author compares the pregnant uterus to a jar in which the fruit of the cucumber plant is placed to grow. If the container is too small, the plant, which represents a foetus, will be restricted in its growth. Accordingly, the author claims that a constricted uterus will lead to small or malformed children, for the child will be just like a tree that grows in insufficient earth.[35] The jar analogy suggests that the uterus' role

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[31] "*Verum intra hominem natura et figura talia, sunt, vesica, et caput, et uterus in mulieribus; atque haec manifeste maxime trahunt et semper plena sunt attractae humiditatis*." Hippocrates *De veteri medicina*, 22. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:38. English translation from Schiefsky, *On Ancient Medicine*, 107.

[32] "*Spongiformes vero et molles, velut lien, pulmo, et mammae, ubi admotae maxime fuerint et adhaeserint, evivunt, duraque fiunt ac augescunt humore accedente*." Hippocrates *De veteri medicina*, 22, Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:38. English translation from Schiefsky, *On Ancient Medicine*, 107.

[33] Hippocrates, *De genitura*, 5. Cf. Latin in *Opera omnia*, I:127; For an English translation (from the Greek) see, "On Generation" in *The Hippocratic Treatises, "On Generation," "On the Nature of the Child," "Diseases IV":A Commentary*, trans. Iain M. Lonie (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1981), 3..

[34] "*Ab utero quid de ipso ipsius incremento foras prodiit, utero nimirum amplius hiante, & propterea debilis factus est;" "Si enim non habuerint spaciositatem, in qua foetus nutriri possit, necesse est ipsum tenuem fieri*." Hippocrates, *De genitura*, 9. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:131. Translation from Lonie, "On Generation," 4-5.

[35] "*Quemadmodum si qui cucumerem qui iam defloruit, fit autem adhuc tenellus, et in cucumerario adhuc adhaereat, ponat ac immittat in vas angustum, aequalis ac similis evadit cavitari ipsius vasis. Si vero quis eundem in vas amplum inter quod verisimile fit cucumeris capax esse, sed non valde multo meius quam pro*

in generation and its influence on the offspring are passive and derived from the effect of its shape and size, as the container which must hold the foetus.

A more active role is given to the uterus's function as a container in the Hippocratic, *On the Nature of the Child*. In this treatise, the uterus is compared to an oven in order to explain how breath enters the child by the process of heating. The author gives a series of analogies, based on scientific theory, which compare the uterus' effect on the seminal matter which it encloses to the heating of wood or the cooking of food in an oven. He argues that it was necessary for the womb to heat the seed in order to condense the seminal matter which is to be a child, to give it breath, and to form a protective membrane around it.[36] The uterus is not merely a container, but also performs an essential function which brings its contents to life.

In the same treatise, *On the Nature of the Child*, the uterus is also compared to the earth which, in this case, is treated as a kind of container. Earth was mentioned in the jar analogy from *On Generation*, where it represents the effects that the uterus can produce passively on the foetus according to quantitative conditions, but in *On the Nature of the Child*, the analogy is used to express the effect of qualitative conditions of the uterus on the foetus. The author of *On the Nature of the Child* likens the foetus to a plant and, in this case, the mother's body represents the earth in an extended analogy/digression about trees which emphasizes the maternal role of passing on nutrients to the child. He portrays the uterus as a permeable container which imparts what nutriments it receives from the maternal body onto the foetus. The analogy is summarized in the following passage:

> Nutrition and growth depend on what arrives from the mother into her womb; and the health or disease of the child is relative to that of the mother. In just the same way, plants growing in the earth receive their nutriment from the

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cucumeris natura, aequalis itidem ac similis erit cucumis vasis ampli cavi vasis cavitate contendit." Hippocrates, *De genitura*, 9. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:131. Cf. Lonie, "On Generation," 5.

[36] On the role of the internal heat and cold breath of the mother in the process of introducing breath into the foetus: "*Omnia autem quae calescunt, spiritum habent. Spiritus autem erumpit et sibi ipsi viam facit, ac foras procedit.Id antem quod calescit rursus in seipsum alium spiritum frigidum trahit, per fissuram unde nutritur. Atque hoc contingit etiam in lignis, et in foliis , cibisque ac potibus si fortiter calefiant*." On the role of maternal heat and the foetal membrane: "*Quemadmodum in pane dum torretur, tenue quiddam pellicule specie in superficiem abscedit ac extat. Calescens enim panis et inflatus elevator: qua parte vero inflatur iste hic pelliculae species excitatur et consistit. Geniturae autem calfactae ac inflatae ex toto, pellicula forinsecus circumdatur*." Both passages, Hippocrates, *De natura pueri*, 1. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:133. Cf. Lonie, trans., "On the Nature of the Child," in *Hippocratic Treatises*, 6.

> earth and the conditions of the plant depend upon the condition of the earth in which it grows.[37]

In this earth metaphor, as well as the metaphors of the oven and the jar, the uterus is portrayed as a normally positive and nurturing space, which provides essential circumstances for foetal growth: containment, space, warmth, and nutrition. However, each of these analogies also highlights potential hazards, since the uterus that is not closed enough, not spacious enough, not hot enough, or not nutritious enough will lead to infertility, or injury to the foetus.

Though the uterus' natural functions were portrayed as nurturing ones, and woman's natural "role" was depicted as carrying offspring inside of her, when infertility or miscarriage took place, the Hippocratic authors emphasized the womb/woman's failure to act as a nurturer. The *Diseases of Women I* makes note of different conditions of the uterus which harm rather than foster an unborn child: "Wombs by themselves also have natural dispositions by which miscarriage can occur: wombs that are flatulent, for example, or tightly packed, loose, over large, over small, and other types which are similar."[38] Here the author suggests that the uterus could often be a hostile space for the developing foetus. He explains how the physician can determine, in cases of miscarriage, whether the cause was a problem with the uterus' ability to nurture, or the pregnant woman's own failure to protect the pregnancy, either by falling ill, or by her actions, such as performing heavy labour, taking strenuous exercise, or shouting violently. The author does not take for granted that the uterus, and the pregnant woman, will naturally carry out the nurturing functions necessary to carry the foetus to term. In fact, he writes, "It requires careful attention and much skill to carry a child to full term, to nourish it properly in the womb, and to bring it forth at the time of birth without injury to herself."[39]

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[37] "*Alimentum et augmentum puerorum fit, ubi ea quae a matre veniunt, in uterus processerint, et prout mater habet juxta sanitatem aut debilitatem, sic et puer habet. Quemadmodum etiam quae in terra crescent, a terra nutriuntur, sic etiam nascentia in terra habent*." Hippocrates, *De natura pueri*, 9. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:148-49. English translation from Lonie, "On the Nature of the Child," 13.

[38] "*Sed et ipsi uteri naturas habent, quibus abortum faciunt, quum sunt flatuosi, densi, magni, parvi, et alia his similia*." Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 25. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:443. English translation (from the Greek) from Ann Ellis Hanson, "Diseases of Women I," *Signs* 1, no. 2 (1975): 580.

[39] "*Nam custodia et scientia multa opus est, ut in uteris gestent puerum et enutriant, et ut evandant ab ipso in partu*." Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 25. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:444. English translation from Hanson, "Diseases of Women I," 580.

The uterus is granted consideration in the Hippocratic corpus not only with regards to its reproductive functions, but also because of its role in female health. It was seen as having an essential role in restoring healthful balance to women's too wet bodies, as the container which collects and releases the excess moisture.[40] However, it was also believed to be prone to displacement, which could cause disease. Hippocratic authors placed a great deal of emphasis on the diseases of the uterus. The author of *Diseases of Women II* went so far as to say that, in women, the "uterus is the cause of all diseases; for wherever it has moved from its natural place it causes illnesses, whether it goes upwards or downwards."[41] One particularly dangerous disease which was attributed to the dislocation of the uterus is hysterical suffocation. It is described as the womb rising upwards, causing a woman to feel heaviness and pain in her head and to become sleepy.[42] One treatment for hysterical suffocation involves using foul smells, held to the nose, in order to repel the womb downwards and back into place.[43] The concept of hysterical illness, which was popular with the Hippocratic authors and remained a feature of medical theory into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, portrays the womb as having the qualities of an animate and separate entity that wreaks havoc within the woman's body and is outside of her control.[44] Moreover, the concept of the illness itself exemplifies the belief that woman is particularly vulnerable to the movements of her body which she cannot rule over. It is linked to the belief

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[40] The author of *Diseases of Women I* writes that in a state of health, the uterus collects menstrual blood through absorption from the body, and allows it to exit through the mouth of the uterus, the cervix. Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 1. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:418. (This section of *De morbis mulierum I*, is not part of Hanson's translation).

[41] "*Uteri omnium morborum causae sunt: hi enim ubi ex natura transmoti fuerint, morbos exhibent, sive asscenderint, sive descenderint*." Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber secundus*. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:526. (To my knowledge, an English translation of *De morbis mulierum II*, does not yet exist.)

[42] "*Quum ad caput conversi fuerint uteri, et hac parte suffocatio definit, caput gravat.*" Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber secundus*. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:545.

[43] "*Unguento autem rosaceo caput illinatur, et odorata subter suffiantur: graveolentia vero sub nares, et brassicam edat, et succum sorbeat.*" Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber secundus*. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:546.

[44] The pre-modern history of hysteria and the wandering womb can be found in Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). For a more recent revision of Veith's study, see Helen King, "Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates," in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). An interesting study of medieval and early modern illustrations of women suffering from ailments related to the wandering womb is Laurinda S. Dixon, *Perilous Chastity: Women and illness in Pre-Enlightenment art and medicine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

that women required the purging effects of sexual intercourse, and pregnancy, to keep the uterus from wandering.[45]

Let us turn now to examine the Hippocratic representation of those detectable forms of the moisture which was believed to accumulate readily in the female body: uterine blood and breast milk. Both were considered evacuations that were necessary for a woman's health and both were said to have an important role in nourishing offspring. However, uterine blood, including menstrual blood, the blood of birth, and postpartum discharge, was portrayed primarily as an emission which was necessary for women's health, while breast milk was depicted as having the nourishment of offspring as its primary function.

Ancient medical beliefs about the role of menstruation in women's health were derived from the understanding of blood in humoural theory. All blood (which, in this case refers to a combination of all four humours)[46] was said to be refined nutriment, since, it was argued, ingested food was converted into blood by means of heat in the body. Women, because of their wetter constitutions,[47] and because they do not perform heavy labour,[48] were said to be unable to use up all of this nutriment. Thus, the surplus is collected in the womb and expelled as menstrual blood. A positive result of menstruation, according to this theory, is that, if a woman had an excess of one of the humours in her body, a healthy balance could be restored by the purgative function of the menses.[49] Additionally, women's inability to efficiently expend all of their nutriment was viewed as advantageous for reproduction.

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[45] The author of *Diseases of Women* writes that the women who are most likely to suffer from the disease are older widows or young women who are unmarried or barren. *Diseases of Women* I, i-iii. Helen King provides a detailed discussion of the relationship between sexuality and hysteria in the Hippocratic corpus, pointing out that the Hippocratic author's main rationale for the connection was women's essential wetness, which could be aided by intercourse or childbirth, both of which were believed to have powerful effects on the body's humoural balance. King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 219-21. See for example *De genitura*: *"Mulieres si cum viris coeant, magis sanae sunt; si non, minus. Nam et uteri simul humidi fiunt in commixtiones: qui enim sicci sunt magis quam convenit, fortiter contrahuntur, ubi vero fortiter contrahuntur, dolorem corpora afferent: et simul coitus sanguine calefaciens ac humectans, viam faciliorem mensibus facit.*" Hippocrates, *De genitura*, 4. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:128. Cf. Lonie "On Generation," 2.

[46] On the difference between blood as one of the four humours, and blood as the fluid of life in the body, see Iain M. Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises, "On Generation," "On the Nature of the Child," "Diseases IV": A commentary* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 293-94.

[47] Hippocrates, *De natura pueri*, 6. Cf. *Opera omnia*, I:138; Lonie, "On the Nature of the Child," 7.

[48] Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 2. Cf. *Opera omnia*, II:418.

[49] Hippocrates, *De genitura*, 2. Cf. *Opera omnia*, I:128. Lonie, "On Generation," 1.

Following conception, the menstrual blood was believed to be retained in the uterus and to provide nutriment for foetal growth.[50]

The Hippocratic authors viewed menstruation as a type of natural remedy which operated in the female body both for the prevention and for the cure of illness.[51] The *Aphorisms* contains a number of pronouncements concerning the ability of the menses to restore balance to the body through purging. Some examples include: "When the menses are excessive, diseases occur, and when the menses are stopped, diseases from the uterus occur;"[52] and, "A woman does not get gout, unless her menses are stopped."[53] These aphorisms maintain that if a woman's body is not purged of impure blood, regularly and in the right amount, through the process of menstruation, diseases can occur. Ailments which were seen to be the cause of an excess of bad humours were believed to be cured by menstruation. For example, there is an aphorism which states that, "when a woman vomits blood, it is removed by the flow of the menses."[54] This indicates the belief of the Hippocratic physicians that the menstrual flow would divert blood being evacuated from other parts of the body. Likewise, the *Aphorisms* posit that, if the menses cease to flow, it was beneficial for the excess blood, which is filled with impurities, to leave the body by other means, such as through the nose.[55] Thus, the positive therapeutic function that menstruation was held to perform was derived from the negative ideas about the menstrual blood itself which was construed as being impure.

The Hippocratic representations of uterine blood use descriptive analogies relating it to the blood of sacrificial victims. In *Diseases of Women I*, the author writes that, in a healthy woman, during menstruation, "the blood flows just as it does from a sacrificial victim and

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[50] "[*genitura*] *augescit a matre, sanguine in uterum descendente. Menses enim non prodeunt, ubi mulier conceperit intra seipsam, si puer sanus fuerit et permanere debet, nisi in quibusdam primo mense modicum sui indicationem faciant*." Hippocrates, *De natura pueri*, 2. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:136-37. Cf. Lonie, "On the Nature of the Child," 7.

[51] For a discussion of menstruation as curative in the Hippocratic corpus see Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, 136-44.

[52] "*Mensibus pluribus prodeuntibus morbi sunt, et non prodeuntibus, ab utero morbi contingunt*." Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* V. 57. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:96. For an English translation (from the Greek) see Hippocrates, "Aphorisms," in *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*, ed. Francis Adams (London: Sydenham Society, 1849), 748.

[53] "*Mulier non laborat podagra, si non menses ipsi desecerint*." Hippocrates *Aphorismi* VI.29. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:100. Cf. Adams, trans., "Aphorisms," 757.

[54] "*Mulieri sanguinem vomenti, mensibus erumpentibus solutio sit*." Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* V.32. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:93. Cf. Adams, trans., "Aphorisms," 743.

[55] "*Mulieri mensibus deficientibus, sanguinem ex naribus fluere bonum est*." Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* V. 33. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:93. Cf. Adams, trans., "Aphorisms," 743.

congeals quickly."[56] He uses the analogy to refer to certain qualities of the blood, by which it can be known that a woman is healthy and fertile. The author of *On the Nature of the Child* uses the same analogy to describe postpartum blood, writing that it should flow "as it does from a sacrificial victim," if the woman is healthy and if she will be healthy.[57] Thus, he shows that the analogy refers to the appearance of the blood which can be used for prognostic purposes. He adds that if a woman's blood following birth does not have this appearance and is slow and does not coagulate readily, or if there is no blood flow at all, she will be very ill and likely to die. This comparison between the quick blood flow of sacrificial animals and women's postpartum bleeding is somewhat contradictory because the quickly flowing blood from the animal being sacrificed is what leads to its death, whereas in the medical analogy, it is a sign that the woman will live. The analogy, thus, seems to be based on what were perceived to be the qualities of healthy blood and the blood which flows from the cut veins of a sacrificial animal.[58] However, Helen King has noted that, "although sacrificial blood may appear to be an obvious empirical source of analogies with any bleeding from the human body, it is significant that… comparisons of this kind are restricted to the gynaecological treatises."[59] She suggests that the comparison may have been used to describe female bleeding because of the association, from ancient Greek literature, of women as sacrificial victims, and argues that this related uterine bleeding's role in restoring health to the sickly female body, and sacrificial blood's role in restoring order to the society.[60]

To the breasts were ascribed two positive functions: further refinement of the body's nutriment into milk for feeding the infant, and excretion of the female body's surplus while the menses are stopped in the period after giving birth.[61] The Hippocratic authors believed

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[56] "[*P*]*rocedit autem sanguis velut a victima, et cito congelatur si sana fuerit mulier*." Hippocrates, *De Morbis Mulierum, liber primus*, xv. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:426.

[57] "*Procedit autem sanguis velut a victima si sana est et sana futura est mulier, et statim congelatur. Si vero mulier sana non est, neque sana futura est, purgatio paucior procedit, et specie deterior, et non cito congelator*." Hippocrates, *De natura pueri*, 4. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:142. Cf. Lonie "On the Nature of the Child," 7. *Diseases of Women I* also uses the same metaphor of the sacrificial animal for postpartum blood. See, Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 72. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:485.

[58] Iain Lonie points out that the animals which were chosen for sacrifice would have been in good health. Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises*, 196.

[59] King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 90.

[60] Ibid., 93-97. Notably, Vivian Nutton has noted, plants which were used in ritual purification, namely squill and agnus castus, were also used for their symbolic powers, in fumigations to clean the womb. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 98.

[61] The two functions, nutrition of the foetus and purification of the body, are given in *Diseases of Women I*, alongside an argument that women whose bodies are less soft produce less milk because their bodies absorb

that the breast milk also had a purifying function which was necessary as a result of women's particular physiological make-up. In *Glands*, a treatise which was first attributed to Hippocrates by Galen, the female body's ability to produce milk is said to be a result of its "sponginess," which is identified as an essential difference between male and female composition. The author of *Glands* writes that males are close-pressed like a thick carpet both in appearance and to the touch" while females are "rarefied and porous, like wool, in appearance and to the touch."[62] Thus, he reasons, like a thick carpet, the densely packed male body does not absorb excess material from what it ingests, whereas the soft and porous female body does soak up surplus moisture from food and drink. This moisture is drawn into the spongy tissue of the breasts from the uterus, which, as the Hippocratics understood it, was a container for the body's surplus nutriment.

The author of *Glands* taught that milk retention would cause illness in women. He writes that tubercles and inflammation are caused by milk retention. Moreover, he explains how it is known that the interruption of milk flow is an impediment to women's health:

> Proof of this is provided by women that lose a breast either because of disease or some other accident: their voice becomes bold, fluid enters their oesophagus, they secrete excessive saliva, and they have pains in the head. They suffer these things because of the following: since milk continues to leave the uterus and flows out towards the upper regions of the body as it did before, not having a proper receptacle it lights upon the principal parts of the body such as the heart and lung, and the women suffocate.[63]

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less: "*Dulcissimus enim humor ex cibis ac potibus ad mammas vertitur ac exsugitur. Et necesse est etiam reliquum corpus magis evacuari, et minus sanguine plenum fieri… Sunt autem quae natura sine lacte sunt, et quibus lac deficit ante tempus. Hae vero natura soldiae sunt, et densae carnis: et propterea sufficiens humor non penetrat a ventre in mammas quum via sit densa.*" Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 73. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:486.

[62] "*Mas enim plenus est, et velut pallium densus, tum ad visum, tum ad tactum: foemina vero rara et laxa, et velut fluida, tum ad visum, tum ad tactum.*" Hippocrates, *De glandulis*, 17. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:422. English translation (from the Greek) from Hippocrates, "Glands," in *Hippocrates, with an English translation*, ed. and translated by Paul Potter, *The Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 125. Note the difference between the Latin translation of women's flesh "like fluid" and the English translation of the Greek words as, "like wool."
Women's flesh is compared to wool (*lana*) in, and translated as so in the Latin version of, *Diseases of Women I*. Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 1 in *Opera omnia*, II:417.

[63] "*Porro faciunt etiam mammae tubercula ac inflammations, lac ipsum putrefacientes. Commoda autem habent superioribus similia, et reliqui corporis redundantiam auferunt: testimonium abunde praebent mulieres, quibus morbus, aut alia quaedam calamitas mammas adimit. Nam et vox ipsarum aspera redditur, et humores in gulam feruntur, et multo sputo vexantur, et caput dolent, et ab his aegrotant. Lac enim proficiscens ac influens ab*

This excerpt shows that lactation was viewed as an equivalent process to menstruation, since the milk was believed to be diverted uterine blood.

Breast milk, as the source of food for infants, was understood to have an analogous relationship with earth, which passes on nutriments for plant growth. The Hippocratic authors compared healthy earth, in which trees grow, with corrupt earth which putrefies and engenders worms. In *Diseases IV*, bad milk is said to cause round worms and flat worms to grow in the child while it is still feeding at the breast. The worms are said to generate spontaneously in the corruption of the milk: "a burning pus is formed from the milk, which itself is formed from excess of blood which has putrefied in consequence of its sweetness, and a living creature is engendered in it."[64] In ancient and medieval theories about the generation of insects, it was held that some insects generated out of decaying earth and excremental matter.[65] The author of *Diseases IV* suggests that, like other organic matter that decays into earth, breast milk can putrefy in the breasts and engender worms. The same treatise mentions another childhood disease called stone, which is said to be caused by unfit milk, lacking in nutriments as a result of the poor diet of the nursing woman, also described as "earthy" milk.[66] The treatise says that the disease was also caused when a young child eats earth.[67] The earth analogy is an extension of the comparison between the foetus, or infant, and a plant and the maternal body as a field, which was used prominently in *On the Nature of the Child*. It explains the dependence of the child's heath on the nutriment provided by the maternal body. Just as good earth brings forth plants and supplies them with what they need to grow and bad earth, like decaying food and faeces, putrefies and engenders insects and

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utero, quemadmodum etiam antea in superna vasa transibat, quum propria vasa non habeat, nec reperiat, utpote ipsisper mammarum ademptionem privatum in principales partes incurrit, cor videlicet ac pulmonem atque sic suffocantur." Hippocrates, *De glandulis*, 16. Latin from *Opera omnia*, I:422. English translation from Potter, "Glands," 125.

[64] "*Ubi ex lacte et sanguine computrescente ac redundante, utpote quod dulce est, pus factum fuerit fervidum, animale isthic generatur.*" Hippocrates, *Morbis IV*, 27. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:151. English translation from Hippocrates, "Diseases IV," in *The Hippocratic Treatises, "On Generation," "On the Nature of the Child," "Diseases IV": A commentary*, ed. Iain M. Lonie (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 37.

[65] Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises*, 349-52.. For Aristotle's teachings about spontaneous generation see *De Generatione Animalibus* 1.1. On the topic of spontaneous generation in the medieval tradition, see Van Der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la vierge*, 45ff.

[66] "*Ac ubi fluxerit lac non purum, sed terreum et pituitosum,… si quid sane in lacte non purum fuerit, id quo vesica fruitur lapis fit tali modo, velut in aqua non pura, in calice aut vase aenea turbata et rursus sedata, fex acervata fit in medio.*" Hippocrates, *Morbis IV*, 28. Latin from *Opera omnia*, II:153-54. Cf. Lonie, "Diseases IV," 39.

[67] Hippocrates, *Morbis IV*, 28. Cf. *Opera omnia*, II:155; Lonie, "Diseases IV," 39.

toads, so the fluids which nourish the offspring in the womb and at the breast can be either nourishing or putrid.

The Hippocratic authors, since they were concerned with therapeutic medicine, highlight what they saw as the health-bringing and disease-bringing aspects of female reproductive processes. Both milk and menstruation were equated with nutriment for offspring and purifying processes which could be beneficial for the mother. Improperly evacuated, however, both could also cause harm, by endangering the infant or causing illness in women. The Hippocratic texts emphasize the role of the uterus, dwelling on what they saw as its protective, nurturing function during pregnancy and its role in female health as a container for attracting and expelling surplus. Often, however, they express concern for the uterus as a container which can affect badly the foetus living inside of it, and as a problematic antagonist to female health, easily displaced by the slightest imbalance in the body and prone to causing a variety of illnesses. They view the restorative functions of the evacuations from the uterus and breasts crucial because of women's excessively wet bodies. Thus, in the Hippocratic corpus, desciptions of the health-bringing abilities of the female reproductive system also contain the suggestion that their distinct physiology can be the source of sickness.

2.2.2. Aristotle.

Aristotle's ideas about women's physiology and reproductive functions, like those of the Hippocratics, were tied to a larger theoretical model. For Aristotle (384 B.C.E.-322 B.C.E.), who was concerned with the questions of natural philosophy rather than therapeutics, this theoretical model had to embrace all living things (plants and animals) and be able to explain all of the observable differences and similarities that exist between them. The famed Greek philosopher wrote several treatises on his understanding of natural phenomena which included several biological works, *On the History of Animals*, *On the Parts of Animals*, and *On the Generation of Animals*. In these works, he explains his understanding of what were the characteristics of women.

Aristotle's description of women's reproductive anatomy was influenced by his belief that women as a whole were fundamentally different from men. When he wrote about the

female body, he frequently used contrast to define women with respect to men. Sometimes he noted similarities between the sexes, such as when he wrote that the uterus in female animals is always double because the testes are always double.[68] However, frequently, he imagined male and female as dichotomous forms. In *History of Animals*, he wrote that in almost all species of animals, the female is less courageous, of softer disposition, more impulsive and more suited to the nurture of offspring.[69] He believed that the human species is the most perfect species and, thus, the contrast between male and female natures is especially noticeable in the race of mankind:[70]

> Therefore, woman is more compassionate than man, more prone to tears than man is; she is more envious, and querulous, and scurrilous, and caustic. Moreover, she is more anxious, and despondent, and more shameful and untruthful. Furthermore, she can more easily deceive, and is better suited to remember. She is more wakeful, slow-moving, less active, and she requires less food.[71]

His description of woman's behavioural differences was based on his understanding of woman's physiological difference, which he derived from his theories about the importance of essential heat. Aristotle held that man is more perfect and his physiological make up is hot and dry, while woman is less perfect, and her physiological make up is cold and wet. He describes their different roles in generation according to what he believed to be their physiological distinctions:

> But, male and female are distinguished by certain capacity and incapacity. (For the male is that which can concoct and form and discharge a semen

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[68] "*Uteri omnium bipartiti sunt, quemadmodum et testes geminos omnes mares habent*." Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.3. Latin translation of the original Greek from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, ed. Ambrose Didot, 4 vols. (Paris: Instituti Franciae Typographo, 1854), III:321. For an English translation (from the Greek) see Aristotle, "Generation of Animals," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1984), I:1113.

[69] Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 9.1. Cf. Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:171-2. For an English translation see Aristotle, "History of Animals," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1984), I:948-49.

[70] "*Atque horum vestigia quum paene in omnibus sint, tum apertius manifestantur in iis, quae sunt moratiora, maxime vero in homine: ipse enim naturam habet perfectam, quare ii quoque habitus in eo sunt manifestiores.*" Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 9.1. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III: 172. Cf. Barnes, I:949.

[71] "*ergo mulier quam vir facilius movetur misericordia, et ad lacrymas promptior; invidia quoque plus laborat, ac frequentius defraudatam sese conqueritur; convicior etiam et exprobantior. Est etiam animo demissior femina quam mas et desperiatiore; impudentior quoque et mendacior; facilius dolo capitur, et memorior; ad haec vigilantior et ignavior, atque denique minus mobilis; minus item capit cibi*." Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 9.1. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:172. Cf. Barnes, I:949.

> carrying with it the principle of form… and the female is that which receives semen but cannot form it or discharge it). Therefore males of all animals must needs be hotter than the females. For it is by reason of cold and incapacity that the female is more abundant in blood in certain parts of her anatomy.[72]

Aristotle's understanding of women, that they are colder and wetter than men, provided an explanation for why women menstruated, and it supplied the basis for his teaching that the sexes had opposite roles in generation, one an active participant, who forms, and the other a passive participant, who receives.

The contrasting roles of the male and female sex in generation were described by Aristotle using an analogy based on the different roles occupied by tools and material in a carpenter's workshop. This analogy fits into a larger model of Aristotle's description of the universe's workings, which he lays out in his treatise on the laws of the physical world. In *Physics*, he explains that all natural substances are a composition of form and matter. Matter is simply potential without form to give it its actual nature, as wood, for example, has the potential to become many things before receiving the form of a bed.[73] Nothing can be created unless form is combined with matter in order to give rise to the individual characteristics which delineate what it is, be it a rooster, a lily, or a bed. Drawing upon this understanding of form and matter as the essential principles of all sensible objects, Aristotle explains that in reproduction, the female's contribution is the raw material (her menstrual blood) for the creation of the foetus, and the form is supplied by the male semen. To Aristotle, the menstrual blood is unconcocted semen which cannot form but which, like the wood with the potential to become a bed, provides the essential material component to generation:

> If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon. This is just

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[72] "*Sed quum mas et femina potentia quadam et impotentia definiantur (quod enim potest concoquere, et condensare, et secernere semen principium obtinens formae, id mas est.... quod autem recipit, nec potest condensare et secernere, id femina est) item, si omnis concoctio calore efficatur, mascula animalia quam femina esse calidiora necesse est. ob frigidatem enim et impotentiam femina sanguine magis abundat quibusdam locis*." Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 4.1. in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:395. English translation from Barnes, I:1184-85.

[73] Aristotle, *Physicorum* 2.1.

> what we find to be the case, for the menstrual blood has in its nature an affinity to the primitive matter.[74]

The metaphor of the carpenter's workshop depicts further the active and passive roles of the male and female contributions to generation:

> The male does not emit semen at all in some animals, and where he does this is not part of the resulting embryo; just so no material part comes from the carpenter to the material, i.e. the wood in which he works, nor does any part of the carpenter's art exist within what he makes, but the shape and the form are imparted from him to the material by means of the motion he sets up. It is his hands that move the tools, his tools that move the material; it is his knowledge of his art, and his soul, in which is the form, that move his hands or any other part of him with a motion of some definite kind, a motion varying with the varying nature of the object made. In a like manner, in the male of those animals which emit semen, nature uses the semen as a tool and as possessing motion in actuality, just as tools are used in the products of any art, for in them lies in a certain sense the motion of the art. Such, then is the way in which males contribute to generation.[75]

The way which females contribute to generation is, therefore, by supplying the basic material to be shaped by the tools of the male semen. In this way, the workshop analogy ascribes to the male and female active and passive roles in reproduction.

According to Aristotle, menstrual blood was the female equivalent to the seminal fluid provided by males; however, it was an imperfect version. He makes this clear in his description of seminal fluid in the body:

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[74] "*Quod si mas est ut movens et agens, femina vero, qua femina, ut patiens, sequitur ut ad maris genituram femina non genituram, sed materiam conferat quod et fieri ita apparet: natura menstruorum pro prima materia est*." Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.20. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:340. English translation from Barnes, I:1132.

[75] "*Nec enim mas omnis semen emittit, et quibus emittitur maribus nulla pars foetus hoc est, sicut nec a fabro quicque secedit ad lignorum materiam, necque pars ulla artis fabrilis in eo quod efficitur est, fed forma et species ab illo per motum materiam subit, atque alia, in qua forma et continentur, nec minus scientia movent manus, aut aliud quidpiam membrum, motu certae qualitatis, diverso quidem, si ab illis diversum quid procreandum est, eodem vero, si idem. Manus autem instrumentaque materiam movent. Ita natura etiam maris apud eos qui semen emittunt utitur eo semine quasi instrumento, et actu habente motum: ut in operibus artium instrumenta movent; in illis enim quodmmodo motus ab arte provenit*." Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.22. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:342. English translation from Barnes, I:1134.

> But since it is from the blood, when concocted and somehow divided up, that each part of the body is made, and since the semen if properly concocted is quite of a different character from the blood, when it is separated from it, but if not properly concocted has been known in some cases to issue a bloody condition if one forces oneself too often to coition, therefore it is plain that semen will be a residue of the nutriment when reduced to blood, being that which is finally distributed to the parts of the body…. But since it is necessary that the weaker animal also should have a residue greater in quantity and less concocted, and that being of such a nature it should be a mass of sanguineous liquid, and since that which has by nature a smaller portion of heat is weaker, and since it has already been stated that such is the character of the female.... [i]t is plain then, that menstrual discharge is a residue, and that it is analogous in females to the semen in males.[76]

Aristotle explains that both male semen and female menstrual blood are residues of nutriment in the body which have a role in the discharge of superfluity and in generation. Male semen is purified by the heat of the masculine body, which gives it its white colour and its potency as the active power in the creation of the foetus. The menses provided an unconcocted, bloody seed, which is worked upon by the perfect seed provided by the male.[77]

Aristotle depicted the womb's container role as being a distinguishing characteristic of the female body in reproduction. He wrote that in all animals, the male is "that which generates *in another*" and the female is "that which generates *in itself*."[78] He explains that because the female is that which holds what it generates, and the male is the outside creator,

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[76] "*sed cum ex sanguine concocto digestoque modo quodam pars quaeque gignatur, semen autem concoctum diversum a sanguine secernatur verum inconcoctum atque tunc emissum,ubi per vim aliquis saepius re venera utitur, cruentum iam aliquibus prodierit, constat semen esse excrementum alimenti sanguinei, quod ultimum in membra digeritur…. Sed cum infermioris plus excrementi, minusque concotum fieri, idque copiam cruenti humoris esse necesse sit: infirmius autem naturam est, quod minus caloris adipiscitur, taleque foemina sit, ut antea dictum est….menstrua igitur excrementum esse, et marium geniturae respondere feminarum menstrua….*" Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.19. in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:336-37. English translation from Barnes, I:1128.

[77] He compares the impure state of menstrual blood to the nutriment in fruit trees which needs to be mixed with, and worked upon by pure nutriment to produce fruits: "*Sunt menstrua semen non purum, sed indigens confectionis: quomodo in fructuum generatione ubi nondum dispensatum est, inest quidem alimentum, sed confectionem ad puritatem desiderat, quamobrem illa, si geniturae admisceatur, hoc vero, si alimento sincero, illa, inquam, generant, hoc vero alit.*" Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.20. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:339. Cf. Barnes, I:1130

[78] "*Mas id est quod in alterum generare potest, ut dictum iam est, femina vero quod in se ipsum.*" Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.2,Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:320. Cf. Barnes I:1112-13.

"in the macrocosm, also men think of earth as female and a mother, but address heaven and the sun and other like entities as progenitors and fathers."[79] In this paradigm, the female body performed an essential role in generation. Aristotle argues that nature determined that the uterus should function as a container, by placing it on the inside of the body, unlike the testicles in many male animals, so that it could guard, shelter and concoct the foetus.[80] He explains that a healthy uterus ought to open quickly and with prompt obedience in order to receive the male semen.[81] His descriptions of the uterus suggest that it is a container that must actively hold onto and nurture the offspring.

Aristotle described what he saw as the attractive capability of the female body, especially the uterus and the breasts, through analogies with other objects in the natural world that have attractive, or drawing, properties. He considered the shape and composition of the breasts and uterus in order to explain how they operated with experiential evidence drawn from his comparisons. For example, in order to account for how the semen, deposited in the vagina during intercourse, makes its way into the enclosure of the uterus, Aristotle writes that it has a similar shape to the nose and draws in semen the same way the nose draws in breath, through a narrow passage leading to a larger inner space.[82] Further evidence that the uterus is able to draw in material is provided by women who claim, according to Aristotle, that when they have erotic dreams, they wake up dry.[83] The womb's method for attracting fluids was also shown to follow the same principles by which a cupping-glass draws blood to the surface:

> The discharge and collection of the menstrual blood also excite heat in this part [the uterus]. Hence it acts like cone-shaped vessels which, when they

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[79] "*Quamobrem in universo quoque naturam terrae, quasi foeminam matremque statuunt: coelum autem et solem et reliqua generis eiusdem nomine genitoris patrisque appellant.*" Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.2, Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:320. English translation from Barnes, I:1112.

[80] "*Cur autem uterus aut vulvas idem omnia intus habeant, testes alia extra alia intus, causa est situs vulvae interioris omnibus communis, quod utero contineantur id quod gignitur, idque custodiam, operimentum et concoctionem desideret, locus autem exterioris corporis et frigidus est et offensioni expositus.*" Aristotle *De generatione animalium*, 1.12. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:326. Cf. Barnes, I:1117.

[81] Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 7.4; 10.1 in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:138, 210.

[82] Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 10.5. Latin translation from the Greek from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:215. Cf. Barnes, I:991.

[83] Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 10.7. Cf. Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:216. Cf. Barnes, I:991.

> have been washed out with hot water, their mouth being turned downwards, draw water into themselves.[84]

The analogies of the wombs attractive qualities set the stage for late medieval descriptions of the uterus as "greedy" for semen, the empty container seeking to be filled.

Aristotle also claimed that the breasts had an attractive power which was understood by analogy with sponges. Like the Hippocratic authors, he describes the flesh of the breasts as "spongy," saying that its attractive power is so strong that it pulls in not only moisture but can even draw in hair if it is swallowed while drinking.[85]

For Aristotle, women's inferior nature could be explained by comparing their physical form to that of men. He describes male and female as opposites in many of their features, which he frequently traces back to their positions in the hot/dry and wet/cold spectrum. In generation, women's inferior make-up limits them to the passive role of providing material to be formed by the male active force. Aristotle contrasts the impotence of women's menstrual blood with the analogous, but perfected, male semen. His understanding of women's role as a receptive one is reflected in the analogies which he uses to describe the uterus and the breasts as organs which are active in drawing into themselves.

2.2.3. Galen.

Galen of Pergamum (ca. 130 C. E.-ca. 200 C. E.) was a prolific writer who produced a huge body of writing that integrated previous authorities, in particular the Hippocratic writers, and covered many aspects of medical knowledge, including descriptive studies of anatomy and physiology, philosophical works on embryology, and practical treatises on everything from diagnostics and prognostics to dietics and pharmacology. Galen's works are united by his reliance on observation and logic to support his claims. One of his key

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[84] "*Trahit autem genituram hic locus suo calore atque menstruorum secessio et confluvium fomitem in ea parte caloris parat, ita ut eodem modo attrahat, quo vasa non picata, calida aqua lota, aquam in se trahunt ore inverso*." Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 2.4. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*,, III:357. English translation from Barnes, I:1147.

[85] "*tota enim mamma adeo spongiosa est, ut etiam hausto in potu pilum forte hauserit mulier, dolor moveatur in mammis: quod malum pilare appellant: nec sedatur, donec pilus vel pressus exeat sponte, vel cum lacte exsugatur*." Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 7.11. Latin from Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, I:144. Cf. Barnes, I:921.

convictions, which he shares with Aristotle, is that "nature does nothing in vain." Having identified woman's shortcomings, he sought to find the reason for her biological inferiority.

Galen challenged the Aristotelian theory of generation which held that women did not contribute active semen to reproduction.[86] He believed that, for conception to occur, both parents had to contribute seminal matter. For Galen, the theory of two seeds was a logical conclusion derived from his understanding of the sexes as two comparable versions of a single body model, which differ only in respect to perfection. This has been dubbed, by Thomas Laqueur, the "one-sex model."[87] The metaphors and analogies found in Galenic descriptions of female reproductive anatomy, and his recommendations for how to treat women's health complaints, correspond to his theories about female semen and likeness between the sexes.

Within his model of equivalence between the sexes, Galen set up a dichotomy between perfect and less perfect, which he explained with an analogy taken from the animal kingdom. He argued that men and women had fundamentally the same bodies, but they differed according to their natures. He examined the question of the difference between the sexes in *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*.[88] He wrote that women are different from men in two important ways. First, they are colder, which indicates that they are less active and less perfect (*imperfectior*).[89] Second, they are anatomically different as a result of their essential difference in heat. He writes that, although women have the same parts as men, women have these parts hidden in the body.[90] The testicles of women (the ovaries), he explains, are comparable to the eyes of a mole, which are less perfect than the eyes of other

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[86] Aristotle's theory has been described as the "one-seed model" and Galen's theory the "two seed model" by historians, such as Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir*, 70; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 15-22; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 38-41; John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 94-6.

[87] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, Cf. 25ff.

[88] Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:158-65. For an English translation (from the Greek) see, Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body: de usu partium*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May, 2 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), II, 628-36.

[89] "*Est igitur foemina mare imperfectior, una quidem ac prima ratione, quia frigidior*." Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:159. For an English translation, see May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 628.

[90] "*Omnes, igitur quae viris insunt partes, in mulieribus etiam reperias, nisi in eo duntaxat discrepent,* (*quod in hoc toto sermone tenere memoria oportet*,) *quod in mulieribus quidem partes hae intus sunt conditae, in viris autem sunt extra ad nuncupatum periaeum; utras enim harum priores mente voles concipere, mulierum quidem extra evertendo, virorum autem velut introverto atque replicando, omnes sibi inter se similes invenias*." Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:159. For an English translation, see May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 628.

animals because they did not completely form when the animal was still a foetus.[91] However, he believes that they still produce a type of seminal fluid, comparable to male semen, although it is an imperfect one.

Galen argued that female semen and menstruation are two separate fluids. He established that women and men both contribute analogous seminal fluids to generation on the basis of the similarities which he saw in the reproductive organs of both sexes. Both men and women had testicles, therefore, they both must emit seed. That women's semen is "imperfect" compared to men's was evident to Galen, because, as he saw it, it was produced by a colder body with smaller "testicles" than that which was produced in men. Thus, male semen was "thick, abundant and warm,"[92] while women's semen was less concocted and less elaborated, and therefore "less perfect."[93] He explains that male semen is whiter because the male testicles are able to better purify it in the spermatic vessels.[94] In this model, menstruation was not unconcocted semen, as Aristotle had it, but it did have an important function in generation. Galen explained that the surplus of the body's nutriment, which collected in women's bodies as menstrual blood, supplied the foetus with the food it needed to grow in the uterus.[95] Thus, he writes that woman both "accumulates an excess of useful nutriment [the menses], and has imperfect semen."[96]

Galen claimed that women's imperfection is necessary for generation. He argued, "You ought not to think that our Creator would purposely make half the whole race imperfect

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[91] "*Cuiusmodi et in talparum oculis accidere videas; hae enim vitreum ac crystallinum humorem etiam habent; et praetera tunicas his circumdatas (quas ortas a meningibus essed diximus) non minus habent, quam animalia, quae oculis utuntur; sed neque eis aperti fuerunt oculi, neque foras prodierunt, sed ibi imperfecti fuerunt relicti, similes eorum oculis, qui utero adhuc geruntur, manentes…. nam quemadmodum talpa oculos habet imperfectos, non tamen imperfectos aeque, ut quibus animalibus ne ipsorum quidem omnino ulla est delineation, sic et mulier partibus genitalibus viro est imperfectior; partes enim ipsius formatae intus fuerunt, dum ipsa utero adhuc gestaretur; quum autem extare et foras emicare prae caloris imbecillitate non possent…*." Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:160-62. For an English translation, see May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 628-30.

[92] "*[semen in masculis] sit multum, ac crassum et calidum.*" Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:165. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 632.

[93] "*imperfectius autem testes foeminarum id efficiunt, ut qui minores sint ac frigidiores, minusque exacte coctum humorem excipiant.*" Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.10, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:184. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 642.

[94] Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.10, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:184-5. English translation in May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 641-42.

[95] Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:163. English translation in May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 631.

[96] Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:164. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body*, II, 632.

and, as it were, mutilated, unless there was to be some great advantage in such a mutilation."[97] Women's coldness means that they are not able to efficiently "cook" their food, so they have a surplus of nutriment which is necessary to feed a foetus. Their inverted genitalia, another result of female coldness, create a space to receive and retain sperm and nourish the developing foetus. Finally, their smaller "testes" make it impossible for them to generate semen which is potent enough for them to generate independently.[98] Thus, both "perfect" male sex and the "imperfect" female sex are equally important in order for the species to reproduce.

In Galen's descriptions of the roles of the uterus, menstruation, and female semen in women's health, he frequently revealed his understanding of how they work by analogy. He compared the uterus to other organs which act as containers in the body, the stomach and bladder, in particular. He portrayed the uterus as a functional container, which has formative role in generation and a therapeutic one in women's health. He also viewed the uterus as the potential site of many serious health problems in women because of its ability to act as a container for corruption. He saw menstruation and lactation as performing similar functions in generation and women's health and associated them with foods and also with other purifying evacuations of the body.

Galen adapted Aristotle's craftsman metaphor to suit his own needs. In his tract, *On Semen*, he writes:

> [A]t the initial generation from semen the fluid out of which the [embryonic] vessels were fashioned was still in a mass, and its craftsman was two-fold: the power in the semen itself and the power in the vessels of the uterus in which (the semen) fell. . . . It is no wonder, then, that the first organs of nature are quickly formed in foetuses because of the abundance and excellence of the material and the cooperation of the craftsmen that fashion them.[99]

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[97] "*Nec credendum est, opisicem partem totius generis nostrile dimidiam sponte imperfectam ac velut mancam fuisse facturam, nisi imperfectionem hanc magnam quidam usus fuisset secuturus.*" Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.6, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:162. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, II, 630.

[98] *Ibid*.

[99] "*Verum juxta primam ex semine generationem coacervatus adhuc est humor, ex quo vasa ipsa formantur. Opifex antem ipsius duplex est, tum factas quae in ipso semine est, tum quae in uteri vasis, quibus allapsum est….Nihil itaque mirum est prima naturae organa velociter in foetibus formari tum ob materiae copiam simulque praesantiam, tum ob opificum ipsorum circa actionem efficaciam.*" Galen, *De semine*, 1.13, in Kühn,

Here, we find a striking contrast to Aristotle. The semen forms part of the material substance of the foetus and it shares the creative role with the uterus.[100]

Galen argued that the uterus was an organ with a powerful retentive quality, and addressed the problem that, as such, the organ could become a container for corrupt and harmful substances it was designed to collect and expel. Galen believed that both menstruation and the female seminal fluid could be held in the body, begin to putrefy, and have an extremely toxic effect. In *On the Affected Parts*, Galen describes an illness, called "hysteria," or uterine suffocation, which, he says, affects many women. The symptoms include a loss of responsiveness, a weak, almost imperceptible pulse, a slowing of the respiration to the point that it seems as if they are not breathing at all, and, in some cases, contraction of the limbs.[101] With these symptoms, the afflicted women are often mistaken for dead; thus, Galen recommends that the physician hold some wool in front of the patient's nose to check for breathing. In order to determine the cause of the illness, Galen examines the evidence which is known from the cases where it has occurred: "It is generally agreed upon that this disease mostly affects widows, and particularly those who previously menstruated regularly, had been pregnant and were eager to have intercourse, but were now deprived of all this."[102] From this, he deduces that "the retention of semen does greater harm to the body than the suppression of menstrual flow, [especially] in persons who have an abundance of poorly conditioned humors, who lead a lazy life, and who initially had indulged quite frequently in sexual relations but suddenly stopped the previous habit."[103] Then, he

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Opera omnia, IV:560-61. English translation (from the Greek) from Galen, *On Semen*, trans. Phillip De Lacy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 113.

[100] Galen also argued, against Aristotle, that both male and female semen combined to form the foetus, although he agreed with the philosopher that the female contribution was nutritive rather than formative: "*Quando igitur sub idem tempus foemina simul cum mare semen emiserit, semen per utrumque cornu ejectum et in medium uteri spatium delatum simul quidem oblinit vias, simul vero pervenit ad macsculi semen, ipsumque etiam huic miscetur, et per membranas mutuo innectuntur, quas tunc in propria profectione ipsum mulieris semen produxit, ut totam genituram amplectens hunc foetui usum exhiberet, et ut veluti alimentum quoddam masculo semini fieret*." Galen, *De semine*, 1.7, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:536. Cf. De Lacy, *On Semen*, 87.

[101] Galen, *De locis affectis*, 6.5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, VIII:414. For an English translation (from the Greek) see Galen, *On the Affected Parts: Translation from the Greek Text with Explanatory Notes*, trans. Rudolph E. Siegel (New York: S. Karger, 1976), 183.

[102] "*Convenit inter omnes hunc affectum magna ex parte viduis evenire, iisque maxime, quae quum antea probe purgarentur ac parerent, atque virorum concubitu gauderent, omnibus his fuerint privateae*." Galen, *De locis affectis*, 6.5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, VIII:417. English translation from Siegel, *On the Affected Parts*, 184.

[103] "*Haec ergo consideranti mihi apud me visa est longe major ex retento semine quam menstruis corporis noxa evenire posse, quibus corporibus ipsum suapte natura deterioris succi est ac copiosius, et qui in otio degunt, quique quum antea nihil ad libidinem reliqui fecissent, affatim continere coeperunt*." Galen, *De locis affectis*, 6.5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, VIII:418-19. English translation from Siegel, *On the Affected Parts*, 184.

argues, a disturbance of the humours in the body, leading to ill-composed semen or menstrual discharge, can have the same effect as a deadly poison if it becomes retained in the uterus.

Following the Hippocratic authors, Galen understood the menstrual blood to be a superfluity which had a therapeutic effect in its expulsion. He compared it with other purgations of the body, both those which were believed to occur naturally as part of the body's system for re-establishing balance, and those brought about by a physician in order to artificially induce this restorative process. Menstruation, he argued, is nature's response to remedy the weaknesses of the female sex. He wrote the following about menstruation in his treatise on bloodletting:

> Does [nature] not evacuate all women every month, by pouring forth the superfluity of the blood? It is necessary in my opinion that the female sex, who stay indoors, neither engaging in strenuous labor nor exposing themselves to direct sunlight –both factors conducive to the development of plethos [excess blood]—should have a natural remedy by which it is evacuated.[104]

Moreover, when menstruation did not occur, such as during pregnancy, the superfluous blood which accumulates in women found other ways to exit the body, for example, through "the cleansing that follows childbirth, although the *conceptus* itself is also an evacuation, since it is nourished from the blood of the uterus; and [through] the development of milk in the breasts after delivery."[105] Like the Hippocratic physicians, Galen compared menstruation to other forms of bleeding which were understood to be expulsions of superfluities, such as haemorrhoids:

> For not merely once or twice, but frequently, we have observed dropsy produced by chronic haemorrhoids which have been suppressed, or which, through immoderate bleeding, have given the patient a severe chill; similarly in women, the complete disappearance of the monthly discharge, or an undue

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[104] Galen, *De venae sectione adversus Erasistratum*, 5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, XI:164. English translation (from the Greek) from Galen, *Galen on Bloodletting: A study of the origins, development, and validity of his opinions, with a translation of the three works*, ed. Peter Brain, trans. Peter Brain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 26.

[105] Galen, *De venae sectione adversus Erasistratum*, 5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, XI:164. English translation from Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 25-6.

> evacuation such as is caused by violent bleeding from the womb, often provoke dropsy.[106]

Galen believed that regular evacuation of excess blood was essential to women's health. Menstruation was salutary and when it did not occur, unless the woman was pregnant or lactating, he prescribed venesection to bring about some curative evacuation.[107]

Like the other Hellenistic authors, Galen perceived breast milk to be a transformed version of menstrual blood. In *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, he explained that the uterus and the breasts are connected by common veins so that when the infant is still in the foetal stage, it can be nourished by surplus nutriment in the uterus, and after it has been born, it can be nourished by the same nutriment that has been elaborated in the breasts. He argues that, "this is the reason why the female cannot menstruate properly and give suck at the same time; for one part is always dried up when the blood turns toward the other."[108] Because he believed that breast milk was mutually exclusive with uterine blood, Galen warned that the breasts would dry up if the mother became pregnant, because the excess nutriment would be diverted to the feed the foetus.[109] Since they are both residues of nutriment in the body, menstruation and breast milk are both useful for purging the body, as well as supplying food to offspring.

Galen argued that breast milk was a substance fashioned by Nature because in infancy we are required to have an abundance of nourishing food. Nature's design is evident to Galen in the placement and qualities of the breasts. Since they are situated near the heart, which he calls the source of heat in animals, they can use this heat to make produce a

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[106] "*Siquidem ex diuturnis haemorrhoidibus vel suppressis vel immodica profusion hominem ad extremam frigiditatem ducentibus non semel, aut bis, sed saepe iam factum hydropem vidi; sicut mulieribus quoque tum menstruae purgationis omnimoda cessatio, tum immodica vacuatio, quum scilicet uteri nimio sanguinis profluvio laborarunt, saepe hydropem accersiverunt…*" Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 2.8, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:109-10. English translation from Brook, *On the Natural Faculties*, 171.

[107] Galen, *De curandi ratione per venae sectionem* 11, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, XI:283. For English translation, see Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 83.

[108] "*Quae causa est, cur eodem tempore menstrua velle procedere nequeant, et foemina lactare; altera enim pars, dum sanguis ad alteram transfertur, sicca semper relinqitur.*" Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 14.8, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:176-77. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, II, 638.

[109] Galen, *De sanitate tuenda*, 1.9, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, VI:46. For an English translation (from the Greek), see Galen, *Hygiene*, trans. Robert Montraville Green (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1951), 29.

perfectly concocted version of the surplus blood, and since they are in the front of the body, they can easily absorb and hold copious amounts of this valuable fluid.[110]

In his treatise on *Hygiene*, Galen reveals that, since breast milk is a residue of the body, its quality is connected to the breastfeeding woman's health. Thus, a mother has to be careful lest humoural imbalance lead to poor quality milk. He recommends to women who are nursing that they take care of their food, drink, sleep, sexual activities, and exercise so that they will avoid a build up of yellow or black bile, or phlegm which will harm the milk.[111] He teaches that one can tell if a woman is unhealthy by studying the milk she produces. He describes good milk as that which is white, somewhat thick and sweet to smell and taste, and bad milk as variably coloured, too thick or too thin, and tasting of brine.[112] Galen writes that the quality of the milk can indicate whether the mother has a disease that would require a nurse to be hired so that the infant does not come to harm because of it.[113]

2.2.4. Soranus.

Soranus (98 C.E.-138 C.E.) lived in the century before Galen, and although he was aquainted with the works of the Hippocratic doctors, he drew different conclusions about causes of health and disease in the body. Soranus belonged to the Methodist school of physicians, who rejected humoral theory in favour of their theory that diseases were caused by constricting or loosening of the pores of the body which allowed atoms to flow.[114] Since this theoretical system was eventually elbowed out by the Galenic system, we know very little about the Methodist beliefs from their own writings. In fact, Galen's diatribes against them are our main source of knowledge of their practices. The few remaining works of Soranus, the *Gynaecology* and perhaps several other works which are available only through the translations of Caelius Aurelianus, are the only extant examples of Methodism. Soranus' gynaecological text fared much better than the other Methodist texts. It continued to have

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[110] Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani*, 7.22, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, III:602-08. English translation from May, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, I, 380-83.
[111] Galen, *De sanitate tuenda*, 1.9, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, VI:45. For an English translation, see Green, *On Hygiene*, 29.
[112] Galen, *De sanitate tuenda*, 1.9, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, vol. VI:47. For an English translation, see Green, *On Hygiene*, 30.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] On the Methodists, see Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 191-3.

influence in the early Middle Ages through adaptations of the book made by Mustio and Caelius Aurelianus.[115] Soranus' *Gynaecology* is full of practical advice. In addition to covering women's health, the treatise also contains an extensive discussion on obstetric and pediatric concerns.

Soranus' description of the parts of the uterus explains their shape and function by comparison with other parts of the body. In his comparison, he associates the female genital organs with male genital organs, and portrays animalistic qualities of the uterus. This is evident in the names which he gives to these parts:

> The uterus has a mouth, a collar, a neck, which all together are called the private parts (*veretrum*).[116] After the end of the private parts, two rising parts on both sides are called shoulders, and following these, the sides, and at the end, the bottom (*fundus*);[117] and all the empty space which is in the middle is called the stomach and the bosom (*sinus*).[118] [119]

Caelius Aurelianus' choice of the word *veretrum* for the vagina, in his translation, is remarkable since it is the only known case of the word being used to designate female private parts. His choice of the masculine label assumes equivalence between the male and female genital organs.[120] Like Galen, Soranus also described the female ovaries by comparing them to male testicles, albeit smaller versions.

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[115] All of my references for *Gynaecia* are to a Late Medieval Latin version of Soranus, compiled from the abbreviated Early Medieval versions of *Gynaecia* by Mustio and Caelianus Aurelianus, and attributed to the latter. Caelius Aurelianus, "*Gynaecia*; Fragments of a Latin version of Soranus' *Gynaecia* from a thirteenth century manuscript," in *Supplements to the Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, ed. Miram F. Drabkin and Israel E. Drabkin (1951).

[116] From *vereor*, this term for the "private parts" was usually used to designate the penis. *Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879).

[117] *Fundus*, meaning bottom part, was used euphemistically to describe the part of the body which held the genitals and excretory orifices. *Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879).

[118] *Sinus*, the word for a hollow, frequently also designates the bosom. *Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1876).

[119] "*habet [matrix] os, collum, cervicem, quorum congestio sive unitas veretrum dicitur. Cuius post finem surgentes partes in ambitum humeri dicuntur, horum sequentia latera, ultimus fundus; omnisque inanitas illa que est in medio venter <et> sinus appellatur.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.12, 4. For an English translation of Soranus' Greek text, see Soranus, *Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 10.

[120] This comparison is emphasized in Soranus' original Greek text, which says that the vagina elongates during sexual intercourse in the same way as the male penis, and collapses when it is not accustomed to intercourse (Cf. Temkin *Gynaecology*, 14, 31); however, the thirteenth-century Latin edition edited by Drabkin and Drabkin does not contain these passages.

Additionally, by naming the parts of the uterus after body parts, Soranus constructs the image of the organ as a small animal. Not only are the parts of the uterus said to ressemble an embodied creature, but it is said to have certain animalistic qualities. For example, the mouth of the uterus could open and shut in order to let substances in and out following external or internal stimuli: "[the mouth] will be more open at times when in the desire or excitement of intercourse for capturing semen; also in the time of [menstrual] purgation when blood exits, and when conception has occurred, [and] the increase of the uterine growth begins."[121] Thus, in desire to let semen into the belly of the uterus, the mouth of the uterus performs the same function as the mouth of the head, when it consumes food, and, in purgation, it opens to allow an eliminative function similar to vomiting.

Soranus assigned the maternal body an active role in shaping the foetus during pregnancy. Unlike the Hippocratic authors and Galen, he argued that the mother imparted both her own qualities and the traits of images conjured in her mind onto the offspring. Thus,

> It ought to be said, rightly, that the condition of the soul can impart shape onto bodies, and moreover, can make the conception deformed. So, in fact, when, during intercourse, women see monkeys, they give birth to infants with similar appearances…. Therefore, so that an unnatural birth might not follow, since from excessive drunkenness the wounded sight suffers lapses, which the Greeks call fantasies, it ought to be that women go into intercourse with sobriety preserved.[122]

Thus, to Soranus, the uterus was much more than a simple container for holding the foetus; in some unexplained way, it tranferred maternal impressions onto the shape of the offspring.

Unlike Hippocratic writers and Galen, Soranus did not believe that the menstrual flow was necessary for women's health. He disputed the belief that menstruation had to be brought about by any means. In his *Gynaecology*, Soranus remarks that it is entirely natural

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[121] "*apertius fit secundum aliqua tempora quomodo in appetentiam aut veneris excitatum rapiendi seminis causa. Item purgationis tempore cum sanguis egreditur, et conceptu facto increscentis uteri sumit au[g]menta*." Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.13, 5. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 10.

[122] "*Merito dicendum quod anime habitudo exortis tradat corporibus formas, et propterea faciat conceptionem dpravari. Sic denique in concubite femine visa simia vultus similes pepererunt…. ut igitur minime portentuosa assequatur nativitas cum a nimia ebretate sauciata labentia patitur visa, que Greci fantasmata vocant, decet feminas sobrietate servata veneris in gremia convenire.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.50, 15-6. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 37-8.

for some women not to menstruate at all.[123] Soranus believed that a physician had to consider a woman's age, her physical activities, and her innate constitution, before determining whether or not amenorrhea was bad for his patient's health. He observed that prepubescent and postmenopausal women, women who sang or who were breastfeeding (both activities considered "drying") and women who were naturally robust, or manly, did not suffer from health problems caused by not menstruating.[124]

Soranus likened the experience of menstruation to illness or drunkenness. He described how a woman can know that her menstrual periods are about to start, providing a list of symptoms: "Frequently, those women who are purged in the customary time of purgation are made lazy. They sometimes feel heaviness and pain in their kidneys, with a sad expression and frequent yawning and constant swelling of their limbs… And sometimes they suffer from nausea and squeamishness with upset stomach."[125] During menstrual periods, Soranus taught, a woman should be treated like a patient who has consumed too much alcohol, or one who has too much mucus in his head:

> Then, often, rest is shown to be beneficial. For just as those who are heavy and full with drunkenness often fall sick by vigorous movement, or just as those who are heavy with a full head, if they use their full voice have pain in those parts, it is the same with the uterus; the material of purgations, excited and pushed back by movements, causes distress and assumes complaints caused by compression.[126]

The superfluities which built up in most women and were released in the menstrual blood were viewed as having a harmful effect on the body, like inebriating drink, or nasal mucus, if they were spread into the body through agitation.

Like his contemporaries, Soranus believed that menstrual blood and breast milk both served as food for the foetus. He argued that maternal breast milk was usually best for the

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[123] Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.28, 8. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 19.
[124] Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.40, 12. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 26.
[125] "*que enim frequenter purgate sunt solito tempore purgationis pigre efficiuntur. Gravidinem aliquando in renibus et dolorem sentiunt cum vultu tristi et oscitatione frequenti et assidua membrorum extensione,… aliquando etiam nauseam et fastidium stomacho commuto patiuntur.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.32, 9. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 20.
[126] "*Tunc sepius requies prodesse probatur. Sicut enim crapula gravati ac pleni forti motu acti sepe cadunt in egritudines, vel ut gravati capite impleto, si plurima voce exercentur, in dolores veniunt eius partis, non aliter matrix purgationis materia reflexa motibus exercita labores facit atque querelas assumit densitate confectas.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.38, 11. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 21-22.

newborn because it was the same substance that had nourished him in the womb.[127] However, he suggested that breastfeeding was draining for the mother because she expended too much of her nutriment in feeding the child during pregnancy and afterwards: "But, since the woman nourishing the foetus is known to run out completely and to decline into early old age, and, since, as luck would have it, the preganant woman divides the food from one mouth to two animals, the mother appears to lose the moisture from her own body."[128] Thus, in pregnancy and breastfeeding, women sacrificed their health for that of their offspring.

Breast milk could also be harmful substance to the foetus depending on its source. Although he viewed maternal breast milk as generally the most suitable food for infants, Soranus believed that breast milk which was agitated by the exertions of childbirth and by the loss of postpartum blood was unwholesome. Thus, he advised new mothers to hire a nurse and wait twenty days until they breastfeed their children.[129] Moreover, in the selection of a wet nurse, one had to determine if she had qualities which would indicate that her milk would be poor food for the infant. If a nurse was badly nourished, or drank too much alcohol, her infirmities would lead to bad milk. Moreover, Soranus believed that behavioural traits could be passed on through the milk. Thus, he writes, "the nurse should not be prone to anger, since the nursling often resembles the nurse, and therefore, an angry [infant] comes from [a nurse] prone to anger, and a gentle [infant] from gentle [a nurse]."[130] Accordingly, the purity of breast milk was a sign of the health and good habits of the nurse.

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[127] "*Est enim pre ceteris melius materno lacte nutriri infantem, siquidem maior est diligentia matri in suos fetus, et eadem nutrimenti natura ut quo alebatur in uterus, eodem lactis nutriatur succo.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.124, 44. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 90.

[128] "*set quia mulier suum fetum nutriens perfecte deficere conprobatur ac precipiti senectute marcescere, et cum forte gravida uno ex ore eundem duobus animalibus dividat cibum, et propterea de corpore proprio succum mater perdere videatur…*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.124, 44. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 90.

[129] "*Maternum enim lac usque ad XX dies es separandum, quia de labore partus et tubore et purgatione malum est et a pingue et indigestibile post partum.*" Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.122, 44. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 89.

[130] "*pretera nutrix non sit iracunda, siquidem simulantur nutriti sepe nutricibus, et propterea animosi ex iracundis, mites vero ex mitibus educentur*." Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.128, 47. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 93.

2.3. Women's reproductive bodies in medieval scientific and medical writing.

Even though the transmission of the corpus of Greek scientific and medical writing to medieval libraries and schools happened indirectly, incompletely, and often very late, many of the metaphors which they used to describe female reproductive functions had a more continuous history in the Middle Ages, indicating the strength of the hold of these ideas on premodern understanding of women's physiology. The medieval inheritance of the humoral system for describing the body inevitably brought along with it classical definitions of woman as colder, moister, and of inferior composition to man. Container metaphors, common throughout Hellenistic descriptions of the uterus, were considered apt for describing female anatomy by gynaecological writers throughout the medieval period. Moreover, medieval medicine embraced classical explanations of the menstrual blood and breast milk, even contradictory ones. For example, both the teaching that they are food and the teaching that they are poison appeared in medieval texts. In this section, we will examine these and other maternal metaphors as they appeared in late-medieval texts and the implications that they make about women, for example whether they are naturally different from men or sickly and inferior to them, or whether, as mothers, they are good or bad to their children.

2.3.1. Representations of pregnancy.

From the point of view of the natural scientist, pregnancy is an essential, and somewhat marvelous, function of nature for the development of the species. From the point of view of the medical writer, it is a period of hazards and concerns. Medieval descriptions of the uterus, the organ responsible for both the wonderful and perilous aspects of birth, reflect medieval science's attempts to grasp what occurred in the womb during and after conception, and medieval medicine's concern to alleviate the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth. Scientific and medical literature of the Middle Ages contain descriptions of pregnancy both as a health-bringing and disease-causing process. Representations of the uterus were likewise divided into contrasting groups. It was positively associated with fertility, depicted as a

formative influence in the creation of the embryo, and assigned nurturing qualities. However, it was also associated with corruption, illness and death, and its influence on the foetus was feared as potentially harmful. These positive and negative symbolic associations connected to the uterus and pregnancy reflect ambivalent attitudes about women which existed in medieval society: woman as sick, inferior, and threatening; but also, woman as fecund, foodbringing, and nurturing.

Medieval medical writers believed that the effect of pregnancy on women's health could be either beneficial or detrimental depending on how one looked at it. Following ancient authorities, many of the medieval authors considered pregnancy and giving birth to be purgative. Aristotle had called the afterbirth the "purgations;"[131] Galen had taught that both the infant, who had been nourished on the body's superfluities, and the fluid lost through postpartum bleeding and lactation, helped to purge the mother's body.[132] The medieval authors expressed this belief in the purgative effect of pregnancy through analogy with the cupping-glass.[133] Hildegard of Bingen[134] compared the force of the act of conception with the attractive power of therapeutic tools for bloodletting: "When a woman has received male semen, the conception of this semen is so powerful that it attracts her entire menstrual blood, like a tube or a cupping-glass that the bloodletter places on a person's flesh for drawing much blood and waste matter."[135] Albert the Great[136] wrote that the foetus used the umbilical cord like a cupping-glass in order to draw the woman's superfluous nutriment to

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[131] "*purgationes*" Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 7.11, in Aristotle *Opera omnia*, III:144.

[132] Galen, *De venaesectione adversus Erasistratum*, 5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, XI:164. English translation from Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 25-6.

[133] The image of the uterus as a cupping glass has ancient roots. Cf. Hippocrates, *De veteri medicina*, 39 (Latin in *Opera omnia*, I:37); Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.3, 1.

[134] Hildegard, a twelfth-century German abbess and natural scientist, composed two works on medicine, the *Physica*, and *Causae et curae*, which provide important information of the medicine practiced in her convent. Hildegard also wrote important religious and mystical writings, and frequently, her religious beliefs enter into her medical writing. Cf. Ernst H. Soudek, "Hildegard of Bingen, St.," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VI, 228-9.

[135] "*Mulier namque cum virile semen conceperit, conceptus seminis illius tam fortis est, quod omnem menstruum sanguinem mulieris sibi attrahit, velut fistula aut ventosa, quam minutor ad carnem hominis ponit, multum sanguinem et tabem ad se ducit.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, trans. Paul Kaiser (Basel: Basler-Hildegard-Gesellschaft, 1980), 109. English translation from Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegard of Bingen on Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et cure*, trans. Margret Berger (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 84.

[136] Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great; *ca*. 1200-1280) was a Dominican bishop, well-known for his scholastic writing, especially his works in natural philosophy and metaphysics. His scientific work *De animalibus* was strongly influenced by Aristotle's writing on animals. Cf. James A. Weisheipl "Albertus Magnus, Saint," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, I, 126-130.

itself and the womb.[137] He adds that a male foetus will draw more blood than a female foetus and will begin to do so sooner in its development because the male has greater heat and power; thus, a woman who is pregnant with a male will be better purified and as a result feel healthier, have better colouring, and not suffer from a build-up of moisture in her limbs which is common to women who have conceived a female.[138]

In other contexts, pregnancy was also believed to expose women to a great many health problems, and to bring long-term detrimental consequences for women's health. Ancient medical writers, the Hippocratic writers and Soranus especially, wrote about the afflictions which befell women as a result of pregnancy and parturition.[139] Soranus claimed that pregnancies bring about "deterioration and debility of the body, and premature old age."[140] Medieval gynaecological texts call attention to the hazards of pregnancy. The introduction to the *Trotula*,[141] a gynaecological text from twelfth-century Salerno which had great popularity in later medieval Europe, explains that "because women are weaker than men and because they are most frequently afflicted in childbirth, diseases very often abound in them especially around the organs devoted to the works of Nature."[142] The treatise includes treatments for a variety of complications following childbirth, including pain of the womb following miscarriage, and the exit of the womb, rupture of the genitals, and haemorrhoids, all as a result of parturition.[143] Although, on the one hand, pregnancy was seen to have a purifying effect which was helpful to the body, on the other hand, it was considered

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[137] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.1.3. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Augustus Borgnet, 38 vols. (Paris: Ludovicum Vives, 1891), XI:504. For an English translation see Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 785.

[138] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.1.3, in *Opera omnia*, XI:504. English translation in Kitchell Jr. and Resnick, *On Animals*, 788.

[139] Hippocrates and Soranus both wrote about problems that stemmed from pregnancy, covering miscarriage, expulsion of the foetus, uterine displacement as a result of pregnancy, flux following childbirth, among other conditions. Cf. Hippocrates, *De morbis mulierum, liber primus*, 67-72; 103-128 (in *Opera omnia*, II:447ff.; 494ff); for Soranus' discussion, see Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 2.79, 98ff.

[140] "*Quod autem marcorem corporis et debilitatem et precipitem senectutem conceptions ingerant*…." Caelius Aurelianus, *Gynaecia*, 1.52, 17. Cf. Temkin, *Gynecology*, 41.

[141] The *Trotula* was ascribed to a woman named Trota who is said to have practiced medicine in twelfth-century Salerno. Although a woman physician named Trota is believed to have written a medical manual, the *Trotula* was not composed by her, and is likely the work of several male physicians educated in the teachings of Salernitan the medical school. Cf. John F. Benton, "Trota and Trotula," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, XII:213-14. Monica Green has studied the *Trotula* and women's medicine in the medieval period extensively and has increased greatly scholarly understanding of this work. Cf. Monica H. Green, ed., *The Trotula: A medieval compendium of women's medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[142] "*Quoniam ergo mulieres viris sunt debiliores natura, et quia in partu sepissime molestantur, hinc est quare in eis sepius habundant egritudines, et maxime circa membra operi nature debita*." Latin text and English translation from Green, *Trotula*, 70-1.

[143] *Ibid*., 157-61.

to be difficult on the body. Bernard of Gordon[144] expressed the predicament for women when he wrote, in *Lily of Medicine*, that, "the woman who is able to be pregnant lives longer but ages faster, [while] the sterile woman is sicklier."[145] Bartholomew Anglicus provides a different positive outcome related to pain in childbearing; he writes that the more a woman suffers in childbirth, the more she will love her infant and the more diligently she will care for it.[146]

Like the Hellenistic writers, medieval authors of medical and scientific treatises which considered the topic of pregnancy explained the use and nature of the uterus through a variety of different container analogies. Through these analogies the uterus in pregnancy is associated with fertility, and formative and nurturing abilities, but also with the unruliness of the body, and unclean and hazardous spaces.

Medieval authors compared the uterus of a pregnant woman to trees and the earth in order to explain how the organ contained the foetus and transmitted nutriment to it. In addition to explaining the relationship between maternal body and the foetus, agricultural metaphors related the pregnant womb to images of natural fertility. One common analogy is that the uterus is like a tree from which the foetus hangs.[147] This comparison entered into scientific language in the naming of the place where the placenta joins to the uterus, *cotyledon*. The word is "Greek for cup-shaped depression,"[148] and it is the name given by Aristotle to describe the place in which the umbilicus attaches to the navel of the infant.[149] Albert the Great uses the term, which also describes the part of the stem of a plant which holds and transmits nutriment to the fruit, in his description of the uterus.[150] He connects the

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[144] Bernard of Gordon (*ca*. 1258-*ca*. 1315) was a teacher at the renowned school of medicine at Montpellier. His *Lilium medicinae* (*Lily of Medicine*) was based on his scholastic study of medicine and was most likely intended for use in classroom instruction. Cf. Luke Demaitre, *Doctor Bernard de Gordon: Professor and practitioner* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980).

[145] "*mulier fecunda magis vivit sana sed citius est anus. Mulier sterilis magis est egrotativa*." Bernard of Gordon, "*Practica, seu, Lilium medicinae*," in *French Books Printed before 1601; AC 20.FT.35* (1491), 7.14.

[146] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 6.7, p. 241.

[147] Cf. Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir*, 39-40.

[148] The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following definitions: "*Ety*. Gr. A cup-shaped cavity. / *Phys*. Formerly applied to the less separated lobules of the human and other discoid or diffuse placentae. / *Bot*. The primary leaf in the embryo of higher plants…. [Linnaeus used the term to refer] to those seed-leaves which are not themselves depositories of nutriment, but act as organs of absorption."

[149] Aristotle, *De historia animalia*, 3.1. In the Latin translation of Aristotle, the word "*acetabula*" is used which also means "cup-shaped part of a plant" (Cf. *Lewis and Short*). Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:37. Cf. Barnes I:812: "the females of horned animals … are furnished with *cotyledons* in the womb when they are pregnant."

[150] "[*embryones*] *adhaerent matrici per coctilidones*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.1.7. in *Opera omnia*, XI:514. On the basis of the term in plant analogy see, Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:800 n.58.

two types of cotyledons by saying that they have the same function in plants and animals, holding the fruit/offspring until it ripens and then releasing it:

> In addition, in those wombs in which the embryo absorbs using cotyledons, the more the embryo grows, the more the cotyledons contract and shrink. This is because all the moisture is absorbed into the body of the foetus in the same way that fruit cotyledons perform a drying function on fruits that have grown and ripened. In the end, they break off from the womb much the same as the cotyledons of the fruits break off from the pore of the tree. The foetus falls as does the fruit.[151]

Albert also writes that the umbilical cord is called a root, because it nourishes the foetus in the same way that roots feed a plant.[152] The analogy of the foetus as a fruit on a tree was used by William of Conches in *Dragmaticon*,[153] in order to answer the question of how the foetus was fed in the uterus: "there are certain nerves in its umbilical cord by which it is attached to the womb, just as an apple is held to the tree by a stalk. Through these nerves blood travels down from the mother's liver, by which the foetus is fed and grows."[154] It is found also in *Trotula*, where it explains the fragility of the foetus in the early stages of pregnancy by comparing it to young fruit: "Galen reports that the foetus is attached to the womb just like fruit to a tree, which, when it proceeds from the flowers is extremely delicate… but when it has grown and become a little mature and adheres firmly to the tree, it will not be destroyed by any minor accident."[155] The same belief was expressed by Aldebrandin of Siena,[156] the

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[151] "*Amplius in matricibus in quibus per coctilidones sugit embryo, quanto magis crescit partus, tanto trahuntur et diminuuntur coctilidones: eo quod totus humor sugitur ad corpus foetus, per eumdem modum quo arescunt cotilidones fructuum auctis et maturatis fructibus, et in fine abrumpuntur a matrice, sicut fructuum coctilidones abrumpuntur a poro arboris: et tunc cadit foetus sicut cadit fructus.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.1.7. in *Opera omnia*, XI:515. English translation from Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:800.

[152] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.2.24. Cf. Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:215.

