

CHRISTINA OF MARKYATE, MANLY WOMAN OF GOD: MYSTICISM,
MONASTICISM, AND MASCULINITY IN TWELFTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

by

Angela Ruth Bolen

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

Boise State University

December 2012

© 2012

Angela Ruth Bolen

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Angela Ruth Bolen

Thesis Title: Christina of Markyate, Manly Woman of God: Mysticism, Monasticism, and Masculinity in Twelfth-Century England

Date of Final Oral Examination: 06 July 2012

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Angela Ruth Bolen, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

Lisa McClain, Ph.D. Chair, Supervisory Committee

Joanne Klein, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

Matthew Hansen, Ph.D. Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Lisa McClain, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

To Jonathan, my husband, my best friend, my partner in every journey, and to my daughter Zoë; her beauty, wonder, and enthusiasm inspire me every day.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Lisa McClain for her unyielding support, encouragement, and insight. Also, thank you to my committee members Dr. Matthew Hansen and Dr. Joanne Klein for their guidance during the final steps of this project. Thank you to my father, Steve Groening; his tireless quest to understand the heart of God inspired the undertaking of this project. Thank you to my mother, Lynne Groening, for always believing in me. Finally, thank you to my sister, Melody Hayward; her nurturing encouragement gave me so much energy. To my husband, Jonathan Bolen, thank you. In the end, I found the strength to finish because of the generosity of his love.

ABSTRACT

Christina of Markyate, a little-known twelfth-century mystic, challenged the secular masculinity of medieval England. Christina abandoned her home and family to search for a greater understanding of Christ, and her search led her away from the will of her father, her husband, and her king. Unlike other female religious of the time, she lived in an all-male monastery. Male religious figures from throughout England regularly sought her out for her wisdom and insight. This examination of Christina's life reveals the complex relationship of sex, gender, and religion in the Middle Ages, because in her search to understand Christ, and by challenging the social constructions of secular masculinity, she was perceived as both male and female, both masculine and feminine.

For decades scholars have argued that historical traditions largely exist as a telling of male stories. Though this statement is generally accurate, these histories fail to examine men as gendered beings or the influence ideas about masculine gender have had on female populations. Ignoring the implications of masculinity on the experience of women mystics limits our understanding of how medieval religious and secular populations perceived and acknowledged women's religiosity or how women gained influence and power within all-male and patriarchal hierarchies. This thesis employs insights from Thomas Laqueur's one-sex/one-flesh model in a gendered analysis of the twelfth century manuscript, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, and explores the influences that fluid medieval social constructions of femininity, masculinity, and biological sex had on the perception of women mystics living and working in male-

dominated religious communities. I conclude that the medieval understanding of sex and gender, as delineated by Thomas Laqueur, allowed Christina of Markyate's male counterparts to perceive her as both male and female, which gave her extraordinary opportunities to challenge traditional gender and religious roles for women. Christina of Markyate's experiences depict a transformation of Christina from a weak and helpless girl in the secular realm, into a manly woman of God.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| DEDICATION | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| ABSTRACT | vi |
| CHAPTER ONE: GENDER, SEX, AND ENGLAND IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY..... | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Context..... | 8 |
| The Meanings of Gender and Sex in the Middle Ages..... | 14 |
| CHAPTER TWO: RELIGION AND GENDER IN THE MIDDLE AGES | 19 |
| Defining Manhood in the Middle Ages | 19 |
| Medieval Feminine Spirituality | 27 |
| CHAPTER THREE: CHRISTINA OF MARKYATE..... | 34 |
| From a Girl to a Man | 34 |
| In Her Father’s House..... | 57 |
| A Soldier of Christ..... | 63 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: MANLY WOMAN OF GOD..... | 71 |
| Christina as Man, Christina as Woman..... | 71 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS | 82 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 85 |
| Published Primary Sources | 85 |

Secondary Sources 85

CHAPTER ONE: GENDER, SEX, AND ENGLAND IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Throughout western, Christian history the image of God as a man, God as a father, and God as the archetype of male perfection has pervaded the Christian idea of who God is and has been. During the Middle Ages, most Christians strove to achieve God-like masculine perfection, even women. Born into an established system of patriarchy, society expected women to follow the rules of their fathers, their husbands, their kings, and above all, God. Though medieval society expected an equal level of deference from men, women carried the burden of balancing the demands of their patriarchs and their God, with the perception of the inherently sinful nature of their sex.

Christina of Markyate, a little known English mystic, born into this social structure in the end of the eleventh century, challenged the status quo of secular masculinity. Men who demonstrated the ability to effectively control and dominate women, especially wives and daughters, performed important actions of secular masculinity in the Middle Ages. Subsequently, subservient and obedient women willing to become wives and mothers defined some of the widely accepted tenets of secular femininity in the Middle Ages. Christina abandoned her home and family to search for a greater understanding of Christ, and her search led her away from the will of her father, her husband, and her king. While challenging the secular masculinity of the patriarchs in her life, Christina's experience illuminates a complicated truth regarding the conflict between social ideals of both secular and religious definitions of masculinity. Within the religious realm, the ability to prove righteous devotion to God defined true masculinity.

Similarly, these communities praised men who displayed the ability to resist the temptations of the flesh and the secular world as possessing God-like masculine prowess. The record of Christina's life also reveals the complex relationship of gender and religion in the Middle Ages, because in her search to understand Christ, and by challenging the social constructions of secular masculinity, she became both male and female, both masculine and feminine in a religious sense.

Before reaching adolescence, Christina's parents arranged an advantageous marriage for her and planned for her a future of ideal secular womanhood as wife and mother. Her parents hoped that the match would ensure their political survival. Christina's parents believed her marriage would allow them to maintain possession of the wealth they had accumulated before the Normans invaded England. Her parents hoped for the future generations Christina's body would bear. They expected her hands to maintain the home of her husband, and that she would always speak the prayers and admonitions of a decent wife. Christina's choice to reject the machinations of her parents and follow her calling directly challenged the authority of her father and eventually her husband. To enter into a monastic community required that Christina sacrifice the political and monetary well-being of her family, openly challenge the authority of her father, and publically challenge the hierarchy of gender. In the end, Christina openly rejected the traditions of twelfth-century secular femininity and embraced mysticism, a life that allowed her to transcend the confines of her sex by assuming a religious masculine persona.

Since its rise in popularity during the Middle Ages, Christian mysticism has captivated the attention of those who experienced it first hand and those who studied it

centuries later. The lives and experiences of women mystics during the Middle Ages led many secular and religious figures to posit justifications for the mystics' dramatic and strange behaviors. However, a lack of historical documentation of their activities forced medieval women mystics to exist in relative historical obscurity for centuries. Perhaps inspired in part by the rise in feminist and gender history and a need to understand women's mystical experience, historical scholars have turned to what little remains of these manuscripts in an attempt understand religious practices as women experienced them. Historians seem initially drawn to these women because so often their records detail an existence removed from the traditional, and socially accepted, feminine gender roles. Yet, recent trends in scholarship suggest that during the Middle Ages, male theologians and monastic writers described the experiences of women mystics as uniquely feminine in a religious sense.

The historical treatment of medieval women mystics focuses largely on themes of femininity and mysticism's effect on women's religious roles within the social structure of both the religious and secular realms. In an attempt to illuminate the experiences of women mystics, scholars have paid little attention to themes of masculinity present in the experiences of women mystics. Feminist historians have a long tradition of moving scholarship away from a male focus. Though these scholars are correct in their claim that historical traditions have largely existed as a telling of male stories, these histories typically do not examine men as gendered beings, or the influence masculinity has had on female populations. Ignoring the implications of masculinity on the experience of women mystics limits understanding of how medieval religious and secular populations perceived and acknowledged women's practice of mysticism. By analyzing women's

mystical experiences through the lenses of both masculinity and femininity, historical scholars have the opportunity to expand understanding of the complex nature of female religiosity and social perceptions of sex and gender as a whole during the Middle Ages.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, a small group of scholars, which included JoAnn McNamara, Clare Lees, and Vern Bullough, began to reexamine popular medieval texts in an attempt to elucidate medieval constructions of masculinity.¹ Despite the emergence and recent popularization of the field of masculinities, religious and gender historians rarely examine the influence of the masculine gender on experiences and perceptions of women mystics. Scholars such as Caroline W. Bynum, Clarissa Atkinson, and Laura Swan offer invaluable contributions to the histories of medieval mysticism; however, the field of masculinities offers the opportunity to expand the seminal work of these scholars by offering a new lens with which to analyze such enigmatic subjects.² Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to nuance scholars' understandings of medieval women's mystical experiences by examining them through the lens of medieval masculinities. I will address this larger issue by surveying the life of Christina of Markyate, the little-known, twelfth-century mystic who, throughout her life, was described as both man and woman, exemplifying both feminine and masculine

¹ Jo Ann McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3-30; Clare Lees, "Men and *Beowulf*," in *Medieval Masculinities*, 129-148; Vern Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities*, 31-46.

² Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, (New York: MIT Books, 1991); Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001).

virtues as a result of her dedication to Christ. This research will further elucidate the influence that medieval social constructions of religious femininity and masculinity had on the perception of women mystics as both male and female by their religious contemporaries during the Middle Ages.

Introduction

Scholars know little about Christina of Markyate. However, according to her hagiography, during the twelfth century in England she exercised a considerable amount of influence over powerful religious men. Most of the Christian community in England knew and revered her. The most detailed account of her life exists in a single, incomplete manuscript, written during her lifetime by an unknown monk. The manuscript, known as *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth-Century Recluse*, offers an excellent opportunity to examine the perception and prevalence of masculine and feminine gender roles in medieval women's spiritual experience, because the author used a significant amount of gender-specific language.³ The second source on Christina is the St. Alban's Psalter. This is a book that Talbot, Fanous, and Leyser all agree belonged to Christina of Markyate.⁴ Despite the importance of the Psalter as an indicator of the form of Christina's worship, it does not reveal anything about the details of Christina's life outside of the claim that she lived and prayed at St. Alban's. In 2005, art historian Jane Geddes published a work detailing the contents of the Psalter, but her publication focuses

³ Anonymous. *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. by C.H. Talbot. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). Citations refer to the 2005 edition.

⁴ Talbot, "Introduction," in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, 22-25; Samuel Fanous, "Introduction" in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, trans. by C.H. Talbot, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxi-xxii.

entirely on the artwork and translation of the text and does not offer any further analysis into the experiences and perceptions of Christina's life.⁵ Despite the lack of source material on Christina's life, the manuscript of her hagiography offers an invaluable portal in to her obscure life as a mystic.

Despite the growing interest in medieval women's mysticism, few modern scholars have included an examination of Christina's life in their analyses.⁶ The story of her life is hagiographical in style and intent, but unlike Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen, who personally wrote their famous devotionals, an unknown monk penned Christina's story. Scholars drawn to Margery Kempe's histrionic behavior and far reaching unpopularity may have found nothing exceptional or remarkable about Christina's life. She did not lead an army of men to war, like Joan of Arc, nor did she become England's first Queen Regnant, like Elizabeth I. Christina lived nearly her entire adult life in seclusion, speaking only to God and a few close and influential friends, leaving no known devotional writings of her own, as did Julian and Hildegard. Leaving personal writings and devotions was not typical for women mystics of this era.

Though there are a few references to Christina in larger studies on women's religiosity and an edited volume dedicated to a literary analysis of her manuscript, the most extensive exploration and analysis of her life exists in the brief introductions to the translated editions of the manuscript, *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth*

⁵ Jane Geddes, *St. Alban's Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 27, 222, 247, 281. This work examines the religious practice of women mystics. Christina appears in this work but is mentioned only in passing in a few pages. Carol Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 136. This work mentions Christina in a passing sentence on one page of her book, which includes the stories of women like Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Ávila.

Century Recluse, translated and edited first by C.H. Talbot in 1959 and then in 2008 by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser.⁷ Though both of these translated editions offer contextualization of the life of Christina of Markyate in Anglo-Norman England, these scholars do not examine issues of masculinities or gender with regards to Christina's experience.⁸

I posit that Christina of Markyate's experiences, illustrated in the manuscript detailing her life, depict a transformation of Christina from a weak and helpless girl in the secular realm, into a manly woman of God. Furthermore, her devotion to God and persistence in following an ascetic life permitted Christina to assume both religious masculine and religious feminine virtues, allowing her to exist in the eyes of others as both male and female. This transition empowered Christina to reject her parents' matrimonial machinations, nullify her betrothal, and pursue a deeper, more personal understanding of God. Furthermore, it caused powerful religious men to accept her as a legitimate leader and advisor. Christina lived, worked, and prayed within an all-male community, a community that accepted her as an equal. Throughout this work, I intend to augment the prior findings and theories offered by historians of gender and religion to demonstrate the fluid nature of gender in the Middle Ages. I expect to accomplish this task by creating a firm link between Christina's religious experience, her devotion to

⁷ Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, eds., *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Anonymous, *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C.H Talbot.

⁸ Monica Furlong, *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1996), 99; Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 36; C. Stephen Jaeger, "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," in *Christina of Markyate: Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, 99-115; Neil Cartilidge, "The Unknown Pilgrim: Drama and Romance in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*" in *Christina of Markyate: Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, 79-98.

God, and her ability to transcend the confines of the female gender by adopting masculine virtues, which her religious contemporaries considered reasonable because of an inherent fluidity in the medieval perceptions of sex and gender.

Context

Christina of Markyate was born to Auti and Beatrix as Theodora in the English town of Huntingdon, sometime between 1096 and 1100 A.D. As wealthy Anglo-Saxon merchants, locally esteemed by their contemporaries, Christina's parents sought to maintain and strengthen their social position through the arrangement of an advantageous marriage of their daughter to a man named Burthred during the early years of Christina's life.⁹ In all likelihood, at the time of Christina's birth, her parents feared the stability of their status. During the eleventh century, England faced the invasion of the Norman forces who threatened to invalidate the social standing of the established Anglo-Saxon nobility. Thirty years before Christina's birth, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian attempts to prevent the Norman invasion ended in defeat at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and redefined political, economic, and religious hierarchies.¹⁰ The conquest ushered in leadership; after the sudden death of King Edward the Confessor and then King Harold Godwinson in the same year, William the Conqueror assumed the throne on Christmas Day 1066.¹¹

⁹ Anonymous, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, vi. This is Talbot's 2005 edition. All future references will refer to this text unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ Hugh Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066 - c. 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 46-55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Historians such as Janice Hamilton, David Carpenter, and Hugh Thomas maintain that the conquest diminished the authority of the native ruling class and redistributed many of their landholdings, giving them to the Norman aristocracy.¹² The invasion signaled a new era of English history, defined by distinct differences in language and culture that eventually created a closer link between England and continental Europe.¹³ However, most of the Anglo-Saxon nobility did not welcome the linguistic and cultural invasion; they resented the Norman king, who dissolved English control over the Church and eliminated the old Anglo-Saxon aristocracy.¹⁴ As the decades of Norman rule progressed, fewer and fewer Englishmen and women held positions of authority in the Church and in the monasteries.¹⁵

Christina of Markyate hailed from a family of Anglo-Saxon merchants, and it is likely that her family attempted to accommodate to Norman influences in an effort to maintain their social status and wealth. Talbot maintains that Christina's family lived in Huntingdonshire in eastern England and enjoyed broad political influence.¹⁶ Christina's father, Auti, was a wealthy, highly respected man who held a certain degree of influence with the clergy and many members of the community.¹⁷ However, Talbot states that the only mention of Auti in the historical record exists within the pages of the manuscript

¹² Janice Hamilton, *The Norman Conquest of England* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008); David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery: The Penguin History of Great Britain, 1066-1284* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Thomas, *The English and the Normans*.

