Acute Melancholia

Amy Hollywood
Harvard Divinity School

The inaugural lecture of the Elizabeth H. Monrad Chair in Christian Studies at Harvard Divinity School, 2 March 2006

Before melancholy, gratitude. First to Elizabeth and Ernest Monrad, for their countless gifts to Harvard University and, today in particular, to the Divinity School. It is a great honor to hold the Elizabeth H. Monrad Chair in Christian Studies and I hope I can do so in ways that at least partially reflect the grace and generosity of the chair's namesake and of its donors. My gratitude to Bill Graham, Dean of the Divinity School, is enormous, both for his professional confidence in me and for his persistent and inspiring vision of what Harvard Divinity School is and can be. It is wonderful to be here and for that I thank my colleagues—the faculty, administration, staff, and students of HDS. And finally, for helping me think through this particular bit of work, special thanks to Constance Furey, Stephanie Paulsell, and Melissa Zeiger.

My topic today is perhaps sadder than is fitting for a happy occasion, the celebration of a new institutional site for scholarship, thought, and teaching. But I wanted to present to you, in this inaugural moment, a piece of my current work and that work is, for reasons that will emerge as I speak, about the implacability of grief and our inability ever fully to let go of those we love. It is also about how, if we are lucky, the others we refuse to lose enable us to live. As an exiled and ill Sigmund Freud wrote to the poet H.D. (she and her daughter Perdita had sent him a flowering plant for his eightieth birthday): "Life at my age is not easy, but spring is beautiful and so is love."[1] Without love, there is no grief. Perhaps, I'll suggest today, with Freud and a host of others much wiser than myself, without grief there is no love.

[1] H.D. (Hilda Dolittle), *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 1974) 194.

HTR 99:4 (2006) 381–406

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

No one in my family can tell one story without telling twenty-five stories, not just because one story inevitably leads to another, but also because any given story is embedded with endless digressions, only seemingly incidental anecdotes, all wending their way toward some grand narrative finale, which tends never quite to arrive. (As my students know, this also tends to be the way I teach.) I am going to give you today the abbreviated, non-digressive version of the story of my paternal great-grandmother, Maria Hollywood. (It will be—for me, at least—incredibly difficult.)

My mother is the one who told this story, one she had from my Grandfather Hollywood. His mother, after whom I was unwittingly named (here is the first long, omitted digression, and I promise now to stop marking each of them), my great-grandmother, starved herself to death. She lived in lower Manhattan. Her bartender husband, my great-grandfather, Patrick, died young, leaving her with those of their eight children who remained alive at the time. My grandfather, Joseph, graduated from the sixth grade just after his father died, left school, and worked to support his mother and younger brothers and sisters. First he sold newspapers. For reasons that never were made clear to me, he became interested in chemistry, taught himself a bit about it, and went to work for a chemical salesman who had connections with the papers. Eventually, he co-owned a chemical sales business and made a decent amount of money (which all dissipated rapidly after his death). But that was later. Through his twenties he lived with his mother and one remaining sister, until, when she was sixteen, that last sister, Mary, died. And when Mary died, his mother, my great-grandmother, Maria, stopped eating, refused doctors, and she too died.

There is something awful now in thinking about my mother telling me this story when I was just a small child. But the truth is, I loved my mother's stories, even when they involved starving Irish grannies and impecunious youth, maybe in part because I never quite believed them. Now I can see all the key narrative elements—Horatio Alger meets *Newsies* meets a certain much beloved (to Irish Americans at least) strand of melodramatic Gothic.

So I loved the story—or was at least fascinated by it—and later could analyze its religious, political, ethnic, and gender implications, and the play of power, oppression, desire, and anxiety that ran through each episode (and perhaps even more, provided the conditions of its telling). On some fundamental level, though, the older I got, the less I believed it.

But the thing is, it turned out to be true. After my father died, I opened the grey lock box that I had seen on his desk for years (and oddly, given that I had rifled through every other available object in the house, had never touched). I remember only two of the documents that were in the box: my father's flight record from World War II (it was the original flight record, now lost) and a copy, now also lost, of my great-grandmother's death certificate. Maria Smith (therein lies yet another complex story) Hollywood died at the age of fifty-five. The cause of death: acute melancholia.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I tell this story—about the power of loss literally to kill—because it serves as a cautionary backdrop for my current research. From medieval Christian mysticism to psychoanalysis and contemporary feminist philosophy—an odd array, I grant—I have learned that one way we deal with loss is through an internalization of the lost other, who then becomes part of who we are. I am interested in the bodily, psychic, spiritual, and mental practices by which we are formed and reformed; in the role of loss and incorporation in those practices; and in the ways in which they give rise to forms of subjectivity that are always and necessarily intersubjective. (And also always and necessarily, although in complex ways, sexed, gendered, sexualized, raced, and marked by the other salient differences that constitute the social worlds of which we are a part.)

It is not an accident, of course, that the relationship between mourning, melancholia, and Christian mysticism first became starkly apparent to me—it had always been, I can now see, a crucial, yet under-theorized aspect of my work—the year that one of my brothers and one of my sisters were both very ill. I was, inevitably, thinking about mourning and melancholia and, less inevitably, reading Margaret Ebner's *Revelations*. There it was—the complex interactions between trauma and loss, mourning and melancholy—enacted in and by Ebner's book. Despite my own worries about reading anachronistically, I am convinced these complex interactions are in this text and in many others, and not just a result of me reading melancholically.

I hope today to convince you of this and to suggest the foundational role of trauma and loss, mourning and melancholic incorporation in the writings by and about two medieval women. I will then turn, albeit briefly, to what these women's stories can tell us about Freud, melancholia, and what we might call, for lack of better words, the theological imagination. To get at these questions, I need first to lay out a three or sometimes fourfold movement visible in the devotional, visionary, and mystical lives of Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268) and Margaret Ebner (ca. 1291–1351). The most striking feature of this pattern is its movement from external objects to their internalization by the devout person (the key component of melancholy for both medieval and modern theorists), and then their subsequent re-externalization in and on the body of the believer (the rendering visible of melancholic incorporation whereby the holy person becomes Christ to those around her).

Beatrice of Nazareth

Beatrice of Nazareth was a Cistercian nun, the author of a short vernacular treatise, *On the Seven Manners of Loving God*, and the subject of an extensive Latin life. I've written at length about the crucial differences between Beatrice's own text and the hagiography, presumably written by a male cleric shortly after her death. I will conflate the two documents here, however, for it is only when they are brought together that the three- and fourfold pattern of female sanctity in which I

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am interested emerges.[2] Most crucially, the hagiographer tells us about Beatrice's use of external objects as an aid to devotion, just as he will emphasize the external manifestations of belief on Beatrice's body. Beatrice, on the other hand, is intent on describing her experience as *internal*, and eschews discussion of external objects of devotion and of her own, externally apprehended body. Together the two texts give a picture of movement from external to internal and back again that we then find repeated in fourteenth-century texts like Margaret Ebner's *Revelations*.[3]

After briefly describing the ascetic rigors to which Beatrice subjects herself, the hagiographer writes of her devotion, particularly to the cross of Christ:

> Day and night she wore on her breast a wooden cross, about a palm in length, tightly tied with a knotted string. On it was written the Lord's passion, the horror of the last judgement, the severity of the judge and other things she wanted always to keep in mind. Besides this she also carried tied to her arm another image of the Lord's cross painted on a piece of parchment. She had a third, painted on a piece of wood, set before her when she was writing, so that wherever she went, or whatever exterior work she did, all forgetfulness would be banished, and by means of the image of the cross she would keep [firmly] impressed on her heart and memory whatever she feared to lose.[4]

Not only does the hagiographer portray Beatrice as making use of devotional objects to aid in her meditative practice, but there is a proliferation of these objects, suggesting both a desire that the cross be ever present to the believer, and its tendency to slip from memory in the absence of external reminders.[5]

[2] For the gap between the two, see Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 27–39; Amy Hollywood, "Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (ed. Catherine Mooney; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 78–98; and Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 247–66.

[3] There is no evidence that Ebner knew Beatrice's *vita* or treatise. Rather, Beatrice's *vita* and treatise and Ebner's *Revelations* provide evidence for commonly disseminated patterns of sanctity.