[153] William of Conches (*ca.* 1080-*ca.*1154) was a master of theology at the cathedral school of Chartres. The *Dragmaticon* was composed as a dialogue in question and answer form, and attempts to answer questions about the universe, geography, living creatures, and human nature. Cf. Wanda Cizewski, "William of Conches," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, XII, 639.

[154] "*Quidam nervi sunt in umbilico illius et cuius fetus, quibus nervis matrici adherent quemadmodum poma cauda sua arbori. Per hos nervos sanguis ab hepate matris descendit, quo partus nutritur et crescit.*" William of Conches, *Guillelmus de Conches Dragmaticon philosophiae*, ed. Italo Ronca, *Corpus Christanorum 152* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 6.9.7, 214.This question and answer appear in a collection of questions-and-answers from the medical school at Salerno and was likely copied from William by the compiler of the *Quesiti Salernitani*, according to Brian Lawn. Cf. Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B24, 15.

[155] "*Refert Galyenus, ita ligatus fetus in matrice sicut fructus in arbore, qui cum procedat a flore tenerrimus est, et ex qualibet occasione corruit Sed cum adultus fuerit et aliquantulum matures et firmiter adheserit arbori, non de levi occasione corruet.*" Latin text and English translation from Green, *Trotula*, 98-99.

thirteenth-century physician, who added that a dead foetus would fall from the womb like a flower from the tree.[157] Alternatively, the umbilical cord was described as the root which extended from the foetus and took up nutriment from the maternal body.[158] These analogies represent pregnancy, and whether or not a foetus is successfully brought to term, as a natural process. They call to mind the flourishing of plants and trees, whose fertility is evident. The uterus as tree or earth is, generally, portrayed as a passive object, from which the foetus takes its food and onto which it adheres with increasing strength.

The uterus is given more of a formative role in foetal development in metaphors which compare it to a mold. William of Conches describes the uterus as containing molds in the shape of foetuses, having "seven little cells impressed with a human figure as [wax] with a seal, so a woman can bear up to seven children and no more at one birth."[159] Although this image is rare, scholastic debates about the role of the uterus in shaping the child reveal that many medieval writers questioned whether the womb had some contribution to shaping the offspring. One explanation given in the *Prose Salernitan Questions*[160] reiterates the common belief that the sex of the embryo was determined by which side of the uterine chamber the semen fell:

> if it was established in the right part [of the uterus] in the area of the liver, the foetus will be hotter, because it is nourished on better and hotter blood, and a male foetus will be formed; if [it falls] in the left, it will be colder, and female;

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[156] Aldebrandin of Siena was a thirteenth-century physician who wrote a treatise in French on preserving health. This work was influenced by Arabic physicians, such as Avicenna and Rhazes, and on the *Isagogue* of Johannitius. Aldebradin de Sienne, *Le régime du corps*, trans. Louis Landouzy and Roger Pépin (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1978).

[157] "*li enfes ki est ou cors de le feme est ausi comme li fruis des arbres, car vous veés premierement ke li flors où li fruis vient qu'il se tient foiblement à l'arbre, et par pau de vent out de pluie chiet, et apriès, quant li fruis engrosse, et il se tient fort, et ne ciet mi volentiers; et quant il voit qu'il est meurs, si chiet ausi comme li flors legierement*." *Ibid*., 71.

[158] "*…the roote by that nutriment takith with hym holdith* [*the conceptus*]" Anonymous, "*De humana natura* (*Liber cerebri*)," in *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium; Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, its texts, language, and scribe*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 268.

[159] "*Septem habet cellulas humana figura ad modum monetae impressas; inde est quod septem nec plures potest mulier uno lecto parere*." William of Conches, *Dragmaticon*, 6.7.8, 209. Translation from William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy (Dragmaticon Philosophiae): Translation of the new latin critical edition*, trans. Italo Ronca and Matthew Curr (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 136.

[160] The question was the primary form of instruction in scholastic universities. The Prose Salernitan questions, published by Brian Lawn, cover a wide aray of scientific and medical topics. Cf. Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*.

> but if [it falls] in the right, some way away from the left, a feminine male [will be formed].[161]

Although the influence of the uterus in these images is passive, they show that, as a container, it was often believed to have some effect on the way the embryo is formed. In the worst case, the womb could fail as a container, close too early, and retain too little of the semen needed to create the child, thus causing the child to be formed, monstrously, out of too little matter.[162]

The pregnant uterus was often described as a type of shelter or nurturing space for the foetus through comparison with various kinds of buildings and warm places. The *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville contain several definitions which depict the uterus as a warm dwelling place. For example, his definition of the "vulva" is that it is the "*valva*" or gateway to the womb through which semen enters and the foetus exits;[163] he says that the womb is called *matrix* "because the foetus is engendered in it, for it fosters the received semen;"[164] and his explanation of the name for "foetus" is that it came from the word "*fovere*," Latin for "to foster, or keep warm," because, "it is still 'being kept warm' in the uterus."[165] In a similar way, Hildegard of Bingen wrote of the placenta and the womb that they form a warming and nourishing shelter for the foetus, "as a man in the domicile of his house."[166] These analogies convey positive, familial connotations.

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[161] "*Spermate in matrice locato oreque eius declauso, si in dextra parte consistit ex vicinitate epatis calidior fit fetus, quia meliori atque calidiori sanguine nutritur, fetus masculus efficitur, si in sinistra est frigidior, femina; si vero in dextra sed aliquantulum versus sinistram, vir muliebris; si in sinistra sed aliquantulum versus dextram, mulier virilis." Ibid*., B24,14.

[162] This is told in Ps-Albertus, "Monstrosity is caused not only by too little matter, but also by a poor disposition of the womb. If the womb is slippery, defective, or harmful, it does not retain all the semen. Instead, it scatters it before the moment when the seed is all collected in a mass and the womb closes by force. Thus too little semen is received from which the fetus ought to be formed. This happens in many ways, however to go into them in detail would take to long, so we shall leave them out here, and say only that in this case the scarcity of matter is caused by the womb." Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 116.

[163] "*Vulva vocata quasi valva, id est ianua ventris, vel quod semen recipiat, vel quod ex ea foetus procedat.*" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 11.1.137 For an English translation, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 240.

[164] "*Matrix dicitur, quod foetus in eo generetur: semen enim receptum confovet…*" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 11.1.136. Translation from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 240.

[165] "*Foetus autem nominatus, quod adhuc in utero foveatur.*" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 11.1.144. Translation from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 240.

[166] "*…pellicula velut vasculum circa eandem formam crescit… ita quod eadem forma in medio eius iacet, ut homo in habitaculo domus suae. At que in eo havet calorem, et adiutorium in eo nutritur de nigro sanguine iecoris mulieris usque ad partum.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 66.

The uterus was also considered a potential container for corruption. Wombs which retained substances that they were meant to expel, such as unfertilized semen or menstrual blood, were believed to cause a wide range of troubles, for example, the disease called "uterine suffocation" by Galen.[167] *Trotula* records that this disease "happens to women because corrupt semen abounds in them excessively, and it is converted into a poisonous nature."[168] Moreover, writers expressed the belief that the uterus could contain poisonous contents that could harm others, not just the woman herself. Albert the Great expressed fear that the infant could be harmed by growing in the waste material of the body:

> It also happens sometimes that a pregnant woman pours forth a soiled young dipped in the superfluities of certain foods which she ate in her cravings. For the womb, needing nourishment for the foetus and being empty, sometimes grows warm and draws a great deal to itself. It then draws the undigested juice of the food, much as kidneys do when they are made quite warm. Then, this juice, because it cannot nourish the infant, clings to it like some sort of filth, adhering to the outside.[169]

Albert's account highlights the tension that exists between the uterus' ascribed functions of drawing waste material from the body and supplying the infant with nourishment. Frequently, men were identified as the victims of the pollution of the womb. The belief that prostitutes spread leprosy led to the following *quaestio* explaining why prostitutes did not contract the disease but could pass it on:

> The womb is a nerve-rich member, dry, hard, and cold. Therefore, the sperm [of a leper], existing there as if congealed, is not dissolved by heat; neither those humours contained in the uterus, nor the uterus itself, are able to be infected by the putrid semen, for which reason the woman is not affected. However, whoever first approaches her [sexually] is infected. For in the action

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[167] Cf. p. 53.

[168] "*Contingit autem haec mulieribus quia sperma nimium corruptum habundat in eis, et in venenosam naturam convertitur.*" Green, ed., *Trotula*, 84-5.

[169] "*Contingit etiam aliquando, quod mulier, praegnans effundit partum sordidum superfluitatibus quorumdam ciborum quos desideranter comedit: eo quod matrix indigens nutrimento foetus quando vacua est, aliquando calefacta multum attrahit, et tunc trahit succum cibi indigestum, sicut faciunt renes quando sunt fortiter calefacti: et tunc ille succus quia cibare infantem non potest, adhaeret ei ut sordities extrinsecus adhaerens.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.1.5. in *Opera omnia*, XI:511. English translation from Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:794.

> of coitus, there comes about a movement of parts, and from this movement, heat is created, and from this heat, the dissolution of sperm takes place. The spirit and humours, therefore, are transmitted to the penis and veins and arteries are both infected through the nerves.[170]

Constantine the African[171] wrote that the male was injured by having sexual intercourse with women who are menstruating, who abstained from sex for a long period of time, or who have yet to menstruate,[172] indicating that men were at risk of coming into contact with superfluities that were released or could build up in the female body. The dangerous contents of women's bodies, and the harm that they could bring to men who have intercourse with them, is also a topic of several discussions in the *Secrets of Women*, a text that was erroneously attributed to Albert the Great.[173] According to the text's author, and, subsequently, its commentators, menstrual blood was a poisonous substance. This belief is expressed through tales of menstruating women who can poison the men with whom they have intercourse, as though they were full of venom, and warnings that menstrual blood causes cancer in the "male member."[174] One commentator on the *Secrets* wrote that the uterus was like a latrine, because it attracted the filth of the body.[175] This latrine/waste container imagery suggest that women's bodies are containers for dangerous material and can

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[170] *"[M]atrix est nervosum membrum, siccum, durum, et frigidum. Sperma [leprosi] igitur ibi existens quasi congelatum, calore non dissolvitur tantum; nec humores in matrice contenti, nec matrix, illos putrido semine possunt infici, quare mulier non efficitur. Qui autem primus ad eam accedit inficitur. In actione enim coitus fit partium motus, ex motu calefactio, ex calefactione illius spermatis fit dissolutio. Spiritus ergo et humores ad virgam transmissi per nervos, et venas, et arterias, inficuntur.*" Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, P116, 249-50.; On the same topic, see also Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B14, 9.

[171] Constantine the African (d. *ca.* 1087) was a converted Chrsitian, who learned medicine in Africa and then moved to Salerno where he taught and translated from Arabic into Latin a large number of medical works. These works bear the influence of ancient Greek medical tradition. Cf. Herbert Bloch, "Constantine the African," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, III, 548.

[172] "*Coitus eciam cum menstruata nocivus, coitus cum ea que se longum abstinuerat, cum ea eciam que nondum menstrua novit.*" Constantinus Africanus, *Constantini Liber de Coitu: El tratado de andrologia de Constantino el Africano*, trans. Enrique Montero Cartelle (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1983), 90.

[173] The author of this popular treatise on women is unknown, but was most likely a monk writing in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The influence of Albertus Magnus on the author of the *De secretis mulierum* (*Secrets of Women*) is evident. Clerical commentaries on the work bear testament to its popularity and provide additional insight into some of the beliefs about women that circulated in the late medieval period. Cf. "Introduction" Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*.

[174] *Ibid*., 129-31.

[175] *Ibid*., 133-34. Compare with Bartholomeus Anglicus who compares the uterus' beneficial expulsive function to a latrine: "*[sanguis menstrualis] in matrice recolligitur tanquam in sentina, a qua si debito modo expulsus fuerit, corpus totum mollificando alleviat…*" Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 4.8, 105.

be hazardous to men who come in contact with them sexually, and to the infants which begin their lives in them.

The analogies of the womb as cupping-glass, as tree or earth, as mold, as home, and as sewer are only a few of a number of images which I have dubbed "container analogies." This category includes analogies of the womb as an oven,[176] as a flask,[177] as a purse,[178] and as a bladder.[179] All of these metaphors bring to mind the womb's ability to hold something, but each also adds additional elements to the description. The analogy of the oven also adds the quality of warmth in describing the uterine environment. The metaphor of the purse highlights the uterus' ability to open, to receive sperm and expel menses and offspring, and to close tightly, to retain infants as they grow, and suggests the value of their human contents. Similarly, the comparisons between the uterus and the bladder draw upon what ancient and medieval medicine saw as the organ's role in expelling superfluities. With these analogies, scientific and medieval writing emphasized the womb's ability to be both permeable and impermeable, to be both open and shut, to retain and expel, according to what it needs.

The ability to act as good container was believed to be an important aspect of woman's role in conception. Out of concern for proper conception, Albert the Great dictated

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[176] The womb as oven is an analogy which led to a range of descriptions of the function of the uterus in pregnancy as "cooking" the semen in order to form an embryo. Avicenna wrote that when the two seeds of the parents have combined in the womb, the heat of the womb creates a protective crust-like skin around them like that which forms around baking bread dough. Avicenna, *Canon*, 3, fen. 21 (Avicenna, *Liber canonis [1507]* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagscuchhandlung, 1964), 361.).This theory of the uterus' warmth as an efficient power in generation was debated, however, on the basis of what were believed to be flaws in this analogy. Aristotelians, like Albertus Magnus and Giles of Rome, were critical of the theory that the heat of the womb performs a formative function in generation, even in the creation of the placenta. The former states that the womb could not be the effective cause of the placenta since it is soft and moist by nature (unlike an oven or roasting pan), and, moreover, "the cause of all things which occur in a *conceptus* is the power in the sperm, unless we should say that is the work of nature resulting from a mover that is outside it." (*De animalibus*, 9.2, 2; Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 806-8.) Giles denies that the womb's heat could form the placenta since he too believed that the male seed was the sole creative operator in the formation of the embryo. He adds that if the heat of the uterus could create a membrane around matter, would not the heat of the stomach do the same to food being concocted in it? (M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception: A Study of the De formatione corporis humani in utero* (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1975), 105.)

[177] "[*Matrix est*] *alchanna vas vinarium sursum habens os amplum, inferius ventrem rotundum et grossum, inter os et ventrem collum gracile et longum.*" William of Conches, *Dragmaticon*, 6.7, 208-9. Cf. William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy (Dragmaticon Philosophiae)*, 136.

[178] Isidore defines the uterus as a pouch from the Latin "*uter*." Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 11.1.135. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus writes, that, upon receiving semen, the womb "closes up like a purse on every side, so that nothing can fall out of it." Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 65.

[179] "*Matrix in foemina est… ad modum vesicae dispositum*." Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 5.49, 206.

that women lie on their backs during sexual intercourse, since if they were on top, the contents of their womb would pour out.[180] Physicians, concerned with explaining the causes of sterility, often blame female infertility on the uterus' inability to receive or to contain semen. Thus, according to the *Trotula*,

> There are some women who are useless for conception, either because they are too lean and thin, or because they are too fat and the flesh surrounding the orifice of the womb constricts it, and it does not permit the seed of the man to enter into [the womb]. Some women have a womb so slippery and smooth that the seed, once it has been received, is not able to be retained inside….[181]

Through association, woman herself, frequently, came to be associated with the container function of her womb. Hildegard of Bingen calls woman "merely a vessel for conceiving and bearing children."[182]

A popular analogy found in medieval scientific writing about women's bodies is that of the uterus as an animate creature. The main source for this analogy was the Hippocratic image of the uterus which wandered about the body causing serious disturbances to the woman's health. Galen had refuted the theory of the "wandering womb" and his explanation for the uterine disorder called *hysteria*, that it was caused by vapours from corrupt seed in the uterus, was the one which dominated Arabic and Latin medical literature; however, the Hippocratic theory continued to crop up here and there.[183] One surprising place in which it survives is in the Hebrew treatise entitled *Galen's Book on the Womb*:

> *On the movement of the womb*. When the womb moves it produces pain, and hard and malign effects. If it is not treated quickly, it provokes ailments there. If it lies under the ribs, it produces distress, and it provokes a hard pain in the heart, and nausea. At times the woman's spittle becomes like vinegar, and her mouth fills with water; her thighs become cold and her tongue and head

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[180] "*Quando autem mulier virum supergreditur, matrix est revoluta: et ideo effunditur id quod est in ipsa.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 10.2.1. in *Opera omnia*, XI: 551-52.

[181] "*Quedam mulieres sunt inutiles ad concipiendum, vel quia nimis tenues sunt et macer, vel quia sunt nimis pingues et caro circumvoluta orificio matricis constringit eam, nec permittit semen viri in eam intrare. Quedam habent matricem ita lenem et lubricam quod semen receptum non potest interius retineri…*" Green, ed., *Trotula*, 94-5.

[182] "*…femina tantum vas est, ut prolem concipiat et pariat…*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 77.

[183] King, "Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates," 56.

> flutter; her colour turns yellow; these phenomena cause her to lose her voice.[184]

Monica Green has shown that a similar belief was found in an early Trotula manuscript: "The womb, like a wild beast of the forest, declines [because of] its sudden evacuation, wandering, as it were, this way and that, whence vehement pain is produced."[185] Moreover, even though most medieval physicians rejected the idea that the womb itself actually travelled around the body, this did not prevent them from recommending scent therapy[186] based on the belief that the womb was attracted to, and repelled by, different scents. The image of the uterus as being an animate inhabitant of a woman's body implies also that woman is vulnerable to its irrational movements within her, and to being ruled not by higher functions of the brain but by the unruly animal which can overwhelm it.

The uterus was also personified as an antagonistic "creature" which functioned according to its own desires. In depictions of its attraction of semen, the uterus was at times even personified as greedy; it was portrayed as something that consumes. The origins of this image of the uterus derive from ancient Hellenistic anatomy which taught that there was a "mouth" of the uterus (*os uteri*), and descriptions of the womb and stomach as having similar structures and performing similar functions.[187] One commentator of the *Secrets of Women* wrote that, during intercourse, the woman's seed "runs out from those organs because of delectation just like saliva runs out of the mouth of a starving person."[188] The hazard caused by the greedy womb is directed at men, who are drained and weakened through the loss of semen.[189]

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[184] Although, it contradicts the famous Greek physician's teachings, this excerpt is from a work entitled, *Galen's Book on the Womb, which is called Genicias*, Jews' College, Ms. Montefiore, 440, fol. 53v-59v, in Ron Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 161-62.

[185] From *Ut de curis*, B.N. lat. 7056, fol. 81va (p. 29) translated by Monica Helen Green, "The Transmission of Ancient Theories of Female Physiology and Disease through the Early Middle Ages" (Thesis, Princeton University, 1985), 276.

[186] For the prevalence of scent therapy in the medieval Latin West, see, King, "Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates," 54-61.

[187] Cf. Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, 3.2. in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:147.

[188] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, Commentary B, 62.

[189] For example, Constantine the African, in *De coitu*, writes that loss of semen causes weakness and debility, and sometimes even death, because within the seminal fluid is "spirit" taken from the man's body. Constantinus Africanus, "De coitu (Liber creatoris)," in *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium; Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, its texts, language, and scribe*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 311.

The medieval depictions of the uterus and its role in pregnancy and women's health examined here go beyond representing merely the physical organ itself and its physiological functions. The analogies used do not just illustrate a similarity, but frequently, also add secondary meanings. As they address medical concerns, such as women's fertility, the health of the offspring, and gynaecological health issues, the medieval writers examined above found cause to compare the womb to the earth, to various containers, or to a wandering animal, and in doing so added additional layers of significance. The analogies of the uterus as a tree or a home convey positive connotations related to natural fertility and familial nurture onto the maternal body while the analogies of the uterus as a beast or a latrine, are negative, evoking images of irrational instincts and corrupt matter. Medieval authors did not just use figurative language to describe the uterus, but also the blood which it held and expelled, as menses or postpartum flux, or as milk purified in the breasts, as we will see in the following section.

2.3.2. Representations of uterine blood and breast milk.

The medieval medical understanding of the form and function of blood is that of a highly complex substance. Blood was believed to take various forms: different effusions of blood could be seen as a vital humour, a waste product of the body, a seminal fluid, or a nourishing substance. Blood was believed to perform various functions: it was known to play some essential role in preserving life and health in the body; it was held to help restore balance to the humours of the body; it was indispensable for the generation, development, and nourishment of offspring. The form and function of blood was believed to be significantly different for men and women in several areas.

Women's blood was believed to have several qualities which made it different from men's blood. It was characterized, in humoural theory, as melancholic, because it was believed to be colder and wetter than men's blood. Additionally, it was said that because women's bodies were colder, their blood accumulated. Humoural medicine viewed such superfluities as harmful to the body; as a result, menstruation was understood to be the purging process which prevented buildup and illness in women. The abundance of women's blood was seen as advantageous, too. This accumulated blood was uniquely suitable for

fulfilling a material role in conception and for the nourishment of the foetus and infant. This section examines medieval representations of these types of blood which were viewed as characteristically female, namely uterine blood, the blood which played a role in generation, and the nourishment of the infant both in the womb and outside of it. The latter includes breast milk, because medieval writers accepted the ancient tradition which held that it was a version of the menstrual blood which had been transmitted to the breasts and converted there to a purer and more wholesome substance.

Ancient descriptions of uterine blood associated it with women's difference and inferiority; however, they were, for the most part, free from superstition and taboos.[190] Frequently, ancient authors cited uterine blood as a positive substance: as the much desired result of cathartic processes, as nourishment for offspring and, moreover, as the material which constituted all bodies, both male and female, from their conception. Medieval medical representations of uterine blood inherited the theories of their Hellenistic authorities, but they also, frequently, reflect cultural fears about menstrual blood which were rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition. The existence of the contrasting views of women's blood as good blood or as bad blood is evident thoughout medieval medical and scientific literature. In this section, I examine, briefly, secondary associations given to uterine blood in its various forms: associations with medicinal therapy and with disease; with fertility and with sterility; with life and with death; with wholesome food and with spoiled food; with purity and with pollution.

The first dichotomy found in representations of women's blood that I explore here is the contrast between menstruation as a form of curative or preventive medicine and as a symptom of disease. The contrast between these two representations of the menstrual blood is really a matter of emphasis, rather than an essential disagreement. Almost all medical writers and natural philosophers of the medieval period accepted the theory that menstrual bleeding was a necessary purging which prevented the build up of harmful fluids in the female body and restored women's health. Some authors, however, placed their emphasis on the cleansing aspects of menstruation, portraying them as distinctive health-bringing functions of the female body; others stressed that the female body was fundamentally ill and constantly suffering from symptoms of this illness.

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[190] Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, 226ff.

Many medieval scientists and physicians equated the function of menstruation with that of the forms of evacuations that they themselves provoked, such as venesection, or cupping. That is to say, they saw menstruation as a salutary and restorative form of blood loss, rather than a sickening condition. Albert the Great, the Aristotelian natural philosopher, accepted that women naturally suffered from a build-up of humours caused by unconsumed food as a consequence of their deficiency of heat. However, he also believed that the regular purging of this excess of humours has a salutary effect: "Because menstruation cleanses bodies, women are sick less often than men. They especially incur a flow of blood from their nostrils or through anal hemorrhoids less often than men."[191] This belief that menstruation purged women was incorporated into medieval medical practice. Gynaecological works, based on the *Trotula*,[192] repeat the idea that the suppression of the menses is harmful to women's health. They describe afflictions which befell women whose menstrual flow had ceased, and provide numerous recipes and treatments for correcting amenorrhea. It was feared that non-menstrual women would become ill with dropsy, haemorrhoids, heart disease, fainting, or mental illness, as a result of withholding their body's impure blood, and, therefore, menstruation was provoked by any means available, which included herbal remedies, fumigations, suppositories, plasters, *et cetera*.[193] Referring to ancient authority, the author of the *Trotula* provided an example in order to explain that, to restore an ammenorrheic woman's health, the natural purgative function of the menses had to be artificially induced:

> Galen tells of a certain woman whose menses were lacking for nine months, and she was drawn and emaciated in her whole body, and she almost entirely lacked an appetite. [He] drew blood off from her from the aforementioned vein [of the foot] for three days, one pound of blood from one foot on the first

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[191] "*Praecipue tamen minum incurrunt sanguinis fluxum per nares, et per hemorrhoidas ani, quam mares*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.6. Latin from *Opera omnia*, XI:248. Translation from Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:415-16.

[192] Recently, a number of Middle English translations have been edited and published; Anonymous, "Sekenesse of wymmen 2: Yale Medical Library 47. ff. 65v-71v," in *Middle English Medical Texts; MEMT Presenter*, ed. Irma Taavitsainen, Päivi Pahta, and Martti Mäkinen (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005); Alexandra Barratt, ed., *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001); Beryl Rowland, ed., *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health: The First English Gynecological Handbook* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1981).

[193] On diseases caused by the rentention of the menses and their treatments, see, Green, ed., *Trotula*, 72-76. Barratt, ed., *Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, 214-19; Rowland, ed., *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, 67-75.

> day, one pound from the other foot on the second day, and eight ounces from the first foot on the third day. And so in a brief time her color and her heat and her accustomed condition returned to her.[194]

Notably, the evacuation of blood was meant to restore the woman to the condition of health that she was "accustomed to," or "ought to have" (*debitum*). In a Middle English version of the gynaecological text, it is explained that phlebotomy was meant to simulate the function that the body should have been performing naturally: "to help women in [their] illnesses, there are various remedies, such as bloodletting in other places to get rid of the blood that she cannot be cleansed of…"[195] The text even recommended that a woman be bled as soon as her menses were absent when they were due, even before any negative conditions had developed, as preventive medicine: "And about that time of the moon that women should have their purgation, if they have none, have them bled a considerable quantity of blood at their big toe one day, and another day at the other big toe."[196] From this it is clear that the gynaecological text's author considered menstruation to be a sign of health and its absence to be the disease.[197]

Alternatively, menstruation was aligned with illness, and depicted as symptomatic of women's phlegmatic state. The image of menstruation as a symptom was expressed in connection with the belief that women, as a sex, were sicklier by nature than men. Hildegard writes that woman menstruates because "otherwise she could not survive for she is moister than man and would incur serious infirmity."[198] When the subject of why only women menstruate was taken up in the question literature, one scholar provided the following answer:

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[194] "*Galyenus refert de quadam muliere cui defecerunt menstrua per .ix. menses, et in toto corpore constricta erat, et extenuate et defecerat ei penitus appetites, et ipse extraxit ei sanguinem de predicta vena per tres dies: de uno pede primo die libram i., secundo die libram .i. de alio pede, tercio die primo pede uncias .viii., et ita in brevi spacio rediit ei color et calor et status debitus.*" Latin text and English translation from, Green, ed., *Trotula*, 74-5.

[195] "*For to helpe women of these sekenesses ther be many diverse medecynes as blode letyng in other places to delivere them of blode that they mowe nought be yporged of ….*" Middle English text and modern translation from, Rowland, ed., *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, 66-7.

[196] "*And about Þat tyme of Þe mone Þat Þey schul have her purgacion, yt they have noon, lete hem blede a good quantite of blode at her gret too & another day her other gret too.*" *Ibid.*

[197] This is not just a concern of gynaecological writers. Bernard of Gordon also emphasized the "naturalness" of menstruation in women, stating that "the menstrual flow runs naturally from ages of fourteen to forty-five" except during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 7.8.

[198] "*…ita sanguis et humores per menstruum tempus in muliere purgantur, alioquin durare non posset, quia humidior viro est, et magnam infirmitatem incideret.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 102. Translation by Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 80.

> We say that man is hot and dry by nature. Heat and dryness, as a matter of fact, dry up the superfluities which are created in them and emit them through the pores of the body. But woman, since she is cold and humid by nature, is not able to make this, whence, the superfluity amplified by her catarrh goes towards her *fundus*, and is purged through menstruation.[199]

This suggests that women cannot be cured of their phlegmatic state, but merely treated by their purgations which are a sign of their illness. The author of *The Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing*, calls the menses a "syknes," which occurs because of an abundance of "corrupte blood."[200] The idea that women are sickened by their menstrual blood is recorded in *Secrets of Women*, where it is written that "Menstruating women are also somewhat sluggish and do not enjoy sexual intercourse."[201] In these texts, following a subtle shift in meaning, menstruation is not presented as a cure, but as a symptom of woman's innate illness.

Some authors connected menstruation with fertility, restoration, and rebirth by means of allusions to nature, which connected it to the lunar and agricultural cycles. A common natural analogy is between menstrual blood and flowers. These comparisons emphasize what was believed to be the role of the uterine blood in the creation of human life. And, while such natural metaphors were often used to describe women's menstrual flow in the medical and scientific writing of the Middle Ages, some writers portrayed the blood as unnatural, as being harmful to nature and fecundity, and they associated it with death. This will be shown through examples in which the menstrual blood is compared with excrement, corruption, and poison.

The association of the menses with the moon was based on the monthly cycle which the menstrual cycle was believed to follow and the moon's influence over fluids. In his *Etymologies*, Isidore traced the origins of the name "*menstrua*" back to the Greek word for

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[199] "*Dicimus quod vir calide et sicce nature est. Caliditate vero et siccitate superfluitas que in eo generatur disiccatur et per poros emittitur. Mulier vero cum sit frigida et humide nature hoc facere non valet, unde augmentata superfluitas gravedine sua fundum petit et per menstrua purgatur.*" Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, P37, 221.

[200] Barratt, ed., *Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, 100-04.; Similarly, John Trevisa's translation of *De Proprietatibus rerum*, uses the word "infirmyte" to describe the phenomenon of menstruation. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 5, 49.

[201] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 131.

moon, "MĒNĒ," because they are said to flow according to the phases of the moon.[202] His definition suggests that women have a connection to the cycles of nature. The question of the relationship between women's cycles and the cycles of the moon was touched upon in the *Prose Salernitan Questions*:

> Why do women purge menstrual blood from month to month? Master: This is from the action of celestial forces [*superiora*]. Since all earthly things [*inferiora*] are changed by the action of celestial forces, especially the moon since it is closest to us, and the moon restores its splendor from month to month, and loses it from month to month, in the same way, women, by means of the purgation of the menses, are renovated and lose moisture, from month to month.[203]

The cyclic nature of both women's periods and the moon also recall cycles of death and rebirth by which all life is constantly renewed.

Medieval authors also frequently used metaphors involving nature to represent the important role that menstruation was believed to play in generation. Hildegard of Bingen, whose writing was scattered throughout with natural metaphors, described the menses variously as tree blossoms and as earth in order to explain their role in female fertility. In *Causes and Cures*, she writes that women conceive more easily at the end of the menstrual flow because at these times their bodies are more open to receiving seed, "similar to a tree that spreads its greenness in the summer to produce blossoms but draws it inward in the winter."[204] Not only is a woman's body more open at the time of menstruation, her menstrual blood itself is also essential for conception to occur: "For woman is now like soil which is ploughed with a plough. She receives man's semen, encases it in her blood and warms it with

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[202] "*Menstrua supervacuus mulierum sanguis. Dicta autem menstrua a circuitu lunaris luminis, quo solet hoc venire profluvium.; luna enim Graece MENE dicitur.*" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 11.1.140. Cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 240.

[203] "*Quare mulieres de mense in mensem purgant menstrua? M[agister]. Hoc fit ex actione superiorum. Cum enim omnia inferiora alterentur actione superiorum et maxime lune quia magis propinqua est nobis, et ipsa luna in splendore de mense in mensem renovetur et de mense in mensem debilitetur, eodem modo de mense in mensem mulieres per mundificatione menstruorum quasi renovantur et in humiditate minuuntur*." Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, P38, 221.

[204] "*Similiter vero, cum iam menstrua in fine sunt, ita quod iam deficiunt, mulieres facile concipiunt, quia membra earum adhuc tunc aperta sunt; sed in alio tempore tam facile non concipiunt, quoniam membra earum tunc aliquantum constricta sunt, velut in arbore est, quae viriditatem suam in aestivo tempore ad producendum flores emittit, in hiemali autem introrsum eam ad se trahit.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 104. Translation by Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 81.

her warmth. So the seed develops until it is infused with the breath of life and until the time is ripe for it to come forth."[205] These metaphors convey positive connotations with regards to the female reproductive body. The first metaphor suggests that the menstrual blood is, like blossoms on a tree, a visible sign of woman's fertility and ability to bear fruit.[206] The second, that woman is like earth, indicates that menstrual blood performs its function in reproduction by enclosing and nurturing the seed.

Woman's "flowers" was a popular designation for menstruation in the Middle Ages. This terminology was utilized at various levels of discourse, from scholastic Latin of the thirteenth-century *disputatio* ("*flores*"),[207] to the Middle English vernacular gynaecological texts directed at at midwives ("*floures*").[208] The *Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing* provides the following explanation for the name "flowers": "For just has God has ordained that trees bud and flower and afterwards bear fruit, in the same manner, he has ordained that all women have a purgation called the "flowers" without which no child may be conceived, neither before it has arrived nor after it has gone."[209] With these words, the text's author expresses clearly the view that the "flowers" were named thus because they were a natural sign of women's period of fertility.

On the other hand, the cultural taboos against menstrual blood were reflected in medical and scientific literature which depicts it as an unnatural substance and connected it with sterility and death. An early account of the dangerous, supernatural power of the menstrual blood was recorded by Pliny. He wrote that it blunted razors, caused sterility in those who ate it and miscarriages in pregnant horses and women, and killed men who came

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[205] "*Nam femina est nunc velut terra aratro et arata et semen viri suscipit et in sanguinem suum involvit et calore suo calcefacit, et sic illud crescit, dum spiraculum vitae in ipsum mittitur et dum maturum tempus venit, ut procedat*." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 104. Translated by Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 81.

[206] Further in the text, Hildegard repeats that a menstruation is like the blooming of fertility of a tree which precedes the production of fruit: "*Rivulus autem menstrui temporis in muliere est genitiva viriditas et floriditas eius, quae in prole frondet, quia, ut arbore viriditate sua floret et frondet et fructus profert, sic femina de viriditate rivulorum menstrui sanguinis flores et frondes in fructu ventris sui educit*." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 105.

[207] "*...sicut flores in arboribus fructum precedunt, sic menstrua fetum, ad quorum similitudinem satis vocabulo decenti, flores appellantur*." Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B19..

[208] Barratt, ed., *Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, CV32-39.

[209] "*Ffor right as God hath ordeyned trees for-to burion and floure and afterward to bere frute, in the same maner he hath ordeyned to all women to haue espurgement called the floures, with-owte the which may no chyled be conceyud a-fore that it is comyn, nor after that it is gon*." *Ibid*.

into contact with it during intercourse.[210] Later, Isidore of Seville taught that a woman's menstrual blood was corrosive to metals, destructive to growing plants, grasses, and fruit trees, and turned dogs rabid.[211] In the thirteenth century, Bartholomew the Englishman recorded the list of bad things which the menstrual blood was believed to cause, explaining that the coldness of women's bodies caused corrupt blood to accumulate there.[212] The *Secrets of Women* frequently refers to the poisonous effects of corrupt menstrual blood. It argues that menstrual blood affected the fertility of humans as well as of plants. The vapours caused by menstrual blood which has been retained in a woman's body are, in particular, said to be poisonous and harmful to infants:

> It should be noted that old women who still have their monthly flow, and some who do not menstruate, poison the eyes of children lying in their cradles by their glance…. This is caused in the menstruative woman by the flow itself, for the humors first infect the eyes, then infect the air, which infects the child.[213]

These images run counter to the positive associations of women and their natural cycles with fertility. Here, the uterine blood is depicted as a death-bringing, poisonous substance.

Uterine blood could be positively associated with food because it was believed to nourish the foetus. This explanation of its function in pregancy dated back to the Hellenistic theories of embryology. The *Sidrak and Bokkus*, a Middle English book of knowledge, in question and answer format, reproduced this learned explanation for a popular audience:

> How does a woman heavy with child nourish it in her body? God nourishes it and maintains it, and gives it food in her womb; but all the food that does it good, it takes from its mother's blood, that is from a suitable vein which fastens to its navel. For, if the food of such thing were not already digested,

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[210] Pliny's list was not entirely negative, although it did focus on the menstrual blood as a supernatural substance. He also wrote that it could cure a variety of diseases and neutralize magic spells. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 28.24, 304-7.

[211] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 11.1.141.

[212] "*Nam ut dicit Isidor… sanguis menstrualis contactu fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, morieuntur herbae, arbores amittunt fructus, ferrum rubigo corrumpit, nigrescunt aera et metalla, quod si canes inde comederent in rabiem efferuntur, glutinum asphalti, quod nec ferro dissolvitur, nec aquis ipso pollutum sponte dispergitum… hic sanguis ex superflua humiditate et debili calore in corporibus mulierum generatur*." Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 4.8, 105.

[213] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 129.

> then the child would need to digest it in his body; but the blood that it lives on is already digested, and that blood originates in the "flowers."[214]

This answer suggests that uterine blood was created by God as the most suitable food for the foetus.

The analogies of the uterine blood as food or earth which signified the transmission of nutriment to the embryo has a counterbalance in the much less pleasant analogy of the uterine blood as putrefying earth, which generates and feeds unclean creatures. Uterine blood, which was associated positively with the earth in which plants grow, was also portrayed negatively as being like the decaying earth and excrement out of which insects and vermin were believed to arise. Aristotle's account of spontaneous generation explained that out of the putrefaction of rotting matter and excrement in the earth, base animals, like insects, reptiles, and mice were created without parentage.[215] Pseudo-Albert the Great wrote the following formula for generating a serpent from the hair of a menstruating woman: "Take the hairs of a menstruating woman and place them in the fertile earth, under the manure during the winter, then in spring or summer when they are heated by the sun a long stout serpent will be generated, and he will generate another of the same species through seed."[216] A fourteenth- or fifteenth-century commentator of this passage says that the reason that the hair of a menstruating woman can cause a serpent to grow is because hairs are composed of vapours and the vapours of women are poisonous because they are undigested. Therefore, he writes, "from this type of rotting a serpent is generated."[217] This sets up an unpleasant comparison between the generation of infants, surrounded by the menstrual blood in the womb, and the generation of insects in putrid matter. Caroline Walker Bynum has explained that because women were perceived as food for their offspring, they were conceptually

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[214] My translation. "'*A womman wiþ childe greet and heuy, / What norisshiþ it in hir body? ' / 'God it norissheþ and mainteneth / And in hir wombe feding it leneþ; / But al þe foode þat dooth hit good /It takiþ of þe modris blood, / Þat is of a veine parteyninge / To þe navel fastenynge. / For if þe fode of suche þing wore / Þat it were not deuyed þerbifore, / Þanne bihoued þe child nedly / Make digestioun in hir body; / But þat blood þat it lyueþ by / Is defied bifore redy. / And þat blood is bigynnyng / Þat in hir floures doþ spryng*.'" Anonymous, *Sidrak and Bokkus: A Parallel-Text Edition from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Lansdowne 793*, ed. T. L. Burton, *Early English Text Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 520.

[215] For an examination of theories of spontaneous generation in medieval science, see Van Der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la vierge*, 131ff.

[216] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 96. Compare with the description of the generation of the basilisk in chapter 1.

[217] *Ibid*.

linked with food and its ability to decay and become food for worms.[218] The symbolic power of the images associated with spontaneous generation from rotting material connects women's bodies and uterine blood with death, when the body decomposes and becomes food for worms.

Women's surplus blood was often understood to be essential as the food upon which the foetus feeds while it is developing in the womb. However, medieval writers wondered, if the menstrual blood was so corrupt, how could it be suitable food for an infant? At the turn of the twelfth century, the compiler of the *Prose Salernitan Questions* addresses this question, concluding that infants could not be nourished on menstrual blood because if they were, they would be corrupted themselves.[219] No alternative explanation for how the foetus is nourished is given. Avicenna's *Canon*, which was not introduced into Europe until the mid-twelfth century,[220] provided one explanation. It posits different kinds of menstrual blood: one which is formed into a female sperm which, together with the male sperm, provides the nutriment for the growth of the foetus' organs; a second type of blood, of lesser quality, which forms the flesh and blood of the foetus; and, a third type of blood, which is useless and is expelled from the body as waste material at the birth of the child.[221] The medieval encyclopedic writers, William of Conches and Thomas of Cantimpré,[222] both drew upon the Aristotelian claim that female animals of other species did not menstruate; they attributed the long period of infancy in which humans do not stand or walk to the harm caused by the impurity of the menstrual blood on which infants are fed in the womb.[223] This explanation of the role of

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[218] "Closer to decay because colder and wetter than men's bodies, the female body was also closer to being food for worms because it was in all ways closer to food." Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 221.

[219] "*Queritur quare pueri non nutriantur menstruo sanguine ut secundum quosdam asseritur? R. Sanguis menstruus corruptus est, qui corruptos et chimos debet generare humores. Pueri ergo non nutriuntur menstruo sanguine quia corruptus est, quoniam si inde nutrirentur cito corrumperentur.*" Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B306, 144.

[220] Jamal Moosavi, "The Place of Avicenna in the History of Medicine," *Avicenna Journal of Medical Biotechnology* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5.

[221] Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago, Illinois: Great Books of the Islamic World, Inc., 1999), 5.2, 152.

[222] Thomas of Cantimpré (*ca.* 1201-*ca.* 1270) was an Augustinian monk and pupil of Albertus Magnus. He wrote several popular works, incuding *De natura rerum*, which covers secular knowledge about the universe, and *Bonum universale de apibus*, which is an allegory on human society. Cf. Arjo Vanderjagt, "Thomas of Cantimpré," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, XII, 34-5.

[223] "*Cetera animalia, ex quo sunt nata, stant et incedunt: et unde hoc quod homo nisi longo tempore post nec stare nec incedere potest? PHILOSOPHUS: Quia menstruo sanguine et corrupto est in utero nutritus, cetera vero animalia menstruis carent….*" William of Conches, *Dragmaticon*, 6.10.4, 216. Thomas de Cantimpré made the same argument: "*quia ex sanguine matris nutritur fetus, non indiget purgatione. Inde est quod, cum*

woman's surplus blood in generation brings together the interpretations of menstrual blood as impure substance and menstrual blood as food.

Because breast milk and uterine blood were both perceived to be superfluities, lactation was believed to have a purgative role similar to the role of menstruation. Aristotle wrote that "so long as there is a flow of milk the menstrual discharges do not take place at one and the same time" and, therefore, lactation is like other forms of vicarious menstruation such as haemorrhoids and spitting up blood.[224] Albert the Great gives this relationship between the milk and menses as an explanation for why women sometimes have milk in their breasts after menopause:

> It also happens that women who have progressed in age and are old sometimes have milk in their breasts. This occurs when they stop menstruating and the menstrual blood flows back to the breasts. Thus, their breasts are sometimes found to be full of blood and they sometimes become putrescent due to the corrupted blood in them.[225]

The breasts, likewise, are similar to the womb. Albertus calls them "*uteri*" or pouches, playing up their likeness to the uterus.[226] They are described as having an attractive quality which draws superfluous blood like a vacuum.

Medieval explanations of how breast milk came to be produced in the breasts of women after pregnancy show that milk was valued as a more refined substance than the menstrual blood. The purity of breast milk, and the superior qualities that were believed to result from this purity, were seen to be manifest in milk's whiteness. Isidore's description of the origins of the word "*lac*" hinges upon the image of milk as a whitened form of blood:

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cetera animalia ex quo nata sunt gradiuntur, homo vero non gradiuntur, quia ex sanguine menstruo nutritur." Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, ed. H. Boese (New York: W. De Gruyter, 1973), 1.72, 73.

[224] "*Exeunte lacte haud fere eveniunt purgationes; nam sane lactantibus feminis quibusdam factum est ut purgarentur; in universum autem humor locis pluribus simul non erumpit, velut iis, quae haemorrhoidas patiuntur, deteriores superveniunt purgationes; nonnullis etiam, per varices quum a lumbis excretus fuerit, priusquam uterum subeat. Quibus cessante purgatione vomitus sanguinis evenit nihil laeduntur.*" Aristotle, *De historia animalis*, 7.11. Latin translation in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, III:144. English translation from Barnes, I:921.

[225] "*Aliquando autem accidit, quod etiam foeminae quae processerunt in aetate et sunt vetulae, aliquando lac in mamillis habent, et hoc contingit quando desinunt eis fieri menstrua ex redundantia sanguinis menstrui ad mamillas: unde aliquando inveniuntur ubera earum plena sanguine, et aliquando putrescunt ex sanguine corrupto in uberibus earum.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.9. in *Opera omnia* XI:256. English translation from Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:428.

[226] "*mamilla quae lactis est uter…*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.9. in *Opera omnia*, XI:255.

> Milk (*lac*) derives the meaning of its name from its color, because it is a white liquid: For in Greek *λευκὸς* means "white." It becomes what it is through a transformation of blood, for after birth, if any blood is not consumed as nourishment in the womb, it flows along a natural passageway to the breasts and, whitened due to their special property, it takes on the quality of milk.[227]

Medieval writers agreed that, in order to create a suitable food for a newborn infant, the menses had to be further concocted in the breasts. The heart was portrayed as the furnace which creates the heat needed for purifying the blood. The breasts because they are closer to the warmth of the heart, are able to more fully "cook" or refine the menstrual blood, giving it its "whiteness" and making it a suitable food for the offspring. The *Prose Salernitan Questions* provides a detailed description of how milk is formed and whitened in the breasts:

> Infants do not have the instruments suitable for chewing and grinding hard and solid foods, and so nature institutes certain chief and provident instruments, namely the loosely textured, spongy breasts, so that in them a large amount of blood can concoct and be received. Through a certain concocting, a white liquour released from the substance of the breasts whitens it. And thus by concoction it is converted into milk by which the foetus is nourished. … The uterus is connected to the breasts by certain medial veins. Therefore, through these branches and through these veins the abundance of blood and superfluities contained in the uterus, and greatly melancholic blood, are sent to the breasts, which then concocts, with its own heat and the heat of the breasts, and the heat and motion of the nearby heart. And by concoction, digested and cooked, it is changed into the substance of the breasts…. Moisture is the material cause and heat is the efficient cause.[228]

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[227] "*Lac vim nominis a colore trahit, quod sit albus liquor: λευκὸς enim Graece album dicunt: cuius natura ex sanguine commutatur. Nam post partum si quid sanguinis nondum fuerit uteri nutrimento consumptum, naturali meatu fluit in mammas, et earum virtute albescens lactis accipit qualitatem.*" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, II: 9. 1. 76. English Translation from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 236.

[228] "*[I]nfantes non habent instrumenta habilia ad commasticanda et conterenda dura et solida cibaria. Et ideo natura prima et provida instituit quedam instrumenta, scilicet mamillas raras et spongiosas, ut in eis massa sanguinea ebulliret et reciperetur. Et per ebullitionem quedam alba succositas resoluta de substantia mamillarum dealbat eam. Et ita ebulliendo converteretur in lac ex quo fetus nutriretur….Item, matrix est alligata mamillis quibusdam venis mediatibus. Ergo per ramos illos et per has venas massa sanguinea et superfluitas contenta in matrice, et maxime sanguinis melancolici, mittitur in multa mamillarum; que tunc, proprio calore, calore etiam mamillarum, calore et motu cordis suppositi illis, ebullit. Per ebullitionem digesta*

The "whitening" of the breast milk is attributed to the heat[229] which concocts the melancholic moisture which accumulates in the female body into the most appropriate food source for infants.

Several medieval writers suggest that milk derives from its purified state a formative power. They explain this by comparing it to another "whitened" and purified by-product of the body, the male semen. Averroes explains that the white colour is a result of the white flesh in which the milk and sperm are produced: "The testicles were ordained for making sperm, and thus, their flesh is white and spongy like the flesh of the breasts, so that when blood is converted it is converted in the likeness of the flesh and the testicles make it white."[230] The whiteness also represents the purity of the fluids, for they have had their impurities burned away. Both milk and sperm are said to come out bloodied if over expended since the body has not had time to fully concoct the blood.[231] Breast milk was said to have formative power, with the ability to transmit physical and behavioural traits to the infant. Macrobius had taught that just as semen fashions the infant's body and mind, similarly the milk shapes its dispositions and properties. This is the reason, he wrote, that goats fed sheep's milk have softer hairs and lambs fed goats' milk have coarser hair.[232] Similarly, Albert the Great writes that milk continues the formation of infants after they are born:

> The breast itself, which is the pouch [*uter*] for the milk, also has a singular suitability for the newborn, so much that it has been experienced that inserting the nipple of the breast into the mouth of a human newborn, if this is done very often, does good against all the harmful things which can befall a

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et excocta, mutatur in essentiam mamillarum…. Humiditas illa est causa materialis, calor est causa efficiens." Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, BA115.

[229] Similarly, Albertus Magnus writes that heat that digests "perfectly" converts red blood to white substances, such as sperm and pus, which can be seen also when meat is boiled or roasted and turns white. Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.2.223. Cf. Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:213.

[230] My translation. "*sed testiculi fuerunt ordinati ad faciendum sperma: et ideo fuit caro eorum et alba et spongiosa sicut caro mamillarum ideo quando convertitur sanguis convertitur a similitudine eo; et faciunt ipsum album.*" Averroes, *Colliget Averrois* (Venice: Octavianum Scotum, 1542), 53.

[231] For this reason, a number of medical writers recommend that the mother's first milk, the colostrum, be extracted for several days following birth and the newborn be fed by a wet-nurse or on boiled honey. The colostrum is thick and yellowish, rather than fluid and white, and writers such as Soranus, Avicenna, and Albertus Magnus read this as a sign that it was not prepared well because of the strain put on the mother's body by the birth. Albertus called this first milk "bloody" and "unclean." Cf. Soranus, *Gynecology*, 2, 17.; Avicenna, *Canon*, 5.2, 1448.; Soranus, *Gynecology*, 2, 17. Similarly, the semen of men who over-indulge in sexual intercourse was said to become sanguineous as a result of the strain on the body trying to produce large amounts of the highly-concocted substance. Cf. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 147.

[232] Macrobius, *The Saturnalia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 5.15-19, 326.

> newborn. Further, milking the milk onto its body and face is useful for bringing about proper disposition of the shape of its members.[233]

Although the uterine blood was not believed to have a formative faculty, this description shows that sometimes the breast milk was said to have this ability. This belief that milk could instill the qualities of the nurse onto the infant is reflected in the advice given in medical manual that, if a mother could not breastfeed her own child, she should select a wet nurse who had similar physical and behavioural characteristics.[234]

Medieval depictions of blood from the uterus and blood which has been converted to milk reveal differences in the way that the two substances were viewed. Menstrual blood was assigned many contradictory meanings. It could be portrayed as a cure for disease or a symptom, as a sign of fertility or as a corrupting force, as food or as poison. Milk, because it was a purified form of the blood, was generally described positively, as a wholesome food for the infant, or a positive force in shaping it. Exceptions to this rule exist when the mother is described as being unhealthy or immoral, and her milk degraded as a result. Milk's goodness was defined through its identification as a purified version of baser sanguinous matter, and as a result whitened milk reflected the purity of its source.

As a result of the differences in the way the two substances were viewed, the analogies used to describe menstrual blood and breast milk convey different ideas about the female body which produces them. Menstrual blood was assigned meanings which highlight the polarity of ideas about women. Explanations of menstruation's role in purging the body reflect both the belief that women's bodies are specially designed by nature to prevent certain illnesses, and the belief that women are sicklier. The analogies of the uterus as cupping-glass and menstruation as a sickness reflect these contradictory ideas. The analogies of uterine blood as flowers or food convey positive images about women being fertile and nurturing as mothers. Conversely, comparisons between uterine blood and pollution or poison imply that women are dangerous to themselves, to men, and, especially, to their fragile offspring. In contrast to uterine blood, breast milk was associated with whiteness and purity, and was

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[233] "*Habet etiam convenientiam cum partus singularem ipsa mamilla quae lactis est uter, ita quod espertum est in partu hominis, quod immittere papulam mamillae in os partus valet contra omnia nocumenta quae accidere possunt partui, si saepius hoc fiat: et mulgere lac in corpus et faciem eius, valet ad rectam figurae membrorum dispositionem.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.9. in *Opera omnia*, XI:255. English translation from Kitchell and Resnick, *On Animals*, I:429.

[234] For example, Aldebrandin de Sienne: "Vous devés regarder le femme qu'ele soit samblans à le mere tant com ele puet plus…" Aldebradin de Sienne, *Le régime du corps*, 76.

compared to masculine sperm. Discussions of milk in medical texts are found in the context of a mother's ability to nourish her child. As a food, maternal breast milk was praised as the most healthful for nourishing infants because it conveyed not just nutriment, but was also believed to shape infants' physical and moral character.

2.4. Conclusions.

It should be clear by now that the Middle Ages held no single dominant model for describing the female reproductive body and its functions; in medical and scientific writing, pregnancy, menstruation, and lactation were given different meanings in different contexts. The diversity of explanations for these phenomena, and the figurative comparisons that supported them, reflect various notions about women in general.

Secondary meanings which were transmitted along with the analogies used to describe women's reproductive bodies conveyed elements that could contribute to both positive and negative ideas about women and mothers. Metaphors of fertile land and trees, wholesome food, and protective, nurturing enclosures could be used to build up images of woman as a good mother, whose womb and maternal blood are safe and beneficial. Metaphors of poisonous substances, constricting containers, and toxic waste products conjure an impression of woman as harmful, with a sterile or unfavourable womb, and polluting superfluities.

Chapter Three. Women's Bodies II: The Female Reproductive Body in Medieval Christian Religious Writing.

3.1. Introduction.

In this chapter, we continue our examination of representations of women's reproductive bodies in the later medieval period and their background traditions. The previous chapter considered representations of the physical phenomena of menstruation, lactation, and pregnancy in medical and scientific tradition; in this chapter, we look at representations of these phenomena in the context of medieval Christianity.

In organizing the chapters in this way, I do not mean to set up a contrast between medical writers and religious writers in terms of how they viewed the maternal body. This would be misleading, first of all, because the medical writers which I look at were themselves Christian, or else Jewish, Muslim, or pagan, and participants in the religious culture and belief system of the community to which they belonged; moreover, clerical authors were often versed in some medical theory, particularly that which explained matters of spiritual importance, such as embryology and the origin of the soul; and, most significantly, the ideas about women's bodies expressed in both medical and Christian discourses from the Middle Ages draw heavily from a shared set of notions, both misogynistic and philogynistic, about women and neither group was homogenous in the adoption of these notions. Therefore, to imply that there was a clear division between the medical views of women and religious views of women would be false.

Like the men of science and medicine, Christian religious writers of the Middle Ages were interested in women's contribution to conception, the pains and dangers they experienced in childbirth, and the nature of the distinctive secretions of their bodies, menstrual and postpartum blood, and breast milk. In biblical and theological explanations of

the physical phenomena of the maternal body, concerns about purity and impurity, sin and salvation, and the ideal of the "good mother" versus the threat of the "bad mother" are especially prevalent. Natural symbolism, container metaphors, dichotomies between flesh and spirit, and archetypal models are all used to express the association between physical maternity and these abstract associations.

Just as the medical/scientific ideas about women's bodies belong within the framework of medical/scientific ideas about the body in general, so too should Christian notions about women's bodies be examined in the context of Christianity's feelings about the body. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul proclaims, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another."[1] This belief in a battle, taking place in every human body, between the flesh and the spirit resonates throughout Christian thought about corporality. As Peter Brown describes it, "In all later Christian writing, the notion of 'the flesh' suffused the body with disturbing associations; somehow, as "flesh," the body's weaknesses and temptations echoed a state of helplessness, even of rebellion against God, that was larger than the body itself."[2] This idea paved the way for the idea of a hierarchy between flesh and spirit. The Church Fathers expressed the belief that the body could be swayed either to carnal things, by which it was debased, or to spiritual things, by which it was exalted. In this worldview, which divided the phenomena of this world into two categories, either carnal or spiritual, sexuality fell into the latter category.[3]

For many Christian writers, the hierarchy between flesh and spirit overlapped with the hierarchy between men and women. Men were depicted as being more rational, and women as more carnal. This, too, has roots in Pauline traditions. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul instructs: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and

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[1] "*caro enim concupiscit adversus spiritum spiritus autem adversus carnem haec enim invicem adversantur…*" Gal 5:17. All Latin quotations are from the Vulgate version. *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). English translations are from Douay-Rheims version. *The Holy Bible: the Catholic Bible, Douay-Rheims version, translated from the Latin Vulgate and diligently compared with the Hebrew, Greek and other eds.* (New York: Benzinger, 1941).

[2] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, women and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 48.

[3] Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (New York: Verso, 1991), 15.

cherisheth it, as also Christ does the church. Because we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."[4] In comparison with men, women are symbolically associated with the flesh, but Paul's teaching makes it clear that all of humankind belongs to the flesh with respect to God and is in need of his spiritual nurturing. These complex analogies between flesh and womankind, and flesh and humankind, gave women a place which was inferior to men, but also central to understanding Christ's sacrificial love. Medieval acknowledgement of the implications of these analogies is expressed most fully in later medieval mystical writings[5] but they also extend throughout medieval Christian writing about the female body.

This chapter examines ideas about the female body found in those traditions based in scripture and developed by early Church authorities, and in later medieval methods of religious dissemination, such as saints' *lives*, sermons, and ecclesiastical rituals. The perceptions of the body as something base and tainted and of women as being more subject to carnal demands influence medieval Christian observations of women's reproductive roles. Pregnancy, menstruation, and lactation are connected with ideas about the body's weaknesses, even when they are being treated in a positive light.

First, this chapter considers the origins of Christian ideas about the female body from their biblical and patristic sources. It then explores the two models of maternity, Mary and Eve, and considers the implications of these two archetypes on medieval Christian understanding of women's bodies.

3.2. Women's reproductive bodies in the Christian Bible.

Within the context of Christian belief, a woman's ability to become pregnant and to nurse was understood to come from God. The Bible contains accounts in which, through God's divine grace, a woman is made pregnant despite previous sterility, old age, and even virginity. Likewise, breasts withered by age flow with milk to nurse an infant. Women are depicted as containers for future generations. This function is also believed to give them a

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[4] "*viri diligite uxores sicut et Christus dilexit ecclesiam et se ipsum tradidit pro ea. . . . ita et viri debent diligere uxores suas ut corpora sua qui suam uxorem diligit se ipsum diligit. Nemo enim umquam carnem suam odio habuit sed nutrit et fovet eam sicut et Christus ecclesiam. Quia membra sumus corporis eius de carne eius et de ossibus eius.*" Eph 5:25, 28-30.

[5] The definitive study of these carnal metaphors is Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

special connection to the infants created in them and to God the creator. In addition to the literal treatment of the maternal body, female reproductive functions—childbirth, lactation, and even menstruation—were also used as metaphors. These metaphors recall specific biblical beliefs associated with these phenomena, namely, that labour pains and menstruation are part of God's punishment to postlapsarian womankind, a healthy birth is his gift of fertility, and lactation his gift of nourishment.

3.2.1. Biblical representations of pregnancy and childbirth.

Birthing children was presented as women's primary role in Old Testament stories. It was the duty of every man and woman to fulfill God's commandment to Adam and Eve: to "increase and multiply."[6] But their ability to carry out this task was ultimately in the hands of God, a fact to which many of the patriarchs and matriarchs were forced humbly to submit. The Old Testament's archetypal barren wives, Abraham's Sarai/Sarah, Isaac's Rebekah, Jacob's Rachel, Elkanah's Hannah, all bore sons miraculously after years of barrenness and, presumably in the case of Sarah, menopause, following prayer and supplication to their God.

The metaphor of the container or vessel is frequently used to describe women's fertility in the books of the Hebrew Bible; it was God who had the power to open and shut these vessels. Hannah, who was the more beloved of her husband's two wives, nevertheless, had her "womb closed" by God for many years.[7] God is said to have taken pity on the unloved wife of Jacob, Leah, and opened her womb while her sister Rachel was made barren.[8] Here, fertility is presented as a gift bestowed by God and obstructions to conception are either tests of patience or signs of God's displeasure. Likewise, God "closed the wombs" of all the women of the household of Abimelech as a punishment for unknowingly taking Abraham's wife, Sarah, and, upon his repentance, opened their wombs again.[9] He also made Abraham and Sarah wait until he was a hundred and she ninety years of age before he granted them a child. These unlikely pregnancies accentuate the fact that, in the end, the power to create human life originates in God. Inasmuch as a theory of conception is given in

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[6] *"crescite et multiplicamini*." Gen 1:28.
[7] "*…conclusisset Dominus vulvam eius*." Sam 1:6.
[8] "*videns autem Dominus quod despiceret Liam aperuit vulvam eius sorore sterili permanente*."Gen 29:31.
[9] "*orante autem Abraham sanavit Deus Abimelech et uxorem ancillasque eius et pepererunt. concluserat enim Deus omnem vulvam domus Abimelech propter Sarram uxorem Abraham*." Gen 20:17-18.

the Old Testament, the formative agency is God's, while women are only vessels for holding and bringing children into the world.[10]

This said, having been chosen to be a vessel in which God infuses life entails a certain connection with divine powers, as is best exemplified by the miraculous maternities of New Testament women, Elizabeth and Mary. John the Baptist's mother Elizabeth, like her Old Testament sister, Sarah, before her, was said to be both barren and past the age of childbearing.[11] However, the angel Gabriel revealed to Elizabeth's husband, Zacharias, that God's hand would act in her womb, for not only would she conceive a son but the infant would "be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb."[12] This echoes the phrase used in the twenty-second Psalm, "you have been my God from my mother's womb."[13] The angel also reveals to Zacharias that his and Elizabeth's child will be the forerunner of the Messiah, but following the news, on account of his doubt concerning the miracle, Zacharias is struck dumb until after the birth.[14] Because of her husband's temporary muteness, Elizabeth learns of the importance of the child that she carries by the leaping of the foetus in her womb when she is in the presence of her kinswoman, Mary, who also conceives miraculously, and bears the Messiah in her womb.[15] It is Elizabeth who announces coming life, as is her sex's privilege.[16] This story exemplifies the hidden knowledge of pregnant women. Elizabeth has intimate communication with her child and his movements while he is in closed up in her womb. However, Zacharias, who miraculously is granted the ability, usually excluded from men, of having foreknowledge about his unborn child, but must keep his secret knowledge about his son locked up in silence for nine months. Clearly, the womb

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[10] The mystery of conception hidden within women's bodies is among the divine mysteries of the world unknowable to mankind: "Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things." Eccl 11:5. The male role as contributor of seminal fluid is acknowledged in the punishment doled out to Onan (Gen 38:10) but is not acknowledged directly in these accounts of famous births except indirectly in the granting of paternal status to the husbands.

[11] Lk 1:7.

[12] "*…Spiritu Sancto replebitur adhuc ex utero matris suae.*" Lk 1:13, 15.

[13] "*…de ventre matris meae Deus meus es tu.*" Ps 21:11.

[14] Lk 1:13-20.

[15] Lk 1:41-44.

[16] In fact, it is women, Anne, Elizabeth, Mary who are among the first to announce the coming of the Messiah, because of their knowledge about what they are carrying in their wombs. Philippe Lefebvre notes this in his article on characteristics of biblical women, Philippe Lefebvre, "Au commencement, des femmes. Libre méditation biblique," in *L'Éternel féminin au regard de la cathédrale de Chartres. Actes du Colloque Européen des 30 juin et 1er juillet 2001* (Chartres: Association des Amis du Centre Médiéval Européen de Chartres, 2002), 22.

is being construed, by Luke, as a sacred space. Through it, women have a unique connection to God for it is inside the womb that his divine action takes place. The womb of the Virgin Mary is special because it is closed to all men. It is also remarkable in its intactness, fulfilling the prophesy of Jeremiah: "the Lord hath created a new thing on earth: a woman shall encompass a man."[17] More than any other womb, it could be compared to a temple, for God dwelled there.

Early Christian authorities taught that Mary's virginal conception and bearing of Christ heralded the end of the God's original curse upon Eve which brought death to humanity. Mary and Eve are, thus, set up as contradictory archetypes according to their maternal functions. In Genesis, the first mother of mankind is punished by God for her transgression in taking the fruit from the tree of knowledge and sharing it with her husband. Besides being expelled from paradise, she is condemned to suffer pain in childbirth and subjection to her husband. Adam, for his part, will be made to endure difficult physical labour.[18] God's commandment for them to multiply now comes with the condemnation that they and their descendents will know death. Thus, the pains and dangers of childbirth are a reminder of Eve's sin which caused death to enter into the world. The birth of Christ from the womb of a virgin signaled the enclosure of God in a fleshy body, precipitated his redeeming death, and, consequently, helped to reverse the fatal sentence on mankind. The two mothers, Mary and Eve, serve as reminders of the connection between death and life which are both present at every birth.

Eve and Mary figure as archetypical mothers in the Christian mindset. Through the "bad mother," Eve, birth is associated with the fallen state in which pain and death exist. The pains associated with childbirth after the Fall are used metaphorically to describe the suffering of sinners. Thus, God exacts judgment against the arrogance of the city of Moab, threatening that "the heart of the valiant men of Moab in that day shall be as the heart of a woman in labour."[19] Similar comparisons are made of the cities of Edom and Damascus, that

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[17] "*…creavit Dominus novum super terram femina circumdabit virum*." Jer 31:22.

[18] "*mulieri quoque dixit multiplicabo aerumnas tuas et conceptus tuos in dolore paries filios et sub viri potestate eris et ipse donimabitur tui. ad Adam vero dixit quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae et comedisti de lingo ex quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes maledicta terra in opera tuo in laboribus comedes eam cunctis diebus vitae tuae*." Gen 3:16-17.

[19] "*…erit cor fortium Moab in die illa sicut cor mulieris parturientis*." Jer 48:41.

they will suffer the "distress and pangs" of a woman in childbirth.[20] The prophet Jeremiah says of Judah's destruction, "I have heard the voice as of a woman in travail, anguishes as of a woman in labor of a child; the voice of the daughter of Zion dying away."[21] He uses the metaphor of parturition to evoke sinfulness, pain, and death. In all these verterotestamentary examples, the birth pains are never depicted as elevating the one suffering them, but rather apply only to sinful individuals.

However, the Bible's negative discourse on birth pains, from the suffering of Eve to that of the sinners of Moab, does not extend to childbearing as a whole. The rewards of childbirth, desired progeny, are mentioned throughout the Old and New Testaments, as the previously discussed examples of biblical mothers reveal. In the New Testament, following Mary, the ultimate "good mother," giving birth becomes a means for salvation. Thus, it is said of woman, "she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and sobriety."[22] The birth of Christ emphasized again the act of bringing new life into the world. Jesus, himself, recalls the connection between childbirth and death, which was introduced by the first mother, Eve, when he uses the pains of childbirth as a metaphor for describing his own death; however, he emphasizes the analgesic effects of the elation of new motherhood which overrides the previous pain:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore, you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.[23]

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[20] "*…[Edom] quasi cor mulieris parturientis;… dissoluta est Damascus versa in fugam tremor adprehendit eam angustia et dolores tenuerunt eam quasi parturientem.*" Jer 49:22, 24.

[21] "*vocem enim quasi parturientis audivi angustias ut puerperae vox filiae Sion inter morientis expandentisque manus suas…*" Jer 4:31.

[22] "*salvabitur autem per filiorum generationem si permanserint in fide et dilectione et sanctificatione cum sobrietate.*" 1 Tim 2:15.

[23] "*amen amen dico vobis quia plorabitis et flebitis vos mundus autem gaudebit vos autem contristabimini sed tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium. mulier cum parit tristitiam habet quia venit hora eius cum autem pepererit puerum iam non meminit pressurae propter gaudium quia natus est homo in mundum. Et vos igitur nunc quidem tristitiam habetis iterum autem videbo vos et gaudebit cor vestrum et gaudium vestrum nemo tollit a vobis.*" Jn 16:20-22.

Unlike the suffering of the sinful citizens of Moab and Zion, the metaphorical birth pangs of Christ's followers after his death are not in vain for what is born of them is salvation.

In the New Testament, birth becomes a metaphor for salvation. Jesus preaches to Nicodemus that all people must be "born again" in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven:

> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"[24]

The second birth does not take place from the womb of a woman, literally, as Nicodemus believed it would, but from baptism in water and the action of the Holy Spirit.[25] This birth of the spirit is superior to the first birth into the flesh since it provides eternal life. Thus, when Paul says to the Galatians, "Rejoice thou barren women that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she with a husband,"[26] he is comparing long-barren Sarah with the church which did not become fruitful until the long-awaited arrival of Christ. All birth is considered a gift from God, but the second birth of baptism is a blessing which undoes the condemnation which taints the original birth from a woman. Physical birth, which brings mortal life into the world, compares unfavourably in some respects with spiritual birth, rid of its associations with the female body and the flesh, through which souls are ushered into eternal life.

3.2.2. Biblical representations of menstruation and lactation.

Uterine blood and breast milk are not equated with each other in scriptural writing. Menstruation is not explicitly connected to conception and pregnancy anywhere in the Bible;

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[24] "*dicit ad eum Nicodemus quomodo potest homo nasci cum senex sit numquid potest in ventrem matris suae iterato introire et nasci. respondit Iesus 'amen amen dico tibi nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu non potest introire in regnum Dei. quod natum est ex carne caro est et quod natum est ex Spiritu spiritus est. non mireris quia dixi tibi oportet vos nasci denuo.*'" Jn 3:4-7.

[25] Interestingly, this mirrors Aristotelian models of creation in which the female superfluity of moisture is acted upon by the male principle, the spirit, in order to create life.

[26] "*…laetare sterilis quae non paris erumpe et exclama quae non parturis quia multi filii desertae magis quam eius quae habet virum.*" Gal 4:27. Cf. Isa 54:1.

instead, menstrual blood is associated with uncleanness, as is conveyed in the Hebrew purity laws. The blood which women shed following birth was also considered to be unclean. Lactation was associated with maternity, and like pregnancy, it was represented as a divine gift. What were considered related forms of bodily superfluities in medical literature, were considered to be fluids of contrasting nature in biblical writing. The former was linked with pollution and death, and the latter with food and love.

The designation of menstrual blood as a kind of pollution derived from Jewish concerns regarding purity and impurity. Menstruation is mentioned several times in Leviticus, the book of the Bible which establishes Jewish laws and regulations. The book teaches that menstruating women are ritually unclean and are to be segregated for seven days following their flow of blood. Their uncleanness spreads also to anyone who touches them or anything which they have sat or lain upon.[27] Sexual intercourse with a woman who is menstruating was treated as a crime punishable by death: "If any man lie with a woman [who is menstruating], and uncover her [distemper], and she open the fountain of her blood: both shall be destroyed out of the midst of their people."[28] Post-partum blood is also attributed the same polluting qualities as menstrual blood. According to Levitical law, if a woman gives birth to a son, she is unclean for seven days, and if she gives birth to a daughter, she is unclean for fourteen days.[29] Following that, she is to wait thirty-three days with a son or sixty-six days with a daughter before she can be purified and resume worship in the Temple and take up her traditional roles in her household and community. After any discharge of uterine blood, a woman was required to make an offering and seek atonement for her sin:

> But if she be cleansed of her issue, then she shall number to herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall offer the

[27] Lev 15:19-20.
[28] "*Qui coierit cum muliere in fluxu menstruo et revelaverit turpitudinem eius ipsaque aperuerit fontem sanguinis sui interficientur ambo de medio populi sui*." Lev 20:18.
[29] Lev 12:2-5.

> one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her before the Lord for the issue of her uncleanness.[30]

This ritual of giving an offering at the temple and seeking atonement for sin was also prescribed for other bodily discharges believed to make the individual unclean. Men with seminal discharge, likewise, were required to expiate their uncleanness.[31] Thus, the relationship between impurity and sin was not mapped out onto one sex alone.

Nevertheless, it was women's menstrual rags which were adopted as a symbol of the polluted state of God's people. Thus, the prophet Isaiah laments, "And we are all become as one unclean, and all our justices as the rag of a menstruous woman."[32] He is referring to the just deeds of the community that are tainted by the people's sin just as the rag used by a menstruating woman is made unclean by being contaminated with menstrual blood. The metaphor draws on menstrual blood's ability to pollute whatever it touches, as described in the Levitical laws. Moreover, it makes use of Old Testament prohibitions which link physical pollution with spiritual sin. We find this metaphor of the menstruous rag, again, in the book of Esther. Queen Esther says of her royal trappings that she detests them "as a menstruous rag."[33] The metaphor emphasizes that her position of favour in the Persian court is abhorrent and contravenes her Jewish heritage. Her trappings represent a tainted wealth which is worldly rather than spiritual; thus, they are represented by a symbol that is conceptually linked with the weakness and corruption of the flesh. The metaphor of the menstrual rag builds upon Levitical prohibitions which tie menstruation to filth and impurity.

For Christians, these Old Testament laws and practices were to be reinterpreted in light of the New Testament. Jesus diverted this reliance on the law. In the Hebrew scriptures, the law was unbending about contact with a woman during menstruation. A man is deemed just if he follows the law, avoiding prohibited practices, including "approaching a menstruous woman": he shall live, the prophet Ezekiel teaches, and all who break these laws shall die.[34] The severity of this proscription makes Jesus' contact healing of the woman

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[30] "*si steterit sanguis et fluere cessarit numerabit septem dies purificationis suae. et octavo die offeret pro se sacerdoti duos turtures vel duos pullos columbae ad ostium tabernaculi testimonii. qui unum faciet pro peccato et alterum in holocaustum rogabitque pro ea coram Domino et pro fluxu inmunditiae eius.*" Lev 15:28-30.
[31] Lev 15:2-18.
[32] "*Et facti sumus ut immundus omnes nos, et quasi pannus menstruatae universae justitiae, nostrae*." Isa 64:6.
[33] "*Tu scis necessitatem meam quod abominer signum superbiae et gloriae meae quod est super caput meam in diebus ostentationis meae et detester illud quasi pannum menstruatae*." Esth 14:16.
[34] Ezek 18:4-9.

suffering from a haemorrhage more remarkable. The story is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[35] In these accounts, Jesus is approached by a woman who has suffered from an issue of blood for twelve years. She secretly touches the hem of his clothes while he was walking through a crowd of people and she is immediately healed. Mark records that "immediately the fountain of her blood dried up and she knew in the body that she had been healed of her wound."[36] In Luke's account, Jesus feels a loss of power when the woman touches him. But instead of referring to the ancient prohibition of contact between the pure and impure, Jesus blesses the woman and says that reaching out to him was the act of faith which cured her. This act served to symbolically reintegrate women and men who were excluded under the strict observance of the old law because bodily discharge caused them to be viewed as a source of pollution.

Milk was portrayed as a pure substance, associated with the bonds of parental love and with nurture. It was a gift from God to be passed from mothers to their newborn offspring. Thus, Sarah rejoices that, at the age of ninety, following God's promise, she can nurse her own child.[37] Though the milk was ultimately said to come from God, the act of nursing was depicted as one which is dependent on natural maternal sympathy. Isaiah asks rhetorically, "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb?"[38] This suggests that maternal nursing and motherly love are natural, and their absence in a mother-child relationship unnatural. The Old Testament seems to have a preference for maternal nursing. Sarah and Hannah are both said to have nursed their sons until the time where they were to be weaned. Even Moses, who was given by his adoptive mother to a wet nurse, was in fact nursed at the maternal breast.[39] But, there are metaphorical wet nurses throughout the sacred literature. In representions of milk in scripture, parallels are drawn between a mother's nourishing gift of milk to her helpless infant and God's offerings to his children.

In biblical symbolism, milk can represent a gift from God for nourishing and building up the strength of his people. It is tied to both an abundance of food and agricultural fecundity and to symbols of parental love. This is evident from the accounts where the

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[35] Mt 9:20-22; Lk 8:43-48; Mk 5:25-29.
[36] "*Et confestim siccatus est fons sanguinis ejus: et sensit corpore quia sanata esset a plaga*." Mk 5:29.
[37] Gen 21:7.
[38] "*numquid oblivisci potest mulier infantem suum ut non misereatur filio uteri sui*?" Isa 49:15.
[39] Ex 2:9.

prosperity of Israel is linked with dwelling in lands of milk and honey,[40] that is places which abound in natural fertility. In Isaiah, the Israelites are told "You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings…"[41] and, moreover, that Jerusalem is given to them as a nurturing mother:

> "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, that you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, that you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom." For thus says the Lord, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you will be comforted in Jerusalem." Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, and your bones will flourish like the new grass…[42]

The milk of God/Jerusalem will both comfort and provide the necessary sustenance for the nation of Israel to grow strong. Here, God acts in the role of a kindly father, appointing a wet nurse, and also as the maternal figure who does the comforting. But the bounty of flowing milk could also be taken away. Thus, during the siege of Jerusalem, mothers have no food and therefore cannot breastfeed their infants and, in Hosea, the prophet laments that the women will be cursed with dry breasts.[43] This harsh weaning, caused by a disproving God who turns his back on his people and cuts them off from their source of nourishment, is a reminder of the authority of the disciplinarian parent who ultimately controls the flow of milk.