¹³ Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 46-55.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 46-55, 202-208.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 202-208.

¹⁶ Anonymous. *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

about Christina. Although Auti's name appears in the Domesday Book, the mention of this name within the text refers to landholdings outside of Huntingdonshire and could easily refer to another man by the same name.¹⁸ Most of what historians know about Auti relies on the personal feelings and interpretations of Christina's hagiographer. Because source material is limited, the historical portrayal of Auti as well born is possibly a hagiographical convention and requires that scholars exercise a level of discretion when formulating theories regarding Christina's life and experience with regards to her relationship with her mother and father. However, the depiction of him is typical for a man of his social standing in twelfth-century England.

After the death of William the Conqueror in 1087, his son William II, or William Rufus, ascended to the throne. He afforded Auti and Beatrix the opportunity to maintain their social status and the favor of the monarchy by arranging an affair between their daughter and a powerful advisor to William II, Ranulph Flambard. For several years earlier, Christina's aunt, Alveva, carried on a sexual affair with Ranulph Flambard, and when the affair ended, Ranulph arranged for Alveva to marry a wealthy man and maintain her status as a well-born lady. Around Christina's sixteenth birthday, Ranulph came to Huntingdon. Allegedly enamored with Christina's exquisite beauty, Ranulph pursued Christina and promised her family political favor if Christina agreed to replace her aunt as his sexual companion.¹⁹ According to Talbot, Ranulph did not intend to marry Christina; rather he expected that she would act as his mistress. Ranulph's familiarity in approaching Christina's parents and their subsequent willingness to send their daughter

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

off without the promise of marriage suggests that Auti and Beatrix may not have been politically strong enough to resist Ranulph's demands. This interaction exemplifies the asset Auti and Beatrix realized what they had in their daughter; to them she was a commodity.

Just as Auti and Beatrix struggled to maintain their wealth and power while adapting to Norman rule, they also attempted to adjust to a changing religious climate within Europe and within Anglo-Norman England more specifically. Christina would later have to navigate these changes when she embraced a religious life. During the late eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII challenged the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, by questioning the authority of monarchs to invest Church officials with the symbols and authority of holy office, a conflict known as the Investiture Controversy. For a time the fight existed mainly between Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. However, in 1103, Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury and loyal to the papacy, brought the controversy to England. Like Henry IV, Henry I, the king who succeeded William in 1100, believed that his royal heritage gave him the authority to invest church officials with divine and secular authority. Eventually the Concordat of London resolved the dispute, for the English, in 1107.²⁰ The Concordat of London dictated that the monarchy maintained the right to require bishops and abbots to pay homage to the king for the properties given to the episcopate by the King of England as recognition of the king's temporal authority, and the monarchy forfeited its right to invest bishops and abbots with divine authority. Because the monarchy forfeited some of its power within the structure of the Church in England, it lost influence.

²⁰Carl A. Volz, *The Medieval Church: From Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1997), 105.

During the era of the Investiture Controversy, England experienced religious change that transformed the relationship between the monarchy, the clergy, and the laity. These shifts successively influenced Christina's fate as a mystic. Before and after the Concordat of London, the clergy possessed spiritual and secular influence over the laity. For nearly seven hundred years, the Catholic Church had existed as a powerful ruling force.²¹ During the early Middle Ages, monastic men, and some women, possessed a level of influence and authority over lay populations because priests, anchorites, and anchoresses served as surrogate worshippers for the laity, acting as links between lay worshippers and God to procure the communities' salvation.

Though the Pope and his cardinals acted as the most influential and powerful members of Church leadership, they had very little, if any, direct contact with the common laity within England and Western Europe as a whole. Thus, many Christians gained all of their exposure and knowledge of the church through the parish priests and monks or nuns if a monastery existed nearby. The parish, or *parochia*, led by the parish priest, existed as the most basic unit of the Church, and the priest often acted as the only visible member of the Church to the laity.²² The less visible clergy, like bishops, appeared sparingly, often only attending important religious events like baptisms, burials, and the collection of tithes.²³ Lay populations associated bishops with the control of feudal properties and did not identify them with pastoral care. In addition to the parish church, a monastery or convent often existed close enough that the laity sought spiritual

²¹ Ibid, 105-106.

²² Ibid, 144-145.

²³ Ibid, 146-147.

guidance from the monks, nuns, prioresses, and abbots who inhabited these holy places. Christina and her family, for example, traveled on occasion to St. Alban's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Hertfordshire. Medieval Christians typically had a deeper religious connection to the parish priests, nuns, and monks than they did to the powerful bishops and cardinals who often dominate the texts of medieval Church history.

The Norman invasion, coupled with England's involvement in the Investiture Controversy, likely created an uncomfortable and anxious spiritual environment for both men and women in the Middle Ages. The reforms of Pope Gregory VII and the limitations on European secular leaders' ability to invest the clergy with spiritual authority transformed the social and religious environment of England. The clergy obtained spiritual authority over Christians that monarchs and nobles could not rival. These changes effected men and women differently.

In in order to understand how religious expectations impacted medieval Englishmen and women differently, we must first investigate how medieval people understood the categories of "man" and "woman" at their most basic levels: sex and gender. For the purposes of this thesis, sex will be defined as physical, biological differences between men and women. Gender will refer to socially constructed performances and understandings of male and female difference. Of course, the difference between the two categories is not so simplistic. How individuals and societies perceive these distinctions has evolved over time, and the medieval period was one era in which what it meant to be man or woman, male or female, was understood very differently than it is in the twenty-first century.

The Meanings of Gender and Sex in the Middle Ages

Thomas Laqueur, in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, posits that before the eighteenth century, many people believed that sexual difference existed on a single, hierarchical continuum. People did not understand male and female as being two opposite sexes as they would in the modern era. Instead, in this controversial work, Laqueur argues that during the pre-enlightenment era, both religious and secular populations believed that only one sex existed and that sex was a sociological, rather than an ontological, category. Sex depended on gender. Being perceived as a man or woman biologically by one's community was linked to one's assumption and performance of socially-constructed gender roles. A person born with male sex organs did not achieve manhood until he successfully proved, through fulfilling various social roles, that he was masculine. By this logic, women could also achieve manhood if they assumed socially accepted masculine roles. A great degree of fluidity existed within medieval understandings of man and woman, male and female.

Referring to the works of Galen, the prominent second-century Roman physician, surgeon, and philosopher whose medical theories predominated in the Middle Ages, Laqueur conjectures that medieval populations believed men and women had the same reproductive organs, just in different locations on the body. Both theologians and medical practitioners during this era perceived the female sex as inferior to the male because of the "inverted" placement of the reproductive organs. Women had the same organs as men but in the wrong places. Conversely, men emulated a perfect version of the

human body because of the outward placement of male reproductive organs.²⁴ Since everyone had the same organs, genitalia were strong indicators of sex but not in the concrete, determinative way they are in modern times. Laqueur argues that because men and women were made of the same flesh, their gendered actions and roles determined whether their communities perceived them as men or women and that these perceptions could change throughout a person's lifetime.

After the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, theologians Christianized this classical understanding of sex and gender. They retained the earlier emphasis on male perfection and elevated sexual abstinence as a form of piety.²⁵ Laqueur suggests that medieval Christian Europeans believed that God created man in God's image and woman in man's image but out of the same flesh, which strengthened the notion that only one sex existed. Many church leaders believed and taught that the inferior, female placement of the sexual organs thus emphasized a divine order, in which the male form of the human body mirrored the perfection of God and the female form reflected the inherently flawed and imperfect nature of women.²⁶ Laqueur refers to this as his "one-sex/one-flesh model." According to his argument, during the pre-enlightenment era both religious and secular societies believed that only one sex, or one flesh existed and that it resided on a fluid continuum of perfection, with the God-like male version at the top and the imperfect, female version at the bottom.

²⁴ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 8. "[...] sex, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while gender, what we take to be a cultural category, was primary or "real."

²⁵ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 59-60.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 60-61.

Laqueur's theories, controversial two decades later, inspire criticism and continue to fuel debates regarding the nature of sex and gender. Joan Cadden uses the introduction of her book, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, to critique Laqueur. She claims that his research is narrowly focused, centering only on western notions of gender. Furthermore, Cadden maintains that Laqueur largely ignores the Middle Ages, which in my opinion is a fair observation.²⁷ Despite her criticisms, Cadden does not disagree with the major foundation of Laqueur's argument: the fluid one-sex/one flesh model. Both Laqueur and Cadden agree that Europeans prior to the Enlightenment believed that performing certain gendered actions could change a person's perceived sex. Individuals and societies did not ascribe manhood to men or femininity to women simply because they were born with particular anatomy. Rather, they required men and women to perform gendered actions and assume gendered roles after which they would be described as male or female. Both men and women operated and moved along this continuum. Women could become men, and men could become women.

Despite the criticism his work attracts, Laqueur's theories continue to inspire historians of gender and sexuality to reevaluate previous assumptions and offer new insights into familiar historical territory. Anthony Fletcher examines views of sex and gender held in early modern England and parallels many of Laqueur's arguments. In his work *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800*, Fletcher posits that it is only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that an ideological transition away Laqueur's one-sex/one-flesh mindset to the more familiar model of two opposite yet

²⁷ Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-10, 13.

complementary sexes occurred.²⁸ Instead of a structure founded in the Aristotelian theory of a single-sex on a fluid continuum, enforced through religious prescription, England created a new social structure founded in natural law, which classified sex in rigid and complementary categories. Gender roles would now be determined by one's biological sex. This shift in ideology provided a stable foundation for patriarchy, one which clearly and rigidly defined gender and delineated complementary roles for men and women to fill. Though Fletcher focuses on early-modern England, his findings suggest Aristotelian theories regarding sex and gender dominated English thought until this shift occurred during the eighteenth century. Fletcher's work suggests that these ideas pervaded medieval thought as well.

I will use Laqueur's, Cadden's, and Fletcher's insights into medieval perceptions of sex, gender, and the relationship between the two to analyze gendered descriptions of Christina of Markyate and her actions. I contend that because Christina's hagiographer depicts her acting in masculine ways and filling masculine gender roles while simultaneously maintaining several of the virtues of femininity, her hagiographer perceived her sex as both female and male. If medieval people understood sex and gender according to the one-sex/one-flesh model, these seeming contradictions become reconcilable.

In order to best interpret the gendered language in Christina's *Life* and place this analysis in greater context, it is imperative to understand the state of scholars' understandings of medieval masculinities as well as medieval women's mysticism. Christina of Markyate managed to successfully abandon an arranged marriage, disregard

²⁸ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

the authority of her husband and father, and rise to a status of power and influence envied by men. A gendered analysis allows scholars the opportunity to examine more fully the influence social constructions of both masculinity and femininity had on Christina's ability to rise to such a status. Furthermore, re-examining Christina's hagiography and teasing out the implications of both feminine and masculine genders provides new insight into the influence Christina's spiritual experience had on her perceived sex and gender.

CHAPTER TWO: RELIGION AND GENDER IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Defining Manhood in the Middle Ages

Although historical study has been primarily of men and their experiences, it has evinced little understanding of men as gendered beings. Attempting to address this oversight, scholars over the last two decades have returned to medieval source materials written for and about men and gleaned from them indications of socially accepted and constructed masculine gender roles. The resulting research has led to the creation of a multi-faceted, sub-category of history—masculinities—that continues to augment contemporary interpretations of medieval history. Not surprisingly, historians who ventured into this new and controversial field felt inclined to justify their research in very strong terms, claiming that previous histories ignored the implications of masculinity in the history of men and promoting the value of investigating historical experience through the lens of masculinity.²⁹ In its brief existence, historians largely agree that the definition of manhood is fluid and polymorphic, and masculine identities often fall into various and often conflicting categories.

In attempting to delineate a clear definition of masculinity in the Middle Ages, historians initially did not clearly distinguish between secular and religious masculinity and argued that all societies define manhood through displays of dominance. Scholars like Vern Bullough, Ruth Mazo Karras, JoAnn McNamara, C. Leyser, Lynda Coon, and Jacqueline Murray all suggest that displays of dominance largely defined true manhood

²⁹ Thelma Fenster, "Preface: Why Men?" in *Medieval Masculinities* ed. Clare A. Lees, ix-xv.

in the Middle Ages.³⁰ In his essay, “On Being Male in the Middle Ages,” Bullough posits that medieval societies believed that men held biological supremacy over women and thus enjoyed superior social rank and more influential cultural roles. Furthermore, a man’s ability to prove his manhood rested in his capacity to demonstrate dominance over women and weaker men; lead his family, country, or army; confirm his virility by procuring a wife and creating children; and provide food and shelter for his offspring.³¹ Bullough supports his thesis by referring to the medical treatises of Galen and Aristotle, carried over from the classical period, which refer to the inherent ability of true men to act as dominant leaders.

Bullough’s argument is problematic because he promotes a simplistic, one-size-fits-all definition of manhood. His suggestions indicate that men who did not demonstrate virility through physical prowess, reproduction of offspring, and domination over women and weaker men, failed to receive social acceptance as true men. By this definition, there would have been very few men in medieval Europe and no one in a religious vocation would have qualified as a true man by these standards.

Later historians recognized that a single definition of medieval masculinity did not exist. For example, while issues of rank, virility, and bravery in battle comprised the major tenets of secular manhood in the Middle Ages, secular men often demonstrated

³⁰ Vern Bullough, “On Being Male” in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); JoAnn McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*” in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees; C. Leyser, “Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emissions and the Limits of Celibacy in the Middle Ages,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (New York: Addison Wesley, 1998); Lynda L. Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jacqueline Murray, “Mystical Castration: Some Reflections on Peter Abelard, Hugh of Lincoln and Sexual Control,” in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1999).

