

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Representations of Continental Mysticism in British Library MS. Additional 37790:

Mystical Union's Relationship with Courtly Love

by

Natalie Elaine Dear

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

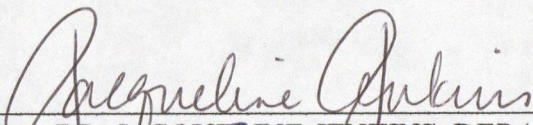
CALGARY, ALBERTA

September, 2005

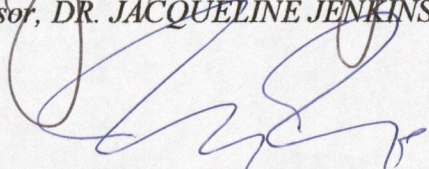
© Natalie Elaine Dear 2005

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

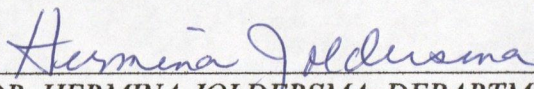
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Representations of Continental Mysticism in British Library MS. Additional 37790: Mystical Union's Relationship with Courtly Love" submitted by Natalie Elaine Dear in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.



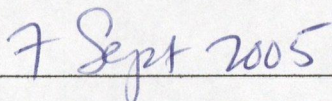
*Supervisor, DR. JACQUELINE JENKINS, DEPARTMENT
OF ENGLISH*



*DR. MURRAY MCGILLIVRAY, DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH*



*DR. HERMINA JOLDERSMA, DEPARTMENT OF
GERMANIC, SLAVIC AND EAST ASIAN STUDIES*



DATE

Abstract

Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* and John Ruysbroek's *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* are found in British Library MS. Additional 37790. Both are Middle English translations of Continental vernacular mystical texts. These works discuss the apostolic life and how to achieve a mystical union with the divine. Both texts incorporate the courtly love literary convention to describe the religious devotee's desired relationship with God. This thesis considers Porete's and Ruysbroek's literary influences in articulating their versions of mystical union and their respective applications and contestations of the courtly love convention. As well, this thesis examines the *Mirror's* and *The Treatise of Perfection's* inclusion in the Middle English manuscript. The thesis proposes that Porete's and Ruysbroek's works were included in the manuscript as representations of Continental mysticism that would address the spiritual needs of the manuscript's audience.

Preface

This thesis concentrates on the textual and literary connections between the medieval mystics Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), a French Beguine, and John Ruysbroek (1293-1381), a Flemish priest. Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* and Ruysbroek's *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* employ the courtly love idiom to describe the ineffable relationship between God and the religious devotee. Historically, courtly love is a conventional literary discourse that demarcates love as Christian, as aristocratic, and as heterosexual. This thesis examines Porete's and Ruysbroek's applications and contestations of the courtly love topos for their narratives on the apostolic life and on mystical union.

Porete's and Ruysbroek's works survive together in Middle English translations in the early to mid-fifteenth-century manuscript British Library MS. Additional 37790. The manuscript, through translation, explanatory glossing, compilation, and provenance, was associated with the Carthusian order. Chapter 1 discusses the Carthusians' Continental and Insular histories and examines the Carthusians' reputation in the production, publication, and dissemination of spiritual literature during the Middle Ages. The chapter also considers why the Carthusians might have been interested in Porete's and Ruysbroek's texts. Chapter 1 discusses the provenance and history of Additional 37790 to conceptualize an audience for the manuscript. The chapter also provides analysis of the academic research on the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* so as to position this thesis within the critical context for both texts. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the texts as Middle English translations and each translator's effectiveness in articulating the author's original intentions.

Chapter 2 focuses on Porete's and Ruysbroek's biographies and examines the similar religious and literary influences that affected their lives and their texts. As well, this chapter discusses why Porete and Ruysbroek incorporated language and images associated with the human sexual encounter in their narratives on the spiritual life. This chapter considers the traditional literary influences and connections between secular love language and spiritual love language in mystical writing.

Chapter 3 deals with Porete's Beguine identity and how it influenced her writing style and her description of a mystical union. This chapter discusses the Beguines' history and their literary presence during the Middle Ages. The Beguines were aristocratic and well-educated women who used the courtly love convention in their mystical union narratives to present their superior social position and their piety. Chapter 3 examines how Porete implements characteristics associated with Beguine writing and the courtly love topos in her own text. This chapter also interrogates Porete's contestation of courtly love's heterosexual structure. Porete incorporates a same-sex union, which results in the *Mirror*'s homoerotic potential and promotion of female spirituality. This chapter discusses how Porete's text produces its underlying homoeroticism, and details the homoeroticism and heteronormativity in Porete's seven states of spirituality. The chapter examines how Porete moves from an estate that has a female/female union to an estate that has a heterosexual mystical union.

Chapter 4 concentrates on Ruysbroek's mysticism and his appropriation and his challenge of the courtly love literary convention. Similar to Porete, Ruysbroek's text contains states of spirituality that lead to a mystical union. Chapter 4 examines these states in relation to Ruysbroek's occupation and position in the religious structure. This

chapter discusses how Ruysbroek's ecclesiastical hierarchy participates in the contemplative's desire for a mystical union. Chapter 4 also considers Ruysbroek's instructions on how to achieve a mystical union that is intrinsically a same-sex relationship between the male God and the male spiritual lover. Similar to Porete, Ruysbroek's divine same-sex union produces the text's latent homoeroticism. Chapter 4 examines how this homoerotic narrative is created and why Ruysbroek's ecclesiastical authority validates this same-sex union.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis containing an examination of Porete's and Ruysbroek's antithetical final outcomes. The chapter also summarizes the thesis' findings and analyzes the scribe's possible reasons for including Porete's and Ruysbroek's texts in Additional 37790. The thesis ends with recommendations for further research based on the thesis' results.

Essentially, this thesis examines the *Mirror's* and *The Treatise of Perfection's* mystical unions and each text's adaptation of the courtly love literary convention to communicate spiritual desire. The thesis will demonstrate that reading Additional 37790's *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* together encourages discussions on Continental mystical literature as found in the Middle English manuscript.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its financial support.

Thank you to the University of Calgary's Department of English for funding my M.A. program.

Thank you to Dr. David Oakleaf, Graduate Head of the Department of English at the University of Calgary for his encouragement and advice.

I would like to thank Dr. Jacqueline Jenkins for supervising this thesis and my M.A. program. Dr. Jenkins' professionalism and attention to detail has influenced my academic career.

Thank you to my sister Kimberly Rudolph whose daily telephone calls were welcomed distractions.

I especially want to thank my children Griffin and Marcie Dear for their enduring patience. Marcie and Griffin continue to inspire me with their own achievements.

Most importantly, thank you to my husband Donald Dear for his constant encouragement, support, assistance, and reassurance. Donald provides the work ethic that I endeavour to emulate.

Dedication

For Donald

Table of Contents

Approval page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Preface.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Dedication.....	viii
Table of Contents.....	ix
 CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.....	 1
1.1 British Library MS. Additional 37790 and the Carthusians.....	1
1.2 The Critical Contexts for the Middle English <i>Mirror</i> and <i>The Treatise of Perfection</i>	7
1.3 Translation of the <i>Mirror</i> and <i>The Treatise of Perfection</i>	14
 CHAPTER 2 – PORETE, RUYSBROEK, AND MYSTICISM.....	 24
2.1 The Mystics Porete and Ruysbroek.....	24
2.2 Mystical Union: Human Sex, Divine Love.....	38
 CHAPTER 3 – PORETE.....	 45
3.1 Courtly love: The Beguines and Porete.....	45
3.2 Porete's <i>Mirror</i> and Courtly Love.....	51
3.3 Courtly Love and Homoeroticism in the <i>Mirror</i>	59
3.4 The <i>Mirror</i> 's Estates.....	63
3.5 Heteronormativity in Estates Five and Six.....	68
 CHAPTER 4 – RUYSBROEK'S MYSTICISM.....	 72
 CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION.....	 90
5.1 Porete and Ruysbroek – Further Considerations.....	90
5.2 Conclusion.....	94
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 98

CHAPTER 1 -INTRODUCTION

1.1 British Library MS. Additional 37790 and the Carthusians

Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* and John Ruysbroek's¹ *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* share an audience through the Middle English manuscript British Library MS. Additional 37790. The manuscript, which is also known as the Amherst manuscript,² contains "a large collection of theological treatises, written by one scribe" (Wogan-Browne *et al* 79). Additional 37790 includes one of three extant copies of the Middle English *Mirror*, and the only complete Middle English translation of any of Ruysbroek's works. The manuscript also contains the only known copy of Julian of Norwich's *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, which critics believe to be the first written account of her visions (Watson and Jenkins 6). As well, the manuscript includes the Lincoln Carmelite Richard Misyn's Middle English translations of Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* and *Emendatio Vitae*, portions from Rolle's *Ego Dormio* and *Form of Living*, Bridget of Sweden's *Liber Celestis*, and Hugh of Balma's *Mystica Theologia*. The manuscript dates from approximately the mid-fifteenth century and its provenance and contents suggest that it was a Carthusian creation.

The austere and hermitic Carthusian order originated in France during the late eleventh century when existing religious orders were under attack from the lay population for their

¹ Since Ruysbroek's name has various spellings, quotations from secondary sources citing his name will adhere to the spelling chosen by the critic. This paper will employ the spelling chosen by Joyce Bazire and Eric (Edmund) Colledge.

² The British Museum received the manuscript in the Amherst estate sale. For a complete manuscript description refer to *Catalogue of the Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1906-10* (London, 1912), 153-156, or Edmund Colledge's and James Walsh's *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, Vol. 1, 1-5.

accumulation of wealth, power, and prestige.³ Bruno Hartenfaust established the order intending to replicate “the ideals of the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Syria” (Coppack and Aston 12). Hartenfaust’s mandate also included renunciation of all material ties to the earthly world, which would hopefully increase the possibility of a spiritual union with God. The Carthusians lived solitary existences in their own cells that were housed in buildings that came to be known as charterhouses.⁴ From the eleventh century onwards, the Carthusians’ Continental popularity increased as secular criticism against the agency and the authority of other religious orders heightened. The Carthusians’ fortunate position and favourable reputation in relation to other ecclesiastical orders facilitated the Carthusians’ move into England in 1178 with the construction of the charterhouse Witham in Somerset. The English Carthusians imitated the Continental Carthusians’ manner of living in separate cells and their renunciation of worldly possessions. The Carthusians lived by a set of legislated tenets known as the *Constitutions*, expressing the order’s literary objectives and interest in the creation and dissemination of texts. The *Constitutions* listed the belongings approved for each Carthusian: “a desk, pens, chalk, two pumices, two ink-horns, a pen-knife, two knives for scraping parchment, a parchment pricker and lead dry points, a ruler, and a pencil” (Coppack and Aston 73). Glyn Coppack’s and Mick Aston’s archaeological work on the surviving ruins of English Charterhouses, especially Mount Grace, assists in demonstrating that an occupation “of the Carthusians was the production and copying of books for their own use and for others” (96).

³ My discussion of the Carthusian’s Continental history and progression into England derives from Glyn Coppack’s and Mick Aston’s research in *Christ’s Poor Men: The Carthusians in England*.

⁴ The term charterhouse derives from the first Carthusian hermitage that was erected in Chartreuse, France (Coppack and Aston 13).

Coppack's and Aston's reconstruction of the Mount Grace Charterhouse possibly reveals the Carthusians' method in constructing a manuscript:

The monks in Cells 10 and 11 [Mount Grace had 16 Cells] were both writers, for their cells produced a number of copper alloy pen nibs and Cell 10 additionally contained a lead pencil for lining out parchment pages. If these two monks were the copyists, the monks in Cells 12 and 13 were illuminators, for their cells produced oyster shells with evidence of coloured pigments. The monk in Cell 8 was a book binder, and the garden and galleries of his cell were scattered with copper alloy corners, clasps, and studs (some of them unfinished) from the covers of books. It does not take much imagination to see a lay brother picking up manuscript pages from Cells 10 and 11, taking them to Cells 12 and 13 to have the colour added, and finally taking the finished pages to the monk in Cell 8 where the pages were bound into books. Production on an almost industrial scale was quite possible without the individual monks leaving their cells or meeting each other. (96)

Coppack's and Aston's conceptualization of the Carthusians' manuscript process provides a potential indication of the order's interest in, and attention to, the construction of texts. Coppack and Aston envision that the production of Carthusian manuscripts incorporated a majority of the Charterhouse's occupants. This research, the order's *Constitutions*, and manuscripts like Additional 37790 support "the significance of the role of the English Carthusians in the transmission of late medieval spiritual writings" (Sargent, "The Transmission" 240).

Manuscripts associated with the Carthusians pervasively influenced the lay and religious populace even though the order had very little contact with the outside world. According to Michael Sargent, “[the Carthusians] spoke to the Christian world through the books which they wrote, copied and transmitted” (“The Transmission” 225). The *Constitutions* states the order’s literary intentions, corroborating Sargent’s statement: “Surely we ought to preserve books most carefully, as immortal food for our souls, and to make volumes most assiduously, that, because we cannot preach the word of God by mouth, we may with our hands” (qtd. in Sargent, “The Transmission” 226). Additional 37790 likely derives from this programme of textual transmission. The manuscript is believed to be a Carthusian production since the Shene Carthusian James Grenehalgh annotates it in places (Cré, “Vernacular Mysticism” 20). Also, the manuscript contains texts, such as Porete’s and Ruysbroek’s, that communicate highly speculative notions of mystical union that speak to the Carthusians’ own objectives of “[s]eeking an extraordinary spiritual experience of the divine” (Van Engen xix). The order also advanced mystical works by Walter Hilton, Nicholas Love (a writer at Mount Grace), *The Cloud of Unknowing* author, and Margery Kempe.⁵ According to Kent Emery, “the Carthusians became the acknowledged specialists in mystical theology and the literature of ‘deification’” (xxii). Literary works concerned with ‘deification’

⁵ A Latin translation of Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* is found with Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris* and *Emendatio Vitae* in MS. Heneage 3083. A Latin translation of *The Cloud* is found with Richard Methley’s Latin translation of the *Mirror* in Pembroke College MS. Cambridge 221. Both manuscripts are of Carthusian provenance. Please refer to Sargent’s “The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings,” which advances the argument that these works were intended for a Carthusian audience. According to Julia Boffey, “Margery Kempe was well known during her lifetime, but the complete text of the ‘boke’ from which the extracts were taken has survived in only one copy, a manuscript apparently associated in the fifteenth century with the Carthusian House of Mount Grace in North Yorkshire, and it remained unidentified until 1934” (628).

communicated an individual's desire to achieve an affective union with God while still living. Treatises such as Porete's and Ruysbroek's advocate means by which an individual, upon union with God, could ascend to god-like status while residing on earth. This form of 'deification' suggests heresy since the 'deified' individual potentially has a spiritual authority above the ecclesiastics. The Carthusians were sheltered from accusations of heresy because of their ecclesiastical reputation. The order's "privileged position" allowed them to translate and gloss the possibly unorthodox texts that comprise Additional 37790 (Watson, "Melting into God" 32).

We can only conjecture who might have been the audience for this manuscript, as well as for Porete's and Ruysbroek's individual texts, since we lack absolute evidence for the manuscript's purpose and intended readership. However, it is possible to conceive of an audience for the manuscript from its Carthusian provenance, and from the Carthusians' religious prominence and literary authority. Marlene Cr   asserts that the manuscript "was produced within a Carthusian monastery to be read by the monks themselves, and that the anthology was designed with a view to guiding the readers in their own spiritual growth" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 19). This thesis proposes an extended readership for Additional 37790, which would include the Bridgettines of Syon and members of the royal court. According to Coppack and Aston, "[s]upport for the Carthusians was a feature of most of the royal courts of Europe" (38), and in England that included such spiritual patrons as Lady Margaret Beaufort, the Duchess of Buckingham Anne Neville's daughter-in-law. Lady Beaufort, who was an exceptionally pious woman, had considerable contact and communication with the Carthusian order and the Bridgettines of Syon. Evidence reveals that

Lady Beaufort's relationship with the Carthusians and the Bridgettines included providing for the "scholar, Richard Moyne, at the charterhouse of London" (Jones and Underwood 181), "[visiting] the Sheen charterhouse and the Bridgettines of Syon, offering at the rood of the charterhouse in 1498," and receiving "[a] papal licence [which] granted her leave in 1504 to visit, converse and dine with the inmates of enclosed houses" (Jones and Underwood 180). As a member of an aristocratic book-sharing community, Lady Beaufort was also interested in book ownership, and displayed a commitment to devotional literature, which led to an interest in book dissemination (Jones and Underwood 181). It is not implausible that Lady Beaufort may have come into contact with Additional 37790 or Carthusian manuscripts like it since she was concerned with textual transmission and circulation, and had an intimate relationship with the Carthusians. Also, the association between the Carthusians, Lady Beaufort, and the Bridgettines encourages us to consider that manuscripts and texts possibly circulated amongst them. Sargent supports this premise stating that

[t]he houses of Sheen and Syon, [were] situated directly across the Thames from one another, ..., and richly endowed by royal patronage until their dissolution; their histories are intertwined, and they seem often to have borrowed each other's books for shared textual transmission is common. ("The Transmission" 228)

As well, the courtly love and devotional characteristics prevalent in some of the manuscript's texts, especially Porete's *Mirror* and Ruysbroek's *Treatise of Perfection*, possibly had literary currency for the *litterati* of the royal court. These texts blend religious love for God with romantic love and courtly love. According to Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al* "a common distinction between *litterati* and *illiterati* – roughly 'educated' and 'uneducated' – ... [are]

shifting definitions along the fault line dividing Latin from vernacular” (xv). The royal court’s *litterati* would be able to read and comprehend the Latin and the vernacular texts of Additional 37790. As well, the manuscript’s narratives dealing with affective piety and mystical union would attract the devout *litterati*’s interest in, or at least familiarity with, topics on spirituality and theology.

Contemplating Additional 37790’s audience depends on circumstantial evidence. However, it is not unreasonable to imagine that an audience for the manuscript extended beyond the Carthusians and possibly included members of the royal court and the Bridgettines of Syon. The manuscript’s contents articulate sophisticated perceptions of mystical union and require an educated audience of ecclesiastics such as the Carthusians themselves and the Bridgettines. As well, Additional 37790’s audience could have included individuals like Lady Margaret Beaufort, a pious member of the royal court, who was associated with the religious orders and interested in spiritual literature and the dissemination of texts.

1.2 The Critical Contexts for the Middle English *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection*

Academic and critical interest in the Middle English *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* are linked to the British Museum’s purchase of Additional 37790 in 1909. The manuscript’s contents attracted scholarly attention since, as mentioned, it also contained works from the Middle English mystics Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle. Analysis of its contents focused on the texts’ common themes of mystical union and desire for God. Porete’s and Ruysbroek’s texts in the manuscript are translations of their works, which were originally

written in their respective vernaculars: Porete's Old French *Mirouer des simples âmes anientes* and Ruysbroek's Middle Dutch *Vanden blinckenden steen*.⁶

The Middle English *Mirror* was initially categorized as an anonymous work since there was no mention of the author's name in the text. Upon the British Museum's receipt of the manuscript, Evelyn Underhill, an "amateur of mediaeval spiritual literature, published a series of modern English excerpts from the Amherst *Mirror*" (Colledge, Marler, and Grant lxxvii). Underhill's work was circulated in both the *Fortnightly Review* and *The Porch* beginning in 1911 (Kirchberger xxi). According to Edmund Colledge, James Marler, and Judith Grant it is difficult to ascertain how much critical attention Underhill received from her work since *The Porch* was "an obscure pamphlet ... [dealing] in various spiritual oddities and showed leanings toward the Oriental 'mysticism' in which she was at that time dabbling" (lxxx). Despite this uncertainty of critical influence, it was not long after the publishing of Underhill's work that Hope Allen found two more manuscripts containing the Middle English *Mirror* and the Latin version of the Middle English: Bodley Library MS. Bodley 505, St. John's College MS. Cambridge 71, and Pembroke College MS. Cambridge 221, which contains the Latin translation (Kirchberger xxi). These manuscripts are from the fifteenth century and are also associated with the Carthusian order. It is interesting to note that the only other text in MS. Bodley 505 is the anonymous *The Chastising of God's Children*, a text that includes translations from Ruysbroek's *The Spiritual Espousals*. Considering Additional 37790, it is possible that the *Mirror* and Ruysbroek's texts travelled together and that the Carthusians

⁶ James Wiseman states that the Dutch title *Vanden blinckenden steen* "has most commonly been entitled *The Sparkling Stone*, a title taken from his [Ruysbroek's] extended use of that scriptural symbol" (22). Chapter 4 discusses Ruysbroek's employment of this image.

believed that the *Mirror* was written by Ruysbroek since *The Treatise of Perfection* and the *Mirror* have similar writing styles, which will be discussed in the following chapters. This is only a conjecture since there is no evidence to support these theories, especially since MS. Cambridge 71 contains only the *Mirror* and no other texts.