[4] *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth* (trans. and annotated by Roger DeGanck; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991) 88–91. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *LBN*.

[5] Jeffrey Hamburger provides countless examples, particularly from late-medieval Germany, of the use of devotional images and objects. Central for Hamburger is the juxtaposition of devotional practices focused on objects and sensory, ecstatic, and unitive experiences of the divine. Yet his statements about the nature of this relationship focus on methodological and descriptive issues rather than explanatory ones and therefore demand amplification, both in terms of the various ways in which medieval people themselves understood the relationship between these phenomena and of how recent theoretical work on ritual, memory, and belief might help us understand medieval practices and mentalities.

Hamburger struggles with how theoretically and practically to articulate the relationship between devotional images and visions. With regard to images of the cross that give expression to the Bride's wounding love (drawing on biblical language from the Song of Songs and the tradition of Longinus), Hamburger argues: "The miniature need no more reflect a vision than Gertrude [of Helfta's] vision need rely on such a miniature. Nevertheless, the miniature's visualization of the same commonplace metaphors of mystical union is intended to stimulate and encourage the kind of experience recorded in the visions of Gertrude of Helfta." Thus while the vision might not *rely*

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The wooden cross and images of the cross painted on wood and parchment ultimately, however, become unnecessary. The goal of Beatrice's meditation on Christ's cross seems to be met when she has so fully internalized the image of Christ's Passion that she is unable *not* to see it before her mind's eye:

> Thereafter for about five unbroken years she had the mental image of the Lord's passion so firmly impressed in her memory that she scarcely ever quit this sweet meditation, but clung from the bottom of her heart with wonderful devotion to everything he deigned to suffer for the salvation of the human race. (*LBN*, 92–93)

The hagiographer thus depicts Beatrice as having so successfully internalized that which is represented by the cross as no longer to require external aids for her meditative practice.[6]

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on such visual images, the images are meant to stimulate and encourage such visions. Hamburger does not ask, however, either how images serve to stimulate and encourage visions, or how medieval people believed this occurred. Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998) 127.

Elsewhere, Hamburger talks about the relationship between visions and visual images in terms of analogy. "The drawings from St. Walburg do not transcribe such visions, nor should the experience of viewing them be confused with visionary experience itself. The analogies are structural. They extend beyond straightforward parallels in imagery, the search for which reduces visionary accounts to no more than another set of textual sources or, conversely, the comparable works of art to little more than stimuli for hallucinations masquerading as authentic vatic phenomena. Instead, the wide-ranging correspondences authorized the images as instruments of meditation, just as, on occasion, works of art could authenticate visions. The analogies between works of art and visions enabled the images to inspire certain devotional experiences to which visualization and, on occasion, visionary experience were intrinsic." Hamburger's point is crucial methodologically. As he convincingly argues, the search for "sources" is inadequate and misguided. "No single passage or group of passages linked in exegesis serves as a univocal source [for an image]." Likewise, no image can serve as the univocal source for a vision or visionary account. "Instead, the devotional works that inform the drawings [from St. Wahlburg] stand *pars pro toto* for the spiritual readings that would have informed the nuns' response to them, just as the drawings, in turn, focused and heightened their readings of exegetical and meditational texts." See Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 130 and 168; see also 154, 164, 168–69, 214.

Although this paper does not directly touch on these issues, in future work I hope to explore the question of how visual images and texts, whether read or heard, and ascetic, paraliturgical, and liturgical practices, serve as tools for meditation. I hope also to consider what meditation itself is believed to accomplish and how its effects are experienced and theologically articulated. In a figure like Margaret Ebner, moreover, these practices and experiences are not merely visual, but involve all of the senses.

[6] On the tradition of meditation on the life of Christ, its goal in the internalization of Christ's Passion, and the compunction for human sinfulness that necessitated it, see Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1989) 19–54; Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) esp. 26–68; and Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) esp. 165–83.

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Turning to Beatrice's own treatise, *On the Seven Manners of Loving God*, we find no explicit reference to her devotion to Christ's cross, either as externally apprehended through created objects or as internally present to the mind. Yet the language Beatrice uses to describe her intense love for God can be traced to contemporary discourses on and representations of the Passion (discourses and representations closely tied to ancient and medieval medical accounts of melancholia). In describing the violent and overwhelming experience of the fifth manner of loving, Beatrice writes that

> at times love becomes so boundless and so overflowing in the soul, when it itself is so mightily and violently moved in the heart, that it seems (*dunct*) to the soul that the heart is wounded again and again, and that these wounds increase every day in bitter pain and in fresh intensity. It seems (*dunct)* to the soul that the veins are bursting, the blood spilling, the marrow withering, the bones softening, the bosom burning, the throat parching, so that her visage and her body in its every part feels this inward (*van binnen*) heat, and this is the fever of love.[7]

The wounding of the heart by love calls to mind both Song of Songs 4:9 ("You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, with one of thy eyes") and the piercing of Christ's side by Longinus's spear. In Sermon 61 on the Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux writes that the spear, in piercing Christ's side, laid bare his heart, the very heart wounded by the glance of his beloved.[8] Beatrice's words, then, evoke the Passion in ways that may seem oblique to modern readers but would have been clear to her contemporaries. In writing of her own heartache, moreover, she not only internalizes a mental image of the Passion, but herself comes to experience internally the suffering Christ felt on the cross (a movement of identification facilitated by the Song of Songs itself, which moves between the laments of the Bridegroom and his Bride).

The conflation of language from the Song of Songs with events from the Passion narrative is further reinforced by the application of medical accounts of lovesickness and melancholia to the Song of Songs. Twelfth-century commentators on the Song wrestle with the problem of how lovesickness, which they considered to be a physical illness, "could signify spiritual love." Yet by the thirteenth century, William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, argues that the medical language of lovesickness can be used to help describe and understand mystical rapture.[9] The soul

[7] Beatrice of Nazareth, *Seven Manieren van Minne* (ed. L. Reypens and J. Van Mierlo; Leuven: S. V. de Vlaamsche Boekenhalle, 1926) 19–20; Beatrice of Nazareth, "There Are Seven Manners of Loving," in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (ed. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff; trans. Eric Colledge; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 203. Translation modified. My thanks to Walter Simons for help with this difficult passage and other suggestions for reading the Dutch text.

[8] Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 61 in *On the Song of Songs III* (trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene Edmunds; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1979) 143–44.

[9] Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 23–24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

languishing for love of God ("for I am sick with love," Song of Songs 2:5, 5:8) becomes emblematic of mystical rapture itself, and the effects of lovesickness and mystical desire are almost indistinguishable.[10] Medieval natural philosophers and theologians, moreover, closely associated lovesickness with melancholia and both, it must be added, with languor.[11] Although in the Middle Ages, melancholia is often associated with acedia and anger[12] and, much less often, with envy and avarice[13]—all sinful states—lovesickness as a species of melancholia is clearly not, or at least not always, sinful. Instead, mania, sorrow, despair, and languor (not easily assimilable categories, to modern ears) are so closely associated with melancholic lovesickness that by the twelfth century, as Mary Wack explains, "the medical *signa amoris* came to be applied to mystical love."[14] And not only, I argue, with mystical love of the soul for God, but also the love of Christ for humanity.

When Beatrice writes that it seems to her as if her veins were bursting, her marrow withering, her bones softening, her throat parching, and above all, her blood spilling, she borrows from late-medieval medical discourses about lovesickness and melancholia.[15] She describes herself as sick with love, not for another human being, but for God. By juxtaposing this language with that of the heart wound, moreover, she conflates the soul's love for God with God's love for the soul as demonstrated by the Son's death on the cross. For medieval medical writers within both the Christian and Muslim traditions, lovesickness as a form of melancholia (or sometimes as a forerunner to melancholia) is a malfunctioning of judgment or the estimative faculty. Like Freud, as we will see, Avicenna and those who follow him argue that the melancholic (whether lovesick or not) overestimates his or her object.[16] Although often read within the terms of humoral theory (a complicating factor I don't have time to discuss today), Avicenna and his followers fundamentally

[10] As Bernard McGinn shows, James of Vitry's *Life of Marie of Oignies* (ca. 1213) is the first text to use language traditionally associated with the heights of monastic contemplation (*separatus a corpore*, *a sensibilibus abstracta*, *in excesssu rapta*) for trance-like states of langour, furthering the association of lovesickness (langour) with mystical ecstasy. See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200–1350* (New York: Crossroad, (1998) 37–38

[11] See Wack, *Lovesickness*, 6, 10, 12–13, 21, 35, 40, 56, 61, 160–62.