³¹ Vern Bullough, “On Being Male,” in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees, 40-41.

manhood in ways that were unavailable or forbidden to religious men. This required religious communities to create another definition of manhood.³² McNamara argues that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially during periods of reform such as the Investiture Controversy, emphasis on clerical celibacy forced women out of the daily lives of religious men, creating homo-social environments. The absence of women compelled men to define their masculinity without using women to perform demonstrations of dominance, virility, or physical strength and forced some men to assume both male and female gender roles. By filling both masculine and feminine roles, McNamara argues that religious men constructed a masculine identity that emphasized verbal dominance and mental prowess, rather than sexual virility and procreation, and incorporated feminine attributes.³³

Without access to women, religious men redefined masculinity by shifting emphasis away from physical force and sexual dominance and towards other aspects of the body, spirit, and mind. Acts of dominance remained important components of proving manhood, however, religious men created different means of performing them. Coon agrees with Bullough in his assertions that male reproductive organs played an important role in determining manhood for the general, secular population. Since monastic practice disallowed religious men from engaging in sexual acts and fathering legitimate children, Coon argues that male monastics assigned gendered meanings to the voice and the practice of self-mastery. In monastic communities, boys reached manhood

³² Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*. Karras's work focuses on the transformation of young boys into manhood. She examines how rank, title, and virility allowed young boys entrance into the realm of manhood. However, these issues did not directly or explicitly affect a woman's ability to become male. Furthermore, a man's ability to achieve the rank or title befitting a man did not have any direct implications on the perceived masculinity of religious women.

³³ JoAnn McNamara. "The *Herrenfrage*," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees, 20.

at the age of fifteen and became eligible to join the choir.³⁴ A man who joined the choir gained a voice in the regular liturgy. Though not entirely free from oversight, he earned freedom from the direct supervision of his *magistri*, because the monastic order determined he could demonstrate self-mastery and thus achieve liturgical manhood.³⁵

Religious individuals and communities perceived acts of self-mastery and self-denial—particularly over sexuality—as indicators of true manhood. Surveying the writings of the fifth-century Christian theologian and mystic John Cassian, and the sixth-century pope, Gregory the Great, Leyser argues that ascetic and clerical men defined masculinity as the ability a man had to control his mind and heart. "Gregorian masculinity," as Leyser calls it, emphasized the importance of constant spiritual contemplation and rigid self-control over the body and mind.³⁶ True men did not experience lustful, idle thoughts and therefore did not pollute their bodies or minds.

Such self-control and self-denial could be taken to extremes that help scholars further understand how religious masculinity depended on dominating one's own body and will and how others perceived this alternative masculinity. Murray examines the experiences of Peter Abelard and Hugh of Lincoln, suggesting that physical and/or mystical castration changed how these men and their contemporaries viewed their status as men. Murray contends that fear over their inability to control sexual impulses drove some ascetic and clerical men to castrate themselves. The act of castration, whether

³⁴ Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, 121.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 121.

³⁶ C. Leyser, "Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emissions and the Limits of Celibacy in the Middle Ages," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (New York: Addison Wesley, 1998);

actual or symbolic, became a demonstration of such extreme self-denial that even without their sexual organs, the religious communities viewed these men as true men.³⁷ The strength of will superseded the strength of the body in proving and performing manhood.

In this way, a level of flexibility existed in religious masculinity that allowed both men and women to become masculine. I argue that because these religious understandings of masculinity emphasized self-control and purity over virility and dominance over oneself rather than the dominance of others, they thus removed the importance of the male body in defining masculinity. Leyser's, Coon's, and Murray's arguments build upon scholars' earlier, more simplistic definitions of masculinity because they emphasize the importance of gendered actions, like self-denial and self-mastery, in the formation of masculine identities. They cement a trend in medieval historiography that contrasts secular and religious masculinities and that shifts scholarship away from a single, rigid, binary definition of manhood into multiple, nuanced, and fluid categories.

The problem with identifying multiple definitions of masculinity lies in the hierarchies of sex, gender, and power and the complexities of attempting to define them. J.L. Nelson, for example, claims that during the Middle Ages, secular and religious men co-existed equally at the top of a fluid gender continuum in a parallel hierarchy. Neither secular nor religious masculinity was considered superior to the other.³⁸ Connell disagrees, stating that secular masculine identities held a higher value over the seemingly

³⁷ Jacqueline Murray, "Mystical Castration," in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray, (New York: Garland Press, 1999), 76.

³⁸ J.L. Nelson. "Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley, 123.

passive religious identities. Cullum maintains that though religious men held social value as true men, medieval men and women perceived the ability to prove physical strength, virility, and dominance as the most important tenet of masculinity. They therefore valued hegemonic secular masculinity over religious masculinity.³⁹ Cullum states, “Secular clergy, like monks, were in principle if not always in practice, excluded from two activities which most obviously characterized the ideal of masculinity: fighting and reproducing.”⁴⁰ Cullum asserts that many of the major tenets of religious masculine identities resembled feminine virtues. For example, passivity, submission, and chastity broadly defined femininity in the Middle Ages making religious men lesser men.⁴¹

Megan McLaughlin suggests that religious men tried to conform to traditional secular definitions of manhood—such as those around fatherhood—when they could, adapting then to work within religious environments. McLaughlin contends that men in positions of invested religious leadership, like priests, bishops, and abbots, acted as spiritual fathers and thus performed some of the functions of a true secular man without sacrificing their celibacy. Using the sermons, devotions, and letters of Peter Damian, McLaughlin argues that performing sacramental ceremonies and baptisms turned a cleric’s parishioners into his spiritual “children.”⁴² While a secular man fathered children with a wife, virtue acted as the wife of a cleric, and with her, he became a father without

³⁹ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 76-81. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity: “hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity within the gender hierarchy. Although hegemonic masculinity subordinates other masculinities and femininities, it can be challenged by them.”

⁴⁰ P.H. Cullum, “Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and J.K. Lewis, (London, University of Wales Press, 2005), 182.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Megan McLaughlin, “Secular and Spiritual Fatherhood in the Eleventh Century,” in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities*, ed. Jacqueline Murray, 27.

sacrificing his religious dedication.⁴³ Furthermore, McLaughlin states that duties ascribed to spiritual fathers included the responsibility and expectation to discipline their spiritual children just as secular men disciplined their own natural or adopted children.⁴⁴ McLaughlin's argument indicates that the definitions of masculinity remained relatively similar between secular and clerical populations but that religious men tried to adapt to secular understandings of masculinity rather than the other way around. This may indicate secular masculinity did rank above religious masculinity in the minds of religious men, consciously or subconsciously.

Allowing only one hierarchy of masculine perfection to exist perhaps required the creation of a third gender category for religious men. Cullum posits that men adopting Leyser's "Gregorian masculinity" existed as a third gender, rather than as an alternative to secular masculinity. She argues that religious men participated in nurturing, feminine activities, such as singing and caring for the poor and infirm, despite their role in masculine activities like celebrating the mass and writing religious treatises.⁴⁵ Cullum posits that clerical men were not completely men nor completely women but something else entirely: a new gender category. R. N. Swanson agrees, calling this new gender *emascularity*.⁴⁶ Cullum's and Swanson's assertions are not convincing, however, as they defy medieval conceptions of sex and gender as operating on a fluid continuum. By categorizing men and women into two opposite sexes, a modern convention, into which

⁴³ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 31

⁴⁵ P.H. Cullum, "Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression," in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and J.K. Lewis, 182.

⁴⁶ R.N. Swanson, "Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, D.M Hadley, 160.

religious men do not fit, Cullum and Swanson are forced to create a third category. There is no evidence medieval people understood religious men as a third gender, which speaks more to the modern inability to understand medieval conceptions of gender and sex.

Though historians have shifted away from a single, monolithic definition of masculinity, it is interesting that they typically fail to include a comprehensive examination of the role of women in their discussions of the development of masculine identity and ideals. Laqueur and Cadden agree that during the Middle Ages, sex existed as a sociological rather than an ontological category and that medieval populations believed that men and women were comprised of the same flesh. Society assigned gender to specific actions, virtues, roles, and ranks, and therefore gender determined perceived sex. Following this logic and the evidence offered by Leyser, McLaughlin, McNamara, and Murray, women had the ability to assume masculine gender and become male even though they lacked male, outward positioning of their reproductive organs. This is particularly true for religious masculinities, which is what this analysis will focus upon. I contend that Christina of Markyate's religious performances and experiences caused her contemporaries to perceive her behavior as masculine according to understandings of religious masculinity. This allowed them to perceive her as becoming a manly woman. Examining Christina's hagiography through the lens of masculinity will likely bring forward new questions regarding medieval women's mystical experiences as a whole and offer new perspectives regarding this ambiguous and misunderstood population.

The study of masculinity should not be a history only of men; women too have a role in shaping masculine identities as well as assuming them. Lay women typically served supporting roles in the transition of secular men into manhood. They birthed their

offspring, cared for their homes, and submitted to their masculine authority. However, religious women often lived in homo-social communities, and because they did not directly support the masculinity of husbands and sons, they seemed to face social exclusion with regards to developing gender identities. Still, scholars who study medieval masculinities offer evidence that suggests that by performing an accepted brand of religious masculinity, women mystics, like Christina of Markyate, assumed masculine gender characteristics and roles that appear as male to the men who wrote about and celebrated them.

Medieval Feminine Spirituality

It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate how Christina of Markyate's religious experiences and performances as a mystic affected her perceived sex, gender, and sphere of influence.⁴⁷ Examining the historiography of manhood in the Middle Ages is essential to understanding the masculine nature of Christina's experience and the agency her spiritual performance had in the metamorphosis of her perceived sex and gender. Equally important to investigate, however, are the historiographical interpretations of feminine spirituality in the Middle Ages, particularly that of mysticism. The majority of scholarship on women's mysticism concentrates upon the uniquely feminine aspects and experiences of this religious practice. Early scholarship focuses on women's inherent sinful sexual nature and the devaluation of the female body. Later historians move toward

⁴⁷ Because the purpose of this thesis focuses on Christina's religious experiences while she was a recluse at St. Alban's Abbey, I intend only to examine the historiography as it relates to women's mystical experience. I do not intend to examine Christina's experience after assuming the position of prioress because the manuscript is relatively silent about this experience. Therefore, the historiographical treatment of other trends, topics, and specialties regarding women and religion in the Middle Ages are not addressed. The purpose of narrowing the focus of the historiography is to attempt to illustrate the absences in the current scholarship on female mysticism and illuminate how this thesis will address such silences.

more nuanced meanings of the feminine flesh in medieval worship and uniquely feminine aspects of the mystical experience.⁴⁸

Peter Brown offers a traditionalist analysis of women's spirituality in early Christianity in *The Body and Society: Men, Women and the Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Focusing on the social and religious meaning of the human body in Christianity, Brown argues that women's sexuality and celibacy became important elements of Christian religious practice in the early Middle Ages because Mary, and her perpetual virginity, gained renewed reverence during this era. During the early Middle Ages, the virginal female body became a physical representation of the Holy Virgin. The Christian Church considered an attack upon a consecrated virgin as a direct affront to Christianity. For Brown, however, women were often victims. Fathers committed their young, virginal daughters to the church to benefit from the renewed veneration of the Virgin Mary, stripping them of the opportunity to enter religious life on their own volition.⁴⁹

By failing to give women sufficient agency, Brown's discussion of the female body in Christian religious practices seems incomplete. A focus on celibacy and sexual renunciation in the early Church, while undeniably important, creates an assumption that

⁴⁸ Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002). Some scholars, like Mary Laven, explore spirituality as it existed within the walls of convents, suggesting that women in these communities had different experiences from women who did not. Other scholars focus on the mysteries of women mystics and recluses, examining the various ways their communities accepted, rejected, or understood them. Regardless of the trends, the historiographies demonstrate that within this sub-field of medieval history, many interpretations exist, and by employing several different tools and examining the subject matter through various lenses, scholars will uncover these interpretations.

⁴⁹ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 263.

the female body was only important in the Christian Church in a sexual context.⁵⁰ Few scholars would disagree with Brown's assertions, but his findings do not account for the many ways in which women used their own bodies, minds, and spirits to worship God and attain a religious experience with Christ.

In contrast, Carolyn Walker Bynum examines feminine patterns of religious performance, analyzing choices medieval women mystics consciously made in their worship. In her work, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Women in the Middle Ages*, Bynum states that scholars have ignored the deeply religious significance of food in feminine piety, claiming that the modern, twentieth century fascination with sexuality and the role of celibacy in Christian history overshadows the relationship religious women had with food and their bodies in the Middle Ages.⁵¹ These women embraced chastity, certainly, but their contributions to female spirituality go beyond their sexuality. Women in the Middle Ages used fasting as a means to show reverence to God and to experience spiritual enlightenment. The giving up of daily nourishment came at a cost greater than giving up sex or money. The holy life required devout dedication to celibacy and poverty. Fasting met this requirement and caused many theologians to characterize abstemious fasters as truly devoted servants of God. For many medieval women and some men, extreme fasting and self-starvation became a basic form of worship. Bynum's dedication to examining ascetic women, and elucidating the agency Brown minimizes, adds a decidedly feminist approach to her analysis.

⁵⁰Ibid, 259-260.

⁵¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 1.

Bynum, unlike Brown, offers a unique perspective on the non-sexual ways women's bodies became tools of Christian worship.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, medieval religious practice began increasingly to emphasize the *imitatio Christi*, or the imitation of Christ. Many pious Christian mystics like Catherine of Siena and Christina the Marvelous honored and worshiped their savior by welcoming the experience of bodily suffering similar to the crucified Christ. Often the *imitatio Christi* resulted in a painful and emotionally tumultuous experience. Bynum, however, argues that the suffering led women mystics to paradisiacal encounters with Christ and tended to cause physical marks on the body. Many mystics who engaged in the *imitatio Christi* presented such marks as evidence of divine favor and religious dedication. Though a modern observation may interpret such activities as a masochistic form of self-abuse or as unwanted suffering, Bynum claims that mystics, both men and women, chose the activities as a positive way to achieve *imitatio Christi*.⁵²

While Bynum focuses predominantly on German and French mystics, Karma Lochrie explores the implications of gender in mystical practice in England in her analysis of the fifteenth-century lay mystic, Margery Kempe. During the medieval era, Christian treatises perpetuated the notion that the female sex did not possess the ability to resist the temptations of the flesh and taught that women were irrational and weak-willed, more inclined than men to indulge temptation. These assumptions lead Lochrie to conclude that the female body became the central focus of women's spiritual

⁵² Ibid, 211.

performance and practice because a woman who defied the desires of her flesh ultimately defied the weakness inherent to her sex.⁵³

A question that Bynum, Lochrie, and Margaret Miles all address is how much control women had over their own bodies during the medieval period. Women certainly did not enjoy the same freedom men did over their bodies, and as Miles discusses, men limited women's ability to make choices for their bodies. Men constructed and interpreted the meanings associated with female bodies and projected male fears and fantasies onto female bodies.⁵⁴ We must be careful, therefore, in using male voices to describe female mystics' religious experiences. Miles suggests that looking past male representations of the female body reveals that for ascetic women, bodies became "both the location and the symbol of a religious self."⁵⁵ Women's bodies became the place where they worshipped God and the instrument that allowed them to achieve a holy union with Christ because during this era, they did not control much else.