In the New Testament imagery, milk is equated with spiritual knowledge that provides sustenance not for this world but for the next. Thus, Peter says to Christ's believers

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[40] Cf. Ex 3:8; Lev 20:24; Deut 31:20.

[41] "*et suges lac gentium et mamilla regum lactaberis et scies quia ego Dominus salvans te et redemptor tuus Fortis Iacob*." Isa 60:16.

[42] "'*laetamini cum Hierusalem et exultate in ea omnes qui diligitis eam gaudete cum ea gaudio universi qui lugetis super eam. ut sugatis et repleamini ab ubere consolationis eius ut mulgeatis et deliciis affluatis ab omnimoda gloria eius.' quia haec dicit Dominus 'ecce ego declinabo super eam quasi fluvium pacis et quasi torrentem inundantem gloriam gentium quam sugetis ad ubera portabimini et super genua blandientur vobis. quomodo si cui mater blandiatur ita ego consolabor vos et in Hierusalem consolabimini.' videbitis et gaudebit cor vestrum et ossa vestra quasi herba germinabunt et cognoscetur manus Domini servis eius et indignabitur inimicis suis.*" Isa 66:10-14.

[43] Lam 4:3; Hos 9:14.

that they are "like newborn infants": "[You] long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."[44] Here, Peter is like a nurse providing the necessary spiritual food. This metaphor can also be used in a more derogatory way, for milk is the food of infants who are not yet able to handle solid food. This is the meaning found in the following verse from the book of Hebrews: "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe."[45] And, the meaning is repeated by Paul when he writes "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly…"[46] In this analogy, milk represents the basic, most easily palatable, sacred food, necessary for sinners as a precursor to the denser morsels of spiritual food which are needed for complete spiritual growth. While it is a good, it is necessary because of the carnal weaknesses of humankind.

Biblical representations of pregnancy, lactation, and menstruation are representative of Judeo-Christian beliefs about the body, and humanity's relationship with the divine. Women's bodies and their generative powers are viewed as mysteries in the sacred scriptures of the Christian faith; the sacredness of their creative powers is praised, while the potential threat posed by their uncontrollable bodily functions is brought under control by purification rituals. Pregnancy is depicted as a gift of God but the pain of childbirth was a reminder of sin and the purification period which women were meant to undergo after giving birth implies uncleanness in the act. Eve and Mary, women who figure prominently in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, represent the ignoble and the divine aspects of motherhood. Lactation and menstruation, the fluids associated with reproduction in medieval medical physiology, were not seen to be connected to each other by biblical authors. Breast milk was linked with nourishment. It was the gift of God to the mother which she was duty-bound to pass on to her child, and a necessity because of the weakness of humankind at birth. It was

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[44] "*sicut modo geniti infantes rationale sine dolo lac concupiscite ut in eo crescatis in salutem si gustastis quoniam dulcis Dominus.*" 1 Pet 2:2-3.
[45] "*omnis enim qui lactis est particeps expers est sermonis iustitiae parvulus enim est.*" Heb 5:13.
[46] "*et ego fratres non potui vobis loqui quasi spiritalibus sed quasi carnalibus tamquam parvulis in Christo. lac vobis potum dedi non escam nondum enim poteratis sed ne nunc quidem potestis adhuc enim estis carnales*." 1 Cor 3:1-2.

also a symbol of spiritual nurture or abundance. Menstruation, however, was connected only with the weakness of human flesh, and not with humanity's connection with the divine. It was associated with carnal sin and pollution, which could only be redeemed through Christ's sacrifice.

In Christian tradition, biblical depictions of women and reproduction were interpreted and incorporated into larger theological models. These scriptural interpretations did not rest solely on the sacred texts themselves, but also integrated elements from their authors' cultural and intellectual backgrounds. For example, in the writings of the early Christian Church Fathers, we find already recognition of the dominant Hellenistic medical position which held that menstrual blood had a role in both the conception and/or early growth of the foetus and in lactation. The integration of scientific and religious ideas contributed to the complexity with which the Church came to represent the female reproductive body. Patristic authors defended women's uterine blood as a natural element of generation in the postlapsarian world, and portrayed breast milk as the food which infants required because of the inborn weaknesses of carnal bodies. Symbolically, however, the dichotomy between milk as a pure substance and menstrual blood as an impure substance which was present in scripture endured in Patristic writing.

3.3. Women's reproductive bodies in Patristic writing.

The treatment of women in the writings of the Church Fathers reflects biblical antecedents and, also, Late Antique beliefs about the difference between men and women. In order to understand women's reproductive functions, Patristic writers turned first to scripture, but in order to interpret it, they consulted medical authorities and even drew upon their own experiences with women. Understanding women's sexuality, procreative abilities, and menstrual cycles provided key information to help them answer several theological questions which interested them. These include finding a basis for theological teachings on the superiority of virginity, proving the nature of Christ's humanity, determining the process by which humans are ensouled. The Church Fathers took up the complexities which were present in biblical representation of women's reproductive capabilities and applied them to their own teachings. They saw pregnancy, menstruation, and lactation as having negative and

positive elements and were willing to draw upon either set of associations according to their needs. Their interpretations of the female reproductive body were influential to later Christians.

Patristic understanding of female reproductive functions springs from accepted beliefs about women in general. All of these beliefs originated in the principle that women were fundamentally dissimilar to men. This dissimilarity was said to have arisen in the first man and woman: their different origins (man from the earth, woman from man's side)[47] and their different roles in the Fall and, consequently, different punishments (man consigned to physical labour, woman to subservience and pain in childbearing)[48] contributed to their distinct physiological make-ups and social roles. Patristic authors turned to Adam and Eve, to the story of their origins and fall, to find the explanations for humanity's current state, including the meaning of sex difference.

The writings of the Latin Fathers contain a number of references to pregnancy, lactation and menstruation from which we can garner an understanding about how they viewed these physiological phenomena. Their primary source for understanding women's bodies was scripture but they attempted to resolve biblical ambiguities concerning reproductive phenomena using other authorities, such as the writings of famous physicians and even women. Tertullian cites the Greek physician Soranus' *De anima* in his own treatise on the soul.[49] Moreover, he reveals a level of knowledge of embryological theory in his argument on Mary's contribution to the flesh of Christ. As part of his argument, Tertullian suggests that Mary's ability to nurse her son is evidence that she contributed materially to Christ while he was carried in her womb. He calls upon authorities on women's physiology to support this assertion:

> Midwives, and doctors, and naturalists, can tell us, from the nature of women's breasts, whether they usually flow at any other time than when the womb is affected with pregnancy, when the veins convey therefrom the blood of the lower parts to the mamilla, and in the act of transference convert the secretion into the nutritious substance of milk. . . . But if the Word was made flesh of Himself without any communication with a womb, no mother's womb

[47] Gen 2:7, 21-22.
[48] Gen 3:16-17.
[49] Tertullian, *De anima*, in PL 2, 681-798.

> operating upon Him with its usual function and support, how could the lacteal fountain have been conveyed (from the womb) to the breasts, since (the womb) can only effect the change by actual possession of the proper substance?[50]

This description capably replicates contemporary medical arguments about the connection between breast milk and the uterine blood on which embryos were believed to be nurtured. Tertullian seems to be the most familiar with medical writing of all the Latin Fathers. He also describes in detail the operation for removing a dead foetus from its mother's uterus.[51]

The Church Fathers did not limit themselves to the opinions of learned men when making arguments involving the female reproductive body; some of them, in fact, perceived the bodies of actual women to be a source of evidence. Tertullian turns to women as authorities on the question of whether or not souls are infused into the bodies of infants while they are still in the womb. He asks them:

> Give us your testimony, then, you mothers, whether yet pregnant or after delivery (let barren women and men keep silence). . . [and tell us] whether you feel in the embryo within you any vital force other than your own, with which your bowels tremble, your sides shake, your entire womb throbs, and the burden which oppresses you constantly changes its position?[52]

He relies specifically on mothers who have first-hand experience of pregnancy to provide expert opinion on the debate. Augustine (354-430) also used personal experience in order to understand questions related to the female reproductive body, but he more often frames it as his own observations of women as mothers. His personal accounts of nursing and witnessing other infants being nursed at the breast form part of his theological conception of human

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[50] "*Respondeant obstetrices, medici et physici, de uberum natura, an aliter manare soleant, sine vulvae genitali passione, suspendentibus exinde venis sentinam illam inferni sanguinis, et ipsa translatione decoquentibus in materiam lactis laetiorem. . . . Quod si Verbum caro ex se factum est, non ex vulvae communicatione, nihil operata vulva, nihil functa, nihil passa; quomodo fontem suum transfundit in ubera, quae, nisi habendo, non mutat?*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 20.86, in PL 2, 832; Translation from "On the Flesh of Christ" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, ed. Ante-Nicene Christian Library, trans. Rev. S. Thelwall and Rev. Dr. Holmes, 3 vols., *Translations of the Writings of the Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), vol. 2, 206-7.

[51] Tertullian, *De anima*, 25, in PL 2, 734.

[52] "*Responde, matres, vosque praegnantes, vosque puerperae; steriles et masculi taceant; vestrae naturae veritas quaeritur, vestrae passionis fides convenitur: an aliquam in foetu sentitis vivacitatem, alienam de vestro? De quo palpitent ilia, micent latera, tota ventris ambito pulsetur, ubique ponderis regione mutetur?*" Tertullian, *De anima*, 25.62-3, in PL 2, 733; Translation from "On the Soul" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. 2, 469.

nature and divine generosity.[53] Not all of the Latin Fathers seem to have reflected on women's experience of their own generative body, nor on their own birth from a woman, but not all of the Fathers had equal contact with women. Tertullian himself had been married, and Augustine had once taken a concubine and enjoyed a well-documented and close relationship with his mother.[54] Evidently, they incorporated this familiarity into their readings of scriptural portrayals of women.

3.3.1. Patristic representations of pregnancy and childbirth.

The Bible says to women, "Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not… for many are the children of the desolate; more than of her that hath a husband;" and, it also says "She shall be saved through childbearing."[55] The Church Fathers expressed similarly ambiguous sentiments when it came to women and their role in childbearing. Patristic ideas about pregnancy are revealed in the contexts of several different theological considerations, namely, in defense of virginity, in the Christological debate about the Virgin Mary's contribution to the humanity of Christ, and in contemplation of the rituals of infant baptism and postpartum purification. In each of these contexts, the authors touch upon tensions present in the biblical tradition between the representations of birth as related to sin and pollution, on the one hand, and salvation and divine favor, on the other.

Questions surrounding maternity and childbearing were examined by the early Fathers of the Latin-speaking Church within the context of the debate between sexuality and virginity. Based on their sexual choices, women were either mothers or virgins. The fruits of the former were physical: children to continue the race. The fruits of the latter were spiritual: the increased number of Christians in heaven. According to the Patristic writers, virginity was clearly the ideal state and their fruits the most valuable.[56] However, they realized that most people could not follow this superior path. For those who aspired to a virginal or

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[53] Miles, *A Complex Delight*, 1-2. Cf. Augustine, *Confessionum*, 1.6-7, in PL 32, 663-65.

[54] On Augustine's relationship with his mother Monica, see Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1995), 77ff.

[55] "*Laetare sterilis quae non paris. . . quia multi filii desertae magis quam eius quae habet virum*." Gal 4:27; "*Salvibitur autem per filiorum generationem*" 1 Tim 2:15. Both phrases are attributed to the apostle Paul.

[56] For example, Augustine wrote that the fruitfulness of the flesh could not compare to the fruitfulness of the soul: "*Nulla ergo carnis fecunditas sanctae virginitati etiam carnis comparari potest.*" Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 8.8, in PL 40, 400.

celibate life, the Fathers composed warnings of the challenges and temptations which they would face. In order to help strengthen their conviction towards celibacy, the aspiring female virgins were encouraged to contemplate both the carrot, the celestial reward for virgins, and the stick, the trials suffered by wives and mothers. Jerome (ca. 347-420) in his letter to the virgin Eustochium recounts the disadvantages of wifehood as a warning lest she rethink her decision to remain unmarried, listing "[the swelling womb of pregnancy], a wailing infant, the torment of a husband's unfaithfulness, household care, and how death at last cuts off all fancied blessings."[57] Tertullian interprets Jesus' warning "woe to those that are with child, and them that give suck"[58] in the final days as meaning that mothers are burdened by their offspring and thus unable to leave behind earthly world and achieve the same spiritual level as virgins. He represents mothers as being weighed down spiritually by the physical presence of the "burdensome fruit of marriage heaving in the womb … [and] in the bosom."[59] Elsewhere, he writes, "Let them accumulate by their iterated marriages. . . breasts [streaming], and wombs qualmish, and infants whimpering."[60] In their praises of the virginal state, pregnancy and maternity, the goods of marriage for women, are recast as onerous, and even repulsive, reminders of Eve's transgression.

The poem, "On Virginity," by Venantius Fortunatus, a bishop and poet living in the sixth and seventh centuries, reflects effectively the message of the Latin Fathers:

> [The virgin] does not overwhelm her numbed entrails with a shut-up foetus, or lie down, worn out and saddened by her hostage. In the panting agitation of her uncertain soul or body, her health is hanging by a worn thread, as she who will be injured swells by the wounds of the belly and the dropsy of pleasure grows. In addition, the cruel skin stretches out extraordinarily, that this condition which the mother got from love shames her… What words can express equally the groan of birth, or what song cause so many tears flow,

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[57] "*uterus intumescat, infans vagiat, cruciet pellex, domus cura sollicitet, et omnia quae putantur bona, mors extrema praecidat.*" Jerome, *Epistola XXII: Ad Eustochium, Paulae filiam*, in PL 22, 395; Translation from "Letter 22: To Eustochium" in Jerome, *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, *Ancient Christian Writers: The works of the Fathers in translation* (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1963), 135.

[58] Mt 24:19; Mk 13:17; Lk 21:23.

[59] "*in utero… in uberibus… aestuante sarcina nuptiarum.*" Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 5, in PL 1, 1395; Translation from "To his wife" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, , vol. 1, 286.

[60] "*…fructus iterates matrimoniis colligant, ubera fluitantia, et uteros nauseantes, et infants pipiantes.*" Tertullian, *De monogamia*, 16, in PL 2, 1002; Translation from "On Monogamy" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. 3, 54.

> when the maternal bindings loosen the onerous secret and the mother's entrails deliver the burden with great pain. The conquered doorway gapes open for the birth of the limbs and the child exits into the light, without light. The parent lives without an offspring…. She, who had hardly yet given birth, now has a funeral. She deserves to be called neither mother nor virgin.[61]

Fortunatus' poem depicts pregnancy as a sickness, a "dropsy of pleasure," which is shameful reminder of the woman's own fallen state from virginity, and her sex's original fall from Paradise—the death of the child recalling the way in which death came into the world. It echoes the sentiments of Jerome and Tertullian in portraying childbirth as a burden belonging to the physical world. In his description of the mother's sense of loss for her previously held virginal state, Fortunatus repeats the attitude towards reproduction voiced by the fourth-century Church Father, Saint Ambrose (ca. 340-397), who wrote that "we are not sanctified by carnal copulation, by conception, and by parturition, whereby the womb of a woman is opened and her virginity destroyed."[62] In an atmosphere of "eschatological fear and expectation,"[63] writers from the early Church shared in their concern that the fall from virginity meant giving up a spot in the celestial kingdom. The descriptions of pregnancy and the female reproductive body composed by Patristic writers, and the religious writers of their day, is influenced by this paradigm of antagonism between maternal and virginal states.

In praising virginity, the Patristic writers relegated maternity to secondary status, yet, they were careful to distance themselves from the heretical position that birth was sinful. The writings of Tertullian in defense of pregnancy are indicative of the Patristic writers' attempt to strike a careful balance between the base physical and the divine aspects of human

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[61] "*Non premit incluso torpentia viscera fetu / aut gravefacta iacet pignore maesta suo. /Inter anhelantes animae seu corporis aestus / in dubio pendens stamine fessa salus, / quando suis iaculis uteri laesura tumescit / atque voluptatis morbida crescit hydrus. / Ultra hominis habitum tantum cutis effera turget, / ut pudeat matrem hoc quod amore gerit. /... / Quis gemitum partus verbis aequare valebit / aut cui tot lacrimas carmine flere vacet, / cum sua secretum compago relaxat onustum / atque dolore gravi viscera fascis agit? / Victa puerperio membrorum porta fatiscit / exit et ad lucem fors sine luce puer. / Sin vivat genitus genetrix/.../ quae vix dum peperis, haec modo funus habet. / Nec mater fructu meruit nec virgo vocari…"* Venantius Fortunatus, *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes*, III vols., (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), II:142-44.

[62]"*Neque enim hi nos corporei coitus, conceptus partusque sanctificant, quibus vulva femina deflorato pudore virginitatis aperitur.*" Ambrose, *De Cain et Abel*, 9.46 in PL 14, I:357; Translation from "Cain and Abel" in Ambrose, *Saint Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. John J. Savage, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 399.

[63] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female sanctity and society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 212.

generation. Tertullian broaches the topic of pregnancy in his defense of the theological argument that Christ's humanity came from Mary against the heretic Marcion. He presents his opponent's claim that growth in a woman's womb is unworthy of God on account of the "uncleanness of the generative elements within the womb, the filthy concretion of fluid and blood, of the growth of the flesh for nine months long out of that very mire."[64] Moreover, he explains that Marcion's argument is strengthened by the unpleasant aspects of pregnancy: "Describe the womb as it enlarges from day to day, heavy, troublesome, restless even in sleep, changeful in its feelings of dislike and desire. . . . Of course you are horrified also at the infant, which is shed into life with the embarrassments which accompany it in the womb."[65] These are the conditions of prenatal life which are seemingly unbefitting of God: the animalistic and temperamental womb, its filthy and shameful contents, and a birth contaminated by this environment. In his defense of Christ's absolute humanity, however, Tertullian does not play down that image of the womb as a place of impurity and discomfort. Rather, he writes, "Christ, at any rate, has loved even that man who was condensed [*coagulatum*] in his mother's womb amidst all its uncleanness, even that man who was brought into life out of the said womb [*pudenda*], even that man who was nursed amidst the nurse's simpers."[66] Although, every human birth is contaminated by physical pollution, through Christ, who, Tertullian argues, loved his own redeeming nativity, birth is reformed. A similar list of disgusting qualities attributed to the pregnant womb was composed by Jerome in his description of the humiliations that Christ endured when he was born into human form. In being born, Christ suffered "a womb teeming for nine months, nauseation, the birth, blood, swaddling clothes. . . [being] wrapped in the usual webbing of membranes."[67] Christ endured these things, however, because they were necessary aspects of

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[64] "*...spurcitias genitalium in utero elementorum, humoris et sanguinis foeda coagula, carnis ex eodem coeno alendae per novem menses.*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, in PL 2, 803; Translation from "On the Flesh of Christ" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, 170.

[65] "*Describe uterum de die in diem insolescentem, gravem, anxium, nec somno tutum, incertum libidinibus fastidii et gulae.... Horres utique et infantem, cum suis impedimentis profusum utique et oblitum.*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, in PL 2, 803-4; Translation from "On the Flesh of Christ," 170.

[66] "*Certe Christus dilexit hominem illum in immunditiis, in utero coagulatum, illum per pudenda prolatum, illum per ludibria nutritum.*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, PL 2, 804; Translation from "On the Flesh of Christ," 171.

[67] "*uterum insolescentem, fastidia, partum, sanguinem, pannos. . . . tegmine membranorum solito convolutus.*" Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate b. Mariae, adversus Helvidium*, 18, in PL 23, 212; Translation from "Against Helvidius" in Jerome, *Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, trans. John N. Hritzu, *The Fathers of the Church: A new translation* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Universitiy of America Press, 1965), 38.

becoming human, in the flesh. In these writings, the image of the womb, even the blessed womb of the Virgin Mary, is of a restrictive and unclean space. This image, however, parallels the Church Fathers' descriptions of the carnal body, which itself was seen as a constraining and polluted container for the soul. But, because Christ, too, suffered in this postlapsarian condition, the Fathers insist, humanity is redeemed from conception to death.

Patristic writers attempted to mitigate the harsh postpartum pollution taboos of the Hebrew Laws to fit with this redemptive theology. Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) wrote that, although childbirth is not forbidden by God, it carries the stain of the Original Sin: "For there are many things which are proved to be lawful, and yet we are somewhat defiled in doing them."[68] Nevertheless, when, as Pope, he was asked by his missionary Augustine of Canterbury whether this defilement prevented pregnant women and newborn infants from being baptized, and women who have recently given birth from attending church, Gregory replied that, for the act of carrying and bearing children, women should not been seen as being guilty of any sin. "The pleasure of the flesh is in fault," he writes, "and not the pain [which is in bringing forth the child]."[69] Gregory emphasizes that childbirth is a natural process which is ordained by God for the continuation of the human race after the fall. The pain of childbirth is the "punishment" which redeems childbirth from its fallen state. Out of shame, he writes, women may desire to observe the Levitical period of postpartum or menstrual separation, but they should not be forbidden from going into a Christian church if they are moved to by a strong spiritual urge. For, "as in the Old Testament the outward works are observed, so in the New Testament, that which is outwardly done, is not so diligently regarded as that which is inwardly thought."[70]

On the question of whether or not the infant should wait before being baptized, he likewise asserts that the sacrament should be performed quickly so that the child might not be

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[68] "*Sunt etenim multa quae licita ac legitima, et tamen in eorum actu aliquatenus feamur...*" Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, ed. André Crépin, vol. I, *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2005), I, 27, 24. Translation from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England: A revised translation*, trans. A. M. Sellar (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 46.

[69] "*…voluptas etenim carnis, non dolor in culpa est.*" Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, I, 27, 20. Translation from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, 43.

[70] "*Sicut enim in testamento verteri exteriora opera observantur, ita in testamento novo non tam quod exterius agitur quam id quod interius cogitator sollicita intentione adtenditur….*" Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, I, 27, 23. Translation from Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, 45.

at risk of dying before it is conferred, disregarding the belief that the newly born are ritually unclean. Cyprian (d. 258), in his defense of the baptism of infants against the suggestion that they are impure from being enclosed in the womb, emphasized divine aspects of birth:

> For, with respect to what you say, that the aspect of the infant in the first days after its birth is not pure, so that any one of us would still shudder at kissing it, we do not think that this ought to be alleged as an impediment to heavenly grace. . . . For although the infant is still fresh from its birth, yet it is not such that any one should shudder at kissing it. . . since in the kiss of an infant every one of us ought, for his very religion's sake, to consider the still recent hands of God themselves, which in some sort we are kissing, in the man lately formed and freshly born, when we are embracing that which God has made.[71]

Although the infant is grown in the womb and composed from the flesh, it receives its soul from God. Cyprian even goes so far as to suggest that God physically shapes the foetus with his hands. He implies that God's intentionality in his preservation of humankind through the act of childbirth and in the creation of each infant supersedes the element of pollution associated with maternal carnality.

Patristic writing teaches that, although it bears the stain inherited from the first mother, childbirth is a natural occurrence. Agricultural imagery associated with fertility was used positively to associate pregnancy with God's great plan and the necessity of procreation. For those who chose the married life, the "fruit of the womb" is their reward.[72] Jerome advises the widow Salvina to take comfort in her wifely reward, the "*fructus ventris,*" and let her children be a replacement for her lost husband.[73] For women who model themselves after the model of the "good mother," who is chaste in marriage and in widowhood, there can be

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[71] "*Nam et quod vestigium infantis in primis partus sui diebus constituti mundum non esse dixisti, quod unusquisque nostrum adhuc horreat exosculari, nec hoc putamus ad coelestem gratiam dandam impedimento esse oportere. . . . Nam etsi adhuc infans partu novus est, non ita est tamen ut quisdam illum in gratia danda atque in pace facienda horrere debeat osculari, quando in osculo infantis unusquisque nostrum pro sua religione ipsas adhuc recentes Dei manus debeat cogitari, quas in homine modo formato et recens quodam modo exosculamur quado id quod Deus fecit amplectimur.*" Cyprian, *De infantibus baptizandis*, 4, in PL 3, 1052; Translation from "Epistle 58: To Fidus on the Baptism of Infants" in Cyprian, *The Writings of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage*, ed. Ante-Nicene Christian Library, trans. Rev. Robert Ernest Wallis, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Translations of the Writings of the Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), 197-98.

[72] Ps 126:3.

[73] Jerome, *Epistula LXXIX: Ad Salvinam*, in PL 22, 723.

some consolation in procreation. However, Jerome views these fruits small in comparison with the fruits of virginity.

In their examination of the theological significance of Christ's birth from a woman, the Patristic writers compare the uterus to various kinds of containers. The pregnant womb is sometimes imagined as a sacred space. Cyprian imagines the hands of God working inside the womb; and, Augustine thanks God for his pious mother, "in whose womb You created me."[74] Mary's womb, which exceeds any other in its proximity to the divine, is described by Augustine as a bridal chamber: "that secret place from which he came forth to us… the Virgin's womb where humanity was wedded to him."[75] Ambrose distinguishes Mary's womb from the wombs of other mothers by its virginal intactness; it is an enclosed sanctuary. In his exegetical examination of Ezekiel 44, he interprets allegorically the sealed Temple of Israel as representing Mary's womb:

> '*And he brought me back to the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary, which looked towards the east; and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered by it, and it shall be shut*….'" (Ezekiel 44:1-2) Who is this gate, if not Mary? For that reason, closed, because a virgin. The gate, therefore, is Mary, through whom Christ entered this world, when he was delivered in the virginal birth and did not open the closed genitals of virginity.[76]

Jerome, too, calls the Virgin's womb, the "temple of the Lord's body" and "sanctuary of the Holy Spirit."[77]

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[74] "*in cuius utero me creasti*." Augustine, *Confessionum*, 9.9, in PL 32, 773.

[75] "*in illud secretum unde processit ad nos, in ipsum primum virginalem uterum, ubi ei nupsit humana creatura*..." Augustine, *Confessionum*, 4.7, in PL 32, 701. Translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, 2 ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 65.

[76] My translation. " '*Et converti me secundam viam portae sanctorum exterioris, quae respicit ad Orientem, et haec erat clausa. Et ait ad me Dominus: Porta haec clausa erit, et non aperietur, et nemo transibit per eam; quoniam Dominus Deus Israel transibit per eam. Eritque clausa….' Quae est haec porta, nisi Maria; ideo clausa, quia virgo? Porta igitur Maria, per quam Christus intravit in hunc mundum, quando virginali fusus est partu et genitalia virginitatis claustra non solvit.*" Ambrose, *De institutione virginis*, 8, in PL 16, 334.

[77] Jerome accuses Helvidius of sullying the "*templum Dominici corporis [et] sanctuarium Spiritus sancti*" by saying that it held Jesus' brothers and sisters after him. Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate b. Mariae, adversus Helvidium*, 16, in PL 23, 210; Translation from "Against Helvidius" in Jerome, *Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, 36.

Mary's virginal intactness was an important teaching for the Patristic writers who regularly depicted virginity through the metaphors of "things closed."[78] Tertullian believed that Mary lost her virginity postpartum since in childbirth her womb was "opened" by a male, her Son[79] –an argument which was later deemed heretical by the Church. Ambrose's image of Christ's birth from a "closed gate" better reflects the Patristic belief and orthodox Church teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary. The maternal womb, for the Latin Church Fathers was a permeable, penetrable space, which opens and shuts, and can be filled and emptied. This analogy reflects Old Testament descriptions of God "opening" the wombs of the wives of the patriarchs; however, "openness" for the Patristic writers took on a negative connotation in opposition to the metaphor of integrity used for virginity. Wives, who give themselves over to childbearing, are called glasses (*vitrum*), and are negatively compared to virgins who, in their intactness, are like pearls (*margaritum*).[80] The metaphor of female openness was tied to representations of female sexuality as receptive. The pregnant womb was one which had been opened by sexual intercourse and this breach would be repeated again in the act of giving birth.

The open maternal womb and its swelling in pregnancy were viewed with disgust as being like the alimentary organs. Tertullian connects the "open mouths" of talkative women with open genitals.[81] Jerome says of women who desire to procreate that they are "feeding on flesh." He writes, "Let those whose wombs are burdened cram their stomachs with flesh."[82] The pregnant womb is like a full stomach. Patristic writings on pregnancy lay emphasis on the swelling of the belly, the growth of flesh within it, and its food desires and aversions.[83]

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[78] Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 29.

[79] "*Peperit quae peperit, et si virgo concepti in partu suo supsit. Nam nupsit ipsa patefacti corporis lege: in quo nihil interfuit de vi masculi admissi an emissi: idem illud sexus resignavit.*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 23, in PL 2, 835. For an examination of Tertullian's argument of the "law of the open body" which makes Mary's status change from virgin to wife *in partu*, see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Mary's Virginity *in partu* and Tertullian's Anti-Docetism in *De carne Christi* Reconsidered," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (2007): 467-84.

[80] Jerome, *Epistola LXXIX: Ad Salvinam*, 7, in PL 22, 730.

[81] "*Per loquacitem irrepunt verba pudoris inimica. . .* Deus *enim* illis (*ait Apostolus*) venter est *(Philipp. III, 19), ita et quae ventri propinqua.*" Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 1.9, in PL 1, 1400.

[82] "*Comedant carnes, quae carni serviunt, quarum ferfor despumat in coitum quae maritis alligatae, gernerationi ac litteris dant operma. Quarum uteri portent foetus, earum et intestina carnibus impleantur.*" Jerome, *Epistola LXXIX: Ad Salvinam*, 7, in PL 22, 729.

[83] Some examples: "*uterum insolescentem*" (Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate*, 18, in PL 23, 212; Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, in PL 2, 804); "*tumore uteri"* (Jerome *Epistola XXII*, 13, in PL 22, 401); "[*uterum*] *gravem, anxium... incertum libidinibus fastidii et gulae*" (Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, in PL 2, 804).

This imagery of the womb as a stomach associates it with sins of the flesh, such as greed and lust.

3.3.2. Patristic representations of uterine blood and breast milk.

Theological teachings about female blood from menstruation and childbirth were tied to ideas about Original Sin and Old Testament purity laws. Medieval biblical commentators understood the pain of childbirth, and even menstruation, to be part of Eve's punishment after the Fall. Levitical purity laws condemn the blood which flows from a woman's uterus as unclean. The pollution taboo is reinterpreted in the New Testament, when Christ heals the woman suffering from a haemorrhage.[84] This act was interpreted as an "act of inclusion"[85] for those previously considered unclean and an overturning of the old Laws which predated the purifying sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Patristic writers, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Gregory the Great, defend the blood of childbirth and menstruation from the persistent appellation of filth by referring to God's hand in procreation as evidence that it is not innately sinful and by depicting the bleeding as natural (that is, uncontrollable, like hunger) in the postlapsarian world.[86] Nevertheless, the regularity with which Church authorities tackled the question of the menstrual and postpartum woman's pollution reveals that the association of women's uterine blood with impurity endured in medieval Christian societies.

Cyprian's defense of infant baptism in his letter "On the Baptism of Infants" reflects the Levitical tradition that the contents of the womb were viewed as pollution. The continuation of belief in uterine impurity is evident from Patristic references to the "filthy" and "nauseating" mixture of fluid and blood by which foetus is surrounded. Cyprian writes that the uncleanness of being born does not make an infant more polluted by sin. The only sin of the newborn infant is being born in the flesh, having "contracted the contagion of the

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[84] Mt 9:19-22; Mk 5:24-34; Lk 8:43-48.

[85] Linda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy women and hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 45.

[86] "*Certe Christus dilexit hominem illum in immunditiis, in utero coagulatum illum per pudenda prolatum, illum per ludibria nutritum…*" Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 4, PL 2, 804; "*Quid enim ei deest qui semel in utero Dei manibus formatus est*?" Cyprian, *De infantibus baptizandis*, 2, in PL 3, 1051); "*Perpende autem, frater carissime, quia omne, quod in hac mortali carne patimur ex infirmitate naturae, est digno Dei iudicio post culpam ordinatum; esurire namque, sitire aestuare algere lassescere ex infirmitate naturae est…. Feminae itaque et menstruus sui sanguinis fluxus aegritudo est*." Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I, 27.22. in Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, 226.

ancient death at its earliest birth."[87] He quotes Paul's saying: "To the pure, all things are pure."[88] Christians should not fear the physical filth of uterine blood, which is a mere sign of the spiritual infection, more than they should fear the guilt of not cleansing the infected infant through baptism and thereby putting its soul at risk. Likewise, Augustine argues that the Hebrew Law ordering women to be purified after menstruation should not be understood as indicating that the menses of women are sinful. The impurity of the menstrual blood, rather, lies in its existence in the "material formless state" when no conception has taken place to give it form and a soul.[89]

Cyprian's and Augustine's reinterpretations of the Levitical prohibitions concerning contact with uterine blood were echoed by Gregory the Great. In his response to Augustine of Canterbury's concerned questioning of the rules for parishioners who fall under the Levitical pollution interdict, Gregory stresses flexibility above all. Despite what is written in the Law, "nevertheless, the woman who is suffering from her monthly condition must not be forbidden to enter the church, because the superfluity of nature should not be considered a crime."[90] Menstrual blood is a superfluity, but one which was necessary for the preservation of the race after the Fall.[91] The menses are impure in the same way that hunger, thirst, and infirmity are impure; they are all symptoms of the fallen state. However, Gregory also cites Paul's dictum that impurity lies in intention rather than uncontrollable carnal urges. The woman who touched Christ's clothes in order to be cured of her haemorrhage had pure intentions. Likewise, he advises in his letter, women who seek to cleanse themselves of the inherited sin marked by the flow of blood by receiving Holy Communion should be praised for this pure desire. Thus, Gregory teaches that, "monthly courses are no crime in women, because they

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[87] "*...nisi quod secundum Adam carnaliter natus contagium mortis antiquae prima nativitate contraxit…*" Cyprian, *De infantibus baptizandis*, 5, in PL 3, 1054-55. Cf. "Epistle 58: To Fidus on the Baptism of Infants" in Cyprian, *The Writings of Cyprian*, 198.

[88] "*Omnia munda mundis: coinquinatis autem et infidelibus, nihil est mundum, sed inquinatæ sunt eorum et mens et conscientia.*" Tit 1:15.

[89] "*Numquid et solita menstrua peccata sunt feminarum? A quibus tamen eas eadem Legis vetustas praecepti expiari; non nisi propter ipsam materialem informitatem, quae facto conceptu tanquam in aedificationem corporis additur: ac per hoc cum informiter fluit, significari per illam lex voluit animum sine disciplinae forma indecenter fluidum ac dissolutum; quem formari oportere significant, cum talem fluxum corporis jubet purificari.*" Augustine, *De bono conjugali*, 20.23, in PL 40, 389.

[90] "*Quae tamen mulier, dum consuetudinem menstruam patitur, prohiberi ecclesiam intrare non debet, quia ei naturae superfluitas in culpam non valet reputari…*" Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I, 27.22. in Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, 226.

[91] Charles T. Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," *Speculum* 56, no. 4 (1981): 713.

naturally happen."[92] However, he means that they are "natural" to the condition of women only after the Fall.

Although they oppose a strict reading of Levitical pollution laws and defend menstrual blood is a natural component of postlapsarian condition, Patristic writers continue to see it as a symptom of the Original Sin. Gregory wrote that female fertility and the ability to bear children was a concession made by God so that mankind could continue in future generations after the Fall. However, Jerome ties woman's punishment most closely to menstruation. He understands menstruation to be a reminder of Eve's transgression, connected to both parts of the divine curse on woman: that she shall have pains in childbearing and shall be ruled over by her husband. According to Jerome, "She who is no longer subject to the anxieties and pain of childbirth, she who has ceased to be a married woman with the cessation of the function of the menstrual blood, is freed from the curse of God… [and no longer] placed under the power of her husband, but, on the contrary, her husband is made subject to her…."[93] Once freed from "the curse," women can refuse the marriage debt and encourage their husbands to turn their minds to prayer. Although Jerome represents clearly the relationship between menstruation and fertility, it is a physical fertility which is tainted for him by its origins. To Jerome, the best kind of fertility is a spiritual kind which is supplied by virgins. Menstrual fertility is something to be despised along with other worldly distractions. Elsewhere, Jerome echoes the Book of Esther in praising a noble lady who, in aspiration of becoming a nun against the wishes of her family, despised the luxuries of her wealthy status as if they were "menstruous rags."[94] Menstruation evidently continued to be viewed as a negative symbol. A Latin poem on the destruction of Sodom from the Patristic period, and falsely attributed to Tertullian, speaks of the continued menstruation of Lot's wife even after she defied the prohibition on looking back at the destroyed city and

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[92] "*Menstrua enim consuetude mulieribus non aliqua culpa est, videlicet quae naturaliter accidit*." Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I, 27.23. in Bède le Vénérable, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais (Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum)*, 228.

[93] "*Quae non est in partus anxietatibus et dolore, quae deficientibus menstrui cruoris officiis, mulier esse desiit, a Dei maledictione fit libera: nec est ad virum conversio eius, sed e contrario vir subjicitur ei*…" Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate b. Mariae, adversus Helvidium*, 20, in PL 23, 214. English translation from "Against Helvidius" in Jerome, *Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, 41.

[94] "*Et cum Esther loquebatur ad Dominum: 'Tu nosti quod oderim insigne capitis mei (hoc est diadema, quo utebatur quasi regina) et tantae ducam immunditiae, velut pannum menstruate.'*" Jerome, *Epistola CXXX*, in PL 22, 1109.

was, subsequently, transformed into a pillar of salt.[95] The image of the bleeding pillar of salt recalls the way in which the curse of menstruation was believed to be put upon women, through the disobedience of a woman, Eve.

The uneasy revision of Old Testament taboos against menstruation and postpartum blood which Patristic writers attempted in their reclassification of these physiological processes as natural and part of God's plan was not resolved in the medieval period. Evidence for this lies in the theological debates which circled around the question of whether Mary was wholly woman or entirely without the stain of original sin and all its consequences.[96] Early on, Tertullian had weighed in on the question of whether Mary contributed menstrual blood to the growth of Christ, and argued, based on contemporary medical belief, that the fact that she produced breast milk to feed her Son proved that she had had blood in her womb.[97] The complex arguments surrounding the relationship between Mary's bodily fluids and the flesh of Christ will be discussed with Marian theology, further on in this chapter.

Even breastfeeding, which commonly epitomized the nurturing maternal relationship in Patristic writing, took on some negative connotations for the Fathers of the Latin Church. Although the association of breastfeeding with nourishment and affection encouraged the Fathers to see in it a reflection of the divine relationship between God and humankind, this also caused them to condemn it as an imperfect reflection. The maternal relationship represented by the act of feeding and caring for an infant was a worldly one, a fleshy bond rather than a spiritual one. Thus, in the writings of the Fathers, we find reminders of Christ's apocalyptic warning: "Woe to them that give suck in those days!" which tainted even the more positive imagery of lactation. We find a separation between the representations of breast milk as a spiritual symbol, and of breast milk as a physical substance which feeds the flesh.

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[95] "*In fragilem mutata salem stetit ipsa sepulcrum, / Ipsaque imago sibi formam sine corpore servans / Durat adhuc etenim nuda statione sub aethram, / .../ Dicitur et vivens alio iam corpore, sexus munificos solito dispungere sanguine menses.* Tertullian (*autor incertus*), *Sodoma*, in PL 2, 1161-62. For an English translation of the poem, see "A Strain of Sodom," (cf. ll. 165-73) in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, 290.

[96] See Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma."

[97] Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 20, in PL 2, 832. Cf. "On the Flesh of Christ" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, 206-7.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote about the abundance of maternal milk as a symbol of love and nourishment, but he credited God as the ultimate source of this bounty. Milk was the physical food, preserved in the breasts of his mother and wet-nurses, which Augustine called the source of "sustenance and delight" in his infancy. Yet, Augustine writes, the ultimate source of his puerile satisfaction was not a physical parent, but a divine one:

> It was Yourself, using [women's breasts] to give me the food of my infancy, according to Your ordinance and the riches set by You at every level of creation. It was You by Your gift that I desired what You gave and no more, by Your gift that those who suckled me willed to give me what you had given them: for it was by the love implanted in them by You that they gave so willingly that milk which by Your gift flowed in the breasts.[98]

Augustine describes the human breast as full and flowing, but the gift of this milk could be given or refused to the infant at the will of the mother. Ultimately, it is God who ensures that the infant is fed by supplying mothers with both the lacteal food and the suitable maternal affection so that they may be inclined to impart it. Elsewhere in the *Confessions*, Augustine teaches that the seemingly innocent act of breastfeeding is in fact an opportunity for the infant to ease into sin, since an infant can become greedy for the milk and jealous of other infants who share in it even though there is enough for all.[99] Augustine sets up a comparison between God's breast, which pours forth divine love, abundantly and without limit, and the maternal breast, which provides the food upon which carnal attachments are founded, and which never satisfies.[100] The milk of the breast may be a blessed food and an emblem of God's divine love, but hunger for it is a result of the weakness of the human condition after the Fall.

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[98] "*tu mihi per eas [mater mea, vel nutrices meae] dabas alimentum infantiae, secundum institutionem tuam et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas. Tu etiam mihi dabas nolle amplius quam dabas; et nutrientibus me dare mihi velle quod eis dabas. Dare enim mihi per ordinatum affectum volebant quo ex te abundabant.*" Augustine, *Confessionum*, 1. 6, in PL 32. Translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.

[99] "*Vidi ego et expertus sum zelantem parvulum: nondum loquebatur, et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu collactaneum suum. Quis hoc ignorat? Expiare se dicunt ista matres atque nutrices nescio quibus remediis. Nisi vero et ista innocentia est, in fonte lactis ubertim manante atque abundante, opis egentissimum, et illo adhuc uno alimento vitam ducentem, consortem non pati*." Augustine, *Confessionum*, 1.7 in PL 32.

[100] Margaret Miles has written of this as an example of her argument that ownership of the female breast was appropriated by males, in this case, God: "By contrast with the ambiguous breast of his mother/nurse, Augustine discovered a reliable breast . . . that offered unlimited gratification." Miles, *A Complex Delight*, 3.

Other Patristic writers similarly depicted milk and nursing as worldly ties. Jerome wrote that the bond between mother and child extends back to infancy. He recalls this bond in a letter to a mother about her daughter's desire to devote herself to a life of virginity when he tells her, "[your daughter] was nourished by your milk, taken from your body; she grew in your embrace, [and] you kept her safe by your protecting love."[101] After performing this maternal sacrifice, he writes, why then should the mother want her daughter to be condemned to such worldly concerns when a superior, spiritual path is opened to her. The maternal bond forged in the womb and at the breast tied mothers to day-to-day matters, preventing them from achieving the same spiritual bond with the divine which virgins strive to attain. Tertullian teaches that "[the] day when the 'woe' pronounced over 'such as are with child and giving suck' shall be fulfilled. . . for from marriage result wombs and teats and infants!"[102] Affection for children will be a source of grief in the final days for they will be turned over to the "murderous midwives" sent by the Antichrist.[103] Breastfeeding was itself considered laudable, but, as a function of the maternal body, it was not as praiseworthy as virginal continence.

The praiseworthy attributes of breastfeeding, that is, the physical sacrifice and the communication of nourishment and love, lent it metaphorical force in Patristic theology. Metaphorically transferred onto the incorporeal, milk is cleaned up. The Fathers followed the scriptural tradition, where milk represents spiritual nourishment. Ambrose described the symbolic meanings of breastfeeding in his exegesis of Genesis 49. He focused on the layers of symbolic significance of "breasts" in Jacob's saying, "You prevailed by reason of the blessing of the breasts and womb, the blessings of your father and mother."[104] In one layer, the breasts are said to signify the two bountiful Testaments which foretold and revealed Christ: "And he did well to say 'breasts,' because the Son nurtured us and offered us to the

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[101] "*Tuo lacte nutrita est, tuis educata visceribus, in tuo adolevit sinu; tu illam virginem sedula pietate servasti*." Jerome, *Epistola XXII: Ad Eustochium, Paulae filiam*, 20, in PL 22, 407. English translation from "Letter 22: To Eustochium" in Jerome, *The Letters of St. Jerome*, 152.

[102] "*quo die 'voe' illud super praegnantes adimplebitur, id est, super maritos et incontinentes: de nuptiis enim uteri, et ubera, et infantes.*" Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 9, in PL 2, 974. English translation from "On exhortation to chastity" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. 3, 15.

[103] "*Parent Antichristo in quae libidinosius saeviat. Adducet illis carnifices obstetrices.*" Tertullian, *De monogamia*, 16, PL 2, 1002. Cf. Tertullian "On Monogamy" in Tertullian, *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, vol. 3, 54.

[104] Gen 49:24-5.

Father as men nourished on a kind of spiritual milk."[105] Another layer of Ambrose's reading of Jacob's words is that they are an example of the Old Testament foretelling events of the New Testament and the breasts are Mary's, "which were truly blessed, for with them the holy virgin gave milk to drink to the people of the Lord."[106] Breast milk serves as a symbol for the spiritual food on which Christians are reared. Augustine echoes this image when he rejoices: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the bread, made Himself milk for us. . . . Hence let us grow, by this milk let us be nourished; before we are strong enough to receive the Word, let us not depart from faith in our milk." [107] Recalling Paul's saying "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it,"[108] he says that since, "the infant is not fit for the table, he is fit for the breast, and therefore bread is passed from the table through the mother's breast, that the same food may thus reach the little infant."[109] Likewise, Christians need divine food that is suitable for their stage of spiritual development. It was a reminder of the weaknesses of the flesh that kept Christians in a state of spiritual infancy long after physical maturation.

After scripture, the Church Fathers were the most frequently cited authorities on theological questions throughout the Middle Ages. Patristic descriptions of women's reproductive bodies are repeated in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, in the exegetical compilations such as Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, and the *Glossa Ordinaria*, for example. A cleric, educated in the late Middle Ages, would have been familiar with Patristic interpretation of scripture and theological matters directly and indirectly from a number of sources. However, the beliefs of the Fathers about sex difference and the qualities they

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[105] "*Et bene ubera, quoniam velut quodam nos spiritali lacte nutritos educavit, et obtulit Deo Filius*." Ambrose, *De benedictionibus Patriarcharum*, 11.51, PL 14, 723. Translation from "The Patriarchs" in Ambrose, *Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, *The Fathers of The Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1972), 269.

[106] "*Vel Mariae dicit ubera, quae vere benedicta erant, quibus sancta Virgo populo Domini potum lactis immulsit*." Ambrose, *De benedictionibus Patriarcharum*, 11.51, PL 14, 723. Translation from "The Patriarchs" in McHugh, trans., *Ambrose*, 269.

[107] "*Dominus ergo noster Jesus Christus panis, se fecit nobis lac…. Hinc crescamus, ipso lacte nutriamur; antequam vale diximus ad capiendum Verbum, non recedamus a fide lactis nostri*." Augustine, *Ennaratio in Psalmum CXXX*, 11, in PL 37, 1712. Translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, trans. Anonymous, vol. VI (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1857), 84.

[108] 1 Cor 3:2.

[109] "*Ad mensam infans minus idoneus est, ad mamillam idoneus est. Panis ergo de mensa trajicitur per matris mamillam, ut sic perveniat idem alimentum ad parvam infantem*." Augustine, *Ennaratio in Psalmum CXXX*, 9, in PL 37, 1711. Translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, 83.

ascribed to maternal birthing and feeding of infants and menstrual and postpartum emissions found life beyond the vellum page of tomes enclosed in clerical libraries. Sermons, devotional literature, and even saints' *lives* reproduce the metaphors and connotations which surround maternal bodies in the scriptural and theological traditions, disseminating them among the Christian laity.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, we will examine a number of descriptions of the maternal body found in accounts of the bodies of the mother of Christ, and of saints whose lives emulated her model of maternity in every way but one, and of the bodies of ordinary lay women whose maternity bore the curse of Eve. Although the sources for these accounts were generally composed by male clerics and reflect scriptural and theological traditions, many were incorporated into popular culture, being spread through sermons, incorporated into saints' cults, and enacted in religious plays. In some cases, as is common in the study of popular religion, it is difficult to say whether the origins of a tradition are coming from the top down or from the bottom up. The desires and demands of a popular audience was certainly a factor in the dissemination of many of these accounts.

3.4. The archetypal "good" mother: Mary and saintly mothers.

The most popular saint in the Middle Ages was the Virgin Mary.[110] The theological and popular beliefs about Mary deserve special attention here because of the role she played as both an archetype and antitype for mothers. In theological tradition, Mary was presented as the ideal mother; she is identified with agricultural metaphors, which emphasize her abundant fertility since she gave life to the human race through her Son, with container metaphors, which point out that her holiness derives from being the vessel by which God entered the world, and with lactation imagery, which highlights the boundlessness of her maternal compassion. In many ways, however, Mary was unlike any other mothers; her womb was closed, though maternity was typically associated with the "opening" of the womb; her breast milk was not just physically but also spiritually nourishing, and it was seemingly infinite, supplying the entire human race with salvific provisions; it was

[110] On the importance of the cult of Mary in medieval culture, see Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

sometimes suggested that because she was without the stain of Original sin, she did not endure the "curse" of menstruation. The unique qualities of Mary's maternal body were crucial for understanding the divine mystery of the Incarnation of God. Popular representations of Mary helped to disseminate doctrines of Marian theology and reflected the widespread distribution of a common set of metaphors and beliefs about the physical elements of the virgin birth. In accounts of Mary's exceptional maternity, concerns and expectations about normal experiences of motherhood are revealed.

3.4.1. *Virgo parturiens*.

In medieval imagery commonly used to portray the Virgin Mary, we can see that, like other women, she was also very often described according to her reproductive capabilities. The virgin pregnancy and uncontaminated birth of Christ, in particular, were crucial aspects of her saintly life.

The maternal womb was commonly described as fruitful and women's natural fertility was compared to agricultural production. Mary's womb, which brought Christ into the world, and brought life not only to one person but to all humankind, was described as abundantly fertile; and the fecundity of her womb was depicted using a wide array of flower, field, and tree metaphors. Mary's ancestry from the family of David, her unique birth, and the unique birth of her Son are commonly indicated by reference to Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a flower blossom from his roots."[111] Mary is interpreted as the stem sprung from the root of Jesse which blossomed miraculously without seed or moisture.[112] Similarly, Jacob of Voragine, in his *Golden Legend*,[113] calls Mary, "the shrine of God, the spring undug, the field unplowed, the vineyard unwatered, the fruit-

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[111] "*et egredietur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet*."

[112] For some early examples, see Tertullian *De carne Christi* in PL 2, 834; or Rabanus Maurus *Enarrationes in librum Numerorum* in PL 108, 688. On the popularization of the image in stained glass windows and liturgical tradition of the High Medieval period, see, Margot Fassler, "Mary's Nativity, Fulbert of Chartres, and the Stirps Jesse: Liturgical Innovation and its Afterlife," *Speculum* 75, no. 2 (2000): 389-434.

[113] Jacobus de Voragine, a Dominican friar and later archbishop of Genoa, composed the *Legenda Aurea* (*Golden Legend*), an extensive collection of saint's *lives* and other religious legends sometime before the year 1267. It enjoyed wide popularity, being translated into the vernacular in several languages. Cf. Carl F. Barnes Jr., "Golden Legend," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, V, 574.

bearing olive,"[114] calling attention to the fact that Mary's fecundity was not the result of the work of any man. We also find references to Mary's fertility in the widespread tradition of associating Mary with flowers, including the rose and lily, most commonly, but also a great number of other flowers. In this tradition, the late-medieval theologian and poet Jean Gerson[115] invokes Mary with these words of praise: "Beautiful Rose, and more comely than a rose, you are a unique rose. For you are the only rose who is also called lily and violet, sweet and full of honey.… Rejoice, verdant paradise, in whom our face comes alive, from whom arises the flower of beauty…"[116] The composer of eight homilies to the Virgin Mary, Amadeus of Lausanne,[117] emphasizes Mary's close relationship with Christ, with his own set of agricultural metaphors: "Every tree is distinguished by its fruit and valued because of its own specific fruitfulness. Just as the palm tree is appreciated for the sweetness of its dates, the vine for the juice of its grapes, the olive for the fatness of its oil, so it is certain that the praise of the Son redounds upon his Mother, and the divine birth fills the Bearer with glory."[118] These analogies encourage a connection between Mary's physical childbearing and the fruitfulness of the spiritual rebirth of humankind which took place through Christ.

Like other women, who were frequently categorized as either virgins or wives and their status represented by the synecdoche of the closed or opened womb, Mary, too, was often represented by her womb. She is lauded as the chosen vessel of the Creator (*vas*

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[114] "*…dei sacrarium, fontem indefossum, agrum inaratum, vineam non irrigatam, olivam fructiferam terre gremio non teneri*." Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2 vols. (Florence: SISMEL, 1998), 115, II:807. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, II vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), II:94.

[115] Jean Gerson (1363-1429) was deeply involved in Church reform and papal politics in the period of the Western Schism. His poetry is evidence of his side of spiritual contemplation. Cf. Louis B. Pascoe, "John Gerson (Jean Charlier)," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, V, 512-13.

[116] "*…rosa speciosa / super rosam tu formosa. / Tu es rosa singularis, / Sola rosa tu vocaris / Tu lilium et viola / Plena favis et suavis /… / Gaude vernans paradisus / In qua viget noster visus / De qua surgit flos decoris…*" Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. P. Glorieux (Paris: Desclée, 1960), IV:141. Translation from Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 288.

[117] Amadeus of Lausanne, was a twelfth-century Cistercian who became bishop of Lausanne in 1144. G. Bavaud, "Introduction" in Amadeus of Lausanne, *Huit Homélies Mariales*, ed. G. Bavard and J. Deshusses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1960).

[118] "*Omnis enim arbore ex fructu suo dignoscitur, et ex propria ubertate pensatur. Ut palma ex dactylorum suavitate, vitis ex uvae liquore, oleaster ex olivae pinguedine; ita nimirum laus nati genitrici exuberat et honorem puerperae partus divinus accumulat.*" Ibid., 64. Translation from Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, 157.

electum creatoris)[119] and identified with a number of container metaphors. Caesarius of Heisterbach[120] lists common names used to designate the Virgin Mary: "hill, castle, temple, chamber, city, palm, cedar, vine, rose, …the rod that budded, the burning bush, the fleece of Gideon, Solomon's throne of ivory and gold, the sealed fountain, the enclosed garden, and very many others which I must omit for the sake of brevity."[121] The great majority of these names refer to Mary's role as a container for God, as a closed off building, garden, or city, or else they are signs of her miraculous fecundity, such as the palm, the vine, or the budding rod. The remaining designations are to Mary as Queen of Heaven.

The images of Mary's womb as sacred container and fertile space come together in a vision of the maiden of Quida, recounted by Caesarius, which focuses on Mary as a new Eve:

> Once when she was meditating upon the profound difficulty of eternal predestination and upon the ineffable mysteries, and the remedy of the divine Incarnation, she fell into ecstasy, and saw herself in the presence of a maiden all crystalline, i.e. who appeared as bright and transparent as crystal, and in her womb she saw a most beautiful infant, crowned in the royal diadem. This diadem had moreover four branches growing from it, which, as she looked, grew and increased, fed by the brain of the maiden, and became trees, and soon filled the four quarters of the world. Whose fruits were the most beautiful, of wonderful odour and of marvelous savour. And behold beneath their branches was seen the whole human race, from the first created Adam to the last man who should be born at the end of the world. But only the elect

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[119] This phrase is from an anonymous twelfth-century Marian oration, "*Imperatrix reginarum*," which was frequently included in anthologies containing the work of Anselm of Canterbury. See Thomas H. Bestul, ed., *A Durham Book of Devotions* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1987), 64.

[120] Caesarius of Heisterbach (*ca*. 1180-*ca*. 1240) was the composer of the *Dialogus miraculorum* (*Dialogue of Miracles*), an important collection of miracles meant to serve as examples for the purpose of instruction on different points of Christian doctrine and morality. The collection was popular among preachers and Christian writers. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, III:10.

[121] "*Hanc designant per exemplum mons, castellum, aula, templum, thalamus et civitas, palma, cedrus, vitis, rosa...virgam floridam, rubum inter flammas virentem, vellus madidum Gedeonis, thronum eburneum ac deauratum Salomonis, fontem signatum, hortum clausum, et alia quam plurima, quae brevitatis studio sunt omittenda*." Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne: J. M. Heberle, 1851), 7.1, II:1-2. Translation from Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. Von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1929), I:454.

> were able to pluck the fruit of the tree and feed upon it; the reprobate could neither touch it, nor eat of it.[122]

The Virgin's transparent body effaces all of her parts except for the one associated with her fertility, her womb and her brain which feeds the Tree of Life, growing from her infant's head.[123] The vision contains striking images of female openness: the receptivity of the transparent flesh, open for all to see, and the tree, extending for all of the chosen to feed upon. However, in contrast to this, there are clear limits to the Virgin's openness, namely, the visible enclosure of her womb, and the tree's inaccessibility to the reprobate.

The image of Mary's womb as "closed container" was of significance for late medieval theologians. After Tertullian's teaching that Mary's womb was opened *in partu*[124] was dismissed, the virginal intactness of Mary became part of the divine mystery surrounding the nativity of Christ. The perpetual virginity of Mary was considered dogma within the Patristic period. Ambrose's allegorical reading of Ezekiel 44:1-2 as Christ passing through a "closed gate" taught that Mary's womb remained closed in childbirth and afterwards; in this it was unique: "There is a gate of the womb, but it is not always closed; indeed, only one was able to remain closed, [and] through it the offspring of the Virgin came out without the loss of genital closure."[125] Jerome wrote a polemical work defending the virginal union of Joseph and Mary from the belief that following the birth of Jesus, Mary gave birth to his brothers, saying that this thought of later births defiles the sacred womb which held Christ.[126] Not only was Mary's womb incorrupt, in the sense that it had never been opened, but, moreover, it was

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[122] "*Cum tempore quodam cogitaret de abysso aeternae praedestinationis, et de ineffabili sacramento atque remedio divinae incarnationis, facta in excessu, virginem coram se vidit cristallinam, id est ad instar cristalli perlucidam. In cuius utero contemplata est infantem pulcerrimum, regio dyademate coronatum. Habebat autem idem dyadema quatuor flores eminentes, qui ea intuente sursum ascendentes, et virginis cerebrum excrescentes, in ramos arboreos profecerunt, et modico spatio temporis emerso, quatuor mundi partes impleverunt. Quorum fructus erant pulcherrimi, odoris eximii, mirique saporis. Et ecce sub ramis eisdem apparavit omne genus humanum a prothoplasto Adam usque ad ultimum qui in fine mundi nasciturus est. Soli vero electi fructus arboris carpebant eisque vescebantur, reprobi autem nihil ex eis contingere vel vesci potuerunt.*" Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 7.20, 27-8. Translation from Scott and Bland, trans., *Dialogue*, II:484.

[123] Compare this image with the "crystalline womb of the virgin" described in Jacqueline E. Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts: The exuberant bodies of the Katharinenthal visitation group," in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval communities and the matter of person*, eds. Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 223-37.

[124] Cf. Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 23, in PL 2, 835.

[125] *"Est ergo porta ventris sed non clausa semper: verum una sola portis manere clausa, per quam sine dispendio claustrorum genitalium virginis partus exivit."* Ambrose, *De institutione virginis*, in PL 16, 319-20. My translation. (I am not aware of a published English translation of Ambrose's text.)

[126] Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate b. Mariae, adversus Helvidium*, 10, in PL 23, 202-3.

also free from corruption from sin. Thus, Thomas Aquinas,[127] following Patristic tradition, wrote that the expression in Luke 2:23 that Christ "opened" the womb of his mother, "does not imply the unlocking of the enclosure of virginal purity, but the mere coming forth of the infant from the mother's womb."[128] In fact, the belief that the maternal body from which Christ's flesh was formed should ever have had carnal intercourse, even after his birth, Aquinas deemed unbecoming.[129] Aquinas also argued that it was erroneous to believe otherwise than that the Son of God should be conceived without corruption of the mother.[130]

The theology of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which was developed by theologians in the Middle Ages,[131] taught that Mary was born without the taint of Original sin; as a result of being a "second Eve," that is, in the same state as Eve was before the Fall, she felt no pain in childbirth. In the late thirteenth century, the Franciscan author of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*[132] wrote that Christ was born without injury to the maternal body or any discomfort. He depicts the scene of the nativity of Christ in which the infant is miraculously transported from the womb to the floor at Mary's feet:

> And when the hour of birth had arrived, namely the middle of Saturday night, the Virgin, rising, went up to a certain column which was there: but Joseph sat unhappy, perhaps because he was not able to prepare those things which were suitable. Rising, therefore and collecting the straw of the manger, he threw it at the feet of the Lady, and turned away: then the Son of the Eternal God

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[127] Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) was a Dominican theologian whose extensive work attempted to harmonize knowledge derived from faith with that derived from reason. Although some of Thomas' writing came under censure for his use of pagan sources, he was eventually validated as both an exemplary scholar and a saint. Cf. Ralph McInerny, "Aquinas, St. Thomas," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, I:353-66.

[128] "*Unde ille apertio non significat reservationem claustri pudoris virginei: sed solum exitum prolis de utero matris.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, 28, a.2. in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Latin text and English translation*, ed. Thomas R. Heath, 61 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), LI:42-43.

[129] Thomas writes that this error detracts from the dignity of the Holy Spirit, of the mother of God, and of Joseph. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, 28, a.3. Cf. Heath, ed. *Summa theologica*, LI:44-53.

[130] "*Dicendum quod simpliciter confitendum est matrem Christi virginem concepisse: contrarium enim pertinet ad haeresim Ebionitarum et Cerinthi….*" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, 28, a.1, in Heath, ed. *Summa theologica*, LI:37.

[131] Mary's Immaculate Conception was not made an official doctrine until 1854, in the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* by Pius IX. However, it was developed by theologians from the Patristic period onwards. On the controversy in the Middle Ages, see, Marielle Lamy, *L'immaculée conception: étapes et enjeux d'une controverse au Moyen âge, XIIe-XVe siècles* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

[132] The *Meditationes* were believed to be composed by Bonaventure, but this attribution is now considered false. However, the work was likely written by an Italian Franciscan living at the end of the thirteenth century. Kathleen Ashley, "Accounts of Lives," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 441.

> exited his mother's womb, without any trouble or injury; in one moment, He was in the uterus, then He was outside of it, on the straw at His mother's feet.[133]

Alongside the teaching of Mary's exclusion from sin, medieval Christian writers developed an image of the birth of Christ which was similarly exceptional in that no womb was physically opened, no blood shed, and no pain endured.

In late-medieval popular piety, the teaching of Mary's intact womb and painless parturition was conveyed through representations of the apocryphal tale of the midwife, Salome. The legend originated in the second-century *Protevangelium of James*, which recounts many legendary details of the life of Mary in narrative form.[134] Christ's birth is described as occurring in a bright cloud. The attending midwife, who inspects Mary's body after the fact, is in awe of the event. She spreads the word that a virgin has given birth, but this fact is doubted by another woman present, whose name is given as Salome. She professes that she will not believe that a virgin has given birth until she has manually inspected the body of the new mother. Salome's hand is itself injured after having done injury to the dignity of the Mother of Christ, and it is then healed when she repents and touches the holy infant.[135] In another early version of this story, the midwife gives the following speech, which recounts the physical details of the miraculous birth:

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[133] My translation. "*Cumque venisset hora partus, scilicet in media nocte dominicae diei, surgens virgo appodiavit ad quamdam columnam, quae ibi erat; Joseph vero sedebat moestus, ex eo forte quod non poterat quae decebant parare. Surgens ergo et accipiens de foeno praesepis, projecit ad pedes Dominae, et vertit se in aliam partem: tunc Filius Dei aeterni exiens de matris utero, sine aliqua molestia vel laesione, in momento, sicut erat in utero, sic fuit extra uterum super foenum ad pedes matris suae*." Ps-Bonaventura, "*Meditationes vitae Christi*," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Fr. Benedicti (Paris: A. C. Peltier, 1868), 518.

[134] Although this work falls outside of canonical and divine literature, it had a widespread audience. As Luigi Gambero has written, it is valuable for what it reveals of how early Christians attempted to understand the mystery of the virgin birth: "The *Protoevangelium*'s author, as a collector of different stories and traditions, can be considered a very early and quite valid witness to the Christian people's faith in the complete holiness and virginity of the Mother of the Lord." Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 41.

[135] "The Protevangelium of James," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. VIII*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), XX, p. 365-66. This postpartum investigation of the Virgin's body is given as one of the proofs of Mary's perpetual virginity given by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Legenda Aurea*: "*Notandum autem quod nativitas Christi fuit mirabiliter facta, multipliciter ostensa et utiliter exhibita… Quarto per experientiam. Cum enim ut in compilatione Bartholomei habetur et de libro infantie salvatoris sumptum fuisse videtur, pariendi tempus instaret, Ioseph licet deum de virgine nasciturum non dubitaret, morem tamen geners patrie obstetrices vocavit, quarum una vocabatur Zebel et altera Salome. Zebel igitur considerans et inquirens et ipsam virginem inveniens exclamavit virginem peperisse. Salome autem dum non crederet, sed hoc similiter probare vellet, continuo aruit manus eius. Iussu*

> Lord Almighty, mercy on us! It has never been heard of, or thought of, that any one should have her breasts full of milk, and that the birth of a son should show his mother to be a virgin. But there has been no spilling of blood in his birth, no pain in bringing him forth. A virgin has conceived, a virgin has brought forth, and a virgin she remains.[136]

The midwife's words echo the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, while revealing that blood and pain were seen to be essential elements without which childbirth was inconceivable. Pain was a result of the sin which afflicted all life from the moment of conception, and a part of God's curse, thus no woman conceived in sin could hope to avoid it. This version of the nativity was repeated for popular audiences in several mystery plays of the late Middle Ages. The character of Salome appears among the surviving English biblical cycles, in the N-Town cycle and the Chester mystery plays and in the fifteenth-century French play, *Miracles de Notre Dame par personnages*.[137]

Caesarius of Heisterbach, a thirteenth-century monk whose *Dialogue on Miracles*, became a popular source of exemplary stories for sermons in the late Middle Ages, provides several accounts of miraculous visions of the nativity. In one story, a priest, meditating deeply on the incarnation of Christ, is transported in a vision to the inn where Christ was about to be born. He initially thinks that this virgin must be about to bring forth a prophet, since Christ had already been born into the world, but upon witnessing the birth, he realizes that he is in fact an observer at the scene of Christ's nativity: "Behold! She without any pain brought forth a son, and held Him out wrapped in swaddling clothes to the monk. And when he took Him into his arms and kissed Him, he understood the mystery."[138] Here, painless childbirth is read as the primary sign that this is the birth of the Son of God; elsewhere in the *Dialogue*, a naturally painful birth is a sign of fraudulent imitation of the virgin birth. This occurs in a story of a Jewish woman who was seduced by a Christian man and convinced by him, after she admits that she is pregnant, to trick her family into believing that she is a virgin

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tamen angeli sibi apparentis puerum tetigit et continuo sanitatem recepit." Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 6, I:66.

[136] "The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. VIII*, 376-77.

[137] Diane E. Booton, "Variation on a Limbourg Theme: Saint Anastasia at the Nativity in a Getty Book of Hours and in French Medieval Literature," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2003): 60.

[138] "*Ecce illa sine omni dolore peperit filium, pannisque involutum monacho porrigebat. Quem ille inter brachia sua colligens, ac deosculans, mysterium intellexit….*" Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 8.2, II:82. Translation from Scott and Bland, trans., *Dialogue*, II:3.

pregnant with the Messiah. However, when she goes into labour and delivers the child, she does so with "the usual pain, groans, and cries," bringing forth a daughter and not the Messiah.[139] In this story, Caesarius ridicules the delusion of the Jews, who did not believe in the actual birth of the Messiah foretold by their prophets, but who attended a birth which was in every way the opposite of Christ's birth from Mary; for, the mother was not a virgin, the birth not painless, and the infant not the foretold son but a daughter.

The teaching of Mary's painless childbirth was reflected in the popularity of late medieval women's prayers which seek divine assistance from the Virgin Mother for a safe childbirth. Relics which had touched the Virgin's reliquary at Chartres were brought home by women to improve their chances of a safe and easy delivery.[140] Pregnant women sometimes wore the prayer rolls inscribed with the *Magnificat*, the words spoken by Mary in the Gospel of Luke when she visits her cousin Elizabeth, for aid during labour.[141] The fact that Mary did not feel any pain in her labour was emphasized in the popular Marian "*peperit*" prayer, which invokes biblical birth stories, concentrating on the miraculous birth of Christ from Mary.[142] Miraculous accounts of the Virgin interceding to protect women in childbirth were popular in medieval collections of Marian miracle stories. The stories of Mary coming to the aid of a woman in labour in the middle of the ocean, or helping a pregnant abbess deliver secretly, are two frequently repeated examples of this theme.[143] The latter tale, which exemplifies the Virgin Mary's confounding tendency to offer compassion to the greatest of sinners, describes how Mary assists the penitent nun in having a painless birth like the one she experienced.

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[139] "*Affuit hora ut pareret misera, et ecce secundum consuetudinem mulierum dolor, genitus et clamor. Tandem enixa est infantem, non tamen Messiam, sed filiam.*" Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 2.24, I:94-5. Cf. Scott and Bland, trans., *Dialogue*, I:106.

[140] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 230-31.

[141] Carole Rawcliffe, " Women, Childbirth and Religion in Later Medieval England," in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Diana Wood (Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2003), 107.

[142] Marianne Elsakkers, "'In Pain You Shall Bear Children' (Gen 3:16): Medieval Prayers for Safe Delivery," in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. A. M. Korte (Boston: Brill Press, 2004), 184.

[143] For examples, of Mary helping a pious woman to give birth in the ocean, see William of Malmesbury, "*De miraculis beatae Viriginis Mariae*," in *El libro De laudibus et miraculis Sanctae Mariae de Guillermo de Malmesbury*, ed. J. M. Canal (Rome: Alma Roma, 1968), 36; Vincent de Beauvais, *La vierge et le miracle: Le Speculum historiale de Vincent de Beauvais*, ed. Michel Tarayre (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1999), VII, 86. For examples of the story of the dishonest abbess, see William of Malmesbury, *Miracula Beatae Virginis*, 35; Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*, VII, 86; Nigel of Canterbury, *Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in Verse / Miracula Sancte Dei Genitricis Virginis Marie, versifice*, ed. Jan Ziolkowski (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieaval Studies, 1986), 91-8. On the version written by Gautier de Coinci, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Gautier de Coinci and medieval childbirth miracles," in *Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music, and Manuscripts*, eds. Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 197-214.

After Mary miraculously lifts the child directly from the mother's womb and places him in a nearby town, the abbess' accusers find her without signs of pregnancy. The poetic account by twelfth-century monk Nigel of Canterbury describes how the nuns who investigated her body found a closed womb (*clausa viscera*), and breasts firm and dry (*ubera dura nimis et prorsus sicca*), and no signs that she was recovering from the pains of labour in her pulse and colouring.[144] Mary's ability to have miraculously released her infant from a sealed womb is also reflected in miracles stories where she appears and loosens prisoners from locked prisons or chains.[145]

Although Mary's parturition was believed to be painless, medieval tradition held that the mother of God did experience maternal pains and thus could be completely sympathetic to the suffering of men and women, and especially mothers. As Gail McMurray Gibson points out, "it is not at Bethlehem where Mary suffers her mother's pains…; Mary, immune from childbirth's painful curse, performs her mother's labor in grief at the cross."[146] Jacob of Voragine argued that Mary bore Eve's pain, in suffering at the death of her child, although she did not experience pain in childbirth.[147] Late medieval devotional literature reflects the teachings that Mary did not suffer in delivering the infant Christ and that she endured great anguish at the foot of the cross instead. The fourteenth-century Middle English poem, "As I lay upon a night (Lullay, lullay, lay lay, luallay)" has Mary singing to her son, telling him of his miraculous birth: "There as he[Gabriel] said, I gave birth to you, / On a midwinter night / As a virgin, without pain, / By the grace of God almighty. / *Lullay, lullay, lullay…*"[148] Another poem from the same period, "Stond wel, moder, under rode," mentions both the pain-free birth and the maternal suffering of Mary at the foot of the cross. In this poem, it is Jesus speaking to Mary, telling her not to grieve as he hangs on the cross: "Mother, now for the first time, you might come to know / What those who bear children suffer / What sorrow

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[144] Nigel of Canterbury, *Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in Verse*, ll. 2619-22, 46.

[145] See, for example, Caesarius' account of a knight released from his chains after he invokes the Virgin Mary. Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 7.28, II:37.

[146] Gail McMurray Gibson, "Scene and obscene: Seeing and performing late medieval childbirth," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29,1 (1999).

[147] "*Mulieri quoque dixit deus: 'Multiplicabo erumpnas tuas, in dolore paries.' Erumpnam Maria sustinuit, cuius animam gladius pertransiit, sed sine dolore genuit. Maria ergo, etsi communicat erumpnis Eve, non communicat parturiendo cum dolore*." Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 115, II:809. Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, II:96.

[148] "There as he[Gabriel] seidë, I thee bare, / On midwinter night / On maydenhed, withouten care, / Be grace of God almight. / *Lullay, lullay, lullay…*" Thomas G. Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics, 1200-1400* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1995), 115.

have they that lose a child /…/ Mother, have pity for maternal pain! / Now you know a mother's lot, / Even though you are a clean maiden…"[149] This tradition of representing Mary's co-suffering with Christ on the cross as being like the torments of labour is typical of forms of religious devotion which characterized the late Middle Ages from the twelfth century onwards, focusing on emotive, and sensuously physical, expressions of the relationship between God and humankind.[150] The emphasis on Mary's agony, as the flesh which is her flesh is tortured, implies, too, that the experience of pain is necessary in order to for Mary to experience fully her motherhood, and have true compassion for other mothers.

3.4.2. *Virgo lactans*.

Although the nativity stories found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke do not mention Mary nursing the infant Christ, medieval writers frequently laid emphasis on the symbol of the *Virgo lactans*, stressing that Christ's physical nature came from her maternal body. This tradition began with the Patristic writers. Tertullian referred to Mary's breasts as a fountain (*fons*) which nourished the infant Christ with blood taken from lower regions and converted to the more favourable substance of milk (*materiam lactis laetiorem*).[151] Later medieval artistic and literary depictions of Mary increasingly favoured the imagery of the nursing mother. The composer of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* writes that Mary does not only feed her son with her milk, but also uses it to wash him:

> And the mother quickly bending to the infant, gathering him up and embracing him sweetly, held him in her lap and from her breast filled from heaven and informed by the Holy Spirit, began to wash or daub him all over

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[149] "'*Moder, now tarst thou might leren / What pinë thole that children beren, What sorwë have that child forgon /. . ./ 'Moder, rew of moder carë! / Now thou wost of moder farë, / Though thou be clenë mayden-man.*'" *Ibid*., 125.

[150] On the representations of Mary's suffering in late medieval art and the literary traditions which preceded it, see, Amy Neff, "The Pain of Compassio: Mary's labor at the foot of the cross," *The Art Bulletin* 80, 2 (1998): 254-73.

[151] Tertullian, *De carne Christi*" in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. II, 832.

> with her milk: when this was done, she wrapped him in the cloth from her head.[152]

Mary's swaddling of the Christ child depicted here reflects the postpartum practice, noted by Albert the Great, of covering the infant with breast milk so that it might help shape strong limbs as the child grows outside the womb.[153] This belief stemmed from the understanding that breast milk was a purified version of the blood which supplied the material for the growth of the infant in its uterine environment. The act of washing Christ in mother's milk before wrapping him in the womb-like swaddling clothes reminds readers that Christ's human flesh came from Mary's womb.