Following these manuscript findings, Clare Kirchberger produced the first Modern English translation of the *Mirror* using MS. Bodley 505 as her exemplar. Her 1927 edition was published “for the Orchard Series, [which was] already well established as a library of serious and competent studies of Western classics of contemplative literature” (Colledge, Marler, and Grant lxxx). Kirchberger’s edition was produced under the direction and support of the Downside Benedictines, a monastery located in southwest England. At the time of publication, the *Mirror* was still considered an anonymous work. However, Kirchberger agreed with Underhill that the *Mirror*’s author was male and “that he may have been a secular priest or a Carthusian living on the borders of Flanders and France in the last third of the thirteenth century” (Kirchberger xxix). Despite erroneously asserting male authorship, it was Kirchberger’s research that led Dr. Romana Guarnieri in 1946 “to conclude and prove beyond any doubt” that Marguerite Porete, a condemned heretic put to death in the early fourteenth century, was indeed the *Mirror*’s author (Colledge, Marler, and Grant lxxx). Guarnieri connected the propositions that were “quoted by William [of Paris, Porete’s Inquisitor]” at Porete’s inquisition to statements mentioned in Kirchberger’s edition (Colledge, Marler, Grant lxxx). After her discovery Guarnieri produced an Old French edition of *Le Mirouer* found in Musée Condé, Chantilly MS. F XIV 26, which according to Alexandra Barrett is a “somewhat corrupt manuscript ..., from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.” (61). The edition was

published in the 1965 volume of *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* with her critical introduction “Il Movimento del Libero Spirito: Testi e Documenti.” In 1968, Marilyn Doiron published a Middle English edition of the *Mirror* in *Archivio Italiano* as well. The 1968 volume of *Archivio Italiano* also includes Guarnieri’s collaborative essay with Edmund Colledge entitled, “The Glosses by ‘M.N.’ and Richard Methley to *The Mirror of Simple Souls*,” which examines M.N. and Methley’s annotations and translations of the *Mirror*. Guarnieri also worked with Paul Verdeyen to produce “[a] full critical edition of the Old French and Latin with Middle English notes and supplements” (Babinsky 49). This was published in 1986, two years after Verdeyen’s identification of the manuscript Vatican Library Vat. latino 4953, “which quotes from the Latin *Mirror*” (Colledge, Marler, Grant lxxvii).

There have been no further Middle English critical editions published since Doiron’s edition. In 1993, Ellen Babinsky published an English translation based on the Chantilly manuscript, as did Colledge, Marler and Grant in 1999. It is undeniable that the French *Mirouer* has garnered more academic interest than the Middle English *Mirror*. A possible explanation for this might be that since Porete’s own text is not extant, the French *Mirouer* comes closest to the author’s original intent since it is written in Porete’s vernacular. However, the two editions based on the Middle English *Mirror* have generated notable critical attention not only from Edmund Colledge and those working with him, but also from Robert Lerner, Michael Sargent, and Nicholas Watson. Lerner’s historical investigation into medieval Continental heretical movements identify Porete as an influential member of the Brethren of Free Spirit. Lerner asserts that the potential heresy found in the *Mirror* originates from Free Spirit philosophy. Michael Sargent has written essays on the Carthusian interest in, and promulgation of, the *Mirror*, and an article examining the *Mirror* as a female narrative.

Sargent states that he is “trying, specifically, to understand her words through the hermeneutics of gender, rather than of dogma – to argue that she was condemned for attempting to teach a specifically feminine form of spirituality” (“The Annihilation” 254). Nicholas Watson’s essays on Porete’s Middle English translator contribute significantly to the current scholarship on the *Mirror*, which largely concentrates on the text’s heretical characteristics. Although there are many other academics researching Porete and her *Mirror*, the critical works done by Colledge, Sargent, Lerner, and Watson have considerably influenced later readers in their examination and interrogation of the Middle English *Mirror*.

Unfortunately, the amount of critical attention to Ruysbroek’s *Treatise of Perfection* is minimal in contrast to Porete’s *Mirror*. *The Treatise of Perfection* is a Middle English translation of the Augustinian Canon William Jordaen’s Latin version of Ruysbroek’s *Vanden blinckenden steen* (Bazire and Colledge 84). In 1957, Joyce Bazire and Eric (Edmund) Colledge published a critical edition of *The Chastising of God’s Children*. In the process of editing this text, Bazire and Colledge decided to supplement the edition with *The Treatise of Perfection* “which one of the editors had already completed” (viii). *The Treatise of Perfection* was not their primary interest and was only included as an afterthought since it had already been transcribed and edited prior to their work on *The Chastising*. The editorial decision to include *The Treatise of Perfection* was based on the objective of “[including] in one volume the only two known Middle English translations of works by Ruysbroek” (Bazire and Colledge viii). To date, there are no other editions of *The Treatise of Perfection* and there are few articles solely written on the text. Critical research on *The Chastising* outweighs *The Treatise of Perfection*, which probably stems from the former being found in fourteen Middle English

manuscripts compared to *The Treatise of Perfection* being in only one manuscript. According to Bazire and Colledge,

[o]nly this one manuscript [Additional 37790] is known to survive, and the uncorrected state of the text in it of *The Treatise*, compared with the careful study and correction which have been expended by James Grenehalgh on the other works in the manuscript, suggests that even he, with all his enthusiasm for mystical theology, spent no pains on this treatise. Neither is there evidence to show that other English scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries paid any attention to this translation. One reason for this neglect, without doubt, is that all such works as *The Treatise of Perfection* were overshadowed by *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which deservedly gained for itself an immense prestige in England. (87)

The Cloud of Unknowing attracts attention “as a masterpiece of simplicity that distills a complex mystical epistemology and discipline into engagingly readable prose” (Gallacher). Despite Ruysbroek and the *Cloud* author incorporating similar influences such as pseudo-Dionysius and Saint Bernard in their respective notions of mystical union, “it is improbable that those who knew *The Cloud*, as Grenehalgh did, would fail to find that it in every way surpassed *The Treatise*” (Bazire and Colledge 87).

Ruysbroek’s Middle English audience may have also been limited because of his identity as a Continental mystic and his choice to write his religious texts in his vernacular Middle Dutch as compared to “Latin, the lingua franca of his time” (Van Bragt 1). By not writing in Latin, ecclesiastics would dismiss his work as less important than Latin religious texts. In turn, English ecclesiastical scriptoria would not invest the time to translate his

work from Middle Dutch into Middle English, or into Latin. Another factor possibly affecting the lack of critical attention paid to Ruysbroek is that his writing in Middle Dutch situates “his work in the literature of the Low Lands (the present-day Netherlands and the northern part of Belgium), whose international influence was never very great in any case” (Van Bragt 1). Jan Van Bragt believes that Ruysbroek remains a relative unknown today due to the censorship and the suppression of “Dutch” literary texts in Belgium during the nineteenth-century (1). It was not until the 1930s that there was a concerted effort to release texts from such political restraints (Van Bragt 1). Also, Ruysbroek, like Marguerite Porete, is a Continental mystic, whose work is translated into Middle English, unlike the Middle English mystics Rolle, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Walter Hilton who wrote in their vernacular Middle English and thus hold critical positions in the study of Middle English mystical literature. The Continental mystics remain on the margins of Middle English mystical literature since their texts are originally written in a language other than Middle English.

Evelyn Underhill, who also studied Ruysbroek’s Middle Dutch works, promoted Ruysbroek as “the greatest of all the mediaeval Catholic mystics” at the beginning of the twentieth century (*Ruysbroeck* vii). It is during this time that critical attention to Ruysbroek’s Middle Dutch works begins to surface because of “the admirable work of three generations of the Antwerp Ruusbroecgenootschap (Ruusbroec Society)” (Dupré xv). Today, scholars Paul Mommaers, Jan Van Bragt, James Wiseman, and Paul Verdeyen influence the study and learning of Ruysbroek’s Middle Dutch texts. Collectively, their research questions and examines Ruysbroek’s mystical union and his concept of the Trinity.

The critical attention to Porete's and Ruysbroek's Middle English texts encourage and advance further academic investigations. Marlene Cr 's PhD dissertation, "Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse: An Analysis of BL. MS Additional 37790 in Its Religious and Literary Context," is evidence that there continues to be academic interest in Porete's and Ruysbroek's Middle English works. Despite the insufficient attention thus far on Ruysbroek's Middle English text, there are still historical and literary connections to be investigated between the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection*, which this thesis plans to reveal in its ensuing chapters.

1.3 Translation of the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection*

Porete's *Mirror* and Ruysbroek's *Treatise of Perfection*, as found in Additional 37790, are translations and, as such, each is a narrative that attempts to convey the original author's meaning and purpose for the work. The translator's objective is to produce a work that stays true to the original's intent. The translators of both works are believed to be either Carthusians or strongly affiliated with the order. Regarding *The Treatise of Perfection*, Marlene Cr ' states that "[i]f we look at the translation within the context of the Amherst anthology, it seems logical to assume that the translator was indeed a Carthusian" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 130). Cr ' bases this opinion on her analysis of *The Treatise of Perfection* as an "unpolished text" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 130) and the translator's statement that "I intende to transpose for myne owne lernynge a trettresse frome latyn into englysche" (229). Cr ' asserts that *The Treatise of Perfection* was not intended for a wide audience since the translation has many discrepancies in relation to Jordaen's Latin version and that the translator specifically states that he translated the text for his own knowledge. If the translation were meant for an audience

beyond the surroundings in which it were created, the translator would have revised and edited his work to reflect a more accurate translation of the original work. Cré hypothesizes that “such an unpolished text would only have made its way into an anthology such as Amherst if it originated in the same environment” (“Vernacular Mysticism” 130). Since the Amherst manuscript is of Carthusian provenance, Cré proposes that *The Treatise of Perfection*’s translator was likely a Carthusian and that the translation was included in the manuscript because of its availability (“Vernacular Mysticism” 130).

The *Mirror*’s translator, who identifies himself only by his initials “M.N.” in the Translator’s Prologue and throughout the text, translated the French *Mirouer* into Middle English sometime during the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. M.N. is also believed to be associated with the Carthusians since all three Middle English manuscripts, as well as Methley’s Latin translation of the Middle English, have Carthusian provenance. Although M.N.’s identity is unknown, the manuscript’s Carthusian compilation and provenance led Clare Kirchberger to suggest that M.N. was Michael Northbrook, also known as Michael of Northburgh, “bishop of London and one of the founders of the London Charterhouse” (Doiron 245). This suggestion does substantiate the Carthusian association and promulgation of the *Mirror*. However, this hypothesis has little credibility since Northburgh died in 1361 and all four manuscripts roughly date from the early to mid-fifteenth century. In his essay “Melting into God The English Way,” Nicholas Watson asserts that it is unlikely that the *Mirouer* was translated prior to 1361. According to Watson, an individual such as Northburgh would not “have felt it necessary to translate a work from French into English, unless to meet the needs of specific, English-speaking readers” (Watson “Melting Into God” 31 n. 35). Watson also states that “[e]xisting copies of the *Mirror* also seem to belong to a later period linguistically”

("Melting into God" 31 n. 35). In his discussion of Kirchberger's claim that M.N. was indeed a Carthusian, Watson states that "if [Kirchberger] ...is correct, the *Mirror* might never have been out of Carthusian hands, but have been produced inhouse sometime after 1415, for the benefit of a circle of M.N.'s colleagues" (32). Watson also cites that

[a]gainst the theory of Carthusian provenance are the fact that no Carthusians whose initials are 'M.N.' have surfaced, that Methley has no knowledge of M.N.'s identity, and the differences between the *Mirror* and the other Continental texts that we know the Carthusians to have translated – not to mention the difference in translation style. ("Melting into God" 32)

Texts translated by the Carthusians normally exhibit a "heavily interventionist" style of translation (Watson, "Melting Into God" 32). M.N. does provide fifteen explanatory glosses, which according to Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri were intended to explain the possibly heretical propositions put forward by Porete's text as "wholly orthodox" (381), and to present it as "a valuable, fruitful work of mystical theology" (381). However, M.N.'s overall approach to translating the *Mirror* is unlike other Carthusian translations since his Prologue, which is discussed below, confirms that his translation will maintain a strict adherence to the French version. Although Watson advocates that we do not presume a Carthusian identity for M.N., the *Mirror*'s highly theological content concerning mystical union does correspond with the Carthusian interest in spiritual literature. As well, the manuscripts' provenances are evidence for strongly proposing that M.N. was a Carthusian or somehow linked to the order.

Examining M.N.'s Prologue to the *Mirror* provides some information to construct his identity. The Prologue communicates M.N.'s literary acumen, his biblical knowledge, and possibly the recipients of his translation. His Prologue reveals that he was familiar with

medieval literary topoi and mystical literary conventions, and was conversant in French and possibly Latin. M.N. immediately begins his Prologue with a modesty topos, a familiar and often used medieval practice. He states his objective of re-translating the *Mirouer* from French into English: "I, moost vnworpi creature and outcast of all opire, many 3eeris goon wrote it out of French into Englisch aftir my lewede kunnyng, in hope þat bi þe grace of God it schulde profite þoo deuout soules þat schulden rede it" (247).⁷ He is compelled to translate it a second time not only because it is spiritually profitable, but also because "some wordis þerof haue be mystake" (247). "Mystake" may refer to translation and interpretation errors made by M.N. since in the Prologue's conclusion he asserts that this second translation "wole folewe þe sentence acordynge to þe matere, as ny3 as God wole 3iue me grace, obeiyng me euere to þe correccioun of hooli chirche, preiyng goostli lyuers and clerkis þat þei wole fowchesaaf to correcte and amende þere þat I do amys" (249). M.N. specifically gives authorization to possibly his fellow clerks, spiritual lovers, and the holy Church to amend or alter any word that he translates incorrectly. This translation will construe the substance of the sentence and translate accordingly rather than translating word for word. This sentence in conjunction with M.N.'s use of "mystake" infers that his first translation was verbatim; that he translated word for word, sentence for sentence, thus causing a misinterpretation of not only the word, but also the subject matter. M.N.'s translation will now be "one favouring the idiomatic over the literalistic" (Watson "Melting into God" 35). This time M.N.

shal declare þo wordis more openli; for þou3 loue declair þo poyntes in þe same booke, it is but schortli spoken, and may be taken opirwise þan it is iment

⁷ All textual quotations for the *Mirror* are from Marilyn Doiron's Middle English edition.

of hem þat reden it sodeynli and taken no ferþir hede. Þerfore such wordis to be
twies iopened, it wole be þe more of audience, and so bi grace of oure Lord
goode God it schal þe more profite to þe auditoures. (247)

We can assume from this statement that M.N.'s initial translation was literal. His words "taken
opirwise," confirms that M.N. appreciates that words have multiple meanings and that some of
the words that he used in his first translation were translated differently than what was meant
by the author. M.N. explains that when words are translated incorrectly, readers will quickly
gloss over the sentence and not pay full attention to its meaning. Therefore, reviewing these
words twice, as M.N. is accomplishing with this second translation, will be to the benefit of the
work's readers and listeners.

M.N.'s second translation will attempt to fully convey the original work's intention.
However, this translation, as mentioned, is not without concern for M.N. He states in his
Prologue that, "But boþe þe firste tyme and now I haue greet drede to do it, for þe boke is of
hiþe diuine maters and of hiþe goostli felynges" (247). M.N.'s use of the word "drede" has a
much more subtle meaning than fear and should be idiomatically translated as M.N.'s concern
and anxiety "for it is a difficult and often obscure treatise of profound mystical doctrine"
(Doiron 246). M.N.'s apprehension fuels his inclusion of fifteen explanatory glosses to
passages that he believes might be difficult to understand and may cause misinterpretation.
M.N. states that "at suche places þere me semeth moost nede, I wole write mo wordis þerto in
maner of glose, aftir my symple kunnyng as me semeth is best" (248). M.N. yet again
includes another modesty topos statement. This is another manifestation of the convention
since he does display his literary proficiency and biblical expertise throughout the Prologue.
M.N. directs his readers and listeners to understand *The Mirror* "as Dauid seiþ in þe sawtere:

Gustate et uidete. Þat is to seie: Taastep and seep" (248). M.N.'s reference to the psalter, an ecclesiastical prayer book that includes the Book of Psalms, and to David, reveals that he is conversant with biblical stories, that he knows Latin or at least some Latin phrases, and that he is accustomed to employing sensory images in his writing that are commonly used in devotional and mystical texts. M.N. confirms his familiarity with using these devotional conventions in his assertion that "I may seie þe wordis of þe prophete: My teeth ben not white to bite of þis breed" (247). Devotional images comparing the text to nourishment abound in M.N.'s Prologue. Jacqueline Jenkins in her article discussing the translation of the legend of St. Katherine states that such images of nourishment "create a trajectory of responsible reading from the readers *in* the text to the readers *of* the text" (145). M.N. briefly shifts responsibility of interpreting the *Mirror* from himself to the readers and listeners by indicating that they govern themselves accordingly since this "fine fare" is only for those with discriminating tastes (Colledge, Marler, and Grant 178 n. 5).

M.N.'s employment of devotional nourishment images, his references to the *Mirror*'s sophisticated content, and his explanatory glosses possibly provide the demographics of his readership, which might have been Carthusian. According to Watson, "M.N. was writing for colleagues, not for either institutional superiors or spiritual dependents: so much is clear from the lack of specific direction given readers" ("Melting into God" 37). M.N.'s glosses are very cursory and at times encourage the readers to "arrive at their own interpretation" (Cré, "Women in the Charterhouse?" 56). The *Mirror*'s challenging subject matter would have required readers to be affiliated in one way or another with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or at least familiar with complex theological issues. The individuals would be the clerks, the

spiritual lovers, and the holy church that M.N. authorizes to amend his translation. If M.N. were writing for contemporaries, these individuals would have a similar knowledge, education, and class to that of M.N. If M.N. were a Carthusian, he and his colleagues thus occupied the dominant position in the religious hierarchy when this re-translation was undertaken. The Carthusians received this designation since, as previously mentioned, they played a primary and influential role in the production, publication, and dissemination of vernacular spiritual literature during the Middle Ages. As a possible Carthusian, M.N.'s own crafted academic Prologue fully displays his literary knowledge, encouraging us to believe that he fittingly translates into Middle English the content of the *Mirouer*, complete with courtly love references of nobility and of desire found in the French original. As well, M.N.'s organization of the Middle English text demonstrates that he distinctly separated his glosses outside of Porete's narrative. M.N. structures his translation in this manner for the reader to understand his version of the *Mirouer* as an accurate and careful translation of the original. Despite admitting translation difficulties, M.N. confidently demonstrates that his Middle English version of the French *Mirouer* will be an appropriate representation of Porete's intention and meaning for the work.

Unlike the extended and extensive Translator's Prologue in the *Mirror, The Treatise of Perfection's* translator keeps his comments to a minimum. The translator states that the original from which he is translating was "compiled bi dan john rusbroke, the first prior of chartyrhowse in valle viridi iuxta bruxellam, whiche tretysse is called the tretesse of perfeccioun of the sonnys of god, that es to saye the grownde and the ledere vnto the trew [t]rayse of perfeccioun" (229). It is in error that the translator positions Ruysbroek as a Carthusian. According to Sargent "[t]he mistake seems to have arisen from the confusion of

the Latin forms of the names of Ruusbroec's Augustinian house of Groenendael – Viridivalle – [the male hermitage where Ruysbroek spent his adult years] and the Paris' Charterhouse – Vallis Viridis" ("The Annihilation" 262). The translator, employing a modesty topos, perhaps anticipates errors in his translation and authorizes his readers to amend them: "Wherfore 3if ony man happen to rede it, or 3it here it redde, whiche approbately can defete it, mekely I beseche þame to withedrawe the defawte and gyffe stede to the trowthe" (229). Although this is a common convention, nonetheless it provides his readers with the understanding that this is his adaptation and translation of Ruysbroek's text.