Beyond using their bodies as a means to worship Christ, women's mystical practice could cause religious men to perceive these women as masculine. Both Miles and Grace Jantzen incorporate the value of masculinity into their dialogues of women's mystical experience in ways scholars of medieval masculinities have not. Miles argues that medieval religious men who wrote about such holy women saw them as "becoming male," because the ascetic practices carried out by female martyrs and women mystics included severe fasting, excruciating pain, and torture believed too great for a woman to

⁵³ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 23.

⁵⁴ Miles, Margaret R., *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meanings in the Christian West*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 169-170.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

bear.⁵⁶ Miles believes that religious men and women in the Middle Ages believed this transformation occurred because the devotion to Christ that allowed them to endure the ordeal simultaneously removed their female body from the secular realm, the realm of sexual perversion and sin, and into the presence of divine purity.⁵⁷ Jantzen agrees, stating that martyrdom and mysticism qualified as masculine performances in the Middle Ages. During the early Christian and medieval era, religious leaders traditionally excluded women from discussions of spirituality because the nature of their sex could not achieve a true and perfect union with God.⁵⁸ To account for the women who did exemplify undeniable spirituality purity and strength, Jantzen states that medieval communities, both secular and religious, considered these women to be honorary males.⁵⁹ Like Miles and Bynum, Jantzen avoids explicitly assigning the male sex to these women.⁶⁰ Regardless of what she names them, Jantzen's argument suggests that medieval Christians believed that women who assumed roles of austere spirituality, like mystics and martyrs, became men or at the very least man-like. Jantzen and Miles arguments imply that the process of "becoming male" was a metamorphosis that male writers and hagiographers projected on to the female subject. These "manly" women, or honorary males, achieved a deeper connection with Christ because they no longer carried with them the burdens of a body linked to immorality, irrationality, and sexual pollution.

⁵⁶ Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 169.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 170-171.

⁵⁸ Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43-45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 49-50.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 51-53. Jantzen defines "honorary males" as women who have transcended femininity by becoming dominant and courageous and who have denied their sexuality.

Although historians such as Miles and Jantzen describe the process of “becoming male” largely as a metaphor, Laqueur and Cadden’s promotion of the one-sex/one flesh model suggest that Christina’s hagiographer may have perceived an actual biological shift in Christina’s sex as she adopted male gender roles. Their ideas suggest that through religious devotion and mystical performance, Christina of Markyate became male, a transformation witnessed by her male contemporaries. It is to Christina and her *Life* that I now turn. Christina’s experiences as a female mystic were not unique. What is unique is the content of the hagiographical record that allows historians to view the stages of Christina’s transformation in the eyes of her contemporaries. Her metamorphosis does not hinge on an extreme event such as martyrdom, extreme ascetic suffering, or a particular mystical event, as it does for the medieval writers analyzed by Miles and Jantzen. Instead, Christina’s hagiographer chronicles a long-term journey during which the masculine descriptions of her activities and body accumulate over time into a portrait of Christina that is neither male nor female but both.

CHAPTER THREE: CHRISTINA OF MARKYATE

From a Girl to a Man

Born Theodora, to Auti and Beatrix, sometime between 1096 and 1100, Christina of Markyate entered into a world of relative luxury and wealth. The account of her life lies with the pages of a manuscript written by an anonymous monk and requires that scholars glean her story from the conventions of hagiography. Christina's parents did not intend for their daughter to pursue a religious vocation. Rather, they allegedly sought to secure their status and privilege by using their daughter's beauty to win the favor of King Henry I and his powerful advisor, Ranulph Flambard.⁶¹ Christina's hagiographer notes that while pregnant with Christina, Beatrix received a vision of the Holy Spirit. Looking out of the window at the monastery of the Blessed Mother of God, a pure-white dove flew gently towards her and nestled in the sleeve of her tunic.⁶² Occurring on a Saturday, a day set aside for honoring the Mother of God, the dove stayed for seven days showing no sign of fear or anxiety. This account bears resemblance to the story of the Virgin Birth. Beatrix did not experience miraculous conception like Mary; rather the Holy Spirit came to Beatrix while she was pregnant with Christina much like Mary's encounter while she was pregnant with Christ. Later evidence will show the author consistently compares Christina to Christ and other significant male figures of the Bible. This sign of holiness,

⁶¹ In the 2008 translation by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, Ranulph Flambard is referred to as Ralph. Despite the variation in name, Ralph and Ranulph are the same person. For the purpose of continuity and consistency I will refer to this man as Ranulph.

⁶² This is the actual name of the monastery as mentioned by the hagiographer; Anonymous, *The Life*, 35.

common in hagiographical tradition, may imply that hagiographers perceived their subjects as embodying Christ-like, and thus masculine, attributes from birth.

Previous historians argue that medieval Christians believed that the male body represented perfection; Christ embodied the pinnacle of that perfection. Though Laqueur includes only a brief examination of the Middle Ages, his findings suggest that during this period of heightened religious fervor, society believed that the biological sex hierarchy reflected a divine order, one in which God favored men by creating them a perfect body. Christina, born a female, tirelessly strove to seek religious favor and heavenly perfection that the author implicitly suggests came to her while she grew in her mother's womb.⁶³ Signs of holiness appear in both men's and women's hagiographies; however, this is not a reason to discount the masculine implications. In the hagiography of Saint Perpetua, the third-century martyr, Augustine praises Perpetua for her strength and claims that in Christ she becomes a man.⁶⁴ Christina's hagiographer similarly praises Christina's strength of will and her ability as a child to build the resolve that would eventually lead to her manly metamorphosis.

From the moment she could talk, Christina reportedly demonstrated an unwavering dedication to religious practice, which historians claim as a masculine virtue. Karma Lochrie and Grace Jantzen report that during the Middle Ages, the church taught, and the congregants believed, that ability to resist sexual temptation, gluttony, and greed was a tenet of masculinity.⁶⁵ Historiographical evidence suggests that successfully

⁶³ Ibid, 35-36.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *The Passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicity*, in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1998), 39-41.

⁶⁵ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 19-23; Jantzen, *Power*, 45-49.

denying the desires of the flesh separated the masculine from the feminine. Miles claims that women who successfully overcame such temptations became “manly” women.⁶⁶

The written evidence left in the *Life* suggests that Christina’s hagiographer thought her worthy of admiration precisely because she demonstrated a strength of will typically attributed to men. The author writes,

*Inde fuit quod cum adhuc per atatem discernere nequiret inter rectum et iniquum suam tenellam carnem virgis cedebat quociens aliquod illicitum se fecisse putabat.*⁶⁷

Hence, it came about that while she was still too young to see the difference between right and wrong, she beat her own tender body with rods whenever she thought she had done something that was not allowed.⁶⁸

Hence, while she was the age too young to distinguish between right and unrighteous, she would beat her tender flesh with rods as often as she believed she had done something unrighteous.⁶⁹

The author signifies Christina knew her own unrighteous thoughts and actions before she knew the difference between cultural or social rights and wrongs, indicating that at an early age her spiritual and mental fortitude matured beyond her physical age. Jantzen claims that Philo of Alexandria taught that only men were capable of rational thought and intelligence. Thus, to act with reason and prudence defined true masculinity and belonged only to the male sex.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 54-56.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, *The Life*, 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 37.

⁶⁹ This is my translation, offered as a comparison to C.H. Talbot’s, to demonstrate the nuanced difference between the two.

⁷⁰ Philo, *Laws* I.xxxvii, as cited in Jantzen, *Gender*, 43.

As a young child, Christina's parents brought her with them to visit the monastery of St. Alban's. Though the author does not comment on her approximate age, Christina likely visited the monastery before she reached the age of betrothal, because the author does not mention her marriage or engagement to Burthred. When Christina visited the monastery, she reportedly became overwhelmed by the level of devotion displayed by the monks. She longed to worship with them, and at such a young age, Christina desired to be like them.⁷¹ Before leaving the monastery, Christina reportedly etched a cross with her fingernail onto the door as a symbol that she left a piece of her heart and devotion at that monastery. Her hagiographer writes,

*Illa signum crucis uno unguium suorum scripsit in porta scilicet quod in illo specialiter monasterio suum recondidisset affectum*⁷²

With one of her nails, she wrote the sign of the cross on the gate at the monastery, as a signifier that she had placed her affection there.⁷³

The act of marking the monastery gate with her fingernail is not an act of masculinity; however, Christina identifies with the *monachorum*, or monks, at the monastery and creates a physical mark on the gate to indicate her desire to become a part of them. During the eleventh century and into the twelfth century the monastery at St. Alban's housed both male monastics, or *monachorum*, and female monastics, or *moniales*. The manuscript only mentions the *monachorum*, which suggests that Christina identified more with the *monachorum* than the *moniales*. It is not known if female monastics were

⁷¹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 38-39.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ This is my translation.

accessible to visitors, though it seems that they were not because the manuscript does not mention the presence of *moniales*. This is important because in the passage, Christina's hagiographer notes that the activities of the monks moved Christina enough to cause her to make a physical mark on the door, an indication of her dedication to the Benedictine order and possibly her intent to follow it. Because Christina did not leave anything of her own words, it is impossible to know for sure, and exactly how, the experience affected her, but the author writes of the experience in a way that suggests Christina longed for a religious life and pursued it unremittingly.

After Christina and her family visited St. Alban's and after she made her indication that she longed to live as a monk among them, a man named Ranulph Flambard, the Bishop of Durham and the justiciar of England, observed her beauty and relentlessly pursued her. Christina's hagiographer writes that before he became bishop, he had a love affair with Christina's maternal aunt, Alveva.⁷⁴ The affair lasted many years. Ranulph and Alveva had several children, and after the affair ended amicably, Ranulph married Alveva to a citizen of Huntingdon. Long after the affair ended, Ranulph held Alveva and her family in high regard and eventually became good friends with Christina's father, Auti.⁷⁵ During one of their visits, Auti brought his children along, and according to the manuscript, Ranulph gazed upon Christina, and his desire for her overwhelmed him. The author writes,

⁷⁴ During the Middle Ages the justiciar was the equivalent of the modern day prime minister. During Christina's childhood and early adulthood Flambard served as the chief advisor to King William Rufus or William II as he is commonly known today; Anonymous, *The Life*, 40-41.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

factum est ut episcopus elegantem puellam intencius consideraret. continuo misit in cor eius incentor libidinis Satanas ut eam male concupisceret.

The bishop gazed intently at his beautiful daughter, and immediately Satan put it into his heart to desire her.⁷⁶

It happened that the bishop beheld his comely daughter, and immediately Satan sent to his heart lust and desire for her.⁷⁷

Ranulph immediately ordered Christina sent to his chambers, with the intention of raping her. The author refers to Christina as *innocente* or “the innocent,” leading the reader to believe that the bishop intended to attack a defenseless virgin.⁷⁸ The author insinuates that Ranulph expected that Christina would succumb to his advances or at the very least fail to effectively fight him off. The author calls Christina the lamb, or *agnum*, and Ranulph becomes the wolf, or *lupum*, signaling the obvious disparity in power and strength between the two.

Ranulph’s intention to rape Christina and her perceived inability to resist him do not blatantly indicate any level of masculine fortitude on Christina’s part; however, the language the author uses to describe Christina’s defense demonstrates a version of Christina that is taking on decidedly masculine tones. As Ranulph pursued Christina, she faced two unthinkable options: she could give in, allowing Ranulph to corrupt her pure and virginal body, or she could openly reject him, placing herself in greater harm.⁷⁹ Instead, Christina acted with prudence or *prudenter*. She deceived Ranulph, convincing

⁷⁶ Ibid, 40-43.

⁷⁷ This is my translation, I translated the word *libidinous* to mean “lust” and the word *concupisceret* to mean “desire.” C.H. Talbot’s translation leaves out the word “lust” and mutes the licentious nature of Ranulph’s initial intentions with Christina.

⁷⁸ Anonymous, *The Life*, 42.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 42-43.

him to let her go so that she might bolt the door to ensure their privacy. She then ran out and locked the door behind her, leaving Ranulph inside seething with shame and humiliation.⁸⁰ The author's choice to use the word *prudenter* to describe Christina's actions suggests that the author credits her wisdom or rationality for allowing her to escape. Scholars like McNamara and Cullum link rationality with masculinity; therefore, because Christina was able to outwit Ranulph, her masculine *prudenter* saved her.

Following Christina's escape, the author comments that her success in deceiving Ranulph challenged his manhood and emasculated him. Ruth Mazo Karras suggests that in many homo-social environments, men proved their manhood by unmanning other men or demonstrating their success in dominating women. In this particular situation, Christina challenged Ranulph's masculinity and subsequently asserted her own. The author writes,

*Tunc illa miser videns quia illusus esset ab adolescentula. Contabuit dolore ut nisi contemptum ulcisceretur. nichili penderet quantumcumque videbatur habere potencie. Set nullo alio modo se ultum iri creditit quam ut vel per se vel alium auferret Christine florem.*⁸¹

Then the wretched man, seeing that a little girl had made him a fool, was consumed by pain and it seemed that all of his power meant nothing until he could avenge the insult he had suffered. He sought to gain his revenge by depriving Christina the flower of virginity, by either his hand or someone else's.⁸²

Christina's strength of will and of mind unmanned Ranulph. Karras states that in medieval universities, adolescent boys proved their masculinity by winning intellectual

⁸⁰ Ibid, 43.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² This is my translation.

contests against other men.⁸³ Men dominated other men through battles of wit and knowledge. Though not in a university, Christina's ability to outwit Ranulph proved that she was more of a man than he. Christina's ability to outsmart Ranulph humiliated him and led him to feel the need to reassert his manhood by forcing Christina to sacrifice her virginal body to him.

Eventually Ranulph's bitterness towards Christina, coupled with his determination to avenge his shame, led him to involve her parents, and together they persuaded a young man to first seduce and then marry Christina. Ranulph turned to Burthred, a young nobleman. Ranulph assured Christina's parents that the marriage would secure their social standing and wealth.⁸⁴ Christina's parents agreed to the marriage; however, when they introduced Burthred to Christina as her future husband she rejected him.

*malo respondit casta manere. nam et votum feci*⁸⁵

she answered; I prefer to remain chaste, for I have made a vow⁸⁶

When her family heard her say this, they laughed. They made fun of her for being rash and foolish.⁸⁷ Scholars like Lochrie suggest that because medieval social constructions of femininity typified women as licentious, irrational beings, traits like rashness and

⁸³ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 67-70.

⁸⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 44-45.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ This is my translation.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

foolishness typified medieval views of femininity.⁸⁸ Christina's parents expected that she would respond foolishly and claimed that her refusal to marry Burthred came from a place of womanish irrationality rather than a manly resilience to remain faithful to God.