It was common for writers in the later Middle Ages to stress the emotional bond between the nursing mother Mary and the infant Christ as well as the physical one. The author of *Meditations on the Life of Christ* argues that Mary felt more sweetness towards her child than any other mother has ever felt.[154] The belief in Christ's reciprocal obligation to Mary for carrying him and nursing him, led to the argument that Mary, above all the saints, could beg for his favour toward humankind. Bernard of Clairvaux calls Mary, the *Mediatrix* of all creation because through her humanity could approach God.[155] Medieval devotional poetry echoes the belief that Mary's intercession on our behalf will lead to Christ's compassion. The macaronic English poem, "*Enixa est Puerpera*" contains the following lines: "Well I know that He is your son / The one whom you carried in your womb; / He will grant you your request / This infant whom you breastfed."[156] Here the poet links directly Mary's role as intercessor to the physical acts of holding the infant in the womb and feeding

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[152] "*Et mater incontinenti se inclinans, recolligens eum et dulciter amplexans, posuit in gremio suo et ubere de coelo pleno, et Spiritu sancto edocta, coepit lavare sive linire ipsum per totum cum lacte suo: quo facto involvit eum in velo capitis sui...*" Ps-Bonaventura, "*Meditationes vitae Christi*," 524.

[153] Compare Bonaventura's description of Mary's swaddling of Christ with Albertus' recommendations: Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 3.9.

[154] "*O quam libenter eum lactabat! Vix fieri potuit, quin magnam, etiam aliis foeminis inexpertam dulcedinem in talis filii lactatione sentiret.*" Ps-Bonaventura, *Meditationes vitae Christi*, 524.

[155] "*Domina nostra, mediatrix nostra, advocata nostra, tuo Filio nos reconcilia, tuo Filio nos commenda, tuo nos Filio repraesenta. Fac, o benedicta, per gratiam quam invenisti, ... ut qui te mediante fieri dignatus est particeps infirmitatis et miseriae nostrae, te quoque intercedente participes faciat nos gloriae et beatitudines suae, Jesus Christus Filius tuus Dominus noster.*" Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Adventu Domini*, 2.5, in PL 183, 43.

[156] "Wel I wot He is þi sone / *Ventre quem portasti*; / Then wol grant þe þy bone / *Infans quem lactasti /…*" These lines are from the late-thirteenth, or early-fourteenth-century poem, "*Enixa est Puerpera*" from Ashmole 1393 (Sum. Catal. No. 7589) in Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 34-5.

him at the breast. The relationship forged by the physical connection binds Christ to his mother and, through her, all humankind.

As mother of the Saviour, Mary, it was said, fed all Christians when she nursed her Son. Her breasts are associated with spiritual nourishment. Devotional poets called them "breasts of your consolation" (*ubera consolationis tuae*)[157] and "breasts of piety" (*mamilla pietatis*).[158] Aelred of Rievaulx,[159] in his sermon on Mary, teaches that Mary is the mother of all people: "Through her we were born, not to the world, but to God. Through her we are nourished, not with physical milk, but with that of which the Apostle says: *I gave you milk to drink instead of solid food* (1Cor 3:2). Through her we grow, not in physical bulk, but in spiritual might."[160] His sermon provides an expanded analogy of the transformation of the incomprehensible knowledge of God into a spiritual substance which weak humans can digest, based on the conversion of food into breast milk in the maternal body of the Virgin:

> Now let us see what sort of milk we have received from here. The Word of God, the Son of God, the Wisdom of God, is the *bread*, and He is *solid food*. Accordingly, only those who were strong--that is the angels--ate of him. We who were little were not able to taste this food because it was *solid*. We who were on earth were not able to get up to this bread, because it was in heaven. What happened then? This *bread* entered into the womb of the Blessed Virgin and there it became milk. What kind of milk? The kind we are able to suck. Reflect now on the Son of God on the Virgin's lap, in the Virgin's arms, at the Virgin's breast. All this is milk; suck it in. This is the milk that our good Mother provides for us. Now too reflect on her chastity, her charity, her

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[157] Maurilius of Rouen, "*Oratio beati Maurilionis episcopi ad sanctam Mariam*," included in London, Society of Antiquaries, MS. 7. Bestul, ed., *A Durham Book of Devotions*, 60.

[158] This phrase is from an anonymous twelfth-century poem, "*Imperatrix Reginarum*" given the title, "*Alia oratio de sancta Maria*" in London, Society of Antiquaries, MS. 7. Bestul, ed., *A Durham Book of Devotions*, 64.

[159] Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1166) was a Cistercian monk who composed a number of sermons, homilies and histories. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, IV:516-17.

[160] "*Per illam enim nati sumus, per illam nutrimur, non lacte carnis, sed illo de quo dicit Apostolus: 'Lac vobis potum dedi non escam.' Per illam crescimus, non magnitudine corporis, sed in virtute animae*." *Sermo XXIII.* Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 185. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 320.

> humility; and by her example grow in purity, grow in charity, grow in humility, and in this way follow your mother.[161]

Following the medieval belief that individual traits are passed on through breast milk, all of the Virgin's spiritual children can take on some of her qualities by ingesting her lacteal offerings. Thus, Aelred encourages his audience to share in the spiritual food and pass on the benefits: "*Honey and milk are under thy tongue* (Song 4:11). Since milk is the sign of motherly charity and nourishes little ones and causes a mother to bend over her infant, by 'milk' we understand 'compassion.' Nothing more impels a person to speak to another caringly and kindly and sweetly than compassion."[162]

Bernard of Clairvaux, the influential twelfth-century Cistercian abbot and theologian, was well-known for his great devotion to Mary; because of this, a popular legend developed around him which told of a miracle of a lactating statue of the Virgin mother. Since the early medieval period, images of the Virgin nursing Christ with one bare breast was depicted in art, but during the fourteenth century, statues and paintings featuring the *Virgo lactans* flourished.[163] It is in this period that we first see written versions of the legend of the Lactation of Saint Bernard. In the legend, Bernard is praying before a statue depicting the *Virgo lactans*, and he receives a few drops of milk on his lips.[164] This story was spread through artistic representations of Bernard which increasingly portray him praying before an image of Mary who is pressing a spray of milk into his mouth. A version of the same miracle circulated earlier concerning Fulbert of Chartres, who was also associated with the development of Marian devotion on account of several sermons which he dedicated to her.

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[161] "*Nunc quale lac de ipsa sumpsimus, videamus. Verbum Dei, Filius Dei, Sapientia Dei, panis est et solidus cibus est. Et ideo de illo soli illi qui fortes erant, id est angeli, manducabant. Nos, qui parvi eramus, non potuimus cibum istum gustare, quia solidus erat; nos, qui in terra eramus, non potuimus ad istum panem ascendere, quia in caelo erat. Quid ergo factum est? Venit iste panis in uterum beatae Virginis et ibi factus est lac. Et quale lac? Quale surgere possumus. Considera modo Dei Filium in gremio Virginis, inter brachia Virginis, ad ubera Virginis. Istud est lac quod nobis bona mater nostra ministravit. Iam nunc considera eius castitatem, eius humilitatem, et exemplo eius cresce in puritate, cresce in caritate, cresce in humilitate, et ita sequere matrem tuam.*" *Sermo XXIII*. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 186. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 321.

[162] "*Mel et lac sub lingua tua…. Quoniam lac est signum maternae caritatis et nutrit parvulos et facit matrem inclinare se ad parvulum suum, per lac intelligimus compassionem. Nihil autem magis facit hominem pie et benigne et duliciter loqui cum alio quam compassio.*" *Sermo XXIII*. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 188. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 325.

[163] Miles, *A Complex Delight*, 6.

[164] Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 54.

Nigel of Canterbury recounts, that the Virgin appeared to Fulbert when he was lying ill and healed him with her holy milk:

> … behold, the virgin with her breast revealed from her bosom
> Moistens the sick members with the sacred dew of milk;
> She who fed God on earth, likewise, refreshed
> The bishop with that breast…
> For at the touch of milk, all illness, driven off, flees.
> The members immediately become strong with the touch of the sacred drink.[165]

These accounts of miraculous physical lactation reinforce the belief that Mary provided spiritual sustenance for those who were devoted to her.

Mary's breast as a symbol of spiritual nourishment appears frequently in religious art of the late medieval period, but these symbolic representations serve to set it apart from all other female breasts. Margaret Miles describes the common features of the symbolic maternal breasts illustrated by late-medieval visual artists which distinguish them from eroticized breasts:

> First, they depicted a large breast, visually at odds with the small high breasts considered erotic by contemporaries. Second, Mary's dress does not show the provocative disarrangement that characterizes erotic exposure. Moreover, the covered breast is perfectly flat, while the exposed breast is round and ample: the viewer's impression was not that of an illicit glimpse of a normally concealed breast, but rather one of a purposefully revealed symbol of specific religious meaning.[166]

The Virgin's breast, which does not resemble the female body's natural organ, is differentiated from the breasts of ordinary women which dispense merely the material substance of milk; viewers are encouraged to focus on the spiritual offering of the miraculous breast which contains an abstract nourishment in the form of compassion, or pious example.

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[165] "*…ecce!—sinu producta virgo mamilla / Lactis rore sacri morbida menbra rigat; / Quoque Deum pavit in terris, hoc relevavit / Ubere pontificem… / Lactis ad attactus, morbus fugit omnis abactus. / Menbra vigent subito tacta liquore sacro*." Nigel of Canterbury, *Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in Verse*, 38.

[166] Miles, *A Complex Delight*, 45.

3.4.3. *Mater sine macula*.

In contrast to the prolific writing on the topic of Mary's lactation, whether the Virgin menstruated, or not, was a topic that medieval authors approached obliquely, but, nevertheless, with the utmost seriousness. The significance of the matter hinged on the questions of whether menstrual bleeding could be considered natural, and therefore Mary would be not wholly woman without it, or whether it was merely a symptom of sinfulness incompatible with the body of the mother of God. These questions were of crucial importance to the construction of the theology of the Immaculate Conception.

Long before the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was fully fleshed out, theologians of the Church took to describing Mary as being without the stain of sin. Augustine wrote that Mary "lived without contagion or the stain of sin."[167] To say that Mary was without sin is not to say explicitly that she is free from the menstrual periods that afflict all other women but, as Charles Wood has pointed out, if one is to accept the medieval tradition of viewing menstruation as part of God's curse on Eve, then one necessarily follows from the other. Wood's explanation reveals the paradox faced by medieval theologians in presenting the idea that Mary was free from Original Sin:

> [J]ust as her Immaculate Conception should have exempted her from the penalty of periodic distress, so, too, should her freedom from sin have made it unnecessary to procreate, a process which was in any event deemed impossible without that curse. Indeed, the seeming contradictions were even greater than that: Mary had, after all, nursed her Child, and it was widely recognized that lactation was intimately connected both with pregnancy and with those menses that made it possible.[168]

The penalties of the flesh that the daughters of Eve inherited from the sin of the first mother were also understood to be the source of their fertility. The contradictory necessities of Mary's purity and the contribution of her flesh to her Son were clearly reconciled in a uniform doctrine concerning Mary's reproductive body and relationship with sin.

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[167] "*Credite eum conceptum esse de Spiritu sancto, et natum ex Maria virgine, quae virgo ante partum, et absque contagione vel macula peccati perduravit*." Augustine, *Sermones ad Populum*, 244.1, in PL 39:2195.

[168] Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma," 719. For a critique of Wood and a further examination of medieval discussions of the mystery of Mary's physiology, see Paulette L'Hermite-Leclerq, "Le sang et le lait de la Vierge," in *Le Sang au Moyen Age*, ed. M. Faure (Paris: Cahiers du C.H.R.I.S.M.A., 1999).

The belief that Mary was exempted from the weaker, corrupt flesh, associated with female nature is expressed clearly by Peter Comestor,[169] in the *Scholastic History*:

> 'And all together continued in prayer with the women, and with Mary the mother of Jesus,' [Acts 1:14] who is distinguished from women because she is not properly able to be called woman, as if weaker, that is having undergone weakness. Nevertheless, sometimes woman is classified for her sex, not for her corruption.[170]

Comestor makes a distinction between Mary's incorrupt flesh and that of other women.

Medieval embryology, which held that menstrual blood was the female contribution to the conception and growth of the foetus, seemed to necessitate that Mary menstruated, since Christ's humanity was said to come from his mother's flesh. Scholastic logic was applied to reconcile the physical elements of birth with the purity of the flesh of Christ. Thomas Aquinas wrote against the concept of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, arguing that, if Mary had never had the stain of original sin, her soul would not have needed to be saved by Christ, which ran contrary to the doctrine of universal salvation. He argued that the Blessed Virgin did in fact contract original sin, but she was cleansed of it before her birth.[171] Notwithstanding this cleansing, there is one element of Original sin which is transferred universally by nature, which Thomas calls the *fomes*, or the lower powers; these are in all people, including Mary, giving them an appetite for sin, although not making it impossible for individuals to resist sin. Since Mary could not have been freed from this before the conception of Christ, Thomas argues,

> [I]t seems better to say that in the sanctification in [her mother's] womb the inflammation of sin [*fomes*] was not removed in essence from the Virgin but that it was rendered harmless. Of course, this was not achieved by an act of her reason. . . but rather by the abundance of grace given to her in her sanctification.… But afterwards, at the conception of Christ's flesh [in Mary's

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[169] Peter Comestor (*ca*. 1100-1178) was a theologian who studied under Peter Lombard and eventually taught at the Paris cathedral school. In *Historia scholastica* (*Scholastic History*) he created a foundational work for the study of the bible and theology. Cf. Mark A. Zier, "Peter Comestor," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages,* IX:513-14.

[170] "*Et erant omnes unanimiter perseverantes in oratione cum mulieribus, et Maria matre Jesu, quae a mulieribus distinguitur, quia non potest proprie dici mulier, quasi mollier, id est mollitiem passa. Interdum tamen mulier pro sexu, non pro corruptione ponitur*." Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica,* (Lyons:1542).

[171] "*Virgo non fuit sanctificata nisi postquam cuncta eius perfecta sunt, scilicet corpus et anima.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica,* III, q.27 a.2. in Heath, ed., *Summa theologica,* LI:10-11.

> womb], where immunity of sin was to shine for the first time, we believe that complete freedom from the inflammation of sin [*fomes*] passed over from the child to the mother.[172]

Since Mary's inclination to sin and concupiscence was fettered, lust did not pull unclean blood to the womb. Aquinas argues that Christ was formed of woman's blood in a manner similar to other conceptions, except that her blood was pure because it was brought to the Virgin's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus not tainted by impurity.[173] At this moment, through the connection between mother and child, the Virgin was sanctified and freed from *fomes*.

The theological question of the purity of the blood supplied in Mary's conception was popularized in the *Golden Legend*. In his sermon on the purification of Mary, Jacob of Voragine explains that Mary was conceived without sin, and, therefore, gave birth sinlessly without the contaminating effects of birth which compelled other Jewish women to undergo the rite of purification: "Mary needed no purification. She had not conceived by receiving seed and had been made perfectly clean and holy in her mother's womb. Indeed she was made so completely glorious in the maternal womb, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit upon her, that no slightest inclination to sin remained in her."[174] Mary's exemption from the Levitical laws concerning the unclean nature of the postpartum blood could have been explained simply by the widespread account of the bloodless birth of Christ taken from the apocryphal gospels; however, Jacob of Voragine argues that Mary was sinless in the

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[172] "*Et ideo melius videtur dicendum quod per sanctificationem in utero non fuit sublatus Virgini fomes secundum essentiam, sed remansit ligatus: non quidem per actum rationis suae… sed per gratiam abundantem quam in sanctificatione recepit…. Postmodum, vero, in ipsa conceptione carnis Christi, in qua primo debuit refulgere peccati immunitas, credendum est quod ex prole redundaverit in matrem totaliter a fomite subtractio.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, q. 27, a.3. in Heath, ed., *Summa theologica*, LI:18-19.

[173] "*Sanguis autem menstruus, quem feminae per singulos menses emittunt, impuritatem quamdam naturalem habet corruptionis; sicut et ceterae superfluitates, quibus natura non indiget, sed eas expellit. Ex tali autem menstruo corruptionem habente, quod natura repudiat, non formatur conceptus; sed hoc est purgamentum quoddam illius puri sanguinis, qui digestione quadam est praeparatus ad conceptum, quasi purior et perfectior alio sanguine. Habet tamen impuritatem libidinis in conceptione aliorum hominum, inquantum ex ipsa commixtione maris et feminae talis sanguis ad locum generationi congruum attrahitur. Sed hoc in conceptione Christi non fuit, quia operatione Spiritus Sancti talis sanguis in utero Virginis adunatus est et formatus in prolem.*" Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, q.31, a.5. in Heath, ed., *Summa theologica*, LII:26-29.

[174] "*Vere enim purificatione non indigebat que ex suscepto semine non conceperat et in matris utero perfectissime mundata et sanctificata erat. Adeo autem fuit in matris utero et in adventu spiritus sancti sanctificata et mundata quod non solum aliquod inclinatiuum ad peccatum in ea penitus non remansit…*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 37, I:247. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, I:148.

conception of Christ and, additionally, had been cleansed in her mother's womb and in the Annunciation. In another section of his work, he explains how Mary could have contributed to the body of Christ although she did not contribute menstrual blood: "Indeed the Holy Spirit took the most pure and most chaste blood of the Virgin and out of it formed that body."[175] This notion of Mary as the source of pure material is repeated in the Middle English poem, "*Edi be thou, hevenë queen*" ("Blessed are you, Heaven's Queen"), which describes Christ's conception in which the Holy Spirit acted upon Mary's blood. Of Mary, the poet writes: "You are the earth to God's seed; / On you lights the evening dew; / Of you springs the blessed blood / Which the Holy Ghost sewed in you."[176] The poet draws upon the common understanding of human conception, described using an agricultural model, while highlighting the unique aspects of the virgin birth: the fructifying role played by the Holy Spirit and the purity of the mother's material contribution.

In the third century, Jerome wrote about the filth and blood of Mary's womb, in order to emphasize Christ's humanity and sacrifice.[177] However, in the late Middle Ages, the popularization of the apocryphal nativity stories and devotions to Mary's purity deemphasized the physical aspects of Christ's birth. The purity of Mary's flesh, which was Christ's flesh, was accentuated. Thus, a fourteenth-century sermon taught:

> But Christ's flesh was taken and formed out of the most pure blood of the Virgin, and he himself lived in the most pure virginity until his death. This is shown well by observation. *The Book on Animals* [of Albert the Great] tells us that if someone's flesh is cut after death and found to be red, it is a sure sign of virginity; but if it is white, it is a sign that virginity has been lost.[178]

The conflation of Christ's flesh with Mary's flesh meant that the purity of Christ's body had to be traced back to the maternal body which provided him with the substance of his material form. This reflects the scientific beliefs that during conception women contributed matter to the foetus, and, further defines the paradigm, affirmed by the story of the Fall, in which each

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[175] "*Nam spiritus sanctus de castissimis et purissismis sanguinibus viginis accepti unde corpus illud formavit.*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 6, I:67. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, I:39.

[176] "Sprongë blosome of onë rotë, / The Holy Gost thee reste upon; . . . Thou art erthe to godës sedë, / On thee lightë th'evenë-dew; / Of thee sprang the edi bledë, / The Holy Gost hire on thee sew…" Duncan ed., *Medieval English Lyrics, 1200-1400*, 107.

[177] Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate b. Mariae, adversus Helvidium*, 18, in PL 23, 212.

[178] Siegried Wenzel, ed., *Fasciculus Morum: A fourteenth-century preacher's handbook* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 221.

mother passes on to her infant the corruption of her flesh, by the miraculous overcoming of it.

3.4.4. The Maternal Body in Hagiography.

Female sanctity was often associated with virginity, following the belief of the Church Fathers that virginity was superior to marriage. However, although virgin saints, particularly the martyrs of the early Christian era, remained popular throughout the later Middle Ages, wives and mothers, who frequently modeled the ideal characteristics of obedience and quiet piety for the majority of contemporary women, joined their religious and virginal sisters in filling up the numbers of later medieval female saints. Mothers of saints and saintly mothers are described by clerical hagiographers, along with details about the physical aspects of motherhood. Medieval hagiographic literature tends to depict saints' mothers either as cruel antagonists threatening the young saint or as idealized nurturers fostering their blessed children. According to Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, the bad mothers who serve as a foil to the saintly offspring display distinctly nonmaternal qualities; they are abusive or attempt to kill their child.[179] In contrast, the idealized mother in medieval *vitae* is represented as the giver of life and the source of spiritual sustenance –a perfect version of the positive maternal stereotype. The descriptions of the maternal body in hagiography reiterate the biblical and Patristic ideas about the pregnant body as a container of secret or divine knowledge, the spiritual significance of childbirth pains, and the paradox of breast milk as both a spiritual food and as an earthly luxury.

A mother's connection with the child in her womb is recounted in the Bible in Elizabeth's exclamation that her son, who would be called John the Baptist, is leaping for joy in her womb when Mary greets her at her home. She reads this as a sure sign that the contents of Mary's womb are blessed. The premonitory knowledge of pregnant women, often through a vision which indicates the extraordinary nature of the child which they are carrying, is a common theme in hagiographic literature of the Middle Ages. The extensive collection of hagiographical narratives, Jacob of Voragine's *Golden Legend*, includes accounts of this

[179] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 257.

phenomenon in the *vitae* of several different saints. For example, Jacob repeats the well-known story that the mother of Saint Bernard had a prophetic dream while she was carrying him:

> She saw in her womb a little dog, white except for its red back, and the puppy was barking. She told a certain man of God about this dream, and he responded prophetically: 'You will be the mother of a very good dog, who will be the watchman of the house of God and will bark against its foes, for he will be a renowned preacher and will cure many by grace of the medicine of his tongue.'[180]

The legend of Saint Dominic also tells that the saint's mother had a dream where her future offspring was represented by a dog, in this case, one who came out of the womb carrying a torch which set the entire world aflame.[181] In both cases, the visions are remarkably somatic, representing the interior space of the womb and its exceptional contents. The pregnant woman's revelation is a common feature of other hagiographic collections, such as John Capgrave's *Chronicle of England*,[182] which repeats the already common feature of the life of the Irish Saint Brendan, the pregnancy vision of Brendan's mother who imagined her womb to be full of fine gold and her breasts to be resplendent.[183] A bishop is said to have interpreted her vision for her, saying that it meant she would give birth to a virtuous and holy child. All of these visions are interpreted as signals of the future sanctity of the foetus. Sometimes it is an outsider, generally a male cleric, who interprets a dream's significance, but most commonly in cases of premonitory messages it is the pregnant woman herself who has the visions about that which dwells within her body. Through the physical connection between the container and contents, she is the recipient of secret knowledge of her womb.

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[180] "*…adhuc gestaret in utero, vidit sompnium presagium futurorum, catellum scilicet totum candidum, totum in dorso subrufum et latrantem in utero se habere. Quod cum cuidam viro dei exposuisset, ille prophetica voce respondit: 'Optimi catuli mater eris, qui domus dei custos futurus magnos contra inimicos dabit latratus. Erit enim predicator egregius et multos medicinalis lingue gratia curaturus.*'" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 2:812. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:98.

[181] "*Cuius mater ante ipsius ortum vidit in sompnis se catulum gestantem in utero ardentem in ore faculam baiulantem, qui egressus ex utero totam mundi fabricam incendebat.*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 2:719. For an English translation, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 2:44.

[182] John Capgrave (1393-1464) was an Augustinian prior and historian who composed the *Nova Legenda Angliae* (*Chronicle of England*) as well as several saint's lives, sermons, and theological works.

[183] "*mater vero sinum sum vidit auro obriso plenum, et mamillas suas nimio splendore radiantes. Hanc visionem Ercus episcopus interpretatus dixit: quod ex illia mulier filius magne virtutis atque sanctitatis nasciturus esset.*" C. Hortman, ed., *Nova Legenda Angliae: As collected by John of Tynmouth, John Capgrave and others*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), I:136.

The religious association between the pain and danger of childbirth and sin is reflected in hagiographic accounts of labour. Some birth stories of saints depict extreme examples of the hazards of bringing life into the world. For example, Saint Gerald of Mag Eó was said to have emerged from the womb gripping onto a bloody clot of flesh torn from his mother's interior body.[184] On the other hand, a number of *vitae* deemphasize the pain of childbirth. The births of St. Leon, archbishop of Rouen, and that of the Irish Saint Coemgen, were said to be free of pain since both mothers and offspring were exceptionally innocent and virtuous.[185] More often, however, the ubiquitous nature of Original Sin explained the common experience of women in childbirth as painful and potentially deadly.

The invocation of saints was a necessary precaution to help protect women and their infants against the innate dangers of childbirth. Hagiographers' and preachers' accounts reflect the popularity of the cults of saints who acted as mediators for women in pregnancy and childbirth. St. Margaret of Antioch was connected with the concerns of pregnant women giving birth because of the frequently repeated aspect of her *vita* which described her birth-like escape from the belly of a dragon. In one Middle English account, which leaves out this tale of the dragon but preserves the saint's affinity with women in childbirth, Margaret gives a speech before her death, describing anachronistically the various ways late-medieval parents-to-be participated in her saint's cult:

> Each person who raises a church in my name and those who seek me with their candles, or with other alms, and those who write of my sufferings or purchase it with their alms, that within their house no disabled child be born: neither crippled nor dumb nor deaf nor blind nor mentally ill. But forgive, dear Lord, all their sins for your great grace and for your divine glories and for your great mercy.[186]

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[184] Saint Gerald was, and still is, a popular intercessor for pregnant women. For a discussion of Gerald's *vita* and what it reveals about early Irish concerns about pregnancy and childbirth see, Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of sex and gender from Early Ireland* (Itahca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 74.

[185] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 228.

[186] "And get Ic þe, leofa Drihten, biddan wille, þaet þu aelc þaera manna þe on minum naman cirice araere, and þan þe me mid heora lithe gesecan willa***d*** and mid o***d***rum aelmessan, and þan þe mine þrowunge gewrita***d*** o***dd***e mid heora figa gebicga***d***, þaet inne heora husum nana unal cild sy geboren: ne crypol, ne dumb, ne deaf, ne blind, ne ungewittes. Ac forgive þu, loega Drigten, ealle heora synna for þinra þaere mycele ara and for þinum godcundum wuldre and for þinre þaere mycelen mildheorness." "The Life of St. Margaret," in *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1400: An anthology*, ed. Elaine M. Treharne (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 270-71.

This speech demonstrates the conviction that devotion to a saint could protect the unborn child by interceding on behalf of the sins of the parents. Although no earthly medicine could immunize women and their offspring from the infection of Original Sin which brought with it the hazards of birth, the saints offered a spiritual remedy for the faithful believer.

Even before maternal breastfeeding became a popular ideal in the high and late Middle Ages, hagiographers described with great frequency the nursing of saintly infants at their mothers' breasts. Accounts of the breastfeeding of future saints draw upon biblical and Patristic images of breast milk as a symbol of purity and spiritual bounty, as well as the Augustinian belief that milk, as the first food which an infant tastes, is also the first object of carnal desire. According to Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's survey of the hagiographic genre, the mothers of newborn saints who suckled them at their own breasts seem to have done so as a result of the belief that milk could transfer moral or spiritual qualities from a nurse's body onto the infant and that their exceptional child, therefore, required the spiritually pure nourishment of his or her pious mother rather than the milk of a nurse of uncertain moral character.[187] This is the case with the mother of Saint Bernard as stated in the *Golden Legend*:

> His mother was called Aleth. She bore seven children, six sons and a daughter, all her sons future monks, her daughter promised to the religious life. As soon as she had brought forth a child, she offered him or her to God with her own hands. She did not allow her babies to be nursed by other women: it was as though she wished, with her milk, somehow to infuse them with her own goodness.[188]

The great piety of Aleth is revealed by the number of her offspring, whom she nourished at the breast, who devoted their lives to the church. One extreme account of maternal nursing is recorded in an exemplary story about a woman who died shortly after giving birth but, with the help of Mary Magdalene, the saint to whom she had prayed when she was trying to

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[187] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 236.

[188] "*...mater vero Aaleth nuncupata est. Haec septem filios genuit, sex mares, feminam unam; mares autem omnes monachos futuros, feminam sanctimonialsm. Mox autem ut filium partu ediderat, manibus propriis ipsum deo offerebat, alienis uberibus ipsos nutriri refugiebat, quasi cum lacte materno materni quodammodo boni infundens eis naturam.*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 2:809. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 98.

conceive, her body lactated miraculously to feed her child for two years, after which she was revivified by the saint.[189] On the other hand, a number of saints were said to have begun their pious careers as infants who abstained from overindulgence in the food of the breast. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg has presented a number of accounts of infant saints who were said to have had a preference for drinking out of right breast, which was believed to contain milk which is more pure, or whose piety was revealed by the fact that they would abstain from drinking from the right breast or from nursing on fast days.[190]

The idealized mothers, depicted in accounts of the Virgin Mary and *lives* of the saints, reveal the positive associations which were attached to the maternal body; these ideal qualities are most apparent in the symbolic descriptions of the womb as a sacred, and secret, vessel, and the breasts as transmitters of positive qualities, such as piety, and of both physical and spiritual sustenance. However, ideal models of motherhood such as those found in hagiographic accounts are not representative of medieval ideas about women's reproductive bodies in general, as we will show in the following section.

3.5. Maternity of the Daughters of Eve.

Medieval sermons and saints' *lives* emphasize the difference between the female portion of their audience and the holy women they depicted. There was a marked divide between the perfect mother, the Virgin Mary. Christianity taught that all women were daughters of Eve and all, except for Mary alone, were subject to the stain of Original Sin. Although Mary's role in humanity's redemption was performed through motherhood, she did not redeem maternity in general. Every birth was tainted by corruption and death; only in the second birth, baptism, were individuals born into purity and life. Thus, when Aelred of Rievaulx writes, "through blessed Mary we were born in a much better way than through Eve, because in that Christ was born of her, we have recovered newness of life in the place of

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[189] Pseudo-Etienne de Besançon, *An English Fifteenth Century Translation of the 'Alphabetum narrationum' Once attributed to Etienne de Besançon from Additional Ms. 25,719 of the British Museum*, ed. Mary MacLeod Banks, vol. II, *Early English Text Society* (London: Kegan Paul, Teench, Trubner & Co., 1905), 458, 312-13.
[190] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 236.

old age; incorruption in place of corruption; light in place of darkness,"[191] he associates birth from a woman with aging, corruption, and darkness in order to distance it from the idealized spiritual birth. In this way, he sets up a dichotomy between Mary's model of motherhood, which can only be imitated and never achieved, and Eve's maternity which is reflected in all birth. Medieval representations of motherhood frequently emphasize the failure to achieve the ideal, referring to pain in childbirth, postpartum uncleanness, and unchaste mothers' refusal to breastfeed their infants.

3.5.1. Hazardous births.

Representations of pregnancy and childbirth in medieval Christian writing often emphasize pain of childbirth as a punishment for sin, and motherhood as related to death, revealing the influence of the story of Eve's curse.[192]

Although medieval clerics rarely included descriptions of childbirth in any detail, in those accounts which depict childbirth at all, pain is the most prominent physical feature of birth to be described. Men were excluded from the birthing room, except in dire circumstances, but the sounds of women crying out in labour would have been familiar to many, living in the close quarters of medieval secular society. *Exempla* from the late-medieval period reveal their male authors' knowledge of the sounds of labour and their readiness to associate it with the punishment given to Eve in Genesis 3. In the well-known tale of the female Jew who tries to convince other Jews that she is virginally pregnant with the Messiah, the mother's cries of pain in childbirth are read as signs of her innate sin and, therefore, as proof of her deception.[193]

Medieval writers associated pain in childbirth not only with Original Sin, but also with individual sinfulness. Pregnant women's prayers, offerings, pilgrimage to shrines suggest that they were doing these things to alleviate their sin before the birth in hopes of lessening their individual share of their sex's punishment. In hagiography, as I mentioned above, pious women were sometimes said to have experienced painless childbirth, which was

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[191] "*Sed per beatam Mariam multo melius quam per Evam nati sumus, quia per hoc quod Christus de ea natus fuit, pro vetustate recuperavimus novitatem, pro corruptione incorruptionem, pro tenebris lucem.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 23.7, 185. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 320.
[192] Gen 3:16.
[193] See above, pages 126-27.

a sign of their exceptional purity. The reverse was also presented in accounts which emphasized the extraordinarily difficult labours of women with guilty consciences. This is the case in another exemplary tale included in the *Alphabet of Stories*, in which a young, unmarried woman who is "corrupt with child" frames an innocent deacon for her pregnancy. When the time for delivering the child arrives, the woman suffers a terrible labour which lasts seven days. Fearing death and damnation, she confesses her two crimes, her loss of virginity and the defamation of the deacon. When the local bishop hears of this, he reinstates the deacon and orders him to pray for the woman. Immediately, thereafter, she delivers the infant.[194] It is clear from this account that we, like the woman in the tale, are to interpret her pain in childbearing as a punishment for her sinful behaviour.

Guibert of Nogent[195] emphasized the pain which his own mother suffered in giving birth to him on Good Friday, linking her maternal sacrifice with Christ's sacrifice on the cross: "My mother had passed almost the whole of Good Friday in excessive pain of childbirth (in what anguish, too, did she linger, when I wandered from the way and followed slippery paths!) when at last came Holy Saturday, the day before Easter."[196] This example reveals that, in late medieval theology, a mother's pain could be viewed as both the punishment for Original Sin and a means of redemption.

The dangers of childbirth were a constant reminder that death entered the world through Eve. Many clerics were drawn to comparing the physical fertility of Eve, which was infected by mortality, with the spiritual fertility of Mary, which was eternal. For example, Jacques de Vitry[197] wrote: "On the one hand, Eve was just as the earth, *void and empty* (Gen. 1, 2), she who nurtured the head of the serpent in her lap; on the other hand, Mary was the blessed earth, fertile and fecund, she who crushed the head of the serpent."[198] By condemning all of her offspring to death, Eve was the archetypal murderess mother. This

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[194] Pseudo-Etienne de Besançon, *English Fifteenth Century Translation of the 'Alphabetum narrationum'*, 380, 261-62.

[195] Guibert of Nogent (*ca*. 1064-*ca*. 1125) was a monk who wrote works of theology and history, and composed his *Memoirs* in the style of Augustine's *Confessions*.

[196] Guibert de Nogent, *The Autobiography of Guibert, Abbot of Nogent-sous-Coucy*, trans. C.C. Swinton Bland (London: Routledge, 1925).

[197] Jacques de Vitry (*ca*. 1165-1240) was a famous preacher whose sermons, over four hundred of them extant, contain many anecdotes and *exempla* that reflect concerns of his day, including new religious movements, the crusades, and Christian relations with the Jews. Cf. S. C. Ferruolo, "Jacques de Vitry," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VII:39-40.

[198] Jacques d Vitry, *The Faces of Women in the Sermons of Jacques de Vitry*, trans. Carolyn Muessig (Toronto: Peregrina Translation Series, 1999) XXIV, 31.

archetype of the bad mother, who brought harm rather than nurture to her child and gave it death rather than life, captured the medieval imagination. One detested kind of murdering women were pregnant women who refused to become mothers, and instead procured an abortion or committed infanticide. According to Jerome, women who took potions to abort their pregnancies were guilty of the "murder of an unborn child."[199] Late medieval sermons provide *exempla* warning women of the seriousness of abortion and infanticide, since the infants killed were denied the chance of baptism and their souls were thus condemned. One story which circulated was a ghost story in which the mother died shortly after killing her child. The spirit of the mother appeared to her cousin and showed her the burnt child whom she had damned to hellfire.[200]

3.5.2. Mothers' blood and milk.

Fear of the pollution of menstrual blood was expressed in various ways by medieval Christian authorities. Although the Christian Church had rejected the Hebrew laws of ritual purification, women who were menstruating or bleeding following giving birth were still sometimes persuaded against certain forms of contact with their husbands and with sacred spaces. Women were strongly discouraged from engaging in sexual intercourse with their husbands while they were menstruating. Writers of penitentials suggested that sex with a woman who was menstruating could lead to a monstrous birth because, if conception occurred, it would be corrupted by the menstrual blood in the womb.[201] Before he became Pope Innocent III, Lothario Segni wrote *On Contempt of the World*, a treatise exaggerating purposefully all the negative aspects of life on earth. Regarding the foetus and menstrual blood, he wrote,

> But listen by what food the conceived child is nourished in the uterus. Indeed by menstrual blood, which ceases in woman after conception, and from which the conceived child is nourished in the woman. Which is said to be so

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[199] Jerome, *Epistola XXII: Ad Eustochium, Paulae filiam*, 13, in PL 22.
[200] Pseudo-Etienne de Besançon, *English Fifteenth Century Translation of the 'Alphabetum narrationum'*, 455, 309.
[201] Cf. Becky R. Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth: A window onto medieval perceptions of women," *Florilegium* 14 (1995-96): 46; Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 63.

> detestable and unclean, that grains that come in contact with it will not germinate, shrubs will wither, plants will die, trees will lose their fruit, and if dogs then were to eat it, they would run mad. Foetuses conceived [during menstruation] contract the defect of the seed, so that lepers and elephantics are born from this corruption. Thus according to Mosaic law, a menstruating woman is reputed as unclean [Lev. 15.19]; and if anyone were to approach a menstruating woman [sexually], he is ordered to be killed [Lev. 20.18]. And on account of the uncleanness of menstruation it is ordered that if a woman give birth to a male child, she should not enter the temple for forty days, if a female child, eighty days.[202]

Innocent, thus, explains the reasons for abstaining from sex during menstruation as a matter of public health for the protection of the unborn.

In the *Decretum* of Gratian,[203] woman's postpartum blood is associated with the innate weakness of the flesh but not with individual sinfulness. Following Gregory I, the *Decretum* states that a woman should be allowed to receive the sacrament of communion during the period of postpartum purification, if she is moved to do so, and if she should choose to refrain out of piety, this too is allowed. The latter option was observed because of the stain of Original Sin rather than a personal transgression:

> Even when they have no fault good people will sometimes acknowledge one. This is because things that happen without fault often occur on account of a fault. For example, we eat, which is without fault, when we are hungry, but it is because of the first man's sin that we become hungry.[204]

This pronouncement on the observance of the purification period suggests that all childbirth is necessarily tainted and that the new mothers are very often contaminated as a result of giving birth, although they should not be blamed for it.

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[202] Lothario De Segni, *De contemptu mundi sive de miseria*, 1.5. PL 217, col 704. Translation from Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, & Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 115-16.

[203] Gratian is the name of a twelfth-century canon lawyer, about whom not much is known. His *Decretum* is a concordance of Church law, incorporating papal letters, conciliar decrees and patristic writings. The concordance became a standard text for canon law. Cf. Kenneth Pennington, "Gratian," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, V:656-58.

[204] Gratian, *Decretum*, D.5.C.4.13. For an English translation see, Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, trans. Augustine Thompson (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 18.

Although it was connected with forms of uterine blood which fed the foetus and purified the body, menstrual blood, as well as the blood that was shed in childbirth, was frequently connected with negative symbols, such as Eve's curse, Levitical taboos, and pollution. Blood of birth was a conspicuous sign of maternal pain which, in Judeo-Christian tradition, was a reminder of the transgression of the first mother. The rules recorded in Leviticus for women who were experiencing the flow of uterine blood taught this blood was unclean, and that this uncleanness could be transmitted to objects and people.

Medical claims that breast milk transmitted qualities of the mother onto the nursling, and the increasing popularity of the Cult of the Virgin and, especially, the image of the *Virgo lactans*, were incorporated into late medieval advice against the practice of hiring wet nurses. The concern over the practice of wet nursing, widespread in many parts of Europe in the late Middle Ages,[205] was reflected in both the contemporary medical advice and in the clerical and lay response. It suggests that the image of the perfect maternal breast, associated with moral qualities of compassion and care, may have loomed largely in the minds of male didactic writers who opposed the hiring of wet nurses.

Breastfeeding was symbolic of maternal chastity, since it was believed that a woman's milk would become bloodied or dry up if she began to engage in intercourse. In the *Decretum*, married couples who hire a wetnurse to feed their newborns are reproached for their incontinence:

> A husband ought not initiate sexual relations until the newborn has been weaned. Nevertheless, among married couples, the depraved custom has grown up of women refusing to nurse their own babies and handing them over to other women to nurse. The only reason, apparently, is their incontinence, for they refuse to nurse their newborns to avoid practicing continence. And so women following this depraved custom, who hand their children over to others to nurse, would not have relations with their husbands before their

[205] The numbers of families who hired wet nurses varied from place to place, though the statistics are vague. We do know that maternal breastfeeding was more common among poor women among the peasantry and urban working class. Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1992), 59-60.

> purification have been completed…for the sacred law [Lev. 20:18] inflicted death on a man who approached a menstruating woman.[206]

The abundant milk of the good mother who nurses her own child would thus be a manifest sign of her chastity.

Medieval condemnations of the milk of wet nurses, which date as far back as Soranus, reveal that breast milk, although it was commonly associated with purity and nourishment, could also be viewed as tainted depending on the source. This sentiment was expressed in the early fifteenth century, by the Italian preacher Bernardino of Siena,[207] who chastised mothers who did not nurse their own children. He quotes Augustine in calling the practice a "depraved custom" by which mothers condemned their infants because of their own incontinence. Bernardino then adds his own denunciation of the practice based on the degenerating effect it can have on the infant:

> ….Although they have parents endowed with many gifts and virtues, [the infants] degenerate to such a degree over time that they are often suspected to be the progeny of another…. One who is nursed by an angry wet nurse, is inclined to anger; one raised by an immoderate one, is inclined to self-indulgence. And thus it is for many similar traits.[208]

Similarly, Erasmus[209] wrote in his *Colloquies* that the common practice of sending a child to be fed by the strange milk of a wet nurse was against nature. He compares women to the personified "Mother Nature" who "nourished those things she produces." He uses examples from the plant world to show how offspring, nourished on the milk of a woman different from the mother in whose womb they were fed before birth will suffer:

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[206] Gratian, *Decretum*, D.5.C.4.1-2. For an English translation see, Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, 17-18.

[207] Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) was a Franciscan preacher. His sermons, directed at lay audiences, focused on moral and religious concerns that affected secular audiences. Cf. William M. Bowsky, "Bernardino of Siena, St.," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, II:195-6.

[208] "[*Augustine:*] *'Prava autem consuetudo in coniugatorum moribus surrexit, ut filios quos gignunt, nutrire mulieres contemnant eosque aliis mulieribus ad nutriendum tradunt…. licet habeant parentes multis donis et virtutibus decoratos, degenerant quandoque in tantum, quod alterius progeniei fore saepius suspicentur…. A furiosis nutricibus lactati, inclinantur ad furiam; a luxuriosis educati, inclinantur ad luxuriam. Et sic de consimilibus multis.*" *Sermo XVIII. De Pudicitia Coniugali*, 1.3. Bernardino de Siena, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas, 1950), 220.

[209] Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (*ca*. 1466-1536) is frequently called the Father of Humanism. He was a Dutch priest who applied Christian humanist techniques to his study. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, IV: 628.

> Wheat being sown in strange soil degenerates into oats or small wheat. A vine being transplanted into another hill changes its nature. A plant when it is plucked from its parent earth withers, and as it were dies away, and does in a manner the same when it is transplanted from its native earth.[210]

These horticultural metaphors are followed by the argument that maternal nurturing is a gift of nature. A mother ought to consider her breasts as "two little fountains, turgid, and of their own accord streaming out milky juice." To spurn this gift of nature and turn her child away to a stranger who does not have the natural maternal feeling towards him, should cause any woman to blush at being called by the name of mother.[211] Thus, Erasmus plays up the contradiction between the perfect maternal breast, ample and flowing, and the breast of the bad mother who refuses her natural duty to her offspring and cuts him off.

In praise of maternal breastfeeding, medieval secular authors made positive comparisons between breastfeeding mothers and the Virgin Mary. Herzeloydë, the mother of Parzival, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of the Grail romance, imagines herself as a source of physical and spiritual nourishment while identifying with the mother of God. First she associates the milk which flows from her breast with infant's food, then with the spiritual liquid of baptismal water.[212] While pregnant, she calls her breasts "the holders of an infant's nourishment" and upon pressing milk from them calls it a second christening. Then, "[t]he queen took those little brownish-pink buds of hers—I mean the tips of her little breasts –and pressed them into his tiny mouth, for she who had borne him in her womb was also his nurse, like the most elevated of queens, who gave the breast to Jesus."[213] The description of the idealized breasts of Parzival's mother as containers of nutriment and spiritual salve like the breasts which fed the infant Christ, emphasizes the suitability of maternal milk.

In contrasting the depictions of the idealized mother, Mary, with the depictions of other women, it is clear that the image of the maternal body was polarized. Furthermore, the archetype of the "good mother," which was an ideal, helped to emphasize the imperfection of ordinary mothers. The physical aspects of childbirth, which included pain, bodily fluids, and

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[210] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. N. Bailey (London: Reeves & Turner, 1878), 364-65.
[211] *Ibid*., 376.
[212] For more on the religious significance of Herzeloydë's maternity see Patricia Ann Quattrin, "The Milk of Christ: Herzeloydë as spiritual symbol in Wolfram von Escenbach's Parzival," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Garmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996): 25-38.
[213] Wolfram of Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. H. M. Mustard and C. E. Passage, (New York: Random House, 1961), 62-3.

acts of self-sacrifice for a carnal rather than spiritual being, seemed to medieval religious writers to ensure that mothers were mired in the carnal world.

3.6. Conclusions.

This chapter has presented a dichotomy that existed in medieval Christian ideas about mothers. The Virgin Mary represented the ideal of motherhood. She was viewed as the generously loving and patient mother to all. In bodily terms, she was set apart from other mothers. Her womb was depicted as unsullied and intact despite pregnancy and childbirth. It was the original site of humanity's salvation and her material contribution was said to be untainted by sin. Her breasts and abundant white milk were modeled as symbols of compassion and purity. All mothers were urged to aspire to the maternal ideal embodied by Mary, and some saintly mothers were said to have achieved some degree of similarity, but in general the complete ideal of immaculate motherhood was out of reach for biological women. Furthermore, in contrast to the ideal, mothers were frequently portrayed as being tied to the misery of the carnal world, bodily ailments, pain, and death, as a result of their inheritance from Eve. Their wombs and uterine blood were frequenly portrayed as unclean. Bad mothers were disparaged for being sexually open, having milk of uncertain quality, and refusing their breasts to their offspring. The secondary associations attached to ideal wombs were largely based on spiritual and behavioural qualities, which were extensions of qualities that the idealized mothers were said to possess, while the associations attached to real wombs tend to highlight physical and corporal characteristics.

Chapter Four. Pregnant Men: Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth Imagined in the Context of the Male Body.

4.1. Introduction.

The second and third chapters of this dissertation provide a summary of medieval medical-scientific and Christian representations of the generative functions that were exclusive to women, namely, conception in the uterus, pregnancy, and birth, and the production and emission of menstrual blood and milk, with an emphasis on analogies and imagery associated with these phenomena. The scope for this collection of sources is broad, in order to give a sense of the wide variety of explanations for female reproductive functions, and of the diverse interpretations, which attached a range of meanings to the procreative bodies and bodily processes of women, that were available to medieval audience, and, also, to draw attention to recurring analogies and paradigms used to represent women's bodies in different contexts. In this chapter and the one following it, I examine how meanings are transferred when the female reproductive body and its generative functions are displaced, either by metaphor or by imitation, onto the male body.

The medieval written record contains many positive, or at least objectively neutral, descriptions of the female reproductive body which stress its natural fecundity, its ability to hold and protect a foetus, and its ability to feed a child before and after birth. In both medical and religious writing, we find examples of descriptive analogies which frame these physical characteristics in a favourable light. Frequently, the procreative female body is compared with creation in nature: fruitful trees, and productive fields, for example. It is also likened to other containers, such as buildings which serve as dwelling places or sanctuaries, ovens used for cooking, or molds that shape material. Moreover, many depictions of the female body credit it

with being the source of necessary provisions, such as the material needed for infant growth and nourishment. These analogies add abstract qualities to the female body they represent: comparisons with agriculture frame the female role in generation as receptive, natural, and/or creative; depictions of the womb's container function as being like a house, a kiln, or mold, attribute to it the qualities of being protective and nurturing, and/or of having a role in shaping the foetus; by casting the maternal body as a source of provisions, authors imagined it to have a bountiful supply and portrayed the act of feeding as generous and even as sacrifice.

On the other hand, the female reproductive body was also frequently represented in a negative light, as chapters two and three have shown. The Judeo-Christian tradition taught that childbirth pain and the danger of death were the result of women's role in the Fall of humankind; they were both the punishment for the transgression and the lasting sign of Original Sin. When female genitals were compared with male genitals, they were often described as inferior in size and function and as sites on the female body which made it open and penetrable. The uterus was, at times, imagined as a container for disgusting fluids, and the uterine environment was depicted as cramped for the foetus. The connection between the infant in the womb and the mother was viewed as possibly hazardous to the child; for, it was believed, the mother could cause harm to the infant through her actions or even her thoughts. Medical and religious authors both wrote about women's pain in delivering and the shadow of death that hung over the moment of birth. The unpleasant physical characteristics that were attributed to the female reproductive body reflect negative qualities that were ascribed to women themselves. In medical discourse, the female genital organs were considered to be the cause of many medical problems, and in Christian doctrine, they were frequently regarded as the site of women's insatiable lust. The descriptions of their shape and function cast female genital organs as passive, and submissive, qualities which were reflected in cultural beliefs about women. Women's contribution of material to the foetus, their ongoing menstrual cycles and frequent gynaecological illnesses, and the lengthy periods of physical involvement in the act of reproduction while their infants are gestating and nursing, reinforced the notion that women were occupied with bodily concerns.

The widely divergent interpretations of the physical phenomena of conceiving, being pregnant, and giving birth reflect cultural prejudices, both negative and positive, about women, their role in society, and their relationship to men. The examples reveal that

seemingly incongruous beliefs about women, drawn especially from ancient Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian traditions, were incorporated into medieval understanding of their bodily functions. In the medical tradition, which had roots in Ancient Greek theories, the belief that women's bodies were essentially equivalent to men's, but different in terms of potency and function, reinforced women's and men's different roles in society. The Christian paradox, which is exemplified in the figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary, allowed women to be described as both the source of temptation and evil and as the source of salvation. Through their bodies, the site of female sexuality and of childbirth, women could represent both the threat of damnation and the possibility of redemption that, simultaneously, confronted all Christians, men and women, alike.

The examples given in the previous chapters show that the female reproductive body was ascribed contradictory meanings, dependent on context as much as on convention. Thus, an author could, in one instance, attribute negative qualities and, in another, positive ones, to the same body part or physiological function, depending on his purpose. For example, Jerome describes the pregnant womb as a physical burden, which is part of the trials of motherhood, in his defense of virginity, and yet regards its reproductive function, when, borrowing a biblical phrase, he tells a widow to take comfort in the existing fruit of her womb rather than in a second marriage.[1] The range of interpretations for the same phenomena meant that both explanations were available for Jerome, and later, medieval authors, to draw upon.

In this chapter, I explore metaphors of pregnancy and birth, which are used to describe male subjects, and fictional accounts of men who are "pregnant;" I look at how representations of men conceiving, being pregnant, and giving birth draw from the range of attributes associated with the female reproductive body. The metaphors reflect both the medieval understanding of the actual physical phenomena which were part of carrying a foetus, giving birth, and the issue of menstrual blood and breast milk. These primary metaphors, based on observable characteristics, such as the shape and function of the reproductive organs, the physical experience of childbirth, or the colour and appearance of the blood and milk associated with birth, are consistent with characteristics described in medical and religious descriptions of the phenomena. In addition to these primary metaphors, we also find secondary metaphors based on specific meanings that were associated with these physical phenomena in

[1] See above, pages 105, 107, and 109.

various medieval traditions. These are largely intangible qualities, such as behavioural characteristics associated with motherhood and abstract concepts: for example, "nurture," "greed," "purity" or "pollution." The primary metaphors, based on the physical phenomena could be interpreted in different ways; for example, labour pain could be understood to be a laudable form of sacrifice or a punishment for past transgressions. The secondary metaphors, however, have already been given a particular meaning and value judgment; "womb is a nurturing space" is positive, and "womb is a polluted space" is negative.

The examination of maternal metaphors of pregnancy and birth, presented in the final two chapters of this dissertation, reveals that the complexity of meanings which existed in descriptions of the female body, where negative and positive associations could often result from the same phenomena, become especially polarized when transferred onto a male subject. Whether pregnancy and birth imagery is meant to convey positive or negative meanings is dependent on the particular male subject. The positive meanings associated with the female role in generation, such as creativity, fecundity, nurture, and selflessness, are used separately from the negative meanings, and reserved for representations of religious figures, God, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and saints, or they are adopted by certain male (and female) authors to describe themselves, particularly, in the contexts of spiritual devotion to the Christian faith and reflection on the rhetorical production. Negative associations with pregnancy and birth, which recalled Original Sin, and sin in general, such as carnality, pollution, pain, and death, are reserved for less praiseworthy figures; usually, these are men who are fools or the perpetrators of wicked deeds.

The first section of this chapter examines medical analogies used to ascribe qualities of the womb and its role in pregnancy to other bodily organs that are not exclusive to women, such as the brain, or the stomach. The next two sections of this chapter provide examples from religious and popular literature of the metaphorical image of the "good womb," which transfers onto its male subject the positive meanings associated with female generative functions, followed by examples of the metaphor of the "bad womb," which transfers onto its male subject the negative meanings associated with female generative functions. Each section provides an examination of sources which contain analogies involving pregnancy or childbirth in order to describe a male subject. I consider the different elements of reproduction that are

represented: conception, the site of pregnancy, the signs of pregnancy, the outcome of pregnancy, and the process of birth. I also take into account the situations in which a comparison with the female generative body, in conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, is used, the ways in which the comparisons are made, and the meanings that are transferred in the comparison. Finally, I attempt to draw some conclusions about the way the female reproductive body is used as a referent in these different contexts.

4.2. Equivalent wombs.

In Chapter Two, we introduced the important role played by analogy in medieval medical thought. In this section, we will examine comparisons that were made between the uterus and other organs based on their shapes and functions.

4.2.1. Womb-like qualities of hearts, heads, stomachs and bowels.

To Albert the Great, the heart and the uterus are two organs which have similar qualities: structurally, since they are both designed to attract, retain, and expel matter; and in their purposes, since, in different ways, they both act as sources of life. He wrote about the former,

> We say, therefore, that the heart is created out of strong, tough, flesh, by means of which it can better resist things that would change or harm it. For in it lies the principle of life. All different sorts of fibers are woven together in it. There are longitudinal ones for attraction, latitudinal ones for expulsion, and transverse ones for retention.[2]

Although he does not compare the heart and the womb directly, in this passage, Albert reveals structural similarities related to their shared functions of holding and expelling blood. The difference is that the heart heats the blood and ejects it to form and enliven the rest of the body, while the uterus uses it to provide the matter for the foetus, or else, expels it as waste.

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[2] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.3.4. English translation from Albertus Magnus, *On Animals: A medieval Summa Zoologica.*, trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell Jr. and Irven Micheal Resnick, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 266.

Elsewhere, Albert argues that all other parts of the body are generated from the heart, for it is the first organ to be formed in an embryo in the uterus. As a result, the embryo's heart is envisioned as a womb within a womb:

> This is just how all the powers proceed, by means of a distribution from one first power. In part of the seminal matter they are gathered together into the heart's location or into that which takes the place of a heart. It forms that part first and it forms all the other members later.… Moreover, the entire material multitude of the members arises from the heart through generation.… Thus, the heart is in the members much as the first heaven in celestial things and the power of the heart is like the power of the first cause in celestial things.[3]

Albert envisions the generative power of the heart as part of the essential life-bringing function which the organ was believed to hold: "For just as in generation, no part of the matter takes on the form of a member except by leaving from the heart (within which it takes on and dons the power which forms the member), so too in a generated animal, no nourishment is convertible into the form of the member except by using the heat of the heart to don the power through which it moves to the member."[4] Albert's emphasis on the role of the foetus' heart in generation displaces the generative power of the uterus. The womb is relegated to the role of a simple, passive container, while the formative and enlivening functions are carried out by the heat of the foetal heart.

The head and the brain were also compared to the womb in terms of their protective/retentive structures and creative functions. The medical language used to describe the two bodily structures contains some overlap. The membranes which envelop the brain were portrayed as tenderly protective and mother-like structures, given the names, "hard mother" (*dura mater*) and "pious/soft mother" (*pia mater*). Albert the Great described these membranes:

> There are, moreover, two pannicular-membranes covering the brain. The upper one is raised up to the skull and is thicker and harder to withstand the hardness of bone and to ward off any damage that might come to the brain from the bone. Because of its hardness [*duritia*] and the maternal vigilance [*materna*

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[3] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 20.2.5. English translation from Resnick, 2:1404-5.
[4] *Ibid*.

> *custodia*] it expends in keeping the brain from damage, it is called the *dura mater*.
>
> The second pannicular-membrane is soft and thin, clinging to the brain, holding it softly and guarding it lest it should be raised up and receive a hard blow…. Because of this protection, like that of a devoted mother, this pellicle is named the *pia mater*.[5]

In his description of the womb, Albert also describes it as having personified maternal qualities, embracing, and protecting the foetus.[6] Moreover, Albert assigns the brain maternal qualities of its own. He describes the brain as being connected to two "breast-shaped appendages" which connect to the olefactory canals, and as having chambers (*venter*) that hold the animal spirit.[7] He argues, "The divisions and commissures in the brain are necessary so that the animal spirit can be contained in them… [and] to enable the animal spirit to be digested in them."[8] He, thus, emphasizes the brain's container function.

According to Bartholomew Anglicus, the creative role of the brain as the source of sensation, movement, and thought, and its role in health could both be attributed to its container function. He described the spirit which rose from the heart and was converted in the different chambers of the brain. First, the heart's vital spirit was converted into animal spirit in the front chamber; then, it passed onto the middle chamber wherein intellectual understanding was formed; and, finally, the "formed" thought was passed into the final chamber of the memory where it was imprinted and stored.[9] Additionally, he calls these cells of the brain, "wombs" in which thoughts are engendered.[10] The multicelluar structure given to the brain and the process of converting, shaping, and storing its contents resemble attributes commonly assigned to the womb. Moreover, like the womb, the brain is said to be affected by the movements of the moon, waxing and waning by drawing more or less of the cerebral

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[5] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.3.1. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 246.
[6] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 22.2.
[7] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.3.1.
[8] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 1.3.1. English translation from Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 248.
[9] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 5.3, pp.123-25. Cf. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 174.
[10] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 5.3, p.124. Cf. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 173.

"substance and virtue" into itself.[11] As a result of its fluctuations, Bartholomew writes, the brain positively and negatively affects the health of the whole body.[12]

Some writers posited a sympathetic relationship between the brain and the womb. The roots of the theory can be found in ancient authorities who had suggested that there was a connection between the brain and the production of semen in the genital organs. In the Hippocratic treatise, *On Generation*, it is argued that sperm flows from the entire body and then is distilled in the brain before descending to the testicles. If the spermatic vessel, which was believed to be situated behind the ears, was cut, the man would be sterilized.[13] The Hippocratic writer was vague about whether a similar connection existed between the brain and the generative organs of women.[14] However, the author of the *Trotula* writes explicitly that there is a relationship between the brain and the uterus, arguing that it is reciprocal because they are joined by nerves. Thus, "if the womb has within itself excessive humidity, from this the brain is filled, which [humidity], flowing to the eyes, force them involuntarily to emit tears."[15] The connection between the mind and women's generative organs was also established by Bernard of Gordon, who connected strong emotions such as anger (*ira*), sadness (*tristitia*), and fear (*timor*) with women's inability to conceive.[16]

The belief that the mother's mental impression could shape the offspring in her womb was reflected in certain practices, carried out by those involved in animal husbandry, which were aimed at achieving desired qualities in their livestock's offspring. A twelfth-century Latin *Bestiary*, composed by an English author, refers to Jacob's practice of placing striped rods in front of his ewes while they were mating, in order to obtain similarly mottled offspring from them, which was recounted in the Bible,[17] and tells of contemporary pigeon breeders,

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[11] "*Habet autem cerebrum hoc proprium, quod sensit & sequitur motum lune, qua crescete, medulla cerebri crescit, & decrescente, diminuitur in substantia & virtute.*" Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, 5.3, p.125. Cf. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 175.

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] "*Tendunt enim in hanc ex omni corpore viae, et diffundunt ex cerebro in lumbos, ac in totum corpus et in medullam: et ex ipsa medulla procedunt viae, ut et ad ipsam humidum perferatur, et ex ipsa secedat….Caeterum eunuchi propterea non coeunt, quia geniturae transitus ipsis sublatus est.*" Hippocrates, *De genitura*, ix, in *Opera omnia*: *Graece et Latine edita*, vol. I, 131. Cf. Lonie, "On Generation" in *Hippocratic Treatises*, 2.

[14] The author suggests that women contribute something during intercourse and at one point writes of "sperm from both partners" (Lonie, 3) but seems to have in mind menstrual blood. There is no mention of the spermatic vessel behind the ears of women, but he does compare the accumulation of semen from the rest of the body in men to the accumulation of blood from the rest of the body in women (Lonie, 2).

[15] Green, ed., *Trotula*, 114.

[16] Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 7.14.

[17] Gen 30:37-43.

who, in the same fashion, placed the most attractively coloured pigeons where female pigeons could see them in order to encourage them to produce offspring that will resemble the attractive ones.[18] The text explains that the influence of the mind on unborn progeny affects humans, too, but highlights only the negative implications of this phenomenon:

> This is why people tell pregnant women not to look any of the very disgusting animals in the face… lest they should give birth to children similar in appearance to those they met. For such is said to be the nature of females that whaterver they view, or even if they imagine it in the mind during the extreme heat of lust while they are conceiving, just so do they procreate progeny.[19]

The question of the role of the pregnant woman's imagination in shaping the child was also taken up by scholars at Salerno around the turn of the thirteenth century. The master explained how the imagination could affect physical changes on the foetus:

> When the mother desires anything a great deal, the spirit in the sensitive portion of her brain is greatly moved and, through imagination, a similar form is represented, whence the spirit takes up the form in itself. If therefore the mother squeezes some part with her hand, the spirit, having retained it in itself changes the humour according to this. Therefore, the spirit and the humours thus changed are sent down to nourish the foetus, are changed in the essential parts just as those which the hand had squeezed. From this, a similar form is impressed on that part, which changed by the impression according to that place, is, therefore, made like it.[20]

While the maternal imagination was granted creative power in shaping the infant *in utero*, this power was viewed in a negative way. The influence of the mother's mind on the foetus was

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[18] T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts: being a translation from a Latin bestiary of the twelfth century* (Madison: Parallel Press, 2002), 89. White's translation is from the following twelfth-century bestiary from England: Cambridge University Library MS II. 4. 26. Fol. 72v. Cf. Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, 31.

[19] White, *The Book of Beasts*, 89-90.

[20] "*Queritur si mulier pregnans a quarto mense in antea aliquid cum nimio desiderio appetat quod habere non possit, et ponat ibi manum in facie vel in alio membro, quare consimilis forma eius quod appetit nascitur postea in simili membro pueri? R. Dum mater aliquid multum appetit, spiritus in fantastica cellula multum commovetur et per imaginationem similis forma representatur, unde spiritus in se formam suscipit. Si ergo mater manu comprimit aliquam partem, spiritus sibi retentus immutat humorem secundum se. Spiritus ergo et humores sic immutati demittuntur ad nutrimentum fetus, mutantur in essentiam partis similis ei cui impressa est manus. Unde et similis forma imprimitur illi parti, que impressa immutate locum secundum se, quare ei similis efficitur.*" Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B35.

believed to mold it against nature. Thus, writers in the later medieval period wrote about the mother's impressions as the cause for birth abnormalities. One commentator of the *Secrets of Women* argues that "a monster of this type [which has the head of an animal] can also be caused by a special action of the imaginative power of a woman who is having coitus."[21] Thus, the connection between the brain/mind and the uterus was believed to have a physical influence in pregnancy, although, it is generally cast as a harmful one.[22]

The uterus was also compared to organs belonging to the lower body. Galen believed that the stomach and uterus performed similar functions as containers in the body, using the comparison to highlight the retentive power of both organs.[23] In *On the Natural Faculties*, he employed analogy to explain how the uterus was able to hold the foetus by comparing it to similarly shaped organs: namely, the stomach, and the placenta.[24] He does not discuss the placenta directly, likely because its function overlaps with the function of the uterus with which he is concerned, that is its use in pregnancy. In Galen's analogy between the stomach and uterus, the point of comparison is the ability of both to actively hold onto and then expel its contents. He explains that both organs have this ability, but to different degrees: "For the stomach retains the food until it has quite digested it, and the uterus retains the embryo until it brings it to completion, but the time taken for the completion of the embryo is many times more than that for the digestion of food."[25] Thus, to Galen, the uterus is remarkable because of the strength of its ability to actively retain. He adds that it has a certain capacity to know what to retain and what to eject: "A wonderful device of Nature's also is this—that, when the foetus

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[21] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, Commentary B.

[22] Gerald of Wales, the twelfth-century Welsh chronicler, suggests that the imagination of both male and female parents could affect the physical appearance of the offspring. He suggests that a child could be born with a birth defect resembling an accidental scar that marked his father's body if the mother dwells on the flaw, and recounts the second-hand story of a queen who gave birth to a black-skinned baby after staring at a picture of an Ethiopian during pregnancy. He also writes that if a man is occupied by thinking of a physical defect that he has seen during intercourse with his wife, this defect can be passed on to the child. It is evident from Gerald's descriptions of the male and female imaginative powers that the mother's imagination is more dangerous, since she is in contact with the child and, thus, able to shape it over a longer period of time. Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales; and, The Description of Wales*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 190-91.

[23] Compare with Soranus' description of the similarities between the stomach and the uterus, recorded above, p. 58.

[24] "*Porro inter animalis partes maxime cavae amplissimaeque sunt ventriculus, et uterus, et quae secundae vocantur*." Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 3.2 in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:146.

[25] "*Retinet namque et venter cibum, quad eum concoxerit; retinet porro non minus et uterus foetum, quad hunc perfecerit; caeterum longe diuturnius est tempus foetus perficiendi, quam cibi concoquendi*." Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 3.2 in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:147. English translation (from the Greek) from Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brook (London: W. Heinemann Press, 1963), 229.

is alive, the *os uteri* [mouth of the uterus] is closed with perfect accuracy, but if it dies, the *os* [mouth] at once opens up to the extent that which is necessary for the foetus to make its exit."[26] Galen provides an experiment for understanding how the mouth of the uterus closes to retain the foetus and the whole organ contracts around it, by using vivisection to look at a stomach in the process of digesting food:

> Suppose you fill any animal whatsoever with liquid food—an experiment I have often carried out in pigs…—thereafter cutting them open after three or four hours.… You will observe, as we have just said, that the pylorus is accurately closed, and that the whole stomach is in a state of contraction upon the food very much as the womb contracts upon the foetus.[27]

He argues that the action of both organs is carried out by retracting tightly around their contents; in this way the stomach concocts (*concoquere*) food and the uterus completes (*perficere*) the foetus.

Galen also believed that the uterus and stomach performed a similar therapeutic role, acting as containers which removed unhealthy superfluities from the body. In *On Semen*, he provides the following description of the faculties of the uterus and stomach:

> For in the stomach, too, one can see nothing remaining that is not congenial to it. But what need is there to speak of the stomach, that clearly either rejects what pains it through vomit or excretes it by way of the gut, when we see the uterus acting in the same way?... [T]his organ also, like all the other parts, attracts and retains what is congenial and rejects what is alien. But it rejects the menstrual blood as superfluous. Therefore it can never retain it as congenial. For it is not this, but the semen, that is congenial to the uterus, and nature made it an organ receptive of semen.[28]

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[26] "*Est porro et illud miro naturae consilio provisum, quod, vivente foetu, uteri os ad unguem connivet; mortuo vero, tantum statim aperitur, quantum ad exitum sit ex usu.*" Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 3.3, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:151. English translation from Brook, *On the Natural Faculties*, 234.

[27] "*Quin etiam si animans quodvis humido expleveris cibo, veluti ipsi in suibus subinde sumus experti… deinde post tres quatuorve horas dissecantes, sit ut quoque ita seceris…. cernes namque in illis ea, quae paulo supra diximus, pylorum ad unguem clausum, ventriculum autem totum cibos suo complexu prementem perinde omnino, sicut uterus foetum.*" Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 3.4, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:155-56. English translation from Brook, *On the Natural Faculties*, 241-43.

[28] "*Neque enim etiam in ventre quicuqm manens videre est eorum, quae non ipsi familiaria existent. Quid autem opus est dicere de ventre adeo manifeste aut per vomitum, quod molestum est ipsi, ejiciente, aut juxta intestiuum idem excernente, quum uterum videamus similia perficientem?... hic similiter, ut aliae omnes partes, trahat ac*

Here Galen compares uterine blood and unwholesome matter that is vomited from the stomach. The implication of this analogy is that the menstrual blood is an antagonistic and alien substance, like a poisonous food, which the body must expel in order to preserve its health, while semen is suitable to be retained.

Elsewhere, Galen compares childbirth and miscarriages to the evacuation of waste from stomachs and bladders:

> Thus, when the stomach is sufficiently filled with the food and has absorbed and stored away the most useful part of it in its own coats, it then rejects the rest like an alien burden. The same happens to the bladders, when the matter attracted into them begins to give trouble either because it distends them through its quantity or irritates them by its quality. And this also happens in the case of the uterus; for it is either because it can no longer bear to be stretched that it strives to relieve itself of its annoyance, or else because it is irritated by the quality of the fluids poured out into it. Now both of these conditions sometimes occur with actual violence, and then miscarriage takes place. But for the most part they happen in a normal way, this being then called not miscarriage but delivery or parturition.[29]

Thus, the uterus' expulsive act turned out not only the menstrual blood, but also foetuses, impelled in the same way that the stomach and bladder were driven to eject their contents. Medieval medical writers also compared the purgative functions of wombs and stomachs. For example, vomiting blood was sometimes believed to be caused by the retention of the menses or haemorrhoids.[30]

Medical texts also contain womb parallels in descriptions of life generated in the concavity of the alimentary canal. Compared to the happy productivity of the womb, the spontaneous generation of worms in the digestive system was an unwelcome event, but some authors pointed out similarities between both generative acts. Albert the Great explained that worms could generate only in places which held onto the material out of which they needed to

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contineat familiar, ehiciat vero alienum. Atqui excernit sanguinem menstruum ut superfluum: nequaquam igitur continere ipsum potest unquam ut familiar; non enim est hic utero familiaris, sed ipsum semen, et propterea coceptaculum huius organum natura uterum fecit." Galen, *De semine*, 1.5, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, IV:534-5. English translation from De Lacy, *On Semen*, 85.

[29] Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*, 3.12, in Kühn, *Opera omnia*, II:160. English translation from Brook, *On the Natural Faculties*, 285.

[30] Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 6.10.

grow. Like the uterus, the small intestine made a good holding spot because "it has only one opening and in this the food is collected until it can all exit together."[31] As it is held in this place, the food corrupts and turns to excrement out of which worms arise. The terms of reproduction were used to describe how worms "are generated" (*generentur*) and "are born" (*gignantur*) in the stomach and intestines.[32] Bernard of Gordon argued that the generative matter for worms is the phlegmatic humours in the concavities of the body; worms are found more in the very young and very old because their bad diet causes the creation of crude humours.[33] Thus, like the uterus, the bowels produced a place where superfluities were gathered together and could be held long enough for a creature to be engendered.

4.2.2. Equivalent Wombs: Conclusions.

Medieval medical texts do not suggest that other organs could act as substitutes for the uterus in generation, or even in expelling superfluity from the body. Nevertheless, they do point out similarities between the uterus and other organs in terms of their shapes and functions. The brain and heart were both believed to function as containers comparably to the uterus and, thus, to have similar physical structures, such as multiple cells, in the case of the former, or muscles for contraction, in the case of the latter. They are described as receiving and emitting fluid substances from the body. Like the uterus, they are associated with health, life, and creation. The stomach, bladder, and intestines were also compared to the uterus on the basis of similar container functions. They were all considered to be organs necessary for the expulsion of superfluities and toxic substances from the body, and medical authors emphasized similarities in their structural features which allowed them to retain and expel as needed. The comparisons between digestion and pregnancy, or between the generation of worms from fecal matter and the generation of the foetus from uterine blood, represent the role of the uterus in pregnancy as purely physical and not at all sublime.

The images conjured by anatomical analogy carried over into maternal metaphors that describe concepts outside of the context of medical literature. Not surprisingly, the "heart as a womb" or "brain as womb" are positive comparisons, describing a subject or process that is

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[31] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 13.2.1. Translation from Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 1022.
[32] Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 4.20.
[33] *Ibid*.

good, while the "stomach as womb" or "bowels as womb" represent someone or something unpleasant.

4.3. Good Wombs.

In this section, I look at examples of the metaphors of pregnancy and birth which convey positive meanings onto male subjects. My starting point is in Christian religious texts which expand on imagery drawn from scriptural and patristic precedent by depicting God as having feminine attributes, and, from there, I examine the extension of maternal imagery to human men (and, for comparison, two examples of not-pregnant women).[34] I explore the use of metaphors of the female reproductive body and its generative functions to signify attributes belonging to God, to Christ, or to devoted Christian followers. In this context, we find, for example, the metaphor of "conception," which describes a receptive or creative act, the metaphor of the "womb," which evokes a protective space and the provision of sustenance to something fragile, and the metaphor of "labour pains," which denote a selfless or sacrificial act that brings about something good. The religious texts that I look at and the literary phenomena of "God as Mother" and "Male Saint as Mother" that I examine have been described and put into historical context in several excellent studies.[35] My purpose, here, is not to suggest new interpretations of these texts themselves, but to examine the language used to depict the maternal qualities of God and the saints—what associations with the pregnant and birthing female body the imagery conveys—and to compare it with the pregnancy analogies used, in other instances, by men to describe themselves. After an examination of the metaphors of motherhood of God and the saints, I explore a second set of maternal metaphors,

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[34] The examples of not-pregnant women as subjects for maternal metaphors are both self-referential. Julian of Norwich and Christine of Pizan are exceptional figures for many reasons, including their advanced levels of education and the influential nature of the texts which they composed. In many ways, both women's texts interact with conventions established by male writers; thus, it is interesting to see how they use analogy based on the female reproductive body.

[35] The work most responsible for drawing attention to the use of feminine imagery for God is Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother*. Earlier examinations of the topic include, André Cabassut, "Une dévotion médiévale peu connue: la dévotion à 'Jésus Notre Mère'," *Mélanges Marcel Villier, Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 25 (1949); Eleanor McLaughlin, "'Christ My Mother': Feminine Naming and Metaphor in Medieval Spirituality," *The Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 18, no. 4 (1975). The large number of publications on this topic that have followed Bynum's influential study include, Kerry Dearborn, "The Crucified Christ as the Motherly God: The Theology of Julian of Norwich," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 3 (2002); and Patricia Donohue-White, "Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5, no. 1 (2005).

those which depict the self, in union with God, and in spoken or written expression. These uses of the maternal metaphors of pregnancy and birth were employed by female writers, such as Julian of Norwich and Christine de Pizan, but also male writers, such as Alberic of Montecassino and Guibert of Nogent. These examples draw upon the same positive meanings taken from the pregnant body that are used to describe divine and saintly figures as creative, nurturing, and selflessly labouring to produce something positive.

The maternal metaphors examined in this section all derive their meanings primarily from secondary meanings that were attached to the female body in pregnancy and birth: for example, the metaphors of conception as "creation," the womb as "nurturing space," and birth as "sacrifice." In subsequent pages, we will see examples in which the intuitive act, which produces a truer understanding of God, or which brings about an idea for a written text, was compared with the feminine role in conception. Medieval authors who made this comparison did not do so because they saw a clear overlap between the intuitive act and the primary physical characteristics of conception, as it was understood through the principal models of embryology; but rather, they believed that the origins of thought shared an abstract secondary characteristic which they, and their audience, associated with conception, namely creation. Thus, the metaphor is based on the shared characteristic: conception is creation, and having an idea is creation, therefore having an idea is a conception.