The translator's version is twice removed from Ruysbroek's Middle Dutch original since he states that he is translating from the Latin, and we know that Ruysbroek wrote only in Middle Dutch. We therefore have to question how much of Ruysbroek's original intention is being accurately translated into Middle English. In translating the Latin, *The Treatise* translator would have had to mediate between Ruysbroek's objectives, Jordaen's intentions for the Latin version, and his own aim for the Middle English version. This extended departure from the original complicates *The Treatise of Perfection* as a translation of Ruysbroek's *Vanden blinckenden steen*. According to Bazire and Colledge, *The Treatise's* translator

has not in any way edited his material, nor has he added anything to it. His work is a strictly literal translation of his Latin text; and even judged as a translation, it cannot be considered as entirely successful ... he is in many places handicapped by a defective Latin text; and although at times his writing seems to capture, even through the medium of Jordaen's Latin, some of the easy flow of the original Dutch, ..., more often his pedestrian, painfully literal renderings

entirely disguise Ruysbroek's felicitous style, and sometimes even his meaning.

(84)

Marlene Cré also believes that the translator, at times, displays an "inability to grasp Ruusbroec's meaning fully" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 145) and has difficulties conveying Ruysbroek's "intimacy between the contemplative and God" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 149). While M.N. provides separate glosses to articulate his rendering of Porete's intent, *The Treatise* translator adds "the phrase 'that is to say'" (Cré, "Vernacular Mysticism" 145) prior to difficult passages to communicate his rendering of the Latin text as well as Ruysbroek's original meaning. Despite these issues, Cré believes that "Ruusbroec's message gets into the text and through to the reader" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 150); the translator is able to impart to the reader Ruysbroek's theological perspective on mystical union with God. However, since there are critical issues concerning how the translator communicates Ruysbroek's content and theology, we must always keep in mind that *The Treatise of Perfection* is a narrative that contains a milieu of meanings and intentions from Ruysbroek, Jordaen the Latin translator, and the Middle English translator.

Cré asserts that both M.N. and *The Treatise* translator worked with defective exemplars since sections from the Old French and Middle Dutch texts are missing in the Middle English translations. Nevertheless, as Watson and Cré stress, the Middle English translations of the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection*, to a certain extent, are able to communicate the subject matter and the underlying meaning of the content in the original texts. Watson states that "the existence of a close English translation of such a work [the *Mirouer*] in its entirety is remarkable in itself" ("Melting into God" 30). Despite

expressing concerns regarding translating the *Mirror* for a second time, M.N. is still able to convey the *Mirror*'s courtly love representations of spiritual nobility and mystical union. *The Treatise of Perfection*, as well, endeavours to communicate Ruysbroek's original content of mystical union and the hierarchy of spiritual followers. If we subscribe to the hypothesis that *The Treatise of Perfection* was translated solely for a Carthusian audience, then,

even if the reader did not have the full view on Ruysbroec's mystical theology as he expresses it in his eleven works, he [the reader] would have understood what he [the translator] was getting at because the Carthusian reader we assume to have read Amherst lived a life grounded in the contemplative traditions on which the *Treatise* draws. (Cré, "Vernacular Mysticism (147)

Readers of *The Treatise of Perfection*, regardless of being acquainted with Ruysbroek's Middle Dutch version, would comprehend the translator's reproduction of Ruysbroek's concept of mystical union and the underlying impressions of courtly love because of their own spiritual indoctrination on such issues. Therefore, both *The Treatise* translator and M.N. produce for their audiences not only their own conceptions of Ruysbroek's and Porete's texts, respectively, but they also generate texts that we, the contemporary readers, can sufficiently employ to interrogate the original works, keeping in mind during our analyses that they are translations. This thesis will negotiate and refer to these translations as apposite representations of the originals since both translators put forward representations of the character and constitution of the original works, as well as including their own understanding of these texts.

CHAPTER 2 – PORETE, RUYSBROEK, AND MYSTICISM

2.1 The Mystics Porete and Ruysbroek

Marguerite Porete's and John Ruysbroek's biographies reveal similarities in the religious and theological influences that shaped their devotional lives and their texts. Both treatises indicate their desires to live the *vita apostolica* and to have a spiritual connection with God. As Continental mystical authors, Porete and Ruysbroek communicate comparable definitions of mystical union in the vernacular. The themes and writing styles in the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* provide indications of each author's intelligence and piety.

On June 1, 1310, Marguerite Porete was burnt at the stake in Paris for writing and promulgating her book. There is very little documentation detailing Porete's life. We draw upon the *Mirror* and various historical records to produce her biography. The *Mirror* is a seemingly heretical exposition for the cultural and religious time in which it is written. Writing in her Old French, Porete elevates the individual human soul above the authority of her contemporary ecclesiastical hierarchy. The *Mirror* is an allegorical dialogue primarily between the female Soul, Lady Reason, and Lady Love, with Lady Love representing God. Porete attempts to acquire spiritual power for herself and for her readers through her narrative by advocating seven states of spirituality that result in the Soul experiencing a mystical union with God and achieving spiritual divinity while still residing on earth. Estates one through three are concerned with the Soul adhering to Church doctrine, which includes abiding by the Ten Commandments and by completing good deeds. Once the Soul enters the fourth estate she is no longer expected to comply with Church doctrine, but must prepare herself to be drawn into God's love. In estates five and six, Porete details her concept of apophatic knowledge of God and annihilation, which originally stems "from pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite early in

the sixth century” (Watson, “Misrepresenting” 124). Aphophatic knowledge of God is the intelligence acquired from being negated to God; that is, by becoming nothing or nought in relation to God. The Soul is nought, or annihilated, when she relinquishes her will and becomes nothing to become one with God, thus receiving his will. Upon annihilation the Soul is now prepared for a union with God, ultimately resulting in God and the individual being undifferentiated at the moment of union. The union with God endows the Soul with divinity, but this divinity in orthodox terms is not supposed to be received until the after-life, nor is it to situate the Soul as God. The *Mirror* discusses death and everlasting glory in the seventh estate.

Undoubtedly the Soul’s spiritual dominance over religious authority would confront and challenge the ecclesiastical structure that governed Porete’s society. According to Grace Jantzen, “[t]he connection of questions of power to questions of mysticism is obvious as soon as one stops to consider that a person who was acknowledged to have direct access to God would be in a position to challenge any form of authority, whether doctrinal or political, which she saw as incompatible with the divine will” (194). In the *Mirror*, Porete advances notions of female power since her text predominantly consists of all female characters, except for one, who occupy significant positions of spirituality and the intellect. Having three main female characters depict God, the intellect, and the soul subverts contemporary medieval theology, which was undeniably male-centered. Amy Hollywood asserts that women “had no basis on which they could write or teach, nor any ‘text’ that they might legitimately read and interpret” (36). Porete challenged male authority not only by writing a text, but also by promoting in this text a means by which lay individuals including women could advance beyond the control of the religious structure. As well, she also outlined the manner in which to achieve an

unmediated relationship with God that does not require adherence to the ecclesiastical authority. Peter Dronke states that Porete

tells of divine love and how she experiences it; ... Marguerite's language to evoke that love can be provocative and deliberately shocking. The reason she was persecuted and condemned, however, had little to do with this. It was rather that, ..., she laid claim to new perceptions of the divine realm, and of the Church.... she castigated those in all ranks of the clergy who failed to welcome her unique insights; ... Marguerite did so of her own accord, speaking only in the name of the 'simple souls', the 'free souls' – an invisible ideal community to which she aspired to belong, and which she was certain should guide and judge the 'Little Church' that is established on earth. (217)

Porete's text advocates a new religious structure for the lay individual and also creates a narrative that includes women in positions of spiritual power. As well, Porete's use of the vernacular increases the lay population's access to the *Mirror*. Saskia Murk-Jansen asserts that Porete's writing in the vernacular was the primary reason for her death: "It is clear from the inquisitorial process against Marguerite Porete that the real problem was not so much the ideas themselves as the fact that she was disseminating them in the vernacular to lay people who might be led astray by them" (37). Porete's vernacular text educates and supports the lay individual's claim to religious authority. Porete's *Mirror* places her in a dissenting position since her text advocates a means by which the lay individual undermines the current ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Porete's Beguine identity is not definitive, but stems from several historical works that refer to her as a member of this religious movement. According to Gwendolyn Bryant,

“scholars agree that she came from Hainaut (a region south of Flanders and Brabant, today part of France and Belgium), since she is referred to as Marguerita de Hannonia” (204). Benefiting from Romana Guarnieri’s research, Bryant also states that

[i]n the *Myreur des histors* Jean des Pries described her [Porete] as a ‘*beghine en clergie mult suffissant*’ (a Beguine very capable in theology), a judgment echoed in the *Grandes chroniques de France*, where Marguerite is called a ‘*béguine clergesse*.’ The canon lawyers responsible for the condemnation of the *Mirror of Simple Souls* called her by the Latin term *beguina*. (205)

As a Beguine, Porete was a member of a community that consisted of highly religious laywomen. Primarily found in Continental Europe, the organization was formed in the early part of the thirteenth century in response to the “religious awakening” among women who “developed forms of religious life in number and variety” (Babinsky 6). According to Murk-Jansen, “[t]he Beguine movement is generally held to have started with the papal dispensation obtained in 1215 by Jacques of Vitry from the newly elected Pope Honorious III for women living together in chastity and poverty, doing works of Christian charity to do so unmolested and to be able to exhort one another to increased piety and good works” (23). The Beguines included well-educated and aristocratic women who chose to either live together or at home with their families since there were no formal rules prohibiting marriage. Although the Beguines “lived from the work of their hands rather than relying on charity” (Murk-Jansen 11), they were still considered outcasts by the other religious orders such as the Premonstratensians and the Cistercians, who eventually “[banned] women from joining the orders” (Murk-Jansen 21).

The Beguines were not cohesively structured or based on a strict regiment of tenets. Over the course of the thirteenth century “[t]he name ‘beguine’ applied to all sorts of persons who lived a religious life outside the ecclesiastical norms of regular orders. The term was ordinarily applied to women, both to those who lived together in a house called a beguinage and to women who lived as religious solitaires” (Babinsky 7). Bryant declares that

the polyvalence of the term ‘Beguine’ illustrates the ambiguity of their status.

‘Beguine’ could be used to mock the ridiculously righteous or denounce those of loose morals... The term was a synonym for ‘heretic,’ particularly a single female heretic; more neutrally, it could signify an unmarried secular person devoted to spiritual matters. (206)

Many of the organizations that were deemed to be heretical were formed in response to orthodox rigidity and the difficulty of obtaining entry into ecclesiastical orders. Murk-Jansen asserts that “[w]hile the main orders were becoming increasingly strident in their efforts to close their doors to women, there were ever increasing numbers of men and women seeking to live a religious life of apostolic poverty and service in the cities” (21). People’s desire to lead an apostolic life translated into the formation of movements that created their own theology and definitions of religiosity. These communities, including the Beguines, were very critical of the authority and power inherent in the existing religious hierarchy. This criticism did not go unnoticed and the Beguines were targeted as a heretical movement. In 1311 at the Council of Venice the Church instituted two decrees against the Beguines. The first “explicitly condemned the status of beguine” and the second stated that all Beguines were deemed heretical and “faithless women” (Babinsky 11).

Chroniclers of Porete's inquisition chose to identify her as both a heretic and a Beguine. Michael Sargent claims that Porete was a Beguine since "her *Mirouer* was taken as one of the sources of the condemned doctrines attributed to them [the Beguines]" ("The Annihilation" 267). However, Sargent also appreciates that Porete's text complicates her Beguine identity since "in the poem that concludes the *Mirouer*, she appears specifically to group the beguines together with members of the four mendicant orders, all representatives of the hierarchical church who will not understand her" ("The Annihilation" 267). If Porete were a Beguine, her audience of well-educated women would understand her theology in the *Mirouer* since it communicates Beguine spirituality, as Sargent attests. It is unlikely that Porete would doubt their intelligence in comprehending her narrative or her spiritual objectives. However, Porete includes the Beguines with the other orders who will not understand the text. The inclusion of the Beguines in the poem challenges Porete's Beguine identity. It is possible that Porete was not a Beguine, but that her theology shared similarities with Beguine spirituality.

Porete was also identified as a member of the Brethren of Free Spirit, a popular apostatical movement during the Middle Ages. Similar to the Beguines, the Free Spirits were not a "sect or homogenous organization" (Lerner, *The Heresy* 229), nor were they an established religious order in the way that they lived. Rather, the Free Spirits were individuals who shared similar religious beliefs. In a patriarchal society that dismissed women as inferior, Free Spirit philosophy attracted many women since they were given equal status with men in their pursuit of a union with God. The Free Spirit philosophy affirmed that individuals, regardless of sex, could become one with God while still residing on earth (Lerner, *The Heresy* 3). This assertion is a major characteristic in Porete's fifth and sixth estates of spirituality. According to Lerner, Porete was "one of the most important figures in the history of the heresy

of the Free Spirit" (*The Heresy* 71), even though there is no historical documentation to authenticate this claim. In a time when heresy was challenging and encroaching upon the powers of the religious hierarchy, anyone who may have had a tendency to Free Spirit convictions was automatically deemed a heretic and a Free Spirit apostle. Porete's identity as a Free Spirit is drawn from the *Mirror*'s narrative since the text advocates that an individual can receive divinity from God while still living. Porete was branded a Free Spirit member since her spiritual views closely resembled Free Spirit philosophy.

Porete's death sentence was based on statements in the *Mirror* claimed to be heretical by the Inquisition. According to Sargent, Porete's chief Inquisitor, William of Paris, "submitted a number of propositions from her book to a panel of twenty-one theologians from the University of Paris, who declared them to be heretical" ("The Annihilation" 256). There were fifteen propositions in total; however, only proposition one and fifteen are known today since they were quoted in William of Nangis's *Chronica*, which recorded Porete's trial (Colledge and Guarnieri 358). The first heretical proposition from the text is, "The soule of such loue seiþ loue, seiþ loue himsilf, may seie þus to uertues: I take leue of 3ou. To þe whiche uertues þis soule many a day hap be seruaunt to" (254). Porete explains that before the Soul can enter into a union with God, she must go from being a servant to the Virtues to becoming a mistress of the Virtues. The Soul must learn from the Virtues before proceeding to annihilation and union. There is no implicit statement that the Soul is above Church doctrine although Porete's inquisitors assumed this to be the case. Although the paradox initially contradicts theological guidelines, once analyzed the statement illustrates medieval religious doctrine by revealing that the Soul has to be, at one point, servant to the Virtues. The paradox

emphasizes that the Virtues teach the Soul to be virtuous, which empowers the Soul. The Virtues must then step back and allow the Soul to continue her search for supernatural happiness with God.

The Inquisition's proposition fifteen asserted that the Soul has no regard for God's gifts or consolations because it would impede her from following God (Lerner, *The Heresy* 75). Unlike proposition one, the fifteenth proposition does not refer to any specific section or line in the *Mirror*. Colledge and Guarnieri believe that this statement stems from Porete's Beguine teachings in which the Beguines

ought not to rise to their feet at the elevation of the body of Jesus Christ or to show any reverence for it, because they assert that it would be an imperfection in them if they were so to descend from the purity and exaltedness of their contemplation as to give any thought to the administration or the sacrament of the Eucharist or to the passion or the humanity of Christ. (359)

The Soul's prominent position in relation to the other characters in the *Mirror* demonstrates Beguine notions of spiritual elitism. Michael Sargent differs from Colledge and Guarnieri on the interpretation of proposition fifteen. He believes that it stems from Lady Love's discussion on the mediation of pure love ("The Annihilation" 260):

Now vndirstande þe remenant, lordis herynge, lordis louynge, bi meditacion of loue wiþouten herynge of creature, for such meditacion þat soules receyuen in loue wiþouten willinge ony of his 3iftes þat men clepen consolacions þat soules conforten bi felinge of swetnesse of orison techen not þe soule, ne noon oþir usages, but pure loue. For who þat wolde haue þe confortis of God bi felinges of consolacion, he breken þe price of fyne loue." (278)

Lady Love asserts that pure love for God does not come from the gifts that God grants, but from the sweetness that is received in pure prayer and meditation of God. Those who desire God only for the gifts he provides will not truly become one with God. The paradoxical element in this statement is that God comes with these gifts or consolations, so not wanting them can be seen as not wanting God. The Soul desires God and once in union with the divine will ultimately receive these gifts.

The paradoxical and potentially heretical nature of these propositions undoubtedly made Porete's inquisitors highly anxious. Their anxiety is communicated in their labelling Porete a "*pseudomulier*," a fake woman (qtd. in Lerner, *The Heresy* 71). According to Sargent, this term was used to "[denigrate] women who took on roles – like the writing of books of mystical theology – considered more appropriate to men" ("The Annihilation" 254). The purpose of this disparagement was to call into question Porete's status as a woman in society. Porete did not abide by society's standards for women since she chose to write in a traditionally male genre.⁸ Porete's challenge to the social criterion for women, her Beguine identity, and her possible Brethren of Free Spirit membership contributed to her death since she and her text question the power inherent in the religious/social hierarchy.

Porete's distinction as a Beguine and her disrepute as a heretic stands in opposition to the esteem bestowed upon John Ruysbroek, despite their texts displaying similar characteristics in their representations of mystical union, and their employment of the courtly love idiom.

⁸ Although mystics were both male and female, Grace Jantzen asserts that mysticism was a "domain of men. Women, on the whole, did not have the education necessary to study the text and its multiple glosses; and even in exceptional cases where they did have the requisite education and access to the manuscripts, they were not considered suitable to teach or to have the authority that discernment of the mystical meaning would confer" (196).

Evelyn Underhill's and A. Wautier D'Aygalliers's research into Ruysbroek's life demonstrates the extensive amount of detailed material available on his life in contrast to Porete's limited biography. According to Underhill in *John of Ruysbroeck*, he was born in 1273 in an area known as "Ruysbroeck or Ruusbroeck, [which is located] between Brussels and Hal, [and] from which he takes his name." He left home at the age of eleven and went to live in Brussels with his uncle John Hinckaert, and Francis van Coudenberg, both of whom were canons. Ruysbroek's mother, who died in a Brussels beguinage, encouraged her son's religiosity, desiring him to become a priest. Ruysbroek remained in Brussels until 1343 when he, Hinckaert, and Coudenberg left the city to live in the Groenendael male hermitage. Hinckaert's and Coudenberg's clerical authority greatly influenced Ruysbroek's tome of mystical writings. Evelyn Underhill states that the religious leadership of these men "formed the heart of Ruysbroeck's education; helping to build up that manly and sturdy character which gave its special temper to his mystical outlook" (*Ruysbroeck* 11). This gendered quality in Ruysbroek's writings originates from his early indoctrination in the Church, an inherently male structure. The combination of male-centred discourse and religion in Ruysbroek's writing is evident in the narratives of his eleven texts, all of which were written in Middle Dutch. Despite being a member of the clergy, Ruysbroek did not write in Latin, but rather chose to write in his native Middle Dutch. As with the French *Mirouer*, Ruysbroek's texts would be much more readily available for the reading and listening lay population.

As a member of the institutional Church and inculcated in its doctrines, Ruysbroek was a staunch defender of the faith in his texts, using his writings to preach against heretical movements. The foremost unorthodox faction that Ruysbroek waged battle upon was the Brethren of Free Spirit, the very same organization that Porete is said to have been associated

with. The problems that plagued religious orthodoxy during the time in which Porete was writing her French *Mirouer* were still prevalent during Ruysbroek's time.⁹ According to James Wiseman, "the mendicant orders had lost much of their initial fervor and were coming under increasingly frequent attacks" that focused on the amount of monetary wealth that the orders had amassed (3). The Free Spirits were exceptionally pervasive in Brussels and aggressive in the promotion of the "divinity of man" (Underhill, *John of Ruysbroeck*) and of autotheism: "the possibility of a person's total identification with God on earth, and, ... the view that this identification can be lasting rather than momentary" (Wiseman 6). This vision of earthly deification, which prevails in Porete's *Mirror*, was one of the primary reasons for Ruysbroek writing against the Free Spirits.

Ruysbroek opposed Free Spirit theology that encouraged individuals to believe that they could be essentially God-like while still living. However his writings, like Porete's, promoted the idea and possibility of a mystical union with God for the lay individual. Ruysbroek's version of mystical union is similar to Porete's since he, too, is influenced by pseudo-Dionysius. Porete's and Ruysbroek's concepts of annihilation and of mystical union, which will be discussed later in relation to their employment of courtly love, both have the individual experiencing a complete abandonment of will to God. Porete's and Ruysbroek's respective versions of annihilation rest upon time: Porete's mystical union does not specify a time in which the union comes to an end, whereas Ruysbroek's union is momentary with the potential for the individual soul and God to continually flow in and out of one another.