[12] For the association between melancholia and acedia (often translated as sloth, although the term as it first appears in Cassion [d. 430] and as it is used throughout the medieval period carries much more complex connotations), see in particular Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan State College Press, 1952) 430, n. 61; Stanley Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 66–70; Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Gendering of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) 154–58; and Jennifer Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 19–20, 69–74.

[13] See Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, 428 n. 30; and Wack, *Lovesickness*, 12–13, 162.

[14] Wack, *Lovesickness*, 23.

[15] Ibid., 29.

[16] Ibid., 56–59.

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agree with Freud that lovesickness and melancholy involve an over-valuation of the object, suffering in the face of one's own inadequacy before the beloved, and the beloved's loss or absence. We can discern here why melancholic lovesickness for God or Christ cannot be sinful, for the object of love cannot be over-valued, nor the lover ever sufficiently debased before its divine beloved.[17]

The tie between Beatrice's internal experience of a lovesickness reminiscent of Christ's Passion and her meditation on the Passion of Christ becomes clearer when we see how Beatrice's hagiographer chose to translate the passage of the treatise cited above. As elsewhere in his rendering of Beatrice's words, the hagiographer externalizes what she describes as internally apprehended experiences:

> Indeed her heart, deprived of strength by this invasion, often gave off a sound like that of a shattering vessel, while she both felt the same and heard it exteriorly. Also the blood diffused through her bodily members boiled over through her open veins. Her bones contracted and the marrow disappeared; the dryness of her chest produced hoarseness of throat. And to make a long story short, the very fervor of her holy longing and love blazed up as a fire in all her bodily members, making her perceptibly (*sensibiliter*) hot in a wondrous way. (*LBN*, 308–11)

Lest this body, with blood boiling over through its open veins, seem far from the representations of Christ's Passion on which Beatrice might have meditated, we have only to turn to an image now in Cologne, and probably produced in the Rhineland during the fourteenth century.[18] Here we see Christ depicted as awash in blood, suggesting a visual rendition of the reading of Christ's Passion as lovesickness evoked textually by Beatrice's hagiographer. We cannot know if she ever saw images like this one. Nonetheless, it is clear that a common set of biblical and medical references enables the conflation of Christ's Passion with the love of the Bridegroom for his Bride in the Song of Songs and with medieval discourses on lovesickness. Christ's Passion *is*—iconically and experientially—melancholic lovesickness. In taking on that lovesickness, internalizing and then externally enacting Christ's melancholic desire, Beatrice herself shares in and is depicted as reenacting Christ's Passion.

As I have said, the emphasis on external objects of devotion as aides to meditation and the subsequent externalization of the internalized image of Christ's suffering on the body of the saint appear only in Beatrice's hagiography, not in her own texts. She quite explicitly emphasizes the internal nature of her experience, perhaps in an attempt to forestall thirteenth-century presumptions of the necessarily bodily nature of women's sanctity. By the time Margaret Ebner writes her *Revelations* in the fourteenth century, however, women religious writers seem fully to have inter-

[17] On Theresa and the attempt to distinguish loving desire for God from melancholia, and the reasons for this shift away from medieval Christian patterns of thought, see Radden, *Nature of Melancholy*, 107–17.

[18] See Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, Plate One.

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nalized the prescriptions for sanctity found in thirteenth-century hagiographies. For this reason, Kate Greenspan and Richard Kieckhefer have referred to books like the *Revelations* as autohagiographies, for they include accounts of both the internally apprehended and externally visible lives of the holy person.[19] Something very close to the threefold pattern of internalization and externalization discerned in Beatrice's treatise and hagiography, then, appears explicitly in Ebner's *Revelations*.[20]

Margaret Ebner

Ebner writes about her devotional practices and their seemingly miraculous fulfillment in ways that demonstrate the relationship of these practices to her intractable mourning over the loss of a beloved other. The close ties between lovesickness and melancholia, loss and mourning, are thus starkly apparent within her book (as also are the deep resonances between late-medieval devotional and mystical texts and psychoanalysis). Like Beatrice, moreover, Ebner not only comes to see and hear Christ's suffering, but also to experience it herself. Again, in ways that Freud will later theorize in psychoanalytic terms, the infinitely valued but absent beloved is both idealized and internalized by the lovesick melancholic.[21]

Ebner lived from 1291–1351, spending most of her life in the Dominican monastery of Maria Medingen near Dillingen in southern Germany.[22] Her life was marked, according to the account she gives us in her *Revelations*, by continuous ill health and what we would now call paramystical phenomena. The illnesses begin in 1312, but the real impetus for her special religious experiences seems to have been the death of the nun who cared for her in her illness over a number of years and, a year later, her meeting with the secular clergyman, Henry of Nördlingen. (Henry would became her lifelong friend and supporter, making her the center of a

[19] See Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 6. How we are to read these accounts, of course, remains open to question.

[20] A similar pattern can also be seen in Henry Suso's *Life of the Servant*, although with important differences arguably tied to gender difference. (Hence Suso insists that only he can enact the physical appropriation of Christ's Passion; the women around him instead make small emblems that, when they have touched his [Suso's] wounded body, become objects of veneration and community formation.)

[21] Freud uses the terms "internalization" and "incorporation" interchangeably. See Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; New York: Norton, 1973) 211–12, 226–27. Although Karl Abraham and Maria Torok argue for the necessity of distinguishing the two, I will stay with Freud's usage here.

[22] For Margaret Ebner, see Philip Strauch, ed., *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Deutschen Mystik* [*ME*] (Freiburg: Mohr, 1882), which contains Margaret's *Revelations* (1–166); and Ebner, *Major Works* [*MW*] (trans. and ed. Leonard P. Hindsley; New York: Paulist Press, 1993), containing a translation of the *Revelations* (83–172) and a prayer attributed to Margaret, the *Pater Noster* (173–78). The latter volume also includes a useful introduction and bibliography. Further references will be found parenthetically as ME and MW, respectively, within the text (*MW* is listed first in each such reference).

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loose knit group of like-minded religious people, "The Friends of God.") Up until this time in her life, Ebner describes only two experiences that might be taken as extraordinary signs of religious grace, a dream and an audition.[23]

The relative aridity of Ebner's spiritual life changes drastically, however, with the death of the caretaking nun, whom Ebner never names. Ebner's mourning is intense: "there were times when I thought I could not be without my sister and could not live without her" (*MW,* 92; *ME,* 13). Although she claims that this sorrow often turned to joy, she admits that she "could not actually be conscious of" this joy. The sister returns to Ebner in sleep, letting her know that she is in heaven with the Virgin Mary, the humanity of the Lord, and the divine Trinity. She promises, furthermore, that she will be there to greet Ebner when Ebner dies. Yet despite these comforting dreams, Ebner's sorrow for her sister "was not relieved" (*MW*, 92; *ME*, 15). Out of this grief, however, emerges the full range of sensory experiences of both comfort and suffering that will mark the remainder of Ebner's life. Thus in the year following the nun's death, in the midst of an administrative conflict in the monastery about which Ebner claims not to care, she went out to visit the convent graves (and presumably that of her beloved fellow sister). Later, she writes:

> As I went into choir a sweet fragrance surrounded me and penetrated through my heart and into all my limbs and the name *Jesus Christus* was given to me so powerfully that I could pay attention to nothing else. And it seemed to me that I was really in His presence. (*MW*, 93; *ME,* 15)

This marks the beginning of Ebner's multi-sensory experience of the divine presence, which will come to encapsulate not only smell, but also hearing, sight, taste, touch, and proprioreception. It is also the first instance of one of the two devotional practices that will be central to her life from that time forward, the constant repetition of the name of Jesus Christ.[24]

Ebner insists that in her subsequent meeting with Henry of Nördlingen (1332), he spoke words of such comfort that the death of her sister was "never again as unbearable as it had been" (*MW*, 93; *ME*, 16). Yet immediately following this passage she describes the onset of "the greatest pain" in her head and teeth, a pain so great that she "could not bow [her] head for six weeks and all seemed bitter to [her] and [she] thought that [she] would rather suffer death each day" (*MW*, 93;

[23] The first is a dream in which she feels full of grace and lightness and experiences God sporting with her soul. The second is a moment in which a voice suggests the divine origin and power of her daily suffering. As Ebner explains, pain replaces active asceticism in her life, for her illness often makes her unable to participate in even the normal ascetic activities associated with her monastic rule. Suffering, however, is an everyday occurrence. So at one moment, when her sisters believe she is at the point of death, a voice tells her, "You are not dying; indeed many of the nuns will die before you." The voice continues, "You must suffer here on earth. . . . But when you die, you will go to heaven without delay" (*MW*, 90; *ME*, 10).