Some of the authors examined here do draw upon primary meanings to build upon their metaphorical structure. For example, conception is imagined as not just creative but also receptive, mirroring the Aristotelian explanation of the physiology of conception which argued that the active component in creation came from the male seed and the female role was primarily to receive and furnish material for its growth. Guibert of Nogent imagines the individual's role in the act of accepting faith to be a receptive conception; one makes the choice to receive and incubate an understanding of God and divine will. Some authors, following Augustine, imagine the container function of the womb to correlate to the role of the heart or mind, envisioning all of these things as spaces which contain and nurture a new conception. Additionally, these images are expressed in reference to creativity, in the metaphor of "conceiving" an idea, labouring to bring it into the world in the form of a written work.

For my analysis of what I have dubbed "good womb" pregnancy metaphors, I have selected several sources from the High and Late Middle Ages which use the maternal metaphor extensively to describe a positive experience. Maternal imagery to describe God and Christ was regularly incorporated into mystical writings from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. I examine two texts which make significant use of this imagery: the "Prayer to St. Paul" by Anselm of Canterbury and the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich. Anselm and Julian both saw the maternal qualities of creating and nurturing, which they used to describe Godly figures, also reflected in individual Christians in communion with the divine. I then explore how other religious writers considered the Christian experience to be a kind of "pregnancy" during which one produces the fruits of a good life through receiving and nurturing the seed of the Holy Spirit. I use Guibert of Nogent as an example of an author who imagines the individual "conceiving" an understanding of the sacred, and "delivering" good words or deeds. I also provide a few examples of other authors who use the metaphors of pregnancy and birth to describe the creation of both religious and secular texts. To begin, I give an overview of biblical and patristic foundation for the transfer of positive meaning in metaphors of conception, pregnancy and birth, which is reflected in all of the later uses of birth metaphors examined in this section.

4.3.1. Biblical and Patristic origins of a parental metaphor.

The Bible utilizes motherhood in a range of imagery which describes God and his relationship with his people. In its essence, all writing about God is metaphorical,[36] and maternal imagery is just one of many metaphorical constructs which are contained in scripture in order to depict that which is divine and beyond knowing. Representations of the motherhood of God employ particular attributes of maternal nature and function in order to describe specific qualities of God, namely his creative and nurturing roles. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God's relationship with his people is compared with parental relationships, using the metaphors of both father and mother in order to express that God has created and borne

[36] For extensive examinations of the central role of metaphors in representations of God in biblical and theological writing, see George Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); and, Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

humankind.[37] In the prophetic books, God reveals himself through maternal imagery as a caring parent or nurse who feeds, teaches, and comforts his helpless children.[38] If we look to the Gospels, we find that Jesus adopts a similar image of nurture and protection when he likens himself to a hen who longs to gather her chicks and shelter them within her wings.[39] He also explains how his suffering and death, and the grief of his followers, are to be seen as a part of a creative act by comparing them to labour pains which are forgotten after a successful birth brings new life.[40] In this analogy, the pains of his sacrifice are to be seen as the necessary precursors to the birth of the Christian Church.

The metaphor of travail in childbirth, as an act of creative sacrifice, is not reserved in the Bible for members of the Godhead. Moses employs it when he complains of the burden of leading the people of Israel through their hardships: "Have I conceived all this multitude?" he asked, "Have I begotten them, that thou shouldst say unto me: Carry them in thy bosom, as the nursing is wont to carry the sucking child, and bear them into the land which thou hast sworn to their fathers?" He also asks that he might find flesh to feed the people, and complains that the burden of bearing them makes him long for death rather than be afflicted with evil.[41] The metaphors of pregnancy and nursing symbolize Moses' burden and his responsibility to feed the people and convey them with him, but, these difficulties are divinely appointed and Moses' faltering is temporary as his weight is lightened by God. The metaphors symbolize the great tribulations which Moses underwent to deliver the people of God out of the wilderness.

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[37] The following example uses the verb "*genere*" ("to beget"), which typically denotes the paternal role in generation (i.e. "*Abraham genuit Isaac Isaac autem genuit Iacob*…" Mt 1:1) to describe God's relationship with his people: "*Deum qui te genuit dereliquisti et oblitus es Domini creaoris tui*." Deut 32:18. However, God was also imagined as having experienced the maternal role of carrying the infant within the body: "*audite me domus Iacob et omne residuum domus Israhel qui portamini a meo utero qui gestamini a mea vulva / usque ad senectam ego ipse et usque ad canos ego portabo ego feci et ego feram et ego portabo et salvabo*." Isa 46:3-4.

[38] Some examples of God offering consolation and protection, and fostering the growth of His children, like a mother or a nurse are: "*quomodo si cui mater blandiatur ita ego consolabor vos et in Hierusalem consolabimini / videbitis et gaudebit cor et ossa vestra quasi herba germinabunt*..." Isa 66:13-14; and, "…*quia puer Israhel et dilexi eum et ex Aegypto vocavi filium meum / … / et ego quasi nutricius Ephraim portabam eos in brachiis meis et nescierunt quod curarem eos*." Hos 11:1, 3.

[39] Jesus says: "*Hierusalem Hierusalem quae occidis prophetas et lapidas eos qui ad te missi sunt, quotiens volui congregare filios tuos quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas et noluisti*." Mt 23:37. Cf. Lk 13:34.

[40] Jesus predicts his death: "*mulier cum parit tristitiam habet quia venit hora eius cum autem pepererit puerum iam non meminit pressurae propter gaudium quia natus est homo in mundum*." Jn 16:21.

[41] "*et ait ad Dominum cur adflixisti servum tuum quare non invenio gratiam coram te et cur inposuisti pondus universi populi huius super me. numquid ego concepi omnem hanc multitudinem vel genui eam ut dicas mihi porta eos in sinu tuo sicut portare solet nutrix infantulum et defer in terram pro qua iurasti patribus eorum. unde mihi carnes ut dem tantae multitudini flent contra me dicentes da nobis carnes ut comedamus. non possum solus sustinere omnem hunc populum quia gravis mihi est. sin aliter tibi videtur obsecro ut interficias me et inveniam gratiam in oculis tuis ne tantis adficiar malis*." Num 11:11-15.

Paul, too, likens himself to a mother when he writes, in a letter to the Galatians, of his own suffering in his attempts to generate and foster new Christians: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."[42] This metaphor is split across two subjects; Paul suffers pangs of labour, but it is his audience whom he wants to conceive and bear the spirit of Christ. Paul also utilizes the fertility metaphors of planting a spiritual seed and fostering spiritual fruit within each person, to encourage Christians to tend to their salvation.[43]

The Church Fathers continued the use of maternal imagery for the representation of God. In particular, the Greek Fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria[44] and John Chrysostom,[45] wrote freely of God, in feminine terms, as a nurturer and generator. The tradition existed, to a lesser degree, in the writings of the Latin Fathers. Ambrose, for example, in his exegetical writing, explains that the two-fold nature of Christ in whom the divine and the carnal co-existed is a result of his unique experience of being born twice. He writes that, through the prophets, God foretold how Christ came, first from the womb [*vulva*] of the Father, the spiritual womb in which he continues, endlessly, to dwell, and secondly, from the generative womb of his mother, Mary.[46] Ambrose teaches that prophets' use of the image of the womb or bosom of the father [*sinus Patris*] should be understood in a spiritual sense; it is the innermost, private sanctuary of the Father's love and his nature, and, within which, the Son always remains, and, from which, the Son is born, just as from a generative womb. He explains that the Old Testament speaks variously of the Father's womb, his heart, and his mouth as the places from whence the Word which heralded Justice and Wisdom proceeded; however, Ambrose warns, this imagery should be taken to represent the spiritual mystery of

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[42] "*filioli mei quos iterum parturio donec formetur Christus in vobis*." Gal 4:19.

[43] "*si nos vobis spiritalia seminavimus magnum est si nos carnalia vestra metamus*" 1 Cor 9:11; "*fructus autem Spiritus est caritas gaudium pax longanimitas bonitas benignitas*." Gal 5:22.

[44] Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 C.E.) was an early theologian and teacher in the catechetical school of Alexandria where he taught the young Origen (185-232 C.E.). In his *Paidagogus*, Clement writes an extended analogy of God as nurse and mother.

[45] John Chrysostom (348-407 C.E.) was archbishop of Constantinople at the turn of the fifth century, who was well-known for his sermons and homilies. For an example of his use of maternal imagery for depicting God, see his *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, in which he refers to the hen and chicks analogy and describes Christ as our nurturing and nourishing mother.

[46] "*Quod autem ait*: *'Vulvae benedictionem patris tui et matris,' si vulvam solam Mariae velimus intelligere, cur utram benedictionem conjunxerit, latebit causa…. arbitror, ut secundum spiritale mysterium intelligamus utramque generationem Domini Jesu, et secundum divinitatem, et secundum carnem; quia ante saecula est generatus ex Patre*." Ambrose, *De benedictionibus patriarcharum*, 14.51, in PL 14, 527. For an English translation, see Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works*, 269.

Paternal generation rather than something corporeal.[47] In a separate treatise, in which he praises virginity, Ambrose, himself, adopts this biblical image of Christ's generation from God the Father: "[The Son] is the one whom the Father created before Lucifer, as eternal: he produced him from the womb as a Son.… The father so loved Him, as to bear Him in his bosom, and place Him in His right hand, that you may learn His wisdom, and know His power."[48] In these explanations, Ambrose emphasizes that Christ's first birth, from the Father, takes place outside of time, as was befitting of the eternal nature of the Trinity. Augustine replicated Ambrose's argument about the two-part birth by which Christ's eternal spirit and temporal body came into existence.[49]

The Eleventh Council of Toledo, in 675, likewise, utilized the imagery of birth in its declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity, in order to express the shared substance of the Father and Son, and to explain the Son's origins, while insisting on the eternal coexistence of all parts of the Godhead:

> The Son also was born [*natus*] from the substance of the Father, without beginning, before time. For, we confess, that he was not made, since at no time did the Father exist without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. And, nevertheless, the Father is not from the Son as the Son is from the Father, since the Father is not generated by the Son but the Son by the Father.… The Son of the Father, however, and God the Father, [are] equal in all things; the Son [is equal] to God the Father because he has not begun, nor finished, being born at any time. It should be believed that He is of one substance with the Father.… For, it should be believed that the Son was begotten [*genitus*], or born [*natus*],

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[47] "*Sicut ergo sinus Patris spiritalis intelligitur intimum quoddam paternae charitatis naturaeque secretum, in quo semper est Filius: ita etiam Patris spiritalis est vulva, interioris arcanum, de qua tamquam ex genitali alvo processit Filius. Denique diverse legimus nunc vulvam Patris, nunc cor ejus quo verbum eructavit, nunc os ejus ex quo justitia processit, ex quo prodivit sapientia, sicut ipse ait: Ex ore Altissimi prodivit [Ecclesiastes 24:5]. Ita cum unum non definitur, et unum omnia sonant, spiritale magis mysterium generationis paternae, quam membrum aliquod corporale significat.*" Ambrose, *De benedictionibus*, 14.51, in PL 14, 527-28.

[48] "[*Filius*] *est quem Pater genuit ante Luciferum, ut aeternum: ex utero generavit* [Psalms 109:3]…. *Quem Pater ita diligit, ut in sinu portet, ad dexteram locet, ut sapientiam discas, virtutem noveris*." Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 3.1.3, in PL 16, 175.

[49] "*Utraque enim eius nativitas mira est, et divinitatis et humanitatis. Illa est de Patre sine matre, ista de matre sine patre: illa est sine aliquot tempore, ista in acceptabili tempore: illa aeterna, ista opportune: illa sine corpore in sinu Patris, ista cum corpore, quo non violate est virginitas matris*…." Augustine, *Sermo* 214, 6, in PL 38, 1058.

> not from nothing, nor from any other substance, but from the womb [*uterus*] of the Father, that is from His substance….[50]

The feminized language of reproduction which is used here, which represents the acts of "birthing" and creating in a "womb," in addition to "begetting" as a father, is particularly useful for getting to the core of the difficult theological concepts of the three persons of the Trinity as a single Godhead and their consubstantial nature. For the teachings on embryology explained that the mother gives to her offspring her own substance, her flesh, while the male contribution shapes, but does not enter, the foetus. Whereas fatherhood maintains a separation between parent and child, maternity forms a unity between the two persons of mother and child.

4.3.2. Maternal metaphors of pregnancy and birth in medieval expressions of divine and spiritual relationships.

The use of maternal metaphors for describing the incorporeal and the incarnate manifestations of God, and also the individual Christian achieved its fullest expression in the religious writings of the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Caroline Walker Bynum, whose article on the symbolic image of "Jesus as Mother" remains among the most influential studies on this topic, has noted the prevalence of the theme in Cistercian writing, and has attributed its rise in popularity to specific trends in High Medieval spirituality, namely, "the rise of affective spirituality and feminization of religious language."[51] Devotional literature of this period, as Bynum has shown, emphasized Christ's humanity, and his mercy, through the use of feminine bodily and domestic imagery.[52] The image of Christ as mother is frequently found in the mystical writing, religious lyrics and sermons, written between the twelfth and fourteenth

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[50] "*Filium quoque de substantia patris sine initio ante secula natum. Nec tamen factum esse fatemur, quia nec pater sine filio, nec filius aliquando extitit sine patre. Et tamen non ut filius de patre, ita pater de filio, quia non pater a filio, sed filius a patre generationem accepit…. Ille autem filius patris, et deus de patre, aequalis tamen per omnia, filius deo patri, quia nec nasci coepit aliquando nec desiit. Hic etiam unius cum patre substantiae creditur…. Nec enim de nihilo neque de aliqua alia substantia, sed de patris utero, id est de substantia eius, idem filius genitus vel natus, esse credendus est….*" Giovan Domenico Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, vol. 15 (Florence: 1692-1769).
[51] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 129.
[52] See also, Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 282 ff.

centuries. Both male and female authors found the maternal image to be expedient for illustrating the relationship between God and humankind.[53]

In a prayer of great expressiveness and beauty, Anselm of Canterbury[54] made use of the language of motherhood to evoke Christ's creative, self-sacrificing, and sustaining love, the labours of Saint Paul and the apostles and their nurturing care for the early Church, and finally, the toil of individual Christians endeavouring to bear spiritual fruit. His "Prayer to Saint Paul" begins by addressing the apostle as nurse (*nutrix*) and as the one who gave birth a second time (*iterum parturiens*) to her sons, that is, all Christians.[55] Paul's maternal qualities are physical—he is weighed down by the mortal flesh (*gravis mortalitate*)—and behavioural—he cherishes (*fovens*) offspring and displays a wonderful tenderness (*solicitudine mirabilis*) towards them. As he gets further into his prayer, Anselm recalls Paul's own use of the maternal metaphor, reiterating that Paul is like a mother because he struggled continuously to teach and foster the faith of Christ:

> O Saint Paul, where is he that was called the nurse of the faithful, caressing his sons? Who is that affectionate mother who declared everywhere that she is in labour for her sons? Sweet nurse, sweet mother, who are the sons you are in labour with, and nurse, but those whom by teaching the faith of Christ you bear and instruct?... And if in that blessed faith we are born and nursed by other apostles also, it is most of all by you, for you have laboured and done more than them all in this; so if they are our mothers, you are our greatest mother.[56]

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[53] The image of bearing, birthing, or nursing God can be found in the writing of such authors as, Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Guerric of Igny, Adam of Perseigne, Mechthild of Magdeberg, Mechtild of Hackeborn, Gertrude the Great, Marguerite d'Oingt, Robert Rolle, John Whiterig, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich. For a general introduction to the occurrence of maternal metaphors in writings by these authors see McLaughlin, "'Christ My Mother'."

[54] Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 until his death. He was also a prolific writer, composing hundreds of letters, as well as a number of prayers and meditations, religious treatises and philosophical works. His "Prayer to Saint Paul" reveals the expressiveness and passion which typified Anselm's writings.

[55] "*Sancte Paule, tu magne Paule, tu ille qui unus ex magnis apostolis dei omnes alios tempore sequens, labore et efficacia praecessisti in agricultura dei; tu qui adhuc mortalitate gravis raptus es usque 'ad tertium caelum', et 'raptus in paradisum' audisti 'quae non licet homini loqui'; tu inter Christianos non solum 'tamquam nutrix' fovens 'filios suos', sed et sollicitudine mirabilis affectus iterum parturiens filios tuos*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1938-61), 35.

[56] "*O sancte Paule, ubi est illa nominata nutrix fidelium, fovens filios suos? Quae est illa affectuosa mater, quae se ubique praedicat filios suos iterum parturire? Dulcis nutrix, dulcis mater, quos filios parturis aut nutris, nisi quos in fide Christi docendo gignis et erudis? ...Nam etsi benedicta fides ista ab aliis quoque apostolis nobis nata sit et nutrita: utique magis a te, quia plus omnibus in hoc laborasti et effecisti Cum ergo illi sint nobis matres, tu magis nostra mater*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 35. All translations of this prayer,

Just as Paul is a mother, the rest of the apostles are also mothers, since they, too, laboured to give life to and feed the early Church.

Christ, likewise, is described as a mother in his acts of selfless affection. For this imagery, Anselm again draws upon a scriptural basis, the analogy of the hen and chicks: "And you, Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not a mother who, like a hen, gathers her chickens under her wings?"[57] Christ is not only a mother because he protects and cares for his spiritual brood, but also because he suffered in bringing them forth:

> It is by your death that they have been born, for if you had not been in labour, you could not have borne death; and if you had not died, you would not have brought forth. For, longing to bear sons into life, you tasted of death, and by dying you begot them.[58]

Anselm compares the suffering of Christ's death on the cross to the pains suffered by a woman in childbirth, recalling Christ's own analogy of the woman in labour whose pain is overshadowed by the rewards of a successful delivery.[59]

Anselm portrays himself among the spiritual offspring who share in two mothers, Jesus and Saint Paul. In a series of analogies, he represents himself as both the stillborn product of the flesh, and the spiritually re-born child of his male mothers. He first describes himself trapped in a womb-like, tomb-like, pit and wrapped in the membranes of his transgressions:

> St Paul, I came to you as a sinner to be reconciled.… Even if it is not yet permitted that I be thrust down into the prison of tortures, already I am confined in a trap of sins. For however much up till now I may not have been buried in hell, I am even now wound in the grave-clothes of sin.[60]

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included here, are from Anselm (of Canterbury), *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 135-56. Cf. Gal 4:19.

[57] "*Sed tu Iesus, bone domine, none et tu mater? An non est mater, qui tamquam gallina congregat sub alas pullos suos*?" Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, 40. Cf. Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34.

[58] "*et moriendo peperisti. Nam nisi parturisses, mortem non sustinuisses; et nisi mortuus esses, non peperisses. Desiderio enim gignendi filios ad vitam mortem gustasti, et moriens genuisti*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 40.

[59] Jn 16:21.

[60] "*Sancte Paule, veni ad te ut peccator reconciliandus…. Nam licet nondum sim detrusus in carcerem tormentorum, tamen iam sum conclusus in fovea peccatorum. Quamvis enim non sim adhuc in inferno sepultus, iam sum tamen ut sepeliendus delictis obvolutus*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 37.

St Paul is to act as midwife, and deliver Anselm from this foul space, and to be like the mother from the Gospels, who handed over her dead child to be revived by Christ.[61] In performing this act of rebirth, St Paul and Christ both become "mothers of his soul":

> Then both of you are mothers. Even if you are fathers, you are also mothers. For you have brought it about that those born to death should be reborn to life --you by your own act, you by his power. Therefore you are fathers by your effect and mothers by your affection. Fathers by your authority, mothers by your kindness. Fathers by your teaching, mothers by your mercy. Then you, Lord, are a mother, and you, Paul, are a mother too.
>
> ...
>
> You have revealed yourselves as mothers; I know myself to be a son. I give thanks that you brought me forth as a son when you made me a Christian: You, Lord, by yourself, you Paul, through him; you by the doctrine you made, you by the doctrine breathed into you... St. Paul, pray for your son, because you are his mother, that the Lord, who is his mother too, may give life to his son. Do, mother of my soul, what the mother of my flesh would do.[62]

Anselm makes it clear that he is comparing Paul to the mother of the flesh, only insomuch as he shares the feeling of maternal affection. Paul's motherhood, in fact, resembles the superior kind of motherhood which is typified by Christ, and exemplified by the acts of mercy and sacrifice. Christ is a more perfect form of mother, who gives eternal life to those born to death through their natural mothers, and it is this kind of life-giving mother that Paul approximates in Anselm's analogy.

This is the type of motherhood which, according to Anselm, all Christians should strive to attain. Anselm describes the faithless as those who are sterile in good or fruitful in

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[61] Mk 5:39-42.

[62] "*Ambo ergo matres. Nam etsi patres, tamen et matres. Vos enim effecitis, tu per te, tu per illum, ut nati ad mortem renasceremur ad vitam. Patres igitur estis per effectum, matres per affectum. Patres per auctoritatem, matres per benignitatem. Patres per tuitionem, matres per miserationem. Ergo et tu mater, et tu mater….*
Matres vos divulgatis, filium me fateor. Gratias ago, filium me genuistis, cum Christianum me fecistis. Tu per te ipsum, et tu per eundem ipsum. Tu per doctrinam a te factam, et tu per doctrinam tibi inspiratam. . . . Ora pro filio tuo, quia mater es, ut vivificet filium suum, quia mater est. Fac, mater animae meae, quod faceret mater carnis meae." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 40-41.

evil. The fate of these people is death.[63] Thus, one should strive to cultivate good faith as taught by Christ, and to become mothers in turn: "Truly, Lord, you are a mother; for both they who are in labour and they who are brought forth are accepted by you. You have died more than they, that they may labour to bear."[64] Anselm compares the exertion and difficulties of the Christian's path in faith with the travails of childbearing. As a follower of Christ, he is both the infant born from God and the mother endeavouring to bear good fruits.

Anselm's extended metaphor of the maternal body is composed of several parts: the metaphors of physical burden, of painful labour, of producing offspring, and of nursing infants. Although Anselm refers to the somatic aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, it is not the physical characteristics that are reflected in St. Paul, Christ, and the Christian follower, but, rather, the secondary characteristics of "love," "sacrifice," "fertility," "protection," and "nourishment" that the physical activities of bearing, birthing, nursing, and mothering stand for. In his prayer, pregnancy's physical exertions and the struggle of birthing are metaphors for the selfless love and sacrifice experienced by Paul and Jesus, rather than reflections of a similarity between their physical experiences and actions to those of women in the physical act of becoming mothers. Additionally, the metaphor indicates that the efforts of these two men are fruitful and enduring. Unlike the physical offspring of mothers, the "offspring" which Paul and Jesus produce through their labours are incorporeal; they are the souls of Christians who are granted spiritual life. This analogy reveals the fragility of human souls, which are like infants needing protection and nourishment. Paul, the nurse, provides nourishment, which comes in the form of spiritual instruction and feeds the soul rather than the body.

Anselm intends the metaphors of "Christ as Mother," "Apostle as Mother," and even "Anselm, the Christian, as Mother" to convey purely abstract notions about maternity that are removed from the physical realities. Thus, he writes that Christ and Paul are mothers when they display the qualities of "affection," "kindness," and "mercy" rather than the paternal qualities of "achievement," "authority," and "instruction." Furthermore, they are mothers when they give life. The "maternity" metaphors do not depict Paul with a growing abdomen, though they say that he bore Christians; nor do they depict the sweat and blood of Christ's

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[63] "*Qui fidet non habet, mortuus est. Sed si sterilis bonorum mortuus est: fertilis malorum quam magis mortuus est? Nam si 'arbor quae non facit fructum bonum', exciditur ut arida: quae facit fructum malum, utique eradicatur ut noxia*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 36. Cf. Mt 7:16-20; Lk 6:43-44.

[64] "*Vere, domine, et tu mater. Nam et quod alii parturierunt et pepererunt, a te acceperunt. Tu prius illos et quod pepererunt parturiendo mortuus es et moriendo peperisti*." Anselm (of Canterbury), *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, 40.

labour, though they say that he gave birth to Christians.[65] Anselm gets closest to describing physical aspects of pregnancy when he discusses his own plight as a sinner yet to be re-born through Christ, saying that he is confined in an enclosed space and wrapped in membranes. The physicality of this imagery is negative and associated with sinfulness; the enclosure is a "trap of sins" and the membranes the "grave-clothes of sin." Only in the abstract sense is the "maternal body" a positive referent for Anselm.

In the fourteenth-century, an English anchorite, Julian of Norwich,[66] experienced a series of visions, during a serious illness, which revealed to her Christ's love and the nature of His uniting (*onyng*) with mankind. She recorded her visions in English so that she could share the message that she received in these very intimate moments with the world in general. Maternal imagery played a significant role in her visions. Julian writes, in her *Showings*, about the important role of the Virgin Mary who was mother to Christ and, through this, acted as mother to all people. She also describes the Church, God, and Christ as mothers, using physical and behavioural aspects of maternity to characterize divine love and mercy; and, she describes herself and other Christians as mothers, too, in their attempts to foster pure love in their souls and endure the burdens of life in the flesh. Benedicta Ward has suggested that, prior to her enclosure, Julian may have been a lay woman, whose husband and children died in the plague, which would provide an explanation for her affinity towards metaphors of motherhood and her knowledge of birth.[67] However, it is not necessary to have experienced giving birth in order to use it as a metaphor, as has been shown with Anselm. Alexandra Barratt has suggested the possibility that Julian may have had a scientific understanding of birth, learned from gynaecological manuals, such as *A Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing*, which was a vernacular text available during Julian's lifetime.[68] For our purposes, we can put aside speculation about whether Julian's knowledge of motherhood came from personal experience

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[65] However, Christ's blood, shed on the cross, was associated with uterine blood by Julian of Norwich and by other writers we will look at in Chapter Five.

[66] Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) experienced a series of sixteen visions in 1373, while she was seriously ill and feared to be dying. The record of these visions and their interpretation collected in the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich became one of the most important works of late medieval mysticism. Julian's visions explore theological issues, including such issues as the nature of the Trinity, God's love for creation, and Christ's incarnation, utilizing a number of feminine images frequently related to aspects of motherhood. Cf. Valerie M. Lagorio, "Julian of Norwich," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VII:179-80.

[67] Benedicta Ward, "Julian the Solitary," in *Julian Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Leech and Benedicta Ward (Oxford: SLG Press, 1988): 19-29.

[68] Alexandra Barratt, "'In the Lowest Part of our Need': Julian and Medieval Gynecological Writing," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra McEntire (London: Routledge, 1998): 239-56.

or from medical writing, or, from both or from neither, and concentrate on how she uses the maternal body as a referent to convey some of the central messages of her visions.

Christ's relationship with his mother is highlighted in Julian's visions. In the first revelation, Jesus showed the Virgin Mary to Julian. The vision provided Julian with a profound awareness of Mary's maternal feelings: "Also, God showed to me, in part, the wisdom and truth of her soul, whereby, I understood the reverent beholding, by which she beheld her God, that is her maker, as she marveled with great reverence that He would be born of her, who was but a simple creature of His making."[69] Julian's theology stresses Mary's full humanity; for, it is as the source of Christ's human form that Mary acts as an intermediary between the human and divine and prepares the way for the redemption of her race. Of all the ways which God redeems people, Julian writes, the principal one is, "the blessed matter that he took of the maiden."[70] Christ took on human flesh from his mother when he was in the womb, and, only by doing so, was he able to make salvation accessible to the fallen human race. Julian illustrates Christ's full humanity by referring to the physical connection and unity of substance that exists between the mother's body and the foetus developing in the womb:

> For at that same time that God knit Himself to our body in the maiden's womb, He took our sensual soul; in thus taking it, He enclosed us all within Himself, [and] united [*onyd*] it to our substance. In this uniting, he was completely man, since Christ, having knit in himself all mankind who shall be saved, is completely man.[71]

Because of Mary's role in humanity's delivery from its fallen state, she was viewed in Christian literature as the universal mother. Julian explains, "Thus, Our Lady is our mother, in whom we all are enclosed, and of her we are born in Christ; for, she that is the mother of our Saviour is the mother of all whom are saved through our Saviour; and our Saviour is our very

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[69] "*Also god shewed me in part the wisdom and the truth of her sowle, wher in I understode the reverent beholding, that she beheld her god, that is her maker, marvayling with great reverence that he would be borne of her that was a symple creature of his makyng*." Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, II vols., vol. II (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), LT 4, 1, p. 297.

[70] "*...the blessed kynde that he toke of the meyden*..." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 6, 1, p. 305.

[71] "*For in that same tyme that god knytt hym to oure body in the meydens wombe, he toke oure sensuall soule, in whych takyng, he us all havyng beclosyd in hym, he onyd it to oure substance. In whych oonyng he was perfit man for Crist, havyng knytt in hym all man that shall be savyd, is perfete man*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 57, 14, p. 580.

mother, in whom we are endlessly born and [yet] out of whom we never shall emerge."[72] Mary is a mother to humankind because she gave birth to Christ the redeemer; and Christ, who was composed of maternal flesh, is a mother because he, too, gives life.

Julian uses maternal metaphors to emphasize God's life-giving acts, particularly the incarnation of Christ. However, Julian expresses different aspects of the Creator role by describing God as both Father and Mother. God is Father when he is the active creator who forms Adam from the passive—and, without His participation, barren—earth.[73] He is Mother when he exhibits mercy to all creatures: "Mercy is a pitiful property, which belongs to motherhood through tender love.... Mercy works, keeping, suffering, quickening, and healing; and, all of this is of the tenderness of love."[74] For Julian, the maternal mercy, which God exhibits, stems from love and leads to the gift of life (quickening), and to the protection and healing of this new life, through selfless suffering. Like a mother, God, too, shares his substance with his created people and encloses them within the Trinity:

> And I saw no difference between God and our substance, since all was God; and yet, I understood that our substance is in God, that is to say that God is God and our substance is a creature in God.... We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit.[75]

Julian's analogy utilizes the biological facts of motherhood, which, according to medieval scientific knowledge, include the maternal donation of "matter" and a protective enclosure for infant growth, as well as the secondary, associations of motherhood with love, mercy and selfless suffering.

The duality of the parental metaphor, in which God is depicted as being both Father and Mother, is expanded fully in Julian's revision of the Trinity, which replaces Father, Son,

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[72] "*Thus oure lady is our moder, in whome we be all beclosyd and of hyr borne in Crist, for she that is moder of oure savyoure is mother of all þat ben savyd in our sauyour; and oure savyoure is oure very moder in whome we be endlesly borne and nevyr shall come out of hym.*" Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 57, 14, p. 580.

[73] "*But his syttyng on the erth, bareyn and desert, is thus to mene: he made mannes soule to be his owne cytte and his dwelling place, which is most pleasyng to hym of all his workes.*" Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 51, 14, p. 525.

[74] "*Mercy is a pyttefull properte, whych longyth to moderhode in tender love.... Mercy werkyth kypyng, sufferyng, quyckyng and helyng, and alle is of tendyrnesse of love*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 48, 14, p. 502-3.

[75] "*And I sawe no dyfference between god and oure substance, but as it were all god; and yett my understandyng toke that oure substance is in god, that is to sey that god is god and oure substance is a creature in god.... We be closyd in the fader, and we be closyd in the son, and we are closyd in the holy gost.*" Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 54, 14, p. 562-3.

and Holy Spirit, with Father, Mother, and Lord. This is revealed to her, in the fourteenth vision, which provides insight into the workings of the Trinity:

> I beheld the working of all [parts] of the blessed Trinity; and, in beholding this, I saw and understood these three properties: the property of the fatherhood, and the property of the motherhood, and the property of the lordship, [all] in one God.... For the first, I saw the great power of the Trinity is our father, and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our mother, and the great love of the Trinity is our lord; and, furthermore, I saw that the second person, who is our mother, and substantially the same praiseworthy person is now become our sensual mother; for, we are made twice by God, that is to say, [we are made] substantially and sensually. [76]

Julian continues to explain how the "father" and "mother" properties of the Trinity work together to unite the superior spiritual and the lesser material (sensual) components of our being:

> Our substance is the higher party, which we have in our Father, God almighty, and the second person of the Trinity is our material mother [*moder in kynd*], in our substantial making, in whom we are grounded and rooted, and He is our mother of mercy through [this act of] taking our sensual form. And thus, our mother works for us in divers ways, [and] in him our parts are kept undivided; for, in our mother, Christ, we profit and increase, and through mercy, he reforms and restores us, and, by the virtue of his passion, his death and his rising, [he] unites us to our substance. Thus, our mother in mercy serves all his beloved children who are meek and obedient to him.[77]

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[76] "*I beheld þe werkyng of alle the blessyd trynyte, in whych beholldyng I saw and understode these thre propertes: the properte of the faderhed, and the properte of the mother hed, and the properte of the lord-schyppe in one god.... For the furst I saw and understode that þe hygh myght of the trynyte is our fader, and the depe wysdom of the trynyte is oure moder, and the grete love of the trynyte is oure lorde; And ferthere more I saw that the seconde person, whych is oure moder, substanncyally the same derewurthy person, is now become oure moder sensuall, for we be doubell of gods makyng, that is to sey substannciall and sensuall*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 58, 14, p. 583-85.

[77] "*Oure substannce is þe hyer perty, whych we have in our fader god almyghty and the seconde person of the trynyte is oure moder in kynd in our substanncyall makyng, in whom we be groundyd and rotyd [rooted], and he is oure moder of mercy in oure sensualyte takyng. And thus oure moder is to us dyverse manner werkyng, in whom oure pertys be kepte undepertyd; for in oure moder Cryst we profyt and encrese, and in mercy he reformyth us and restoryth, and by the vertu of his passion, his death and his uprysyng onyd us to oure*

God's fatherhood is expressed in the creation of the human race and in its nature, and is accomplished through divine power, and through the donation of spiritual substance. God's motherhood is achieved through the incarnation of Christ, which displayed divine mercy and wisdom; as mother, Christ becomes one with humankind, physically and spiritually. Through his embodiment, he re-"forms" the flesh by instilling his own spiritual nature into it. He supplies the fertile ground and provides the spiritual sustenance necessary for its growth and for shaping the soul in the image of God.[78]

Julian developed the image of Jesus Christ as mother to humanity in detail throughout the *Showings*. Her explanation of this image reveals the theological reasoning on which it is based. Central to her teaching about Christ's motherhood is his human flesh, which he took from his mother and shares with us. As a fully human being, Christ becomes one, completely, with humanity, just as a mother is united physically with the infant in her womb. However, motherhood, in the postlapsarian world, entails labour and pain in the delivery of the offspring. Within Julian's analogy of Christ's maternity, Christ's labours in human form and his suffering in the crucifixion are framed as the discomforts associated with childbearing. Julian lays out her doctrine of Christ's maternity in Chapter Sixty:

> Our kind mother, our gracious mother. For, he would wholly become our mother in all things. He took the ground of his work, in complete humility and mildness, in the maiden's womb. And this he showed in the first [vision], where he brought that meek maiden before the eye of my understanding, in the simple stature that she was when she conceived; that is to say, our high God, the sovereign wisdom of all, in this low place dressed himself and prepared himself willingly in our poor flesh, himself to do the service and the office of motherhood in all things. The mother's service is nearest, readiest, and surest: nearest, for it is of the most similar matter; readiest, for it is of the greatest love; and surest, for it is of the highest truth. This office could not, nor could it ever, be done fully except by [Christ] alone. We understand that all our mothers bear us to [endure] pain and death. Alas, what is that? But our very mother Jesus,

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substannce. Thus workyth oure moder in mercy to all his belovyd chyldren whych be to hym buxom and obedyent." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 58, 14, p. 586.

[78] See Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 119ff.

> blessed may he be, alone bears us to joy and endless living. Thus, he sustained us within himself in love and labouring, until the time that he had to suffer the sharpest thorns and grievous pains that ever were or ever shall be, and died at last. And when he had done so, and borne us to bliss, yet all this might not yet bear witness to his marvelous love.[79]

Christ's death and his "birthing" pains undid the pain and death which cursed every birth after the Fall. This sacrifice, Julian teaches, is the ultimate expression of his maternal love.

Julian teaches that human beings should imitate Christ's maternal acts of loving and suffering. Because Christ suffered to bring us life, we are able to be infused by his love. Like Mary, we can make room for him within ourselves and be redeemed by this connection. Thus, Julian writes, "marvelous and solemn is the place where the Lord dwelleth; and therefore he wills that we incline with all our ability towards his gracious touching."[80] Not only should we imitate Christ's maternal embraces and prepare a space for him in ourselves, but we should also look to his sacrifice as a model. Julian describes the human plight as an endless travail, caused by our "bodely hevynesse." However, the divine example of Christ's sacrifice should help us to "esely bere oure paynes."[81] Julian creates a parallel between her own physical illness and Jesus' suffering. She writes that she had longed to experience the Passion for herself.[82] In the depths of her illness, when she desired to die and escape the pains which afflicted her, Julian receives a vision of a soul leaving its body which bears resemblance to a birth scene:

> And at this time, I saw a body lying on the earth, which appeared heavy and fearful and without shape and form, as if it were a swollen, stinking pit; and

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[79] "*Oure kynde moder, oure gracious modyr, for he wolde alle hole become oure modyr in alle thyng, he toke þe grounde of his werke full lowe and full myldely in the maydyns wombe. And that shewde he in the furst, wher he broughte þat meke maydyn before the eye of my understondyng, in þe sympyll stature as she was whan she conceyvyd; that is to sey oure hye god, the sovereyn wysdom of all, in this lowe place he arayed hym and dyght hym all redy in oure poure flessch, hym selfe to do the servyce and the office of moderhode in alle thyng. The moders servyce is nerest, rediest and suerest: nerest for it is most of kynd, redyest for it is most of love, and sekerest for it is most of trewth. This office ne myght nor could never none done to þe full but he allone. We wytt that alle oure moders bere us to payne and to dyeng. A, what is that? But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone beryth us to joye and to endlesse levyng, blessyd mot he be. Thus he susteyneth us with in him in love and traveyle, to the full tyme þat he wold suffer the sharpyst thornes and grevous paynes that evyr were or evyr shalle be, and dyed at the last. And whan he had done, and so borne us to blysse, yett myght nott all thys make a seeth to his mervelous love*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 60, 14, p. 594-96.

[80] "*mervelous and solempne is the place where þe lorde dwellyth; and therfore he wylle that we dedely intend to his gracious touchyng*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 81, 16, p. 715.

[81] Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 73, 16, p. 667.

[82] Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 3, p. 292.

> sodeynly out of this body sprung a very fair creature, a little child, fully formed and shaped, swift and lively and whiter than a lily, which glided sharply up to heaven.[83]

Her explanation of the meaning of this vision extends further the comparison of the soul's exit of the body with pregnancy and birth. She deciphers the swelling of the body to be signifying the wretchedness of human flesh, while the small child represents the clean and pure soul.[84] Julian frames life as a burdensome exploit, as the soul is weighed down by the sinfulness of the flesh. Christ's suffering on earth and our own encumbrances, she imagines as long pregnancies, ending with the soul's "birth" which accompanies the body's final surrender.

Julian draws upon several aspects of pregnancy and birth in her depiction of God and Christ as "mothers," and of individual Christians as "mothers." Her extended metaphors utilize the primary physical details of pregnancy more than do the analogies made by Anselm in his *Prayer*. While Julian uses the image of the motherhood of God/Christ as symbolic of divine love, mercy, and humility, she represents these abstract concepts through very specific functions of the female body. The components of her maternal metaphors include: the sharing of substance between mother and foetus, the womb's protective enclosure, and the burdens of the flesh. Rather than state simply that God's mercy can be seen through his giving "birth" to us, Julian extends the analogy to include the ways in which God's mercy is expressed by linking them with aspects of pregnancy. For example, she likens his redemption of humanity through the incarnation to the knitting together of flesh with spirit; and, she describes his eternal encompassing of all creation as a sustaining enclosure, within each of the three persons of the Trinity. Finally, Julian expresses the importance of Christ's full embodiment in reshaping humanity and giving it life in her analogy between his death and pains on the cross and the feminine labours of childbirth.

It was not only God and Christ who were assigned maternal qualities, but also the individual (frequently, male) Christian could be compared to a "mother." Both Julian and Anselm extend their maternal metaphors beyond the divine and saintly figures they describe,

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[83] "*And in thys tyme I sawe a body lyeng on þe erth, whych body shewde hevy and feerfulle and withoute shape and forme, as it were a swylge stynkyng myrre; and sodeynly oute of this body sprong a fulle feyer creature, a lyttylle chylld, full shapyn and formyd, swyft and lyfly and whytter then the lylye, whych sharpely glydyd uppe in to hevyn*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 64, 14, p. 622.

[84] "*The swylge of the body betokenyth grette wretchydnesse of oure derely flessch; and the lyttylnes of the chylde betokenyth the clennes and the puernesse of oure soule*." Julian of Norwich, *Book of Showings*, LT 64, 15, p. 623.

to portray the ordinary individual whose labours replicate the labours of these divine "mothers." They promoted the imitation of "Christ as Mother," however, not the imitation of actual mothers. Within the context of mystical Christianity in which Anselm and Julian wrote, the metaphors of reciprocal motherhood served to emphasize the spiritual union between the individual and God.

4.3.3. Giving birth to the Word: a medieval extension of the biblical maternal metaphor.

The metaphors of conception, of an incubating uterus, and of birthing were also used in a different context in medieval writing, in texts which focus on self-expression through preaching and writing. In this usage, the metaphors draw upon the association between the pregnant body and labour, in order to depict the travails of creative endeavour; they also draw upon associations between the pregnant body and receptiveness and fertility. These latter two concepts were used, particularly, in discussions on the topic of the dissemination of the Christian faith. It is this religious context for the metaphor between the production and multiplying of words and ideas and reproduction that we will consider first, followed by the use of the metaphor in the context of education and the production of nonreligious texts.

The twelfth-century rhetorician, Guibert of Nogent,[85] was inspired by St. Paul's agricultural analogies of planting a spiritual seed, and bearing fruits for God,[86] when he wrote about the spreading of the Christian message orally or by means of the pen. Guibert made use of the agricultural image of the sowing of a seed in his exhortation to preachers on the art of giving sermons. Like Paul, Guibert uses the analogy of sowing seeds for the transmission of the word of God as a parental metaphor, comparing the agricultural act to that of fathering

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[85] Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1064-1125) was a French Benedictine and scholar who produced, among other things, a historical treatise on the First Crusade, exegetical works concerning the Virgin Mary, an autobiographical memoir and a book of instructions on how to write a sermon. Cf. Guibert de Nogent, *Self and Society in Medieval France: The memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, trans. John F. Benton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

[86] For the metaphor of the seed, see 1 Cor 9:11. Paul writes abouth the proliferation of spiritual fruits several times, including in his letter to the Colossians: "*[verbum veritatis Evangelii] pervenit ad vos, sicut et in universo mundo est, et fructificat, et crescit sicut in vobis... ideo et nos ex qua die audivimus non cessamus pro vobis orantes et postulantes ut impleamini agnitione voluntatis eius in omni sapientia et intellectu spiritali ut ambuletis digne Deo per omnia placentes: in omni opere bono fructificantes, et crescentes in scientia Dei*" Col 1:6, 9-10.

children; however, Guibert also employs maternal metaphors to describe the spread of the Christian faith. We find examples of these paternal and maternal metaphors in his description of the methods by which people sin. He divides sinners into two classes: those who do evil and those who are unwilling to do good.[87] He presents Onan, who refused to beget children in his brother's name, as an example of the latter, arguing that he reminds us of the sin of those "who refuse to produce [*procreare*] the seed of the word of God in the hearts of the faithful [and] the fruit of good works to the glory of Christ."[88] This is the sin of those who refuse to preach, and spurn the opportunity to be among the "procreators" who spread and increase the Christian faith through insemination of the hearts of men. In this analogy, the faithful audience who receive the words of the preachers are made the mothers of their own salvation. Guibert also gives the Ammonites as an example of those who refuse to do good; however, here, he uses maternal imagery of nurturing with food: "They shall never enter into, or be united in, the Church of God, which is the body of Christ, which is the Church, not only if they occupied themselves with evil deeds, but even if they hesitated in feeding others with spiritual food and drink."[89] Guibert employs metaphors of reproduction to describe the acceptance of the faith as a receptive act, similar to conception, and the spreading of the faith as both a virile act of insemination and a feminine act of nurturing with spiritual food.

For Guibert, an understanding of the faith is received by the heart in a moment of insemination, and needs to be fed spiritual food in order to grow. Throughout his writing, he uses the language of conception to describe the moment of an individual soul's reception of the faith. For example, in his exegetical writing, he describes the generation of the signs of the Holy Spirit within man: "When they [the signs of the Holy Spirit] were created, that is, when the seeds of these good things were created, they were injected for the renovation of the mind through the conception of good will."[90] This is an interpretation of an Augustinian notion.

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[87] Like Anselm, Guibert expands upon Jesus' parable of the fruit trees in which he warned against being like the trees which do not bear or those which bear bad fruits. Mt 7:16-20; Lk 6:43-44.

[88] This is from the introduction to his study on the moral lessons of Genesis: "*...eos qui verbi Dei semine in cordibus fidelium ad honorem Christi fructum boni operis procreare respuunt...*" Guibert of Nogent, *Moralia in Genesim*, in PL 156, 22.

[89] "*Hi non intrant in Ecclesiam Dei, quia corpori Christi, quod est Ecclesia, nunquam sociantur, non solum qui in malis operibus exercentur, sed etiam qui spiritualibus epulis ac poculis alios pascere pigritantur.*" Guibert of Nogent, *Moralia in Genesim*, in PL 156, 23.

[90] "*Quando creatae sunt, id est quando horum bonorum semina per conceptum bonae voluntatis menti renovandae injecta sunt.*" Guibert of Nogent, *Moralia in Genesim*, in PL 156, 25.

Augustine wrote that words were first conceived and borne in the heart, and then spoken.[91] He writes that our speech is an imperfect reproduction of thought that exists in our heart. However, in comparison with human words, which are fleeting, God uttered the Word, which is eternal. Augustine frames human speech and God's issuing of the Word, that is, Christ, as generative functions. Thus, he writes, "God produced the Word, that is, he begot a Son [eternally]; indeed, you, in time, are pregnant with the word in your heart."[92] The word, which exists in its unspoken state, the "conception of the heart" (*conceptio cordis*), as Augustine puts it, is a spiritual conception; but, when it is born into the world, attached to a certain language and dialect, it experiences only a short-lived existence.

Like Augustine, Guibert envisions the mind, or heart, as a maternal container for receiving the spiritual fruits of God. Guibert's use of the language of conception and birth reveals, however, that these fruits could be brought forth through actions as well as words. In his autobiography, the analogy of conceiving is used to describe actual cases in which individuals decide to accept a divine path. He describes a wealthy man who conceived [*concipio*] a desire to reform and become a monk and subsequently gave birth [*parturio*] to the desire, that is, he put the thought into action.[93] Guibert also relates that his mother continuously laboured in spiritual childbirth for twelve years before eventually giving birth to the pious notion of withdrawing herself from the world.[94] Guibert's use of the language of conception and birth to describe the reception of a pious idea and its eventual expression through speech or action, describes both a passive and active event. For, although the good thought is planted by God, acting as a father, the mind must receive it and labour to bring it to fruition.

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[91] "*quando ergo concipis verbum quod proferas, rem vis dicere, et ipsa rei conceptio in corde tuo jam verbum est; nondum processit, sed jam natum est in corde, et manet ut procedat*." Augustine of Hippo, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 14.7 in PL 35, 1506.

[92] "*sic Deus edidit Verbum, hoc est, genuit Filium. Et tu quidem ex tempore gignis verbum etiam in corde.*" Augustine of Hippo, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 14.7 in PL 35, 1506.

[93] "*Concepta itaque hac ipsa voluntate, fervente tandem desiderio quod parturiebat emisit*." Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, 1.10, in PL 156, 465.

[94] "*A patris mei obitu cum ferme duodennium... quae diutina revolutione parturiit, felicem perducere properabat ad partum.*" Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, 1.14, in PL 156, 470.

Guibert's contemporary, the rhetorician Alberic of Montecassino,[95] used the metaphors of pregnancy and maternal nurturing to describe the process by which learning occurred. In the paradigm recounted in his *Flowers of Rhetoric*, knowledge of rhetoric is transmitted by an author, in this case Alberic, who acts as a father inseminating by means of the written work of instruction, a student, who receives the knowledge and allows it to grow gradually within his mind. Alberic compares the growth of understanding of an art with the stages of pregnancy: "Any art whatsoever ought to proceed in its stages from the lowest to the highest. Now, let the sincere soul turn over itself, let it eat and drink and sustain itself from within... at last touched by the rod of Phoebus, the mind will bear [*pario*] flowers...."[96] According to Alberic, the author of the instructional work fills the role of a father, generating knowledge in the mind of the untaught reader, and, also, as a nurse, feeding the student the milk of instruction.[97] He repeats the analogy used by Saint Paul that the unlearned are like infants, needing to be nourished on milk, while those who are more mature, can be fed on bread.[98] Alberic extends his analogy that knowledge is conceived and nurtured in the mind as an infant in the womb to explain how an author produces a text from the knowledge he has previously aquired. In this analogy, the written text is represented as an offspring, the "flower" of the thoughts which have been obtained and developed in the mind. Alberic writes about the prologue, that "it must be drawn from the material of the work, as from the very womb of its mother.... You see the messengers sent before are born of the thoughts that will follow so that the authors might prefigure by offering the mind a taste of the story to come."[99] Thus, Alberic envisions the author as father, mother, and midwife,[100] in the acts of conveying and nurturing knowledge in

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[95] Alberic of Montecassino (d. 1105) was a part of the flourishing of renewed classical culture that took place in and around the monastery of Monte Cassino, in Italy in the eleventh century. He wrote hymns, *vitae* and other works of devotion, as well as a didactic treatise on rhetoric.

[96] "*Ars enim quaelibet suis debet procedere gradibus, debet inquam ab imis ad summa fieri transitus. Iam fidelis huc se convertat, animus, hauriat, gustet, rapiat intrinsecus... radio Phebi tacta flores mens pariat*." Alberic of Montecassino, *Flores rhetorici* (Montecassino: Arti grafiche e fotomeccaniche Sansaini, 1938), 33.

[97] "*quid aliud quam lacte doctrinae proludium puerile dixerimus*?" *Ibid*.

[98] "*Hactenus quasi lacte doctrinae mentes infantium rigavimus, superest ut viriles animos suo pane consolidemus*." *Ibid*. Cf. 1 Cor 3:2.

[99] "*Primum quasi quibusdam matris de visceribus ex ipsa materia trahatur prologus.... Vides ut ex sequentibus praemissa pariantur, ut mentem praelibando auctores historiae futurae premoneant*." Alberic of Montecassino, *Flores*, 33-34.

[100] Compare this with Socrates who said in the *Theaetetus* that he was like his mother, a midwife, because, although he does not have ideas himself, he helps other men bring forth ideas through questioning. Cf. Maus, "A Womb of His Own," 91.

himself and others; the infant in his several metaphors symbolizes both the nascent understanding in one's mind, and the material of a written work.

It is important to note that Alberic's choice to utilize maternal metaphors to describe the acquisition of knowledge as a receptive act requiring outside insemination and internal nurturing was not self-evident for other medieval writers. That is to say that the maternal model to describe creative expression was not the only model available.[101] Geoffrey of Vinsauf,[102] for example, composed a metaphor for describing the process of poetic creation as building a house.[103] This model for production bears similarity to the Aristotlian model for describing conception and embryology, in which the male sperm actively "builds" and "shapes" the resulting offspring and the mother is merely the container.[104] Alberic's decision to use the symbols of the womb as a container, and the metaphors of natural fertility, and of nurturing, to describe the production of writing and transmitting knowledge, reveals a specific idea about what he saw as the purpose of his writing.[105] He envisioned the work he created to be the product of his received-knowledge and the vessel for passing on this knowledge to the world; to this end he composed a metaphor of the mind, and by extension, the book, as a womb containing the blossoming seeds of rhetorical understanding.

Metaphors drawn from reproductive experience were not exclusively used to describe male-authorship. Most significantly, Christine de Pizan,[106] the late-fourteenth-century female writer, employed the pregnancy metaphor to describe the process of written creation. In her

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[101] On the variety of paternity metaphors utilized by fourteenth-century French writers, see Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La couleur de la mélancholie*.

[102] Geoffrey of Vinsauf was a poet and rhetorician living in England in the last decades of the twelth century and first decade of the thirteenth. He produced his popular treatise on the poetic art, *Poetria nova*, around the year 1200. In this treatise he focuses on the preparation, education, and necessary skills which a poet must have in order to be successful. Cf. Margaret F. Nims, "Geoffrey of Vinsauf," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, V:390-91.

[103] Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), 16-7.

[104] See above, pages 44-46.

[105] Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet describes similar imagery used by late-medieval poets, such as Alain Chartier, Eustache Deschamps, and Christine de Pizan, to depict literary ideas formed in the mind of the poet as a conception taking place in the closed womb of a virgin: "La représentation de la création littéraire au Moyen Age prend le modèle de l'incarnation…. Le poète ne se risqué pas encore à se mettre à la place de Dieu, mais accepte de tenir, revendique même la place d'une vierge." see Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La couleur de la mélancholie*, 80-3.

[106] We know quite a lot about Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364-ca. 1429) from her autobiographical account of her life in the *Vision of Christine*. She grew up in the courts of Charles V where her father was a favoured scholar; she married a royal secretary with whom she had several children, but who died and left her a widow at the age of twenty-five. She was remarkable for her education in French and Italian literature, history, science and poetry. Her own writing was recognized by a number of important patrons who, although women writers were extremely rare, supported Christine in her production of works of romance, history, didactics and morality. Cf. Sylvia Huot, "Christine de Pizan," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, III: 315-17.

biographical fantasy, the *Vision of Christine*, which emulates the visionary narratives like that of Julian of Norwich, but in a secular way, similar to the dream narrative of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Christine meets Dame Nature, who urges her to reproduce her ideas through writing:

> [Gradual learning] was not sufficient at this point to my sentiments and mind; rather [Dame Nature] wanted that the engenderment of study and the things seen would inspire me to new readings. Then she told me, "Take the tools and hammer out on the anvil on the material that I will give you, so durable that neither iron or fire nor anything else will be able to destroy it. So, forge pleasant things. When you were carrying the children in your womb, you experienced great pain in order to give birth. Now I want you to bring forth (*naissent*) new books which in the time to come and perpetually to the world will present your memory before the worldly princes and everywhere, in all places; these in joy and pleasure, you will reproduce (*enfentera*) from your memory. Notwithstanding the pain and labour, just as the woman who has given birth forgets her pain as soon as she hears her child cry, you will forget the pain of labour upon hearing the voice of your books."[107]

Nature calls upon Christine's experience as an actual mother to explain the similar difficulties that both mothers and authors encounter, and the positive rewards that they will subsequently enjoy. She expresses the same sentiment about the sacrificial act of writing that Jesus spoke of when he described his creative sacrifice: that the rewards will have an analgesic effect, just as the joy of the new born infant soothes the pain of the mother.[108]

In general, Christine's analogy depicts the process of authorship/birth as being active, more so than does Alberic's model. Christine's Nature utilizes the metaphor of a blacksmith to

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[107] "*Ne souffist pas atant a mon sentement et engin, ains voult que par lengendrement d'estude et des choses veues nasquissent de moy nouvelles lectures. Adont me dist: Prens les outilz et fiere sure l'enclume la matiere que je te bailleray si durable que fer: ne fu ne autre chose ne la pourra despecier; si forges chose delictables. Ou temps que tu portoies les enfans en ton ventre, grant douleur a l'enfanter sentoies. Or vueil que de toy naissent nouveaulx volumes, lesquelz les temps a venir et perpetuelment au monde presenteront ta memoire devant les princes et par l'univers en toutes place, lesquelz en joie et delit tu enfanteras de ta memoire, non obstant le labour et traveil, lequel tout ainsi comme la femme qui a enfanté, si tost que elle ot le cry de son enfant oublie son mal, oublieras le traveil du labour oyantla voix de tes volumes*." Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de l'advision Cristine* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2001), 3.10, p. 110. English translation from Christine de Pizan, *The vision of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 3.10, 105.

[108] Jn 16:21.

describe how Christine will actively shape the material, as well as carry it in her womb. She emphasizes the role of the craftsman who shapes the material/conception, as well as the labour and pain involved in bringing forth a text/infant. In this way, Christine combines aspects of both the Aristotelian paternal metaphor, used by Geoffrey of Vinsauf to portray the author's dynamic role, and of the maternal metaphors of nurturing and sacrifice.

4.3.4. Good Wombs: Conclusions.

There are clear connections between the maternal metaphors in biblical and patristic writing, which describe maternal qualities of God, Christ, as well as Moses and the apostles, those found in the mystical writings of Anselm and Julian, which reiterate descriptions of the motherhood of divine and saintly figures and carry over the metaphor to liken the spiritual experience of ordinary members of the Christian faith to gestation and birth, and those used in representations of preaching, learning, and composing words and ideas, either sacred or secular, as a reproductive act. In the way in which they envision the act of conception, the womb-space, and the offspring, the metaphors from the various contexts examined in this section were fairly consistent.

In the accounts examined above, in which the maternal body is used as a positive referent, conception is portrayed as the creation of something new, something which will pass through stages of development before achieving the fulfillment of its purpose and which will have to be fostered during its maturation. The metaphors of conception can represent an act of the will, as is the case in descriptions of God conceiving Christ, but, more frequently, they designate a receptive act in which, for example, an individual accepts and begins to nurture the seeds of divine will in his heart, or a student's mind is instilled with knowledge by outside instruction. The moment of conception is not a part of the metaphors which depict the "maternity" of Christ and Saint Paul, but is a common feature of maternal metaphors involving less exalted human figures. In these cases, the active-male role in conception is represented by God, teachers, books, while the passive-female role, is the open and willing individual who receives the embryo of faith, or of learning and accepts the duties of nurturing it. In these cases, it is often connected with the analogy of the nurse and nurseling to form a mixed metaphor in which the student of secular or religious learning is also the infant in need

of food suitable for its immature stage.[109] The connection between these incongruous metaphors, which identify the student with both the woman who conceives and the infant who is fed, lies in the act of being filled, or fulfilled, by an outside source.

The site of pregnancy, in these figurative models, is variously identified as the soul, the heart, or the mind—all of which represented the place in which the higher faculties were located in human beings. These locations emphasize that these "pregnancies" belong to the upper body, rather than the lower body. The metaphorical pregnancies are sometimes described as burdens, although the physical nature of these burdens is glossed over. When Anselm depicts carnal life as a womb-like, deadly pit, it is as a negative comparison to highlight the pristine re-birth which he experienced through Christ. Similarly, Julian's sickly, swollen body which traps and eventually releases an infant-like soul is the counter-image to the spiritual womb. Her description of humankind's enclosure in God's womb reflects a protective space that bears no resemblance to this unpleasant bodily trap.

The texts examined in this section, generally, emphasize the fruits of the metaphorical pregnancies: the gift of eternal life, the increase of the Christian faith, the production of good deeds, positive speech, or a beneficial written work. To this end, the weight of pregnancy and the labour of childbirth are used to portray the sacrifices that are necessary to bring about great rewards. Those subjects whose actual physical exertions are compared to childbirth, such as Moses, Jesus, and Julian, are believed to reap spiritual rewards that will outstrip their bodily pains. Likewise, Christine's Nature professes as much when she compares the female poet's intellectual labour to the travail of childbearing, with the promise that the joy of her completed creation will erase the memory of the pain.

The sources examined in this section use "pregnancy" and "birth" as metaphors to depict the qualities of fertility, creativity, self-sacrifice, and nurture in their subjects. These are abstract qualities associated with the physical phenomena themselves. However, depictions of the physical aspects of pregnancy and parturition in these metaphors are remarkably few. The male subjects, such as Paul and Christ, are like mothers in that they cherish and protect; the student and faithful Christian are like mothers in the way in which they provide a receptive and fertile space for the growth of something both vulnerable and good. The metaphors

[109] In chapter five, we will examine other places in which the male fluids of insemination are compared to maternal breast milk. Here, we wish to examine the other half of this mixed metaphor, which joins conceptually the impregnated woman with the well-fed infant as the recipients of a beneficial offering.

primarily convey these secondary characteristics associated with childbearing, rather than comparisons with the physical phenomena themselves.

4.4. Bad Wombs.

Although pregnancy and birth metaphors sometimes conveyed positive meanings, as the examples of the previous section illustrate, references to the pregnant and parturient body in descriptions of men could also communicate unpleasant associations. The sources presented in this section portray men who are "pregnant" or "in labour" in depictions which are not meant to convey images of fertility or nurture, but, rather, to communicate the opposite. The "pregnant men" examined here are linked with some of the negative characteristics associated with the female reproductive body, which have been noted in previous chapters, namely pollution, sin, and death.

The kinds of sources where we find accounts of men with "bad wombs" are very different from the sources discussed in the previous section. The "pregnant man" as a fool or a figure of evil is a character found in several comedic, satirical, and exemplary tales from the later medieval period. These sources were aimed, primarily, at a popular audience. It is typical, in these sources, for the character to believe that he is actually pregnant or to exhibit physical signs, such as abdominal growth or the bodily emission of some "offspring" in a manner reminiscent of childbirth. In the texts in which pregnancy is used symbolically to illustrate some negative quality of a male subject, there is an emphasis on the bodily functions associated with pregnancy. These physical aspects of birth are, generally, expressed in an unpleasant way; for example, birth is compared to unclean bodily excretions, and labour is not heroic, but a process which dishevels and endangers the mother. Moreover, the "pregnancy" in these sources is always sterile, in that it produces nothing at all, or else, nothing of value. The image of the male pregnancy and birth, in this context, is never used to depict one's own self, or any figure of respect. Pregnancy is used, rather, to depict the irrationality or sinfulness of an individual; often, it is perceived to be a punishment for some transgression.

4.4.1. Biblical origins of a metaphor for sin.

Metaphors of male pregnancy as symbols of sinfulness and punishment have biblical roots, particularly in the Hebrew scriptures. In the books of the Old Testament, we find examples of conception used as a metaphor to describe the act of undertaking the desire to do evil in one's mind, and childbirth signifying the resulting wicked deeds or spoken vanities. In the book of Job, Eliphaz accuses Job of insolence against God, saying that his words are empty, and his belly is filled with air: "Will a wise man answer as if he were speaking in the wind, and fill his stomach with burning heat?"[110] He asks Job, "Why doth thy spirit swell against God, to utter such words out of thy mouth?"[111] With these words, Eliphaz uses the imagery of the inflated stomach and puffed up spirit to depict Job's arrogance. He then composes a pregnancy analogy, which asserts that the wicked and unbelieving are doomed to sterility and death, and will not leave any fruits to posterity except their own falsehoods:

> Before his days be full he shall perish: and his hands shall wither away. He shall be blasted as a vine when its grapes are in the first flower, and as an olive tree that casteth its flower. For the congregation of the hypocrite is barren, and fire shall devour their tabernacles, who love to take bribes. He hath conceived sorrow, and hath brought forth iniquity, and his womb prepareth deceits.[112]

Job's swollen spirit, a symbol of his pride, is represented by the images of the stomach, filled with air, and the womb which produces deceits. The pregnancy metaphor describes Job's acceptance and production of error: he has conceived, let emptiness and error into his soul, and, as a consequence, generated wicked words against God which he brought forth from his mouth into the world.

The image of the wicked man as pregnant with error is echoed in the seventh psalm, where David describes his enemy as a woman who conceives sadness and gives birth to iniquity and deception.[113] It appears again in the writings of the prophet Isaiah, where the

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[110] "*numquid sapiens respondebit quasi in ventum loquens et implebit ardore stomachum suum*." Job 15:2.
[111] "*quid tumet contra Deum spiritus tuus ut proferas de ore huiuscemodi sermones*." Job 15:13.
[112] "*antequam dies eius impleantur peribit et manus eius arescet. laedetur quasi vinea in primo flore botrus eius et quasi oliva proiciens florem suum. congregatio enim hypocritae sterilis et ignis devorabit tabernacula eorum qui munera libenter accipiunt. concepit dolorem et peperit iniquitatem et uterus eius praeparat dolos*." Job 15:32-35.
[113] "*ecce parturit iniquitatem et concepto dolore peperit mendacium*." Ps 7:15.

people of Israel are accused of conceiving and labouring to bring forth false words and sinful deeds; their dissolute behaviour is also likened to the act of forcibly hatching the eggs of snakes and bringing forth poisonous and deadly creatures which in turn produce the death-bringing serpent, the basilisk.[114] These side-by-side analogies imply that evil breeds evil, and that the consequences of its engendering are lethal. These analogies depict the stages through which one passes when committing a sin by means of one's speech or actions: first, evil is planted within, through the conception of sadness or a transgression against God, then, through the actions of the individual, a wicked act is carried out or a false speech delivered. The language of conception and birth for describing the act of sinning is also employed in the Gospels, in the letter of James. James portrays sin as the offspring of desire, and indicates that the progression of sin follows the stages of pregnancy and infant maturity: "When concupiscence has conceived, it brings forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begets death."[115] In this metaphorical construct, applied to sinners in the scriptures, male pregnancy represents a kind of barrenness; the offspring created within the wicked is nothingness, or else something poisonous, which brings death rather than life.

In the Hebrew scriptures, childbirth is also portrayed as an image of looming danger and as a punishment for sin. The prophet Isaiah draws recurrently on a metaphor of parturition to express the suffering of the people of Israel, whose God has deserted them as a result of their sins; for example, he writes, "gripings and pains shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman in labour;"[116] and, he describes his reaction to his terrible vision: "Therefore are my loins filled with pain, anguish hath taken hold of me, as the anguish of a woman in labour: I fell down at the hearing of it, I was troubled at the seeing of it."[117] The prophet Jeremiah employs the same metaphor to refer to past pains, eventually to be rewarded, in the context of his prediction of the end of the captivity of Israel. He writes that the anguish of men currently in captivity parallels the pain and fear of a woman in childbirth: "Ask ye, and see if a

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[114] "*confidunt in nihili et loquuntur vanitates conceperunt laborem et pepererunt iniquitatem. ova aspidum ruperunt.... qui comederit de ovis eorum morietur et quod confotum est erumpet in regulum*." Isa 59:4-5; Cf. Isa 15:13: "*peccare et mentiri contra Dominum et aversi sumus ne iremus post tergum Dei nostri ut loqueremur calumniam et transgressionem concepimus et locuti sumus de corde verba mendacii*."

[115] "*concupiscentia cum conceperit parit peccatum peccatum, vero cum consummatum fuerit generat mortem*." Jas 1:15.

[116] "*tortiones et dolores tenebunt quasi parturiens dolebunt*" Isa 13:8.

[117] "*propterea repleti sunt lumbi mei dolore angustia possedit me sicut angustia parientis corrui cum audirem conturbatus sum cum viderem*." Isa 21:3.

man bear children? Why then have I seen every man with his hands on his loins, like a woman in labour, and all faces are turned pale?"[118] Recalling Genesis 3:16, the prophets suggest that the suffering in labour is a punishment for sin. The punishment for Original Sin has been given as the punishment for the sinfulness of an individual or group—the pain and danger associated with birthing is not only passed on to women as a result of Eve's transgression, but could be inflicted on each member of the nation of Israel, male and female alike, as a result of their sinful behaviour.

The biblical authors employed conception, pregnancy, and birth as metaphors which describe wicked men, drawing upon associations between the pain and labour of childbirth and sin and punishment, and contrasting natural fertility with spiritual sterility. Their metaphors achieve their strong effect by emphasizing the somatic experience of the "pregnancy" of these men, which they portray by means of images of swelling abdomens, and hands grasping the loins in pain. We find the same metaphorical elements and the association with falsity, wickedness, and bodily symptoms in late medieval tales of male pregnancy found in comedic tales and exemplary legends. Fruitless pregnancy as a metaphor to describe the believer of false things is used to depict one who transgresses against God in the Old Testament; however, in late medieval satirical works, an imagined pregnancy can be a characteristic of the fool, who is untaught, rather, in the ways of the world. Late medieval authors of exemplary legends also adopted the metaphor of the pains of childbirth to represent the suffering of those who are being punished by God for their transgressions, using it to represent the evil of certain infamous enemies of the Christian faith, such as Nero and Judas. In the following section, we will examine several accounts which feature male pregnancy in the characters of the pregnant fool and the conceiver of evil.

4.4.2. Pregnant Fools.

The most familiar tale involving the character of the ignorant man who is tricked into thinking that he is pregnant is recorded in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.[119] In the third tale of day

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[118] "*interrogate et videte si generat masculus. quare ergo vidi omnis viri manum super lumbum suum quasi parientis et conversae sunt universae facies in auruginem*." Jer 30:6. Cf. Jer 6:24; 22:23.

[119] The *Decameron* is arguably the most famous of the extensive literary production of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). Boccaccio composed the collection of a hundred tales in the vernacular Italian language. The work

nine of the *Decameron*, the storyteller recounts how the character of Calandrino, a gullible buffoon who appears in several stories in Boccaccio's master narrative, is defrauded of his money by his friends and his physician, who convince him that he is pregnant and needs to pay for an abortion. Calandrino is repeatedly told that he looks different, half-dead, until he is convinced that he feels "something queer inside" him. His friends suggest that he take to bed and send a specimen of urine to the local physician, who is already aware of the prank. Calandrino is easily swindled out of his money by his ready belief in the deception:

> The doctor sat down beside Calandrino, felt his pulse, and then in his wife's presence said: "Calandrino, speaking to you as a friend, there is nothing wrong with you except that you are pregnant."
>
> When Calandrino heard this he screamed dismally and exclaimed: "Alas! It's your fault, Tessa. You would always lie on top. I told you how it would be…. Alas, alas! What shall I do? How shall I bear this child? Where will it come out? I see that I shall die through my wife's folly; may God [make her unhappy] as much as I wish to be happy! If I were well, I'd get up and beat her till I broke her bones, for it would have been well if I had never let her get on top. But if I escape this, then she can die of wanting it first!"
>
> …"Calandrino," said the doctor, "don't be disturbed. Praise be to God, we have found it out so soon that we can set you free in a few days with very little trouble. But you'll have to spend some money."
>
> [Calandrino exclaimed:] "…Yes, for the love of God! ... I've got two hundred lire I was going to buy a farm with; if they're all needed, take them all, only keep me from having a child, for I don't know how I should bear it. I've heard women make such a noise when childbearing, although they've got a good large place to do it with, that I think if I suffered such pain I should die before I bore the child."[120]

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contains satirical, comedic, moral tales which are generally not new inventions but retelling of older and often well-known stories. Cf. Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: the man and his works*, trans. Richard Monges and Dennis J. McAuliffe (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

[120] "*E postoglisi il medico a sedere allato, gli 'ncominciò a toccare il polso, e dopo alquanto, essendo ivi presente la moglie, disse: 'Vedi, Calandrino, a parlarti come a amico, tu non hai altro male se non che tu se' pregno.' / Come Calandrino udí questo, dolorosamente cominciò a gridare e a dire: 'Ohimè! Tessa, questo m'hai fatto tu, che non vuogli stare altro che di sopra: io il ti diceva bene.... Ohimè, tristo me! come farò io? come partorirò io questo figliuolo? onde uscirà egli? Ben veggo che io son morto per la rabbia di questa mia moglie*

In Boccaccio's comedic narrative, Calandrino is a fool because he believes he is pregnant, having accepted the authority of a doctor and the persuasion of his friends. At the end of the tale, Calandrino is told the truth, but not before paying for the unnecessary procedure to "cure" him of his pregnancy.

The way in which Boccaccio's pregnant fool thinks about his "pregnancy" is shaped by concerns about physical suffering and punishment. He is especially concerned with the negative effects of pregnancy on the body: sickness, and the pain and danger of childbirth. His experience of pregnancy begins after he is misled into believing he is sick, when he is convinced that his illness is a symptom of pregnancy. He expresses his fears about the anatomical difficulties which childbirth raises for a man, the pain of labour and the danger of death, but he never mentions the usually happy result of pregnancy, offspring. When told that he is pregnant by the physician, Calandrino immediately comes to the conclusion that his pregnancy is a consequence of "unnatural" sexual behaviour. According to the logic of the foolish man, his wife's desire for being on top during intercourse, a position which was discouraged by the Church,[121] is to blame for his physical affliction.

Boccaccio's character bears resemblance to another comic fool who believes he is pregnant, featured in a tale recounted by a thirteenth-century German author, known only as Zwingäuer.[122] The story revolves around a monk, who was raised in the monastery from the age of seven. Because he was isolated from the secular world from such a young age, he remained innocent and in the dark about the way people reproduced. Having heard about

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che tanto la faccia Idio trista quanto io voglio esser lieto; ma cosí foss'io sano come io non sono, ché io mi leverei e dare'le tante busse, che io la romperei tutta, avvegna che egli mi stea molto bene, ché io non la doveva mai lasciar salir di sopra. Ma per certo, se io scampo di questa, ella se ne potrà ben prima morir di voglia.' ...gli disse il maestro: 'Calandrino, io non voglio che tu ti sgomenti, ché, lodato sia Idio, noi ci siamo sí tosto accorti del fatto, che con poca fatica e in pochi dí ti dilibererò; ma conviensi un poco spendere.' / Disse Calandrino: 'Ohimè! maestro mio, sí, per l'amor di Dio. Io ho qui dugento lire di che io voleva comperare un podere: se tutti bisognano, tutti gli togliete, pur che io non abbia a partorire, ché io non so come io mi facessi; ché io odo fare alle femine un sí gran romore quando son per partorire, con tutto che elle abbian buon cotal grande donde farlo, che io credo, se io avessi quel dolore, che io mi morrei prima che io partorissi.' " Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Sansoni, 1992). Translation from Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. Richard Aldington, 15th ed. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 533-5.

[121] James A Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 286.

[122] For a print version of the Old German tale, accompanied by a modern German summary, see Zwingäuer, "*Der swangere Mönch*" in Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, ed., *Gesammtabenteuer. Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen: Ritter- und Pfaffen-Mären. Stadt- und Dorfgeschichten. Schwänke, Wundersagen und Legenden*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1850), 2:51-69. An English translation of this tale is recounted in Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, 125-31.

"Love" (*Minne*) in a book, he inquired of a servant of the monastery about what it was. The servant praised the power of Love to such a degree that the young monk made plans to go find Love with the aid of the servant. He was taken to the house of a married woman who received lodgers, and arrangements were made between the woman and the servant that he would pay her to teach the young monk about love-making. But the innocent monk did not know what to do, so the woman, annoyed by this, punished him by straddling him and beating him severely. The poor monk decided that he did not like what Love has to offer and departed with his servant. On their journey back to the monastery, he asked the servant about how infants come to be born after two people have come together, and was told that the person who is underneath in the coupling is one who gives birth. He thought to himself, "Now I must bring a child into the world. My honour is lost—and if the Abbot finds out, how will I be able to live? I'll be expelled from the community. I would rather die than suffer their disdain."[123] The monk, now convinced that he was pregnant, became sick with his imagined ailment and determined to get an abortion. He asked a local villager, who had beaten a cow so brutally that she had lost her calf, to beat him in the same way. During the beating, the young monk saw a hare bounding away from him and believed that this was his son. He tried to catch it, hoping to send it secretly to a wet nurse, but he failed and began to pine after it. Sorrowfully, the foolish monk confessed to his brethren that he had carried a child and had lost it before it could be baptized: "My son is still a pagan; if he had only been baptized my sorrow would have passed."[124] At last, the true story of what happened between the monk and the married woman came out, and the monk was set right and absolved of his sins.