⁹ Porete's French *Mirouer* was written "[b]etween 1296 and 1306" (Lerner, Preface 3). The dates of Ruysbroek's texts are uncertain, however "we know that in 1350 he sent a copy of it [*The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*] to the group of Rhenish mystics who called themselves the Friends of God. *The Sparkling Stone* ... [belongs] to a later date" (Underhill, *John of Ruysbroeck*).

The Treatise communicates Ruysbroek's concept of mystical union and abandonment to God in which the inward and outward flow of love between God and the individual is categorized into three separate states of spirituality. Similar to Porete's treatise that delineates seven orderly steps, Ruysbroek's three states of spiritual existence, in order of ascendancy to mystical union, are the faithful servants of God, the secret friends of God, and the hidden sons of God. According to Bazire and Colledge, "*The Treatise* is evidently written for readers of an intellectual subtlety and agility matching Ruysbroek's own" (86). This assertion is echoed by Wiseman who, drawing upon information from a Carthusian associated with Ruysbroek, attests that *The Treatise*

was written in response to a request from a hermit with whom Ruysbroec had discussed spiritual matters and who wished to have the mystic's teaching set down in writing so that he and others could profit from it; an echo of the two men's conversation seems to have been preserved in the bit of dialogue. (22)

We can overhear the conversation between Ruysbroek and the hermit in such passages from the Middle English text as "Wherefore vs behoues to grownde oure lyfe vpon a profounde depenesse" (233). The Middle English translator communicates that Ruysbroek is possibly speaking to a fellow ecclesiastic whose objective is also to lead a deeply spiritual life. Ruysbroek's residence at the hermitage provides evidence that this treatise on achieving contemplative life and mystical union was intended for his fellow inmates who would benefit from *The Treatise's* content. However, we can also examine such quotations in the text to hypothesize a wider audience. This might be an attempt by Ruysbroek to include lay readers in his dialogue on contemplative living. Rather than view *The Treatise* as a closed conversation between two ecclesiastics discussing the devotional life, we can understand the Middle English

translator's use of "vs" as Ruysbroek's objective of creating an audience that includes all individuals, not just the ecclesiastics who are living in meditation to God.

Ruysbroek's and Porete's texts allow for an *illiterati* audience since they are written in the vernacular. However, the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* do contain spiritually advanced notions of mystical union that would challenge the spirituality and the intellectual capabilities of a non-ecclesiastical audience. Porete specifically begins her own text with an author's prologue where she mentions the names of three ecclesiastics who commend her book, despite its heretical status. They include "a frere menour of greet name of liif of perfeccioun. Men clepide him frere Ion of Querayn" (249), "a monk of Cisetyns ... þat hi3te daun Frank, chauntour of þe abbey of Viliers" (250), and "a maister of diuinite þat hi3te maister Godfrey of Fountaynes" (250). All three individuals become an audience for this text since they have read it, or at least they infer that they have read it. Collectively, the three men believe "þat it is al trouþe þat þis boke seiþ" (250), and each recommends that the readership for the text be restricted. M.N. translates Porete as stating that "he [Ion of Querayn] preiede for þe loue of God þat it be wiseli kept, and þat but fewe schulden se it. And he seide þus, þat it was so hi3e þat himsilf my3te not vndirstande it" (249). According to the author, Maister Godfrey echoes this sentiment: "he seide þus, þat he counsailide not þat fele schulden se it, and for þis cause: for þei my3ten leue her owen werkynge and folewe þis clepyng, to þe whiche þei schulden neuere come" (250). Both Ion of Querayn and Maister Godfrey assert that the material contained in the text is a guide to the spiritual life that may be too intellectually

complicated for the average layperson to follow let alone understand. By including these warnings regarding the text's audience, Porete is advocating her own position that the audience be limited. As well, Porete specifically chooses three ecclesiastics to represent her vision of the audience's intellectuality. Rather than employing the average person who may not be acquainted with challenging ideas on spirituality, Porete selects these ecclesiastics to indicate that the text's audience be individuals who understand complex theories of religion. Porete employs their opinions to confine her audience to the spiritually educated and to also demonstrate that there were individuals in the religious hierarchy who did approve of her text.

Porete and Ruysbroek were both conversant with spiritually sophisticated material as is evident from the content in their texts. The *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* require an audience knowledgeable on theology and spirituality, which would implicitly include the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, since both texts are written in the vernacular they also attract lay readers who are not necessarily formally educated in spirituality or philosophy. Porete's and Ruysbroek's intellectually challenging versions of mystical union would undeniably be beyond the average lay person's comprehension of unconventional and progressive states of spirituality. It is possible that this sophisticated subject matter in the vernacular drew ecclesiastical attention towards Porete and Ruysbroek, since their texts would have been available to the *illiterati*. Without an "*interpres* (scholarly interpreter)" (Wogan-Browne *et al* 109), the *illiterati* who could read Porete's and Ruysbroek's vernacular texts would have been on their own to interpret complex notions of mystical union. This would have been a significant worry for the ecclesiastical authority, which was already dealing with the onslaught of heretical movements that advocated "separating [themselves] from the ecclesiastical rules altogether and breaking with the Church itself" (Lerner, Introduction 1).

The *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* contain challenging theological content and as such their authors create a literary site for spiritual discussion amongst the ecclesiastics, the *litterati*. As well, the vernacular accessibility encourages an *illiterati* audience that may not be officially conversant with theology, but can read texts written in the vernacular. Both works address and promote the *vita apostolica* for readers who are positioned somewhere along the *litterati/illiterati* continuum.

2.2 Mystical Union: Human Sex, Divine Love

Porete and Ruysbroek authored texts on the *vita apostolica* and mystical union that attracted the attentions of *litterati* and *illiterati* readers. Wogan-Browne *et al*, in their chapter “Addressing and Positioning the Audience” from *The Idea of the Vernacular*, employ Louis Althusser’s term interpellation to discuss how a text ‘hails’ its readers: “[t]hose texts inform, persuade, coerce, convince, entertain, or seduce their readers. They produce positions for their listeners from which what they say appears most intelligible (and therefore ‘natural’ or incontrovertible)” (111). To “seduce” the audience, and to have this audience appreciate the texts as spiritual knowledge, Porete and Ruysbroek follow in the Christian monastic tradition to describe spiritual desire for God, employing sexual images and erotic language. Porete’s and Ruysbroek’s audiences would have been familiar with this concept, which stemmed from an appropriation of the language and images in “The Song of Songs.” A poem of human love found in the *Old Testament*, “The Song of Songs” metaphorically represents divine love. With such statements as “Let him kiss me with kisses of his / mouth” (*New American Bible*, Song Sol. 1.2B), and “On my bed at night I sought him / whom my heart loves” (*New American Bible*, Song Sol. 3.1B), this love poem became the “instructional text for many Christian

mystics as they sought a deeper understanding of the divine-human relationships” (Runzo 17). “The Song of Songs,” also known as “The Song of Solomon,” followed in the tradition of the *Old Testament* prophet books of *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* in which the relationship between God and Israel is viewed as a marriage with God cast as the beloved and his followers as the lovers (*New American Bible* 742). Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (*d.* 1153), the “most orthodox of the mystics” (Underhill, *Ruysbroeck* 71) employed the language of the “Song of Songs” in his works to symbolize “the union between Christ and the individual soul” (*New American Bible* 743). Porete and Ruysbroek, influenced by Saint Bernard, represent God as the beloved and present a specific type of relationship between God and the lover/Soul. It is a union that includes those attributes that are ascribed to a love affair, marriage, or sexual encounter.

Since this relationship is intrinsically indescribable, why do Porete, Ruysbroek and other mystics continually express this spiritual love for the divine paradoxically in terms of human love when one of the union’s participants is not human but transcendental? Why use language, symbolism, and images that are associated with human sexual love, a hierarchically lower form of love compared to spiritual love, to describe a love that is supposed to surpass all other types of love? Mystics use the discourse of the human sexual encounter because it is conceptually familiar, unlike the ineffable encounter with the divine. Mystics desire to have an individual connection with God like the connection that is received through sexual intercourse: a one-on-one encounter that excludes all, except for the beloved and the lover at the moment of union. According to Joseph Runzo, “sexual imagery serves as a ‘pointer to a higher reality’” (16). Sexual encounters provide a means of corporeal union between individuals seeking the ultimate personal and intimate relationship. Sexual intercourse joins together two individuals

with no intermediary. Society associates sex with ownership and belonging, as well as it being a moment in which one can gain an innermost or deep-seated knowledge of the other.

Although God is not corporeal but celestial, which illustrates the paradox of implementing the human sexual encounter narrative to describe a union that is definitely not of the body, mystics use this narrative to describe the type of relationship that they are attempting to achieve with God. Mystics desire a personal unmediated relationship with God so as to discover God. The lover and God are to be the only participants in this relationship since the mystic demands intimacy and privacy to reach a personal awareness of God.

Margery Kempe (c. 1373) in her spiritual autobiography *The Book of Margery Kempe* displays the conventional mystical desire to be intimate with God and to be his lover. Kempe communicates “her passionate attachment to ... Christ” (Staley, Introduction x) as “a vision in which Christ seems to substitute for her husband as her true lover” (Bynum “Women’s Stories” 40). Kempe’s images and language are deeply erotic and include Christ and Margery sharing a ‘matrimonial’ bed as husband and wife.¹⁰

Therefore must I needs be homely with you and lie in your bed with you.

Daughter, you desire greatly to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in your bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your most worthy darling, and as your sweet son, for I will be loved as a son should be loved by the mother and will that you love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband.

¹⁰ Following Lynn Staley’s direction in *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions*, “I draw a distinction between Margery, the subject, and Kempe her author” (3).

And therefore you may boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you will. (66)

Kempe articulates the image of an intimate human sexual encounter between Christ and Margery. Kempe also employs the conventional erotic language of "The Song of Songs." According to Caroline Walker Bynum, "Margery Kempe's cuddling with Christ in bed is simply a case of an uneducated woman taking literally metaphors from the Song of Songs" ("Women's Stories" 44). In Margery's bed, Christ, cast as her husband, states that he will be "homely" with her as he lies beside her. Kempe focuses on Christ's humanity (his mouth, his head, and his feet), allowing the reader to project the familiar human sexual encounter narrative onto the celestial being/human being spiritual union. Not only does Margery know Christ spiritually, but also physically. According to Robert Nozick, "in sex one can also engage in metaphysical exploration, knowing the body and person of another as a map or microcosm of the very deepest reality, a clue to its nature and purpose" (67). Kempe's mystical union offers knowledge of the ultimate reality, just as sex offers knowledge of the deepest reality. Once union is achieved with God, the ultimate being, there is no other reality to be sought; the profound is found.

To communicate an affective union with God to others requires language and images that can be understood by the community of readers and listeners. Using a structuralist argument, each community has its own signifiers and signifieds that allow its members the ability to converse and to present thoughts and images to each other that will be understood in the way the communicator desires. Medieval mystics such as Kempe, Porete, and Ruysbroek are not unlike any other writers of a particular community in trying to put forward a particular

concept. They are trying to convey to their readers the attributes of a union with God; a mystical union that they have experienced which must be “mediated through and structured by language” (Hollywood 21). Without their own language and a set of images that will be understood by their audience, mystics will fail in conveying and communicating this divine union. The medieval mystic’s blend of erotic language, sexual images, and spiritual content situates God and the religious devotee in a relationship as spiritual and sensual lovers. Although this representation can be thought of as possibly overwhelming, as paradoxical, and/or as being inappropriately applied to religious content, this language and these images provide the mystic the means to convey a relationship that is intrinsically astonishing. Runzo asserts that,

[s]exual symbolism provides both a shock – suddenly seeing the Divine in blatantly erotic terms – and more importantly a shock of recognition. For those who experience the passion of faith, encountering the Divine is so profound – the devout feels so vulnerable and yet so integrated, so desirous to be one with the beloved – that only the archetype of sexual experience seems to compare.

(26)

There seems to be no language other than sexual, which inherently relies on the physical, for the mystic to express her/his thoughts, feelings, and emotions regarding a spiritual union with God. Paradoxically, the mystic relies upon language that is associated with the body to describe a relationship in which one of the participants has no actual physical presence that can be concretized. According to Saskia Murk-Jansen, imagery, and in this context sexual imagery, “is concerned with exploiting the mind’s ability to make affective connections between disparate elements rather than its capacity for rational logic” (42). Sexual images and

language conjures up feelings and thoughts in the reader that s/he can draw upon to comprehend the dynamics of spiritual love between the human and God. Michel Foucault states:

Never did sexuality enjoy a more immediately natural understanding and never did it know a greater 'felicity of expression' than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and sin. The proof is its whole tradition of mysticism and spirituality which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of rapture, of penetration, of ecstasy, of that outpouring that leaves us spent: all of these experiences seemed to lead, without interruption or limit, right to the heart of a divine source returning upon itself. (29)

Sexual imagery and language is inherently stunning, imposing, titillating, and impassioned. Employing erotic and sexually-charged language to describe mystical union has the capability to stimulate in the reader emotions of awe, amazement, and passion which are, in substance, the same emotions that religion attempts to convey in its followers regarding the miracles of the divine. Murk-Jansen asserts that "[i]n the authors' use of imagery, metaphor, paradox and analogy, the meaning is to be found in the interstices of the language, as the mind moves from one element to the next" (42). The reader comprehends the spiritual significance of the relationship between God and the lover by paradoxically connecting the concept of physical sex to the concept of spiritual love. The human sexual relationship offers a vocabulary and a tangible image that the reader can employ to understand mystical union's emotional meaning.

The blending of the erotic and of the religious, confirmed by the adoption of the amatory language found in the love poem of "The Song of Songs," offered medieval mystics a familiar concept in which to present spiritual love. Mystics such as Porete and Ruysbroek used

the human sexual encounter narrative to concretize the potential ecstatic and emotional essence of a mystical union. Medieval mystical authors conflated the erotic, the sexual, and the religious to convey literary representations of spiritual desire. These narratives provided medieval audiences with definitions of spiritual love that encouraged readers to make the necessary projections from the known human sexual encounter onto the unknown divine encounter.

CHAPTER 3 – PORETE

3.1 Courtly Love: The Beguines and Porete

Beguine texts advanced a mystical spirituality particular to their own lay religious organization. Their writings included the sexual imagery and the erotic language inherent in “The Song of Songs.” Beguine mystical texts also included the language of love and of noble privilege found in courtly literature. The Beguines used the courtly love idiom to advance a concept of mystical union that combined romantic and passionate language with spiritual elitism. Beguine mysticism emphasized God’s nobility in relation to his spiritually inferior lovers, and the soul’s spiritual nobility upon union with God. The soul ascends the spiritual hierarchy to be one with God. Upon union, the Soul is spiritually above other religious devotees who still seek a mystical union. Beguine literature presented the mystical union as a loving relationship between God and the soul that would “disclose new possibilities for the soul in its pursuit of divine *aventure*” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 12). The courtly love literary topos offered Beguine writers a narrative to display their desire and their quest for mystical union.

David Simpson asserts that references to courtly love appeared in the late eleventh century and were associated with the love poetry of the lyric poet Troubadours. According to Simpson, courtly love “identified an extravagantly artificial and stylized relationship” between members of the aristocratic court. Courtly love

sketched the ideal woman as noble and arrogant. She was desirable but unattainable, demanding and changeable, but ultimately she yielded her power to a man. Men were adventurous heroes, supremely loyal and obedient unto death, and humble even in victory... the woman plays a

largely passive role. It is the man who seeks to win her love by selfless service and carries out her slightest wishes with loyal obedience. (Murk-Jansen 44)

Deborah Schwartz states that the male lover's affections for the noble lady are ennobling regardless of whether or not the noble lady responds to his love. Individuals with less nobility occupy the marginalized spaces around the noble lady. Just as the lover desires to be with his noble lady, the mystic in her translation of courtly love longs to be with God who is spiritually noble and whose lovers are correspondingly inferior and humble.

In the past twenty years, studies of courtly literature, in concurrence with feminist theory, have examined the treatment of women in this literary medieval convention. Although courtly literature articulates a particular concept of what is female and what is "Woman," it is also obsessed with an idea called "Ravishment" (Gravdal 11). In her pioneering work, Kathryn Gravdal equates ravishment to rape and affirms that "[c]ourtly discourse is a locus in which the feminine figures as an empty sign that can be filled with the reflections of masculine hegemony on itself" (12). In courtly literature "Woman" becomes a symbol that articulates ideological assumptions of male power and female inferiority since, as Murk-Jansen asserts, the woman in courtly literature is passive as she acquiesces to the male lover's desire. Mystical literature's adaptation of the courtly love convention undermines the use of "Woman" as a sign solely for the expression of masculine authority. Although courtly love predominantly concentrates on the masculine gaze upon woman, mystical texts reverse and undermine this focus by permitting gender fluidity in which the beloved, as well as the lover, can be imagined as either masculine or feminine. Both Porete's and Ruysbroek's texts engage in gender fluidity for the divine beloved and the lover, which will be discussed further in this

thesis. The courtly love literary idiom is a fitting structure to communicate the concept of a union with the male God, notwithstanding its focus on the male gaze. Mystical literature's employment of the courtly love topos provides a narrative to represent God as spiritually elite and the spiritual lover as humble and obedient.

Beguine authors, including Hadewijch of Brabant and Mechthild of Magdeburg, used the courtly love convention to communicate their place in society as educated upper class women. Writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, Hadewijch's oeuvre consists of "forty-five poems in stanzas, thirty-one letters, fourteen visions, a list of 'perfect ones', and a collection of some twenty-nine other poems of which sixteen are thought certainly to be by her" (Murk-Jansen 69). Similar to Porete, Hadewijch's writings demonstrate a very educated author. According to Murk-Jansen, "[h]er poetic skill and understanding of the conventions of the poetry of courtly love is considerable" (69). Mechthild demonstrates her literary proficiency and "her theological understanding of the role of the imitation of Christ and the apostolic life" in her text *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (Hollywood 52). The seven books that comprise *The Flowing Light*, written between 1250 and 1282 (Murk-Jansen 66), have two prevalent themes: "In the earlier books she attributes to God a passionate longing for the soul similar to that felt by the soul for God, and in the later ones she portrays a relationship of easy intercourse reminiscent of a long established marriage" (Murk-Jansen 68). According to Bernard McGinn, collectively these Beguine works display "bridal and courtly motifs ... [and] powerful evocations of the madness or insanity of love found in the encounter between God and the human lover" (12). The Beguine writings are spiritually sophisticated and communicate to their audiences the organization's version of the *vita apostolica*, conveying a distinct spiritual elitism that is contemporaneous with their elevated positions as educated and

aristocratic women in the social hierarchy. Barbara Newman declares that “the beguine mystic both replicates and reverses the elitism inherent in courtly literature. ‘We few, we happy few’ - ... who alone have refinement and taste sufficient for the purest love – are transmogrified into ‘we poor, abject, humiliated friends of God’” (*From Virile Woman* 13). Despite adhering to the religious convention dictated by male ecclesiastics that God’s followers must be humble and subservient in their adoration for the divine, the Beguines were unable to separate themselves from their social standings as highborn educated women. They were affluent and spiritual women who had access to education, which “is reflected in the quality of the texts they wrote” (Murk-Jansen 11).

In the thirteenth century, possibly around the same time that Porete was writing, an unknown French priest constructed the Beguine literary rule, *La Règle des Fins Amans*, (“The Rule of Perfect Lovers”) (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 139). This rule confirmed for the Beguines their own spiritual class exclusivity, which they implemented in their writings (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 139, Murk-Jansen 48). *La Règle* “encouraged [the Beguines] to think of themselves as courtly” lovers of God (Murk-Jansen 48). According to Newman, “the hallmark of the rule is its thoroughgoing, unabashed translation of monastic teaching into the idiom of secular love poetry” (*From Virile Woman* 140). The combination of religious instruction and secular love discourse produces seraphic love, a combination of *eros* (sexual love) and *agape* (love that is spiritual in nature) (Runzo 28). This divine/secular love advances God’s followers through stages of spiritual love in their pursuit of becoming perfect and noble lovers of God. *La Règle* defines perfect lovers of God, the *fin amants*, as “men and women who love God *finement* ... that, is, purely, with all our heart, with all our strength, and with all

our virtue” (qtd. in Newman, *From Virile Woman* 140). As well, “[t]he *fin amant* is exhorted to think of her lover often, to seek out his favourite haunts, and to receive the jewels he sends her gladly, although these consist of ‘poverty, diseases, maladies, and tribulation’” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 141). *La Règle*’s characteristics of perfect love overlap with the discourse of courtly love. In courtly love, the male lover desires to be with the noble lady. Similarly in *La Règle*, the religious *fin amant* desires to be with God. Both the courtly lover and the *fin amant* are humble lovers and obedient to the demands of their respective beloveds. The Beguines’ application of *La Règle* and characteristics of courtly love literature assisted the Beguines in communicating their desire to be *fin amants*, the perfect lovers of God.