Furthering the depiction of her resolve, her hagiographer states that the chiding of her family did not move Christina to fall in line with their plans; instead, she remained steadfastly opposed to any marriage preparations and resolute in her determination to preserve her virginity. When the cajoling of her family proved ineffective, they attempted to woo her with gifts and promises.⁸⁹ Likely expecting that Christina's feminine disposition would cause her too much weakness to resist the desires of her flesh, her family convinced a dear friend of hers called Helisen to seduce her with flattery, convincing her to become either a mistress to Ranulph or a wife to Burthred.⁹⁰ Despite great efforts to woo her into marriage, Christina remained firm in her decision. Eventually her parents resorted to assaulting her in church while she was praying; they physically barred her from leaving and forced her into a verbal agreement to wed Burthred. The author claims uncertainty around the events that caused Christina to capitulate to the will of her parents claiming,

*Quid multa? Nescio quomodo. scio quod nutu Dei tot impingue lingua concessit. et eadem hora Burthredus illam in coniugem sibi desponsavit*⁹¹

⁸⁸ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 19-21.

⁸⁹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 44-5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 45.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 46.

Why say more? I cannot tell how. I know that the will of God, against the language of so many, granted them permission. And in that same hour, Burthred betrothed a wife to himself.⁹²

Despite the verbal agreement, in her heart, Christina clung to her vow of virginity. Furthermore, her actions following the betrothal further convinced her hagiographer that Christina's devotion transformed her into a manly woman. Christina did not reject her betrothal to Burthred; without elaborating any further on her motives for complying, the author insinuates that Christina understood the power of her family and decided that in order to keep her vow to God she must instead plead her case to Burthred. Ranulph remained determined to have Christina deflowered, and at night, Burthred was let into Christina's bedroom by Auti and Beatrix, with the purpose of bedding his new wife.

*et noctu clam in cubiculum illius sponsum suum introduxerunt. quantis si forte dormientem virginem reperiret: repente oppresse illuderet.*⁹³

and at night, secretly they brought in her Bridegroom into her chamber so that if the virgin was sleeping he might suddenly overtake her.⁹⁴

⁹² This is my translation. In the manuscript the word *desponsata* is used which means, "betrothed" or "espoused." In the latter twelfth century, what constituted a legal marriage was somewhat ambiguous. A marriage was a legal contract between individuals and families. Thus, because Christina agreed to marry Burthred, the betrothal legally bound them and in the eyes of many people, they would have been considered wed. So bound were they that ecclesiastical intervention was required to nullify the betrothal. . The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, in Canons 50-52, attempted to address some of this confusion by defining marriage as a sacrament, by specifying more clearly the impediments to marital relationships, and by requiring publications of banns. Even then, the Catholic Church left loopholes in the rules that allowed for a "private consent" option between individuals. Until 1545, mutual consent by making a verbal declaration to marry secured a couple as legally bound to one another. Breaking a betrothal required equal consent, and these issues were adjudicated in ecclesiastical courts.

⁹³ Anonymous, *The Life*, 50-51.

⁹⁴ This is my translation.

Christina's parents sent Burthred into their daughter's bedroom to *repente oppresse illuderet*, or suddenly surprise her with abuse. Beatrix, Auti, and Burthred likely expected that Christina's feminine weakness, natural lustfulness, and inability to resist Burthred's masculine advances would allow him to overcome her with ease. However, as soon as he entered the room he found Christina awake, fully dressed, and aware of his intentions.⁹⁵ Christina invited Burthred to join her on the bed as a brother. She did not reproach Burthred. Rather she appealed to a desire to emulate the saints. The author writes,

*iuvenem quasi germanum letabunda suscepit. et apud lectum suum cum ipso residens. multum ad caste vivendum exhortans. exempla quoque sanctorum ei proposuit. Historiam ordine retexui illi beate Cecilie et sponsi sui Valeriani.*⁹⁶

She gladly received the young man as a brother, and in her bed, she sat down with him, strongly exhorting that he ought to live chastely offering a holy example. She covered the history of the order of the Blessed Cecilia and her husband Valerian.⁹⁷

In a similar situation, Margery Kempe implored her husband to live chastely. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written nearly three centuries after *The Life*, chaste marriage became an issue of emasculation for Margery's husband, John Kempe. Margery Kempe encountered a vivid mystical experience with Jesus Christ, and after many years of marriage and fourteen children, wanted to make a vow of celibacy and devote her life to following the visions and encounters that God revealed to her. Her husband, however,

⁹⁵Anonymous, *The Life*, 50-51.

⁹⁶ Ibid. See also Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 81-83. Valerian and Cecilia, second-century martyrs, lived as husband and wife but maintained their virginity and thus lived in a chaste marriage.

⁹⁷ This is my translation.

did not eagerly comply with Margery's fervent devotion, especially when she implored him to honor her wish of embarking on a chaste marriage.⁹⁸ John initially and hesitantly agreed, desiring to live righteously.⁹⁹ However, bedding his wife had allowed John perform an important act of manhood. Later, John tried to renegotiate the issue with Margery, which speaks to the value sharing his bed with his wife had for John. Similarly, Christina's husband seemed to initially agree to engage in a chaste marriage until it also challenged his masculinity.

The ability to prove manhood through procreation and sexual virility, though just one tenet of masculinity in the Middle Ages, mattered to men who lived outside of the religious realm; subsequently, Christina's request to her husband directly challenged his capacity to prove his masculinity. Aware of this truth, Christina eased Burthred's anxiety by assuring him that she would live with him as a wife. The author writes,

*non pudeat te repudiari. licet tui concives impropere tibi a me repudiato viliter ingrediar in domum tuam. et cohabitemus in ea aliquanto tempore. speci quidem coniuges in conspectu Domini continentis.*¹⁰⁰

Be not ashamed to be rejected by me. If thy fellow-citizens reproach you because I have repudiated you, I will dwell together, with you, in your house for some time as husband and wife, but living chastely in the sight of the Lord.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe, 1436*, ed. W. Butler-Bowdon, introduction by RW Chambers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), 121. This is the first edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, without modern translation. The manuscript existed in relative obscurity until it was discovered in the private library of the Butler-Brown family in Lancaster by Hope Emily Allen in 1934.

⁹⁹ Kempe, *The Book*, 23-26.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *The Life*, 50.

¹⁰¹ This is my translation.

Burthred spent the entire night in Christina's bedroom, listening as she pleaded with him to agree. He never once laid a hand on her. Eventually, morning came, and Burthred left and reluctantly faced those who would call into question the validity of his manhood.

The admonishments Burthred received for not consummating his marriage reveal that during the Middle Ages, women could possess a remarkable amount of power in the formation and legitimating of a man's masculinity. In her study on medieval masculinity, Karras concludes that proving dominance, especially sexual dominance, over women became a crucial exercise in proving secular manhood. Men who were unable to show other men that they were capable of dominating women often faced ridicule and were accused of not being true men.¹⁰² Therefore, when Burthred entered Christina's bedchamber but failed to engage in any sexual act, he demonstrated that he lacked sexual prowess.¹⁰³

*Per eum edocti qui introduxerant illum quid factum fuerat. ignavum ac nullius usus iuvenem conclamant. Et multis expro animum eius denuo accendentes: alia nocte impingunt in thalamum magnopere prest. ne infinitis ambagibus et candidis sermonibus fallentis effeminetur.*¹⁰⁴

When those who had got him into the room heard what had happened, they joined together in calling him a spineless and useless fellow. And with many reproaches they goaded him on again, and thrust him into her bedroom another night, having warned him not to be misled by her deceitful tricks and naïve words nor to lose his manliness.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 11, 51, 152.

¹⁰³ Though scholars of masculinity have moved away from defining masculinity in simplistic, rigid terms, Bullough's claim that performing virility remained the ultimate show of manhood still contains some truth. For secular men, part of proving manhood involved exerting dominance over women and demonstrating the ability to procreate.

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, *The Life*, 51.

When those that had got him into the room heard what had happened they joined together in calling him a spineless and useless fellow. With many reproaches they goaded him on again, and on another night they thrust him into the bridal chamber, warning him neither to be misled by Christina's deceitful tricks nor to let her unman him.¹⁰⁶

When those who led him into the room learned what happened, many of them shouted that he was a spineless and useless young man. And many reproached him and sent him again into the bedroom another night warning him neither to be misled by her womanish deceit nor to let her unman him.¹⁰⁷

That first night, Burthred could not overtake her physically or mentally. In this instance, Christina has proved herself more of a man than Burthred, or so the author suggests.

Christina demonstrated the power to unman Burthred, which emphasizes the masculine persona Christina began to take on. With the phrase, *ne infinitis ambagibus et candidis sermonibus fallentis effeminetur*, all three translations agree that Christina's rejection of Burthred and her ability to convince him to engage in a chaste marriage challenged the validity of Burthred's manhood. However, Talbot's translation from 1957 states, "[...] not to be misled by her deceitful tricks and naïve words nor to lose his manliness." This version suggests that Burthred maintained the ability to hold on to, or lose, his masculinity and the only mention of Christina is that her feminine guile, or aptitude for deceit, threatened Burthred's ease at remaining manly. Thus, Talbot's translation does not afford Christina any agency in the construction of Burthred's masculinity. The most recent of the translations, Fanous and Leyser's and my own, suggest that Christina maintained the ability to uphold Burthred's manhood. Fanous and Leyser suggest that the text states, "[...] warning him neither to be misled by Christina's

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*. eds. Fanous and Leyser. This is Fanous's and Leyser's revision of Talbot's initial translation.

¹⁰⁷ This is my translation from the original Latin.

deceitful tricks nor to let her unman him.”¹⁰⁸ In *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, Dyan Elliot claims that during the Middle Ages spiritual marriage, or the union between a celibate man or woman and Christ, rarely became an excuse for sexual dysfunction,¹⁰⁹ Elliot’s assertion offers a plausible reason as to why Burthred’s antagonists accused him of being emasculated by his betrothed. If Burthred was unable to perform sexually because of an injury or physiological impairment, Christina’s role would not have emasculated him. Burthred failure came at the hands of Christina and the phrase, “nor to let her unman him,” implies that the incident in the bedroom between Burthred and Christina became a battle for manhood, and, according to the author, in the eyes of Burthred’s companions, Christina won.

Christina’s ability to unman Burthred in the eyes of his contemporaries further suggests that Christina, through her devotion to Christ, began to assume a masculine persona. Bullough and Karras argue that mastery over women was necessary for men to prove manhood, and because Christina inhibited Burthred’s ability to do so, she effectively challenged his manhood. The phrase, *candidis sermonibus fallentis effeminetur*, warned Burthred not to allow Christina’s feminine deceit, or *fallentis*, to emasculate him.¹¹⁰ This phrase subtly implies a fear that Christina could defeat Burthred and that in outwitting him she would damage his reputation as a true man. Christina proved not only that she was rational and intelligent, but that she exemplified better mental resolve than Burthred. If masculinity originated in the mind, as Philo of

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, *The Life*, eds. Fanous and Leyser, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 147.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous, *The Life*, 50-51.

Alexandria claimed, than in this instance Christina successfully demonstrated that she was more man than Burthred.¹¹¹

Later, after Burthred retreated a second time, Christina's antagonists again berated Burthred for his inability to overpower Christina; their words explicitly questioned his manhood and illustrated Christina's capacity to unman him. The men shouted at Burthred, refusing to let him leave Christina alone. Burthred attempted to appeal to their sympathies, leading the men to believe her wit hindered his efforts. His antagonists refused to give in. They shoved Burthred back into Christina's room and shouted "*Modo meminerit esse virum!*" or "act like a man!"¹¹² This command explicitly denoted that Burthred's previous ineffectual efforts to overtake Christina threatened his manhood. Though recent scholarship indicates a shift away from a narrow and rigid definition of masculinity that relies almost entirely on physical, or sexual, prowess and virility, this phrase demonstrates that sexual mastery over women still defined secular men as men.¹¹³

As Christina's story continues, her hagiographer delineates other moments in which her ability to overpower and overcome men allowed her to act like a man. For example, while Burthred trembled at the commands of his aggressors, Christina remained calm, a virtue the author claims speaks to a masculine fortitude. The shouting increased, and Burthred entered Christina's room a third time, intent on proving his masculine virility. He, however, could not find her, because Christina had hidden between the wall and a tapestry, leaving her husband confused and angry when he realized she had

¹¹¹ Philo, *Laws* I.xxxvii, as cited in Jantzen, *Gender*, p. 43.

¹¹² Anonymous, *The Life*, 52-53.

¹¹³ Work by Cullum, McNamara, and Murray all suggest that even though secular manhood still relied on physical strength and virility to prove manhood, religious manhood was defined by different performances.

outwitted him again.¹¹⁴ Christina did not think she could compete with the force of the men. If they found her, she might not defeat their advances, so she hid quietly and prayed.¹¹⁵ It is at this moment that her hagiographer makes a telling comparison between Christina and King David of the Old Testament, which illuminates his emerging vision of Christina's masculinity.

Both secular and religious men of the Middle Ages valued bravery and courage as masculine virtues. Christina's reactions to her antagonists suggest that her courage granted her a masculine persona akin to King David's. As she hid beneath the tapestry she drew strength from the story of King David. The author writes,

*Quid queso. quid animi tunc illi fuisse putes? quomodo trepidabat inter tot fremitus querentium animam suam. Nonne evanida est in corde suo trementi descripsit sese iam in medium trahendam.*¹¹⁶

What, I ask, do you think happened to her courage at that moment? She trembled as they pursued her; her courage did not disappear as she saw herself drawn out into the midst of them.¹¹⁷

Talbot notes that in the middle of this passage the author made a margin note, referring to *Psalm* 34:4. The passage reads,

confundantur et reveantur quaerentes animam meam avertantur retrorsum et confundantur cogitantes mihi mala.

let them be confounded and turned backward, and let them be confounded, those who seek after my soul and devise evil against me.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 52-53.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ This is my translation.

The thirty-fourth Psalm tells the story of David, the second king of Israel, as he escaped from his enemies. Much of the psalm is a prayer to God, pleading for safety and bravery. By referencing the thirty-fourth Psalm, the author implicitly draws associations between Christina and David. Rather than compare Christina to a biblical woman, like the Virgin Mary or Ruth, the author suggests that Christina's bravery likened her to King David. Christians believe God favored David so much that he became the ancestor of Jesus Christ. David famously killed Goliath, usurped King Saul's leadership, and earned a place in Judeo-Christian doctrine as a warrior and true man of God.¹¹⁹

The comparison the author makes between David and Christina suggests strongly that not only did he admire her bravery but also that he believed her escape from harm embodied the essence of David's escape from King Saul. For example, as Christina hid behind the tapestry, the author claims that she whispered this prayer,

Avertantur retrorsum qui volunt michi mala

Turn them away, those who wish me harm!¹²⁰

The prayer is a truncated version of the one called out by David as King Saul pursued him,

*Deus in adiutorium meum intende Domine ad adiuvandam me festina;
confundantur et reveantur qui quaerunt animam meam avertantur retrorsum et*

¹¹⁸ *Psalm* 34:4 (Latin Vulgate).