As in Boccaccio's story, pregnancy is assumed because of beliefs about the roles of the sexes in the procreative act. Although he is unclear about sexual matters, the foolish monk is convinced that he is pregnant as a result of lying with the innkeeper's wife and her being on top, and that his condition is an indication of his guilt. Like Calandrino, the monk experiences pregnancy as an illness. The imagined birth, which the monk brings about in his attempt to procure an abortion, is painful; and, that which he perceives to be the offspring produced by

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[123] "*Nû wirt ein kint von mir geborn; sô hab' ich mîn êre gar verlorn; Dar zuo verliuse ic mîn pfeund(e) gar, ob sîn der apt wirt gewar, und die münche gemeine werdent mich von in scheiden; Sô waer' mir lieber der tôt, ê ich lîde iren spot*." von der Hagen, ed., *Gesammtabenteuer. Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen*, 2:61. Translation from Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, 125-31.

[124] "*Mîn kint ist noch heiden; Het' e_3 enpfangen die Kristenheit, so waer' zergangen mîn leit*." Von der Hagen, ed., *Gesammtabenteuer. Hundert altdeutsche Erzälungen*, 67. Translation from Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, 125-31.

his pregnancy is inhuman, though he does not appear to notice this. The monk's parental feelings are remorse and fear because that which he has brought into the world is condemned.

Two more examples of the pregnant fool which we will examine here come from a collection of fables written in the twelfth century by a woman, Marie de France.[125] The first is a story of a rich man whose illness is mistakenly diagnosed as pregnancy:

There was a man of medicine
Who served a rich man, cared for him
During a malady most grave.
He drew some blood, and then he gave
It to the daughter, trusted her
To watch and keep the sample pure.
For by that blood, he'd know, said he,
What was her father's malady.…
Alas, her fate did badly fare:
She spilled the blood she'd taken there.
This deed she dared not tell or show
And did not know what else to do
Except to draw more blood --her own.
She got some blood, let it cool down
Before the doctor came and viewed it.
The doctor, seeing it, concluded
It had from someone pregnant come.
At this, the rich man was struck dumb.
He really thought he would give birth.
And so he called his daughter forth.

[125] Marie de France is the first female poet writing in French whose name we know. However, we do not know much more about her than her first name, which she gave in the epilogue to her *Fables*, that she was from France but likely living in England at the time in which she was actively writing. The rough dates in which she produced the texts that are attributed to her put her at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. In addition to the *Fables*, two other works labeled only with the name "Marie" are attributed to Marie de France, a collection of *Lais* and a translation of a Latin legend, *Espurgatoire saint Patrice*. Much of the *Fables* is taken from medieval Latin versions of Aesop's *Fables*, but there are sections which are apparently original. Each of Marie's 102 fables is a short, simple story put to verse which contains a brief, and often serious, moral. Cf. Peter F. Dembowski, "Marie de France," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VIII:135-37.

As much from love as from distress,

The daughter must the truth confess:

She said she spilled what had been drawn;

This other blood - it was her own.… [126]

Marie de France concludes this fable with a moral, the serious tone of which seems at odds with the light-hearted story: Those who attempt to deceive others will be caught by their own wicked deeds; those who attempt to escape this fate, will be thwarted and killed. [127]

In the second of Marie's fables which features an imagined male pregnancy, the "pregnancy" is also diagnosed by a physician, who, in this case, bases his diagnosis on his patient's abdominal pain:

The peasant of this story lay

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[126] "***42. Del mire, del rice humme, e de sa fille***
D'un mire cunte, ki segna
Un riche humme, qu'il garda
En une grande enfermeté
Puis aveit le sanc comandé
A sa fille, que ele l'esgardast
Que nule rien n'I adesast.
Par le sanc, ceo dist, conustreit
Quel enfermeté ses pere aveit.
…
Me smut li est mesavenu:
Kar tut le sanc ad espandu.
Ne l'osa dire ne mustrer;
Ne autre cunsel ne sot trover,
Mes se memes fist segner.
E sun sanc lessa refreider,
Tant que li mires l'ot veü;
E par le sanc aparceü
Que cil ert preinz qu'il ot lessé,
Le riche humme ad mut esmaié,
Qu'il quidot bien aver enfant.
Sa fille fist venire avant.
Tant par destreit, tant par amur,
Li estut cunustre la verrur:
Del sanc li dist que ele espandi
E que li autre esteit de li…."
The original French and English translation are both from Marie de France, *Fables*, trans. Harriet Spiegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 130-33.

[127] "*Autresi vet des tricheürs,*
Des larus, des boiseürs:
En ki la felunie meint,
Par eus memes sunt ateint.
Quant meines se gardent de ester pris,
Si sunt encuntré e ocis."
Ibid.

Asleep out in the sun one day.
He lay face down, completely nude.
His anus could be clearly viewed.
A beetle into him did creep;
The peasant woke up from his sleep
He went, for he was in such pain,
To see a doctor and complain.
The doctor said that he was pregnant.
Now worse than ever felt the peasant,
For he believed the doctor's word.
And when the foolish people heard,
They said they had an omen here,
And all were filled with dread and fear -
Because of him, of faith untrue,
Misfortune great would be their due -
The foolish folk are so naïve
That vanities they will believe,
And put their faith in falsity.
They watched the peasant now to see
Just how the baby's birth would go.
The beetle, through the man's window
Where it had entered, took its leave.
The foolish folk were thus deceived.

Marie concludes:

This example serves to say
The ignorant are oft this way:
Believing that which cannot be,
They're swayed and changed by vanity.[128]

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[128] "*D'unj vilein dit ki se giseit*
Cuntre le soleil, se dormeit.
A sens giseit tut descovert,
E ses pertus esteit overt.

Thus, in this moral, the peasant's physical openness (*ses pertus overt*), which allowed him to be "impregnated" by the beetle, is paired with the people's openness to accepting false stories.

The biblical analogies of men who conceive and bear vanities are echoed in the morals of both of Marie de France's fables about male pregnancy which conclude with brief lessons on deception and the acceptance of false tales. Although the diagnosis of pregnancy made by the physicians in each narrative is unscientific and contrary to reason, the male patient, and, in the second case, a large group of peasants, believe it without question.

Bodily concerns are highlighted in both of these stories. The patients' only experience of pregnancy is illness and discomfort. Their response to the pregnancy is fear and apprehension. Marie recounts that the peasant, from the second fable, worried about how a man could give birth. Not only are the fruits of pregnancy not anticipated, in either tale, but, in the second fable, they arouse great anxiety as the peasant's pregnancy is treated as a portent of evil.

There are several similarities shared by these stories of pregnant fools that circulated in the late Middle Ages. Pain and the fear of pain are common features of all of the tales. The men who believe that they are pregnant all experience illness or physical discomfort. Anxiety about sin and its punishment looms to varying degrees in each of the tales; particularly, in the case of Calandrino and the monk, anxiety arises about allowing women to assume the

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Uns escharboz dedenz entra,
E li vileins s'en esveilla.
Grant mal li fist, tant que a un mire
L'esteit alez cunter e dire.
Li mires dist qu'il esteit preinz.
Ore fu mut pis que ne fu einz,
Kar le vileins bien le creï.
E li fous people quil l'oï.
Dïent que ceo est signefiance.
En poür sunt e en dutance -
N'i ad celui ki bien ne creit,
Que grant mal lur espeir.
Le vilein gueitent pur saveir
Par unt cil enfes deveit nestre.
Li escarboz par la fenestre,
U il entra, s'en est eissuz.
Dunc furent il tuz deceüz.
Par ceste essample le vus di:
Del nunsavant est autresi,
Ki creient ceo que estre ne peot,
U vanitez le oste e muet."
Ibid., 132-35.

dominant position in sexual relations. In the fable of the peasant and the beetle, other people look upon the "pregnant man" as an ill-omen which affects everyone. The fruits of pregnancy are not anticipated happily by the men who are "expecting;" in two of the tales, the character seeks an abortion rather than experience birth. When the imagined pregnancies result in producing an imagined offspring, it is not human.

There are also parallels in the reasons why the fools believe they are pregnant. In the stories composed by Boccaccio and Marie de France, a physician diagnoses pregnancy after the character complains about illness, and the character readily accepts the diagnosis to be true. Zwingäuer's monk, moreover, learns from his companion that he is in a position to be pregnant, and accepts the simple explanation of how pregnancy occurs without questioning it further. The stories portray, comically, the gullibility of men from different social groups: peasants, a monk, and a rich man. Each one becomes "pregnant" because he is receptive to the false ideas that others instill in him. Even in these light-hearted tales, we find reflections of the solemn biblical metaphors concerning empty pregnancies in condemnation of men who let themselves be open to vanities and false-teachings.

4.4.3. Impious births.

Male pregnancy, imagined as an abhorrent artifice, is featured as an element of several of the medieval narratives concerning the Emperor Nero. In the most common versions of the legend,[129] Nero, obsessed by an unnatural desire to understand the mysteries of the maternal body, is convinced that he has been made pregnant when he experiences physical characteristics, such as a swelling abdomen and sickness. According to the legend, the emperor is not really pregnant, but he has been deceived by his physicians who have fed him a potion containing frog-spawn. At the end of the tale, Nero gives birth by vomiting a frog. In order to portray Nero's pregnancy, this legend uses several elements found in medieval descriptions of pregnancy which emphasize its physical aspects: the growth of the belly, which

[129] The most widely distributed versions of the legend contain the elements of the story recorded here with very little variation. These are the twelfth-century German version, the *Kaiserchronik* [*Chronicle of Emperors*], the Latin versions which were a part of Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea* [*Golden Legend*] and Pseudo-Etienne de Besançon's fourteenth-century, *Alphabetum narrationum* [*Alphabet of Stories*], both works which were translated into the vernacular in several languages. Cf. Edward Schröder, ed., *Die Kaiserchronik eines Regensburger geistlichen* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1892).

created imaginary associations between the womb and the stomach; the sickness and discomfort, which are commonly cited characteristics of this distinctly female burden; and, the fluids that surround the foetus in the womb and are a part of the birth, which were frequently the subject of discussion by medical and religious authors alike. Towards demonizing the emperor who was remembered as a persecutor of Christians and the possessor of unchristian vices, medieval descriptions of Nero's pregnancy draw heavily upon negative associations that existed between the pregnant body and sinfulness and death.

Versions of the pregnant Nero legend circulated in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, but it became widely known through its inclusion in the *Golden Legend* of Jacob of Voragine. The Emperor Nero appears several times in lives of saints recounted in the *Golden Legend* as the cruel and insane persecutor of early Christians. The tale of the pregnant Nero is found among several apocryphal stories incorporated into the *life* of St. Peter which are digressions from the saint's *life* itself. Their purpose is seemingly to add to the legend of Nero's lunacy and wickedness. In the beginning of the story, Nero, fixated on the secrets surrounding childbirth, orders his own mother to be killed so that he may see inside her womb; but when the physicians assigned to the task refuse, informing him that matricide is prohibited by Roman and natural law, he decides to learn the secrets of childbearing first-hand, and commands his physicians to make him pregnant on the penalty of death. Despite their protestations that it is against nature and reason, and fearing for their lives, the physicians develop a plan to trick the emperor into believing that he is carrying a child:

> So the doctors made up a potion in which they put a frog and gave it to the emperor to drink. Then they used their skills to make the frog grow in his belly, and his belly, rebelling against this unnatural invasion, swelled up so that Nero thought he was carrying a child. They also put him on a diet of foods they knew would be suitable for the frog, and told him that, having conceived, he had to follow the diet. At length, unable to stand the pain, he told the doctors: "Hasten the delivery, because I am so exhausted with this childbearing that I can hardly get my breath!" So they gave him a drink that made him vomit, and out came a frog horrible to see, full of vile humors and covered with blood. Nero, looking at what he had brought forth, shrank from it and wondered why it was such a monster, but the physicians told him that he had produced a deformed fetus

> because he had not been willing to wait the full term. He said: "Is this what I was like when I came out from my mother's womb?" "Yes!" they answered. So he commanded that the fetus be fed and kept in a domed chamber with stones in it.[130]

This legend is remarkable for the physicality of the details surrounding the "pregnancy." Nero is fooled into believing in his pregnancy by physical signs: his swelling belly, pain, and exhaustion. Like a pregnant woman, he is made to follow a special diet. His labour is agonizing, bloody, and involves unclean humours. The legend recounts that Nero conceived of his desire to bear a child because, one time when he was passing through the city, he heard the loud cries of a woman in labour.[131] This suggests that Nero's performance of pregnancy followed what he believed to be the experience of women: intensely corporeal and veiled in secrecy.

Roberto Zapperi has traced the origins of the legend of pregnant Nero in his book, *The Pregnant Man*.[132] The first oblique reference to Nero's pregnancy, he tells us, is in Suetonius' *The Lives of the Caesars*. We find this reference in Suetonius' description of Nero's acting career, in which the emperor is said to have taken on the *personae* not only of gods and heroes, but of goddesses and heroines: Nero has donned masks of women, we are told, and has performed the songs written for female characters including, the "Canace in Labour." If we turn to the text itself, we find that the second-century Roman historian mentions Nero's performance of pregnancy in a list of several other dramatic scenes notable for the themes which they reproduce:[133] "Orestes the Matricide," from Euripides' tragedy, *Orestes*, about the

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[130] "*Tunc illi eum impotionantes ranam sibi occulte ab bibendum dederunt et eam artificio in eius ventre excrescere fecerunt; et subito venter eius nature contraria non sustinens intumuit, ita ut Nero se puero gravidum extimaret; faciebantque sibi servare dietam qualem nutriende rane noverant convenire dicentes quod propter conceptum talia eum observare oporteret. Tandem nimio dolore vexatus medicis ait: 'Accerlerate tempus partus, quia vix languore pariendi anhelitum habeo respirandi.' Tunc ipsum ad vomitum impotionaverunt et ranam visu terribilem, humoribus infectam et sanguine edidt cruentatam. Respiciensque Nero partum suum ipsum abhorruit et mirabatur adeo monstruosum. Dixerunt autem quod tam deformam fetum protulerit ex eo quod tempus partus noluerit expectare. Et ait: 'Fuine talis de matris egressus latibulis?' Et illi: 'Etiam.' Precepit ergo ut fetus suus aleretur et testudini lapidum servandus includeretur*." Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 571-72. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 347.

[131] "*Hanc insuper voluntatem pariendi conceperat eo quod per urbem transiens quondam mulierem parientem vociferantem audierat*." Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 571.

[132] Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, 112 ff.

[133] "*Tragoedias quoque cantavit personatus heroum deorumque, item heroidum ac dearum, personis effectis ad similitudinem oris sui et feminae, prout quamque diligeret. Inter cetera cantavit Canacen parturientem, Oresten matricidam, Oedipodem excaecatum, Herculem insanum.*" Suetonius, "Vita Neronis," in *The Lives of the Caesars*, ed. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 21.3, p.118.

hero's trials after he follows Apollo's command to kill his own mother; "The Blinding of Oedipus," a reference to the famous story of incest; and the "Frenzy of Hercules," which depicts the legendary hero's murderous insanity which causes him to take the life of his wife and children.[134] Matricide, incest, and the murder of family are all crimes which Nero is accused of committing in Suetonius' account.[135] The significance of the three latter scenes as allusions to elements of Nero's biography established elsewhere seems to me to indicate strongly that the first scene, enacting childbirth, is a reference to some aspect of Nero's character which was also well-known and mentioned in Suetonius' text. Most likely, Nero's adoption of the *persona* of a woman in labour was meant to refer to the transvestitism and homosexual acts which are described in the biography. Suetonius writes that Nero married other men twice; once, castrating and forcing the man into the role of the bride, and the second time, playing the female role by imitating the cries of a virgin being forcibly deflowered.[136]

A connection between Nero's homosexual acts and his "pregnancy" is made explicitly in the early-eighth-century *Chronicle of John*,[137] written by the Bishop of Nikiou:

> [A]fter the death of Claudius, the abominable Nero became emperor in Rome. Now he was a pagan and an idolator. And to his other vices he added the vice of sodomy, and he married as though he were a woman. And when the Romans heard of this detestable deed… [the priests and the senators] deposed him from the throne and took counsel in common to put him to death.… For when he fell into this disquietude of heart, owing to the debauchery which he had practiced as a woman, owing to this cause (I repeat) his belly grew distended and became like that of a pregnant woman. And he was greatly afflicted by the multitude of

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[134] The description of this scene by Suetonius can be identified as a reference to an episode in the play *Herakles*, by Euripides, in which Hercules is bound by his father after having slain his family in a mad rage. Maragrethe Billerbeck, "Hercules Bound: A note on Suetonius, Nero 21.3," *American Journal of Philology* 102 (1981).

[135] Suetonius' account of the life of Nero describes, among his many crimes, the murder of his mother (Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 34, pp. 142-46) his illicit relations with his mother while she was alive (Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 28.2, p. 132), and how he killed his wife, Poppaea, by kicking her when she was pregnant because he was angry with her (Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 35.3, p. 148). These vices are also recounted in the other main Roman source for the life of Nero, Tacitus' *Annals*: matricide 14.8; incest 14.2; Poppaea's murder 16.6.

[136] "*...ipse denupsit, voces quoque et heiulatus vim patientium virginum imitatus*." Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 29, p. 132.

[137] *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou* attempted to record the history of the human race from Adam, through Roman history, focusing on the emperors who persecuted Christians, and the rise of the Church through to the time of its composition at the turn of the eighth century. The *Chronicle* was written in Coptic or Greek and as a result was not a direct source of influence to later Latin versions of the Nero legend which also referred to the emperor's pregnancy. *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Atiya (New York: MacMillan) vol. 5.

> his loathsome pains. And therefore he ordered the wise men to visit him in the place where he was (hidden), and to administer remedies. And when the wise men came to him thinking that he was with child, they opened his belly in order to deliver it. And he died by this evil death.[138]

To the bishop, Nero's sexual crimes are secondary to his offenses as a pagan and idolator.[139] He presents the tale as a warning of what can happen when an individual turns his back on the teachings of Christianity and gives in to evil acts. Here, the spiritual debasement of Nero's soul is matched by the physical transformation of his flesh into a pregnant feminine form. The bishop's story echoes the warnings of the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, that those who conceive vanities and labour in wrongful deeds will die as a result of bringing them forth.

The death of Judas, one of Jesus' closest disciples and a traitor, was represented in some medieval depictions of the event as a violent birth. Some of the imagery which was used portrayed Judas as having "conceived" evil, and "given birth" to his treachery, and "delivered" his soul into iniquity.

Not much is known about Judas from contemporary sources; these tell us little besides the story of his betrayal of Christ in exchange for thirty pieces of silver and his subsequent demise. The Gospels record two accounts of his death. The evangelist Matthew records that Judas hung himself with a noose; Luke writes that he hung in a field purchased by his ill-gotten rewards; his torso split open and his bowels gushed out.[140] A third early account was recorded by the first-century Christian bishop, Papias: "Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety; for, his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the chariot, so that his bowels gushed

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[138] Bishop of Nikiu, *The Chronicle of John (c. 690 A. D.): Translated from Hermann Zotenberg's edition of the Ethiopic version with an introduction, critical and linguistic notes, and an index of names*, trans. Robert Henry Charles (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1981), 52-53.

[139] In comparison with the very negative view of Nero and his actions found in medieval writing, some Italian authors writing in the Renaissance, portrayed Nero in a better light. Katharine Park describes Girolamo Cardano's *Encomium of Nero* (ca. 1560), which defends Nero; and, she argues, moreover, that the title page of Andreas Vesalius' *Fabrica*, which depicts the author dissecting a woman's body and uterus consciously evokes contemporary woodcuts of Nero cutting open his mother's womb. Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 239-40.

[140] "*Dicens peccavi tradens sanguinem iustum at illi dixerunt quid ad nos tu videris et proiectis argenteis in templo recessit et abiens laqueo se suspendit*." Mt 27:4-5; "*Et hic quidem possedit agrum de mercede iniquitatis et suspensus crepuit medius et diffusa sunt omnia viscera eius.*" Act 1:18.

out."[141] Papias adopts the biblical analogy which links bodily swelling with iniquity, recalling the pregnancy imagery, found in the book of Job and in other scriptures, in his description of Judas, who is, swollen, or perhaps "pregnant," with evil and dies as a result of this condition. Although the work of Papias was transmitted incompletely and was not available through much of the medieval period, the representation of Judas with elements of the "pregnant man" was echoed several times in the various permutations of the life and death of Judas recorded in written legend and in art.

An apocryphal *life* of Judas, composed in the high medieval period, fleshed out a background that was missing from biblical accounts and drew upon a range of maternal imagery in order to emphasize Judas' depravity and the foretold nature of his crime. The large number of extant manuscript copies of versions of this *vita* attests to its popularity, as does its inclusion in the *Golden Legend*.[142] In the most common versions of the tale, Judas' mother has a dream that she is carrying in her womb a child who will be the destroyer of the Jewish race. She relates her dream to her husband and when the child is born, not wanting to kill him and not wanting to raise him, the parents put the infant into a basket and push him out to sea. The basket carrying Judas lands on the island of Scariot, and is found by a queen who is childless and who decides to pretend that the infant is her own. The legend's description of the young Judas has him show signs of wickedness early on; he maltreats the son who was conceived by the queen shortly after his adoption, and, when he discovers the fact that he was adopted, he kills the boy who was raised as his brother and flees the kingdom. At this point in the legend, Judas joins the court of Pilate (or Herod, in some versions), who, it so happens, is a neighbour of Judas' birth parents. One day, Judas is asked by his master to retrieve some much desired fruit, usually described in the legend as an apple, from the garden of his father. In carrying out the task, he is confronted by his father, who does not recognize him, and Judas kills him in a

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[141] Papias' work is found only in fragments recorded by later authors. His description of Judas' death is found in Apollinaris' *Catena in Evangelium S. Matthaei* and Oecumenius' *Commentaria in Acta Apostolorum*. Biblical scholar Arie Zwiep has examined these fragments and the contradictory accounts of Judas' death extensively. The quotation above is Zwiep's translation of Papias via Apollonaris from the Greek. Arie W. Zwiep, *Judas and the Choice of Matthias: A Study on Context and Concern of Acts 1:15-26* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 110ff.

[142] Paull Franklin Baum has compiled a list of over forty manuscript copies of several different forms of the legend, not including the numerous copies spread in the *Golden Legend*. His list and examination of the various legends form part of an article which also transcribes in whole and in part a number of the versions not otherwise in print. Paull Franklin Baum, "The Medieval Legend of Judas Iscariot," *Modern Language Assocation* 31, no. 3 (1916): 481-632.

rage. Following this act of patricide, Judas commits incest when he is given his dead father's land and wife by his master. Mother and child, now husband and wife, eventually recognize their true relationship and are filled with remorse. Judas then follows his mother's suggestion that he should seek out Jesus and beg for forgiveness. Most of the versions of the story conclude with an account of Judas' betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver and his subsequent suicide.

The legend, in its various forms, constructs several associations between Judas and mothers. Throughout various versions, maternal affection, leading to the nurture of a wicked infant, is presented as inevitable and calamitous. Judas' biological mother figures prominently as the deliverer of the portent of his crime, which she, herself, receives when he is still *in utero*. In many of the versions of the legend, Judas' mother experiences a vision while sleeping, from which she discovers that she is pregnant and that the child will be the destroyer of the Jewish race. In a thirteenth-century version of the legend[143] Judas' patricide, incest, and the collapse of Judaism are predicted through a set of images of a fire, which centre on the mother's womb:

> She saw a fire arising out of her uterus which, growing little by little, first took hold of her husband and then consuming him thoroughly until he was reduced to ashes, after a short while, it set ablaze the house in which he laid. After [the house] was consumed, the mother perceived a monster originating in that place, namely, her uterus; [and] the fire reentered [her uterus], although not entirely, but, with a long period of time intervening; [then] it drew itself away from there somewhat more moderately, and suddenly, rising up on high, it spread and completely burned down, first, Judea and Galilea, and then all of the entire region.[144]

Despite this vision, Judas' mother gives birth to her child and is unable to kill him, sends him on a boat to what she believes will be a watery death. A thirteenth-century narrator of the legend bemoans this act of maternal sympathy:

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[143] Recorded in Reims 1275, fol. 2; British Museum, Add. 15404, fol. 19; and, Douai 847, fol. 182v. Cf. Baum.

[144] "*Videbat ignem de utero suo egredientem qui paulatim crescens primo maritum suum corripuit cumque penitus consumens donec in favillam deficeret post paululum domum eius in qua iacebat conflagrabat. Qua consumpta prodigiosum monstrum in eosdem ortus, hoc est in utero suo, mater agnovit; ignis vero non totum se recondebat, sed interiecto longi temporis spacio inde iterum quasi moderacius se subducebat et subito in altum excrescens primo Iudeam et Galileam deinde omnem circa regionem afflabat et penitus concremabat…*" Baum,501-2; Cf. 509.

> Why did your miserable mother not immediately abort you when she conceived you? Why then were you born? Received on the knees? Nourished at the breast? Why, when you were born, were you not killed by paternal and maternal hands? … Or, why, moreover, were you not immediately thrown into the sea and submerged and suffocated by the abyss? Either the sea or the belly of some sea beast would have been your tomb, so that at a later date, you, [who is] loathed by heaven and earth, would not have died such an unhappy death among both.[145]

With these words, the author contends that it would have been better if the maternal womb and breast which nurtured Judas had been replaced by the life-extinguishing envelopment of the sea or the stomach of the whale. He foretells Judas' wicked end in describing the events surrounding his birth, and in doing so, sets up a parallel between the mother who fosters evil in her womb and Judas' own nurturing of evil.

The other important maternal figure in the Judas legend is his adoptive mother, who is said to be a fisherman's wife, or alternatively, a queen, as she is described in the *Golden Legend*. In one thirteenth-century version of the legend, the wife of the fisherman is moved by internal stirrings (*mota visceribus humanitatis*) to adopt the infant Judas, who has washed up on the shores.[146] In the *Golden Legend*, however, the queen, who is barren, decides to feign a pregnancy and pass the foundling off as her own child: "She therefore had the infant nursed secretly while she pretended to be pregnant. When the time came, she lied by announcing that she had borne a son, and the word spread throughout the kingdom."[147] After this charade, the queen actually conceives and gives birth to a son, but her sympathies towards the foundling prove to be lethal for her biological child. Judas's cruel and murderous character is revealed for the first time in this text when he discovers his mother's deception and murders the longed-for royal child and flees the country. The queen's fostering of the wicked and unnatural offspring, Judas, leads ultimately to this death and her childlessness.

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[145] "*Cur misera illa mater tua cum te concepit non statim abortivit? Cur autem natus? Cur exceptus genibus? Cur lactatus uberibus? Cur natus non statim es paternis et maternis manibus necatus? ... Cur autem vel in mare proiectus non statim es mersus et a tanto abysso suffocatus? Esset tibi vel mare vel aliquis beluinus venter sepulcrum nec postea celo terreque perosus tam infelici morte perisses inter utrumque.*" Baum, 504.

[146] Baum, 504.

[147] "*Puerum igitur secreto nutriri fecit et se gravidam simulavit, tandem se filium peperisse mentitur et per totum regnum fama hec celebris divulgatur.*" From "*XLV. De sancto Mathia*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 280-81. Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 167.

The end of the medieval legendary *life* of Judas catches up to the biblical accounts of Judas. Many of the extant versions of the legend incorporate, as their conclusion, scriptural accounts of his death given in the Gospel of Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles. In the version recorded in the *Golden Legend*, the various references to mothers culminate in a maternal metaphor which described his death as a fatal parturition. This metaphor was developed throughout the different permutations of the legend. In the earliest extant version, composed sometime in the twelfth century, only Judas' death by hanging is utilized.[148] However, the next earliest version, written as early as 1200, is more elaborate: "[Judas,] seeing that he had condemned an innocent, after he had thrown the blood money into the temple, hung himself with a noose and burst in the middle."[149] One thirteenth-century version of the legend, repeats this account verbatim;[150] however, the contemporaneous version which was incorporated into the *Golden Legend* adds commentary on the death which replicates closely the commentary found in Peter Comestor's *Scholastic History*, which, in turn, was influenced by Bede:

> However, he was sorry for what he had done. He threw back the money, and hanged himself with a halter, and, as the gospel tells us, 'burst asunder in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.' Thus his mouth was spared defilement since nothing came out through it, for it would have been incongruous that a mouth which had touched the glorious lips of Christ should be so foully soiled. It also was fitting that the bowels which had conceived the betrayal should burst and spill out, and that the throat from which had emerged the voice of the traitor should be strangled by a rope.[151]

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[148] "*Qui tandem se ipsum suspendit et miserabili morte vitam finivit.*" Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 14489, fol. 109v. Cf. Baum, 491.

[149] "*Videns autem quia innocentem condampnaverat proiecto in templo sanguinis precio laqueo se suspendit et medius crepuit.*" Munich, Lat. 21259, fol. 231v. Baum, 494.

[150] British Museum, Additional 15404, fol. 19. Cf. Baum, 507.

[151] "*Quos tamen penitentia ductus retulit et abiens laqueo se suspendit et suspensus creuit medius et diffusa sunt viscera eius. In hoc delatum est ori ne per os effunderetur: non etiam dignum erat ut os tam viliter inquinaretur quod tam gloriosum os scilicet Christi, contingerat. Dignum etiam erat ut viscera que proditionem conceperant rupta caderent et guttur a quo vox proditionis exierat laqueo artaretur.*" Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 280-81.Translation from Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 168-69. Compare with the commentary found in Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*: "*…suspensus crepuit medius, et diffusa sunt viscera ejus. sed non per os ejus, ut sic parceretur ori, quo Salvatorem osculatus fuerat. Non enim tam viliter debuit inquinari, quod tam gloriosum, scilicet os Christi contigerat. Dignum enim erat, ut viscera quae proditionem conceperant rupta caderent, guttur quoque quo vox proditionis exierat laqueo arctaretur*." Peter Comestor, *In Act. Apostolorum IX*, in PL 198, 1650. The earliest source of this explanation of the appropriateness of Judas' punishment is Bede's

In this explanation, Judas conceived (*concipio*) the treachery in his entrails. This description is also found in *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, which was attributed to Bonaventura. The narrator of the *Meditations* scolds Judas rhetorically, saying, "Woe to you, wretch, hard-hearted one! What you have conceived, you will bear; not He but you will perish!"[152] The metaphorical use of the verbs *concipio* and *parturio*, commonly used to refer to reproduction, here used to describe Judas' evil plan which was eventually the cause of his condemned end, belongs to a wider trend of depicting Judas' transgression in terms of the physical aspects of pregnancy and birth.

Medieval authors also incorporated into their explanations of Judas' death the vulnerability of the lower body as the seat of the sins of the flesh. The art historian Norbert Schnitzler has drawn attention to the iconographical significance of representations of Judas' bowels in visual images of his death: "The metaphorical equation of the bowels with filth and sin is a prominent feature of medieval physiology. Owing to the unfavourable mixture of liquids (humours), reason and cognition were perceived as being constantly endangered, thereby provoking sinful behaviour."[153] The legendary life of Judas attributed to the traitor the sin of avarice. Judas' greediness was based in interpretation of the Gospels; he was the apostle put in charge of the purse and he gave up Jesus in exchange for money. In an anonymous meditation on the Passion previously attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, the author uses the contrasting images of a full pouch and an empty pot to explain why Judas' stomach ruptured when he died:

> The nature of the exterior penalty uncovered the manner of the punishment; since, through that which man has sinned, he will be punished. The hanged man burst in the middle: his stomach (*venter*) was full, and his pouch (*uter*) was ruptured; he burst in the middle, where the seat of Satan was. Therefore, the vessel of abuse burst; [it is] not because it was the vessel of the potter [that] it

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Expositio super Acta Apostolorum: "*Et suspensus crepuit medius. Dignam sibi poenam traditor amens invenit, ut videlicet guttur quo vox proditionis exierat laquei nodus necaret. Dignum etiam locum interitus quaesivit, ut qui hominum angelorumque Dominum morti tradiderat coelo terraeque perosus, quasi aeris tantummodo spiritibus sociandus, juxta exemplum Achitophel et Absalon qui regem David persecuti sunt, aeris medio periret. Cui utique satis digno exitu mors ipsa successit, ut viscera quae dolum proditionis conceperant rupta caderent, et vacuas evolverentur in auras.*" PL 92, 944.

[152] "*Sed vae tibi, miser: tu quidem obduratus, quod concepisti, parturies….*" Ps-Bonaventura, "*Meditationes vitae Christi*."

[153] Norbert Schnitzler, "Judas' Death: Some remarks concerning the iconography of suicide in the Middle Ages," *The Medieval History Journal* 3, no. 1 (2000): 111.

> does not have a fate in a foreigner's grave, but like a boiling pot, it cracked through its emptiness. "And all his guts were scattered" (Act. 1:18). Money is the guts of the greedy man; it is scattered and lost, but the miseries of man are collected.[154]

Judas is overfilled with greed and, at the same time, spiritually empty. The author plays with the word *uter*, which was often used to refer to a money-pouch or to a womb. In these open places, that is in the purse which incited his greed and in the bowels of Judas' body where avarice grew, Satan dwelled, provoking Judas to wickedness. Pseudo-Bernard's comparison between the womb and money-pouch offers a warning about the sterility of money and the deleterious effects of greed.

By the later Middle Ages, the metaphors of Judas' evil "conception" and of his stomach as a full vessel for sin were reflected in the image of a birth scene in which his soul, or a demon, is born from his ruptured belly when he dies. The *South English Legendary*, composed in the late thirteenth century, describes the emergence of a "*gost*" from Judas' abdomen:

> He hung himself upon a tree for such a death he deserved. His stomach (*wombe*) burst in two down the middle, and as he died, his guts fell to the ground. Many men say that from there an evil spirit (*gost*) came out that could not come from the mouth because he had kissed the lord; therefore, it would not be right.[155]

The spirit, born from the "womb" amidst the entrails of the traitor, participates in the death of the body which brings it forth.

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[154] My translation. "*Exterioris poenae qualitas supplicii modum aperuit; quia per quae peccaverit homo, per haec et punietur. Suspensus crepuit medius: plenus erat venter, et ruptus est uter; crepuit medius, ubi sedes erat satanae. Crepuit ergo vas contumeliae, quia non erat de vasis figuli, in sepultura peregrinorum sortem non habuit, sed velut testa crepitans per inane dissiliit. Et diffusa sunt omnia viscera ejus (Act. I, 18). Pecunia viscera sunt avari; illa diffunduntur et perduntur, sed viri misericordiae colliguntur.*" Ps. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Meditatio in Passionem et Resurrectionem Domini*, 7.17, in PL 184, 753.

[155] "*Hym sulf he heong vppon a treo vor such deþ he scholde to*
His wombe tobarst amydde atwo þo he scholde dey3e
Hys gottes volle to grounde þat monymon hyt ysey3e
Þer wende out þe luþer gost ate mouþe he ne my3te
Vor he custe er oure Louerd þer wyþ myd vnry3te"
Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*, II vols., vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 697.

Judas' death imagined as a kind of caesarean birth releasing his condemned soul from his body was depicted visually in the late Middle Ages. Two scholarly articles on different visual illustrations of the suicide-as-birth scene have been written by art historians, Anne Derbes and Mark Sandora, and Lee R. Sullivan. Derbes and Sandora examine the portrayal of Judas in the Arena Chapel in Padua, which contains a fresco by Giotto di Bondone[156] that, in a striking contrast, places the scene of Judas' conspiracy to betray Jesus Christ in opposition with the annunciation of Christ's coming by the angel Gabriel to Mary. The comparison, Derbes and Sandora argue, is intentional: "We are presented with two conceptions –one cursed, one blessed. Both are beyond nature: Judas' unnatural, Mary's supernatural."[157] Mary's conception comes to fruition in the birth of Christ, while Judas' results in his own death. In Giotto's fresco, Judas' suicide is depicted among the horrors of the Last Judgment. Here, one will find the corpse of Judas hanging from a tree with his intestines falling from his ruptured middle and a spirit escaping his body. Derbes and Sandora propose a convincing argument that the pregnancy and birth imagery surrounding Judas in Giotto's painting are a commentary on the sterility of money in opposition to the fertility of human reproduction.

In the early years of the sixteenth century, over six hundred kilometres from Padua, in the Rhine region, a stained glass window representing the image of a hanging Judas with what appears to be an infant being delivered from his body was displayed in a church. This image has been analysed by Lee Sullivan.[158] In the picture, the realistically depicted body of Judas, suspended limply from a tree, is being attended to by a demonic midwife, who is removing his soul, depicted as a small baby, from his torn-open stomach. The illustration of the soul being released as a newborn child makes it clear that this event is being imagined as a birth scene of sorts, as Judas delivers his already corrupted soul into infernal hands. The iconography used to portray Judas in this stained glass panel and in Giotto's fresco brings together the themes of male pregnancy which entered into the written legend of Judas. These elements draw upon the biblical metaphors which interpreted transgression against God as a sterile pregnancy, resulting from the conception of evil and ending in a deadly birth.

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[156] Giotto's fresco, painted around the turn of the fourteenth century, was commissioned by Enrico degli Scrovegni who came from a family of wealthy moneylenders to decorate his private chapel. The fresco contains a number of panels depicting scenes from the lives of Mary and Christ, as well as depicting the Last Judgment.

[157] Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona, "Barren Metal and the Fruitful Womb: The Program of Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (1998): 279.

[158] Lee R. Sullivan, "The Hanging of Judas: Medieval Iconography and the German Peasants' War," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 15 (1998): 93-102.

The image of the pregnant man as a figure of impiety was not exclusive to Christian texts. In the *Velâyetnâme* ("Book of Saintly Feats), an Islamic hagiographical work composed around the turn of the sixteenth century in Central Anatolia, the *life* of Hajji Bektash contains a story about a man who becomes "pregnant" and dies in "childbirth" as a result of his denial of the saint. In the story, the saint, Hajji Bektash turns the grains harvested by a village into stones because the villagers refuse to give him any after he requests them in the name of God. However, the saint reveals to his followers that the grains are not lost, but the stones will cause childless women to conceive if they swallow them. To show their gratitude for the miracle, the women must make an offering to the saint during their pregnancy. One faithless man, however, not believing that from each of the stones a child would come forth, ate two stones. He immediately became pregnant, and his abdomen grew daily, until, at last, he suffered the pains of labour. Lamenting, he realized his sins and requested the help of the saint. Hajji Bektash arrived and told the wretched man's family that he could not be saved, but, if they cut open his stomach, two sons would come forth. And, this is what happened.[159]

This account taken from Muslim hagiography contains several elements similar to other accounts of pregnant men examined in this section. The pregnancy occurs in the stomach, as a result of something taken in through the mouth, similar to Nero's pregnancy in the *Golden Legend*. The experience of pregnancy is painful and is interpreted as a punishment for a wrong belief. The birth is deadly to the parent, as in the story of Nero as told by the bishop of Nikiou, and in accounts of Judas' suicide as "parturition." However, in this case, the product of pregnancy is something good and human: two offspring. The birth of the twin sons from the man is attributed to the promise of the saint, who can perform miracles of fertility, even from men's bodies, rather than to the impiety of the saint's challenger.

4.4.4. Bad Wombs: Conclusions.

The negative representations of men conceiving, being pregnant, and giving birth, in the examples of the pregnant fools and the faithless bearers of impiety examined in this

[159] I am grateful to Helga Anetshofer for introducing me to this story and providing me with her translation. The translation is based on Duran, Hamiye (ed.). *Velâyetnâme / Hacı Bektâş-ı Veli*. (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları; 369, Anadolu Halk Klasikleri Serisi; 4, Alevî-Bektâşî klâsikleri; 4). Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007.

section draw upon a number of overlapping and unfavourable elements associated with these reproductive phenomena in women.

The site of pregnancy is invariably the lower body: the stomach or the bowels. These places conjure images of uncleanness. Additionally, they serve to associate the male subject's conception with transgression. One example of this is the connection between male pregnancy and sodomy, which is suggested by the beetle who enters the peasant through his anus in Marie de France's fable, and is made more explicit in representations of Nero. Lower body analogy is also used to refer to the sin of avarice, which is alluded to in the play on words involving *uter* to suggest a money-pouch and uterus in several of the depictions of Judas.

The male pregnancies are identified by their carnal aspects. Bodily swelling, illness, and pain are common characteristics. Frequently, the subjects express great fear of the pain that they will endure, and they express the belief that the pain is the result of their personal sinfulness. These pregnancies are about death, not life. In many of the cases, either the male mother seeks to abort his child, or else he himself dies giving birth. Thus, these are fruitless pregnancies. The "offspring" are typically imaginary, inhuman, or damned. They invariably lack a human soul and any spiritual component, and are, thus, tied to this earthly world, or worse, the infernal one below it.

4.5. Conclusions.

In this chapter, I have grouped maternal metaphors involving pregnancy and childbirth into two categories, those which describe positive characteristics of the male subject, and those which describe negative characteristics. Within each of these categories, there is a set of common elements from which the metaphor is made up. The context in which the metaphor is found and, especially, the choice of male subject being described, determine which set of elements it contains.

I began this chapter with medical analogies based purely on the physical characteristics of the uterus, and perceived similarities between it and other bodily organs. I identified the heart, brain, stomach, and bowels as organs which were believed to bear similarities to the uterus in terms of their anatomical structures and physiological functions. These organs also frequently played a role in the construction of the maternal metaphors that were devised to

describe a male subject. In those that were meant to depict some praiseworthy characteristic of the subject, the heart and brain were repeatedly imagined to be the sites of a positive conception. In those that were meant to describe a maligned character, the stomach and bowels were often alluded to. This pattern reflects the dichotomy between the upper body and lower body. In the first category, depicting "good wombs," the context of the metaphor is commonly the portrayal of a spiritual or intellectual conception. The subjects whom the metaphors describe include God, Christ, saints, and individual Christians writing of themselves. The metaphors elucidate some intangible experience or a behavioural characteristic of their subjects. The analogy of the heart and mind as the seats of conception, pregnancy, and birth, thus, builds upon secondary characteristics associated with childbirth, such as creativity, parental love, and fostering care. In the second category, which depicts "bad wombs," the context is usually a comic or popular portrayal of a sinner or a fool. The bawdy and grotesque elements added by the emphasis on the lower body in these accounts also reflect something more significant. The conceptions that take place in the lower body are associated with carnality and sinful behaviour. These two different uses of the maternal metaphors reveal that there were two separate conventions for the application of metaphors involving pregnancy and childbirth.

Chapter Five. Men Bleeding Female Blood: Uterine Blood and Milk Metaphors.

5.1. Introduction.

Blood can be a potent symbol. Its very nature provides a rich source of symbolism; blood is essential to life; it flows through the body's interior spaces; to see blood is to experience the liminality of the body and the fragility of the divide between life and death, between the contained and the leaking, between the intact and the ruptured. It is not surprising that symbolic meanings attached to blood in every culture touch upon concerns crucial to that culture's very self-identity. In the culture of late-medieval Latin-speaking Christianity, which is the focus of this study, blood and what were held to be its derived products, milk and semen, were used symbolically to explain issues that were fundamental in building a social, religious, and scientific understanding of the world, as well as concerns that were intensely personal in nature.

In recent years, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the importance of blood as a symbol in late-medieval literary and iconographic traditions. The work of some of these scholars was brought together at the 1997 colloquium held in Montpellier and later published in the collection entitled, *Le sang au moyen âge*. Several of these articles raise the issue of how blood was "gendered" in medieval subjects.[1] The diversity of scholarly interest in the questions surrounding blood and gender in pre-modern society is evident in valuable works by historians such as Peggy McCracken, Bettina Bildhauer, David Biale, and Caroline Walker Bynum. Their contributions reveal that medieval conceptions about blood defied simple definitions and classifications, and that the shifting meanings attached to blood were bound by context as much as by greater trends. The challenges posed by the study of blood

[1] See contributions by Marie-Hélène Congourdeau, Michel Van Proeyen, and Jean-Pierre Perrot in Marcel Faure, ed., *Le sang au moyen âge* (Montpellier: Les Cahiers du C.R.I.S.M.A., 1999).

are, however, made worthwhile by the vital role that blood's symbolic power played in medieval society.

It is important to consider some of the issues raised by this scholarship concerning the ways in which blood symbolism intersects with cultural identity and with gender construction in the Middle Ages, and, furthermore, to explore what it means to say that blood is "gendered." Peggy McCracken has argued that medieval cultural values were gendered male and female. Using literary works, she constructs a dichotomy of male versus female, in which that which is gendered male is seen to be active and public, while that which is gendered female is seen to be passive and hidden away. Blood which was shed on the battlefield or in sacrifice was public and male; blood which was shed privately, as was menstrual and postpartum blood, was gendered female. According to this model, the shedding of public blood, such as the spilt blood of the hero or martyr, is purifying, while the hidden leaking of genital blood, is polluting. Significantly, McCracken does indicate that female blood was not solely equated with shameful qualities and male blood with heroic ones. She points out that female blood was viewed positively in many contexts, and that male blood was dependent on the polarized values attached to female blood.[2]

Bettina Bildhauer examined how relationships were constructed around blood in the Middle Ages, for example, how blood taboos and fears about death fed into the "othering" of women and Jews, and how kinship relations and the social cohesion of the Christian Church were constructed around notions of shared blood.[3] She concludes that blood which was threatening to the society was gendered feminine even if it were shed by a male, giving as an example the myths of the menstruating Jew.

The potency of blood symbolism as a cultural marker is examined by means of comparison of the role of blood in Jewish and Christian rituals and doctrines by David Biale, in *Blood and Belief*. Biale argues that blood "as both symbol and substance… stands for one of the central conflicts between Jews and Christians over what is real and what is figurative."[4] He argues that the importance of blood in both Judaism and Christianity has roots in the pagan rituals which incorporated sacrifice into communion with the sacred;

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[2] McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*, xi.
[3] Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).
[4] David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

abandoning the blood of sacrifice, Jews and Christians replaced it with other symbolically powerful blood, namely, the blood of circumcision and the blood of Christ and the martyrs. Despite their shared origins, the traditions of Jews and Christians regarding blood diverged in places which marked the separation of the two religions, as Biale's book explores. For example, Jewish law commands that blood should not be ingested, while Christianity is centered on the ritual of the Eucharist, the drinking of Christ's blood. In addition to pointing out the ways in which blood plays a role in the self-definition of each religious group, Biale's study reveals the ways taboos about uterine blood were incorporated into insults against members of the other religion. Both sides depicted the other as womanish and weak, using menstrual blood and associated suggestions of impurity, in their accusations.[5]

In *Wonderful Blood*, Caroline Walker Bynum emphasized the danger of ascribing generalizations about the gendering of blood in medieval society as a whole: "The formulation artificial orifice = male = pure / natural exuding = female = impure does not work when one considers literature, theology, canon law, or piety as a whole. The male shedding of blood, heroic or salvific in one context, is contaminating in another...."[6] In her accounts of the role of blood in popular piety, she stresses that there is little evidence that connects the bodies and blood of women with pollution.[7] Moreover, throughout her study of blood cults, she shows how, in complex ways, gender was mapped onto blood in Christian theology and piety, such as in the positive image of the wounded Christ as a birthing mother.

The purpose of this chapter is to study the metaphorical language used to describe male bleeding to which is attributed the qualities of uterine blood. By uterine blood, I refer to menstrual and postpartum bleeding, as well as to the material substance which medieval people believed to be the female contribution to the generation of a foetus, and also to the blood in its refined form, which had traveled from the uterus and been purified into milk in the breasts. The diversity of functions associated with uterine blood in the Middle Ages and the various meanings attached to the different expressions of female blood, has been explored

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[5] "Whereas Christians might deride Jewish men for menstruating, Jews responded that it was rather Christianity that was impure and female, since Christian women were polluted by menstrual blood, which in turn polluted their male offspring." Ibid., 5. On the role of menstrual blood taboos and religious polemic, see also Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic*.

[6] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and practice in late medieval northern Germany and beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[7] *Ibid*., 19.

in Chapters Two and Three. In this chapter, I will show that the symbolic use of female blood utilizes positive associations drawn from the framing of female physiology in medieval medicine, namely, the purification of the body and nourishment of the infant, at least as much as it refers to pollution taboos. However, as I showed in Chapter Four, in the examination of pregnancy and birth metaphors in men, when using the female reproductive body as a referent, the meaning transferred by the maternal metaphors associated with woman's blood was governed chiefly by context and the subject being described.

In this chapter, I delve into representations of uterine blood or breast milk discharged from the male body. I begin by looking at comparisons made in medical discourse between male and female bodily emissions. Next, I examine positive metaphors related to "female blood" in Christian expressions of piety which drew parallels between the blood of Christ and the martyrs and the blood of conception, bodily purification, and birth, and the symbolism of breast milk used to express several different kinds of nurturing, and hierarchical, relationships. From there, I turn from religious metaphor to fantastic anecdotes of the male in childbed, as I examine the absence of blood in medieval representations of the practice of the couvade and the acting out of postpartum maternal rituals by men. Finally, I consider the use of menstrual emissions as a metaphor in Christian polemic for the threatening Other—the Jew —or the threat within—the idolatrous Christian within the Church, or even, the uncontrollable bodily substances within the individual male Christian himself.

5.2. Equivalent Blood.

In ancient and medieval medical and scientific writing, bodily fluids held a place of importance in explanations of the physiological functions of living creatures and of the differences that exist among them: between man and beast, male and female, young and old, sick and healthy, hot-tempered and melancholic. Every creature was believed to be composed of the same basic elements, the four humours; however, each differed in the manner of composition according to species, sex, age, and individual condition. The doctrine of the four humours, which was handed down from ancient Hellenistic traditions, asserted that all of the fluids of the body were compositions of the sanguineous, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic

humours combined in various proportions. The most important fluid in the body was blood, a mixture of humours containing chiefly sanguineous humour. According to Galen, blood is concocted from food by the heat of digestion to act as fuel by distributing heat to the rest of the body. However, disease results when the blood is corrupted by an excess of less purified humours, such as black bile (*melancholia*), or when it is not used up or expelled by the body and begins to accumulate in excess.[8] Factors, such as sex, age, environment, and lifestyle, were believed to determine the specific state of equilibrium for each individual. They also governed the way in which balance could be restored, through different means of using up or expelling of superfluities from the body.

The dissimilar physiological compositions of men and women were frequently explained with regards to the composition of their bodily fluids, their predisposition to accumulating superfluities, and their inherent heat. In general, women were believed to be moister than men, as a result of a deficiency of natural heat and a lack of exercise. Thus, their bodies had to eliminate the surplus blood, which, as humoural doctrine taught, they did through the processes of menstruation and lactation, and during childbirth. Men's bodies, since they were believed to possess greater innate heat, were also considered to have less need to eliminate excess humours. Moreover, it was said of men's bodies that they could further concoct their superfluous blood, by means of their heat, into a generative substance more refined and with greater formative potency than the menstrual blood. Evidence of male heat was demonstrated by the whiteness and viscosity of the male semen. The difference in genital secretions between women and men, as it was described, was advantageous for generation, in that it allowed for a variety of requirements to be met through the reworking of blood in the bodies of the two sexes. As a result of the differences in essential heat, the bodies of each generating couple would produce one fluid which would have the potency to shape, one which would act as material and nutriment for the foetus and, later, as a food source suitable for the newly born infant.

Thomas Laqueur has argued that the ancient and medieval descriptions of the generative fluids belonged to a conceptual framework in which there was only "one sex" which allowed for variations in make-up and function, according to variations in perfection.

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[8] Galen "On the Humours" in *Galen on Food and Drink*, translated by Mark Grant (London: Routledge, 2000) 16.

He suggests that different bodily secretions, such as semen and menstrual blood, but also other fluids that could be purged, were viewed, in premodern times, as versions, more or less perfect, of each other, comparable in terms of their origins and the purpose which they serve rather than as distinct phenomena.[9] Through examples, Laqueur shows that, although they were seen to be physiologically similar, the male and female sexes were arranged according to a hierarchy in which the difference between them boiled down to a deficiency in the female. However, the distinctions that were made within the "one-sex model," as Bettina Bildhauer has advised, should not be disregarded, nor should we make the assumption that the predominant model for understanding the sexes was merely a hierarchy of sameness.[10] While this section deals with the various arguments for equivalence between male and female bodily fluids that were found in medieval writing, it will show that, even when comparisons are being made regarding a supposed similarity, gender distinctions gave meaning to the association. That is to say, that for male blood to be said to share the qualities of female blood, and vice versa, certain assumptions about qualities of "maleness" and "femaleness" were presupposed and transferred.

Positive and negative meanings associated with female blood frequently appeared side by side in medical writings. As was explained in Chapter Two, medieval medicine generally held that the blood which coursed through women's veins was colder and darker, more melancholic, and prone to building up into toxic excess than male blood. Menstruation was viewed as the symptom of the innate imbalance which caused women to suffer from a surfeit of bad blood throughout most of their adulthood. However, it was also believed to be the cure for the imbalance, which was why so many medieval medical writings provide treatments to restore the regular flow. Women, whose bodies were purged by the monthly issue of blood, were believed to be protected against diseases caused by a plethora of bad humours, such as leprosy and gout. Thus, menstrual bleeding was frequently perceived to be purifying and salutary, and, although the menstrual blood was usually viewed as pollution, on

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[9] Laqueur's explanation of how the "one-sex model" applies to bodily fluids is summarized in the following statement from *Making Sex*: "In the blood, semen, milk, and other fluids of the one-sex body, there is no sharp boundary between the sexes. . . [E]jaculation of one sort of fluid was thought to restore balance caused by an excess of another sort because seminal emission, bleeding, purging, and sweating were all forms of evacuation that served to maintain the free-trade economy of fluids at a proper level." Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 35.

[10] Bildhauer criticizes Laqueur for focusing on the similarities that existed in ancient and medieval descriptions of the anatomical structure of the sexes, and choosing to largely overlook the value-laden implications that were attached to the distinctions implicit in the comparisons. Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 84.

rare occasions the healing function was conflated with the fluid material itself and menstrual blood was said to have healing properties. For example, the first-century naturalist Pliny the Elder argued that menstrual blood, when used as a topical medicine, could have curative effects on gout and skin ailments—both afflictions which the purgative flow was believed to prevent in women.[11]

Besides having a role in purging a woman's body, menstrual blood was also regarded as an essential component of reproduction. Women's excess blood which accumulated in the uterus was seen as the female contribution toward the foetus; it was the passive material component fashioned by the active male semen in the Aristotelian model, or by the combination of both parental seeds, according to the model proposed by Galen. In the Aristotelian view, menstrual residue is a kind of imperfect, bloody seed, which mixes with the spirituous male seed; according to the Galenic position, it is food for the unborn child in the womb. Medieval writers composed their understanding of the female role in generation from the two arguments which depicted menstrual blood as seed and as potential matter, or as foetal nutriment, though they did not always take a clear stance on the issue, and, frequently, altered or combined the two.[12] The generative function of the menstrual blood was sometimes seen to be at odds with its purgative function. For example, the thirteenth-century encyclopaedist Thomas of Cantimpré, revealing a concern about the corrupted nature of the blood which women were believed to expel through menstruation, argued that because the foetus was nourished on the superfluities of the woman's body, human infants are born weak.[13] He also makes a conflicting statement that the menstrual blood itself is *not* the food for the foetus, but rather it has to be purified in the liver before entering the child, since the malignity of the pure menstrual blood would kill the child.[14] Thomas' explanation of the purification process was taken from descriptions of the creation of breast milk, which was

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[11] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 306.

[12] For a more comprehensive discussion of medieval scientific theories of generation, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*.

[13] "Inde est quod, cum cetera animalia ex quo nata sunt gradiuntur, homo vero non graditur, quia ex sanguine menstruo nutritur." Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, 1, 73.

[14] "Vivit ergo puer sanguine menstruato, ut omnes philosophi dicunt, sed ipso sanguine optime et purissime digesto, mediante scilicet dulciori ac iocundiori parte corporis, hoc est epate. Si enim nullo medio vel non optimo medio sanguis menstruatus transiret ad puerum, potius illum sua malignitate occideret quam nutriret." *Ibid*.

believed to be uterine blood which had been "cooked" and made pure, and thus, beneficial as food for newborns.

Comparisons between menstrual blood and other bodily fluids highlight the different functions that it was believed to perform in the female body. Nosebleeds and haemorrhoidal bleeding were sometimes likened to menstruation in serving the purpose of purifying the body of its superfluities; some medical writers taught that male seminal emissions also had a purifying function. Male semen and menstrual blood were often portrayed, following Aristotle, as corresponding generative fluids, the masculine and feminine seeds, which were of similar nature and function but were unequal in refinement and potency. Male semen, in that it was believed to be blood that had been refined and whitened by the heat of the body, was seen to be comparable to breast milk; like semen, milk was seen to have active, formative properties. The rest of this section examines the assumptions that are transferred in the comparisons which were made in what Laqueur dubs the "free-trade economy of fluids"[15] of ancient and medieval physiological teachings.

5.2.1. Beards, haemorrhoidal blood, and semen as purgative secretions.

Although men's bodies were not believed to accumulate superfluities as readily as the colder, less perfect bodies of women, they were nonetheless still said to be susceptible to illness-causing humoural imbalances as a result of their natural makeup and external factors such as diet. Therefore, it was accepted, in teachings on humoural medicine, that men's bodies also needed to be purged both naturally and through medical intervention. The inherent heat of the male body caused the superfluous matter to be converted into drier and hotter substances, such as hair and seminal emissions. The abundant growth of hair on men's faces and bodies was believed to be one of the ways that the male body expelled its superfluous matter. It was in consideration of this belief in the beard's purgative function that the comparison between beards and menstrual blood was made. Aristotle taught that "women do not grow hairs on their chin; except that a scanty beard grows on some women after the

[15] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 35.

monthly courses have stopped."[16] Although he does not here give an explanation for why this is so, it can be deduced from his understanding about hair. He argued that hair was composed of vapours caused by hot moisture in the body. Masculine heat warms the superfluities in men, which explains why they have more hair on their bodies than women do. Moreover, he explains that the male tendency towards cranial baldness was caused by the redirection of superfluities to the lower regions and the draining of heat caused by intercourse.[17] Thus, baldness does not occur in men until after sexual maturity when the excess humours would be used up in the production of semen. In Aristotle's paradigm, then, both the growth of facial hair and cranial baldness were understood as effects of the body's processes for ridding itself of its surplus humours which were characteristically male and, presumably, precluded in women's bodies by the ordinary flow of the menses.

Aristotle's explanation of the beard and thick body hair as male counterparts to the female body's methods of ridding itself of superfluities was influential in the Middle Ages. Bernard of Gordon argued that convalescents, the malnourished, and those who engage in too much coitus do not generate surplus humours and suffer from baldness.[18] Michael Scot,[19] in *Physiognomy*, answered the question of why a woman does not have a beard with the following: "With food and drink, she naturally abounds with many humours; Nature removes them in this manner: since, in woman, [superfluity] is consumed by the growth of the hair and through the menstrual flux; and, in man, [it is consumed] through the growth of the hair and of the beard, whence these humours which are converted into menstrual blood are turned into the hairs of the beard in man."[20] Michael Scot also writes that there are some women,

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[16] Aristotle, *De historia animalia*, 3.11. English translation from Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1984), I: 823.
[17] Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 5.3. Cf. Barnes, I:1211.
[18] Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 2.1.
[19] Michael Scot (*ca*.1200-*ca*. 1235) is known for his scientific writing and reputation as a magician. His writing covers topics including human reproduction, astrology, and physiognomy, which it a method for determining character based on physiological features. Cf. Elaine Golden Robinson, "Michael Scot," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, VIII: 305.
[20] My translation. "*cibis & potibus naturaliter abundet multis humoribus natura eos depellit hoc modo quoniam in muliere consumitur incremento capillorum & fluxu menstruorum; et in viro per augmentum capillorum & barbae, unde illi humores qui convertuntur in menstruum efficiuntur pili barbae in viro, & econtrario*." Michael Scotus, *Liber Phisionomiae* (Venice: 1485), ch. xi.

called "*barbuta*," who are able to grow a beard because they have an abundance of heat. These women are wanton, strong by nature, and virile because of their hot complexions.[21]

On the same topic, Thomas of Cantimpré wrote: "The beard in humans (*hominibus*) distinguishes the male sex from the female sex. It is born from superfluities. In hot men, the beard is full; in cold men the beard is small."[22] He adds that "there are women who have beards on their faces, and this is a sign of heat;" and, there are men, who have been castrated and lost their beards, who appear "feminine."[23] His contemporary, Bartholomew of England, expressed this same understanding of facial hair growth as a purgative function connected to masculine qualities. Although, he admits that women with hot and moist complexions sometimes grow beards, and men with cold and dry complexions are sometimes beardless, he believes that "it is evident that the thickness of the beard is a sign of heat and substantial and vigorous humours, and a certain test of the difference of the sexes."[24] Bartholomew, also, suggests that the superior heat which men have is derived from the testicles, stating that eunuchs lose their beards because "they have lost those hottest members, which generate, from the heat of the humour and smoke, that which is the material of the hair."[25]

These medieval scientific descriptions suggest that the beard was viewed as both a sign of innate heat in the individual, and a symbolic reminder of the natural heat of the male sex. They also assume a connection between masculine heat and the qualities of strength and vigor. Thus, the bearded woman was believed to exhibit these qualities, too, as an additional side effect of what was believed to be her body's masculine level of heat.[26] Moreover, the

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[21] "*Verum est quod hi humores [menstruum] ita subtiles ex natura calidi sunt quod ex eis quasi oriuntur pili aliquando in maxillis mulieris & proprie circa os ubi magis abundat calor & haec mulier dicitur esse baruta. Sciendum quod talis mulier est valde luxuriosa propter calidam sui complexionem. Est ergo fortis naturae & virilis conditionis.*" *Ibid*., ch. lxxiiii.

[22] My translation. *"Barba in hominibus distinguit virilem sexum a feminis. Ex superfluitatibus nascitur. Barba magna in viris calidis, minor in frigidis.*" Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, 1, 10, p. 23.

[23] My translation. "*Sunt femine que barbam habent superibus, et hoc signum caloris in eis est. Spado barba caret, quod si vir barbatus testibus viduetur, cadente barba pili et virili frustratus audacia femineus apparebit.*" *Ibid*.

[24] My translation. "*Unde accidit aliquando in mulieribus calidae & humidae complexionis, quod videntur barbescere. Et e contrario fit in masculis frigidis & siccis, quod barbescunt parum.... Ex quo patet quod barbae spissitudo, caloris & humoris substantialis ac vigoris est indicium, & differentiae sexuum certum experimentum.*" Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, V, 15, p. 144.

[25] My translation. "*Unde & in eunuchis non crescit barba quia perdiderunt illa membra calidiora, quae calidis humoris & fumi, qui pilorum est materia sunt generativa*." *Ibid*.

[26] The thirteenth-century *Lectiones Longipratenses* describes a bearded female physician, Laurette de Saint-Valéry, associating her physical appearance with her "masculine profession." The *lectio* records that "just as she was not less worthy in the manly strength of her mind, so she had the appearance of a man with a bearded face." Susan B. Edgington, "A Female Physician on the Fourth Crusade? Laurette de Saint-Valéry," in *Knighthoods of*

definitions reveal the vulnerability of this internal heat in men; it could be lost through the physical removal of the testicles, or through the potentially cooling, or feminizing, process of the loss of semen.

Medieval writers often expressed concern over the draining effects of excessive coitus on the male while admitting that the ejaculation of semen had a purgative function similar to menstruation in women. It was believed that, if his lifestyle made a man prone to an excess of humours, the male body could naturally restore balance through the involuntary release of seminal fluid. Bernard of Gordon, for example, considered nocturnal emissions to be primarily superfluities from the third digestion caused by excesses of food, drink, and drunkenness.[27] However, while, through menstruation, women were believed to lose the impure humours that had collected in their bodies as a result of their deficient heat, men were believed to lose both heat and vital humours, when they emitted semen. The effects could be healthfully purgative, or damaging, depending on one's individual complexion. Constantine the African wrote about this danger to men in his treatise, *On Coitus*. He suggested that if a man had a complexion that was phlegmatic, having an excess of cold and moist humours, and was robust, loss of semen and the heat produced from frequent coitus could help to dry him up.[28] However, for most men, he argued, too much coitus would weaken and cool the body, and have potentially deleterious effects.[29] Because the male body was seen as naturally well-balanced and temperate, the purgative effects of ejaculation threatened to be disruptive and, therefore, detrimental to a man's health. Michael Scot suggested that after the loss of semen, a man must replenish himself through ablutions, food, and drink.[30] The renowned natural philosopher Albert the Great wrote that, "a person who emits a lot of sperm grows

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Christ: Essays on the History of the Crusades and the Knights Templar, Presented to Malcolm Barber, edited by Norman Housley (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), 77-85.

[27] Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 7.4.

[28] "*Prodest autem illi cui superhabundat flegma non viscosum, si fuerit robustus, quia evacuatur humor per coitum, et non raro fiat, quia calor qui fit ex frequenti motu coitus, condensat et desiccat*." Constantinus Africanus, *Constantini Liber de Coitu*, 122. Similarly, Michael Scotus suggested that people who were fat, "*pinguis*," and did not have sex, such as religious men and women, were accustomed to become sick. Michael Scotus, *Liber Phisionomiae*, ch. ii.

[29] "*si frequentatus fuerit coitus, nocet valde quia convertetur corpus in ultimam frigiditatem debilitatem….Galen enim asserit quia frequens coitus desiccat corpus, sicut contingit crasso, cum institerit solvere corpus*." Constantinus Africanus, "De coitu (Liber creatoris)," 311.

[30] "*Tamen dicimus q[uod] qui nimis penetraverit mulierem lavet sibi nares & pulsus brachiorum & pedum bono vino & comedat bonos cibos, ut restoretur quod deperditum est de semine & de sanguine*." Michael Scotus, *Liber Phisionomiae*, ch. ii.

pale and becomes weak, as if he had lost forty times that much blood."[31] In gynaecological texts, excessive menstruation was treated as a similar problem; however, these texts gave much less space to its treatment than to resolving the problem of insufficient menstruation, which indicates that is was seen to be a lesser concern.[32] In general, the medieval authors concurred that semen expelled in moderation would have no ill effects; but, unless a man already had a condition which required that he be purged, excessive elimination of semen through sexual intercourse was a cause of illness rather than a cure.

A significant difference between menstruation and the emission of semen is that the former occurs according to a natural cycle, while the latter occurs, for the most part, following an act of the will. Nevertheless, some authors did suggest that the loss of semen occurred as a result of a natural cycle or a critical buildup, similar to the flow of the menses. Michael Scot posited that, as the menstrual blood increases with the waxing moon and decreases with the waning moon, the sperm of both men and women likewise increased and needed to be expelled.[33] According to one of the anonymous commentators of Pseudo-Albert the Great's *Secrets of Women*, male superfluity, in the form of seminal fluids, does not flow monthly as is the case with female superfluity because men do not suffer from the same cold and moist complexions that women do; however, occasional build-ups were expelled by nature in the form of nocturnal emissions.[34]

Belief in the body's ability to remedy its own diseases caused by internal imbalances through involuntary eliminations was an important aspect of medieval medical theory. Medieval doctors followed the tradition passed down from their ancient predecessors, which taught that the body, during an illness which resulted from the build-up of superfluities, would naturally come to a crisis and attempt to purge itself of the harmful humours. Albert the Great provided a description of how these critical purgations worked:

> When the blood in the veins is changed and corrupted from its proper dispositions, it sometimes pours from the liver into the stomach and leaves through vomiting. The orifices of the veins of the head sometimes open and

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[31] "*emittens multum de spermate pallescit et debilitatur tantum quantum debilitaretur si quadragesies tantum de sanguine emitteret*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.8. Latin from Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, 11:250. English translation from Albertus Magnus, *On Animals*, 1:417.
[32] Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 174.
[33] "*Crescit menstruum & decrescit secundum lunam & mare in simili & ita sperma utrique sexui; unde potest eius augere; requirit exitum*." Michael Scotus, *Liber Phisionomiae*, ch. ii.
[34] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, Commentator B, 75.

> blood flows forth from the nostrils. When, however, it does not leave but rather putrefies in some member into which it has poured from the veins, it becomes *virus* and an abscess and a festering leaves the body when the *virus* has matured and has turned into pus.[35]

Women, because their blood was naturally less purified than was men's, were granted by nature the ability to purge their bodies on a regular basis before the impurities began to accumulate. As a result Albert, and most medieval doctors like him, believed that women suffered from certain ailments less often than men did:

> For when [an abundance of] food is in large part converted by the weak heat of a woman and is neither well bounded nor consumed, it is necessary that it have an avenue for being diffused through the menstrual blood. Because menstruation cleanses bodies, women are sick less often than men. They especially incur a flow of blood from the nostrils or through the anal hemorrhoids less often than do males. These infirmities of blood flow occur very rarely in women.[36]

He viewed the flowing of blood from the nostrils or from haemorrhoids to be a characteristically male disorder, because it was almost always precluded by menstruation in women.[37]

Haemorrhoids and nosebleeds, as well as other forms of acute blood loss, had a long history of been viewed as being mutually exclusive with menstruation, as a result of their similar purgative function. The Hippocratic *Aphorisms* advised physicians that "when a woman vomits blood, menstruation is a cure," and "when menstruation is suppressed, a flow of blood from the nose is a good sign," and "a woman does not get gout unless menstruation

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[35] "*et cum sanguis qui est in venis, alteratur et corrumpitur a dispositione propria, tunc aliquando diffunditur de hepate in stomachum, et exit per vomitum, et aliquando operiuntur orificia venarum capitis, et fluit de naribus. Cum autem non exit, sed putrescit in aliquo membro in quod fusus est a venis, fit virus et apostema, et exit a corpore putredo, quando virus maturatum fuerit et conversum in saniem*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.6. Latin from *Opera omnia*, 11:248. English translation from Resnick, *On Animals*, 1:415.

[36] "*quando enim ille debili calore mulieris multum* [*cibus*] *convertitur, et non bene terminatur, neque consumitur, oportet quod viam habeat emanandi per menstruum: et quia menstuum purgat corpora earum, ideo mius infimantur mulieres quam viri. Praecipue tamen minum incurrunt sanguinis fluxum per nares, et per hemorrhoidas ani, quam mares*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.6. Latin from *Opera omnia*, 11:248. Translation from Resnick, *On Animals*, 1: 415-16.

[37] Albert is following Aristotle who also argued that women rarely suffered from haemorrhoids unless their menses are suppressed. Aristotle, *De historia animalibus*, 3.19. Cf. Barnes, I:827.

is suppressed."[38] This collection of dictums also contains examples of how critical flow of blood can be seen as a natural way of curing ailments through the removal of impurities. For example, it teaches that haemorrhoids were a good sign for people suffering from kidney disease, excess melancholy, or madness, and that physicians should not remove the haemorrhoids of chronic sufferers or else they would be in danger of becoming dropsical or consumptive.[39] Martin of Saint-Gille, in his fourteenth-century commentary on the *Aphorisms*, explained,

> In this aphorism, Hippocrates teaches us a rule about restraining old haemorrhoids [that] if one does not leave one which still flows, [the patient] is in danger of falling into hydropsy, or consumption, or madness.... this is true, if [the patient] will not undergo another flux, like a flux of blood from the nostrils, or from menstruation, or flux from the stomach.[40]

He explains that what is written about the ability of haemorrhoids, nosebleeds, and menstruation in women is true because they heal by evacuating harmful material which was the cause of illness.[41] Martin adds that Galen verifies all of this.[42]

Medieval writers frequently described haemorrhoids, and other forms of bleeding, as taking the place of menstruation in men. Haemorrhoidal bleeding was held to remedy the same illnesses that women were believed to suffer from if their menses did not flow.[43] Following ancient teachings, medieval authors believed that in curing haemorrhoids, one should be left untreated in order to not restrain completely the haemorrhoidal flow.[44] Like

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[38] Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* V, 32 and 33; VI, 29. Translation from Hippocrates, "Aphorisms."

[39] Hippocrates, *Aphorismi* VI, 11, 12 and 21.

[40] "*En cest ampnorisme, Ypocras nous ensaigne une regle en restraindre les emorrides anciennes, se il n'en laisse une qui flue, c'est peril de cheoir en ydropisie, ou en ptisique, ou en manie, et doit estre... estre vray s'il ne sourvenoit autre flux, si comme flux de sang de narines, de menstrues, or de flux de ventre.*" Germaine Lafeuille, ed., *Les Commentaires de Martin de Saint-Gille sur les Amphorismes Ypocras* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1964), 6.12, 162.

[41] *Ibid*., (VI, 11) 162.

[42] *Ibid*. See Galen's *Commentary on the Aphorisms by Hippocrates* VI, 11 and 12. Additionally, in *On Venesection against Erasistratus*, Galen writes, "But enough of women [and their immunity from diseases caused by impurities] for the present; come now to consider the men, and learn how those who eliminate the excess through a haemorrhoid all pass their lives unaffected by diseases, while those in whom the evacuations have been restrained have fallen into the gravest illnesses." Galen, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 27.

[43] See, for example, Bernard of Gordon's *Lily of Medicine*, which includes dropsy, leprosy, mania and nosebleeds as ailments which the haemorrhoids deflect. Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 5.21.

[44] Bernard of Gordon, for example taught that, according to Hippocrates, if a physician suddenly restricted haemorrhoids that had bled for a long time, it would cause illness to spring up in his patient's body; thus, "*una igitur remaneat aperta*." *Ibid*., 5.21.

menstruation, these various forms of bleeding were viewed as chronic conditions which prevented more serious acute conditions, particularly if the bleeding followed a regular cycle.[45] Some writers even maintained that haemorrhoidal blood flowed according to the cycle of the moon.[46] Unlike their ancient predecessors, some medieval writers suggested that certain groups of men were afflicted with chronic haemorrhoids, such as those with melancholic complexions, and Jews.[47] The comparison between the feminine purgations and haemorrhoids held such sway that the sixteenth-century anatomist Andreas Vesalius, who is credited with utilizing dissection and close observation to revolutionize understanding of human anatomy, chose to determine the process by which menstrual blood entered the uterus by conducting a dissection of haemorrhoids in a male cadaver.[48]

Medieval medicine taught that when the body did not naturally expel all of its superfluous humours, artificial means should be used to promote health. Bloodletting was frequently used in cures for a great number of diseases and for prophylactic purposes. Galen was a strong defender of the practice of venesection, which he likened to an artificial re-creation of the process which occurred naturally in menstruating women and sufferers of haemorrhoids. In *On Venesection Against Erasistratus*, he contended that when a woman experienced the suppression of the menses, she would be stricken with an illness unless a physician drained the plethora of harmful humours by drawing blood.[49] From this conclusion, he explained, it followed that physicians should imitate nature and remove bad blood through artificial means:

> Does not [Nature] evacuate all women every month, by pouring forth the superfluity of blood? It is necessary, in my opinion, that the female sex, who stay indoors, neither engaging in strenuous labour nor exposing themselves to

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[45] See, for example, Gilbert the English, who taught that, in the case of bleeding from the nose or ears, it should be determined whether the blood came on a regular cycle, such as every fourth day, and if it did, it was a healing purgation and should be allowed to flow. Faye Marie Getz, ed., *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbert Anglicus* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 125, 13v.

[46] For example, Hildegard of Bingen suggests that both male and female blood was connected to the waxing and waning of the moon. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 78. Albertus Magnus wrote that haemorrhoids and menstruation both flowed at the end of the lunar month. *De animalibus*, 9.1.2. Cf. *Opera omnia*, 11:501.

[47] This association between Jews and haemorrhoids is discussed further on in this chapter. Cf. Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," 5.21. Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 73-4.

[48] Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body; III: The Veins and Arteries; Vol. IV: The Nerves*, ed. William Frank Richardson, trans. John Burd Carman, vol. 3 (Novato, CA: Norman, 2002), 187-88. Cf. Pomata, "Menstruating Men," 112.

[49] Galen, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 23-4.