[24] This practice is related, in complex ways, to the developing devotion to the name of Jesus Christ in the West and the hesychast movement, centered on recitation of the Jesus prayer, in Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

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ME, 16). The very intensity of this suffering, however, becomes the basis for the second great devotional practice of Ebner's life, her meditation on the person of Christ, and in particular, on his Passion (joined later by a parallel devotion to his childhood):

> Once during Lent [apparently in 1334] great desire and powerful grace were given to me to serve God more perfectly. I felt how our Lord's works of love increased powerfully in me. And I desired that my whole body would be full of the signs of love of the holy cross, as many as were possible to be on me, and that each one would be given to me with all its suffering and pain over my entire body. Still I desired that there be no member of my body not wounded with the pains of my Lord Jesus Christ. I also had great yearning to hear something about the signs of love and works of love (*minnenzaichen und werken*) because I felt an inner grace-filled attraction toward them. Eight days before Easter the Lord gave me a most severe and unceasing pain. In this agony I heard about the sufferings of our Lord as the four Passion narratives were being read. (*MW,* 95; *ME*, 19–20)

Ebner's desire for the stigmata ("the signs of love of the holy cross")[25] entails not only a desire for visible signs of Christ's suffering on her body, but also for the pain of that suffering. Her prayer is answered when she physically reenacts Christ's pain during Passion week (a pattern that will be repeated in subsequent years in a cycle that follows the liturgical calendar).

Ebner's devotion to Christ's cross not only brings about her own bodily suffering, but also leads to her extraordinary responses to auditory and visual representations of Christ's Passion. The passage cited above suggests the importance of the auditory, for Ebner first desires to hear the story of Christ's Passion, and then miraculously does hear the story read aloud.[26] She goes on to stress the role of the visual and the tactile in her devotion:

> Every cross I came upon I kissed ardently and as frequently as possible. I pressed it forcibly against my heart constantly, so that I often thought I could not separate myself from it and remain alive. (*MW*, 96; *ME,* 20)

This language, so strongly reminiscent of that used to discuss the dead nun who had cared for Ebner, suggests that, for Ebner, the cross and Christ on it have replaced this beloved sister in her affective life. Ebner continues:

> Such great desire and such sweet power so penetrated my heart and all of my members that I could not withdraw myself from the cross. Wherever I went I had a cross with me. In addition, I possessed a little book in which there

[25] For other examples of Ebner's desire for the stigmata, in which she explicitly invokes the famous example of Francis of Assisi, see *MW*, 110, 127; *ME*, 46, 78. For the fulfillment of this desire, in which Ebner "was given the sight of the five holy wounds" on her own body, see *MW*, 112; *ME*, 50. This occurs in 1339. For a more ambiguous fulfillment, in which the pain of the body wracked on the cross is invoked, see *MW*, 157; *ME*, 132–33.

[26] As is often the case in Ebner's *Revelations*, there is a natural explanation for what occurs, although Ebner also reads the event as a sign of divine grace.

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> was a picture of the Lord on the cross I shoved it secretly against my bosom, open to that place, and wherever I went I pressed it to my heart with great joy and with measureless grace. When I wanted to sleep, I took the picture of the Crucified Lord in the little book and laid it under my face. Also, around my neck I wore a cross that hung down to my heart. In addition, I took a large cross whenever possible and laid it over my heart. I clung to it while lying down until I fell asleep in great grace. We had a large crucifix in choir. I had the greatest desire to kiss it and to press it close to my heart like the others. But it was too high up for me and was too large in size. [27] (*MW*, 96; *ME*, 20–21)

The one sister in whom Ebner confides this desire refuses to help her, fearing that the act would be too much for one as physically frail as Ebner. Yet, Ebner claims, what is not possible while awake God grants her in a dream: "It seemed as if I were standing before the cross filled with the desire that I usually had within me. As I stood before the image, my Lord Jesus Christ bent down from the cross and let me kiss His open heart and gave me to drink of the blood flowing from His heart" (*MW*, 96; *ME*, 21).[28]

The goal of Ebner's devotion to the name of Jesus Christ and to his Passion is suggested in these passages and very shortly attained. The following Lent (1335), as Ebner explains:

> The sweetest Name of Jesus Christ was given to me with such great love that by the interior divine power of God I could pray only with continuous speaking. I could not resist it. I do not know how to write about it except to say that the Name *Jesus Christus* was constantly on my lips. The speaking lasted until prime and I could do nothing else. Then I was silent. I could avoid speaking with other people, but I had no power to cease from this speaking.[29] (*MW*, 100; *ME*, 27)

Ebner has so fully internalized her devotional practice that she is now unable *not* to repeat continuously the name of Jesus Christ.

A similar pattern repeats itself on the auditory, visual, and tactile planes, although the process of meditative internalization is slower and involves three stages rather

[27] Again there are clear parallels here with Francis, who desires to have Christ's cross impressed on his heart.

[28] For the kiss of the heart and drinking blood from Christ's side wound, see Amy Hollywood, "'That Glorious Slit': Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound," in *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture: Thresholds of History* (ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Theresa Krier; New York: Routledge, 2005) 105–25, and the literature cited there.

[29] Hindsley makes the choice to capitalize three words Ebner often uses to describe her experience, thereby hypostasizing them as special states: the Silence, the Speaking, and the Outcry. Although Ebner does use the words *swige*, *rede*, and *rüefe* to name certain experiences in which divine agency renders her completely passive, the line between actively keeping silence or speaking the name of Jesus Christ and being unable *not* to do these things is often less clear than Hindsley's translations allow. For this reason, I find Hindsley's capitalizations misleading and so omit them here. I don't discuss silence in this paper; suffice to say that it is a state in which Ebner is literally unable to speak, her jaw often clenched together so that nothing can pass through her lips.

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than two. (I am simplifying the often complex relationship between these stages for the sake of time.) First, Ebner desires to impress the cross and the Passion story onto her heart by voluntarily embracing visual images and repeatedly listening to or reading the Passion narrative. This is followed by an inability not to see Christ's suffering. In the Lent of 1340, while at matins, for example, "the greatest pain came over" Ebner's heart (like "the greatest pain" that comes over Ebner after she apparently accepted her fellow nun's death),

> and also a sorrow, so bitter that it was as if I were really in the presence of my Beloved, my most heartily Beloved One, and as if I had seen his suffering with my own eyes and as if it were all happening before me at this very moment. (*MW*, 114; *ME*, 52)

Following in the meditative tradition on Christ's life and death promulgated by the Cistercians, Franciscans and Dominicans, Ebner here describes a perfect *meditatio* in which she no longer needs external aides, be they visual, tactile, or auditory, in order for Christ's Passion to be viscerally present to her.