¹¹⁹ I make this claim based on the biblical stories of David from *I & II Samuel* and *I & II Chronicles* and *I Kings*. Each book depicts David as a flawed man but a brave soldier and a dedicated servant of God.

¹²⁰ *Psalm* 69:4 (Latin Vulgate).

erubescant qui volunt michi mala avertantur statim erubescentes qui dicunt mihi; euge euge.

Attend unto my help, O Lord God, make haste to help me; be ashamed and confounded who seek my soul be turned back and put to shame that wish me evil turned at once blushing that say to me; 'Well done, well done.'¹²¹

Because it is unlikely that the author hid behind the tapestry with her, he could not know for sure what words Christina whispered; however, it is likely that either Christina knew the author personally and shared this story with him, or the author's version of her prayer reflects how he interpreted Christina's experience. To the author, Christina was like the young King David, small and outmatched, yet brave and clever enough to evade capture. Christina did not demonstrate brute force to resist Burthred's advances, just as David did not initially elude King Saul through a demonstration of physical power. Rather, David's bravery and faith in God contribute to his masculine, heroic image. The author obviously admired these similar qualities evinced by Christina and he portrays her as a young King David.

Though the author draws similarities between Christina and David, he also notes how rumors, after her parents forced her into betrothal, persuaded holy men to view Christina as a mere woman, inclined to feminine weakness. While Christina fought off Burthred and his companions, gossip began to spread to the monks at St. Alban's; eventually word that she had married reached Master Sueno, the canon who eventually confirmed Christina's monastic vow. At the moment he heard the gossip, he repudiated Christina, accusing her of feminine fickleness. The author writes,

¹²¹ *Psalm* 69:2-4 (Latin Vulgate). This is my translation from the Latin Vulgate.

Interea fama de Christine nupciis; pervenit ad aures supradicti canonici domini Suenonis. Et Quoniam dura diligens custodia Christina deputata nullo modo permittebat Suenonem ad illam venire. nec ab illa mandatum accipere. tunc cre eam penituisse virginalis propositi et redarguit illam muliebris inconstancie dicens; Vere nulli amplius...cam, quando quidem illa decepit me cui maxime credebam.¹²²

In the meantime, the story of Christina's wedding reached the ears of the above-named canon Lord Sueno. But since Christina was confined to close and rigid custody, which did not allow him to see her, nor receive any message, sent by her, believing she had changed her mind about the vow of virginity he accused her of feminine inconstancy, saying: Truly, it is no other ... since she, whom I believed, beguiled me.¹²³

Sueno did not wait to verify the truth of the news he heard. Rather he assumed that Christina reneged on her vow of celibacy because of a feminine inability to resist the natural inclinations of her flesh. In the phrase "*infremuit et redarguit illam muliebris inconstancie*" the moment Sueno heard the news he angrily accused her of womanish inconstancy. The way that the statement is phrased, *muliebris inconstancie*, suggests that disloyalty and fickleness embodied the essence of femininity in the Middle Ages. Sueno did not hesitate to conclude that Christina abandoned her commitment to virginity because women were inherently deceptive; Christina's infidelity angered Sueno but did not surprise him because he believed that she acted within the capacity of her sex. Sueno's harsh criticism distressed Christina. Devastated by Sueno's rejection, Christina remained resolute, and rather than reacting foolishly, she stood firm and remained unyielding in her vow. The author writes,

¹²² Anonymous, *The Life*, 54.

¹²³ This is my translation.

*Et ecce iam puella perseverante vir defecit unica sua in medio inimicorum contra spem derelicta.*¹²⁴

And behold, the young maiden stood firm while the man faltered.¹²⁵

In this short sentence, Christina's faith and resolve gave her—a woman—the strength to persevere, even when a man might falter. In this moment, because of her bravery and fidelity, Christina acted more like a man than Sueno.

Christina's reaction to Sueno's harsh criticism further motivated the author to make another revealing comparison, one that again emphasizes Christina's masculine character. Sueno's rejection of Christina isolated her. With her family against her, Sueno had represented her last bastion of safety. Rather than give in to the demands of her enemies, as Sueno believed she had done, she turned to God and prayed for strength and protection.¹²⁶ At this moment, the author claims, God renamed her Christina. The author writes,

*Nec dubium quin hoc in articulo meruerit illo nomine sui creantis insigniri. quo postea vocabatur nempe Christina. cui nomen a baptisate fuerat Theodora.*¹²⁷

There is no doubt, that after this juncture, she, whose name had been Theodora, deserved a name by her Creator, by which she was afterwards called, namely Christina.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 54.

¹²⁵ This is my translation; The "man" mentioned by the author is Sueno. Sueno's name is mentioned previously in the text, and the faltering refers to Sueno's inability to trust Christina or God

¹²⁶ Anonymous, *The Life*, 56-57.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ This is my translation.

The author suggests that Christ renamed Christina and that for the remainder of her life her religious community referred to her only as Christina. Though her renaming does not explicitly speak to Christina's masculine transformation, it shares similarities to the story of Saul of Tarsus, whom God also renamed.

Like Christina, the apostle Paul took on a name, given to him by God, after a conversion experience. Before he became an apostle of Christ, Saul ruthlessly persecuted Christians. Christ appeared to Paul as he traveled on the road to Damascus.¹²⁹ At an instant, Saul converted, and God baptized him as Paul.¹³⁰ Often, in Christian history, men and women assume new names after they experience baptism or take monastic vows. However, Christina's story is less formal. Her renaming experience happened without ceremony while she was alone. Much like Paul's unexpected experience on the road to Damascus, Christ suddenly appeared to Christina, and without the involvement of Church officiants or her family and mentors, he renamed her. Though the renaming does not overtly suggest a transition into masculinity, the subtle implications were that the author believes God elevated Christina above most women and men. The comparison to David suggests that she embodied masculine bravery and faith, and the similarities between Paul's experience on the road to Damascus and Christina's confirmed dedication to follow Christ and divine name change imply that God transformed her as he transformed an apostle of the Christian Church.¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Acts* 9:13-19 (Latin Vulgate).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Though the apostle Paul was not a part of the twelve who followed Jesus in his lifetime, his work with the early church and his epistles lend to his title as apostle.

For the author, Christina emulates two great men of the Bible, King David and the apostle Paul. As the story of her life continues to unfold, she becomes akin to perhaps the greatest man, Jesus Christ. Rejected by her family, her community, and for a short time, her spiritual guide, Christina faced a lonely reality. The author states that Christ encountered similar rejection, first by the Jews and then by his apostle Peter,

*Nimirum sicut Christus prius a Iudeis reprobatus post ab ipso apostolorum principe Petro qui eum ardentius ceteris amaverat negatus factus est obediens Patri us ad mortem: sic et hec virgo prius a parentibus afflicta. post ab unico amico suo Suenone derelicta: Christum sequens conten debat ipsius solius infagabiliter implere voluntatem*¹³²

To wit, just as Christ was rejected by the Jews, afterward rejected the Prince of the Apostles, Peter, who loved him more ardently than the rest and was made obedient to the Father even unto death, so this virgin was first afflicted by her parents, then abandoned by her only friend, Sueno. Following Christ, she strove indefatigably to fulfill His will.¹³³

Merely imitating Christ does not exemplify Christina's masculine character; however, the author's previous analogies between Christina and King David and the apostle Paul, augment the author's comparison between her suffering and rejection to Christ's. Rather than associating Christina with biblical women, female martyrs, or saints, the author illustrates her masculinity by paralleling her with three men, men known for their courage, discipline, and strength, qualities that scholars like Bullough, McNamara, Lees, and Karras, have identified as masculine virtues in the medieval era.

¹³² Anonymous, *The Life*, 56.

¹³³ This is my translation.

In Her Father's House

Despite the best efforts of her parents, word eventually reached Sueno of Christina's steadfast dedication to her vow, which compelled Sueno to forgive her and call her friend once again. Sueno desperately sought to help Christina escape from her home.¹³⁴ On several occasions Sueno secretly sent for her.¹³⁵ Her parents, meanwhile, sought ecclesiastical support in order to force Christina to accept her marriage. At one point, Christina's parents brought her before the prior, Fredebertus, and the canons of St. Mary's in Huntingdon and implored the canons to force Christina to consummate her marriage to Burthred.¹³⁶ The prior reportedly looked upon the young maiden and commanded that she comply with her parents' wishes, stating,

*Et apostolus. Uxori inquit vir debitum reddat. Similiter autem et uxor viro. Mulier sui corporis potestatem non habet. Sed vir. Similiter autem et vir sui corporis potestatem non habet sed mulier. Iis autem qui matrimonio iuncti sunt. Precipio non ego. Sed Dominus uxorem a viro non discedere. Et vir uxorem non dimittat.*¹³⁷

And the Apostle says, let the husband render to the wife due treatment and the wife unto the husband. The woman does not have power over her body, but the husband. Likewise, the husband has no power over his body, but the wife. Not I, but the Lord commands to the married, the wife shall not depart from her husband and the husband shall not put away his wife.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 58-59.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. The author claims Fredebertus was the reverend prior at the time of Christina's life however, C.H. Talbot claims that the earliest recorded prior was a man known as Robert.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ This is my translation.

The prior's words demonstrate the importance placed on marriage for both women and men, and it seems that he admonished Christina for refusing to act within the realm of her role as woman and wife. Christina responded by claiming,

*Non tamen uxor ante extiti. Nec unquam fore cogitavi. Quantocius scitote quod elegerim ab infan castitatem et voverim Christo me permansuram virginem.*¹³⁹

Never before have I been a wife and have never thought of becoming one. From my infancy, I have chosen chastity and have vowed to Christ to remain a virgin.¹⁴⁰

Though vowing to remain a virgin and live within the cloister was one well-recognized feminine role in the Middle Ages, Christina's vow to do so boldly defied her parents and her betrothed. Therefore, because medieval society expected women to remain obedient and subservient, this sentence suggests that Christina did fill a traditional female gender role by placing herself under Sueno's authority as her spiritual father. But, by rejecting marriage, she also rejected secular womanhood. Rejecting secular womanhood, however, does not mean that Christina became a man in the eyes of her contemporaries.

Thomas Laqueur suggests that medieval people believed male and female existed on a fluid, single-sex continuum rather than within two separate, yet complementary spheres. The author depicts Christina as David, compares her suffering with Christ's, and notes similarities between her experiences and the apostle Paul's. When forced to defend her refusal to marry in front of the Church she explicitly denied accepting wifhood. When viewed as a whole, the author's portrayal of her appears more masculine than

¹³⁹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 60.

¹⁴⁰ This is my translation.

feminine. Thus, on the continuum of sex, Christina's hagiographer depicts her as more male than female.

The prior continued to berate Christina, believing that greed and lust motivated her decision, rather than devotion to Christ. The men accused her of rejecting Burthred for a wealthier man, suggesting that, like most women, vanity and greed influenced her cause.¹⁴¹ Christina rejected their accusations, offered to hold red-hot irons to prove the authenticity of her vow, and contended that God would reveal her true intentions.¹⁴² Eventually, Christina's pleadings convinced the prior, and he required that her parents take their case to Bishop Robert at Buckden.¹⁴³ The bishop demonstrated sympathy for Christina and made this statement in his ruling,

*Episcopus vero singulis subtiliter notatis. Protestor vobis. Inquit. Et Deum ac Dei genitricem iuro. Quia non est episcopus sub celo qui ad nupcias illam constringere possit. Si iuxta votum suum Deo non alteri viro servare se voluerit. Domino libere famulandi.*¹⁴⁴

I declare this to you, before God and the Mother of God that there is not one bishop under heaven who could bind her to this marriage, if she wishes to keep her vow and stay true to God and serve Him freely, and for no man besides.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 62-63.

¹⁴² Ibid. The holding of red-hot irons refers to a type of ordeal common in England at the time based on a Germanic belief of justice designed to demonstrate guilt or innocence.

¹⁴³ Buckden was the residence of the Bishops of Lincoln and is about four miles southwest of Huntingdon.

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 64.

¹⁴⁵ This is my translation.

Despite the objections of her parents, the bishop's words released Christina from her betrothal from Burthred and, under the authority of the bishop, left Christina free to pursue a religious vocation.

Eventually Christina's family ended their pursuit. The author's explanation of their reasons further contributes to his burgeoning portrait of Christina as masculine. The author writes,

*In Christina iam tunc eluxit tanta morum honestas. Tale decus. Tanta gratia. Ut omnibus qui nossent eam merito super reliquas feminas esset amabilior.*¹⁴⁶

At that time, Christina shown forth such great moral integrity, such great beauty and influence, that all who knew her, esteemed her more loveable, above all other women.¹⁴⁷

The statement *omnibus qui nossent merito super reliquas feminas esset amabilior* indicates that Christina's actions and beauty demonstrated such moral integrity and influence that both Sueno and Bishop Robert esteemed and loved her above all other women. Scholars like Cullum and McNamara claim that influence and moral integrity defined masculine traits, not feminine ones.¹⁴⁸ Additionally Christina's demonstration of these qualities inspired those who knew her to honor as more than a woman. At this moment in the manuscript, Christina is moving up Laqueur's one sex/one flesh continuum, closer to the predominately masculine side of the spectrum, though the author suggests that she did not entirely abandon her feminine characteristics. Although

¹⁴⁶ Anonymous, *The Life*, 66-68.

¹⁴⁷ This is my translation.

¹⁴⁸ P.H. Cullum, "Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression" in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and J.K. Lewis; McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees.

Christina battled fear and paranoia, traditionally feminine traits, she eventually developed masculine courage as her faith and devotion to Christ grew. Thus, Christina becomes a blend, both male and female, assuming both masculine and feminine virtues and strengthening her opportunity to follow religious vocation.

Despite the bishop's ruling, Auti initially refused to give up on the worldly value he saw in Christina and became determined to force her into the marriage with Burthred. Before making her eventual escape from Auti's home, Christina witnessed her father take counsel with influential men, often in secret meetings. She became troubled and often feared that the meetings meant certain doom for her.

*Christina considerabat eorum clandestine conventicula. Et nescio quid suspicata: sicut est feminea consuetudo metuebat omina.*¹⁴⁹

Christina wondered about their secret assemblies and became suspicious and fearful, as is the custom of women.¹⁵⁰

This statement unravels the author's beliefs regarding femininity, that fearfulness and suspicion constituted feminine traits. Also, in the phrase, *sicut est feminea consuetudo*, "as is the custom of women," the author suggests in this moment of Christina's life she still acted like a woman. Later, the author comments on Christina's masculine bravery making a clear declaration that Christina, because religious leaders esteemed her above all other women, became more masculine as her spiritual journey progressed. Eventually, Burthred agreed to let Christina out of their betrothal.

¹⁴⁹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 68-69.

¹⁵⁰ This is my translation.