The Béguines’ blending of religion, love, and class in their texts produced what Newman calls *la mystique courtoise*. This genre had its beginnings in the “The Song of Songs” literary tradition, and in bridal mysticism, “a narrative devised by male authors for a female protagonist: the virgin bride of Christ, who could be understood collectively as the Church, individually as the Virgin Mary or any loving soul, or more concretely as the female recluse or nun” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 138). In bridal mysticism male authors could embrace a female persona or feminine attributes to articulate their love for the Divine who was deemed by Church authorities to be male and masculine. Male mystical authors understood themselves as female or feminine in their relationship with the male God, which therefore created a heterosexual union. *La mystique courtoise* includes such courtly themes, “as boundless longing, *amor de lonh*, or love from afar, prolonged and humiliating love service, and certain stock characters (Frau Minne [Lady Love], the Christ-knight, the soul as princess-bride)” (Newman, “*The Mirror*” 105). The *mystique courtoise* narrative permitted gender

fluidity for the divine and the lover. The divine could be gendered “either female or male” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 12), thus allowing Christ to be referred to as a bride, or as in Porete’s *Mirror*, Lady Love. Conversely, the soul can also be understood as either male or female, having such designations as “exultant bride ... questing knight, suffering servant, or ‘annihilated soul’” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 13). As in courtly love, the soul as lover in *mystique courtoise* is humbled by her continual service to and constant desire for God. The more the soul is humbled, the more she feels that she is making progress in her intention of becoming one with God. The *mystique courtoise* lover, like the courtly male lover, is presented as socially inferior compared to her divine beloved. Once the mystical union with the divine is complete, the soul is transformed into a noble soul. Similar to courtly love, divine love spiritually ennoble the religious devotee. In the *mystique courtoise* narrative, the soul and God are “surrounded by a hostile, uncomprehending public of false lovers and spiritual peasants who will be forever excluded from their inner circle” (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 13). The *mystique courtoise* narrative, with its blending of courtly love images and religious language, oscillates, like the Beguines, between the spiritual and the secular, and assisted the Beguines in communicating to their audiences their undying love for God and their spiritual exclusivity.

There is no definitive proof whether or not Porete was aware of the Beguines’ literary rule. However, Porete, like the Beguines, combines monastic discourse with secular love language. Porete’s writing style incorporates many features of Beguine writing and assists in substantiating her Beguine identity. Similar to the Beguine writers Hadewijch and Mechthild, Porete used the courtly love idiom, as well as characteristics of *mystique courtoise*, to create a discourse in the *Mirror* that combines the mystic’s desire for a spiritual relationship with God

with secular love language. Porete's narrative describes God as the spiritually elite beloved. Her text identifies the love that God and the Soul share as the quintessential perfect and fine love. As with courtly love and *mystique courtoise*, Porete's version of fine love also has the potential to transform the Soul into a spiritually noble being. Porete consistently underscores that her Soul, once annihilated and in union with God, will become a member of the spiritually elite. Porete, like the Beguines, relied upon characteristics of courtly love and *mystique courtoise* to communicate her concept of mystical union.

3.2 Porete's *Mirror* and Courtly Love

As discussed in Chapter 2, Porete's *Mirror* is an allegorical treatise organized into chapters that describe how to achieve a mystical union with God. Drawing upon such literary influences as *The Romance of the Rose* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*,¹¹ Porete includes characters that symbolically represent individual human qualities and spiritual states of being. The *Mirror* focuses primarily on the conversation between the three central characters Lady Love, the Soul, and Reason. Included in the discussions are such minor characters as Hope, Faith, Charity, and Courtesy. Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard view the *Mirror* as a type of drama in which the cast of characters enunciates Porete's spiritual "theme of liberation" (151). The *Mirror*'s agenda of communicating a means to spiritual freedom is ensconced in Lady Love's dialogue with the characters.

¹¹ For further discussion of these influences, refer to Colledge's, Marler's, and Grant's "Introductory Interpretative Essay" in *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, p. lxvi.

The *Mirror* begins with a description of the book's purpose, which is to educate the Soul on the seven estates of spirituality. Lady Love, the text's primary speaker, "represents an aspect of God, or rather, God Himself in His Essence" (Zum Brunn and Epiney-Burgard 151). Lady Love states in the text's first sentence, "O soule touched of God, disseuered of synne, in þe firste estate of grace, sti3e bi diuine grace into þe seuenþe estate of grace, where þat þe soule hap her fulhede of perfeccioun bi diuine fruicion in liif of pees" (250). Lady Love announces to the Soul that there are seven estates of spirituality of which the Soul is presently in the first estate. Perfection and peace with God are achieved in the sixth estate, with the seventh estate discussing death and "euerlastynge glorie" (342)¹². It is Lady Love's ambition to advance the Soul through these six estates. Lady Love educates the Soul and other followers of the Church on how to achieve a life of perfection complete with God's grace. Lady Love has written the text to educate others on the spiritual life. She states that "for 3ou haue I maad þis boke, for it schulde þe more availen 3ou þe liif of perfeccion and þe beyng of pees" (252). Lady Love begins the instruction with spiritual material that the Soul can easily comprehend since she discusses the first estate. However, throughout the text Lady Love progressively increases the intellectual sophistication required of her readers since they will need to understand the theological subject matter of annihilation.

Porete introduces the character Reason early in the text's development when the content begins to challenge Church doctrine. The character Reason "speaks as the mistress of the institutional church, ..., with its masses, sermons, prayers and scriptures, and its attitude of

¹² This thesis is concerned with estates one through six, in which the Soul is still an earthly being.

fearful obedience to the virtues” (Watson, “Melting into God” 28). Reason is silent in the text until Lady Love states that “This soule, ..., ne reckep of schame, ne of worschip, ne of pouert, ne riches, ne of eese, ne of disese, ne of loue, ne of hate, ne of helle, ne of paradise” (256). Reason, unable to comprehend the paradox, exclaims “O loue, for God, ..., what is þis to seie þat 3e haue seid?” (256). Lady Love must explain her statement to Reason, insisting that the Soul needs no understanding since she has “a 3ifte 3ouen of þe ri3t hi3e, in whom þis creature is lost bi plente of knowynge, and bicom nou3t in hir vnderstondinge” (256). The Soul will have no comprehension of shame or poverty since she will be annihilated in God; by becoming one with God she receives his understanding. The text’s subject matter continues to get increasingly complex causing Reason to constantly interrupt Lady Love’s dialogue with the Soul. Before Lady Love begins to discuss the seven estates, Reason becomes upset by the Soul’s statement that she herself is “loue”, therefore God without end (319). Reason can no longer bear to listen and thus dies: “A God, ..., hou dar eny seie þis? I dar not heere it. I falle, lady soule. Soþeli, to heere 3ou, þe herte faileþ me. I haue no liif” (319). However, Reason unexpectedly reappears without any explanation and persists in interrupting Lady Love’s discussion. The *Mirror* concludes with the Soul annihilated and in union with God: “For he is, and sche is not. Sche hap noþing wiþholden in nou3tyng of hirsilf... So hap sche of God þis þat sche hap, and sche is þis þat God is bi vnianunce of loue” (353).

Porete’s *Mirror* encourages an affective loving relationship with God. It is also a “theologically speculative” text, which is indicative of the works of Continental mystics from

the thirteenth century (Watson, "Middle English Mystics" 546). The text communicates "mystic nihilism" in which the religious authority of the Church is undermined by the power inherent in the God/Soul union (Dronke 221). Porete's employment of the God as beloved/Soul as lover relationship also demonstrates a "mystical tradition" (Dronke 219). However, Porete's mystical union differs from the mysticism evident in the texts of other mystics such as the Middle English mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, whose visionary encounters included "paramystical experiences (such as trances, levitations, stigmata, etc.)" that were connected to Christ's and the mystic's bodies (Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* 172). Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love* and Margery Kempe's *Book* are indicative of Middle English mysticism, demonstrating that "English affectivity was meditative and rhetorical, not theologically complex, focused on devotion to the incarnate Jesus, not union with his godhead" (Watson, "Middle English mystics" 546). According to Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, "the Christ of [Julian of Norwich's] revelation is incarnated in the flesh" (20). Julian begins the short version of *A Revelation of Love* stating, "I desirede thre graces be the gifte of God. The first was to have minde of Cristes passion. The seconde was bodelye sykenes. And the third was to have of Goddes gifte thre woundes" (1). All three desires pertain to the body of Christ and Julian's own body. Margery Kempe's *Book* makes numerous references to the body as revealed in her discussions on sexuality, childbirth, and abstinence, as well as having Christ "[appear] to her in his humanity" (Staley, Introduction vii). Porete's mystical vision is unlike other female mystics since it is primarily theological and requires the reader to intellectually imagine a union with God. Amy Hollywood asserts that "bodily asceticism and paramystical phenomena do not begin to emerge in women's mystical writings until the fourteenth century, when, coincidentally, persecution of beguines and other religious women in

northern Europe was given new impetus by the degrees of the Council of Venice" (38).

Although Porete's vision of a mystical union is distinct from other female writers since it is not focused on the mystic's and Christ's bodies, the *Mirror* still incorporates the mystical tradition of affective and erotic language to present God's and the Soul's love for each other.

Porete's use of affective language to articulate her concept of a mystical union does not differ from the texts of her contemporary male mystics. Caroline Walker Bynum asserts that there were no intrinsic differences in the literature of male and female mystics. Bynum states that

[m]en and women thought in the same metaphors – for they read the same Scriptures and spiritual treatises and often heard the same sermons – and many spiritual themes that modern commentators have assumed to be gender-specific (e.g., the vision of nursing the Christ-child or of being pregnant with Jesus) are found in the visions and writings of both sexes in the Middle Ages. ("Religious Women" 131)

Porete's text does not contain such metaphors of the body; however, her intellectual mysticism is comparable to such male mystics as Ruysbroek. The similarity in Porete's and Ruysbroek's mystical writings might simply be a consequence of both authors being Continental mystics who emphasized theology rather than the body. Porete's and Ruysbroek's Continental mysticism is unlike the works of male Middle English mystics such as Richard Rolle, who relied heavily on the body, which, as mentioned, is indicative of Middle English mysticism. According to Lynn Staley, Rolle used "himself as an example" highlighting "his own physical experience of feeling, hearing, and smelling the sweetness of God" (Introduction x). Despite its lack of direct references to the body, the *Mirror* is a mystical treatise since it affectively

discusses the desire to be in union with God and it focuses on spiritual love, which “is the central mystical category” (Hollywood 39).

The text’s application of the courtly love convention is evident in the opening sentences of the *Mirror* with references to perfect love, to nobility, and to the unattainable beloved. Lady Love requests that those individuals who desire the divine life, and who reside “in þe firste estate of grace herkenþ now some my3tes of þe clene loue, of þe noble loue, and of þe hi3e loue of þe fre soules, & hou þe Hooli Goost hap his saile in his schippe” (250). M.N. translates Porete’s attention to class distinctions by stating the “clene” love, which is intrinsically perfect love and class oriented. Perfect love is a noble love available only to those that lead a spiritually divine life: a life led by the spiritually royal. Porete’s reference to perfect love evokes spiritual elitism. Those who receive perfect love belong to a higher spiritual category than those who do not experience perfect love. God becomes attainable to the spiritual lover who becomes one with him in a mystical union. God is unattainable and remains at a distance to spiritual lovers who do not receive perfect love. Porete’s attention to the spiritual hierarchy is translated in the adjective “hi3e” which generates a spiritual elitism binary since listeners would instantly discern “hi3e loue,” which is what the *Mirror* advocates they aspire to, from low love, that which they must presently occupy if there is a need for them to listen to the *Mirror*. Porete employs sailing imagery since it suggests distance between the lover and the beloved. Porete equates the divine beloved to a sailor tacking his ship towards those who have the potential to receive his perfect love and thus become noble members of the spiritual elite. This sailing image creates an absent/present binary since the “Hooli Goost” is

essentially absent and unattainable from the Soul as he sails the seas, but will become present and available to the Soul once she receives pure love.

Porete foregrounds the courtly love features of nobility and the unattainable beloved by introducing a courtly exemplum of a princess who falls in love with "kyng Alisaundre" upon hearing of his "grete curtesie and of þe grete largesse" (251). The use of "straunge" in the phrase, "a kynges dou3ter of greet worþiness and of noble nature, þat dwellide in a straunge lond" (250), highlights the distance that separates the princess and "kyng Alisaundre" since she lives in a "unfamiliar, unknown" area ("Straunge"). The princess cannot receive the "kyng's" attention or affection since there is a physical distance separating them. Even though the princess has never seen the "kyng" she is overcome with love and desire for him because of his reputation. This exemplum is essentially the romance of King Alexander and Candace. According to Brunn and Epiney-Burgard the King Alexander/Candace courtly romance exemplum "had already been sung by the troubadours ever since the beginning of the twelfth century" (153). Porete uses this exemplum to equate the courtly "Alisaundre" to the divine and to draw attention to the *Mirror's* themes of spiritual nobility and God's separation from his spiritual lovers. The Soul states that "I heere speke of a kyng of greet my3t þat for curtesie and greet largesse is a noble Alisaundre" (251). The divine is represented as a king and like "Alisaundre" he too is benevolent and generous.

The princess requests that a painting be made of Alisaundre since she has never seen him. This petition underscores Alisaundre's absence from the princess and the distance that separates them. Once the princess has this painting in her possession she will be able to gaze upon him which in turn will mitigate his absence, her isolation, and the distance that separates

them. Likewise, the Soul states that her king is “so fer is he fro me and I fro him, ..., þat I kan not take comfort of mysilf. And to clepe me he 3aue me þis boke, þe whiche presentep summe vsages of þe loue of himsilf” (251). Just as the princess is distanced from her beloved and has the painting to comfort her, the Soul has this book to console her. The divine’s gift of the book to the Soul demonstrates his generosity. Porete includes the courtly love practice of gift giving to stress “the lack of necessity for an intermediary” between God and the Soul and “to emphasize God’s *largesse*” (Robinson 87). Although both desired beloveds are physically absent, they will be paradoxically present in the minds and spirits of their lovers through concrete means such as the painting and the book. Porete’s Soul, like the princess, lives “in a straunge lond fer fro þe pees, where þat þese noble louyers of þis lord dwelle þat ben al endid and pure, and bi þe 3iftes of þis lord maad fre, wiþ whom þei dwelle” (251). This statement in combination with the courtly exemplum discloses an important theme in the *Mirror*: there is a land far from where the Soul now lives that is occupied by lovers who have been made noble and free by receiving the gift of God’s love.

Porete’s use of the far-off love convention stems from the work of the twelfth-century Troubadour poet Jaufré Rudel, “of whom it was said that he fell in love with the countess of Tripoli without ever having seen her” (Colledge, Marler and Grant 11 n. 9). According to Peter Dronke, “[t]he image of the far-off beloved is familiar from romances and lyrics of human love, as is the exaltation of the state of longing” (219). Porete’s comparison of the Soul’s desire and love for God to the far-off love courtly romance of Alexander and Candace contextualizes the book as a spiritual romance. The Soul wishes to be with God and become

one of the noble lovers in his divine kingdom. The courtly exemplum helps to situate the Soul's desire to be united with her beloved. Her divine beloved does appreciate that the Soul wants to be with him, but since she is only in the first estate, as indicated in the opening line of the *Mirror*, she is not ready to become one of his noble lovers and must remain separated from him. She must successfully pass through the six estates before she can be one with God. In the meantime, her beloved gives her a gift, the book, which will instruct the Soul on how to attain God and achieve union with him. God's gift of the book to the Soul displays his generosity, as well as the Soul's unmediated access to him. The courtly characteristics of the far-off love and of gift giving assist Porete in demonstrating the spiritual lover's desire for the spiritual beloved, the spiritual lover's quest for a mystical union, and the divine's spiritual nobility.

3.3 Courtly Love and Homoeroticism in the *Mirror*

Porete's male divine beloved and female Soul lover relationship challenges the courtly love gender configuration of the noble lady beloved and the male lover. However, Porete's male divine/female Soul union still conforms to courtly love's heterosexual structure. Lady Love asserts that the male God is the ultimate desired lover whom the female Soul needs to be in divine union with: "Pis soule is prentid in God; sche haþ his uerrey prente ytake bi þe vnyon of loue" (293). Although Porete's male God is the desired spiritual beloved, he remains relatively silent throughout the text. God is periodically represented in the *Mirror* by the only male character Far Near, whose name also suggests the courtly beloved's absence and presence.

Prior to discussing the seven spiritual estates, Lady Love complicates God's identity and male gender. Lady Love states that, "I am God, ... for loue is God and God is loue, and his soule is God bi condicion of loue, and I am God bi nature diuine" (274). Porete puts forward a predominantly female spirituality since the female Lady Love is also the male God, and the female Soul's spiritual teacher. Porete creates a spiritual love triangle between Lady Love, the Soul, and God. The Soul desires to be in union with God, who is also Lady Love. The triangle is primarily female, demonstrating a "feminized divine love" (Hollywood 55). The female spiritual voice is exceptionally prevalent since Lady Love and the Soul are the triangle's main speakers and the male God is virtually silent.

Lady Love discusses with the Soul how her union with the male God will change the Soul's disposition. Lady Love states that once the Soul's union with God is complete, the Soul will be "drunken of þe knowinge of þe diuine bounte bi þe pure grace of þe deite, of þe whiche sche is alwei drunken, and of þe biholdinge þerof fulfillid wip laude and heriyng of diuine loue" (275). Lady Love's intoxication analogy asserts that the Soul will become inebriated by and permeated with God's love. Despite Lady Love's discussion focusing on the male God, the Soul announces her love for Lady Love: "þat I am meued in þe þing þat I loue more þan me. So haue I lost my name for louyng, þat so litil may loue. Þus am I meued in þe þing þat I loue more þan me, þis is, in loue, for I ne loue but loue" (278). The Soul's declaration of love for Lady Love can also be an expression of love for the male God since Lady Love is also God. Yet, the Soul states that her love is for "loue" and not for God, even though Lady Love has been using the term "God" as well as the male pronoun "him" (276) in all her discussions on

God. The Soul states that she has “lost [her] name for louyinge” and that she “ne loue but loue,” demonstrating the courtly feature of the lover’s dependency upon the beloved. Porete undermines courtly love’s female/male structure by including a homoerotic potential between the female Soul and Lady Love. Lady Love’s status as female and as male in her relationship with the Soul implies homoeroticism as well as heterosexual eroticism¹³ since she asserts “I am God” (274). Although Lady Love states that she is God, she remains a distinct and separate entity apart from God in the estates of spirituality. Lady Love also occupies a lesser spiritual nobility than God since union with the male God is the summit of Porete’s six spiritual estates.

Lady Love’s importance to the Soul in her pursuit of a divine union is guaranteed since she is the Soul’s educator and in control of the narrative. The Soul confirms Lady Love’s position of authority when she mentions, “þis booke, of whiche loue is mastresse” (264). The Soul cannot escape Lady Love’s presence since she controls what is written, thus writing herself into a position of power. M.N. explains Porete’s intention for Lady Love: “Whanne loue werkþ in þe soule & heeldiþ in hir þe sparklis of his bri3te beemes, sche vndirstandiþ wel þanne bi cleerte of þat li3t and bi swetnesse of þe licour þat sche haþ dronken, þat þe werk of loue is more worþ and drawiþ more to þe vnyon in God þan doiþ hir owen werk” (258). The Soul is dependent upon Lady Love to prepare her for a union with God. Lady Love directs the Soul’s union with God: “loue makþ in hir of ri3twisnesse þis vnianse þat haþ made hir

¹³ Eroticism is defined as “an aesthetic focused on sexual desire, especially the feelings of anticipation of sexual activity” (“Eroticism”). Since desire is inherent in both heterosexuality and homosexuality I will articulate eroticism as either heterosexual eroticism or homoeroticism in this section depending upon the context in which I am discussing it.

drunke of þe moost of his hi3est drinke and neuer shal be opir" (276). The Soul must listen to Lady Love's directives if she wants to be with her ultimate beloved God.