With this internalizing movement, Christ's Passion is also re-externalized in and on Ebner's body. Laid out in pain in the choir and then the dormitory, Ebner becomes a visible sign of the suffering engendered by witnessing Christ's Passion and, ultimately as we will see, of the Passion itself. Not only does she find herself unable *not* to repeat the name of Christ (the speaking), and not to hear of or see Christ's torment before her mind's ear and eye, but she also finds herself unable to hear about or see Christ's death without crying aloud (the outcry).[30] She claims that other signs of the body's share in Christ's Passion often accompany this externalizing vocalization:

> But when I was given to loud exclamations and outcries by the gentle goodness of God (these were given to me when I heard the holy suffering spoken about), then I was pierced to the heart and this extended to all my members, and then I was bound and ever more grasped by the silence. In these cases, I sit a long time—sometimes longer, sometimes shorter. After this my heart was as if shot by a mysterious force. Its effect rose up to my head and passed on to all my members and broke them violently. Compelled by the same force I cried out loudly and exclaimed. I had no power over myself and was not able to stop the outcry until God released me from it. Sometimes it grasped me so powerfully that red blood spurted from me. (*MW*, 114; *ME*, 54)

Ebner's identification with the Passion shifts from identification with the onlookers to one with Christ himself. With blood gushing forth from her body, moreover,

[30] The complicating factor here is that the outcry first emerges around visual or oral representations of Christ's Passion and then *intensifies* when Ebner finds herself unable not to see and hear of the Passion. In the latter instances, moreover, the outcry has new bodily components.

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Ebner so fully incorporates Christ—the lost beloved other—that she now visibly represents his suffering for those around her.[31]

In a similar way, increasingly Ebner does not have to see representations of or hear about Christ's Passion to be overcome by what she calls the outcry. Rather, an "inner vision" comes upon her, and she is unable to restrain herself from crying out in pain and suffering. Again, these events occur particularly during Lent and with greatest intensity during Holy Week:

> And that happened to me frequently at the same time because of some inner vision especially during Lent, even when I did not hear or read the Passion. On that Wednesday when I had read vespers, the entire Passion came to me again with strong outcries and exclamations. On Thursday after that at matins I was again grasped by great sincere sympathy inwardly and outwardly. Then on Friday the Passion was so really present to me while reading the office that I cried out when I read one of the hours. (*MW*, 115; *ME*, 55–56)

Throughout the week, Ebner was in bed, "so wounded externally from the interior suffering" that she couldn't bear to have anyone touch her. Yet she shares not only in Christ's Passion, but also in his resurrection. On Easter Sunday the nun who cared for her found her "in great joy and in good health" (*MW*, 115; *ME*, 56).[32]

[31] Or, at least, this is how Ebner depicts herself. How historians should read Ebner's hagiographical literalizing of metaphors found in earlier women's writing (like that of Beatrice) requires much further discussion. On the salvific power of Christ's blood and the centrality of blood in representations of the Passion, see Hollywood, " 'That Glorious Slit' "; and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

[32] This pattern, of Lenten suffering and post-Easter renewal will increasingly be joined with a devotion to the Christ child. Focused around Advent and Christmas, the practices involved in this devotion are not unlike those tied to Ebner's devotion to the Passion, with an emphasis on both auditory and visual meditational practice and the use of devotional objects. See, for example, *MW,* 132–34; *ME*, 87–91. Henry of Nördlingen champions devotion to the Christ child in a letter to Ebner, suggesting that he may have been the source of this devotion (which also appears in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Flowing light of the Godhead*, sent to Margaret by Henry). Leonard Hindsley insists that Ebner partook in this devotion independently of Henry's influence, since the first letter in which he discusses it was sent at Christmas 1341, three years before she began to write down the *Revelations*. Yet Ebner's account of the years 1332–1340 deal solely with devotion to Christ's Passion and therefore seem to reflect her actual *practice* before the Christ child comes to the forefront in about 1344. She seems both to accept Henry's admonition that she add devotion to the Christ child to her religious life, and at the same time accurately records the absence of that devotion before 1341. See Hindsley, "Introduction," in *MW*, 53–54; and "Letter 38" in Strauch, *ME*, 233–34.

What seems further worthy of note is that Ebner clearly marks a tension between the two even as, in the later parts of her *Revelations*, she pursues both. When Ebner first asks the Virgin Mary to allow her to experience the joys of the Christ child together with the Passion, Mary herself remarks on the apparent disparity between these two desires:

> One day I wanted our Lady to help me so that the five signs of love would be impressed upon me with the same feeling as they had been impressed upon St. Francis. On that same day I asked her to help me to perceive what divine joy there would be with her dear Child. Then I was answered lovingly by her, "You ask me for such dissimilar things that I do not know what I should do for you." (*MW*, 127; *ME*, 78)

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This pattern, of Lenten suffering followed by Easter renewal, which follows the liturgical calendar that structured a Dominican nun's daily life and year, will continue throughout Ebner's *Revelations*. Christ's name and the wounds of his Passion are further impressed on her heart and the "rending arrows" of the Lord shoot through her heart "with a swift shot from his spear of Love" (*MW*, 156; *ME*, 131; here, as in Beatrice's *Seven Manners of Loving*, language from the Song of Songs comes together with reflections on Longinus's spear). Perhaps Ebner's most complete moment of identification with Christ's suffering occurs through her own highly particular version of the stigmata. She receives not the visible wounds, nor simply the pain of the hands, feet, side wound, and head wounds (caused by the crown of thorns), but a wracking of the entire body reminiscent of late medieval and early modern representations of the crucifixion:[33]

> I felt an inner pain in my hands as if they were stretched out, torn, and broken through, and I supposed that they would always be useless to me thereafter. In my head I felt a wondrous pain as if I were pierced and broken through.[34] That seemed so excruciating to me that I began to tremble and shook so violently that the sisters had to hold me fast. I trembled while in their grasp and I felt this trembling for a long time after Easter whenever I prayed earnestly or read or talked, and I perceived the same painful brokenness in all my members, especially on both sides and on my back, arms, and legs, so that it seemed to me I was in the last throes and that all this suffering would continue until death, if it were the will of God. (*MW*, 157; *ME*, 132–33)

Ebner ends her book with an attempt to resolve this dilemma, not through reason or theological argument, but through a visionary dream in which she gives symbolic form to her experience. In the dream, she sees two sisters from her monastery. They give her two apples that have fallen from the beautiful trees among which they are wandering:

> One of them was sour, the other sweet. They asked me to eat them. I took the apples and bit into them. Then I felt such great grace from the apples that I said, "No one on earth could eat both." They said, "If you do not like them, give them back to us." Then I awoke still chewing, and the grace was so sweet and so strong that I could not speak a word and could not take in breath and was really without my bodily senses. That lasted a long time with me and after that I read matins without comprehending a word. (*MW*, 171; *ME*, 159)

Always within the context of the monastic rule by which her life was strictly ordered, Ebner pursues devotions to the name of Christ, to his childhood, and to his Passion. No matter how deeply at odds these various devotions may be emotionally and affectively, they come together in her belief in Christ's humanity and its salvific work. One link between the childhood of Christ and his Passion lies in Ebner's Eucharistic devotion; another link between these two moments in Christ's life, as between Ebner's devotion to Christ's Passion, his Infancy, and the Holy Name, is the feast of the Circumcision. See Irénée Noye, "Jésus (Nom de)," *Dictionaire Spiritualitè* [*DS*] 8, cols. 1109–126.

[33] See James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study in the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Kortrijk, Belgium: Van Ghemmert, 1979).

[34] This recalls the experience of those stigmatics who either exhibit visibly or feel the pain of the wounds on Christ's head made by the crown of thorns. For a brief discussion of the variety of phenomena associated with the stigmata, attempts to catalogue and classify them, and a perceptive account of the classical and modern literature, see Pierre Adnès, "Stigmate," *DS*, 14, cols. 1211–243.

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Even Easter no longer brings about Ebner's renewal. At this point, she writes, she longs for death, quoting Philippians 1:23 and 1:21: "*cupio dissolvi*" ("I desire to be destroyed")[35] and "*mihi vivere Christus et mori lucrum*" ("for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.") (*MW*, 157; *ME*, 132–33)

A pattern common to a number of texts from the later Middle Ages, then, appears with stark clarity in Ebner's *Revelations*. She moves through four stages: 1) She actively remembers Christ's Passion, aided by the recitation and reading of scriptural texts, meditative guides, prayers, and the divine name, as well as by devotional images and artifacts; 2) She is then unable not to cry out in the face of this suffering; 3) She *involuntarily* remembers these events, and, finally, 4) She fully internalizes and reenacts them in and on her body.