Christina's father, Auti, rejected Burthred's decision and resorted to bribing the bishop. The bishop accepted the bribe and forced Christina to leave the monastery and return to Auti's house. After returning home, Christina experienced vicious treatment from her parents. Her response to the abuse inspired her hagiographer to comment on Christina's increasingly masculine persona. Christina's obstinacy enraged Auti. She continued to deny the marriage, spoke to no one but God, and refused to eat. When Auti realized he could not change her and that he could never force her to accept her marriage to Burthred, he beat her savagely, ripped her clothing, and drove her from the house wearing only her shift.¹⁵¹

Tunc pater suus vehementer iratus omnibum eam indumentis preter camisiam expoliavit et claves suas quas ei commendaverat rapiens: ipsam de nocte sic expellere de domo sua disposuit.

Then her father was very angry and stripped her of all of her clothes, except for her shift, took the keys from her and drove her naked from the house into the night.¹⁵²

In stripping Christina of her clothing, Auti symbolically stripped Christina of her womanhood and rejected her as his daughter. The naked female body represented the essence of femininity during the Middle Ages. Stripping women of their clothing and forcing them to confront the world without covering or protection seems to have served two purposes: it humiliated them, and it physically represented a woman losing her covering or protection, both forcing and allowing her to seek a new identity. Christina battled with her family and her community over the freedom to follow her calling, which

¹⁵¹ The shift is an undergarment worn during the Middle Ages by men and women. It was typically the only piece of clothing regularly washed.

¹⁵² Anonymous, *The Life*, 72-73.

led her parents to seek every possible resource to prevent her from entering a monastery. Auti became so enraged with his own impotence regarding his daughter and his inability to control her that he stripped her and sent her away. Thus, Christina leaves Auti's house, his covering, exposed and naked. This event marks a transition in the manuscript; from this point, the author's description of Christina as masculine becomes much more explicit.

A Soldier of Christ

In medieval culture, images of the rugged soldier marching across the battlefield epitomize manhood. Soldiers theoretically embody the essence of hegemonic masculinity; they are physically strong, brave, and disciplined. A soldier bears the responsibility of effectively leading an army to victory or submitting to the authority of a commander. It was on the bloody battlefields where many men, of a high enough status, proved their manhood. Ecclesiastical leaders and writers from the crusades to the twenty-first century claim that true Christian men proved their manhood by becoming soldiers for Christ. Their sentiments mirror the work of the early Church Fathers, like Saint Ambrose and Augustine of Hippo.

The Church Fathers explored issues of warfare and violence, as they appeared to contradict Christ's message of peace and pacifism. Their early works became the framework the Church used to create the justification for war, or *jus ad bellum*, and delineate the conduct within war, or *jus in bello*. The *jus ad bellum* became the driving force behind the Crusades in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. The first

crusade occurred between 1095 and 1099, during the time of Christina's birth.¹⁵³

Christian men became soldiers, led out east to take the Holy Land back from Seljuk Turks; eventually the image of these holy men taking up weapons in the name of God became synonymous with Christian righteousness.¹⁵⁴

Within the domain of the physical world, the Just War doctrine allowed men to take up arms in the name of Christ. In the realm of the spiritual world, many medieval Christians believed that a battle between good and evil waged and that Christ called upon his followers to fight, which allowed religious men to become spiritual soldiers of Christ. It allowed religious men in the Middle Ages a way to demonstrate masculine qualities that mimicked the strength, bravery, and discipline of secular men. Even a pacifist monastic, like Roger the Hermit, who rejected physical violence, could demonstrate a militaristic masculine identity by engaging in spiritual warfare, fighting in the name of Christ much like the Crusaders who shed blood for the same cause.

During the Middle Ages, women did not typically don military garb and fight on the battlefields with their fathers and husbands, and women who did often disguised themselves as men first. Military and spiritual soldiers thus evoked images of masculinity, not femininity. Christina, who defied her family, and her betrothed, demonstrated courage in the face of adversity as well as moral fortitude. Eventually, her contemporaries and the author of her hagiography would describe her struggles as spiritual warfare, and because she successfully defeated her enemies, her hagiographer

¹⁵³ Jonathan Riley Smith, *The Oxford History of the Crusades* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 390-395.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Siberry, "Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 363-384; Marcus Bull, "Origins," in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, 15-34.

describes her as a soldier of Christ, just as other writers have similarly described pious men.

While living in Auti's house, Christina engaged in constant battles with her father. Auti expected that Christina would comply with his demands and become the submissive daughter he desired. Christina remained resolute, and angry at her obstinacy, Auti drove her from his house. Eventually, Auti remembered Christina's value and went after her, bringing her back to his house. Fearful that she may be forced to marry, abused, or raped, Christina fled to her friend, Eadwin, who consulted Ralph d'Escures, the Archbishop of Canterbury, on how to help Christina flee from her family. The Archbishop questioned Christina's honor and piety. He did not believe in Christina's innocence. Eadwin countered the criticisms by lauding her masculine virtue and portrayed an image of her as a soldier rather than a lustful woman. The author writes that Eadwin claimed,

Tunc ille verus Dei servus super angustiis afflicte virginis ingemuit. Ceterum de perseverancia eiusdem fortissimo militis Deo gracias.

Then, the true servant of God, grieved over the anguish and afflictions of the virgin, but also gave thanks to God for her perseverance as a gallant soldier of God.¹⁵⁵

Eadwin defended the honor of Christina by calling her a *fortissimo militis Deo*, gallant soldier of God. The root Latin word *fortissimo*, *fortis*, literally means strong, powerful, robust, moral, brave, and steadfast, characteristics idealized in the Middle Ages as

¹⁵⁵ Anonymous, *The Life*, 84-85.

masculine qualities. Thus, the author defends Christina's honor and reputation by calling her manly.

Earlier in the manuscript, the author portrays the feminine character as weak, fickle, and submissive, claiming that Christina's enemies often mistook her calculating nature for feminine weakness. Sueno initially believed the rumors that Christina married Burthred and cursed her for her womanish inconstancy, or *muliebris inconstancie*. However, the author reveals that after proving her commitment to God, by enduring painful anguish, she had become a soldier of God and thus convinced the Archbishop of her innocence and moral fortitude, which Eadwin claimed qualified her as ideal man. The Archbishop blessed Eadwin's efforts to help Christina escape, and Christina, shrouded in the garments of a man, fled from Auti's house.

The author deliberately mentions that Christina's escape happened because she chose to disguise herself as a man. The mention of Christina's masculine garments seems to represent a physical transformation. The author writes,

*Sumptisque clanculo vestimentis virilibus que preparaverat sibi et eludens in sexum cappa talari exivit foras.*¹⁵⁶

Secretly she put on the masculine garments, which she had prepared earlier, and set out, swathed in a long cloak that reached the ground.¹⁵⁷

Though controversial, women's donning of men's clothing occurs in nearly every era of history. Jeanne d'Arc, or Joan of Arc, successfully led an army of men while dressed in male military garb which she adopted after Jesus appeared to her and commanded her to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 90-91.

¹⁵⁷ This is my translation.

lead the French against the English. After her arrest, Joan of Arc's captors stripped her of her male clothing, leaving her as a helpless woman in her cell.¹⁵⁸ Leslie Feinberg posits that Joan of Arc's decision to wear men's clothing not only offered her protection against molestation but also represented a gender transformation.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Christina cloaked herself in male clothing in order to escape stealthily; however, the author's decision to include this detail of her getaway suggests that the masculine garb provides further evidence of her transformation into the male sex.

A second element of this metamorphosis occurred while Christina was escaping and suggests that not only did Christina shroud herself in a male persona, she also shed a significant piece of her feminine self. As she escaped, her sister, Matilda, saw her and inquired about the suspicious exit and a piece of fabric trailing from Christina's cloak. Christina picked up the piece of fabric, handed it to her sister, claiming her veil had fallen loose.¹⁶⁰ The author writes,

*Quid est hoc Theodora unde verris terram? At illa blande dixit ad eam. Cara michi soror accipe, regrediensque deferto domum quoniam impedit me. Et baiulavit illi bombicinum clavesque patris: dicens. Et has partier dulcis michi anima.*¹⁶¹

'What is this dragging on the ground Theodora'? But she said to her innocently, 'my dear sister, take this with you when you go back to the house, it is getting in my way,' and she handed her the veil and the keys to her father's house.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Polly Schoyer Brooks, *Beyond the Myth: The Story of Joan of Arc* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 112-118.

¹⁵⁹ Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 31-37.

¹⁶⁰ Anonymous, *The Life*, 90-91.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² This is my translation.

During the Middle Ages, women commonly wore veils over their hair as an act of modesty and sign of femininity.¹⁶³ Rather than glossing over Christina's encounter with Matilda, the author chose to include the story of the veil because it exemplified Christina's transformation. As she exited her father's home, Christina literally and intentionally shed the quintessential symbol of her womanhood. Heading towards her new life, she managed to escape because she cloaked herself in masculinity and left behind the trailing remnants of her femininity.

Leaving behind her veil, Christina continued her escape on horseback, pausing in fear for only a moment before remembering her masculine fortitude. The author writes,

*Quid sexum feminei vereris? Virilem animum indue. Et more in equum ascende. Dehinc abiecta pusillanimitate: viriliter super equum aliens atque calcaribus aius latera pungens faulo dixit sequere me a tergo. timeo ne si mecum equitaveri: deprehensis nobis tu moriaris.*¹⁶⁴

The servant asked, why do you have fear for the female sex? Put on manly courage and mount the horse like a man. Then, she put aside her fears and, mounting the horse manfully, said to the servant, 'Follow me from behind. I am afraid that if you rode with me, they would kill you if they discovered us.'¹⁶⁵

While Christina prepared the horses for her escape, her cloak fell and revealed part of her body. Quickly realizing she was exposed, Christina covered herself, and Eadwin's servant, Loric, retorts, '*quid sexum feminei vereris?*' or 'why do you fear the feminine sex?'¹⁶⁶ This statement suggests that Loric, through the author's interpretation,

¹⁶³ Janet Snyder, "From Content to Form: Court Clothing in Mid-Twelfth-Century Northern French Sculpture", in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, and Images*, eds. Désirée Koslin and Janet E. Snyder (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 85–101.

¹⁶⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 92.

¹⁶⁵ This is my translation.

acknowledged Christina's female form but questioned her shame when she tried to cover up. Christina's physical form no longer held any significance; she abandoned her former life to follow Christ and left behind any reason to feel shame in her exposed body, revealing that Loric saw Christina as rising above her physical body.

Loric commanded her to adopt her new role. He stated, '*Virilem animum indue. Et more in equum ascende*' or 'put on the courage of a man and mount that horse like a man.' This statement reveals the author's vision of Christina through Loric's eyes. Christina's ability to act courageously like a man overcame the weakness inherent in her female body, and she was able to mount the horse like a man. Christina did, according to the author, manfully mount the horse. She then commanded her male companion to follow her. Christina had become the brave leader, and like a commander in battle, she ordered Loric to follow behind her so that if danger found them she would be the one to die. Masculine underpinnings pervade this paragraph, reinforcements that suggest that the author intends to demonstrate Christina's masculinity and her divine ability to overcome her weak and cowardly feminine body.

Despite her parent's best efforts, Christina remained a virgin and avoided marriage. Her dedication to serving Christ brought her a great deal of physical pain; however, the author clearly illustrates that Christina's pious devotion afforded her the opportunity to escape. Through wit, courage, and strength, Christina evaded her captors and eventually escaped her father's home, never to return. The author carefully points

¹⁶⁶ Talbot, Fanous, and Leyser translate the word *vereris* to mean "respect" I believe that the literal interpretation of the word, which is "fear", represents a more accurate translation of the manuscript because the following text suggests that Eadwine does not question why Christina respects her feminine sex, but rather why she is afraid of it being exposed. Fanous and Leyser used the term "respect" instead of "fear" in their 2008 translation however, they expanded the text and included the phrase "overcome with embarrassment" to explain why Eadwine questioned Christina's modesty. Again in this sense, the term "fear" is more accurate and therefore a better translation of the text.

out that by donning a man's cloak, Christina passed from her life as a daughter and as a wife into a soldier, a leader, and a man. Loric commanded her to "mount that horse like a man," and with little hesitation, Christina assumed her masculine position at the front of the line and led the male servant away from harm. This moment of Christina's life, these pages of the manuscript, represent her physical and metaphoric transition out of womanhood and into a life where Christina assumed a masculine identity that empowered her beyond the bounds of her sex.

CHAPTER FOUR: MANLY WOMAN OF GOD

Christina as Man, Christina as Woman

After making a successful escape, Christina began her life as a monastic, spending most of her life in seclusion. At St. Alban's Christina conversed only with a few close friends and consulted with a few powerful men. During her life of religious isolation, Christina gained notoriety and admiration. Her efforts to escape her father's home, and her remarkable discipline and extraordinary mystical encounters, caused influential men like Roger the Hermit and Geoffrey, the abbot of St. Alban's, to seek her guidance and wisdom. The author suggests that up until the point of escape, Christina's extraordinary bravery, strength, and rationality allowed her to assume an increasingly masculine identity. As she spent the remainder of her life as a recluse and a mystic, the author claims that Christina managed to personify masculine strength and wisdom while simultaneously exemplifying feminine nurturance and compassion. She becomes both man and woman.

After successfully fleeing her father's house, Christina arrived at Flamstead in the late afternoon, meeting the anchoress Alfwen, who offered Christina new clothes and a new identity. To make her escape, Christina's hagiographer exemplifies the importance of her ability to imbue masculine qualities both in action and appearance. Christina spent the entirety of her journey to Flamstead, a small village near Hertfordshire, in her masculine attire, but as soon as she arrived at a hermitage in Flamstead, the anchoress

handed her a habit.¹⁶⁷ The author writes,

Illic a venerabili inclusa Alfwen suscepta Christina cum gaudio. eadem die pro religionis habitu asperam induebatur tunicam que sericis vestimentis et delicatis variarum pelliciarum deliciis in patris domo consueverat uti.

There, she was greeted by Alfwen, the venerable anchoress, and on that same day Christina put on the religious habit, and she, who had been accustomed to silk gowns and luxurious fur and leather in her father's house, was now clothed in a rough garment.¹⁶⁸

The changing of her garment signifies the continuation of the transition Christina began when she left her father's house, where she had access to luxury and where men and women defined their gender and physical status through physical adornment. Now at the monastery, the lines between male and female continued to blur.

Christina spent the first years of her ascetic life in a tiny cell within the walls of the hermitage at Flamstead. Clothed in those garments, according to her hagiographer, Christina found the strength to survive by emulating King David of the Old Testament. This additional comparison to David strengthens Christina's image as masculine. The author states that Christina drew strength from the thirty-seventh chapter of *Psalms*, praying often,

Domine ante te omne desiderium meum.

All my desire is before thee, O Lord.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ The habit was the traditional garment worn by male and female monastics. Both usually wore tunics which looked similar. Male monastics wore hoods, and female monastics wore veils. The author is unclear if Christina wore a hood or a veil.

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous, *The Life*, 92-93.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid; *Psalms* 37:10 (Latin Vulgate).