> direct sunlight—both factors conducive to the development of plethos—should have a natural remedy by which it is evacuated. This is one of the ways in which nature operates in these conditions; another is the cleansing that follows childbirth, although indeed the *conceptus* itself is also an evacuation, since it is nourished from the blood of the uterus; and the development of milk in the breasts after delivery is itself also an important factor in eliminating the plethos.... Would you not concede that the natural course anyone would take when faced with a plethos of blood was to evacuate it?[50]

Galen recommends bloodletting as a treatment for various illnesses, and also as a prophylactic venesection for people with strong constitutions.[51]

Medieval writing about the practice of prophylactic bloodletting reveals that a conscious effort was made to model the practice after "nature," as exemplified by the cycles of the female body. It was recommended that bloodletting be performed according to a regular cycle. Usually this was connected to the seasons; spring was believed to be the best time, because hot, moist humours were believed to reign in this season, and sometimes autumn was mentioned as well.[52] Frequently, however, the cycles of the moon were to be taken into consideration.[53] In answering the questions of when to bleed and whom to bleed, medieval physicians again emulated what nature taught through the female body. The young and old were not to be bled. As Galen wrote, "you will not phlebotomize children up to the age of fourteen" because they have little blood.[54] Hildegard of Bingen gave the following limits: men should only be bled between the ages of twelve to eighty, but women could be bled between the ages of twelve to one hundred because their bodies contained more noxious

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[50] *Ibid*., 25-6, 27.
[51] *Ibid*., 132.
[52] For example, see the descriptions of the relationship between the seasons an the humours in the fifteenth-century guide composed by British physician, Robert Reynes: Robert Reynes, *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle*, ed. Cameron Lewis (New York: Garland, 1980), 157-58.
[53] Bede recounted a tale of an abbess who was reprimanded for letting the blood of one of her nuns during the waxing moon. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, ch. 5, 3.. Hildegard recommended bleeding according to cycles of the moon because the blood waxed and waned on the same cycle. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 77. Astrological guides recommended beneficial and hazardous times for bloodletting according to the moon. One Middle English verse treatise says: "*Also vs nedys to wit when we sall blede, that the tyme of the mone a-cord wyth the dedes*." L. R. Mooney, "A Middle English Verse Compendium of Astrological Medicine: Bodleian Ashmole 210 Part 1, f. 9r; BL Sloane 610, ff. 5r-6r," *Medical History* 28 (1984): 412-13.
[54] Galen, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 87.

humours.[55] Some writers suggested that the people who most required regular bleeding for preventative measures were those who suffered from the complexions similar to women – those whose complexions were cold and moist.[56] Others suggested that everyone should be bled regularly.[57]

Medieval medicine taught that women expelled their excess superfluities through breast milk as well as through uterine bleeding. Although some natural philosophers explained that it is possible in rare occasions for a man to lactate, breast milk was viewed as a distinctly female bodily fluid. Nevertheless, in some regards, it was believed to have a counterpart in the male body, in the semen. Breast milk's primary function was said to be the nourishment of the infant, which was not a function that semen was believed to perform in generation, since in the production of the foetus, blood from the woman was the nutritious part, on which the sperm acted in a formative role. However, medieval authors saw similarities between other qualities that breast milk and male semen were believed to have.

The lactating male was described by Aristotle and, later, by his follower, Albert the Great. Aristotle mentioned male lactation in his *History of Animals*:

> As a general rule, milk is not found in the male of man or of any other animal, though from time to time it has been found in a male; for instance, once in Lemnos a he-goat was milked by its dugs (for it has two dugs close to the penis), and was milked to such effect that cheese was made of the produce, and the same phenomenon was repeated in a male of its own begetting. Such occurrences, however, are regarded as portents, and in point of fact when the Lemnian owner of the animal inquired of the oracle, the god informed him that the portent foreshadowed the acquisition of a fortune. With some men, after puberty, a little milk can be produced by squeezing the breasts; cases have been known where on their being subjected to a prolonged milking process a considerable quantity of milk has been educed.[58]

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[55] Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 120-21.

[56] Thus, Galen says: "[*T*]*reat those who are darker by phlebotomy, since they accumulate thicker and more melancholic blood*." Galen, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 83. See also Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*."

[57] The abovementioned Middle English verse compendium explains the universal need, "*For ay the langer we lyue, we er wayker, And schorter be oure leueng & frelir of mater*." Mooney, "A Middle English Verse Compendium of Astrological Medicine," 412.

[58] "*Universus autem sexus masculinus, tam ceterarum animantium quam hominis, plerumque lacte caret, quanquam quibusdam evenit, ut haberent, quemadmodum contigit in Lemno insula, ut hircus, quippe cui bina*

Aristotle reveals that, in animals, male lactation was perceived to be a supernatural sign foretelling bounty.[59] However, in humans, he suggests that male lactation had a physiological cause, and that the ability to produce milk was related in some way with the arrival of sexual maturity. Albert the Great recounted a similar account of male lactation, in *On Animals*, adding that milk was usually found only in males who "have loose flesh and eat milk-producing foods."[60] Thomas of Cantimpré, however, raised doubt on the question of male lactation, on the basis that milk and semen have the same origins but are sexually determined:

> The fluids of milk and of semen are derived from one source, as Bede and [other] physicians say. For sometimes milk issues forth from males, as Aristotle says, but this is not evident on account of the thickness of its creation. Nevertheless, some say that sometimes milk runs from men.[61]

Despite a brief mention in encyclopedic and scientific compilations such as these, medieval medical writers did not seem to give the question of male lactation very much thought.

Albert the Great was clear in arguing that breast milk was a feminine fluid, rare in men; however, he made a strong association between breast milk and male semen as whitened and condensed forms of blood. In his extensive scientific treatise, *On Animals*, he wrote about semen and breast milk together in the same chapter, highlighting the similarities which he saw in them. Sperm and milk, he taught, are the two bodily fluids which were created in bodies after maturity. Unlike any other substances, they both serve in the continuance of the species, in the two functions of creating and feeding offspring. The differing functions were not the only dissimilarities. Albert writes,

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sunt ubera prope genitale, tantum lactis daret ad mulctram, ut ex eo caseolus fieret; tum eius initu hoedum generatum idem eventus et consectus. Sed eiusmodi res pro prodigiis interpretantur, quippe illi consulenti Lemnio respondit deus, fore, ut pecus ampliore foetura suppleretur. Viris vero quibusdam post pubertatem exprimitur aliquantulum; quin nonnullis, cum sugerentur, etiam multum prodiit." Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, 3.20, in *Aristotelis Opera omnia*, III:53. Translation from Aristotle, "History of Animals," 828.

[59] G.E.R. Lloyd has shown that ancient Greek interpretation of portents was based fundamentally on analogy. The portent was based on determining a link between what was seen in nature (i.e. a male goat producing milk) and what it was meant to cryptically signify (i.e. a fortune). Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*, 181-82.

[60] "*quamvis forte in quorumdam humidorum virorum qui laxas habent carnes et utuntur cibis lactiferis, aliquando aliquid lactis inveniatur.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.9. Latin from *Opera Omnia*, 11:257. English translation from Resnick, *On Animals*, 1:429.

[61] "*Lactis seminisque humiditas ex unius fontis origine derivatur, ut Beda dicit et phisici. Quandoque etiam lac erumpit in masculis, ut dicit Aristoteles, sed non apparet propter spissitudinem creationis eius. Dixerunt tamen quidam, quod aliquando a masculis lac decurrat.*" Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, 1, 47, p. 49.

> But there is a difference, for the sperm is generated from the thin blood digested very well in the fourth digestion.... Milk, however, is generated not in the last digestion from blood that has been completed but from blood incompletely digested in the third digestion. It is carried to the breasts through the vein and is turned white by the whiteness of the breasts.[62]

Albert was careful to distinguish between the more perfect fluid of the male body and the less perfect fluid of the female body. Yet, the physical similarity caused by the colour of both fluids likely encouraged him, and also other writers, to make the comparison between these two by-products of the body.[63] The whiteness of both secretions was seen to be a sign that they were purer than ordinary blood as a result of heating which occurred in "hotter" regions the body.

In comparing male seminal emissions and female lacteal emissions, medieval writers often transposed qualities of one fluid onto the other. Breast milk was said to have certain formative powers which helped to shape an infant.[64] Semen, too, took on qualities associated with milk, namely, the ability to coagulate to form a solid substance. A common analogy for explaining conception was the production of cheese or butter. Hildegard of Bingen made use of the analogy in *Causes and Cures*: "At first the semen inside the woman is milky. Then it coagulates, and afterwards it becomes flesh, just as milk first curdles and then becomes cheese."[65] Her explanation makes it clear that it is the male semen which curdles like cheese.

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[62] "*Sed differentia est, quia sperma generatur ex sanguine optimo digesto quarta digestione et subtili…. Lac autem generatur non ab ultima digestione completo sanguine, sed ex sanguine qui non est complete digestus tertia digestione, per venam defertur in mamillas, et albedine mamillarum convertitur in albedinam.*" Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.8. Latin from *Opera omnia*, 11:250. English translation from Resnick, *On Animals*, 1:417-18.

[63] One example of this comparison is found in Michael Scotus, *Liber phisionomiae*, ch. xxxvii. Breasts and testicles were also said to have similar functions in emitting these fluids. See, for example the commentary on Ps-Albertus' *Secreta Mulierum*, published by Lemay: "There is a similarity in nature between the female breasts and the male testicles, for just as milk flows through the breasts, so sperm is emitted through the testicles." (Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 73.) Thomas Cantimpré compares testicular tumors to inflamation of the breasts. *De natura rerum*, 1, 61, p. 67.

[64] Albertus Magnus recounts the belief that sprinkling milk onto an infant's body and face helps to shape its members: "*mulgere lac in corpus et faciem eius, valet ad rectam figurae membrorum dispositionem*." Albertus Magnus *De animalibus* 3.2.9. Latin from *Opera omnia*, 11:255.

[65] "*Mulier namque cum virile semen conceperit, conceptus seminis illius tam fortis est, quod omnem menstruum sanguinem mulieris sibi attrahit, velut fistula aut ventosa, quam minutor ad carnem hominis ponit, multum sanguinem et tabem ad se ducit. Et semen illud in muliere primitus in lacte est, deinde in coagulationem caseus subsequitur.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 109. Translation from Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 84. This imagery of conception being like the clotting of milk has a precedent in the Bible, in Job's description of how he was created by God: "Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you

She describes the negative effects that weak semen and bad milk have on an infant's growth. Of a child conceived of poorly concocted semen, she writes:

> When a human being is conceived from the semen of an infirm person or from semen that is thin and unconcocted but intermingled with waste matter and putridity, then often in his life he will be infirm too, and full of decay, so to speak, like a piece of wood that is eaten up by worms and emits decay.[66]

Elsewhere, she explains that a child fed on low quality breast milk will suffer similarly:

> For when the nurse is infirm, or if she frequently consumes incompatible food and drink and strong wine, her milk loses its proper taste and has almost a bad smell. In a child or an infant such milk will produce and evil smelling clot on the site where its urine leaves the body. And this will harden into a stone.[67]

Albert the Great taught that semen curdled not as a result of its own intrinsic heat but because of the heat of the womb, just like milk when it is heated.[68] He explains that both male and female seeds combine into a frothy mixture, "like butter," which forms bubbles that will eventually become the body parts of the foetus.[69] In the first days of conception, the *conceptus* was commonly believed to exist as a milky substance, before graduating to blood, and eventually becoming flesh and finally developing organs and limbs.[70] The milk days represented the initial coagulation of the semen.

5.2.2. Conclusions.

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now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?" Job 10:9-11.

[66] "*Et cum aliquis homo de semine infirmi hominis concipitur vel de semine illo, quod tenue et incoctum est, sed aliqua tabe et putredine permixtum: hic saepissime in vita sua etiam infirmus erit et velut carie plenus, velut aliquod lignum, quod vermibus perforatum cariem eicit.*" Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 33. Translation from Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 51.

[67] "*Nam cum nutrix infirma est vel cum diversis cibis et potibus et forti vino frequenter utitur, inde lac rectum saporem amittit et quasi foetidum erit, et tunc lac istud foetidam coagulationem in loco effusionis urinae in puero ve in infanti facit et ita in calculum durescit*." Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 160. Translation from Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine*, 102.

[68] "*Calor vero coagulat sperma et inspissat sicut et lac*." Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 3.2.9. Latin from *Opera omnia*, 11:259.

[69] Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 9.2.5. Cf. *Opera omnia*, 11:531; Barnes 1:815.

[70] Bartholomeus Anglicus gives the following verse to describe the four stages: "*Sex in lacte dies; ter sunt in sanguine trius; bis seni carnem; ter sunt membra figurant.*" Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus*, VI, 3, p. 236.

The comparisons made between women's uterine blood or breast milk and other bodily emissions which were produced in men's bodies fit within the dominant model found in humoural medicine and natural science; this model described a set of basic units which were admitted to the body from food, and converted to form various fluids and substances required for the body to perform all of its functions, including generation. When these units, the humours, accumulated in excess or became imbalanced, they caused illness and even physiological or behavioural changes. Though this model is based on equivalence, since the fluids and emissions of both male and female bodies were just different manifestations of the same corporeal substances, it nevertheless emphasizes gender differences and transfers assumptions about men and women based on these differences.

One assumption that was implicit in humoural model was that men were hotter/more perfect, and women colder/less perfect. An example of this is that thick facial and body hair was believed to be characteristically male, since it was seen to be a physiological mechanism for ridding the body of impurities which relies on innate heat, while menstrual bleeding was believed to be characteristically female, since it was explained as the mechanism which purged colder bodies. However, beardedness and periodic evacuations through acute blood loss were not primary characteristics by which medieval society distinguished male from female. The bearded women and "menstruating," haemorrhoidal men discussed by natural scientists and encyclopaedists of the medieval period are examples of subjects who were perceived to be closer to the centre in the sex continuum which was explained primarily in terms of essential heat. The explanations that greater essential heat can cause a woman to take on more masculine characteristics, such as beardedness, and insufficient heat cause a man to have need of ridding his body of built up, harmful humours, reinforce the dichotomy of male as hotter, female as colder while allowing for some area of overlap in which members of both sexes could fall. The female body which approaches maleness in terms of heat was expected to have not only certain physical characteristics, such as more hair, but also behavioural ones associated with virility. Similarly, the male body which exhibited certain kinds of bleeding which were equated with female physiological functions was, through this comparison, assigned other "female" attributes. It was considered to be sicklier than the average male body as a result of having more impurities. Thus, the comparison between haemorrhoidal blood and menstrual blood, based on the presupposition that they

shared the common function of purging corruption, bolsters the argument that women are the sicklier sex. For, even though it allows that men suffer from a similar illness, the female body is the referent for the condition. The impure blood is itself gendered female. In contrast, a healing flow of blood is, at times, also gendered female. In the cases of the haemorrhoidal man or the menstruating woman, the body's loss of blood was not perceived to be the illness, but was seen rather as a symptom and a cure for the internal humoural imbalance. The literature on prophylactic bloodletting reveals that the theory behind the practice was influenced by ancient and medieval understanding of the process of menstruation in the female body. Physicians were told to draw blood according to cycles which were to be determined based on individual physiological need, but also general rules related to nature's cycles or stages in the lifecycle.

Comparisons between the male and female versions of whitened, purified bodily fluids also highlight the way that secondary meanings associated with either sex were attached to the fluids themselves. Some, but not all, of the positive meanings given to breast milk were projected onto Aristotle's descriptions of lactating males. The milk produced by a male animal was associated with abundance, but not with the acts of feeding and nurturing. Rather, it was linked with "loose flesh" and a rich diet, which suggests that it was viewed, merely, as a superfluity.

The comparison between female breast milk and male semen, made on account of the evident "purity" of both fluids, also underlines certain secondary characteristics associated with either sex. Breast milk was compared to male semen, in that it was a purified substance. As a result, it was even said to have power in shaping the behavioural and physical characteristics of newborn infants. In this respect, it took on some of the qualities of male semen which was posited as having the primary creative role in the initial shaping of the embryo. On the other hand, the comparison could lend certain "feminine" qualities to the depiction of the seminal fluid. It transferred some of milk's qualities as food onto semen. Thus, its generative operations in the formation of the embryo were understood in terms of the coagulation of cheese and butter; and, as is the case with milk, a poor quality semen could rot and cause an inferior product.

When the comparison was made between the bodily emissions of both sexes, it gave validity to gendering of physiological attributes. The examples given above show that the

comparison frequently reinforced common notions about sex difference: male is hotter, female is colder; male is healthy and whole, female is sickly and full of superfluities; male is the creative power, female is the material, or the food; male is active and strong, female is passive and weak. It should be noted, too, that feminine qualities were not always viewed as undesirable. Menstruation in women was viewed as a healing process; and, likewise, haemorrhoids were frequently interpreted in this way. Women's material contribution to the foetus, construed as the provision of necessary food, was viewed as an indispensable part of generation.

These various comparisons highlight the multiplicity of identities that uterine blood held: as good blood, which is essential for the conception and nourishment of the foetus, and which purge the female body, purified blood, which is transformed into food necessary for feeding infants after they are born, and also potentially polluting blood, associated with sickness and bodily weakness. The following sections explore maternal metaphors based on these different natures of blood.

5.3. Good Blood.

The blood of Christ and of the martyrs was positively associated with generation, nourishment, and purification, the qualities often ascribed to female uterine blood in medieval medical and embryological discourse. This section will examine how the resemblance between this sacrificial blood and female blood was constructed, in a medieval Christian context, and consider the meanings that such a comparison conveys. Christ's blood is described with similar language to that used to depict female blood: like that of a fertile woman, Christ's blood is said to be a sign of future fruits; his flesh and blood which he sacrificed are called a spiritual food, in the same way that a mother's flesh and blood were considered to be food for her foetus; like menstrual blood, his blood was believed to wash away impurity. These feminizing metaphors of flowers, food, and salutary streams of blood help to reinterpret violent aspects of Christianity's origins, replacing the death with birth, acts of symbolic cannibalism with maternal feeding, and suffering with healing.

5.3.1. Fertile Blood.

In medieval embryology, we find frequent use of agricultural metaphors. The woman's contribution was viewed as a bloody seed which mixed with and was shaped by the spirituous seed of a man. Throughout pregnancy, women were also believed to supply blood for the growth of the embryo which was compared to the nutrient-rich soil and waters which are necessary for agricultural production. The uterine blood was likened to flowers, as a result of its fertile powers, and the conception was equated with the production of fruits. Like uterine blood, the blood shed by Christ and the martyrs was compared metaphorically with symbols of natural fertility: seeds, flowers, and fruit trees. Through these metaphors, the bloodiness of their deaths was framed as a necessary precursor to the birth and growth of the Church.

As early as the patristic period, the blood of Christ and the blood of the martyrs was conceived of as part of the same fruitful flow of blood. Jill Ross has explained that:

> In the early church, the martyr was conceived of as an extension of the bloody sacrifice of Christ, and thereby as a participant in the redemptive fertility of the blood spilled by Christ. The fecundity of the blood spilled by Christian martyrs was considered to have the ability to attract more believers to the Christian faith.[71]

Without the initial loss of blood, the Church could not have been born. Thus, in the third century, Tertullian called the blood of the martyrs the seed of the Church.[72] This image of the bloody seed was popular among the Church Fathers for emphasizing that martyrdom was a kind of dissemination of the faith which caused the number of Christian followers to multiply. Augustine described the fertility of the blood of martyrdom with another agricultural metaphor: "Just as Jesus gave his soul for us, so the martyrs imitated him and gave their lives for their brothers, and, so that that most prolific fertility of the people would grow just as the fertility of buds (*germen*), they irrigated the earth with their blood.

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[71] Jill Ross, *Figuring the Feminine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 61.

[72] "*Semen est sanguis Christianorum*." Tertullian, *Apologeticus adversus gentes pro Christianis*, 50, in PL 1, 535.

Therefore, we are the fruits (*fructus*) of their labour."[73] The influence of these fertility metaphors in medieval religious culture can be seen in high medieval contemplative literature (notably, that composed by twelfth-century Cistercians) and in hagiography.

Bernard of Clairvaux developed several analogies to represent the fecundity of Christ's love by interpreting as religious symbols the emblems of marital fertility found in the Song of Songs. In one of his analogies, Bernard reads the flowers and fruits mentioned in the book as red flowers and pomegranates symbolizing the blood of the Passion. The chamber of one's heart is filled with these flowers and fruits when one gives oneself over to contemplating the Passion. He writes that Christ was both the seed and the first flowering of redemption: "[Christ's] flesh was sown in death and rose again (*refloreo*) in the resurrection." The flowers are the signs of the Resurrection, "blossoming (*reviresco*) in a new summer under the power of grace." Although the flowers are only temporary, their fruit, which will be born (*parturio*) at the time of the general resurrection, "will last forever."[74]

The fertile power of the blood from Christ's wounds was also associated with waters which moistened the fields and the ensuing flowers. In a description of the Passion given by Cistercian writer Adam of Perseigne, Christ's blood is represented as a fertile flood, irrigating the land and encouraging the growth of flowers:

> Finally, a soldier's lance pierces the side of the innocent one, so that from the heart of innocence a flood of pity might well forth, that watered by it the face of the earth might be restored to fertility.... Surely while the author of life gave up his spirit on the cross, from the dead man's pierced side there burst forth the flood of all grace by which the face of the earth has been renewed, that is, the faith of the church, and it has brought forth roses, lilies of the valley, and gardens of spices. The outpouring of the pure blood of Christ, while redeeming the world and washing it from its sins, has brought forth roses in

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[73] "*Sicut ille unus animam suam pro nobis posuit, ita et imitati sunt martyres, et animas suas pro fratribus posuerunt atque ut ista populorum tanquam germinum copiosissima fertilitas surgeret, terram suo sanguine irrigaverunt. Fructus laboris ergo illorum etiam nos sumus*." Augustine, *Sermo cclxxx*, in PL 38, 1283.

[74] "*cuius caro seminata est in morte, refloruit in resurrectione*;" "*Porro autem Resurrectionis insignia, novos adverte flores sequentis temporis, in novam sub gratia revirescentis aestatem, quorum fructum generalis futura resurrectio in fine parturiet sine fine mansurum*." Bernard of Clairvaux, *De diligendo deo*, 3.8, in PL 182, 979. English translation from Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God: with an analytical commentary*, trans. Emero Stiegman (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 10-11.

> martyrs, lilies in holy virgins, and has produced in perfect preachers gardens of spices.[75]

The flower imagery serves a similar purpose in describing the productiveness of Christ's blood, as it does in descriptions of the menstrual blood. Both kinds of "flowers" represent the potential for fruits which, in turn may yield more plants, in an ever increasing cycle. This image of Christ's wounds as a verdant field was echoed by the fourteenth-century English mystical writer, Richard Rolle, who likened Christ's wounded body to a "meadow full of sweet flowers"[76] and "the cause of everything that is green, or grows, or bears fruit on earth."[77]

Such fertility metaphors were drawn into closer association with the maternal body when they were employed in the personal meditations of individuals who envisioned themselves as being born from Christ's wounds. Examples can be found in the meditations of the Cistercian abbot Guerric of Igny. Guerric imagines Christ's blood as an overflowing river which "made the ground drunk." He exhorts his companions to implant themselves in this blood-soaked ground and receive life:

> Hide, he said, in the dug-up ground.... Thus, indeed the pious and merciful opens his side, so that the blood of his wounds gives you life, the heat of the body revives, and the spirit of the heart infuses as if by a free and open channel. Here, safely, you will hide until iniquity passes away; here you will never be cold, because the bowels (*viscera*) of Christ's love are not cold.[78]

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[75] "*Denique lancea militis latus aperuit innocentis, ut de visceribus innocentiae, misericordia diluvium inundaret, quo irrigata facies terrae se ad ubertatem fructuum innovaret…. Certe dum auctor vitae in cruce emitteret spiritum, de mortui lanceato latere prorupit diluvium totius gratiae, quo innovata facies terrae, id est Ecclesiae fides, flores rosarum et lilia convallium et hortos aromatum germinavit. Effusio nimirum incontaminati sanguinis Christi, dum mundum redimeret et dilueret a peccatis, et flores rosarum protulit in martyribus, et lilia convalium in sanctis virginibus, et in perfectis praedicatoribus hortos aromatum procuravit*." *Epistola XIV* in Adam of Perseigne, *Lettres I: Texte latin*, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1960), 234. Translation from Adam of Perseigne, *The Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, ed. Thomas Merton, trans. Grace Perigo (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 190-91.

[76] "*Swete Ihesu, ȝit þi bodi is liik to a mede ful of swete flouris...*" Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle of Hampole: An English father of the Church and his followers*, ed. C. Horstman, II vols., vol. I, *Yorkshire Writers* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), 97.

[77] "[*the*] *cause in erþe of ech þing þat is grene, or growiþ, or beriþ fruȝt...*" *Ibid*.

[78] My translation. "*Abscondere in fossa humo…. Ideo quippe latus suum pius et misericors aperuit, ut cruor te vulneris vivicet, calor corporis refocillet, spiritus cordis quasi libero et patenti meatu aspiret. Ibi tuto latebis donec transeat iniquitas; ibi nequaquam algebis, eo quod in visceribus Christi non frigescat caritas.*" *De eodem sermo quartus*, 6,from Guerric d'Igny, *Sermons II*, ed. John Morson and Hilary Costello (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1973), 213-15.

The figurative language used to describe Christ's bleeding wounds in this description is highly suggestive of womb imagery. Like uterine blood, the blood of the Passion fills interior spaces and is the source of life, warmth, and protection.

The blood of the martyrs was similarly associated with fecundity and the production of Christian souls. Adam of Perseigne, in his *Letter to the Virgin Agnes*, fills his description of her with the lush imagery of the fruitful garden from the Song of Songs. He argues that the fruits mentioned in the sacred text are "are apples and, both through the colour of the peel and the multitude of seeds, they signify the many passions of the flesh in saints, and the multiplicity of good works in the union and ardor of charity."[79] The flowers of the garden are white lilies and red roses, which Adam interprets as the symbols of Agnes' virginity and martyrdom. He writes that Agnes' pure flesh provides what is needed to irrigate the garden, calling her blood the "intimate sprinkling of sacred dew" which moistens the garden and causes more virginal flowers to spring up.[80] Since Agnes is a virgin, this spiritual fertility, which increases the number of Christian virgins, is in contrast to natural fertility. This language of natural fertility was not reserved for female martyrs. The prologue to the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* repeated the imagery, originated by the patristic writers, of the blood of Christ and of the martyrs as the growing seed of the Church. The hagiographer depicts God as a gardener, and Christ as the seed which he sowed. The rains which watered the seed were drops of Christ's own heart blood, and, subsequently, the blood of the martyrs: "First the martyr saint Stephen, and the apostles who died, who gave their blood and their life to nourish that sweet seed, and the other martyrs who were our Lord's knights, who shed their blood for Christianity so that it did not perish."[81]

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[79] My translation. "*Caeterum mala, et per corticis colorem, et granorum multitudinem significant et multiplices carnis passiones in sanctis, et multiplicitatem bonorum operum in unione et ardore charitatis.*" Adam of Perseigne, *Epistola XXII. Ad Agnetem Virginem*, in PL 211, 661.

[80] My translation. "*De caetero etiam in carne munda fit hortus irriguus, ubi tanto immarcescibilius vernat amoenitas virginitatis, quanto opportunius eum rigat intima aspersio divini roris*." Adam of Perseigne, *Epistola XXII*, in PL 211, 662.

[81] My translation.
"*God him was þe gardiner þat gan ferst þe sed souwe ….*
Derworþe was þe swete blod þat it was wiþ ysprengd
Atte laste wiþ is herte blod þer com out water ymengd
Þo bigan þis nyuwe sed somdel to cacche more
Ac ʒute after þis manyman his blod ssadde þer uore
Verst þe martir seinte Steuene & þe appostles þat were ded
Þat hare blod and hare lyf ʒaf to norisschi þat swete sed
And þis oþer martirs ek þat oure Louerdes knyʒtes were

In ancient and medieval medical literature, the necessity of seeds, and rains, and flowers in order for fruits to grow, was harnessed into a metaphor to explain the necessity of female blood, in the form of menstrual blood which prepares the womb and acts as the material component in conception, before children can be born. By adopting this analogy to describe the blood of Christ and the martyrs, Christian authors associated their passions with generation–with the birth of the Church and the increase in Christian souls given eternal life—rather than with death.

5.3.2. Nourishing Blood.

Christ's command to his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood[82] can raise some uncomfortable questions about the cannibalistic nature of the Eucharist.[83] The doctrine of the Eucharist taught that Christians were consuming the flesh and blood of Christ when they were eating the bread, and drinking the wine of the altar.[84] Christians believed, however, that Christ's sacrifice was an act of love and the sacrament of the altar provided necessary spiritual sustenance. Through the ceremonial ingestion of the consecrated wafer and wine, Christ's blood and body became a part of the follower, nourishing the soul and providing eternal life. This theological explanation of Christ's sacrifice and the symbolic ingestion of his body by Christian believers was described through maternal metaphors which portrayed Christ's body as a source of life-giving sustenance and protection similar to the maternal womb.

Þat schadde hare blod for Cristendom þat it yperissed nere."
Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*, II vols., vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1, ll. 7-20.

[82] Jn 6:53.

[83] Even the apostles expressed difficulty with Christ's command. Jn 6:60. Cf. Merrall Llewelyn Price, *Consuming Passions: The uses of cannibalism in late medieval and early modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2003), 25ff.

[84] On the significance of the contrast between forbidden and divine acts in the psychological impact of the sacrament, Miri Rubin has written, "What we can assert is that by combining the most holy with the most aberrant/abhorrent, the routine workings of sacramental power—an image of the fullness of life-giving, which dwells in the image of utmost transgression—a very powerful symbol was created, as awesome as it was promising." Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 360.

We can find many examples of this in Cistercian writing. Aelred of Rievaulx encouraged recluses to contemplate the wounds of Christ as a source of womb-like protection, and as a source of spiritual food. He writes:

> Then one of the soldiers opened Christ's side with his lance and from it blood and water flowed. Hurry! Do not delay! Eat the honeycomb with your honey; drink your wine with your milk. The blood [from his wound] is turned to wine so that you might be inebriated; the water is changed into milk so that you might be nourished. Streams were made in stone for you; wounds were made in his members; and, holes were made in the wall of his body, so that hiding in them, like a dove, and kissing them, your lips will become like a scarlet swatch from his precious blood, and your speech will become sweet.[85]

According to Aelred, the blood of Christ which enfolds and nourishes the Christian does not merely feed his body but becomes a part of it by staining it, and confers pleasing characteristics on it.

William of St. Thierry describes the sacrament in a way that is reminiscent of representations of the maternal body feeding the embryo:

> This is what happens when we eat and drink the deathless banquet of your body and your blood.... You say to the longing soul: "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it," and she tastes and sees your sweetness in the great Sacrament that surpasses understanding, then she is made that which she eats, bone of your bone and flesh or your own flesh.[86]

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[85] "*Tunc unus ex militibus lancea latus eius aperuit, et exivit sanguis et aqua. Festina, ne tardaveris, comede favum cum melle tuo, bibe vinum tuum cum lacte tuo. Sanguis tibi in vinum vertitur ut inebrieris, in lac aqua mutatur ut nutriaris. Facta sunt tibi in petra flumina, in membris eius vulnera, et in maceria corporis eius caverna, in quibus instar columbae latitans et deosculans singula ex sanguine eius fiant sicut vitta coccinea labia tua et eloquium tuum dulce*." Aelred of Rievaulx, *La Vie De Recluse, La Prière Pastorale: Texte Latin*, ed. Charles Dumont (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 140. Translation from Mcpherson *Works*

[86] "*Hoc est quod agitur… cum manducantes et bibentes incorruptibile epulum corporis et sanguinis tui… Ubi dicis animae desideranti: Dilata os tuum, et ego implebo illud; et illa gustans et videns suavitatem tuam sacramento magno et incomprehensibili, hoc efficitur quod manducat, os ex ossibus tuis, et caro de carne tua…*" William of St. Thierry, *Meditativae orationes*, 8, in PL 180, 230. English translation from William of St Thierry, *On Contemplating God, Prayer, and Meditations*, trans. Sister Penelope, vol. 1, *The Works of William of St Thierry* (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 142.

The transference of substantial characteristics from the divine body to the soul mirrors that which was believed to take place between the mother and her offspring whom she fed in the womb. Adam of Perseigne called Christ's body the "food of our souls."[87]

Richard Rolle, the English mystical writer, paired food analogies with parental analogies in his description of Christ's passion. In his *Meditations on the Passion*, he gives voice to Christ's complaint that his sacrifice of his body as food and his gentle doting should provoke love, but instead his people are resentful:

> "My people what have I done to you?" [Micah 6:3]. That is: "My sweet, what have I done to you? Have I made you resentful, that you cause me all this misery? Haven't I given you my whole self, and everything which you've ever had, and life without end, if you're willing to accept it, my body as your food, to get death on the cross in return...? Have I injured you so badly by my good deeds, or outraged your feelings by my sweet fondling?"[88]

He describes Christ as a maternal figure whose compassionate acts were like a mother's affectionate care for her children. Christ selflessly offers his own body as the food of life only to receive death on the cross. Rolle portrays humanity as a selfish infant acting out against the one who offered unconditional love and provided limitless food and affection.

Like Aelred, Rolle envisions the manner of Christ's feeding of humanity as taking place in Christ's wounds, which he depicts as enclosed spaces, places of protection, and overflowing with food:

> Your body is like a dovehouse, because, just as a dovecote is full of openings, so your body is full of wounds, and just as a dove being chased by a hawk is safe enough if she can only get to an opening in her dovecote, so, sweet Jesu, your wounds are the best refuge [for us] in every temptation.... What is more, sweet Jesu, your body is like a honeycomb, because in each direction that is packed with cells, and each cell is so stocked with honey that it cannot be touched without exuding some of its sweetness; in the same way, sweet Jesu,

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[87] "*…cibus animarum…*" *Epistola III*, Adam of Perseigne, *Lettres I: Texte latin*, 84. Translation from Adam of Perseigne, *The Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, 76.

[88] "'*Popule meus, quid feci tibi*': *Þat is: 'My swete, what have I Þe don? Have I wratthyt, Þat Þou dost me Þis woo? Have I not ȝevyn Þ al my self, and al Þat evere Þou hast, and lyf with-owten ende ȝef Þou wyl take, my body to Þe foode, and to deth on rode…*? *Have I with my gode ded hytryd Þe so sore, or with my swete dawntynge grevyd Þin herte*?'" Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 88. Translation from Richard Rolle, *The English Writings*, trans. Rosamund S. Allen (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 100.

> your body is full of cells of devotion so that it can't be touched by a pure soul without sweetness [of] affection.[89]

In this set of images, Jesus appears as the ultimate mother, with a womb that has as many cells as there are people who want to take refuge in them and offers protection and the food of life.

The act of feeding undeveloped souls was central to the English mystic's portrayal of Christ's maternal role as can be seen in a final example from an anonymous poem which was collected with Richard Rolle's work. The authorship of the poem is unclear, however, it bears many similarities to Rolle's other poems which indicate that it was either written by him or by someone who was emulating his work. The poem describes the many roles which Christ fulfilled for mankind, as father, mother, brother, sister, and spouse. As mother, the poet writes, "he nourished my kind with noble food, for with his flesh he fed me—a better food which no man may find, for it will bring us to eternal life."[90] Thus, Christ's acts of sacrifice and feeding were compared to maternal acts, but superior, since, unlike normal mothers, Christ's nourishment sustains everlasting life.

5.3.3. Salutary Blood.

One of the primary functions which uterine blood was believed to have in medieval medical theory was getting rid of impurities in the female body. The blood which Christ shed, similarly, was viewed as purifying the body of humanity, and washing clean the souls of Christians. It was described, metaphorically, as having several different medicinal properties: cleansing, refreshing, and acting as an ointment.

Christ's bleeding was believed to purge the souls of individuals who could bleed vicariously by meditating on the Passion. William of Saint Thierry describes how thinking on

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[89] "*swete Ihesu, Þy body is lijk a dufhous: / for as a dufhous is ful of dowve holis, so it Þi bodi ful of woundis: / & as a dowve pursued of an hauke, if sche mai a-reche to an hole of hir hous, sche is sikir I-now3 : so, swete Ihesu, in temptacioun Þi woundis ben best refute.... / Also, swete Ihesu, Þi bodi is lijk an hony-comb; for Þat is ech weies ful of cellis, & ech cell ful of hony, so Þat it may not be touched wiÞouten 3eldinge of swetenes: / so, swete Ihesu, Þi bodi is ful of cellis of devocioun, Þat it may not be touched of a clene soule wiÞoute swetnes, & likinge*" *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Horstman, 96-7. Translation from Richard Rolle, *The English Writings*, trans. Allen, 113.

[90] "*As modir, of hyme I may make mynd,.../ With nobill mete he nureschede my kynde, / For with his flesche he wald me fede-- / A better fude may na mane fynde, / For to lastande lyfe it will us lede*." Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 369.

Christ's sacrifice and sharing in his suffering can flush out evil from a truly repentant sinner's soul:

> [T]he Apostle says: "No sacrifice for sin remains for those who sin deliberately." Unless repentance washes their sins away, unless a sweat of blood expels and the pain of the cross forces out the evil from their systems, I cannot see that those who sin deliberately and knowingly have any share either in the prayer of him who sweat his blood, or in the sacrifice of him who hung upon the cross.[91]

Seeking healing for his soul by experiencing of Christ's wounds by proxy, Richard Rolle prayed to Mary:

> [I]t's wounds I yearn for, wounds of deep remorse, or anguish and sympathy for my sweet lord Jesu's suffering. I have a craving for pain, and I'm imploring my lord for a drop of his red blood to make my soul bloody with, or else a drop of his water to wash my soul with. O mother [of mercy]... visit my ailing soul and insert your son with his wounds within my heart; send a little spark of sympathy into my heart, which is as unyielding as stone, a single drop of that suffering to make it supple with.[92]

Rolle views his desire to take on the wounds, which emanate with the blood of the passion and cause him to feel the pain of repentance, as a form of spiritual therapy. One fifteenth-century English preacher wrote that each individual should contemplate Christ's wounds and pay heed to Christ's request that one open up one's heart to him, for "[t]hrough this you can see the specks of your conscience, the ugliness and impurity of your life."[93] Then, Christ's blood will be able to purge one's sins: "For just as streams of blood and water flowed from

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[91] "*Itaque sicut dicit Apostolus: Voluntarie peccantibus jam non relinquitur pro peccatis hostia. Quae nisi poenitentia deleat, nisi sanguineus sudor exsudet, et crux excruciet, voluntarie et scienter peccantes non invenio partem habere, vel in oratione sanguinem sudantis, vel in sacrificio in cruce pendentis*." William of St. Thierry, *Meditativae orationes*, 5, in PL 180, 220. English translation from William of St Thierry, *On Contemplating God, Prayer, and Meditations*, 120.

[92] "*...woundis of ruÞ, of peyne and of cumpassioun of swete Ihesu my lordis passioun is al my desire. I have apetite to peyne, & I biseche my lord a drope of his rede blood to make my soule blodi, or ellis a drope of his watir to waische wiÞ my soule. A, modir or wrecchis & of alle woful, visite my sike soule & sette in myn herte Þi sone wiÞ hise woundis; sende a sparcle of cumpassioun in to myn herte Þat is hard as stoon, a drope of Þat passioun to souplen it wiÞ*." *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Horstman, 99. Translation from Richard Rolle, *The English Writings*, trans. Allen, 118.

[93] "*Per istud videre poteris tue athom\o/s consciencie, feditatem et immundiciam tue vite*." Original and translation from "Sermon 1" in *A Macaronic Sermon Collection from Late Medieval England: Oxford, MS Bodley 649*, trans. Patrick J. Horner (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006), 44, 45.

the fount of life, the blessed heart of Christ, as soon as it was pierced with this lance, so whichever soul or heart is pierced by the lance of contrition, the stream of blood, the stream of mortal sin, will run out from his heart....”[94] The preacher’s teachings on how the soul polluted by sin is cleansed by Christ’s flow of blood recall medicinal remedies involving bleeding that would be familiar to his audience.

Bloodletting was viewed as an artificially induced process which simulates the body’s own methods for expelling impurities, especially, menstruation in the female body. Bernard of Clairvaux provides a description of the process of salutary bloodletting as was practiced in the monasteries: “...in the medicine of bodies, first purgations are employed, then refreshments, [which is done] undoubtedly, in order that the body may be emptied of noxious humours and then nourished on healthful foods.”[95] He follows this explanation by saying that Jesus was the physician of souls who, through his actions, purged and restored us. Other medieval writers also compared feeble, sin-ridden souls with weak, sick bodies which required spiritual healing. Adam of Perseigne represented the healing power of Christ’s blood, which both purges and restores: “From the side of Christ, blood and water are believed to have flowed. Although the blood of Christ—which heals by its own worth—redeems and crowns, there is water in it, because it cleanses, restores and cools. It cleanses from sin, it restores us through hope, it cools us from the heat of fleshy lust.”[96] Adam teaches that the blood and water shed from Christ’s body did not clean Christ’s own body, which was already free from the contamination of sin, but had the power to clean and heal all of the bodies of mankind.

The metaphorical illness which humans suffer from and Christ’s purifying blood cures was given different faces. Adam of Perseigne provides a detailed description of the condition that afflicts him, which he calls “leprosy”:

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[94] “*Quia sicut rivi sanguinis et aque fluxerunt de fonte vite, Christi benedicto corde, statim ut ista lancea perforabatur, sic cuiuscumque anima vel cor lancea contricionis perforetur, rivus sanguinis, rivus mortalis peccati, decurret ab eius corde...*” Original and translation from “Sermon 1” in *A Macaronic Sermon Collection*, ed. Horner, 46, 47.

[95] “*...in corporum medicina prius purgationes adhibentur, deinde refectiones, ut scilicet prius exinaniatur corpus ab humoribus noxiis, dehinc cibis sanioribus foveatur*.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “*In die sancto Pashae. Sermo III*,” in PL 183, 903.

[96] “*De latere Christi creduntur fluxisse sanguis et aqua. Quanquam Christi sanguis, qui sui pretio sanat, redimit et coronat, in eo aqua est, quod lavat, reficit et refrigerat. Lavat a peccato, reficit spe, refrigerat ab aestu carnalis concupiscentiae*.” Adam of Perseigne, *Epistola XVI*, in PL 211, 639. Translation from Adam of Perseigne, *The Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, 83.

> But long-standing feebleness, grown serious through the experience of vice, does not yet allow me to know what virtue is. The heat of a deep-seated fever has indeed cooled down under Christ's care, since through the medicine of his grace the resolution toward sin has ceased, but still lying, as it were, upon my bed, I have not regained full-strength nor have I been able to regain my appetite for the food which is essential. For I should say that the essential food is a longing for virtue and the hunger and thirst for righteousness.[97]

Ultimately, Adam explains that Christ's cure for spiritual illness is "the outpouring of his pure blood" which washes the world from its sins.[98]

> A similar analogy is found in an anonymous fifteenth-century English sermon: [T]he stream of the merit of Christ's passion... washes man from impurity. For where [mankind] was polluted with the filth of sin and was fouler in the sight of God than any leper, "Christ washed him in the stream of his blood," (Revelation 1,) and cleansed him. Where you were mortally ill... and weak within yourself... [and] where your soul was sterile... [you are healed by the stream of Christ's passion].[99]

In another sermon, the preacher writes that mankind, following from the first man, Adam, has suffered from numerous diseases, including dropsy. He supplies the following moral interpretation of the disease: "to speak morally of this swelling dropsy, I have great fear that many are gravely infected for... it is nothing other than greed, that this is inordinate love of earthly things such that one forgets God...."[100] Medical texts taught that dropsy was a disease

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[97] "*Sed longus languor de experientia vitiorum inolitus, nondum sinit mihi sapere quid sit virtus. Febris quidem insitae fervor, Christo medente, detepuit, cum per ipsius gratiae medicinam, peccandi cessavit propositum; sed, adhuc quasi lecto discumbens, nondum plane convalui, nec plene recuperare potui cibi qui necessarius est appetitum. Cibum quippe qui necessarius est dixerim virtutis desiderium, esuriem sitimque iustitiae*." *Epistola XIV*, Adam of Perseigne, *Lettres I: Texte latin*, 210-12. Translation from Adam of Perseigne, *Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, 176.

[98] "*Effusio nimirum incontaminati sanguinis Christi, dum mundum redimeret et dilveret a peccatis…*" *Epistola XIV*, Adam of Perseigne, *Lettres I: Texte latin*, 234. Translation from Adam of Perseigne, *Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, 191.

[99] "*Rivus meriti Christi passionis… lavit hominem ab immundicia. Quia ubi pollutus erat feditate peccati et turpior erat in visu Dei quam aliquis leprosus, 'Christus lavit eum in Þe stremsui sanguinis,' Apocalypsis primo, et eum emundavit. Ubi infimabaris…* [*et*] *ubi fuisti debilis ex te ipso…* [*et*] *ubi anima tua erat sterilis… rivus meritis Christi passionis… potes te alleviare,* [*etc*.]" Original and translation from "Sermon 1" in *A Macaronic Sermon Collection*, ed. Horner, 56, 57.

[100] "*Set loqui moraliter de ista turgente ydropisy, multum timeo quod plures sint graviter infecti… nichil est nisi avaricia, que est inordinatus amor terrestrium tantum quod obliviscitur Deum…*" Original and translation from "Sermon 18" in *A Macaronic Sermon Collection*, ed. Horner, 440, 441.

caused by an excess of humours, here used to express the excessive love of worldly things. In medieval gynaecology, dropsy was believed to be caused by the retention of the menses and a good physician would attempt to restore the purgative flow or purge the body by artificial means.[101] The preacher gives similar account of how Christ heals the person who is dropsical in sin:

> The art of a good doctor, as you know, is, first, to touch the pulse and the veins of the sick one to understand the distemper from which he suffers.... So did our artful doctor Christ… [and] omitted nothing that would cure the human soul. Since therefore you have sufficient remedies and medicines, and can place the blame on no one if you be damned, take heed therefore for the love of God and see how the pelican pierced his breast that his young might live. Take heed and see how Christ, the son of God, poured out the blood of his heart to cure you from your sickness and purge you from your sin.[102]

In these examples, the sickness of the soul is understood as a toxic build-up of sin which can only be purged through bloodshed.

The stream of Christ's blood on the cross was also compared with the blood which a mother loses during childbirth. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the clearest expressions of this analogy were penned by women writers, Julian of Norwich and Margaret of Oignt. Julian compared Christ labouring on the cross to a mother giving birth, as we mentioned already in Chapter Four. She compares the blood and water that Christ shed to puerperal fluids, while assigning them healing and cleansing properties. She explains that the abundance of blood that was shed so that humans, as Christ's children, could be born, serves also as a healing bath for the newly born souls:

> For the flood of mercy that is his valued blood and precious water is abundant to make us fair and clean. The blessed wounds of our Saviour are open and rejoice to heal us. The sweet gracious hands of our mother are ready and

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[101] Green, ed., *Trotula*, 66.

[102] "*Ars boni medici, ut scitis, est primo tangere puus et infimi venas ad cognoscendum distemperanciam illius qui infimatur…Sic fecit artificiosus medicus noster Christus…* [*et*] *nichil pretermisit quod sanaret animam humanam. Ex quo ergo habes sufficiencia remedia et medicinas, et non vis capere blame no man quamvis damneris, tak hede ideo pro amore Dei et videte quomodo pellicanus perforavit pectus suum ut pulli sui viveant. Take hede et videte quomodo Christus filius Dei effudit sanguinem cordis sui ad sanandum te de infirmitate tua et purgandum de peccato tuo*." Original and translation from "Sermon 18" in *A Macaronic Sermon Collection*, ed. Horner, 440, 441.

> diligent about us, for [Christ] takes on, in all of this, the duties of a kind nurse who has nothing else to do but tend to the salvation of her child.[103]

She explains that maternal blood of Christ has therapeutic and life-bringing purposes which is why it cannot be staunched: "But meekly let us moan to our cherished mother, and he shall sprinkle us in his precious blood, and make our soul soft and mild and heal us over time.... and from this fair working he shall never cease nor stop until all of his beloved children are born and delivered."[104]

Margaret of Oingt also emphasized the great amount of blood which Christ shed to give birth to redeemed humanity:

> ...they tied you to a certain column where they whipped you so stretched out that it seemed that you were stripped of your skin, so covered with blood were you.... O, Sweet Lord Jesus Christ, who ever saw any mother suffer such a birth! But when the hour of the birth came you were placed on the hard bed of the cross where you could not move or turn around or stretch your limbs as someone who suffers such great pain should be able to do.... And surely it was no wonder that your veins were broken when you gave birth to the world all in one day.[105]

She continues her portrayal with even more graphic imagery of Christ's labours: "...your precious blood gushed forth with such strength that the courtyard flowed with it like a large stream, and it gushed forth with such great abundance that it must have come from a truly great stretching."[106] She views her contemplation on the Passion as a protective and purifying, asking Christ to give her the "protection of your holy faith and sign of your passion" so that she can be sure of salvation when she dies.[107]

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[103] "*For the flode of mercy that is his deerworthy blode and precious water is plentuous to make us feyre and clene. The blessed woundes of oure saviour be opyn and enjoye to hele us. The swet gracious handes of oure moder be redy and diligent a bout us; for he in alle this werking usyth the very office of a kynde norysse, that hath not elles to done but to entende about the saluation of hyr chylde*." Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 61, 14, p.608.

[104] "*But mekely make we oure mone to our derewurthy mother, and he shall all besprynkyl us in his precious blode, and make oure soule full softe and fulle mylde, and heele us fulle feyer by processe of tyme... [a]nd of this swete feyer werkyng he shalle nevyr ceese nor stynte, tylle all his deerwurthy chyldren be borne and brought forth*." *Ibid*., 63, 14, p. 616.

[105] Margaret of Oingt, *The Writings of Margaret of Oingt, Medieval Prioress and Mystic*, trans. Renate Blumenfled-Kosinski (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 31.

[106] *Ibid*., 31-2.

[107] *Ibid*., 33-4.

5.3.4. Good Blood: Conclusions.

By utilizing the analogies of flowers, seeds, and fruits, of food, and of purifying streams and healing balms to describe the blood of Christ and of the martyrs, the medieval Christian authors cited above made parallels, perhaps, unconsciously, between the blood of their subject and women's uterine blood. This is evident from the contexts in which the metaphors were used. The analogies drawn from symbols of natural fertility bring to mind not only plant generation, but more significantly, imply human conception and birth (as a metaphor for the soul's rebirth), and are, frequently, coupled with womb and parturition imagery. Similarly, the image of Christ's blood as food, which is of fundamental importance in Christian tradition, is associated in medieval Christian contemplation with that very essential food of infancy, maternal blood. As such, the imagery evokes nurture and subdues associations with butchery, cannibalism, or Old Testament prohibitions on the ingestion of blood. The imagery of Christ's blood flowing in purifying streams from his body, and healing sin-enfeebled Christians through vicarious purgation, or as a cleansing bath or topical ointment, is based on medieval medical therapies. However, the analogies of Christ's therapeutic blood are frequently employed in ways which suggest the periodic bleeding of menstruation or postpartum bleeding. The implications that it is bleeding which should not be staunched, which cures sterility, which accompanies the labours which led to Christianity being born, associate Christ's bloodshed with uterine bleeding, and with healing, fertility, and birth. Thus, it is not just that the Christian authors cited above, and the many others who used similar imagery to describe the blood of Christ and the martyrs, were using metaphors drawn from nature, food, and medicine which also happened to be used to describe uterine blood in other contexts; rather, the overlap brings with it additional layers of meaning drawn from the medieval understanding of uterine blood as a sign of health, fertility and birth.

5.4. Purified Blood.

In the Middle Ages, the breast was almost always presented as a maternal symbol rather than a sexualized one.[108] It was because of its positive maternal associations that it derived popularity as a religious symbol. In medieval Christian literature, breasts are depicted as symbols of nurture, and compassion. In religious writing as well as moral texts, the nursing woman's act of feeding an infant with food taken from her own flesh was portrayed as a compassionate act resulting from powerful feelings of love and mercy towards a weak and helpless infant for whom milk is essential for life. Metaphors of breastfeeding were also influenced by the medical understanding which held that the lactation period was an intermediary stage for a child between its foetal stage and when it was perfectly formed. Milk as a symbol was often associated with the ability to shape, form, and perfect while nourishing something small and imperfect. The scientific belief which held that breast milk was purified blood is also reflected in representations of milk's whiteness as a symbol of purity.

5.4.1. Some influential lactation metaphors.

Mary's nursing breast and the milk which nourished the infant Christ, and therefore helped to give life to the Church, were the most frequently used representations of lactation in medieval writing. However, other popular uses of breastfeeding as a symbol include descriptions of God/Christ's relationship with the Church and its people, the "maternal" acts of holy Christians towards other Christians, and the caring instruction meted out by teachers. The roots of breastmilk symbolism extend from both biblical and scholastic traditions.

In the scriptures, milk as a symbol stands for abundance, instruction for the spiritually weak, and purity. In the Hebrew bible, God promises his people a land "flowing with milk and honey."[109] In this context, the milk and honey represent agricultural fertility and the wealth of the land which God offers as a reward. The prophets proclaim that, because his

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[108] For a history of how the breast went from being associated with maternal qualities and, as a result, having great value as a religious symbol, to gradually becoming secularized as an erotic symbol in the Early Modern period, see Miles, *A Complex Delight*.

[109] Cf. Ex 3:8; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; Deut 6:3; Josh 5:6, etc.

laws were not being followed, God has refused to deliver his people to this land.[110] In Christian exegesis, a plenteous flow of milk and honey symbolizes the munificence of God, namely, the heavenly rewards that await the deserving when they leave this earthly life.[111] In the New Testament, Paul utilizes the analogy of breastmilk to explain the necessity of providing a suitable level of spiritual instruction to Christians in their attempts to understand the faith and what it requires of them. He writes to the Corinthians: "I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal."[112] And, again, in the letter to the Hebrews:

> We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.[113]

In the first example, milk is necessary for all people trying to be Christians, since they are weakened by still being trapped in the flesh, and stuck in this infancy as long as they are part of the earthy world; meat is the spiritual food which they must yet strive to secure. In the second use of the metaphor, the accusation that the people need milk and are still infants is meant to be derogatory for the ones receiving it; it is for the people who have yet to learn about righteousness. Paul suggests that those who have greater understanding are the teachers/mothers, who themselves eat the solid food of God's message, and feed it as milk to those who have yet to learn. The apostle Peter also uses the metaphor of milk to describe spiritual learning. He associates milk with purity: "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that

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[110] Ezek 20:14-16.

[111] For example, Saint Augustine argues that, since we ought not value the temporal world, the land of milk an honey was a symbol of the invisible delights of Jerusalem, the mother of us all: "*Profecto nisi terra illa significaret aliquid magnum, quae terra dicebatur fluens lac et mel, per quod visibile sacramentum ad invisibilem gratiam regnumque coelorum duceret eos qui mirabilia ejus intelligebant; nullo modo isti culparentur, quia pro nihilo habuerunt illam terram, cujus temporale regnum etiam nos pro nihilo habere debemus, ut Jerusalem liberam matrem nostram, quae in coelis est, vere desiderabilem diligamus.*" Augustine, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos. CV.*" 22, in PL 37: 1413.

[112] 1 Cor 3:2.

[113] Heb 5:11-13.

the Lord is good."[114] Thus, he teaches that the source of this pure milk is God, and it alone is all the sustenance one would need.

Another source of milk metaphors used by medieval writers came from scholarly culture. In the personification of Philosophy and Grammar as nursing women, lactation becomes an analogy which depicts the passing on of knowledge (milk) that helps to shape and perfect the pupil (infant), and assigns maternal qualities to teachers. Perhaps, the most famous representation of the source of knowledge being a wet nurse was given by Boethius in the allegorical account of his conversation with Lady Philosophy. When she first arrives to help her former "nursling" in his hour of need, she asks: "Are you the man who was nourished upon the milk of my learning, brought up with my food until you had won your way to the power of a manly soul? Surely I had given you such weapons as would keep you safe, and your strength unconquered; if you had not thrown them away."[115] Lady Philosophy calls herself Boethius' nurse but also his physician, and describes her role when he was younger as being the provider of nourishment but also of fortifying tools, and her current task as being restorative.

In the twelfth-century, Alan of Lille composed a feminized embodiment of Grammar, describing her qualities as those of an ideal nurse: she is chaste, yet, her breasts are full as one who has been through pregnancy; her milk provides nourishment to infants who cannot yet feed on solid foods, and slakes their thirst, too; she acts as both father and mother, by doling out punishment with sustenance; with her tools, she shapes and perfects the infant, helping to clean, whiten, and straighten his teeth.[116] In this way, Alan states, she patiently

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[114] 1 Pet 2:1-3.

[115] "*Tum vero totis in me intenta luminibus: tune ille es, ait, qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus nostris educatus alimentis in virilis animi robur evaseras? Atqui talia contuleramus arma quae nisi prior abiecisses invicta te firmitate tuerentur.*" Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolationis*, ed. G. Weinberger (Vienna: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 1935), 4. Translation from Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. W. V. Cooper (London: J. M. Dent, 1902), 5.

[116] *Cum flos uirgineus non deffloretur in illa*
Nec proprium frangat Veneris fractura pudorem.
Sunt tamen in multo lactis torrente natantes.
Mamme, subducti mentite damna pudoris.
Dum suspirat adhuc lactantis ad ubera matris,
Infantem cibat iste cibus liquidoque fouetur,
Quem solidum non pascit adhuc, dum pocula lactis
Lactea delibat etas potuque sub uno
Et cibus et potus in solo lacte resultat.
Asperat illa manum scutica qua punit abusus

imparts words, speech, and an understanding of the grammatical arts to the infant. The image of Grammar as a nurse became commonplace in rhetoricians' descriptions of the early stages of learning language through which every educated person must pass.[117]

5.4.2. Milk as symbol of fertility, compassion, abundance, and instruction, in medieval Christian religious writing.

Bernard of Clairvaux reinterpreted the erotic overtones of the Song of Songs as religious allegory, representing the relationship between God and the individual soul. His interpretation of the allegorical meaning of the breasts, of which it is said, "they are better than wine, and more fragrant than the best perfumes"[118] is based on the maternal qualities associated with the lactating breast. Nevertheless, he argues that the line could be referring either to the breasts of the Bridegroom (Jesus Christ) or to those of the Bride (the individual soul). He suggests three different readings of what the line could mean, based on different meanings that could be drawn from the image of the lactating breast. Bernard's complicated exegesis of the symbols of breasts in the Song of Songs reveals that breastmilk's various associations, with nurture, nourishment, fecundity, and purity, were well-recognized enough that each could contribute to a reasonable interpretation.

Quos de more suo puerilis combibit etas.
Verberibus sic asperat ubera, uerbera mollit
Vberibus. Facto pater est et mater eodem,
Verbere compensat patrem, gerit ubere matrem;
Officio scalpri seruit manus altera, dentes
Liberat a scabie, dum buxum dentis in ipsum
Vertit ebur rursusque suo candore uenustat
Vel si dens aliquis aliorum de grege solus
Deuiet, excessum sub iusta lance recidit.
Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. R. Bossuat (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955), II, vv.390-405. For an English translation see Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus, or the Good and Perfect Man*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 84-6.

[117] See Gary Cestaro's study of the representations of "Lady Grammar" in the Middle Ages. He provides numerous examples of how rhetoricians employed the imagery; for example: "In the *Morale scholarium*, John of Garland… heaps scorn upon the grammars of Alexander of Villedieu and Eberhard of Bethune by claiming that they 'offer poison instead of milk.' Gervase of Melkley (c. 1185-after 1213), whose very name says 'milky meadow' (Gervasius de saltu lacteo'), sings the praises of his teacher, the rhetorician and fruitful *inventor* Jean de Hautvilla, 'whose breasts have nourished him on discipline since he was an uncultured infant.'" Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 43.

[118] Song 1:1-2.

According to the first reading given by Bernard, the breasts of the Bridegroom signify Christ's nurturing and compassionate stance towards Christians. Bernard argues that the phrase "your breasts are better than wine, more fragrant than the sweetest perfumes," could be read as the words of the Bride, speaking words of praise for the breasts of her spouse, as if she were saying, "You nursed me on the sweetness of your breast with such dignity that, when all fear, [which arose] from your kindness not my temerity, was banished, I may venture more boldly than is expedient. Indeed, I act boldly, mindful of your tenderness, [while] forgetting your majesty."[119] Bernard writes that the two breasts of the Bridegroom represent patience and clemency, the "double sweetness" of Jesus, who shows toleration to sinners and mercy to those who repent.[120] He interprets "your breasts are better than wine" as meaning, "The abundance [*pinguedo*] of grace, which flows from your breasts is more suitable to me for my spiritual progress than the bitter rebuke of prelates."[121] Thus, the breasts are symbols of Christ's gentleness towards the spiritually weak, and care for their spiritual development; the food which they provide is a symbol of grace.

However, if we were to read the breasts to be the breasts of the Bride, Bernard claims, they represent copiousness and fertility of the soul, impregnated by the infusion of God's grace. He states that grace "fattens the breast, fills the body's interior spaces [*viscera*] with a flood of piety" so that if the breasts are pressed, "they do not delay in pouring out abundantly the milk of sweet conception."[122] This milk is better than wine because wine, "fills but does not nourish, inflates without edifying, and engorges without comforting."[123] In this reading, milk stands for fecundity and the nutritious, enlightening, and soothing qualities of divine grace.

A final interpretation of the phrase offered by Bernard is that the words are spoken by the attendants of the Bride about her breasts, and have the following meaning: "The spiritual

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[119] "*tu...o sponse, qui in dulcedine uberum tuorum tanta me dignatione lactasti, quatenus omni metu, tui caritate, non mea temeritate, depulso, audeam plus forte quam expediat. Audeo sane, pietatis memor, immemor maiestatis.*" *Sermons sur le Cantique,* "Sermon 9" in Bernard de Clairvaux, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. Leclercq, H. Rochais, and Ch. H. Talbot, vol. 10 (1) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), IX, 3, p. 204.

[120] *Sermons sur le Cantique*, IX, 4, p. 204

[121] "*Pinguedo gratiae, quae de tuis uberibus fluit, efficacior mihi est ad spiritualem provectum quam mordax increpatio prelatorum.*" *Sermons sur le Cantique*, IX, 4, p.206-8

[122] "*...pinguescit pectus, replet viscera pietatis inundatio; et si sit qui premat, lac conceptae dulcedinis ubertim fundere non tardabunt.*" *Sermons sur le Cantique*, IX, 5, 210.

[123] "[*vinum scientiae saecularis*] *implens, non nutriens; inflans, non aedificans; ingurgitans, non confortans.*" *Sermons sur le Cantique*, IX, 5, p. 210.

delights, which your breasts distill for us, excel the pleasure of the flesh which a little while ago held us as if by intoxicating wine."[124] Here, milk stands for the distilled, purified substance of the spirit separated from carnal concerns.

Guerric of Igny, Bernard's pupil and fellow Cistercian, also commented on the Song of Songs in his sermons. In his sermon on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, he interprets the line, "'Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle; who graze among lilies until the day breaks and the shadows retire,"[125] as a reference to the two apostles. He preaches to his monastic brothers:

> Your mother is the bride about whom these things were said, whose breasts were praised by the voice of the bridegroom. Without a doubt, these two breasts of the Church are interpreted to be Peter and Paul, from whom we have drunk, joyfully and abundantly, from the breasts of their consolation....[126]

As evidence that Peter and Paul are what was meant by the Old Testament author, Guerric turns to the edifying words of the New Testament, and to the maternal metaphors of the apostles themselves.[127]

The meaning of the metaphor, according to Guerric, is drawn from associations between breastfeeding and sacrifice, between the full breast and abundance, and between breast milk and purity:

> How full was Paul with spiritual milk is beautifully shown by the wave of that visible milk, which was said to have left his body in the place of blood, when, on this day he was decapitated, he gave his life for those to whom he had given his breasts. Nothing in him was blood, but he was all milk, who thought nothing of carnal things and nothing of himself, but only that he was useful to others. For he had breasts, although he himself was wholly a breast.… [N]ot

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[124] "*Carnis, inquiunt, voluptatem, qua paulo ante, tamquam vino ebriae, tenebamur, vincunt hae, quas tua nobis ubera stillant, deliciae spirituales*." *Sermons sur le Cantique*, IX, 7, p. 212.

[125] Song 4:5-6.

[126] "*Mater vestra est sponsa cui haec dicitur, cuius ubera voce sponsi laudantur. Quae nimirum duo ubera Ecclesiae Petrum et Paulum esse... in qua potamur ab uberibus consolationis eorum satis iucunde et abunde....*" [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, in Guerric d'Igny, *Sermons II*, 380.

[127] "*Ad ubera parvulos Petrus invitabat, quibus dicebat: Sicut modo geniti infantes lac concupiscite. Ubera Paulus praebuerat, quibus dicebat: Lac vobis potum dedi. Et illud: Factus sum in medio vestri sicut nutrix sedens et nutriens filios suos.*" [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 380-82.

> only did he desire to extract his entire spirit for his children, but also to devote his body.[128]

Paul's purity, his concern for spiritual things and disregard for carnal ones, is depicted in the imagery of his blood being milky white. The ampleness of his spiritual gift is such that it overflows like a breast full of milk and is shared with less perfect Christians. This sharing is portrayed as Paul's martyrdom through which he bestows the gift of himself to nourish the Church.

According to Guerric, the milk which fills Peter and Paul comes from Christ and is a kind of spiritual nourishment. Like Bernard, he links this infusion of spiritual milk with overt signs of feminine fertility, the lactating breasts: "For when Christ, returning to heaven, had left his small flock of disciples, he had not yet sent his Spirit by which the interior parts of the saints were to be made fertile and their breasts filled."[129] The purpose of the spiritual milk of the saints is to supply the children of the nascent Church with the "breasts of doctrine" which they lacked.[130] Through the attentive care and diligence of the nursing parents, Christ and the two apostles, the weak body of the Church would become strong and take on the appropriate characteristics: "there remained much care and work before they would be led to perfection and Christ would be formed in them."[131] The nurses require a proper diet to enrich the milk which fortifies their infant charges. Turning again to the Song of Songs, Guerric calls the lilies on which the fawns grazed the perfect milk-producing food and because of their pure whiteness, sweet fragrance, and medicinal power:

> What are lilies if not the just, who sprout forth like a lily and flower unfadingly before God with such whiteness in the sanctity of their body and purity of their heart, such fragrance of their reputation, and such medicinal

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[128] "*Quem plenus autem lacte dedundaverit spiritali, pulchre significatum est unda illius lactis visibilis, quod de corpore ipsius fertur exisse loco sanguinis, cum decollatus hodierna die pro illis quibus dabat mamillam dedit et animam. Plane nihil in eo sanguineum, sed totum lacteum, qui nihil carnale nihil suum cogitabat, sed tantum quod aliis utile erat; Nec tam habebat ubera quam ipse totus uber erat ....non modo spiritum suum desideraret totum filiis immulgere, sed et corpus impendere*." [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 382.

[129] "*Cun enim Christus rediens in coelum reliquisset pusillum gregem discipulorum, necdumque misisset Spiritum suum, quo erant fetanda viscera et implenda ubera sanctorum...*" [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 382.

[130] "*uberibus doctrinae*." [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 382-84.

[131] "*multumque supererat curae et laboris, donec adducerentur ad perfectum et formaretur in eis Christus*." [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 384.

> power in their work and speech? For it is a tolerable food for the faithful soul to see around itself so many lilies blossoming with such beauty and grace....[132]

In his description of spiritual milk, Guerric incorporates elements drawn from medical concerns about breastfeeding, namely, its ability to transfer onto the nursing child qualities of the nurse, and also the qualities of the food which she consumes.

William of Saint Thierry, also built upon the symbolic power of breastmilk. Using the metaphor in his contemplative writing, William stayed close to the metaphor of milk as elementary instruction used by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.[133] However, he expands on the imagery, picturing himself as the infant, not yet fully developed, and depicting Christ as the nursing mother:

> For, since I have not yet progressed beyond the elementary stage of sensory imagination, you will allow and will be pleased if my still-undeveloped soul dwells naturally on your lowliness by means of mental picturing.... It was not the least of the chief reasons for your incarnation that your babes in the Church, who still needed your milk rather than solid food, who are not strong enough spiritually to think of you in your own way, might find in you a form not unfamiliar to themselves.[134]

This Pauline use of the milk metaphor highlights one of the central elements of the metaphor, which was depicting the maternal care of God, or the holy teacher of God's word, towards one who is spiritually yet an infant. William humbles himself to the role of the infant so that by surrendering himself to Christ he can hope to take on more of Christ's qualities.

Aelred of Rievaulx, like his eminent companions in the Cistercian order, found a richness of metaphorical meanings in breast milk. However, his use of the metaphor was somewhat different than that of Bernard, Guerric, or William. He did not employ the metaphor of breastfeeding in order to describe the spiritual fertility of Peter and Paul, or the compassion of Christ, but, rather, in order to describe to his fellow Cistercians the qualities of the Virgin Mary which they should strive to imitate. He drew upon the Song of Songs,

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[132] "*Quid lilia nisi iusti, qui jerminant sicut lilium et florent immarcescibiliter ante Dominum; quorum tantus candor in sanctimonia corporis et cordis puritate, tante fragrantia in opinione, tam medicinalis virtus in opere et sermone*? *Nam mediocre pabulumn istud fideli animae videre circa se tot lilia tanta venustate et gratia florentia*…" [*De Petro et Paulo*] *Sermo Secundus*, 390.

[133] 1 Corinthians 3:2.

[134] *Meditation Nine* in William of St Thierry, *On Contemplating God, Prayer, and Meditations*, 152.

specifically, the line which reads: "Your lips are a dripping honeycomb, honey and milk are under your tongue"[135] and Paul's much quoted line from Corinthians in which he compares his teaching to feeding milk to infants not yet able to eat solid food.[136] Aelred first describes how Mary is the mother of us all, using an analogy based on scientific understanding of milk production in puerperal women:

> Now let us see what sort of milk we have received from her. The Word of God, the Son of God, the Wisdom of God, is *bread* and he is *solid food*. Accordingly, only those who were strong, that is, the angels—ate of him. We who were little were not able to taste this food because it was solid....What happened then? This *bread* entered into the womb of the Blessed Virgin and there it became milk. What kind of milk? The kind we are able to suck.[137]

Like William of St. Thierry, Aelred reiterates the idea that milk is the wisdom of God in a form which is available for human consumption, namely, through the humanity of Christ. He explains that the maternal body, Mary's body, acts as the conduit through which the divine food passes before becoming something which humans can ingest. Moreover, Aelred explains that milk is "the sign of motherly charity" and symbolizes "compassion."[138] He preaches that the significance of this is a lesson which he and his brothers should internalize: "Therefore, dearest brothers, let us imitate the ever blessed Mary as much as we can. Let us practice holy meditation and kindly compassion towards our neighbor, like *milk and honey*."[139] In this profound message of Marian devotion, Aelred encourages his fellow monks to emulate the lactating maternal body and ingest spiritual food, in the form of pious meditation, and share its purified form, as milk and honey, with others.

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[135] Song of Songs 4:11.

[136] 1 Corinthians 3:2.

[137] "*Nunc quale lac de ipsa sumpsimus, videamus. Verbum Dei, Filius Dei, Sapientia Dei, panis est et solidus cibus est. Et ideo de illo soli illi qui fortes erant, id est angeli, manducabant. Nos, qui parvi eramus, non potuimus cibum istum gustare, quia solidus erat…. Quid ergo factum est? Venit iste panis in uterum beatae Virginis et ibi factus est lac. Et quale lac? Quale nos sugere possumus.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 23.9, 186. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 321.

[138] "*Lac est signum maternae caritatis… per lac intelligimus compassionem.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 23.20, 188. Cf. Translation in Aelred of Rievaulx, *Liturgical Sermons*, 325.

[139] "*Ideo, fratres carissimi, imitemur beatissimam Mariam quantum possumus. Sint in nobis sancta meditatio et pia erga invicem compassio, quasi mel et lac.*" Ibid., 23.22, 189. Translation from, Aelred of Rievaulx, *Liturgical Sermons*, 326.

Lactation as a religious allegory is also found in the writing of Adam of Perseigne, a French Cistercian writing in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In one of his letters, Adam described Christ's body as a source of spiritual food. Adam writes,

> [The infant Christ] was laid in a manger. What do we mean by that but that the food of our souls has been laid on the altar? For the manger represents that altar which feeds holy beings with the sacred body of Christ. These are the things by which the love of God is shown to us. These are the things by which our love is kindled and fed.[140]

In this analogy, Adam depicts Christ's act of making himself food as a sacrificial act. Adam continues, saying that we must drink the blood which Christ shed during his sacrifice: "See now that from the body of the Lamb flow five most needful streams.… Come, dear friend, let us drink with joy from the Saviour's fount."[141] Adam portrays the individual soul's drinking of the flow of grace as a suckling infant. He asks, "Why do we not at once suck the breasts of [Christ's] wounds?"[142] He creates a parallel between the wounds of Christ and the image of the abundant breast of Mary, which, in the same letter, he describes as "breasts full of heaven [which] strengthen by their unfailing sweetness and are never without a throng who suck them."[143] Through his sacrifice, Jesus is like Mary, "the compassionate mother herself [who] is wont not to deny herself to those who suck."[144] The image of "the breasts of his wounds," thus, serves to convey the message of Christ's loving sacrifice and boundless compassion.

In the writing of the fourteenth-century Benedictine monk, known as the "Monk of Farne," we find another example of the symbolic comparison between Christ's wounds and maternal breasts. In his meditations on the crucifixion of Christ, he compares him to a mother: "He stretches out his hands to embrace us, bows down his head to kiss us, and opens his side to give us suck; and though it is blood which he offers us to suck, we believe that it is health-giving and sweeter than honey and the honey comb."[145] The monk links Christ's "maternity" with humility and mercy, and his "milk" with medicine. He calls Christ a physician, who "dost bleed that I may have a drink," and through whose embrace "I shall be

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[140] Adam of Perseigne, *Epistola XVII*. Adam of Perseigne, *The Letters of Adam of Perseigne*, 76.
[141] *Ibid*., 83.
[142] *Ibid*., 84.
[143] *Ibid*., 77.
[144] *Ibid*.
[145] *The Monk of Farne: The Meditations of a Fourteenth Century Monk*, ed. Hugh Farmer, trans. A Benedictine of Stanbrook (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 65.

cleansed from all impurity of body and soul."[146] The monk also writes that the breasts of Christ transmit both life-giving drink and characteristics of the divine parent. He calls Christ the "living spring" and says that those who "drink from the breast of Christ… [are] drawn thence into the body of Christ."[147] The monk argues that, just as Eve who was taken from the flesh of Adam, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," all people can become part of the flesh of Christ by abiding in him.[148] He calls Christ his nursemaid: "It is the greatest delight to me to suck the breast of the king, who has been my hope from the bosom of my mother, and upon whom I was cast from the womb."[149]

The religious metaphors of male lactation, which encouraged monks to imitate Mary, or Peter and Paul, in compassionate "breastfeeding," were expressed as physical realities in legends of lactating male saints. The Irish saints, Finchua and Colman Ela, both embodied the allegory of the nursing male. Finchua was an Irish holy man who was said to have nursed the future saint, Finntan. According to the legend, after Finntan's mother, a queen, gives birth suddenly while seeking protection from the holy man, she sends the child to be baptized by him. He takes the child, after baptizing him, and sends the mother away. Miraculously, the holy man's right breast produces milk on which he suckles the infant. The hagiographer tells that, "That boy throve as he would not have thriven with his own mother if he had had nine wet-nurses under him."[150] The full breast of the holy man is a symbol of holiness and spiritual abundance which are transferred from the man to the infant.

A similar story is found in the legend of Colman Ela. In the story, the saint's uncle reveals that their kin's woman has given birth to two sons in an incestuous relationship. The uncle wishes to kill them but is afraid to bring the shame of their deaths upon himself. Colman replies, "give them to me to nourish and to foster... for I have two paps such as no saint ever had before, a pap with milk and a pap with honey, and these I will give to them (to suck)."[151] The two sons which Colman raises are called his pupils whom he raised on his spiritual teachings. This legend draws upon the biblical precedent which associates milk and

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[146] *Ibid*., 74-5.
[147] Monk of Farne, *The Meditations of a Fourteenth Century Monk*, ed. Dom Hugh Farmer, trans. a Benedictine of Stanbrook (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 73.
[148] *The Monk of Farne: The Meditations of a Fourteenth Century Monk*, 73.
[149] Monk of Farne, *The Meditations of a Fourteenth Century Monk*, 73.
[150] Whitley Stokes, ed., *Lives of saints, from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 237.
[151] Charles Plummer, ed., *Lives of Irish Saints: Edited from the original Mss. with introduction*, II vols., vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 168.

honey with fecundity, but also seems to be an allusion to Paul's maternal metaphor in which milk stands for spiritual instruction. Such male lactation as is found in the *vitae* of these two Irish saints is rare in hagiography compared to the metaphorical tradition of the breasts of Christ or of the saints on which they seem to be based.