Trauma, Memory, and Melancholia

I have argued elsewhere that the meditative practices of the later Middle Ages, which aimed to make vivid and inescapable the pain and suffering of Christ's life and death, are curiously similar to contemporary discussions of traumatic memory.[36] Researchers on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder isolate particular forms of intensely sensory and bodily memories in which the survivor involuntarily and repetitiously relives traumatic events. Such memories are intrusive, intensely vivid, repetitive, and lack a narrative frame. They are not only visual, moreover, but also often involve other senses, presumably those heightened at the moment of trauma (for Ebner the sensory associations are often biblically based).

Contemporary research suggests that in situations of hyperarousal for which one is unprepared, memory is encoded in a different, more viscerally experiential manner than normal. (The scholarship is highly contentious.)[37] These memories are not

[35] A text also cited by Beatrice of Nazareth at a crucial moment in *The Seven Manners of Loving*.

[36] There are, of course, enormous dangers in making a potentially anachronistic retroactive diagnosis. Ebner's *Revelations* have already been put "on the couch" by Oskar Pfister, who argued in 1911 that Ebner was an hysteric. I hope to explore the differences between my move and Pfister's in a future paper. This will include dealing with the general objections to psychoanalytic readings of medieval texts and the problematization of the category of trauma. See Oskar Pfister, "Hysterie und Mystik bei Margaretha Ebner (1291–1351)," *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 1 (1911) 468–85. For objections to Pfister, see Martin Grabmann, "Deutsche Mystik im Kloster Engelthal," *Sammelblatt des Historischen Vereins Eichstätt* 25/26 (1910–11) 33–34; Wolfgang Beutin, " 'Hysterie und Mystik': Zur Mittelalter-Rezeption der frühen Psychoanalyse. Die 'Offenbarungen' der Nonne Margaretha Ebner (ca. 1291–1351), gedeutet durch den Zürcher Pfarrer und Analytiker Oskar Pfister," in *Mittelalter-Rezeption IV: Medien, Politik, Ideologie, Ökonomie* (ed. Irene von Burg et al; Goppingen: Kümmerle, 1991) 11–26; and Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1996) 70–71. For a recent attack on psychoanalytic criticism from a medievalist's perspective, see Lee Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies," *Speculum* 76 (2001) 638–80.

[37] See especially Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Robert McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assimilated to consciousness, and so impinge on it in uncontrollable and intrusive ways. Modern therapeutic accounts of bodily memory, intent on eradicating, controlling, or weakening its sensory strength, argue that this can be done through the process of narrativization. Complex therapies of speaking and reenacting traumatic events within controlled environments make it possible, so the argument goes, for bodily memories to be relived and reordered in meaningful narrative forms. The therapeutic claim is that such narrativization loosens the hold of bodily memories and alleviates suffering.[38]

Late-medieval meditational practices like Ebner's, however, work in precisely the opposite direction. They attempt to inculcate traumatic or bodily memory—or something very like it—by rendering involuntary, vivid, and inescapable the central catastrophic event of Christian history so that the individual believer might relive and share in that trauma.[39] For medieval practitioners of meditation on Christ's Passion, the desire to inculcate something like traumatic memory is theologically justified by a promise: through sharing in the suffering of those who witnessed Christ's death or—as in Beatrice's *Seven Manners of Loving God* and Ebner's *Revelations*—sharing Christ's own pain, one can participate in the salvific work of the cross. The biggest difference between late medieval practice and contemporary accounts of post-traumatic stress disorder, then, is that whereas the latter lacks a narrative frame, medieval practice always occurs—at least in theory—within the context of Christian salvation history. One might argue that through meditation on the life and death of Christ, the believer destroys all other narrative frameworks for his or her life, and induces strong emotion that can then be redeployed toward the imaginative constitution of a new Christian narrative of suffering and redemption.[40] (Franciscan treatises emphasize guilt, although this is not theologically or affectively central in either Beatrice or Ebner.)

Ebner's text, in which her devotion to the Passion occurs in the midst of intense physical suffering and the loss of loved ones (not only the first nun who cared for her, but also the death of her next caretaker and that of another beloved fellow

[38] For the most often cited version of this argument, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[39] See Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 74–97 and the literature cited there.

[40] Meditative practice itself imaginatively recreates this narrative, one given further weight and vividness by the emotions evoked through that very practice. Yet the evocation of emotion seems to depend at least in part on an increased focus on isolated aspects of Christ's Passion—fragmented moments and bits of Christ's body and the instruments of his suffering—thereby working against the apparently seamless progressivist Christian narrative. (See, for example, the innumerable late-medieval images of the instruments of Christ's suffering and death, the *arma Christi*.) This tension in the meditative tradition requires further exploration. Moreover, Ebner's constant repetition of the narrative and experience of Christ's Passion raises the question of how adequate a therapy narrativization really is. Does one simply move from repeating visceral memories to endlessly repeating the story in which those memories are supposedly rendered meaningful? Although this might alleviate suffering to an extent, it does so through displacement or sublimation, a displacement that the viscerality of Ebner's desire refuses.

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nun) suggests further possible refinements in our understanding of the relationship between memory, meditation, and trauma within medieval mystical texts.[41] The central traumas of Ebner's *Revelations* appear to be physical suffering and, most crucially, mourning. Throughout Ebner's *Revelations* one finds constantly repeated scenes of intense physical suffering and loss. Early in the text, however, she makes these scenes theologically meaningful by assimilating her own mourning and pain to that of Christ's followers and of Christ himself on the cross. Traumatic repetition is here not simply an involuntary repetition of past losses, but marks the willed taking on of suffering which also renders it meaningful.

Some attention to Freud's conceptions of mourning and melancholy further advances this reading. Freud opens his seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) by making a sharp distinction between the two reactions to loss (whether of a human being or some more abstract entity). Whereas in mourning, the bereaved is able "bit by bit" to detach herself from the beloved object, allowing other objects to replace that which is lost, in melancholia the bereaved refuses to detach from and replace the lost other.[42] What is putatively surprising to Freud is not that melancholia occurs, but that mourning is so difficult:

> Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect to it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality [the loss of the object] is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.[43]

Despite the seemingly inexplicable detour, then, ultimately the ego returns to the pleasure-seeking state in which it is "free and uninhibited," ready to attach itself to and find pleasure with new objects.

The apparent—and unanswered—puzzle in "Mourning and Melancholia" is why the normally pleasure-optimizing ego is unable immediately to relinquish its object. Yet Freud occupies himself in most of the essay with the opposite issue: why is the ego sometimes unable to mourn at all and instead becomes melancholic? Melancholia is marked, for Freud, by dejection, unremitting sadness, listlessness, and guilt, characteristics familiar from medieval accounts of melancholia and melancholic lovesickness. I won't here rehearse the various arguments Freud makes in his attempt fully to distinguish mourning and melancholia. What is crucial for

[41] There seems to be at least some supporting evidence in many of the fourteenth-century German convent chronicles, which focus on both group and individual responses to death. For full information about and discussion of these sources, see Lewis, *By Women for Women*.

[42] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* [SE] (ed. and trans. James Strachey; London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–74) 14:244–49.

[43] *SE*, 14:245.

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my purposes today is Freud's contention that the melancholic, refusing fully to give up her object and engage in substitutions, instead identifies with the object and internalizes it.

Freud describes this double movement in a peculiar way, first claiming that the melancholic's "object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end." He goes on, however, to explain that in the case of melancholia, "the free libido was not displaced onto another object," but instead "was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object."[44] In other words, Freud claims both that the melancholic readily gives up her object, and that the libido released by that loss turns to the ego in the form of an incorporation of the lost object. The melancholic, despite Freud's contrary claim, never gives up but merely internalizes the lost object. As Freud goes on to explain, this incorporation both extends the ego's narcissism and is the site of a "painful wound":

> Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as thought it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.[45]

The ambivalence felt toward an object that has seemingly deserted the ego—the simultaneous hatred and love of the lost object—is now fully internalized.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud argues that melancholia is a pathological state, one to which normal mourning is the healthy counterpart. We can already see, however, that the incorporations crucial to melancholia are also foundational to the constitution of the ego and to what Freud suggests is a split between the "critical activity of the ego" and its originary repressive and narcissistic aspects. Freud argues much more explicitly for this bifurcation within the ego in "The Ego and the Id" (1923). There he argues that melancholic identifications and incorporations, which he had first viewed as primarily if not solely pathological, are crucial to the development of the superego:

> We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in those suffering from it] an object that was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification. At the same time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its "character."[46]

[44] *SE*, 14:249.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," *SE*, 19:28.