The Soul's love for Lady Love communicates homoeroticism in the text by undermining the characters and language of courtly love. Porete's female Lady Love/female Soul love replaces the noble lady/male lover relationship. This thesis's examination of Porete's homoerotic appropriation of the courtly love topos results in what Karma Lochrie terms (appropriating Judith Butler's neologism), a "queering": "a project of contestation ... [that allows us to] seek out those dissonances, gaps, and excesses of meaning that signal heteronormative protocols of representation and that enable a disruption of those same protocols" (180). By queering the Soul's emotions for Lady Love, Porete, through her own version of courtly love, challenges the heteronormative male/female mystical union by incorporating a female/female love relationship that includes a female character who announces that she is the male God. Porete weakens the heteronormative courtly love language by "subvert[ing] this language through the relative silence of that male God and the prevalence of female-gendered voices throughout the dialogue" (Hollywood 100). Even though Lady Love declares that she is the male God, Lady Love remains female thus challenging the implied heterosexuality of the courtly love topos.

Lady Love's contestation of the courtly noble lady's emotional detachment also challenges the courtly love topos. Rather than being the haughty demanding noblewoman, Lady Love has passionate feelings for the Soul. Lady Love announces her love for the Soul when she beckons her with such heartfelt terms of endearment as "swete soule" (280). The love and desire between Lady Love and the Soul is homoerotic and mutual since both

characters affirm their affection for each other. The homoerotic relationship occupies a female-only space in the text and displays an ideal account of love since Lady Love is loving, affectionate, and attainable, unlike the courtly noble lady.

Porete destabilizes theological doctrine by creating a tripartite spiritual relationship that includes a loving female union. The Soul asserts that her love for Lady Love is a divine union: “A ri3t swete pure diuine loue, seiþ þis soule, what þis is a swete vnianse” (278). This female/female “swete vnianse” challenges the ecclesiastically authorized divine male/female union since the Soul refers to it as “diuine.” Joseph Runzo claims that, “[t]he erotic aesthetic of most religious language is heterosexual, primarily modeled after heterosexual marriage” (28). Porete’s homoerotic female/female union and her heteronormative male/female union are problematic since Lady Love declares herself to be the male God while still remaining female. Since Porete’s Lady Love is also the male God, her female/female and male/female unions could be understood as being both homoerotic and heteronormative at the same time. However, Porete’s Lady Love union with the female Soul is separate from the male divine/female Soul union, which will be discussed further in the following section. Although Lady Love’s announcement that she is God complicates both the female/female union and the theologically heterosexual male divine/female spiritual lover union, the audience cannot discount the importance of the female union that allows for the heterosexual union to occur.

3.4 The *Mirror’s* Estates

To become one of God’s lovers the Soul must ascend through each of the six estates that lead to everlasting glory in the seventh estate. The first estate for the Soul on her

ascension to mystical union with God involves the Soul following the commandments prescribed by the Church. Respectively, the second and third stages are to abide by God's wishes and "biholde þe affeccion of loue of werkis of perfeccion" (339). These first three estates are consistent with Church doctrine in which the Soul follows the Ten Commandments and occupies herself with the necessary behaviour of being a good Christian. These three stages delineate the presence of the Soul's own will at work in essentially completing good deeds for others. The fourth estate embodies yet again a female/female space and announces, once more, the importance of the female/female union in securing the male/female mystical union for the Soul: "þat a soule is drawe bi hi3enesse of loue into delite of þou3t bi meditations, and relinqueþ fro alle laboures outward & of obedience to opire bi hi3enesse of loue in contemplacion" (339). Lady Love carries the Soul from the lesser estates into the next realm of satisfying the requirements for annihilation. The Soul must now give up completing good deeds and following the commandments in order to follow Lady Love's directives. This withdrawal from Church teachings correlates to the Soul's departure from the Virtues, which was the first proposition mentioned in William of Nangis' *Chronica*, as was discussed in Chapter 2. In estates one through three, the Soul is in continuous service to the Virtues, but now that she is with Lady Love, she is no longer servant to the Virtues. The Soul moves from the third estate into the fourth estate, resulting in the Soul becoming mistress to the Virtues.

As a courtly beloved, Lady Love is capable of transforming her female lover the Soul. Lady Love's affection for the Soul in the fourth estate changes the female lover into a noble and sexually desirable being: "Þanne þe soule is daungerouse, noble, & deliciouse, in whiche

sche may not suffre þat enyþing hir touche but þe touchinges of pure delite of loue in þe whiche sche is singulerli gladsome & ioli, þat makip hir proude of abundaunce of loue" (339). Unlike the courtly beloved noble lady, Lady Love again reveals her feelings for the Soul, prompting the Soul to "schewinge þe priuetees of hir herte þat makip hir to tendren and to melte in swetnesse of loue, bi concorde of vnyon þat sche hap of this delices leid in possession" (339). The Soul's love for Lady Love "holdep þe soule þat þer is noon hei3er liif þat to haue þis" (340). According to Amy Hollywood, "[t]he soul is so inebriated and blinded by love that she falsely believes no higher fate is possible" (98). The Soul imagines their love to be absolute to the extent that she cannot entertain, at the moment of the fourth estate, the idea that there is a love beyond what she shares with Lady Love. Although the Soul feels that her relationship with Lady Love is hierarchically superior to other loves, Lady Love encourages the Soul to understand that their love will allow her to experience the ultimate love with God, which "makip hir al drunken þat suffrip hir not to attenden but to him" (340). Lady Love advances the Soul towards God so that the Soul attends only to God. Loving Lady Love is necessary for the Soul to proceed to the next estate.

Lady Love's and the Soul's desire for each other is erotically-charged and produces the text's latent homoerotic narrative. M.N. translates Porete's description of the Soul's love for Lady Love as "deliciouse," directing our attention to the sexual nature of the Soul/Lady Love relationship. The term "deliciouse" (339), as well as "swetnesse" (340) invoke the sensation of taste. Porete bases the Lady Love and Soul relationship on physical sensation, suggesting that they experience each other corporeally. The Soul's "melte in swetnesse of loue" (340)

produces the image of the Soul entering Lady Love. According to Bernadette Brooten, authors presenting female homoeroticism were confronted “with a dilemma. If they tried to fit it into a male model of penetrator and penetrated, they encountered the problem that women do not have phalluses” (6). Although Lady Love and the Soul lack phalluses, Lady Love and the Soul penetrate each other through physical sensations. Porete’s homoerotic narrative evokes the image of Lady Love and the Soul tasting each other and the Soul feeling Lady Love as she melts in her. Translating Porete, M.N. employs the physically erogenous words “delite,” “swetnesse,” and “melte,” to convey Porete’s sexually charged female/female union. The physical sensations of taste and of touch ultimately produce an erotic female/female union.

The Lady Love and Soul relationship privileges and empowers the female voice, and announces a female space in the religious hierarchy. Lady Love’s character as the Soul’s spiritual educator and as the facilitator who directs the Soul to a mystical union with God encourages a female presence in the male dominated ecclesiastical structure. The female/female union’s purpose is to move the Soul towards annihilation with the male divine, promoting the ecclesiastically privileged heteronormative mystical union. Porete may have included this female union to sanction female spirituality and potentially her own predominantly female living conditions and experiences as a Beguine. Porete’s Lady Love/Soul union and her possible identity as a Beguine showcases the “intensity between and among women, an intensity that involves both ‘sharing a rich inner life’ and ‘bonding against male tyranny’” (Bennett 15). The Lady Love/Soul union, Porete’s Beguine identity, and her heresy trial illustrate the commingling of female experience in the face of male domination. Porete’s Beguine identity would correlate to Judith Bennett’s “lesbian-like” term (2): “women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who

resisted norms of feminine behaviour based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women" (9). The similarities between the Lady Love/Soul union and Porete's possible "lesbian-like" existence as a Beguine are interesting. Both consist of women living together in a female only community. As well, Porete's Beguine community would have provided her opportunities to cultivate and experience the emotions of the same-sex relationship that Lady Love and the Soul share. Porete's Lady Love/Soul relationship imitates her own possible life as a Beguine, and offers Porete a discourse in which to privilege the female voice and the Beguine lifestyle within the ecclesiastical structure.

The ecclesiastically approved piety in estates one through three, and the celestial perfection in estates five and six contain the fourth estate's female-only space. Estates one through three, five and six do not evoke female spirituality or female authority. Maria Lichtmann asserts that "the notion of 'gender,' insofar as Marguerite [Porete] entertained such a notion, was not a matter of traits or of social roles, but of the prophetic possibility of dissent from and subversion of the predominant patriarchal order" (74). Porete's female/female union is a form of dissent since she classifies it as divine and places it above the ecclesiastical spirituality in estates one through three. The fourth estate's inclusion in the seven spiritual estates endorses female piety in the religious structure. However, Porete also reinforces the ecclesiastically authorized divine heterosexual union by completing the Soul's quest for a mystical union with a male God in estates five and six.

3.5 Heteronormativity in Estates Five and Six

Lady Love's involvement with the Soul comes to an end in the movement from the fourth estate to the fifth estate, which also marks the end of the female-only space. The fifth estate declares "þat a soule beholde what God is, þat is, þoru3 whom al þing comeþ, & sche is not. Þanne is sche noþing, for þing is. And þis biholdinge 3iueþ hir a merueilouse abaischinge to se he is al bounte þat haþ put fre wille in hir þat is not but in al wickidnesse" (340). The male divine removes and replaces the Soul's will with his own. The heteronormative male/female relationship between God and the Soul takes over the fourth estate's female/female relationship. Porete moves her audience from an estate that promotes female authority to an estate that promotes male authority. The male presence is prevalent in the fifth estate since the Soul's "will must die in order for the death of the spirit to occur and for the soul to move from the fourth to the fifth level of being" (Hollywood 99). Lady Love and the language and images of female homoeroticism must fade into the background for the Soul to proceed to annihilation. The Soul must relinquish her own will to become annihilated and one with the male divine. Heterosexual eroticism in the fifth and sixth estates replaces the fourth estate's homoeroticism since the male divine spiritually penetrates the female soul. Statements such as, "Now haþ þe diuine bounte put fre wille in hir bi pure diuine bounte" (340) implies that the male God empties his divine will and bounty into the female spiritual lover. The male God "spredip þe diuine bounte before þis wille a spredinge rauyschinge of meuyngge of diuine li3t þat is wiþinne þe soule spred bi li3t, þat schewip to þe wille of þe soule þe ri3twissesse of þis þat is" (340). The female soul receives the divine's "bounte," thus permeating her spiritual

being. The powerful divine commands that "Now seep þe soule þis enclinacion & þis perdicion of nou3t of her nature and of hir propre wille, and seeth þis bi illuminacion þat wille owide to willen þe diuine wille wiþouten sche willinge" (340). The male authority is within the Soul and dominates her will to the extent that she cannot comprehend that she is willing the divine will. The infusion of divine light confiscates her will and her reasoning. Annihilation occurs when the Soul becomes "not" or "nou3t"; the Soul only wills what God wills. The Soul's ascension to annihilation in the fifth estate is paradoxically a descent into an emptying of the Soul's will, which will then allow her to climb the spiritual ladder to the sixth estate and become God's noble lover. The renunciation of her being is paradoxically the moment when the Soul is liberated; to become truly free and one of God's lovers, she must become "not, for sche seep bi abundaunce of diuine knowinge hir nou3t, þat makip hir now to putte hirsilf at nou3t" (341). Being truly free correlates to the Soul renouncing her own will and adhering to the will of the male divine.

The sixth estate presents the Soul receiving perfect love and her new position as a perfect lover of God. Once the Soul's will is abolished in the fifth estate, she becomes "a soule in þe sixte estate of alle þinges made fre, pure, and clarefied" (342). The sixth estate constitutes the celestial hierarchy's summit with the soul achieving perfect love and union with God. God's control is ever-present since the Soul "ne seep God ne hirsilf, but God seep þis of him, in hir, for hir, wiþouten hir, þat schewip hir þat þer is noon but he" (342). God overtakes the Soul and she becomes a spiritual lover united with God. Paradoxically, the moment she is nothing is when she becomes everything. The Soul has no internal vision or concept of her

'self' since her vision is now of God: "Þere nys but he þat is, and sche seep þis beyng of his diuine maieste bi uniaunce of loue of bounte spred and leid in him" (342). The Soul, propelled by her union with Lady Love in the fourth estate, reaches the ultimate higher reality of spiritual nobility in the sixth estate.

The male divine/female Soul relationship displays courtly characteristics. The love between the divine and the Soul is spiritually ennobling, like the courtly male lover's affections for the noble lady. The male divine's will in the Soul "makip in hir verrei perfeccion, and so it hap hir meued in nature of loue þat deliteþ hir of fulfilled pees, and fedip and fillip hir of diuine foode" (341). The Soul receives from the male God his divine grace and perfection. The Soul accepts this perfect love from God in order to become one with him in the sixth estate. Porete employs courtly love language to describe this divine love as a state of spiritual perfection, similar to the perfect love that the courtly male lover has for the noble lady. M.N.'s translation of Porete's courtly love language includes "maieste" and "noblesse" (342), communicating Porete's emphasis on mystical union's spiritual aristocracy. Like the fine and perfect love between the noble lady and her lover, the love between God and the Soul is equally majestic, royal, and elite.

Porete advances male authority and superiority in the fifth and sixth estates. However, her female/female union supports female spirituality in the religious hierarchy. It is interesting to note that the Middle English translator M.N. does not gloss any of the estates, including the potentially heretical fourth estate in which the Soul becomes mistress to the Virtues. His fifteenth, and last, explanatory gloss comes well before Porete begins explicating the spiritual states of being. This thesis proposes that M.N. did not gloss the fourth estate because he had

already explained the orthodoxy of this movement in his “take leeu” of virtues explanation (254). To add another gloss would have been redundant. Also, M.N. had already explained Lady Love’s purpose for the Soul, as previously mentioned. Perhaps M.N. felt that his fifteen explanatory glosses prior to Porete’s states of spirituality passage was sufficient spiritual guidance for his readers.

Porete’s mysticism incorporates the courtly love convention, producing a heterosexual mystical union that includes a male spiritual beloved and a female Soul lover. This divine heterosexual relationship should have appealed Porete’s ecclesiastical authority. Using the courtly love narrative, Porete presents God as the spiritually noble beloved and his religious devotees as humble and subservient lovers. Porete’s mysticism, in conjunction with the courtly love convention, communicates mystical union’s spiritual elitism. Lovers who receive a mystical union with God become spiritually privileged and receive earthly deification. Prior to the heterosexual mystical union in the sixth estate, Porete’s *Mirror* includes a female divine union between Lady Love and the Soul. This female relationship challenges courtly love’s gender structure, but demonstrates mystical literature’s gender fluidity. Porete describes the female union using sexually erotic images, thus creating the text’s underlying homoerotic narrative. Porete’s mysticism complicates orthodoxy since it includes a female spiritual union that advocates female authority in the male-dominated religious hierarchy. The *Mirror* advocates a change to Porete’s contemporary male-centred religious structure by including female spirituality in the spiritual estates of being. Even though the *Mirror*’s mysticism preserves male spiritual dominance, it also provides a literary narrative to display female spiritual power.

CHAPTER 4 – RUYSBROEK'S MYSTICISM

The Treatise of Perfection, a considerably shorter text than Porete's *Mirror*, emphasizes the authority of the Church and the contemplative life. Ruysbroek posits that to be a contemplative an individual must follow Church doctrine and must lead a spiritually devout life. Ruysbroek's contemplative life guide proposes a series of spiritual states that takes the religious devotee from living an active life to living a contemplative life, which can lead to a mystical union with the divine. The active life for Ruysbroek entails completing Christian works of piety, whereas the contemplative life focuses on the individual's spiritual connection to God. Similar to Porete's mysticism, Ruysbroek's text discusses annihilation and the notion of becoming nothing in God. The individual loses his will and becomes nothing so as to receive God's will and spiritual divinity while still alive. Ruysbroek's mystical union appropriates and undermines courtly love characteristics to represent the male beloved in the mystical union as a spiritually noble king. Ruysbroek's spiritual lover is male and, like the courtly lover, is humble and obedient to his beloved's demands. His narrative emphasizes the clergy and Church doctrine, articulating the male ecclesiastical structure that does not include the medieval woman. Ruysbroek's use of "man" and his emphasis on ecclesiastical authority highlight woman's exclusion from the religious structure.¹⁴ Ruysbroek may have used "man" as a rubric to represent "[a] person, man or woman" ("Man"); however, his male beloved/male lover mystical union underscores the importance of being male in medieval

¹⁴ *The Treatise of Perfection* translator, interpreting Jordaen's Latin translation of Ruysbroek's Middle Dutch, employs "man" throughout the Middle English text. C.A. Wynschenk's modern English translation of the Middle Dutch *Sparkling Stone* also uses "man." Ruysbroek conveys the concept of "man" in his Middle Dutch text since both translators use "man" in their own translations of Ruysbroek's work.

spirituality. Ruysbroek's exclusively male divine union confirms woman's absence in the spiritual hierarchy.

Ruysbroek's male/male union also evokes the text's latent homoerotic discourse. According to Jeffrey Kripal,¹⁵ "where God is imagined as a male with whom the male mystic erotically unites, the symbolism will, by definition, be homoerotic for males" (19). The homoerotic language and images in *The Treatise of Perfection* conform to orthodox mysticism, which is heterosexually structured, because the "man's soul is imagined to be female in relationship to the divine" (Kripal 70). Caroline Walker Bynum explains that "monks and friars as well as nuns and beguines ... [referred to] themselves as 'weak women,' where the context makes it clear that weakness is a positive description of humility" (*Jesus as Mother* 138). This chapter examines Ruysbroek's representation of the obedient and humble male spiritual lover, and the text's mystical union adaptation of courtly love. The chapter will also consider the text's homoerotic potential within a narrative that advocates Church authority.

The Treatise of Perfection addresses the orthodox spiritual needs of a theologically educated audience. Marlene Cr   describes *The Treatise of Perfection* as "a didactic text, but not one that would teach the contemplative life to beginners" because of its sophisticated content ("Vernacular Mysticism" 131). *The Treatise of Perfection* translator communicates Ruysbroek's discussion on how an individual can first become a spiritual man:

¹⁵ My discussion of Ruysbroek's homoerotic language stems from Kripal's research on male mysticism and homoeroticism in his text *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*.

Whosoeuer will lyffe in the most perfytt state of the modere, holy chyrche, fyrst it es necessary that he be a goode man, and besely actualle. The secounde is that he be alonlye a spirituelle louere, the thryde that he be contemplatyfe and lyfte vp vnto god by loue and affeccioun of the immortalle man, whiche is the best, the fowrthe that he be abowndynge in charite, commoun and generalle. (229)

The ideal spiritual man must be a contemplative, charitable to all, and “growynge and perseuerynge in alle vertew and grace, and in knowliche of verteues, both in the sight of god and alle resonable men” (229). Ruysbroek asserts that the individual must follow Church guidelines and conduct himself in a manner that displays his grace and virtue. Man’s obedience, reason and intelligence are also emphasized: “a man to be goode is that he be obedyent to god, vnto holy chyrche, and to his conscience, or his resoun, or elles to the conscyence or the resoun of anothere man gostelye lyghttened of god” (230).

Ruysbroek underlines the Church’s authority and hierarchy. He stresses that a good Christian man must have reason in order to be faithful to the Church. According to Ruysbroek, good Christians are obedient to the Church and obedient to their own reason, as long as their reason agrees with the Church. If men lack reason, they must turn to other men who are more spiritually enlightened than they.

Ruysbroek’s discussion on man’s reason highlights the text’s male discourse. According to Richard Woods, “[e]arly in the Middle Ages, it was commonly accepted among both religious and secular writers that women as a whole were ... deficient in reason” (148). Ruysbroek’s emphasis on man’s reason underscores his narrative as male-centred, focusing on man’s dominating presence in the religious hierarchy. Man’s

omnipresence results in woman's absence, or diminished identity, in the ecclesiastical structure. Ruysbroek advocates for the male religious hierarchy of which he is a member. He states that there are men with spiritual knowledge who advise other men in becoming better Christians. Ruysbroek emphasizes that man's reason and man's spirituality are bound together. If a man lacks reason, he therefore lacks the spirituality required to be a good Christian. However, these men can turn to other men whose reason agrees with the Church. These men are spiritually aware, and therefore occupy a higher level in the male-dominated religious hierarchy.