5.4.3. Purified Blood: Conclusions.

From the examples presented above, it can be seen that breastmilk, unlike the blood which flowed directly from the uterus, conveys only positive meanings when used symbolically. Although, in medical and moral writing about breastfeeding women, concern was sometimes expressed that the milk could harm the child by passing on the traits of an unhealthy, immoral, or otherwise unfit mother, in the analogies of lactation in men, the metaphorical milk symbolizes a wholly beneficial substance which is produced, invariably, by praiseworthy male subjects.

Even though it was always used as a positive symbol, breastmilk still was attributed a range of meanings. The writers draw upon milk's whiteness, the teaching that it is blood that has been refined in the breast, and the fact that it is the food of innocent babes when they make it a symbol for purity. They use milk as a symbol of fertility, which stems from the fact that in women milk begins to flow only after they have given birth. For this reason, too, milk symbolism is associated particularly with motherhood, and was used to convey onto male subjects ideal qualities which a mother ought to possess. Thus, the lactating breast often symbolized abstract qualities such as compassion, care, and instruction. Usually, the male "breast" is an ideal breast, comparable to the Virgin Mary's breast and its idealized qualities of ceaseless abundance and spiritual purity.

5.5. Invisible Blood.

In this section, I explore the ambiguity of meaning associated with the blood of birth as it was expressed in the rituals of postpartum purification by looking at medieval Jewish and Christian representations of the practice of couvade—the custom by which a man takes the new mother's place during and following birth and acts out the role of the new mother.

The anthropologist, Mary Douglas, has studied the custom of the couvade which is present in a variety of different cultures. She emphasizes that the ritual changes from culture to culture, and over time, in order to match social beliefs.[152] Thus, it is frequently both a public and symbolic act. In the imitation of birth, the man performing the couvade must adopt certain characteristics and behaviours associated with childbirth by his society as a group.

In the Jewish and Christian imaginings of what it would mean for a man to adopt the maternal role and play the central role in postpartum customs, we can see differences in what the authors from each religion recognize as significant elements of the birth rituals connected with the couvade, and in how they view the male usurpers of the maternal role. The ways in which the couvade is depicted are suggestive of the concerns that the authors, and perhaps their audiences, may have had concerning their own society's birth customs. In all of the accounts of the couvade examined here, by both Christian and Jewish authors, the roots of the tradition of ritual separation in Levitical laws concerning the impurity of the blood of birth are not addressed and the reasons for the lying-in of the male "mothers" are not given, except for a cursory nod to tradition. This suggests, perhaps, a trend in the cultures of both religions, in the late medieval period, towards "cleaning up" the custom from its associations with postpartum blood.

5.5.1. Medieval Jewish and Christian postpartum practices.

In the Hebrew bible, the book of Leviticus sets down the rules that God's people must follow, and defines the boundaries between "clean" and "unclean." The book specifies that bodily emissions, particularly from the genitals, rendered one ritually unclean, and it details the process by which one can pass out of impurity and reenter normal social activities. The rules regarding a woman and her child following childbirth are significant as they have been discussed and debated by many biblical commentators and theologians for centuries.

Leviticus 12 explains that following childbirth, the new mother and her infant are considered unclean. The Judaic law states that after giving birth to a daughter, a woman was unclean for fourteen days, during which time she was isolated from contact with other people

[152] Mary Douglas, "Couvade and Menstruation," *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1975), 60-1.

for fear of spreading her pollution; then, she had to wait in "the blood of her purification" a further sixty-six days before she could reenter the Temple to be purified. The period of segregation given to a woman who has given birth to a son, however, was shorter—only seven days plus thirty-three.[153] This law had its analogue in Leviticus 15, which prohibited women from any contact with their husbands while they were menstruating and for a period of seven days thereafter. The initial periods that a woman was deemed unclean after childbirth, seven and fourteen days, are analogous to the period of exclusion for the monthly flow of uterine blood. The period of segregation following this indicated that a Hebrew woman remained polluted by the blood of birth for a longer period than from the blood of her regular periods. During the time of her so-called impurity, the new mother could not enter the sanctuary or touch holy objects. The end of the period was signaled by an act of penance, in which she would make an offering at the Temple.

Jewish commentators have interpreted these passages in various ways. Some believed that the prohibitions on women during and after menstruation and parturition were related to women's sinfulness. Many rabbinical authors stated simply that women were required to give a sin offering because they were sinners.[154] However, for some rabbis, even as female blood loss was situated in the context of Eve's transgression, it was understood to be a covenantal act; that is to say that it belonged to the Covenant between humankind and God. An ancient collection of rabbinical interpretations on Genesis gives the reason for the existence of menstrual blood as follows: "Because woman spilled the first man's blood, therefore to her was handed over the religious duty involving menstruation."[155] In this view, menstruation was related to sin and punishment; however, it also provided a religious duty to follow which would expiate women's sin and signify their relationship with God. The medieval rabbi Bekhor Shor expressed this: "the blood of menstruation that women observe by telling their husbands of the onset of their periods is for them covenantal blood [equivalent to the blood

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[153] Lev 12:2-5.

[154] Linda S. Schearing, "Double Time... Double Trouble: Gender sin and Leviticus 12," in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff, Robert A. Kugler, and Sarah Smith Bartel (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 435.

[155] *Midrash Genesis Rabba. 1, 17:7r* quoted in Kathleen O'Grady, "The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood*, ed. Kristin DeTroyer, et al. (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 5.

of circumcision in men]."[156] Thus, by taking care to follow certain restrictions associated with female blood loss, women could exhibit servitude to God. These restrictions were enumerated by one thirteenth-century Jewish religious scholar, as follows:

> Therefore, a woman in a state of *niddah* [i.e. while menstruating and before completing the time of her impurity] may not wear eye makeup or jewelry. A woman who observes her state of *niddah* properly will not cook for her husband, she will not bake, she will not dance, she will not prepare the bed, and she will not pour water from one vessel to another, because she is in a state of impurity and she can transmit impurity. And she is forbidden to enter a synagogue until she has immersed in water. The saliva of a *niddah* transmits impurity. A *niddah* who has sexual relations with her husband causes her sons to be stricken with leprosy, even for twenty generations.[157]

The restrictions attempt to prevent the spread of contamination by the woman in her state of impurity, giving particular weight to the threat of the spread of pollution through sexual contact.

Some medieval rabbis suggested that the prohibition on sexual intercourse only extended to the first seven to fourteen days of a postpartum woman's exclusion, while, in the following period, she could engage in her wifely duties although she still had to avoid contact with sacred objects.[158] The reason for this limited period of abstinence was likely related to Jewish adherence to God's command to "be fruitful." Susan Roll suggests that the isolation of new mothers allowed for the imperative of "cultic purity" rituals concerned with the polluting effects of bodily emissions, while also ensuring that sexual intercourse "remained a holy act."[159] However, the medieval Jewish practices concerning the period of postpartum abstinence varied. According to sources from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ashkenaz, Jewish women followed the Levitical timeline, immersing themselves in the *mikveh* twice,

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[156] Bekhor Shor quoted in Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 196.

[157] From *Sefer HaRoqeah HaGadol* of R. Elazar of Worms, excerpted in Laurence Fine, *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 140. On the history Jewish understanding of menstruation and the state of *niddah* see, Evyatar Marienberg, *Niddah: Lorsque les juifs conceptualisent la menstruation* (Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 2003).

[158] Schearing, "Double Time... Double Trouble: Gender sin and Leviticus 12," 435.

[159] Susan K Roll, "The Old Rite of the Churching of Women after Childbirth," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood*, ed. Kristen De Troyer, et al. (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 119.

and avoided sexual relations until the second period had concluded.[160] By the end of the Middle Ages, the period of postpartum impurity was more or less standardized at forty or eighty days depending on the sex of the child.[161]

The rabbinical authors endeavoured, in various ways, to reconcile the sexual restrictions prescribed in Levitical law with the divine directive for married couples to reproduce. We find in medieval Jewish religious writing an insistence that the period of abstinence should be viewed as a penitential act rather than as a break from a wife's sexual (and household) obligations. Medieval rabbis repeated the teaching of one of the famed rabbis from the Roman era, Simeon bar Yochai, which explained that a woman had to give an offering after the end of her postpartum exclusion because of the sinful vow, which she invariably would have made during the pain of childbirth, that she will never again have intercourse with her husband.[162] The early thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim* (*The Book of the Pious*) tells of a woman who refused to immerse herself in the *mikveh*, and purify herself so that she could resume marital relations, in order to pressure her husband into agreeing to her request that he become more generous in charitable acts. Though the woman is praised for her pious intentions, the rabbi in the account advises her to attempt to persuade her husband through words, and not by refusing her marital obligations, which would cause them both to stray away from following God's commandment to reproduce.[163]

The thought of Christian theologians on the practice of ritual exclusion and rites of purification which were laid out in Leviticus 12 was, perhaps, even more complicated than that of the rabbis. There is evidence that the Hebrew law was practiced in the early church even though Christ's sacrifice was interpreted as heralding a new covenant which had overwritten the Mosaic code.[164] Christian exegetical writers reinterpreted the laws symbolically, suggesting that the physical impurity of blood which they described in fact signified moral impurity, and referring to Christ's healing of the haemorrhaging woman as an indication of the end of the old purity laws.[165] In the seventh century, Gregory the Great

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[160] Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish family life in medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 105.
[161] *Ibid*.
[162] *Ibid*., 102.
[163] From *Sefer Hasidim* composed by several German-Jewish Pietists, excerpted in Fine, *Judaism in Practice*, 139.
[164] Roll, "The Old Rite of the Churching of Women after Childbirth," 118.
[165] See above, page 98.

argued that if a woman wanted to enter a church immediately after giving birth, she should be allowed to do so. Gregory insisted that the sin involved was in the sexual act which led to the conception of the infant and not related to the pain and blood of birth, which were merely the punishment.[166] However, he did not go so far as to insist that women rush to church following the birth, but rather, praised women who submitted to voluntary segregation, incited by their own pious veneration of the church. Moreover, Gregory maintained that, although the woman may approach the church, she should not approach her husband for sexual relations until her infant is weaned, preserving the rule of abstinence that she would follow during her regular menstrual periods.[167]

The medieval penitential books reflect this framing of the postpartum period of purification as penance for the sexual act, while revealing a continued apprehension concerning the polluting qualities of uterine blood. They reveal that a period of segregation following childbirth, generally forty days regardless of the child's sex, was customary, and frequently, they prohibit a woman's reentry into the church and sexual contact with her husband, until the appropriate time has passed.[168] Gratian's *Decretum*, however, incorporated Gregory's position that a woman should be allowed to reconcile herself with the church immediately after childbirth, if she should wish, although she was not required to return to her conjugal duties until forty days had passed.[169] By the late Middle Ages, the Christian ritual of "churching" as it came to be called, had been reinterpreted as a rite of thanksgiving following childbirth. In recent years, historians have suggested that this period of postpartal purification, although its origins were in the Levitical blood taboos, was also a positive ritual for Christian mothers, providing a needed break from the domestic and sexual duties imposed on wives, and acting as a rite of thanksgiving and public celebration of maternity.[170] However, the implication that a woman was made "unclean" by birth is evident in many of the expressions of support for this custom. The historian Becky Lee has made note of the

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[166] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, 43.
[167] *Ibid*., 44-45.
[168] Roll, "The Old Rite of the Churching of Women after Childbirth," 123-24.
[169] Gratian, *Decretum*, D.5.C.2-3. For an English translation see, Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, 17. This position was endorsed in the Council of Trier in the thirteenth century, Roll, "The Old Rite of the Churching of Women after Childbirth," 124.
[170] Becky Lee, *'Women ben Purifyid of her Childeryn': The purification of women after childbirth in Medieval England*, PhD. Thesis (Toronto, 1998); Paula Rieder, *On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100-1500*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

attitudes expressed by some penitential writers towards unpurified women which incorporate fears of the dangers of menstrual blood into their understanding of the ritual:

> [Thomas Chobham insists that] it is "most shameful to lie with a puerperal woman" while she suffers a "flow of menstrual blood" because hers is an issue of "impure humour." William of Pagula in his *Summa summarum* asserts that intercourse while a woman is nursing breeds infirm and leprous offspring. John of Kent's *Summa de penitentia* warns that intercourse with an unpurified woman can cause bad things to happen to the couple, including infertility and weakness.[171]

In Lee's examples, we can see how the Christian penitential writers were reiterating the Hebrew labeling of the blood of birth as ritually unclean, but couching their interdiction of uterine blood in scientific "facts" concerning the biological dangers that it posed.

Some significant variation is immediately evident in the treatment of postpartum customs in Jewish and Christian religious writing. Jewish theologians expressed a greater concern for the impurity of blood as a religious decree; however, throughout the ages, as the rabbinical literature reveals, there were repeated attempts, apparently prompted by the lay community, to negotiate and better understand the limits on how long the blood impurity could restrict the sexual obligations of wives. Christian theologians, on the other hand, notionally rejected the belief that women were made impure by the blood of birth. Yet, as the customs of segregation and reintegration of new mothers continued to be practiced in Christian communities, they came to explain the practices in ways which denied the continued authority of any Old Laws which went against Christ's teaching of inclusion, and yet provided support for the actions of the pious who upheld the practices. The ritual segregation of the new mother from Church and community was reinvented as a personal act of contemplation and penitence associated with the moment of conception and the sexual act which long preceded the birth. However, belief in the impurity of postpartum blood remained in some of the Christian religious writers' calls for the abstinence of puerperal women, which were now reinforced by medical concerns for the health of offspring, rather than religious fears.

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[171] Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth: A window onto medieval perceptions of women," 46.

5.5.2. The couvade in Jewish and Christian literature from the late Middle Ages.

In medieval descriptions of the couvade, we find reflections on the process of lying-in, or the segregation of mothers after birth, presented outside of the usual context. In these accounts, the customs are being carried out by men, and, moreover, being performed in societies outside of the Christo- and Judeo-European ones to which the authors of the accounts belong. Thus, they present images of the postpartum rituals which are removed from the actual practices carried out by women and from the physical realities of birth. As a result, they provide an opportunity for the exploration of tensions which spring from the custom's roots in cultural anxieties concerning women, sexuality, and blood.

In the widely popular account of his travels in the East, recorded shortly before 1300, Marco Polo describes the ritual of the couvade as it was performed in the province of Kardanan. He writes:

> They have a peculiar custom when a child is born. As soon as a woman gives birth and has risen from her bed and washed and swaddled the infant, the husband immediately takes the place she has vacated. The wife lays the child beside him and family, friends and relatives visit to pass on their congratulations. The mother meanwhile takes care of the household, carries food and drink to her husband in bed and for forty days, suckles the infant at his side.[172]

Although the actual course of Marco Polo's voyage is questionable, and his accounts of the lands and peoples are often romanticized and include fragments of other legends, it is very possible that he did indeed come across the couvade in his travels. We can read other accounts of the rite in Eastern literature, such as the account of the peoples of India written by the Arab writer, Alberuni, composed over two centuries earlier.[173] Marco Polo's depiction

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[172] Translation from Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: The Incredible Journey*, translated by Robin Brown (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005), 134. Cf. Marco Polo, *Il milione*, ed. Giovanni Battista Baldelli Boni, vol. I (Florence: Da' torchi di G. Pagani, 1827), 270.

[173] Alberuni (973- 1047), a Muslim scholar who studied the customs and scientific and philosophical learning of India, noted that, amongst the Hindu people, when a child was born, attention was paid to the father, rather than the mother. Alberuni, *India: An account of the religion, philosophy, literature, geography, chronology,*

of the couvade, albeit short, is remarkably detailed about the features of the ritual, which could suggest that he is supplementing his account with his knowledge of European customs surrounding lying-in after birth. One element above all suggests this: his statement that the ritual is carried out for forty days. Medieval Christian women were often "churched" after forty days, in imitation of the Virgin Mary, who according to the Gospel of Luke, brought Jesus to present him to the Temple after forty days, as prescribed by Mosaic Law. He only mentions briefly the ritual of the couvade, and does so using the objective language of a detached observer; however Marco Polo's further description of the Kardanan people does not hold back judgment. He portrays them as superstitious, primitive, and deluded. Their remarkable birth rituals add to the impression of the strangeness and marvelousness which distinguish the Eastern cultures in Polo's work and which helped it earn such popularity.

The adventure romance, *Aucassin and Nicolette*, first recorded in the thirteenth century, includes a fictionalized account of a traveler's encounter with a society which practices the couvade. The tale exhibits Arabic influences in its style and in the name of the hero, Aucassin;[174] however, the written version which is known to us is a Christian one, composed in France. It is an account of the love story of a young prince and a Muslim slave woman, who was actually a noble kidnapped as an infant, sold to slavery, and raised in Christian lands. The title characters, in their quest to be together, find themselves traveling to strange lands and undergoing many marvelous adventures. Perhaps the most interesting, and absurd, episode in their tale is when they come upon the land of Torelore and discover that its queen is waging war while its king lies in childbed. Upon confronting the customs of this topsy-turvy world, where the king not only neglects his role as head of his family, but also puts aside his kingly duties by entering into a period of exclusion until he has recovered from childbirth and been churched, the hero's response is to enforce his own order upon sexes. Aucassin, calling the king a madman, beats and berates him until he promises that no man will ever give birth in his kingdom again.[175]

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astronomy, customs, laws and astrology of India about A.D. 1030, ed. Edward C. Sachau (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company, 1964), I: 181.

[174] Dorothee Metlitzi, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 245.

[175] "[Aucassin] demande u li rois estoit, et on li dist qu'il gissoit d'enfent. / <<Et u est dont se femme?>> / Et on li dist qu'ele est en lost et si i avoit mené to cias du païs; et Aucassins l'oï, si li vint a grant mervelle; et vint au palais et descendi entre lui et s'amie; et ele tint son ceval et il monta u palais, espee çainte, et erra tant qu'il vint en le canbre u li rois gissoit.

In the couvade, the man imitating the act of giving birth must adopt certain characteristics and behaviours deemed maternal by his society. In this fictional account, the King of Torelore states that he is following a custom carried out by his ancestors: "I'm lying-in with a son; When my months have been completed, and I am fully healed, then I will go to hear mass, just as my ancestors did." These customs described by the king would have been recognizable to the medieval European audience as the period of lying-in and the ceremony of purification. The king suggests that the period of segregation is required for his body to "heal" from birth and he associates it with religious piety when he explains that it will conclude with his attendance in mass.

Blood is never mentioned in this tale, yet it is fundamentally connected to the ritual enacted by the king. For the king of Torelore, as for the romance's thirteenth-century audience, the ritual of lying-in following childbirth carried symbolic significance. By separating himself, with his child, and renouncing his political duties, the king links his body to the taboos surrounding uterine blood, intercourse, and childbirth. He associates himself with impurities of women's blood, rather than the blood of the battlefield, and withdraws himself into the intimate world of the bedchamber rather than participating in the public one beyond it. Aucassin's reaction, to inflict a beating upon the king, pushes the king to his final, and extreme feminization as he is put into the submissive role usually reserved for women

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XXIX. Or se cante.
En le canbre entre Aucassins,
Li cortois et le gentis;
Il est venus dusque au lit,
Alec u li rois se gist;
Par devant lui s'arestit,
si parla; oés que dist:
<<Di va! Fau, que fais tu ci?>>
Dist li rois: <<Je gis d'un fil;
Quant mes mois sera conplis
Et je sarai bien garis,
Dont irai le messe oïr,
Si com mes ancestre fist,
Et me grant guerre esbaudir
Encontre mes anemis;
Nel lairai mie.>>
XXX. Or Dient Et Contes Et Fabloient.
Quant Aucassins oï ensi le roi parler, il prist tox les dras qui sor lui extoient, si les houla aval le canbre; il vit derienr lui un baston, il le prist, si torne, si fiert, si le bati tant que mort le dut avoir. / <<Ha! Biax sire, fait li rois, que me demandés vos? Avés vos le sens dervé, qui en me maison me batés?>> / <<Par le cuer Diu!>> fait Aucassins, <<Mauvais fix a putain, je vos coirai, se vos ne m'afiés que ja mais hom en vo tere d'enfant ne gerra.>> / Il li afie…" Mario Roques, ed., *Aucassin et Nicolette: Chantefable du XIIIe siècle*, 2e ed. (Paris: Librarie Honoré Champion, 1969), 28-30.

and children, rather than taking part actively in man-to-man combat. In this manner, the king gives in to Aucassin's demands to restore the natural order by promising that the men of his kingdom will leave childbirth to women, and enacts his re-masculinization with his return to the battlefield to replace his wife who has been fighting there on his behalf. Interestingly, the battlefield of Torelore is bloodless, as Aucassin discovers, and the battles are fought with vegetables and cheese.

We find another description of the couvade in one Hebrew account of the adventures of Alexander the Macedonian, which is recorded in a manuscript written around 1325. Unlike many Greek and Latin Alexandrian romances, the Hebrew manuscript ignores almost entirely the quasi-historical details of Alexander's life and instead weaves together various fantastic stories.[176] The account of the lying-in of the King of Yovila is, as far as I know, unique to this version of the life of Alexander. The story bears similarities to both the story of the King of Torelore, and Marco Polo's description of the Kardanan men, yet focuses on different aspects of the couvade ritual.

The story goes as follows. Alexander arrives at the land of Yovila where women, not men, wear trousers. He learns that, in this land, women lay in their tents for two months following childbirth, and then their husbands take their place for an additional four months. Moreover, Alexander's request to meet with the king is denied since he is confined to his tent with a newborn son. When he hears of this, Alexander laughs with scorn and commands his troops to "come with me to see the king of Yovila who bore a son and is lying in his tent."[177] After they barge into the king's tent, where the queen is serving the king, lying in childbed, Alexander's first question is to demand to know who rules and judges the people in the king's absence, and he learns that the king's own dog takes his place. He then asks whether the king can come to his wife during the six months, and he is told that if a man and woman have sexual relations during the postpartum period, their eyebrows fall out and by this they are incriminated. When the king's men, sent out to look for people whose eyebrows have fallen out, find them, they are burned to death at the order of the king and their ashes are sent out to the boundaries of the king's land. The king, himself, however, is allowed to come to his wife after two months, but only once every week. At the end of the king's lying-in period,

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[176] Rosalie Reich, "Foreword," in *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian: A medieval Hebrew manuscript text and translation with literary and historical commentary* (New York, Ktav Publishing House, Inc. 1972) xii.
[177] Rosalie Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian*, 95.

he prepares a great banquet and all his people come bearing gifts. Upon hearing this tale, Alexander says: "From the day I left Egypt and passed through many lands I have never witnessed such a strange custom." [178]

Like Aucassin, Alexander finds himself in a topsy-turvy land; here, women dress as men (according to thirteenth-century European dress codes), men share in the postpartum confinement, and dogs act as rulers. Alexander's main concerns are whether the king is neglecting his patriarchal duties, as judge and ruler, and whether he is able to have intercourse with his wife.

This account of the couvade contains reflections of the lying-in period which would have been of particular interest to a Jewish audience. Unlike the Christian ritual, medieval Jewish customs had women purified in two parts. [179] The women of Yovila undergo a similar two step process, in which the mother, after two months, is able to resume her regular tasks and leave the tent, but she returns to the marriage bed only after another four months, in which time her husband takes her place in the tent. The Alexander myth also emphasizes the effect of the segregation on marital relations. The rabbinical literature concerning the postpartum restrictions suggests that the requirement of sexual abstinence raised a number of questions, particularly, in light of the divine commandment to procreate. Alexander's curiosity about the complicated sexual restrictions of the people of Yovila is a significant aspect of the tale. This raises questions about whether this depiction of couvade rituals was meant to contain a satirical reference at the Jewish customs following birth. In Yovila, the postpartum period is six months, which may be an exaggeration of the forty to eighty days ordered by Jewish law. The consequences of breaking the laws concerning sexual relations in Yovila are severe, and are carried out by the people themselves, rather than by a divine power, although the law-breakers are indentified by their eyebrows which fall out by, apparently, supernatural means. This seems to be an unhallowed rendering of the Judaic law which is enforced by God and priestly representatives in the Hebrew biblical accounts. Blood is never mentioned in this tale, as was the case in the story from *Aucassin and Nicolette*. Without the explanatory power of a pollution taboo, the laws and punishments of the people of Yovila seem unfounded and arbitrary –the strangest customs that Alexander has ever seen.

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[178] Rosalie Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian*, 97.

[179] Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) 105.

5.5.3. Invisible blood: Conclusions.

In each of the descriptions of the couvade examined here, the father's enactment of the maternal role following birth is represented by segregation and a reprieve from certain duties. In both of the fictional accounts, the man performing the couvade is a king, and the travelers express concern about the ruler leaving his duties, military and judicial, during the lying-in period. In the romance of *Aucassin and Nicolette*, the reason for the lying-in period in the couvade is imprecisely defined, but is related to the need to heal from childbirth, and religious convention. In the Hebrew *Alexander*, no reason is given for the ritual separation; however, it is strongly linked to sexual prohibitions, and is regulated by both supernatural and legal forces. In both contexts, the element of blood pollution which was at the root of the maternal rituals which were being emulated remains unspoken.

5.6. Bad Blood.

Christian religious writings frequently follow a biblical precedent in which the female body and its menstrual and postpartum bleeding were used as negative referents. For example, these feminine issues were referred to in explanations of uncontrollable physiological phenomena endured by men, and, even, in the development of abstract analogies about earthly weakness in human experience. This section will examine how the figures of the "menstruating" male Christian and the "menstruating" male Jew were constructed, what qualities they were said to share with the menstruating woman, and what purpose the comparison served.

5.6.1. "Menstruating" Christian Men.

Scriptural representations of menstrual and postpartum bleeding came primarily from the purification laws in the book of Leviticus,[180] and in the revisiting of these laws in stories

[180] Lev 12; Lev 15:19-32.

from the Gospels, such as the accounts of Mary's purification following the birth of Christ[181] and of Jesus' healing of the woman suffering from a uterine haemorrhage.[182] Although Christians did not adhere to the ancient rules regarding the uncleanness of menstruating and postpartum women, they continued to attach symbolic significance to the designation of impurity onto uterine blood. This is evident in literal comparisons between menstrual bleeding and male seminal emissions which were made by canonists and penitential writers, and in symbolic analogies based on uterine blood found in examples of figurative exegesis of scripture. In both cases, however, the accepted medical teaching of menstruation's essential purgative function in an imperfect body tempered the negative descriptions of the polluted "menstruating" Christian man.

In Levitical legislation, men suffering from seminal emissions were deemed ritually impure, as were women when they experienced uterine bleeding.[183] Moreover, these men were required to follow similar steps to clean themselves of their impurity. In the Middle Ages, although Christian religious writers no longer regarded the laws of ritual purity to be religious requirements, they were influenced by them in their thinking on nocturnal emissions. They considered seminal emissions within the context of lust; however, they also employed the Old Testament comparison between this form of male genital discharge and female genital bleeding, and, in doing so, tempered the guilt associated with the physiological act, allowing for more complex treatment of the subject. By means of the comparison with women's periodic secretions, unintentional discharges in men, such as nocturnal emissions, were associated with the weakness of the body, and its unruliness against the mind.

The comparison between the genital emissions of each sex was supported by the Aristotelian theory which considered menstrual blood to be a female form of imperfect semen. Female loss of unconcocted semen, or menses, was viewed as a periodic occurrence which was associated with humoral build up. As was mentioned above, medieval medical theory also posited that male seminal discharge could be a necessary result of humoral build up. Although seminal emissions could be the result of physical stimulation or sexual thoughts, as medieval religious writers were certainly aware, they could also be explained as

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[181] Lk 2: 21-22.
[182] Mt 9:19-22; Mk 5:24-34; Lk 8:43-48.
[183] The laws concerning both types of impurity are recorded back-to-back in Leviticus 15.

the involuntary act of the body ridding itself of built-up superfluities.[184] In the much-cited *Decretum* of Gratian, the medical explanation, that seminal discharge was an outlet for overabundant humours, was used to distinguish between intentional and involuntary emissions in order to determine whether or not they were to be considered offences. In the *Decretum*, it is stated:

> A distinction must be made concerning the emission itself, and what caused it in the sleeper's mind should be carefully examined. Sometimes pollution occurs because of overeating, sometimes because of a mere superfluity of nature or infirmity, and sometimes because of thoughts. Certainly, the kind of emission that comes from a superfluity of nature or infirmity is in no way to be feared, since a mind that has unconsciously suffered something is more to be pitied than one that has done something. Also, when a gluttonous appetite gets caught up in excessive eating and the reservoirs of the humors are overburdened from this, then the mind is partially at fault, but not however, to such an extent as to justify prohibition from participation in the sacred mysteries or even the celebration of Mass… But, it seems, if the emission occurred in the sleeper's mind because of impure thoughts while awake, his mind is guilty.[185]

The *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, a guide to pastoral care from the fourteenth century, gives steps for determining whether or not the penitent who experienced an emission of semen was guilty of lust or had merely experienced the blameless discharge caused by excessive humours: "If he says that it happened to him once a month or once a week and he reveals nothing about preceding drunkenness or desire of a woman, then it can be presumed that this pollution happened to him from a natural superfluity."[186] In this case, the regularity of the emission, approximating the regular menstrual cycle experienced by women, was used as an indication that it was an act of the body not caused by conscious or unconscious sinning.

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[184] For a detailed examination of medieval Christian views on seminal discharge, see the article by Jacqueline Murray, "Men's Bodies, Men's Minds: Seminal emissions and sexual anxiety in the Middle Ages," *Annual Review of Sex Research* 8 (1997): 1-26.

[185] Gratian, *Decretum*, D. 6. C. 3. English translation from Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, 19-20. Cf. Murray, "Men's Bodies, Men's Minds," 6.

[186] Murray, "Men's Bodies, Men's Minds," 17. Quoted from, M. J. A. Haren, *Study of the "Memorial Presbiterorum" a fourteenth-century confessional manual for parish priests*, vol. 2 (Unplublished doctoral dissertation, Oxford University, 1975), 31.

The Old Testament instructions concerning ritual impurity of genital emissions continued to be a concern in the Christian church, as is evident in the medieval penitentials. Frequently, penitential writers viewed seminal emission, whether intentional or not, as a type of pollution which would inhibit clerics from coming into contact with the Eucharist. The thirteenth-century theologian Guy of Orchelles explained that the discharge of semen caused by the body's superfluities were pollutions that were only venially sinful; thus, a priest could celebrate the Eucharist, and a man could recieve communion, only after confessing, and washing himself and his clothing.[187] Similar concerns about the impurity of genital fluids and the handling of sacred objects were expressed by penitential writers who required women to do penance if they received communion while they were menstruating.[188] For, although, these emissions were guiltless, they were reminders of the irrepressible forces of the body in its fallen state.

The above examples show that a literal interpretation of the Levitical pollution regulations which equated men who are deemed unclean with women in their menses was still influencial in medieval Christian society even though the old laws were believed to have been overturned by the new law of Christ. In Christian exegesis of Leviticus 15, the woman suffering from menstrual impurity was interpreted as having a figurative meaning; and, here, again, the female condition was seen as a symbol which designated a "male"[189] subject. In such figurative exegesis, the menstruating woman, who was made unclean by the flow of her bodily fluids, was used, in some cases, to denote various kinds of sinners, especially those who are following bad religious practices, and, in others, represented the Church in a state of sickness.

Rabanus Maurus' scriptural interpretation, from the ninth century, gives an expanded theoretical reading of the regulations concerning menstruating women from Leviticus 15. He argues that the ancient law which ordered women to separate themselves and the objects which they touched during their menstrual periods had been given to the Jews living before the incarnation of Christ to practice literally in order to stop the spread of pollution, which he

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[187] Ibid.: 8. For the original context, see P. P. Damiani and O. Van Den Eynde, eds., *Guidonis de Orchellis, Tractatus de Sacramentis ex eius Summa de Sacramentis et Officiis Ecclesiae*, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1953), 95.

[188] Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth: A window onto medieval perceptions of women," 44.

[189] The subject in these texts usually designates Christians universally; however, it is marked by male gender pronouns.

understood to be the threat of feminine lust.[190] However, he argues, its most true meaning was not literal, but spiritual, which is how Christians should understand it. According to Rabanus' reading of the phrase, "a woman who suffered the monthly flow of blood shall be separated for seven days," the flow of blood stood for a flow of blood from one's soul, and denoted idolatry, and the woman who experienced it represented an effeminate person.[191] The threat of idolatry referred to pagan practices, such as performing sacrifices, that predated Christianity. Elsewhere, Rabanus describes idolatry as "the cult of idols and demons, namely, augury, and those who sacrifice to stones, trees, and springs, and who carry out enchantments or divinations" and states that it should be considered a cardinal sin like fornication or murder.[192]

The continuation of pagan practices in the years after the revelations of Christ was Rabanus' main concern in his interpretation of the Levitical law:

> Apply your mind now to the words that the legislator uses: "...a woman who suffers for many days a flow of blood, not in the time of her menses..." [It says] "if she emits a flow of blood," that is, if she emits the stain and error of idolatry, but, not in her menstrual times, that is, not in the periods in which the serving of idols prevailed, for these are the menstrual times, it was shown in those words in which we spoke about these things. Afterwards, however, knowledge began, and the light of piety was illuminated through the evangelical doctrine; he who emits uncleanness and, in the time since, teaches the error of the idols, is unclean.[193]

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[190] My translation. "*Intentio legislatoris est a muliebri libidine abducere hominem, simulque cum viris et mulieres prohibere a turpis commistionis causa…his quidem sensibilis Judaeus, et secundum carnem Israelita juvari per litteram poterat*." Rabanus Maurus, "*Expositio in Leviticum,*" PL 108, Col. 410A.

[191] My translation. "*fluxus enim sanguinis animae cuius personam ut pote effeminatam, et fortitudinem pietatis prodentem, in mulierem nunc legislator insinuavit, idolatria est...*" Rabanus Maurus, "*Expositio in Leviticum,*" PL 108, Col. 410B

[192] My translation. "*cultura idolorum et daemoniorum, id est, auguria, et qui immolant ad petras, vel ad arbores, sive ad fontes, aut incantationes seu divinationes faciunt*." Rabanus Maurus, "*Homilia LXVII*" PL 110, Col. 127C-D.

[193] My translation. "*Attende autem nunc quibus verbis legislator usus est:* 'Mulier quae patitur multus diebus fluxum sanguinis, non in tempore menstruali.' ... *[dixit] si fluxerit fluxum sanguinis, id est, si fluit maculam et errorem idololatriae, facit autem hoc non in tempore menstruali, id est, non in temporibus in quibus idolorum servitus obtinebat, haec enim esse menstrualia tempora, in illis verbis in quibus de ea loquebamur ostensum est, sed et postquam coepit scientia, et per evangelicam doctrinam lumen pietatis illuxit. Ipse tamen immunda fluit, et docet quaedam errori idolorum proxima, immundus est.*" PL 108, Col. 411B-C

He names the Pre-Christian era as the "menstrual times" and argues that those who practiced the religious traditions from this period are polluted by idolatry as if by the stain of ancient blood.

Moreover, Rabanus associates the flow of blood with infertility. He explains that women's blood is a seminal emission, and argues that the woman who suffers from a flow of (uterine) blood (*mulier quae fluit fluxum sanguinis*) stands for "he who corrupts good doctrine, brings it forth disgracefully and badly, to the extent that he is the one who teaches impiety and repudates the law …[and whose] words are full of corruption."[194] Thus, the person who teaches religious error produces, in his thought, wretched and infected offpring.

Walafrid Strabo's commentary on Rabanus' exegetical analysis of Leviticus expanded upon his predecessor's figurative understanding of menstrual blood as the stain of idolatry. He explains how the biblical law's concern for limiting the spread of pollution fits into the figurative reading:

> "A woman who monthy suffers a flow of blood...etc.," that is, a soul, which is stained by idolatry in the time of the advent of God's grace, is entirely unclean: "[She] will be separated for seven days," that is, [the idolater] will be excluded from communion, by divine justice, until the completion of penitence.[195]

Strabo states further that, "'If a man cohabits with her in the time of her blood,' that is, if one sacrifices with an idolater, or lays down in a pagan temple, and eats the food offering of idols, 'he will be unclean for seven days,' that is, he must complete the punishment established for him."[196] He does not consider idolaters to be members of a competing religion, but Christians who are in a state of sin or spiritual uncleanness and, therefore, able to be redeemed through penance.

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[194] My translation. "*sed per mulierem quae fluit fluxum sanguinis, eum qui effundit doctrinam idololatriae intellexit, et propterea nunc eam fluxum seminis patientem appellavit, ut nos disceremus quia eum qui corrumpit bonam doctrinam, turpiter eam et male proferens, talem qualis est is qui impietatem docet lex reputet… [et] verba [eius] corruptione plena sunt*." PL 108, Col 413C.

[195] My translation. "*'Mulier quae redeunte mense patitur fluxum sanguinis,' etc., id est anima quae, veniente Domini gratiae visitatione, in idololatria maculatur, penitus immunda est: 'septem diebus separabitur,' id est, divino judicio usque ad perfectam poenitentiam foris communionem excludetur.*" Walafrid Strabo, "*Epitome Commentariorum Rabani in Leviticum'* in PL 114, Col. 825C.

[196] My translation. "*'Si coierit cum ea vir tempore sanguinis,' id est, si cum idololatris quis sacrificaverit vel recumbit in idolio manducans de idolothytis, 'immundus erit septem diebus,' id est perfectam poenitentiam sibi constitutam expleat.*" *Ibid*.

The twelfth-century Benedictine theologian, Rupert of Deutz also wrote about the figurative meaning of genital emissions in Leviticus in his scriptural commentary. He compares the impurity of "the man who suffers from a flow of semen," "the woman who suffers from a monthy flow of blood" and "the woman who suffers from a flux of blood outside of the time of her menses" with the "incontinence of the murmuring mouth and the loquacity of the loosened tongue."[197] The comparison is based on the inability of a man who experiences seminal discharge and of a menstruating woman to control the flow of their emissions; just so, the gossip has a lack of restraint over his or her speech. Rupert states, "rightly, a woman is said to be suffering a flow of menstrual blood, as long as she does not refrain from the disparaging of the tongue, as long as she does not cease to nourish scandal and to cause dissensions."[198] Similarly, a man is unclean, not when he speaks an unkind word once, but when the "humid affliction of loquacity"[199] stains his flesh because of repeated custom. The practice must be a regular thing, like a woman's menstrual periods, in order to be considered to have a polluting effect on the soul.

Exegetical writers also found a figurative meaning for the woman in the Gospels who suffered from a haemorrhage and was healed when she touched Jesus' hem. In Judaic law, she was deemed unclean and was forbidden to touch another person. However, Jesus showed her acceptance, and performed the miracle of healing her from her incessant flow of blood. Rabanus Maurus wrote that the menstruating woman from Leviticus, whom he sees as the symbol of idolatry, is represented in the Gospels by the haemorrhaging woman:

> We understand the image of this woman to embody the woman from the Gospels who suffered a flux of blood, who expended all her wealth, or indeed, all her life, on physicians, that is, on those philosophers who were among them: nevertheless, she was not healed by them from the sickness of her

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[197] My translation. "[*Vir qui patitur fluxum seminis... Mulier quae redeunte mense patitur fluxum sanguinis... et mulier quae patitur multis diebus fluxum sanguinis, non in tempore menstruali...] Ordinate post legem datam, leprae damnabilis, id est haereticae pravitatis, legem edicit Scriptura de fluxu seminis et de fluxu sanguinis menstrui, id est de incontinentia oris murmurosi et de loquacitate linguae detrahentis."* Rupert of Deutz, "*In Leviticum Commentariorum*" in PL 167, Col. 816.

[198] My translation. "*Recte mulier dicatur patiens fluxum sanguinis menstrui, quamdiu a detractione linguae non parcit, quamdiu scandala nutrire, dissensiones facere non cessat.*" PL 167, Col. 817.

[199] "*humida loquacitatis lues*" Ibid.

> errors.... She, therefore, was healed from the flux by touching the hem of the Lord from behind.[200]

In this image, he neatly argues that the text indicates on an abstract level that an idolater can be "healed" by Christ alone, just as the woman suffering from blood outside of the time of her menstruation was healed by Christ.

Another interpretation of the haemorrhaging woman was put forth by Haymo of Halberstadt, Rabanus' contemporary. Haymo argued that the flux of blood represented the impurity of sins. Quoting Hosea 4:2, he wrote, "Theft, murder, and adultery overflow, and blood touches blood."[201] He adds that, when one chooses to free oneself from the bloody flux, one will cry out, as is done in the Psalms: "Free me from bloodguiltiness [lit. *sanguis*], God, o God of my salvation."[202] Haymo contends that the woman who has been suffering from the haemorrhage for twelve years is the mother of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, whom Jesus saves from dying in another miracle recounted in the same Gospels.[203] Thus, the beginning of her illness corresponds with the birth of her daughter.[204] According to Haymo's symbolic reading, the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue represents the Synagogue, and the woman who suffers from the haemorrhage is a symbol of the church of the pagans. He writes that the spiritual meaning of the scriptural passage indicates that "when the [Jewish] Synagogue was born, the Gentile church began to be infirm: since vices were recognized easily in comparison with virtue."[205] He echoes Rabanus in saying that Christ can heal those who follow the "wrong" faith, and in equating the "idolaters" with the pagans, living in the times before the incarnation of Christ.

In his liturgical sermons, Aelred of Rievaulx taught that the forty-day period of purification for women, which even the Virgin Mary underwent following the birth of Christ, contained a lesson for his male monastic brethren on how we are cleansed of our sins. In his

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[200] My translation. "*Huius enim mulieris imaginem gerere intelligimus eam quae in evangeliis fluxum patitur sanguinis, quae omnem quidem substantiam sive vitam suam in medicis expendit...Haec ergo fimbriam Domini retro tangens, liberata est a fluxu.*" PL 108, Cols. 411D-412A.

[201] "*...furtum, homicidium, et adulterium inundaverunt, et sanguis sanguinem tetigit*."

[202] My translation. "*Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae*." Ps 50:16.

[203] Mk 5: 35-43; Mt 9: 23-26; Lk 8: 49-56.

[204] My translation. "*cognoscimus quia, quando puella nata est, tunc mulier coepit infirmari. Quoniam et illa duodecim annos habebat aetatis, et ista duodecim infirmitatis.*" Haymo of Halberstadt, "*Homilia CXXXIX*" in PL 118, Col. 738D-789A

[205] "*Juxta vero spiritalem intelligentiam, quando Synagoga nata est, Ecclesia ex gentibus coepit infirmari: quia facile cognoscuntur vitia in comparatione virtutum.*" PL 118, Col. 789A.

explanation of this lesson, Aelred refers to the Levitical ordinances which divide the period of purification into two periods: the first of which lasted, in the case of the birth of a son, seven days, corresponding with the circumcision of the son which took place on the eighth day, and the second of which lasted thirty-three more days, during which time the woman remained unclean. Aelred asks, "Why was it commanded that an infant be circumcised on the eighth day and that the child's mother enter the Temple after forty days, and then with her son and with a sacrifice?"[206] And, he provides the following answer:

> Before circumcision both the woman and the child were unclean. After circumcision they were neither wholly clean nor wholly unclean. For if they were wholly clean they would not need purification or be forbidden to enter the Temple. Yet if they were not tainted with greater uncleanness before circumcision it would not be commanded that a woman who had given birth to an infant be held to be unclean until the infant was circumcised.[207]

He explains that the woman, in the period of postpartum separation, stands for human nature, "which by its vices and its sins is unclean."[208] The early generations of humans begot sons, or, as Aelred explains, "they behaved manfully by abstinence and contempt of the world" and "had many disciples," but, because they did not yet know of circumcision and purification, they continued to be unclean. Thus, after Moses gave them the laws, "woman," that is humanity which is "unclean" or continues in sin, was partially purified.[209]

Aelred specifies that the sin that is purged through Moses's laws is not the Original Sin, which is cleaned through baptism, but the sin that arises from evil urges. How this sin is

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[206] "*Quare praeceptum est ut infans circumcideretur octava die et ut eius mater post dies quadraginta intraret in templum, et tunc cum filio et cum sacrificio?*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.5, 47. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 120.

[207] "*Ante circumcisionem immunda erat mulier, immundus infans; post circumcisionem nec ex toto mundi nec ex toto immundi. Nam si ex toto mundi essent, non indigirent purificatione nec prohiberentur ingredi templum. Si autem non inesset illis maior immunditia ante circumcisionem, non esset praeceptum ut, si mulier habuisset infantem, immunda haberetur usque ad octavum diem, quando infans debebat circumcidi.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.8, 47. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 121-22.

[208] "*Mihi videtur quod mulier ista significat humanam naturam, quae immunda per vitia....*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 122.

[209] "*Hoc credebant multi et maxime philosophi, sed decepti sunt. Generabant filios, id est virilia opera faciebant in abstinentia, in contemptu mundi et continentia carnis… Sed quia ignorabant circumcisionem et octavum diem, in immunditia permanebant et qui generabant et qui generabentur. Ita in illis mater, id est natura humana, et filius, id est opera eorum, non poterant aliquam munditiam habere. Ideo docuit nos Dominus per Moysen quomodo debet mundari haec mulier et filius. Primo immunda est usque ad octavi diei circumcisionem. Circumcisio octavi diei fides est Christi, quae maxime pertinet ad resurrectionem eius.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.9-10, 48. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 122-23.

cleaned we can learn by analogy from the postpartum woman: "Now notice, brothers. You are already purified from those major uncleannesses, that is from the vices which incur damnation. Your deeds have been purified, just as your children were circumcised on the eighth day. But can you straightaway enter the Temple, the Temple which is on high in the heavenly Jerusalem?"[210] The answer is "no" since, like the postpartum woman, each person must wait a period of forty days and give sacrifice before entering the Temple. Thus, Aelred explains, we must wait forty days (the number "signifies the toils and temptations which we ought to patiently endure so long as we are in this life"[211]) and then sacrifice "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons"[212] which symbolize through their accustomed mournful songs "the tears and mournings by which we can be purified from our vices."[213] Aelred encourages his male audience to see themselves as mothers by offering their children, that is their actions, to God, and by considering themselves to be in a period of uncleanness as long as they continue in this world, in which they must penitently await satisfaction that will only come upon their passing into the next, eternal, life.

The above examples show how women's uterine emissions—and the interpretations of them found in Leviticus, and reinterpretations of them found in the Gospels—were used to explain physical and spiritual qualities which men and women shared. In the comparisons made by canonists and penitential writers between menstrual impurity in women and seminal impurity in men, women's impurity is equated with male subjects' susceptibility to bodily weaknesses and loss of control. In all of the figurative comparisons, the "woman" who bleeds, stands for a Christian (or, the body of Christians represented by the Church) in a state of weakness, or sin. The analogies draw upon different aspects of uterine bleeding, such as the periodic nature of menstruation and the inability of the woman to control it by conscious means, which help to temper the comparison with the state of being in sin by characterizing it as a universal condition from which one may be freed. Yet, despite this, the most commonly

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[210] "*Iam videte, fratres. Purgati estis ab illis magnis immunditiis, id est vitiis damnabilibus. Purgata sunt opera vestra quasi filii vestri circumcisi octavo die. Numquid tamen potestis statim ingredi templu, illud scilicet quod sursum est in illa caelesti Ierusalem*?" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.17, 49. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 124.

[211] "*Numerus iste, id est quadraginta, significat labores et temptationes quas debemus patienter tolerare quamdiu sumus in ista vita*." Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.20, 50. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 125.

[212] Leviticus 12:8.

[213] "*…significant lacrimas et gemitum per quae possumus purgari ab omnibus vitiis nostris.*" Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermons*, 5.23, 50. Translation from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons*, 126.

characteristic of uterine blood given in these analogies is still its so-called impurity, which is ascribed to it in Leviticus. The figurative readings of women who bleed from childbirth, menstruation, or outside of the time of menstruation, understand them to be symbolic of how one can cross the "unclean"/ "clean" barrier. The analogy was used to separate the Church before Christ and after Christ, the sinner before penance and after penance, or the Christian misled by wrong religious practices and subsequently restored to the right ones. In all of these cases, the separation is viewed as temporary and amendable if one follows the prescribed path for purification—not the Levitical laws, but Christ's teachings on baptism and penance. The analogies emphasize that all Christians are periodically "unclean"—even the "idolaters" mentioned by the ninth-century exegetical writers were considered to be Christians who performed sinful acts requiring penance. In the next section, however, we will examine how the menstruating woman as a symbol of impurity was used to indicate the separateness and irreparable impurity of followers of the Jewish religion.

5.6.2. "Menstruating" Jewish Men.

The myth of the "Jewish male menses"[214] was a Christian invention which may have risen from extreme hatred, but incorporated the same premise found in the meditations on the purifying aspects of Christ's Passion, and in Christian exegetical interpretations of Leviticus 15 that envisioned sin as an illness or carnal weakness and Christ as the cure. According to the legend, which circulated in the late Middle Ages, Jewish men suffered from a flow of blood from their anuses. The bleeding was likened to menstruation through a number of signifiers; it was sometimes said to occur periodically in regular intervals, or to be caused by Jewish people's melancholic complexion. However, the main point of comparison was in secondary meanings associated with menstruation, namely bodily disorder and impurity. The formulation was that the followers of Judaism were ill and that Christ's blood, from his

[214] Among the earliest discussions of this trope in modern scholarship were Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The medieval conception of the Jew and its relation to modern antisemitism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961); Le Goff, "Le juif dans les *exempla* médiévaux: le cas de l'*Alphabetum Narrationum*"; and Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). For more extensive examinations of the myth, see Resnick, *On Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses*, Johnson, "The myth of Jewish male menses", and D.S. Katz, "Shylock's gender: Jewish male menstruation in early modern England," *Review of English Studies* 50, no. 200 (1999).

sacrifice, was the only thing that could heal them. However, unlike the Christian sinner, the Jew was believed to be stuck in a continuous state of impurity and, therefore, to be a polluting factor that had to be separated from Christian society.

The belief that Jewish men suffered from this blood affliction fits within the context of the blood libel mythology which was developed in the later medieval period. Blood libel accusations suggested that Jews engaged in ritual murder and in the theft and torture of the Eucharist, in order to use the blood of Christians, and the flesh of Christ, in their quasi-magical religious practices. An example of how Christian presuppositions about Jews came together in this mythology can be found in the transcripts of the trial of several Jews who were accused of murdering and collecting the blood of two Christian children and their parents in the German town of Endigen. These transcripts have been published in Po-Chia Hsia's study of Christian accounts of Jewish ritual murders. The following excerpt from the fifteenth-century trial reveals the answers regarding the supposed Jewish affinity for Christian blood that the unfortunate Jewish subject of interrogatation believed the Christian magistrates to be seeking:

> Afterwards, Mercklin [one of the accused] was asked as to why Jews need Christian blood. To that he answered in many words, saying first that they needed Christian blood because it has great healing power. We would not be satisfied with this answer and told him he was lying, that we knew why they need it because his brother Eberlin had told us already. To this Mercklin said that Jews need Christian blood for curing epilepsy. But we replied: Why then is your son an epileptic? And we would not be satisfied with the answer. Merckin then said further that Jews need Christian blood for its taste because they themselves stink. But we would not be satisfied.... [Then] he answered badly that he wanted to tell us the truth, that he saw it cannot be otherwise... but that the Jews need Christian blood for circumcision. Mercklin was then asked once more about the aftorementioned things and [we] reproached him: if you Jews all know so well that Christian blood is good and salutary, why don't you make your own blood salutary and accept baptism?[215]

[215] R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 21.

This passage sheds light on several aspects of the myth of blood libel. The accused's attempts to end his torture by guessing correctly at the answers that his interrogators wanted to obtain shows his awareness of Christian myths about Jews suffering from a variety of physical ailments, such as epilepsy or emitting a foul odour, and about Jewish ritual magic related to the practice of circumcision. His interrogators' searching questions reveal that they were trying to satisfy their own biases about the erroneous beliefs of Jews and the supernatural power of Christ's blood. In their manipulations of their captive's confessions, they construct the so-called ritual murder as being the result of Jewish error: the Jews mistakenly believe that the blood of slaughtered Christians has the healing power that only Christ's sacrificial blood can provide them. The whole incident of the murder of Christians by Jews is framed as a replication of the murder of Christ, which was also blamed on Jews.

One of the earliest allusions to Jewish male menstruation is found in the *Dialogue on Miracles* of Caesarius of Heisterbach, which was composed in the thirteenth century. The accusation, which is part of an exemplary story concerning the seduction of a Jewish woman by a Christian cleric, draws upon the notion that Jewish men are diseased in body and suffer from a supernatural disease caused by their disbelief concerning the nature of Christ. Caesarius writes that a Jewish woman revealed to her Christian lover that they would be free to meet on the Friday before Easter, for on that day, "the Jews are said to labour under a sickness called the bloody flux, with which they are so much occupied, that they can scarcely pay attention to anything else at that time…"[216] In this account, the suggestion that the Jews are "menstruating" relies on the phrase "*fluxus sanguinis*," which was used to describe menstrual bleeding since Leviticus, and on the periodic nature of the bleeding (annually, rather than monthly), and on the suggestion, based on the date on which they suffer, that the disease is God's "curse" upon them.

A more detailed explanation of the supposed affliction which struck Jewish men can be found in another thirteenth-century collection of *exempla*, *The Book of Bees*, by Thomas of Cantimpré. The work contains an explanation of why Jews in every region "are

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[216] "*…neque ego ad te, neque tu possis venire ad me, nisi in nocte sexta feriae, quae Pascha vestrum praecedit. Tunc enim Judaei laborare dicuntur quadam infirmitate, quae fluxus sanguinis dicitur, circa quam occupati, aliis tunc minus intendere possunt.*" Caesarius Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 92. Translation from Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 102. The story illustrates Christian misunderstanding of Jewish religious observances, such as the observance of the Sabbath during which Jews remained mostly indoors.

accustomed to draw Christian blood." It makes use of elements that were later part of the accusations made in the fifteenth-century trial at Endigen, such as the myth that Jews suffer from a bloody curse related to their role in the cruxifixion of Christ, and the notion that they are so blinded by their error that they do not recognize that the simple cure for their affliction is baptism in the Christian faith. Thomas writes:

> It is certain, following the Evangelist, that at the moment in which Pilate washed his hands and declared, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man," the impious Jews cried out: "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"... [St. Augustine indicates that] from the curse of the parents a criminal thread runs down to the children, as a consequence of the stain of blood. As a result, following from this wicked flow, the impious descendents will be tormented piteously until the moment in which, during an act of penance, they will admit that they are guilty of the blood of Christ and, consequently, will be healed.[217]

This account associates the Jews who condemned Christ with Adam and Eve, for, as in the story of the Fall, their transgression caused their descendents to be cursed by God. Thomas explains, vaguely, that the curse is a stain of blood. This suggests that the Jews are secretive about their affliction so that Christians know only a little about it. Thomas reveals that what knowledge he does have was learned indirectly from converted Jews. From such sources, he has learned that the blood-affliction from which Jews suffer could be cured by Christ's blood, that is, by accepting Christianity, but the Jews cannot accept the miraculous remedy:

> Moreover, I have heard a well-educated Jew, who was converted in our times, make the following declaration: "One of the prophets had prophesied to the Jews at the moment of his death: 'Know that the most certain way that you can be healed of this detestable punishment that afflicts you is by means of Christian blood.'" Moreover, the well-educated Jew continued, the Jews who

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[217] My translation is based on a modern French translation of Thomas de Cantimpré's work: "*Il est certain, selon le saint Évangile, qu'au moment où Pilate se lava les mains et déclara: 'Je suis pur du sang de ce juste,' les juifs impies s'écrièrent: 'Que ce sang soit sur nous et sur nos enfants!' ...[Saint Augustin indique que] de la malédiction des parents découle jusque chez les enfants un courant de crime, par suite de la tache du sang. En conséquence, par suite de cet écoulement néfaste, la descendance impie sera impitoyablement tourmentée jusqu'au moment où dans un acte de pénitence elle se reconnaîtra coupable du sang du Christ et sera ainsi guérie.*" Thomas de Cantimpré, *Les exemples du "Livre des Abeilles": Une vision médiévale*, ed. Henri Platelle (Paris: Brepols, 1997), II, 112.

> are always blind and impious seized upon this speech, determining that each year, in every region, they had to spill Christian blood to find the remedy for this blood. And, he added, they have badly understood this speech, in perceiving this to be in the blood from any Christian, when rather he had been referring to the blood which is shed each day at the altar for the pardoning of sins. Every Jew who has converted in our times and received the blood of Christ, as is right, is immediately healed from this ancient curse.[218]

He contrasts Christ's healing bloodshed, which purifies Christians, with the Jews' cursed bleeding, which leads them to further sinning and causes the death of more Christians.

The *Memorable Histories*, another thirteenth-century collection of *exempla*, composed by the Dominican Rudolf von Schlettstadt, similarly proclaims a Jewish propensity for ritual murder and identifies it as an attempt to cure an hereditary affliction which dates back to the cruxifixion. Rudolf provides added details about this disease, namely, that it is a monthly flow of blood and a form of dysentary which is frequently fatal to the Jews who suffer from it. He states that the blood of baptized Christians has the power to heal the disease, which suggests that he himself believed in the supernatural power of Christian blood.[219] Rudolf follows this explanation of the reasons for Jewish ritual murder with an anecdote about Jews who had procured a piece of sacramental bread used in the Eucharist and had pierced it, causing it to bleed large amounts of blood and water.[220] Here,

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[218] My translation. "*En outre j'ai entendu un juif très lettré, qui s'était converti de notre temps à la foi, faire cette déclaration: 'Une sorte de prophète avait prophétisé au juifs au moment de mourir: 'Sachez de la manière la plus certaine que vous ne pourrez être guéri de ce honteux châtiment qui vous afflige, si ce n'est par du sang crétien.'' Or, continuait ce juif très lettré, les juifs toujours aveugles et impies s'attachèrent à cette parole, en déduisirent que chaque année, dans toutes les provinces, ils devaient répandre le sang chrétien pour trouver la guérison dans ce sang. Et, ajoutait-il, ils ont mal compris cette parole, en voyant dans ce sang celui d'un crétien quelconque, alors que bien plutôt il s'agissait de ce sang qui est répandu chaque jour sur l'autel pour le pardon des péchés. Tout juif qui se convertit à la foi et reçoit le sang du Christ comme il convient est immédiatement guéri de cette malédiction ancestral*." *Ibid*., 164-65.

[219] My translation. "*Audivi a Judeis, quod quidam Judeorum, scilicet qui in passione Cristi clamaverunt coram Pilato: 'sanguinis eius super nos et filios nostros,' quod omnes Judei, qui de eorum genere processerunt, singulis mensibus sanguine fluunt et dissenteriam sepius paciantur et ea ut frequencius moriuntur. Sanantur autem per sanguinem hominis Cristiani, qui nomine Cristi baptisatus est.*" Rudolf Von Schlettstadt, *Historiae Memorabiles: Zur Dominikanerliteratur und Kulturgeschite des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Erich Kleinschmidt (Koeln: F. Rapp, 1974), 65.

[220] My translation. "*Id intellexi ab una ancilla eorum, que erat Cristiana, quod eis a quodam sacerdote vel sacrista in quadam villa pro pecunia sacramentum dominicum ministratum ferro hostiam perforabant. Et continuo per vulnus hostie sanguis et aqua largiter emanabat.*" *Ibid*.

again, we find a contrast between the purifying power of Christ's blood and the blood-affliction of the Jews.

In the *History of the East*, Jacques de Vitry links the monthly flow of blood, which certain Jews are alleged to suffer, with other feminine qualities. He writes:

> Moreover, other Jews, whose forefathers shouted: "His blood is on us and our children!" are dispersed almost throughout the world and have come to every place, where they are servants and tributaries, just as the prophet Isaiah said, "Their strength has been turned into ashes." For they have become unwarlike and as weak as women. Whence, at every moon, as it is said, they suffer from a flux of blood. For God has struck them in their posteriors and given them eternal shame.[221]

It is clear that, in this description, the blood-affliction of those Jews who were descended from those who swore before Pilate is associated with women's blood. This is meant to be a negative comparison, for it is by this blood that God marks their shame (*opprobrium*). The monthly bleeding is also a sign of their lack of strength. Jacques writes that the Jews' fearfulness is like that of Cain after he killed Abel,[222] and emphasizes further the association between the blood curse and death.

The belief that Jewish men suffered from an affliction that was like menstruation carried over into medical literature. Some scholarly minds attempted to reconcile medical knowledge about the cause of menstruation and its relationship to haemorrhoids in men with the legend that Jewish men bled from their posteriors. Peter Biller has recorded one quodlibetical session which took place in Germany at the turn of the fourteenth century in which the question of why Jewish men experienced a loss of blood from their anuses was addressed. The masters determined that Jews were naturally melancholic and the excess of

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[221] My translation. "*Alii autem Iudei de quibus patres eorum clamaverunt: 'Sanguis eius super nos et super filios nostros!' per universum fere mundum et in omnem ventum dispersi, ubique sunt servi, ubique tributarii, 'fortitudo eorum,' ut ait Isaias propheta, 'conversa est in favillam.' Imbelles enim et imbecilles facti sunt quasi mulieres. Unde singulis lunationibus, ut dicitur, fluxum sanguinis patiuntur. Percussit enim eos Deus in posteriora et opprobrium sempiternum dedit illis.*" Jacques de Vitry, *Histoire Orientale [Historia Orientalis]*, ed. Jean Donnadieu (Paris: Brepols, 2008), 328.

[222] *Ibid*.

cold, wet humours made them more likely to suffer haemorrhoids.[223] Bernard of Gordon's *Lily of Medicine* provides a similar medicalized explanation for this supposed phenomenon:

> Let it be seen that the Jews suffer greatly from the haemorrhoidal flux for three reasons: [First,] because, generally, they are at rest, and thus, superfluities of melancholic humors are collected [in them]; second, because, generally, they are fearful and anxious, and therefore, the melancholy blood is multiplied (according to the great Hippocrates, fear and faintheartedness, if they last a long time, generate melancholic humors); and third, because it is from divine vengeance, according to this: "he smote his enemies on the hinder parts, he put them to an everlasting reproach."[224]

This description combines the medical explanation for menstruation, that it is caused by an accumulation of bad humours, with the legendary belief that Jews bled because of a divine curse upon them. A fifteenth-century commentator on the *Secrets of Women* by Pseudo-Albert the Great referred to the "supernatural" menstruation which the Jews experience in his commentary on the section on menstruation.[225] He fails to explain what this means, but elsewhere gives a description of the loss of blood through the anus which he calls an unnatural form of menstruation. He conflates dysentary, haemorrhoids, and menstruation in his description of an illness caused by melancholy, which, he says, frequently afflicts Jews:

> The second question [about whether or not menstrual blood flows from the anus] is perfectly appropriate to ask because men who have dysentery experience a flow of blood from the abdomen which resembles the menstrual flow, and this dysenteric bleeding is suffered by both men and women. Melancholic males generate a good deal of black bile which is directed to the spleen, and then to the spine. From there it descends to other veins located around the last intestine which are called hemorrhoids. After these veins are

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[223] Peter Biller, "Views of Jews from Paris around 1300: Christian or 'scientific?'" in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 192.

[224] My translation. "*advertendum quod iudei ut plurimum patiuntur fluxum emorroidum propter tria. Et quia communiter sunt in ocio; et ideo congretantur superfluitates melancholiae. Secundo, quod communiter sunt in timore et anxietate et ideo multiplicatur sanguinis melancolicus. Iuxta illud Ypocras, timor et pusillanimitas si multum tempus habuerint, melancholicum faciunt huius. Tertio, quia hoc ex ultione divina iuxta illud et percussit eos in posteriora dorsi: obprobrium sempiternum dedit illis*." Bernard of Gordon, "*Lilium medicinae*," V:21.

[225] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets*, 71.

> filled they are purged of the bile by this flow, which, if it is moderate, is very beneficial. This is found in Jews more than in others, for their natures are more melancholic, although it is said that they have this flow because of a miracle of God, and there is no doubt that this is true.[226]

This response combines the medical explanation with the original assumption that Jewish people suffered because of a divine curse upon them.

The myth of male menstruation portrayed the Jewish male body as ailing from a specific form of haemorrhoidal flux that is unlike any ailment suffered by Christian males. Two causes for this affliction are given and sometimes joined together: one divine, that Jewish bodies are sickened as a result of their sin; and one medical, that the cause of their infirmity, according to the principles of humoral theory, is the poor complexion of Jewish men. These causes mirror the explanations given for female uterine bleeding: that it was, on the one hand, a punishment for the disobedience of the first Mother; and on the other, a normal process which occurred as a result of the natural infirmity of a woman's body.

5.6.3. Bad blood: Conclusions.

The metaphors involving menstruation as a negative referent were based on two understandings of the phenomenon in women: that it is a sickness and a pollution. The former understanding was drawn from medical explanations, while the latter had a history in biblical tradition. These two aspects combined in metaphorical menstruation suggested the feebleness of their subjects with respect to spiritual matters. In descriptions of Christian subjects, the metaphors were used to emphasize the inevitability of an individual falling into sin, either through the uncontrollable movements of the body, or through the human predisposition to lose one's way in spiritual matters and become polluted by unholy distractions. Menstruation metaphors act as a reminder of the innate weakness of all humans trapped inside fleshy forms. In describing Jewish subjects, the same elements are present; however, they are accompanied by the condemnatory belief that the Jews are willfully denying the sacred cure for their physical affliction, and the contention that the blood is both a punishment for and symbol of their disbelief.

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[226] *Ibid*., 73-4.

5.7. Conclusions.

There is some similarity between the examples of "good womb" and "bad womb" metaphors examined in Chapter Four and the feminine blood metaphors examined in this chapter. As was shown to be the case for metaphors of male pregnancy, male menstruation metaphors, when they were used negatively, symbolized the struggle for power between the body and mind, and the dangers of following wrong beliefs. In contrast, positive blood metaphors, which were based on the qualities of healing, nurturing, and generating that were ascribed to uterine blood, deemphasized the physical aspects of the bleeding, and rather emphasized secondary attributes assigned to the blood which signified abstract qualities such as love and salvation.

The only purely "good" blood is the blood of Christ and of the saints. This is the blood that heals souls and provides salvation. In representations of the maternal qualities of Christ's blood, which include being like spiritual milk for frail Christian souls, we see that Christ's blood resembles the ideal blood and milk of the Virgin Mary, and carries the same symbolic meanings, such as spiritual fertility, and compassion. The maternal metaphors examined here reveal that all other blood was believed to be tainted to some degree. Postpartum blood was still a topic that was considered taboo, and it was left out of accounts of couvade rituals. Analogies that were based upon postpartum or menstrual bleeding reflect Levitical regulations; this blood was used as a symbol of exclusion from spiritual purity.

Chapter Six. Conclusions.

This examination of the female reproductive body, in medieval representations and in use as a symbol to describe characteristics outside itself, has attempted to add to the picture painted by recent scholarship of the complexity of medieval conceptualizations of the sexed body. Religion and science intersected in depictions of the female generative body and its functions, each having its own interests concerning the corporeal functions and their significance to several fundamental mysteries of life. In this dissertation, the various meanings that were associated with the physical phenomena of maternity were explored in different contexts. It was suggested that the female reproductive body was a significant source for figurative analogies that could convey wide-ranging meanings. The connotations that are transferred when pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and lactation are used metaphorically to describe male subjects ranged from the positive to the negative ends of the spectrum. However, they do not transmit the complexity of the medieval perception of the female reproductive body, which contained both ends of the spectrum in one place; instead, the maternal metaphors describe characteristics that are either good, bad, or neutral, depending on the context and subject.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I endeavoured to show that descriptions of the female reproductive body and its functions frequently had two components. While they explained observable or scientifically understood characteristics of the physical aspects of reproduction, additionally, they carried secondary meanings that cannot be said to be directly related to the physical phenomena themselves; rather they are conceptually related. In order to represent and explain the functions of the maternal body, medieval writers used analogy, pairs of oppositions, synecdoche, and preexisting religious and scientific paradigms. As a result, the organs, secretions, and bodily processes associated with pregnancy and childbirth were situated within a complex web of associations, making them particularly rich symbols.

The metaphors examined in the second half of this dissertation made use of both components, the physical characteristics and the assigned associations, in order to describe male subjects. Maternal metaphors were used to depict physical properties, for example,

periodic bleedings and secretions, or the container function of other bodily organs. They were also used to communicate abstract qualities of a subject, such as his having conceived of an idea or belief, or performed a nurturing act.

Chapter Two introduced secondary associations attached to pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation and lactation drawn from medieval medical and scientific understanding of the processes. For example, it showed that authors who expressed the idea that the uterus was a protective enclosure for the foetus expressed this through a variety of container metaphors that were built around domestic themes. Fertility, which was a functional characteristic sometimes associated with uterine blood, was represented with metaphors involving the earth, flowers, and fruit-trees. Medical analogies, such as the uterus as cupping-glass, supported the association between menstruation and women's health. The supposed purity of breast milk was believed to be reflected in its whiteness as compared to the red blood from which it was believed to be derived; moreover, it was believed that you could tell the quality of milk by its colour and appearance. These analogies, of nurturing spaces, of flowers, of medicinal blood-loss, of pure substances, were echoed in examples of maternal metaphors that were meant to communicate positive connotations onto male subjects, such as inclusive love, life-bringing acts, therapeutic purgations, and spiritual purity. Maternal metaphors based on these concepts were used in medicine, in framing of the concept of purging the body, and in religious writing, most notably, in descriptions of Christ.

Negative associations from medieval medicine and science, such as the alleged uncleanness of the uterus which was conveyed through analogy with latrines, the supposed harmful quality of menstrual blood which was compared to poison, were also represented in maternal metaphors when they were used to indicate that the male subject was defiled or dangerous. We see these connotations being made in descriptions of male "pregnancy" taking place in the bowels or stomach, and in the description of the "vile humours" that were brought forth by Nero when he "gave birth."

In Chapter Three, various depictions of the female reproductive body in Christian religious tradition were explored. It was shown that Christian religious writers drew upon the Bible, particularly Genesis and the New Testament narratives of the birth of Christ, in their discussions of childbirth. They introduced the contradictory ideas about pain in childbirth: that it was a punishment for sin but also, that it could be salvific. These ideas reflected

biblical maternal metapors about childbirth pain (particularly those used by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah), and also paved the way for the use of childbirth pain as a metaphor for sinfulness (in the case of detested figures like Judas and Nero), or as a metaphor for a labour that is necessary in order to bring something worthwhile to fruition (as it was used by Anselm, Julian, and Christine of Pisan). Futhermore, it was shown that Christian descriptions of breast milk and uterine blood were marked by even stronger contrast than is found in medical writing; generally, milk was portrayed as a wholly pure substance and menstrual blood as fundamentally contaminated.

It was argued that Christian writing we find a divide between "normal" women's reproductive bodies and the act of childbearing and the "ideal" maternal body of Mary who gave birth to, and nursed, Christ. The attributes ascribed to "normal" maternal bodies, which included, in the extreme end of negativity, carnality, pain, futility, and death, were projected, via maternal metaphors, onto "pregnant fools," or men who were said to be "pregnant" with impiety or tainted by unclean blood. On the other hand, the secondary qualities that were associated with the idealized maternal womb and breasts of Mary included spiritual fecundity, generosity, plenteousness, purity. The womb, breast, and blood metaphors associated with Christ, the saints, and Christian writers were clearly modeled on this ideal and convey similar connotations which emphasize the spiritual qualities linked to the body parts and functions separate from the physical realities.

In the fourth and fifth chapters contain a wide-ranging collection of examples of maternal metaphors. Although there is great variety among these examples, clear trends in the use of maternal metaphors were perceived. In Chapter 4, I described two contrasting forms of pregnancy and birth metaphors, which were grouped under the headings of "good womb" and "bad womb." Clear differences were noted. In metaphors of the "good womb" the act of conception is emphasized; in metaphors of the "bad womb" the focus is on painful and dangerous birth. This contrast emphasizes the fact that "good womb" metaphors are about creation and, "bad womb" metaphors about death and vanities. The "good womb" stands for a site generally ascribed to the higher faculties in medieval society, such as the heart, or the mind; whereas "bad wombs" are figured as stomachs or bowels, sites of less exalted bodily functions. The disparity between the meanings conveyed by the metaphors in these two separate trends reflects the different contexts in which they are found. The subjects

of the former include figures who are unquestionably venerated in medieval Christianity: God, Christ, and several saints and pious Christians. This religious model seems to be the source of conscious imitation in other cases in which the metaphor is used to appreciatively describe creative acts of conveying ideas through speech or through writing. In contrast, the negative use of maternal metaphors of pregnancy and childbirth applies to subjects that were universally despised as the enemies of Christ and Christians (Nero and Judas) or to stock comic figures. The comic use of the pregnant fool, despite its lighter presentation, echoes more serious biblical warnings against becoming impregnated by false ideas. Together, the "good womb" and "bad womb" metaphors suggest that an essential component of many pregnancy metaphors was the conceptual understanding of thinking as being like pregnancy: one could receive a good or pious idea and be fruitful, or one could cultivate a false idea and be ruined.

In Chapter 5, I distinguished several trends in metaphors involving uterine blood and breast milk. I argued that as a result of medical understanding about uterine blood, blood that had a role in natural fertility, blood that could feed, and blood that was shed for therapeutic or purifying reasons were all gendered feminine. Moreover, I explored examples in which Christ and Christian martyrs were described as bleeding these forms of blood, showing how they were used to transmit ideas about re-birth of Christian souls, spiritual nurturing and cleansing from sins. This imagery can be compared to similarly positive metaphors of Christ or saints as producing breast milk for the purposes of spiritual instruction. This chapter also explored less positive representations of feminine forms of blood. These include examples from travel literature which contain descriptions of men performing the rituals that surrounded childbirth from which blood is notably absent. Additionally they include examples which include metaphors which derive their meaning from the ideas that menstruation is sickness, proposed by a number of medical authors, and that it is a pollution, which was a frequent attribution by religious writers. The comparison, as was made in the *Decretum*, between menstruation and seminal emissions suggested that men suffered from similar susceptibility to the uncontrollable stirrings of the body; although this comparison suggested that male emissions were not necessarily sinful, it made the female body a symbol for carnal weakness in all of humanity, and portrayed them as fundamentally ill. Menstrual bleeding was also used as a symbol of uncleanness by Christian writers drawing upon

Levitical laws to express the vulnerability of all Christians to periodic, but forgivable, spiritual impurity, and more severely, as a symbol of the supposedly inherent stain on the followers of Judaism. The positive and negative trends in metaphors involving uterine blood and breast milk follow a pattern similar to that seen with regards to pregnancy and childbirth metaphors. The metaphors applied to Christ and the saints are wholly positive and untainted by any of the negative associations that were attached to the physical forms of maternal blood and milk in medieval society. When the metaphors are applied to ordinary people, Christians or Jews, these negative associations, particularly the association of uterine bleeding as a form of sickness, and symptom of carnal weakness and impurity, come to the fore.

In general, the metaphors of "good wombs" or "good blood/milk" convey positive secondary characteristics associated with childbearing that include abstract ideas like "fertility," "nurture," and "sacrifice," and metaphors of "bad wombs" or "bad blood" project qualities of the physical aspects of the uterus and uterine blood, highlighting the negative connotations that were sometimes given to them, such as labour pain, the hazards of parturition, and menstrual pollution. Although descriptions of the reproductive processes in women frequently portrayed positive and negative qualities side-by-side, when the symbols of the female reproductive body were used to describe ordinary male subjects, only negative qualities were emphasized. Metaphorical use of positive and idealized qualities of the maternal body was reserved for Christ and particularly pious or saintly men. Thus, I have argued, metaphors taken from the female reproductive body to describe males were polarized. Maternal metaphors were used either to describe one who was like the rooster from our introduction—effeminate, weak, a source of corruption—or like the pelican—nurturing, self-sacrificing, a life source.

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