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For Freud, then, the very constitution of the subject as self-reflective and self-critical depends on melancholic incorporation. This takes a particularly Oedipal caste, for ultimately it is the father who is thus internalized—and most completely, according to Freud, by men. Yet Freud's account of melancholic idealization and incorporation in no way leads inevitably to his later claims, particularly in his essays concerning femininity, that the Oedipal narrative alone governs the development of "character." (Nor does the deployment of the Oedipal narrative itself demand that the internalized object be the father. For both boys and girls, it is the *mother* who is lost. Freud has to do a lot of work, much of it unconvincing, to make the father the object of melancholic identification and incorporation.)[47]

Freud argues for the pathological nature of melancholia because the melancholic's sadness, guilt, and ambivalence are so often experienced as debilitating, even suicidal. Ebner, arguably a chronic melancholic who mourns the deaths of those around her and the culturally valorized death of Christ, ends where she begins—wishing to die. Yet the theological and existential implications of that desire differ radically. No longer a lone, ill woman mourning the loss of her fellow sister and caretaker, by the end of the *Revelations* Ebner is a woman thoroughly identified with Christ's salvific suffering. She has become the center of the spiritual life of her convent and of a religious movement ("The Friends of God") that sees in her the fulfillment of Christ's promises to his followers. Traumatic repetition here joins with melancholic incorporation, demonstrating the way in which incorporation can itself be a form of repetition. Beatrice and Ebner both necessarily close their texts in the midst of their lives, with no end in sight to the cycle of suffering. Yet the hope offered by the Christian narrative is that with death, the peace and joy experienced only intermittently on earth, will supercede the traumatic repetitions, melancholic identifications and incorporations brought about by illness and loss.[48]

Loss, Identification, and Incorporation

The logic of identification and incorporation, then, is remarkably similar in Beatrice, Ebner, and Freud. The crucial difference, of course, is that by the time of "The Ego and the Id," Freud describes this process as fundamental to the articulation of

[47] See especially Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," *SE*, 19:243–58; Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," *SE*, 21:223–43; and Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *SE*, 22:112–35. On the complex relationship between Freud's accounts of sexual difference and religion, see Judith Van Herik, *Freud on Femininity and Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[48] One is tempted, of course, to add "and by sin," assuming that to be the theological category through which Ebner understands the necessity of the Passion; and yet sin, oddly, plays a very small role in her *Revelations*. Here, finally, is another topic that will require further exploration and explanation before the full import of mourning and trauma for understanding late-medieval devotional practice can be assessed. For Ebner, at least, mourning and the traumatic repetition of suffering and loss seem to supercede sin—and at times, even the hopes of redemption on which that repetition is theologically premised.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the psyche and repeatedly emphasizes throughout the 1920s and 1930s that it is the father who is the first and primary object of identification and incorporation. Beatrice, Beatrice's hagiographer, and Ebner, on the other hand, describe a process of identification and incorporation that occurs when they are adults, through grace-given but also directed practices. For Beatrice and Ebner, the idealized object of love and loss is, of course, Christ. Through their identification with Christ and memorialization of Christ's Passion, they transform themselves into Christ. This gives us a key to understanding Freud's stake in the loss of the father, for just as Christ is the centrally valorized figure for medieval religious women—and for medieval culture as a whole—the father may be said to occupy a similar site within modern Western culture. But what about our other losses? We can see clearly how Ebner conjoins her other, more fully human losses with the loss of Christ. Is Freud doing something similar when he refuses to acknowledge the loss of the mother—and other caretaking figures—in place of the father?

The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein suggests one way to broach both of the issues I raise here. In "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), she argues that all mourning is melancholic and that incorporation is essential to "normal" mourning. For Klein, the internalization of the living others around us, as well as of the dead, is multiple and ongoing. The process of loss, identification, and incorporation constitutes subjectivity in childhood and continues throughout one's life. Thus Klein is able explicitly to link Freud's discussions in "Mourning and Melancholia" with those in "The Ego and the Id." According to Klein:

> In normal mourning the individual reintrojects and reinstates, as well as the actual lost person, his loved parents who are felt to be 'good' inner objects. His inner world, the one which he has built up from his earliest days onwards, in his phantasy was destroyed when the actual loss occurred. The rebuilding of this inner world characterizes the successful work of mourning.[49]

For Klein, we learn to deal with the absence of parents and other early caregivers through a process of idealization and internalization, generating a phantasy in which they constantly remain with us and are part of us. When we experience later losses, not only do we mourn them, but our parents and other caretakers are again lost. The internal world of good objects—and their place as constitutive of our subjectivities—is damaged. Successful mourning occurs when we are able, through identification with and incorporation of the newly lost object, to rebuild that damaged inner world.

[49] Melanie Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921–1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 363.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mourning, for Klein, is always melancholic, for it always involves processes of identification and incorporation grounded in a refusal fully to relinquish our lost objects. Melancholy is experienced pathologically—as ineradicable, disabling depression—when the subject has been unable as a child to establish a good inner world that will sustain her in the face of later losses. And, although Klein does not say this explicitly, melancholia also overwhelms the subject when the losses are too many, too overwhelming, for the "good" parents of her inner world to combat. (This is what I imagine happened to my great-grandmother.)

I would also suggest, on the basis of my work on Beatrice and Ebner, that inner worlds are not only created in childhood, but that they are created and recreated through bodily, psychic, spiritual, and mental practices. In other words, we can, to some degree at least, recreate or reshape ourselves in the image of newly idealized and internalized objects. The problem for Beatrice and Ebner, both of whom yearn for death, is that the idealized other they incorporate is idealized precisely in his suffering and death. Melancholia here feeds melancholia rather than allaying it—the death of the other leads to the idealization of and desire for one's own death.

I return, then, to the dangers of melancholia. I can only speculate, but I think that for my great-grandmother, the enormity of her losses overcame the creative possibilities of incorporation. The lost others were too many and destroyed the self. For Beatrice and Ebner, not only the enormity of their loss, but also the very qualities of that object, led to their continued desire for death. Given these dangers, why would I want to reinstate it as constitutive of subjectivity? Why ignore the widespread disavowal of melancholia, a disavowal made not only on psychological grounds, but also theologically, philosophically, and politically, anywhere that we talk about the resurrection as the denial of death, of successful mourning as a forsaking of the lost object, or of utopias in which all loss will be overcome? Yet as Beatrice and Ebner, Freud and Klein all make clear, to disavow the subject's melancholic constitution is to disavow the complex constellation of others who make us who and what we are. It is to disavow our losses and our grief as well as that which supports and enables our subjectivity, our agency, and, paradoxically, our responsibility. It is to deny our responsibility to the others within, and thereby to disavow that which makes possible our relations with others outside of ourselves, the very grounds of sociality from which our ethical and political projects emerge. The trick is to find ways to sustain ourselves in and through our losses, rather than in their disavowal. I'd like to close today with some brief reflections on the theological implications of these claims, and then conclude with a story, the only way I've found, so far, to gesture toward the intersubjectively articulated, immanent transcendence that is as close as I can come to an avowal of belief.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Theological Imaginings

Even those who most admire Freud generally dismiss his writings on religion as stupidly and willfully reductionistic—and, for those who know the history of nineteenth-century philosophy and theology, as wildly unoriginal.[50] Ludwig Feuerbach argues that God is a projection and reification of human capacities, values, and possibilities onto a divine other, the ideal being toward whom we as individuals and as a collectivity strive.[51] To this Freud seems only to add, "and he's your father." In other words, Freud explicitly oedipalizes Feuerbach's account of projection and reification. And whereas Feuerbach aimed to enable a kind of philosophical therapy whereby we might come to recognize divine capacities, values, goals, and aspirations as peculiarly human, Freud's vision is more fully embedded in the guiding narratives of his psychoanalytic enterprise. When we recognize that it is the internalized figure of the father—the superego—that leads to our greatest accomplishments, to the heights of civilized behavior, artistic creativity, and scientific productivity, then we will no longer require religion. (Or conversely, those with the strongest superegos are least in need of religion.)