Ruysbroek increases the theological and intellectual sophistication of his discussion on spiritual expression. He provides four different states of existence of which three are spiritual states. The lowest state of being is the mercenaries "[f]or thay intende in alle there wykynges pere awne lucre, and thay be inordinatlye kyntte vnto thameselfe, and perfore thay abyde eueremore onely with þamselfe" (238). The mercenaries are not spiritual individuals since they are dedicated only to themselves and not to completing the works of God. Rik van Nieuwenhove asserts that the true mercenaries are hired servants who "love themselves so inordinately that they do not wish to serve God except for their own profit; they cut themselves off from God and keep themselves unfree and self-centered ... they seek themselves and are only intent on themselves in all their works" (67). To leave the mercenary state, individuals must become "trewe seruandys" who "leve synne and to desyre vertue and to doo goode werkis, whiche inwardly dysposes a man to ressayue grace" (239). The true servant is the first state of spirituality and focuses on the individual "beynge and intendynge to loue god in alle his dedes"

(239). The next level of spirituality is the “dere frendys of god,” (239) or the “secrete frendys of god” (241), in which God “teches thame discrecioun in inwarde wyrkyng” (239). According to Cré, the difference between the true servants and the dear friends of god is that

[t]rue servants of God commit to him in outward works, which to them are more important than inward exercise. They keep God’s commandments, but not his counsels. The dear friends of God do keep God’s counsels, thus adding the inward spiritual exercises to the outward works. (“Vernacular Mysticism” 134)

The true servants of God complete God’s works, but they are not spiritually enlightened (Nieuwenhove 67). The true servant represents active spirituality since he completes God’s work in society and “is fulle litle inwardelye lyghtned” (240). The active “put[s] alle in vtwarde werkys, and so he is not apte to fulfyll the cownseyles of oure lorde, for cause his wyrkyng is rathere owtwarde than inwarde, bodely more than gostelye” (240). The true servant concentrates on outward displays of religiosity since he keeps God’s commandments and completes acts of charity. Conversely, the secret friends embody the contemplative life since their spiritual works are from within: “the secrete frendys of god possesse þer inwarde exercyse, þat is to saye þer inwarde wyrkyng, with a trewe wille” (241). The secret friends occupy the contemplative state of spirituality, but they are not yet annihilated or in union with God. An individual who reaches the ultimate spiritual state of annihilation and mystical union is the hidden son of God who “feles a sympylle dyinge desyre withoute manere” (242). The mystical union with God requires the hidden

son to be annihilated, therefore to die in God so as to “fynde in vs a newe lyfe, the whiche lyfe is euerlastyngnesse. Off thees sonnys spekys the apostle, where he says: 3e are dede, and youre lyfe is hid with cryst in god” (245). The hidden son is “dede in oure lorde” (245) and his “lyfe drawynge to nou3t” (246). Although the mystical union “hase drawyn ourselfe [the contemplative] into a derknesse and into an vnsershable wantynge manere, thayre euermore schynes that simple beyng of the clerenesse of god, in the whiche we be growndyd” (246). The annihilated individual’s ascent into mystical union causes him to see nothing but God’s clarity since “betwix god and vs we may fynde no dyfference” (249). The hidden sons experience “superessencialle loue” with God (247). Evelyn Underhill in *John of Ruysbroeck* explains “superessencialle loue” to be “beyond all the concepts of reason, beyond anything that we can name or describe.” The contemplative receives “superessencialle loue” when he is ‘living in God’ in a “deified” state (Underhill, *John of Ruysbroeck*). The “superessencialle loue” provides the hidden son with spiritual divinity while still living.

The individual’s earthly deification is momentary since the “superessencialle loue” continually flows in and out of the hidden son and God. *The Treatise of Perfection* translator interprets Ruysbroek’s “superessencialle love” as the moment “in the whiche we fele vs wille god to be alle oures, sprynges in vs a glad abydyng desyre frome god, welle smellynge, depe and wyde” (250). This mutual desire creates the union between the hidden son and God: “the inwarde touchynge of god, we schalle knowe, causes vs to be made one with god, to dye into euerlastynge happenesse and into þat loue whiche is

moste one and symplest, þorow the whiche the fathere and the sonne are bothe consayved" (255). According to Cré,

[t]he soul's desire for God makes it work its way to [God] in inner activity.

This inner activity is a response to God's outflowing touch of the mystic's soul. God's outflowing touch, and the mystic's reaction to it is what

Ruusbroec calls union. ("Vernacular Mysticism" 136)

The spiritual lover's desire flows into God, and God's love flows into the individual thus creating a union between the two. The inflowing and outflowing of love between the pair permits the individual to achieve a privileged spiritual state of unity with God while in union. Cré explains that

[u]nity comes about because the soul is touched by God's indrawing touch, as opposed to the outflowing touch the soul feels in its experience of union with the divine. When the soul feels unity with the divine, it is in a state of blessedness and idleness and does not experience any difference with God. Thus the experience of being one is a constant alternation of union and unity, the soul's drawing to God in union, and God's drawing in of the soul in a brief and fleeting moment of stable rest that cannot last, and needs to revert to union again. ("Vernacular Mysticism" 136)

The hidden son's union and unity with God is in continuous fluctuation since the union can change into unity and then revert back to union with God. Union and unity are temporal states that correspond to the hidden son's earthly deification being momentary and not lasting. The hidden son's earthly divinity is not everlasting since upon union "the

contemplative is sent down from the heights of contemplation, where he has experienced being one with God, to work in the world” (Cré, “Vernacular Mysticism” 140).

According to Underhill, “[m]an is not here invited to leave the active life for the contemplative life, but to make the active life perfect with the contemplative”

(*Ruysbroeck* 69). The hidden son still lives in the active world and completes outward works of charity and grace, abiding by Church doctrine.

Ruysbroek’s mysticism articulates pseudo-Dionysian influences and the mysticism of Saint Bernard, as previously discussed in Chapter 2. Ruysbroek’s discussion on the individual’s undifferentiated state from God upon union originates from pseudo-Dionysian writings. Pseudo-Dionysian texts articulate “that God and soul cannot be distinguished” from each other in the mystical union (Nieuwenhove 75). Ruysbroek’s mystical union also resembles Bernard’s appropriation of the “Song of Songs.”

Bernard’s work influences Ruysbroek’s writing since, according to Nicholas Watson, Bernard “helped to create a remarkable climate of spiritual ambition throughout western Europe, ... teaching that a state of union with God was attainable, however briefly, in this life” (“Middle English Mystics” 545). Ruysbroek refers to the “Song of Songs” and Bernard in *The Treatise of Perfection*’s discussion on the mystical union experience:

“Syche ane experyence, thus sayinge the loue vnto the lovere, in the songe of songys:

Shewe vnto me whome my soule loffes. Where fedys þou, where lyes þou in the myddys of the day? In the ly3t of ioye, says saynte bernarde” (253). Ruysbroek, like Bernard,

represents the soul and the divine as desiring lovers in union. Ruysbroek also refers to Dionysius: “the derknessys of god be comforth with all ly3tes, and thay be hyd frome alle

knowlleges, aftyr the sayinge of saynt dyonyse, so is hid vnto vs þe selfe dyuynyte, where that alle happenesse we possesse with god" (248). Ruysbroek asserts that the notion of the individual achieving divinity with God originates from Dionysius. Ruysbroek confirms for the audience that his mystical union is orthodox by referring to the traditional Dionysius, the "Song of Songs," and Saint Bernard as theological and textual sources.

Ruysbroek's mysticism demonstrates courtly love influences by representing the male beloved as spiritually noble and the desiring male spiritual lover as humble and subservient. Underhill explains that "an essential preparation of the contemplative state [for Ruysbroek], is a condition of meek and passive attentiveness to God" (*John of Ruysbroeck*). The male spiritual lover's desire for and humility towards the male divine beloved represents the male courtly lover's obedience to and desire for the noble lady. Ruysbroek's male lover has "nothyng eyles to haue desyre ne wille bot onely in god" (230). Respectively, the male divine represents the noble lady in courtly love. The male divine is spiritually noble since he is referred to as a "kynge" (248). His wealth is his love for the spiritual lover and this love is an "incomprehensible ryches so manyfolde" (251). Similar to the male lover's desire for the courtly noble lady, the male lover's desire for God is also ennobling, since "euere spyrrit is named in his reuertynge vnto god, and that specyally be the nobilite of his seruys" (235). The male lover must ascend the hierarchical steps of spirituality (the true servants, the dear friends, and the hidden sons) to receive spiritual nobility. According to Cré,

Ruysbroec presents the life of the hidden sons of God as the highest stage of the contemplative life, and the life that his readers should aspire to, but can only attain by God's gift. Ruysbroec repeats several times that all people are called to be one with God, but also teaches that there is a hierarchical structure to the spiritual life. ("Vernacular Mysticism" 135).

The male divine is the religious hierarchy's "kyng," which positions his love for the spiritual lover as perfect and noble, like the love between the courtly noble lady and her male lover: "with a softe beholdynge and a voluntarye inclynacioun vnto the moste hye lyfe, there we take the selfe perfytnesse of god in alle oure beyng, and also þere we fele oureselfe in god alletogydre vnbelappyd" (249). The male lover enters "the moste hye lyfe" and becomes spiritually noble like his beloved.

Similar to Porete, Ruysbroek employs the courtly love convention of gift giving between the male beloved and the male lover, emphasizing that their relationship does not include others. When the male lover enters the contemplative life, he receives from the male beloved "a lytil white stone, and in it a newe name the whiche no man knowes but who that takys it" (234). The male lover receives his new identity as a lover of God. The stone represents "oure lorde iesu cryste, whiche by his dyuynyte is the whynesse of euerlastande lyght" (234). Ruysbroek's stone exemplum is comparable to Julian of Norwich's vision of the hazelnut. For Julian, the hazelnut represents God's eternal love for all, the creation of the world, and a celebration of all that is created by God; everyone and everything exists due to God's love. Julian's hazelnut vision initiates her deliberation on the renunciation of the created world. Julian states, "Of this nedes ilke

man and woman to hafe knawinge that desires to lyeve contemplatifelye, that him like to nought alle thinge that es made forto hafe the love of God that es unmade" (5). Julian affirms that individuals desiring to live a contemplative life must renounce the created world to be in union with God. For Ruysbroek, his stone signifies the male lover's entry in the contemplative world since it is a "gift to him of the life in Christ" (Cré, "Vernacular Mysticism" 133). The stone "is given to the contemplative when he ascends above himself and all things that can be conceived by 'bodely exercyse'" (Cré, "Vernacular Mysticism" 133). The stone "teches the deuyne trowthe" (234) and those who receive it "ascendys aboue all hevenesse, there abidyng crowned on the fadere ryght hande" (235). Both Julian and Ruysbroek use the hazelnut and the stone respectively to demonstrate the contemplative life as a renunciation of the material world and the contemplative's spiritual enlightenment by God. However, Ruysbroek's contemplative state also includes the active spiritual state since the contemplative is occupied with "lowly service to the world and his fellow Christians" (Cré, "Vernacular Mysticism" 141). Although Ruysbroek's contemplative must still work in the material world, the gift of the stone corresponds to his courtly nobility since he is "crowned" by God and sits in an authoritative position on his right side.

Ruysbroek's spiritual male beloved/male lover relationship challenges the courtly love noble lady/male lover structure. Similar to the *Mirror's* female divine/female lover union, *The Treatise of Perfection's* male/male union has a homoerotic potential. Kripal insists that mystical texts are "cultural sites of sexual and gender liminality, as semiotic openings to a more polymorphous erotic existence that would be impossible within the more orthodox parameters of the social register in question" (17). Ruysbroek's

contemporary society was pervasively heterosexual; however, his *Treatise* contests patriarchal heterosexuality by incorporating same-sex desire in the spiritual love hierarchy. Kripal asserts that “the homoerotic certainly holds an important place, at least with respect to male erotic mystics in Western monotheistic traditions that posit an erotic encounter with a single male deity” (17). Mystical texts such as Ruysbroek’s and Porete’s provide a literary space to celebrate same-sex desire for the spiritual beloved. *The Treatise of Perfection*’s same-sex spiritual love embodies the most perfect love since the union includes the ultimate higher reality. The homoerotic mystical union is theologically orthodox since the male lover “imagines or understands himself to be female in some sense” (Kripal 20), assuming a submissive role in his union with the male divine. Despite the male lover being understood as “female,” thus positioning the spiritual male beloved/male lover union as heterosexual, the erotic language used to describe the desire and the love in the mystical union is homoerotic.

The constant male presence in the text diminishes the category of woman even though the male lover is interpreted as female, and the term “man” is used as a conceptual rubric to connote mankind. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* also used the term man in his narrative, but he employed “women” periodically throughout the text. The *Cloud* author includes the term and the idea of woman as a spiritual lover in such sentences as, “And in other men or wommen, whatso thei be, religious or seculers” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*) and “But it is not thus of the mynde of any man or womman levyng in this liif” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*). These sentences illustrate a conscious effort by the *Cloud* author to incorporate women in mankind’s formula. According to Joyce Bazire and Edmund Colledge, “Ruysbroek and the author of *The Cloud* draw on the same

sources of inspiration and expound the same contemplative way of life" (87). However, Ruysbroek does not communicate the term woman in his narrative, which may be a result of his living in a male-only environment. Ruysbroek probably had little contact with women, if at all, since he lived in a male hermitage. If women were not a presence in his life, chances are they would not be a presence in his text. Ruysbroek did not convey the term woman, like the *Cloud* author, or the term children in his discussion on the hidden sons of God. *The Treatise of Perfection's* translator uses the word "sonnys" (242) in his translation, as does C.A. Wynschenk in his English translation of Ruysbroek's text. The words "sonnys" clearly excludes the female gender and infers a binary between son and daughter, with son being the socially privileged term. Ruysbroek could have chosen the terminology of the 'hidden children of God' since the church is referred to as "modere" (229) and God as "the fathere allemyghty" (255). Despite Ruysbroek using the traditional medieval term man to represent man and woman, *The Treatise of Perfection's* constant focus on man and the male lover receiving God's love excludes women, and thus structures the mystical union as male-centred and homoerotic (Kripal 19).

The Treatise of Perfection translator communicates Ruysbroek's homoerotic narrative, which concentrates on the male lover's desire to be one with the male spiritual beloved. Ruysbroek conveys desire by employing the physical sensation of taste. The image of the male spiritual lover tasting and "swallowynge" (249) God's love suggests both a Eucharistic celebration and a homoerotic sexual encounter between two males. Underhill notes that Ruysbroek's "favourite image is that of feeding: the soul takes God, eats, devours, assimilates Him ... which probably reflects [Ruysbroek's] great personal

devotion to the Eucharist" (*John of Ruysbroeck*). Despite this imagery possibly originating from Ruysbroek's commitment to the Eucharist, the image intimates a homoerotic moment between the male divine and the male lover. The male spiritual lover "wille taste god overe alle thyng" (246). After annihilation in which God's will consumes the male lover's will, the male lover "may nou3t hafe save onely in the swalowyng of loue" (249). The male lover's desire for the male beloved is insatiable since "the more we tayste, the more we desyre to taste, and the more that we be made depe and pyrlde be loue, the more clerely we knowe the inconprehensible swetnesse of god to be infynyte. Vnto the whiche the prophet says: Taste 3e and see 3e pat swete is oure lorde" (251). The male lover falls "into inserchable depnesse" (233) and is "drown(d)e" (233) in God's love. In Ruysbroek's concept of annihilation, which is similar to Porete's, the lover's will is removed and his will dies. In annihilation, the male lover approaches God "bare and cleyne" and receives "euerlastyng lyght" (232). The male lover is "occupied in the nakede loue of god" (242). Erotic images of the male spiritual lover and God being "bare" and "nakede" give God a corporeality, encouraging us to view God and the male spiritual lover as two human men rather than a celestial being and a human being.

Their desire for each other is metaphorically represented as a burning flame: "Therefore 3yf we wille fele god in vs, and the fyre of his loue burne in vs euerlastyngly, it es necessary that we norysche hym with a fourefawlde fre wille" (248). The "hete of [God's] loue" (235) creates a passionate and erotic image of a love affair between the male divine and male beloved. Once in union with God, the male lover "feles hymselfe

as the perpetualle brande of love, be the whiche above alle thyngys he delytes to be oone with god" (232). Ruysbroek's burning love image is analogous to Rolle's "fire of love" image (Watson, "Middle English Mystics" 550). In Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* (*The Fire of Love*), "þe byrnyng in [his] saule" (2) embodies his desire for God's love. Rolle stresses that, "[s]o þe saule with lufe (als before sayde) sett o-fyer, treuly felys most verray hete" (2). Both Ruysbroek's and Rolle's fire images depict the soul's intense desire for God and God's reciprocated love. Ruysbroek's and Rolle's association of fire with God's love contributes to the manuscript's affective spiritual content since *Incendium Amoris* is in Addition 37790, as previously mentioned in Chapter 1.

Ecstasy also characterizes Ruysbroek's male God/male lover union since the male lover is in a state of "delyte," contributing to the narrative's homoeroticism. According to Cré, their "[l]ove is never idle, but moves the soul towards God in a constant stream of desire and impatient hunger that cannot be satisfied" ("Vernacular Mysticism" 137). Sensual words such as "delyte," "taste," "swalowyng," and "burne," assist in translating Ruysbroek's homoerotic discourse that presents the spiritual union as sexual and physical. Kripal states that "[t]o the extent that a male mystic encounters the divine as a masculine Presence and uses sexual language to express the experienced truths of that encounter, those expressions will, by definition, be structured along homoerotic lines" (98). Ruysbroek's male spiritual beloved/male lover union implies homoeroticism, even though the male lover is understood as female, because his images effectively and erotically communicate love and desire between two males.

Ruysbroek's sexual orientation is unknown, but his life spent in an all male environment permits the suggestion that he, at one stage or another, encountered same-sex love and desire. According to Kripal, "[t]his is not necessarily to suggest that such male mystics were homosexually oriented" (98). Rather, like Porete's all female community, these exclusively male environments offered Ruysbroek awareness and knowledge of same-sex desire to create a narrative that communicates his own desire for the male beloved. As well, the employment of homoerotic language and images in mystical texts were "traditional, indeed almost second nature" (Kripal 79) because of authors like Bernard of Clairvaux. If Ruysbroek had not encountered same-sex desire in his male environment, he was aware of the conventional and historical use of homoerotic language and imagery in the mystical writings of Saint Bernard.

The Treatise of Perfection's traditional use of homoerotic language and images positions the text as orthodox. Nonetheless, Ruysbroek's undifferentiated male lover and God "[exposes] him to the charge of pantheism" (Underhill, *Ruysbroeck* 70): there is no distinction between the individual, or the universe, and God. An example of Ruysbroek's pantheism, as communicated by the Middle English translator, is that "the spyrryt feles itselfe dede and loste and one withoute any dyfference with god" (257). According to Nieuwenhove, Ruysbroek illustrates "a *state* of the deified person who relates in an entirely new manner to God and the world" (75). In the mystical union, the male lover receives the will of the divine and becomes "one with god ... whereby we fele the informacioun of god, and also where þorowe we fele vs sunken into ane infynyte depnesse of oure euerlastynge happenesse" (249). Ruysbroek, like other mystics,

represents the union between God and the male lover “in the terms of a mystical marriage” (Kripal 78) whereby God and lover become one entity in matrimony.

Anticipating accusations of heresy, Ruysbroek consistently emphasizes the authority of the Church throughout the entire text. Even though the male lover receives a union with God and spiritual divinity, “[h]e beres commun lyfe” (257). After the union, the male lover is both active and contemplative. He returns to the material world and “alle his dedys he is ryghtwus and trewe, euer abydyng and redy to do whate as god commawndys, stronge and myghty to suffre that he hase promysed” (257). The divine union is momentary and the male lover returns to live in the world to do God’s work. Ruysbroek, unlike Porete, does not advocate a new religious structure with the contemplative above religious authority. Instead, Ruysbroek encourages the contemplative to follow the tenets of the Church, which leads to a mystical union with God.