Despite critics' repeated assertion that both Feuerbach and Freud reduce religion to human and psychic dimensions, I find myself wondering if they both don't get something right—something that, curiously, has enormous theological ramifications. Freud is certainly reductionist with regard to religion, just as he is reductionist with regard to melancholy, in his suggestion that God is the projection of a lost object, and the only loss we mourn is that of the father. Freud's texts, of course, are always more complicated—and more interesting—than this reductive reading can show. Yet even if we read Freud in this simplistic way, there is something right, I think, in his suggestion that what we know of the divine we know from others *around* and *within* ourselves. As yet, I do not know how to articulate the relationship between those two prepositions except by telling you another story.

The fact that I need to tell a story to get at the centrality of mourning and melancholia for the theological imagination raises a host of questions—about the relationship between narrative and theory; about storytelling as a mode of incorporation and the incorporations constitutive of subjectivity; about storytelling and theorizing as practices through which others are incorporated even as they are maintained in their exteriority to the subject. Beatrice and Ebner tell stories, and that is what I have done today. I point to these theoretical issues as the background against which I tell yet another story. For reasons I need to figure out, this one requires fictionalization. It's not the whole truth—nothing ever is—yet it's as true as anything I know.

[50] Among a number of crucial texts, I will only cite here Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Convergence Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), *SE*, 13:1–161; Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *SE*, 21:5–56; and Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays* (1939), *SE*, 23:7–137.

[51] See especially, Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (trans. George Eliot; Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"The Goodness of Our Brother's Heart"

They didn't do eulogies.

The father liked often to announce that if any of his children attempted to eulogize him, he would haunt them remorselessly for the rest of their lives. The prospect was less frightening than intended—in the many years they survived him, all of his children longed for his presence, however ghostly. But still, when he died, they'd honored his wishes and kept their love to themselves.

Other losses followed, in what sometimes felt to the survivors like one long endless funeral reception. Grandmothers, aunts, uncles. Their mother. All rigorously uneulogized. A brother, who died so shortly before his mother that there was no time even to mourn. Two sisters and a brother remained. Not Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but those names will do as well as any others.

To Mary and Martha, although they never admitted it aloud, and certainly not to each other, Lazarus was an extraordinary human being. It was less his beauty they loved—although they loved his beauty, even as it faded—than his goodness. Lazarus, however, wasn't only handsome and good, he was also troubled and unlucky, and it was difficult for Mary and Martha to decide whether his goodness led to trouble or if the one, like the other, was a sheer, astonishing accident. For Lazarus's goodness had no cause and no traceable source. It had nothing to do with the categorical imperative, or the cultivation of virtue, or a utilitarian determination of the greatest good for the greatest number. It couldn't be taught and it certainly wasn't hereditary. But maybe, Mary and Martha thought, it's just that he's our brother and we love him. Maybe he isn't any different than anyone else.

Despite such humbling thoughts, Mary and Martha worried about Lazarus. As they lost father, mother, and brother, they each thought quietly to themselves: please, not Lazarus. They couldn't say why they thought this, but they did.

And then, an inevitability that still managed to take both sisters by surprise, Lazarus became ill. All three denied it for as long as they could—not that he was sick, but that the sickness would kill him. "I'm not ready to die *yet*," he said to Martha.

Mary and Martha would have given up the no-eulogies rule for Lazarus, but after his death neither of them could speak—not coherently, at least, and not about Lazarus. Instead, they spoke through the songs and the readings of the Roman Catholic funeral mass his faith required. They chose passages about building an edifice for the Lord, about God as a mighty fortress, and the father's house having many rooms. Lazarus was a builder and he had the greatest capacity for friendship and for love that either sister had ever seen. "No matter how you feel about the Bible," Mary said, "somewhere in there it says just about everything."

They thought about using the story from the Gospel of John about Jesus' friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—but under the circumstances it seemed self-serving, a public assertation of the superiority of their love for their brother over all other claimants. "More to the point," Mary announced in the kind of wonderful feat of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

projection at which she excelled, "we don't want to upset anyone. They'll hear the story, expect Jesus to come raise Lazarus up from the dead, and be pissed off when it doesn't happen."

So Mary and Martha stuck with the father's many-roomed mansion. They called in their selections to the priest, an old family friend who had known their parents, and who had known Mary and Martha and Lazarus since they were children. The priest honored the no-eulogy rule and didn't speak directly about Lazarus. But, whether through chance or design the sisters never knew, he read from the Gospel of John. He read the story of Jesus' friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and of Mary and Martha's great grief and their great faith, and of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. And in his sermon, he spoke directly to the hearts of our Mary and Martha and he told them that their brother was not dead and that he would live forever.

But as Mary predicted, Jesus didn't come and he didn't raise Lazarus from the dead, on that day or on any other that the sisters lived to see. The priest saw their lack of faith and he spoke to it, but he couldn't heal it, because he couldn't bring their brother back to them. They were heartbroken and desolate and no longer sure even of Lazarus's goodness, now that they could no longer see it before them, sense it in the world around them, know that it lay readily available on the edges of their worlds. The old worry—that his goodness had been a mirage created by their love—returned, and with that doubt any possibility of a reality transcendent to the anguish in which he had died was forever, irrevocably, destroyed.

(To hear your brother cry "Help! Help!" and to have nothing to offer but the morphine that will kill him. Mary held him down—sitting at the feet of the Lord—while Martha got the nurse with the syringe—and Martha was busy with many things.)

But as long as someone survives, there is always more to tell. No one ever raised Lazarus from the dead, but on the day Lazarus was buried an old woman and her husband told Mary and Martha a story. It was a story about their brother's goodness, a story that showed them that Lazarus wasn't only good in their eyes and in the reflection of their love (which in itself maybe should have been enough, but Mary and Martha were obsessed with "objectivity" and "truth," a result no doubt of their overly-abundant philosophical educations), but he was good also in the eyes of at least one old couple. It was, Mary and Martha often said to each other in the long years they lived without their brother, a story about the kind of goodness that Jesus must have had; the kind of goodness that would make people tell stories about a man so good that he raised a beloved brother from the dead simply in order to staunch two sisters' grief; the kind of goodness that has no discernible source and so renders belief in transcendence not only possible, but inevitable. Even if it can't bring the dead back to life in the beauty and goodness of the flesh.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001325 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Perhaps no story can bear this weight without love. The woman told Mary and Martha that she too had loved their brother. He had built a house for her, the house in which she and her husband planned to live out their old age. She had dreamed of the house for years, its spaces and lights and shadows. She found the land for the house and Lazarus took her dream and drew plans. He came every week to talk over the work's progress, to ensure that her desires were met in each detail of its rendering. He gave her the house of her imagination.

As they planned and talked and gossiped, she told him about a drawer she had been lugging from house to house throughout her adult life. She'd inherited it from her mother, who had inherited it from her mother. It was full of broken and discarded religious objects. Catholic kitsch—Mary as Queen of Heaven with her crown of stars chipped, scapulars that wouldn't stick together any more, a baby Jesus whose upraised arm had broken off. Trash, but to this very pious family—grandmother, mother, aunts, maybe even a few uncles—holy and blessed objects that you didn't simply throw away. Yet how long, the woman wondered aloud to Lazarus, do you lug a drawer full of broken Marys and Josephs and Jesuses around.

The truth is, the woman's husband told the rest of the story because she, like Mary and Martha, could no longer speak. On the day the concrete was to go into the new house's foundation, Lazarus came and picked up the old woman, and he carried the drawer full of holy junk out of her apartment and put it in the flatbed of his truck. (This is the way the husband told the story.) Together Lazarus and the woman went to the building site and Lazarus helped her climb down into the pit that he and his workmen had dug for the foundation. He followed her down, carrying the drawer. Together, Lazarus and the old woman lay Mary and Joseph and Jesus and whoever or whatever else was in the drawer on the freshly turned dirt.

"He thought of that," the old woman said.

("He *did* it," Mary and Martha both thought, simultaneously, to themselves.)

The man and the woman lived out the rest of their lives in the house of their dreams. A house embedded with her family's faith. A house—in the words Mary told Martha or Martha told Mary, night after night for the rest of their lives—"a house built with the labor of our brother's hands, with the goodness of our brother's heart."

Of my brother's—my brother Daniel's—heart.

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