The Treatise of Perfection communicates a traditional mystical union with the divine that is fundamentally male-centred. Ruysbroek employs the courtly love idiom to convey God’s spiritual nobility and the male lover’s obedience and humility to the divine. The male divine/male lover union challenges the courtly love heterosexual relationship between the noble lady and her male lover. As demonstrated, mystical texts traditionally allow gender fluidity for the spiritual beloved and the spiritual lover. Ruysbroek’s male/male spiritual union is theologically and symbolically heterosexual since the inferior, humble, and obedient male lover is imagined as female in the relationship. Despite this heterosexual implication, Ruysbroek’s mystical union is homoerotic since he employs the erotic images of taste and consumption to describe the male lover’s desire

for the male spiritual beloved. The love between the male lover and the male divine sounds more like a sexual encounter between two human men rather than between a celestial entity and a human being. Notwithstanding, *The Treatise of Perfection's* male/male desire and homoerotic language and imagery are traditional in medieval mystical texts. As well, Ruysbroek's emphasis on spiritual lovers abiding by Church doctrine assists in positioning *The Treatise of Perfection* as orthodox.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

5.1 Porete and Ruysbroek – Further Considerations

Porete's and Ruysbroek's lives had significantly different conclusions, as discussed in Chapter 2. Porete was tried as a heretic and put to death. Conversely, Ruysbroek, a member of the ecclesiastical structure, lived in the male hermitage until his death at the age of eighty-eight. Ruysbroek is known as "a figure who greatly influenced European mystical literature" (Van Bragt 1), whereas the literary and historical research on Porete continues to concentrate mainly on the heretical components in her text. To supplement this critical research on Porete, Ellen Babinsky proposes that Porete was not solely killed for her *Mirror*, but was caught in a religious/political battle that included Pope Clement V, France's King Philip IV, and the Knights Templars.

At the time of Porete's inquisition and trial, King Philip IV, also known as Philip the Fair, wanted to transform France into an autonomous nation state. Philip the Fair believed that if France were to be a self-governing nation, he would need to separate the secular authority from the religious authority, the country's two governing bodies. Babinsky explains that "[t]he overall program of Philip the Fair was the centralization of authority in France, and one of the primary tasks of centralization was to garner loyalty to the king" (18). If Philip were to be successful, organizations such as the Christian military order the Knights Templars would need to be silenced. The Templars had significant papal ties and were independent of the religious hierarchy since "[Pope] Innocent III absolved the priests of the Order from all obedience to their own bishops, making them directly subject to the Pope alone" (Martin 18). The Templars' freedom from ecclesiastical authority was a primary concern for Philip the Fair because of the

order's considerable French presence. Edward Martin asserts that, "[t]he actual number [of Templars] in all Europe at the beginning of the fourteenth century may be estimated at 15,000, of whom at least one-third were at the time in France" (24). The Knights Templars wielded extraordinary power amongst the masses. If need be, the Templars could obtain from the French people support for the papacy in opposition to the crown.

The Templars were recognized as a religious order that represented honour, trust, and courage. This positive reputation made their strongholds a logical choice for the safeguarding of funds and precious items. The Templars "became the normal agents for raising loans and conducting every kind of financial negotiation for the various Governments of the time ... It was through them that Philip the Fair borrowed the money for his daughter's dowry on her marriage to Edward II" (Martin 17). Despite Philip the Fair's own financial relationship with the Templars, he needed to suppress them since their favourable reputation and their relationship with Pope Clement V could challenge his desire for absolute monarchical sovereignty.

Philip the Fair's plot against the Templars began in October 1307 with a sweeping arrest of every Templar residing in France. Charles Moeller reports that the Templars were arrested on charges of heresy and "accused of spitting upon the Cross, of denying Christ, of permitting sodomy, of worshipping an idol, all in the most impenetrable secrecy." A royal commission was formed to examine these arrests. Many of the Templars admitted guilt during the royal commission. They were demanded to do so by the King's soldiers who tortured them while in prison. According to Moeller, Clement V instituted a papal inquiry, "which was not restricted to France, but extended to all the Christian countries of Europe, and even to the Orient" to interrogate the arrests. Many of

the French Templars recanted their admissions of guilt during the papal inquiry and “almost six hundred Templars attempted to mount a defense of their order” (Babinsky 19). In retaliation, Philip the Fair burnt fifty-four Templars at the stake who had rescinded their admissions of guilt (Babinsky 19, Martin 55). This action, as Philip must have anticipated, intimidated the Templars to the extent that the “the [Templar] witnesses were so stupefied with terror that the [papal] Commission was forced to adjourn” (Martin 55).

At the same time that Philip the Fair was dealing with the Templars, Marguerite Porete was arrested in 1308 for heresy and for disseminating her book, which had been banned in the years between 1296 and 1306 (Babinsky 22). Porete’s incarceration was instituted “by the order of the Dominican inquisitor, William of Paris” (Babinsky 20) who also “skilfully directed the campaign against the Templars” (Babinsky 20). Porete refused to apologize for her book and remained in prison until her April 1310 inquisition. During her trial the inquisitors were told that Porete confessed to several individuals, including Philip of Marigny, that she had at one time or another possession of her banned book. According to Babinsky, Marigny was not a reliable source since he was “guardian of the treasury and confidant of Philip IV” (24). He was also the Archbishop of Sens who conducted “the process against the Templars” (Babinsky 24).

Babinsky’s research demonstrates that the individuals who participated in the undertakings against the Templars were also involved with Porete’s inquisition. Babinsky suggests that Porete’s death was linked to Philip’s burning of the Templars. According to Babinsky, Philip the Fair might have ordered Porete’s death to placate the Franciscans and the Dominicans who were upset at the crime committed against the

Templars. The “Franciscans and the Dominicans made no secret of their contempt for beguines ..., and, in return for their support of royal activities, they may have demanded exemplary action against them – in which case Marguerite ... would simply have been caught between the parties to a political deal” (Babinsky 24). Porete was possibly a political pawn for Philip IV: he killed her to pacify the Franciscans and the Dominicans and, in return, he would receive their support as the absolute ruler of France in opposition to the papacy.

Porete’s death sentence clearly contrasts with Ruysbroek’s life and his glorification. Ruysbroek led an ecclesiastical and contemplative life up until his death on December 2, 1381 (Scully). He spent his life writing texts in Middle Dutch on the contemplative life, as well as writing pamphlets against the Brethren of Free Spirit. After his death, Ruysbroek’s relics were preserved at St. Gudule’s in Brussels. However, during the French Revolution the relics went missing and were never found. On December 1, 1908, a papal decree bestowed the title “Blessed” on Ruysbroek. Ruysbroek’s theology and texts have influenced various twentieth-century authors. Jan Van Bragt states that, “a number of leading figures in contemporary French literature - among them J.K. Huysmans, Paul Valéry, André Gide, Paul Claudel, J.P. Jouve, and Roland Barthes - have expressed their admiration for the works of the Flemish mystic” (2). Ruysbroek’s esteemed reputation as a Continental mystic and his prolific writing demonstrate the difference between his life and Porete’s. Ruysbroek’s contemplative lifestyle offered him a retreat in which to develop and record his concepts of mystical

union. Conversely, Porete's imprisonment for authoring the *Mirror* and continuing to distribute the banned book undeniably curtailed any further writing.

The conclusions to Porete's and Ruysbroek's lives contrast with each other even though their texts present similar mystical unions. Regardless of whether or not Porete was Philip the Fair's political pawn, her *Mirror* advocated spiritual power for the lay individual above the ecclesiastic. Obviously, this feature in Porete's text upset the ecclesiastical authorities. Conversely, Ruysbroek was a member of the ecclesiastical structure and his texts encouraged obedience to the Church. Despite the similarities and differences in their texts and lives, Porete's and Ruysbroek's respective biographies represent the scope of religious and political experiences in fourteenth-century Continental Europe.

5.2 Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the textual and literary similarities between Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* and Ruysbroek's *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, especially in relation to Porete's and Ruysbroek's use of the courtly love convention to communicate mystical union. Porete uses the courtly love topos to present a mystical union with God that results in spiritual nobility and spiritual elitism for the lay individual. Similarly, Ruysbroek employs the courtly love idiom to display the spiritual lover's humility and obedience to God, the noble spiritual beloved who occupies the summit of the religious hierarchy.

Both mystics also undermine courtly love's heterosexual structure by incorporating gender fluidity for both the spiritual beloved and the spiritual lover.

Porete's text includes a female/female spiritual union between Lady Love and the female Soul that leads to a male God/female Soul mystical union. This thesis asserts that Porete's *Mirror* ultimately promotes a heterosexual mystical union that would have been familiar to and authorized by her inquisitors. Ruysbroek's text also includes an orthodox heterosexual mystical union since his male God/male lover union, although intrinsically a same-sex relationship, follows in the mystical literary tradition where the male mystic is understood as "female" in the union. Ruysbroek challenges the gender structure of courtly love to emphasize that his contemporary religious structure and mystical union are male dominant. Conversely, Porete's gender contestation of courtly love promotes female spirituality.

M.N. and *The Treatise of Perfection* translator effectively translate Porete's and Ruysbroek's employment of erotic language and images to describe their respective female/female and male/male unions. Both authors rely upon images of consumption to articulate the religious devotee's obsession with and desire to be one with God. This thesis reveals that these images produce latent homoerotic narratives in both texts. Porete's female/female union and Ruysbroek's male/male union are spiritual and meant to communicate religious love and not sexual love. Nonetheless, these unions are described with erotic images.

The thesis contributes to the current research on Porete's and Ruysbroek's texts by examining how each author blends mystical union with the courtly love topos. The thesis extends Barbara Newman's *mystique courtoise* concept by examining Porete's version of *mystique courtoise* in conjunction with her adaptation of courtly love, her same-sex divine union, and the text's latent homoerotic narrative. As well, this thesis

expands on Amy Hollywood's and Michael Sargent's analyses of the *Mirror*'s heresy in relation to its female spiritual focus. Rather than entirely view the *Mirror* as a heretical document, the thesis continues the text's discussion on female spirituality to expose it as a spiritual state of being that advances the orthodox heterosexual mystical union.

This thesis promotes further study of Ruysbroek's Middle English *Treatise*. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is very little research on this document beyond Bazire's and Colledge's 1957 study and Marlene Cr  's dissertation, which maintain that the scribe included the text in the manuscript because of its convenience and its narratives on the contemplative life and on mystical union. The scribe may have included *The Treatise of Perfection* for these reasons, however this thesis demonstrates that reading *The Treatise of Perfection* with the *Mirror* provides further discussions for medieval readers on Continental mystical theology and on literary representations that employ spiritual states to communicate the apostolic life and mystical union.

The content in Porete's *Mirror* and Ruysbroek's *The Treatise of Perfection* validate the texts' inclusion in Additional 37790. This thesis builds on Cr  's dissertation, which discusses the Carthusian audience for Additional 37790, and Sargent's research on the Carthusian dissemination of manuscripts. The thesis suggests an extended audience for Additional 37790 that possibly included not only the Bridgettines of Syon, but also members of the royal court such as Lady Margaret Beaufort who had a significant relationship with the Carthusians. Considering the limited Middle English accessibility to the manuscript's texts, the Additional 37790 compiler potentially knew that these texts were elusive and wanted to create a valuable manuscript on mysticism for a prominent

audience of ecclesiastics and the educated laity. The manuscript's contemplative life theme would address the Carthusians' and the devout royalty's desire for spiritual knowledge. Since very little information survives on the manuscript's utilization, the audience conceptualization for Additional 37790 is speculation and requires further research.

Most importantly, the thesis promotes additional study of medieval mystical texts associated with the Carthusians that employ and undermine the courtly love topos. Investigating these manuscripts will determine the extent of the Carthusians' reliance on the courtly love narrative to influence and shape vernacular spiritual literature. This study will provide greater insight into the overlap between spiritual and secular literature. Was secular romance literature a staple in ecclesiastical libraries? Were secular romances included in the reading program for ecclesiastical scribes? These questions can only be answered with further study on courtly love adaptations in mystical literature, which also offers increased awareness into the medieval ecclesiastical literary culture.

This thesis endeavoured to demonstrate the similarities in the *Mirror's* and *The Treatise of Perfection's* mystical unions, and their applications and contestations of the courtly love literary convention. The thesis presents the *Mirror* and *The Treatise of Perfection* as reading companions for a Middle English audience. The *Mirror's* and *The Treatise of Perfection's* translations in Additional 37790 educated Middle English readers on Continental theologically grounded mysticism that incorporated courtly love to discuss spiritual desire for God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Babinsky, Ellen L. Introduction. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. By Marguerite Porete. Trans. Babinsky. New York: Paulist Press, 1993. 5-61.
- Barratt, Alexandra. "Marguerite Porete: *The Mirror of Simple Souls*." *Women's Writing in Middle English*. Ed. Barratt. London: Longman, 1992. 61-70.
- Bazire, Joyce, and Eric Colledge. Introduction. *The Chastising of God's Children and The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*. Eds. Bazire and Colledge. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957. 1-90.
- Bennett, Judith. "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (2000): 1-24.
- Boffey, Julia. "Middle English Lives." *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1999. 610-634.
- Brooten, Bernadette J. *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- Brunn, Emilie Zum, and Georgette Epiney-Burgard. *Women Mystics In Medieval Europe*. Trans. Sheila Hughes. New York: Paragon House, 1989.
- Bryant, Gwendolyn. "The French Heretic Beguine Marguerite Porete." *Medieval Women Writers*. Ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1984. 204-226.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1982.
- . "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages." *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*. Ed. Jill Raitt. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988. 121-139.

---."Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of

Liminality." *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body*

In Medieval Religion. New York: Zone Books, 1991. 27-51.

Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1906-1910.

London: William Clowes and Sons, 1912.

The Cloud of Unknowing. Ed. Patrick J. Gallacher. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval

Institute Publications, 1997. *TEAMS Middle English Texts*. 30 May 2005

<<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cloud.htm>>.

Colledge, Edmund, and Romana Guarnieri. "The Glosses of M.N. and Richard Methley to *The*

Mirror of Simple Souls." *Archivo Italiano per la Storia della Pieta* 5 (1968): 357-382.

---, J.C. Marler, and Judith Grant. "Introductive Interpretative Essay." *The Mirror of*

Simple Souls. Eds. Colledge, Marler, and Grant. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1999.

xxxv-lxxxvii.

---, and James Walsh. *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*. 2 vols.

Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978.

Coppack, Glyn, and Mick Aston. *Christ's Poor Men: The Carthusians in England*.

Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2002.

Cré, Marleen. "Vernacular Mysticism in the Charterhouse: An Analysis of BL. MS

Additional 37790 in Its Religious and Literary Context." Diss. U of Fribourg, 2001.

---. "Women in the Charterhouse? Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and

Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* in British Library, MS Additional 37790."

Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval

- England*. Eds. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000. 43-62.
- D'Aygalliers, A. Wautier. *Ruysbroeck The Admirable*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1997.
- Doiron, Marilyn. Introduction: *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. *Archivo Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 5 (1968): 243-246.
- Dronke, Peter. *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Dupré, Louis. Preface. Wiseman xi-xv.
- Emery, Kent Jr. Foreword: Margaret Porete and Her Book. Colledge, Marler, and Grant vii-xxxii.
- "Eroticism." *Wikipedia*. 16 April 2005. 11 May 2005 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eroticism>>.
- Foucault, Michel. "A Preface to Transgression." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ed. Bouchard. Itaca: Cornell UP, 1977. 29-52.
- Gallacher, Patrick J. Introduction. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Ed. Gallacher. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997. *TEAMS Middle English Texts*. 30 May 2005 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/clunintr.htm>>.
- Gravdal, Kathryn. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991.
- Hollywood, Amy. *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1995.
- Jantzen, Grace. "Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics." *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a*

- Global Perspective*. Ed. Gary E. Kessler. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999. 192-209.
- Jenkins, Jacqueline. "“This Lyf en Englyssh Tunge”: Translation Anxiety in Late Medieval Lives of St. Katherine." *The Medieval Translator* 8. Eds. Rosalynn Voaden, Rene Tixier, Teresa Sanchez Roura, and Jenny Rebecca Rytting. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003. 137-148.
- Jones, Michael K., and Malcolm G. Underwood. *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Julian of Norwich. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout and A Revelation of Love*. Eds. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins. Forthcoming, Penn State UP.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Ed. and trans. Lynn Staley. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
- Kirchberger, Clare. Introduction. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1927. xxi-lvii.
- Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism & Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.
- Lerner, Robert E. *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1972.
- . Introduction. *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*. By Herbert Grundmann. Trans. Steven Rowan. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1995. 1-5.

---. Preface. Babinsky 1-3.

Lichtmann, Maria. "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: The Mirror of Simple Souls Mirrored." McGinn 65-86.

Lochrie, Karma. "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies." *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*.

Eds. Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 180-200.

"Man." *Middle English Compendium*. U of Michigan P. 18 Dec. 2001. U of Calgary Lib.

30 May 2005 <<http://80-ets.umd.umich.edu.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/m/mec/>>.

Martin, Edward J. *The Trial of the Templars*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928.

McGinn, Bernard. Introduction: Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of

Vernacular Theology. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. Ed. McGinn. New York: Continuum, 1994. 1-14.

Moeller, Charles. "The Knights Templars." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 14. Robert

Appleton Co., 1912. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2003. 06 June 2005

<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14493a.htm>>.

Murk-Jansen, Saskia. *Brides in the Desert: The Spirituality of the Beguines*. Maryknoll, NY:

Orbis Books, 1998.

The New American Bible. Saint Joseph ed. New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1992.

Newman, Barbara. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995.

---. "The Mirror and the Rose: Marguerite Porete's Encounter with the Dieu d'Amours."

The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature. Eds. Renate

- Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Warren. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 105-124.
- Nieuwenhove, Rik van. *Jan van Ruusbroec, Mystical Theologian of the Trinity*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2003.
- Nozick, Robert. *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
- Porete, Marguerite. *Mirror of Simple Souls*. Doiron 247-355.
- Robinson, Joanne Maguire. *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls*. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2001.
- Rolle, Richard. *The Fire of Love and The Mending of Life or The Rule of Living*. Ed. Ralph Harvey. Early English Text Society, original series, 106. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896.
- Runzo, Joseph. "The Symbolism of Sex and the Reality of God." *Love, Sex and Gender in the World Religions*. Eds. Runzo and Nancy M. Martin. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000. 15-34.
- Ruysbroek, John. *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*. Bazire and Colledge 229-258.
- Sargent, Michael. "The Annihilation of Marguerite Porete." *Viator* 28 (1997): 253-279.
- . "The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 225-240.
- Schwartz, Deborah B. Background to Romance: "Courtly Love." Love in the Middle Ages – Spring 1998. Course home page. 1998. Dept. of English, California Polytechnic State University. 23 June 2005 <<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwartz/engl513/courtly/courtly.htm>>.
- Scully, Vincent. "Blessed John Ruysbroek." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13. Robert

- Appleton Co., 1912. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2003. 06 June 2005
<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13280c.htm>>.
- Simpson, David L. Chivalry and Courtly Love. "True Love": Men vs. Women in Ancient and Modern Culture. Course home page. 1998. The School for New Learning, DePaul U. 11 May 2005 <<http://condor.depaul.edu/~dsimpson/tlove/courtlylove.html>>.
- Staley, Lynn. Introduction. Kempe vii-xix.
- . *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994.
- "Straunge." *Middle English Compendium*. U of Michigan P. 18 Dec. 2001. U of Calgary Lib. 1 Aug. 2005
<<http://80-ets.umdl.umich.edu.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca:2048/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=straunge&rgxp=constrained>>.
- Underhill, Evelyn. Introduction. *John of Ruysbroeck: The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, The Sparkling Stone, The Book of Supreme Truth*. Ed. Underhill. Trans. C. A. Wynschenk Dom. London: Dent, 1916. *TPH Twilight Archive*. Feb. 2000. 31 July 2005
<http://www.tphta.ws/TPH_JRUY.HTM>.
- . *Ruysbroeck*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1915.
- Van Bragt, Jan. Foreword. *Mysticism Buddhist and Christian: Encounters with Jan van Ruusbroec*. Eds. Paul Mommaers and Van Bragt. New York: Crossroad, 1995. 1-6.
- Van Engen, John. Preface. *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*. Trans. Dennis D. Martin. New York: Paulist Press, 1997. xv-xx.
- Watson, Nicholas. "Melting into God the English Way: Deification in the Middle English Version of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer des simples âmes anienties*." *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late Medieval England*. Ed.

- Rosalynn Voaden. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996. 19-49.
- . "Middle English Mystics." *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 539-565.
- . "Misrepresenting the Untranslatable: Marguerite Porete and the *Mirror des Simple Ames*." *New Comparison* 12 (1991): 124-137.
- , and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds. Introduction. Julian of Norwich 5-54.
- Wiseman, James A. Introduction. *John Ruusbroec The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*. Trans. Wiseman. New York: Paulist Press, 1985. 1-37.
- Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans. *The Idea of The Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999.
- Woods, Richard. "Conclusion: Women and Men in the Development of Late Medieval Mysticism." McGinn 147-164.
- Wynschenk, C.A. *The Sparkling Stone*. Underhill.