The author did not know exactly how Christina prayed during her time in quiet solitude. His assumptions suggest that Christina whispered the same prayer that King David offered when faced with uncertainty. In this way, the author is once again paralleling Christina's experience with that of a notable, male figure from the Old Testament.

While in seclusion, Christina experienced little of the outside world, according to the author. Seclusion afforded her several vivid spiritual encounters, encounters which challenged her to continue to "act like a man." During one such experience Christina envisioned herself standing in a swamp, surrounded by threatening bullfrogs.¹⁷⁰ Christina became frightened, fearing that the menacing bullfrogs would tear her to pieces. As she gazed upon the sight she heard a voice,

*Si in loco tuo solide steteris omnem istarum beluarum feritatem frustra timebis.
Sin autem abieris retrorsum eadem hora cades in potestatem earum.*¹⁷¹

If you stand firmly in your place, you will not fear the savagery of the beasts. But if you go back one step, at that very moment you will fall into their power.¹⁷²

This excerpt mimics earlier passages in which the author suggests that Christina's masculine bravery saves her from harm. Christina assumed that same courage and strength she exhibited when she hid behind the tapestry as Ranulph searched for her, and again when she mounted the horse like a man and rode to Flamstead. Though implicit, the author's comments suggest that the heavenly voice reminded Christina that she must reject all feminine cowardice and continue to demonstrate bravery, a masculine virtue.

¹⁷⁰ Anonymous, *The Life*, 98-99.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 99.

¹⁷² This is my translation.

For two years, Christina remained at the hermitage in Flamstead as a recluse. Eventually word reached Roger the Hermit, a monk at St. Alban's who knew of Christina's story, and he sent for the woman who would become his closest friend. After arriving, Christina settled into a tiny cell attached to Roger's room. During her time living next to Roger, Christina reportedly suffered countless ailments and suffering. She described each experience to Roger as an opportunity to seek the grace and comfort of God.¹⁷³ The author writes,

*ait anglico sermone. my sunendaege dohter. quod latine dicitur. mea dominice diei filia. eo quod ceteris omnibus quas Christo genuerat aut nutrierat.*¹⁷⁴

In English, he called her: 'myn sundaege daohter;' in Latin it meant, 'my daughter of the Lord's day.' Because he esteemed her more than any other he had begotten and nursed in Christ.¹⁷⁵

Roger explicitly called Christina his daughter, not his son, which suggests that though Christina embodied many of the qualities of an ideal man, Roger still saw her as a woman. Christina maintained aspects of her femininity, or at the very least, the physical attributes of her womanhood, while exemplifying masculine gender characteristics. Her body remained female, yet her hagiographer perceives her religious experience and performance as more male. Because medieval men and women perceived sex as fluid, Christina lived as both man and woman. This passage also reveals the complicated nature of gender and sex in the Middle Ages because the author suggests that Roger acted as both Christina's spiritual father and mother because he both begot and nursed her in

¹⁷³ Anonymous, *The Life*, 104-105.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 106-107.

¹⁷⁵ This is my translation.

Christ. In this way, Roger becomes both female and male while Christina becomes both male and female.

Recognizing the disparity of their ages and the possibility that Christina would outlive him, Roger the Hermit wanted to make provisions for Christina so, in the event of his death, she would remain protected. Roger brought Christina to Redbourn to meet Archbishop Thurstan, who took immediate notice of Christina's devotion to Christ.¹⁷⁶ After meeting Christina, Archbishop Thurstan officially annulled Burthred's claim of marriage and promised Roger that he would keep Christina in safe keeping. After making his promise, Thurstan sent Christina back to Roger's hermitage, and she remained there until Roger's death.¹⁷⁷

Throughout the manuscript, the author noted various occasions when Christina acted more masculine than other men and moments where her actions caused her contemporaries to esteem her above all other women. After Roger's death, Christina took refuge with an unnamed cleric.¹⁷⁸ For the first time in her life, according to the manuscript, Christina developed strong feelings of lust for the cleric, and he returned those feelings. The portion of the manuscript that details this event supports the author's depiction of Christina as a man and implies that her fortitude and strength of will saved her and elevated her above the cleric and man of God.

Initially, Christina and the cleric enjoyed a chaste and platonic friendship, but that quickly changed. The author states that the cleric allowed Satan to change his heart, and

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous. *The Life*, 112-113.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ The author refuses to name the cleric to protect the man. This suggests that the manuscript was written during Christina's lifetime or very soon after her death.

soon Christina's beauty overwhelmed him.¹⁷⁹ He pursued Christina, and she felt an overwhelming desire to give in to her flesh. However, the author asserts that she drew strength from her masculine resolve and resisted the cleric's advances. The author writes,

*Unde nonunquam virum illam non feminam esse dicebat quem virago virtute virile predita recte effeminatum appellare poterat.*¹⁸⁰

Whence, it could be said that she was not a woman but a man and she, endowed with her masculine qualities, could more rightly call him effeminate.¹⁸¹

In this phrase, the author explicitly calls Christina a man because she resisted the temptation of lust. Subsequently, Christina's masculine actions challenged the cleric's manhood, effectively emasculating him. Christina's manly behavior further supports the argument made by current scholars who claim that rigid self-discipline and chastity defined masculine virtue. Furthermore, it illustrates how men and women could shift their position on Laqueur's one-sex/one-flesh model based on the gendered roles they fulfilled.

Along with explicitly calling Christina a man in this passage, the author again maintains that Christina was above other men. When she outwitted Ranulph, Christina proved her ability to win a battle of wits and rhetorically dominate men; the author praises her for this feat. When Sueno rejected her for her feminine inconstancy, Christina remained firm in her devotion and faithfulness to God; the author commends Christina for being more of a man than Sueno. When faced with the temptation of lust, the author

¹⁷⁹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 114-115.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ This is my translation.

reiterates Christina's ability to out-man the men in her life, both secular and religious.

Karras claims that an important component of transitioning from adolescent boyhood to manhood involved surpassing other men in shows of masculinity.¹⁸² The author attests to three separate men and instances that Christina, though a woman, triumphed in tests of masculinity. She was a better man than they.

Furthering the testament to Christina's manly behavior, the author explicates the details of Christina's temptation, which suggest that in the author's eyes, Christina transcended any boundaries between both the male and female. The author writes,

*Vis scire quam viriliter ipsa se continuerit in tam grandi periculo? Violenter respuebat desideria sue carnis. Ne propria membra exhiberet adversum se arma iniquitatis.*¹⁸³

Do you want to know how very much like a man she behaved in such great danger? She violently resisted the desires of the flesh, lest her own members become the agents of wickedness against her.¹⁸⁴

The phrase, *viriliter ipsa*, explicitly means that Christina behaved like a man. Laqueur and Cadden argue that during the Middle Ages what one did and how one did it largely determined how medieval populations perceived the sex of the doer. Therefore, if Christina behaved or acted masculine, her hagiographer likely saw her as a man.

Furthermore, the statement, *Violenter respuebat desideria sue carnis*, claims that she violently resisted her fleshly desires. Lochrie argues that medieval theologians believed that the essential limitations of the female sex did not allow them to resist their flesh,

¹⁸² Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 67-70.

¹⁸³ Anonymous, *The Life*, 114-115.

¹⁸⁴ This is my translation; I believe that the word "members" refers to Christina's physical body, or the parts of her body that represented sex, though in most cases "member" refers to male anatomy, not female.

which is probably why the author refers to the cleric as effeminized because he, a man, could not resist.¹⁸⁵

Christina proved to the cleric and the men and women who would hear her story that she could rise above the limitations of her sex by harnessing the strengths of masculinity, which led other religious men and women sought out her wisdom and blessing. During the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon for religious women to offer religious guidance. Prioresses, anchoresses, and nuns often did so as nurturers and mothers of the church.¹⁸⁶ Both Hildegard von Bingen and Hilda of Whitby served in similar influential roles. Mysticism, according to scholar Elizabeth Petroff, allowed women to emerge as leaders.¹⁸⁷

What distinguishes Christina of Markyate and lends credence to my argument that her contemporaries perceived her as masculine, however, is that she was allowed to live among men in an all-male religious institution. Women such as Hildegard, Hilda and Julian of Norwich may have been sought out for their religious wisdom and insight, but they lived among women—either in an all-female monastery or a mixed monastery—or alone in isolated cells. Religious leaders generally considered women living amongst men too dangerous. The sexual temptations were too great. But Christina lived side by side with men, even after the specter of physical desire arose between her and the unnamed cleric mentioned above. Possible explanations include that the male monks did

¹⁸⁵ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe*, 23-24.

¹⁸⁶ Anneke B. Mulder, "Introduction," in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-13.

¹⁸⁷ Elizabeth A. Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

not consider her to be fully a woman, and thus Christina was not the sexual temptation other women might be.

Christina's reputation spread to other monasteries. The Archbishop of York sent for Christina on several occasions and tried to get her to enter Marcigny-les-Nonnains or Fontevrault, both monastic communities founded for women.¹⁸⁸ Christina refused; she did not want to leave St. Alban's, the home of the saint she identified with and the man who had spiritually nurtured her. The author writes,

*Illa vero preelegit nostrum monasterium. tum quia egregius athleta Christi Albanus in eo requiescit corporaliter. quem pre ceteris sibi dilectis martiribus amabat specialiter. tum quia Rogerus heremita fuerat inde monachus et in eo sepultus.*¹⁸⁹

But she chose our monastery, St. Alban's. Both because the body of the celebrated martyr rested there, whom she loved and admired above all others, and also because it was the home of Roger the Hermit who was also buried there.¹⁹⁰

Christina desired to stay where Roger had groomed and mentored her into becoming the manly woman of God the author celebrates. The author does not describe any interaction between Christina and the other women at St. Alban's. Perhaps, Christina refused to commune with the women at St. Alban's because she did not identify with her feminine side. Though no explicit evidence exists to support this, the author hardly mentions Christina's experience with the anchoress Alfwen while she lived in Flamstead; conversely the author delves into the intimate details of her relationship with Roger, suggesting that Christina identified with holy men more than holy women.

¹⁸⁸ Anonymous, *The Life*, 126-127.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ This is my translation.

Christina lived the rest of her life as a revered monastic anchoress and respected religious leader. Sometime in 1131 she made her monastic profession at St. Alban's before Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln.¹⁹¹ She formed a deep and meaningful friendship with Geoffrey, the abbot of St. Alban's, and he sought her council and guidance on many issues. Before Geoffrey traveled to the Roman Curia to champion the rights of the Church, he sought Christina's wisdom and blessing.¹⁹² The author believes that God blessed Christina with foresight and dreams to protect Geoffrey, and he in turn protected his friend.¹⁹³ Christina lived among the men at St. Alban's until the end of her life sometime between 1155 and 1166. In the midst of the author's description of Christina's relationship with Abbot Geoffrey after he returns from Rome, the manuscript ends suddenly, either because a fire in 1731 destroyed the remainder, or because the anonymous author never finished it. The incomplete manuscript remains an invaluable resource for scholars, regardless of its abrupt ending, because of what it reveals about the nature of gender, sex, and religion in the Middle Ages.

By the end of the manuscript, the author makes a clear distinction that he perceived Christina's experiences and performances defied the constraints of her sex, challenged the authority of her parents, her leaders, and her husband, and allowed her to become a manly woman of God. Christina met the fear of escaping her father's house with manly bravery. During her time in seclusion, Christina called out for strength from God and emulated the masculine resolve of King David. When challenged with lustful

¹⁹¹ Anonymous, *The Life*, 15.

¹⁹² Ibid, 160-165.

¹⁹³ Anonymous, *The Life*, 156-157.

temptation, Christina manfully resisted, even when her Christian male counterpart was unable to. Christina met and challenged each obstacle in her adult life with bravery, integrity, and honor, qualities the powerful male religious leaders in her community lauded as truly masculine. By the end of the manuscript, the author notes that her manful behavior allowed powerful religious leaders to seek out Christina's wisdom and guidance, transforming her into a respected and celebrated manly woman of God.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

My intention is not to rescue a little-known historical figure from obscurity; rather, I hope to illustrate how the pages of Christina's manuscript contain keys to a better understanding of issues of sex, gender, and religion in the Middle Ages. Talbot, the first to unveil the mysteries of Christina's life, believed that her relationship with Roger the Hermit and Geoffrey the Abbot spoke to her faithfulness as a Christian.¹⁹⁴ He published his original translation of her life in 1959, decades before feminist and gender historians unraveled the complexities of women's religious experiences or attempt to tease out the nuances of masculinities from historical records. In the later translation by Leyser and Fanous, gender entered the dialogue as an afterthought. Even when Christina of Markyate appears in current scholarship, historians briefly mention her in a few short pages and pay no attention to the explicitly stated masculine interpretations of her behavior by her contemporaries in the manuscript. Scholars have not examined the experiences of other more well-known mystics like Hildegard von Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and Catherine of Sienna as uniquely masculine. However, these women also experienced similar obstacles and also faced illness and fear with bravery; many men looked to them as legitimate leaders; and therefore they too fit the qualities of manly women. This alone justifies this gendered study of Christina's life.

Christina of Markyate's life reveals a tumultuous transition, from a young timid girl into a righteous and brave manly woman. Laqueur's, and later Cadden's,

¹⁹⁴ Anonymous, *The Life*, 1-12.

investigation into the nature of sex and gender suggests that because of medical and scientific understandings of gender and sex, masculine and feminine were not rigid categories. Laqueur claims that, by and large, gendered actions determined how men and women perceived biological sex, and though she disagrees with some of Laqueur's conclusions, Cadden concurs with this assertion. Therefore, every time the author of Christina's life compares her to a man, or calls her behavior masculine, the author exemplifies the inherent fluidity of sex during the Middle Ages. Modern interpretations of gender may suggest that Christina jumped from female to male. However, as the author suggests in the manuscript, Christina often simultaneously assumed masculine and feminine traits, benefitting from the virtues of both. I believe that in acting like a man, or assuming a masculine gender, Christina's contemporaries believed that she was also transformed into the male sex, if only partially. This allowed her contemporaries to perceive her as both a man and a woman.

Christina's dedication to God and her religious performances enabled her ability to assume attributes of both sexes. Had she chosen to marry Burthred, have his children, and keep his home, she would have likely remained in Huntingdonshire, known only as the daughter of Auti and wife of Burthred. Because she rejected the covering and protection of her father and the security of her husband, Christina rebelled against the male leadership that defined submissive femininity. Instead, Christina opted to follow a religious vocation, proving that she was brave, rational, righteous, and self-disciplined. These are qualities and characteristics that current historians believe defined masculinity in the Middle Ages. The medieval author of the manuscript specifically names these qualities as manful, masculine, or mannish. Rather than claiming Christina assumed a

third gender, I believe that because of medieval medical theory, Christina successfully assumed both sexes and performed both genders. Because sex existed along a single continuum on which movement was possible, this interpretation is justified.

The manuscript of Christina's life represents a small thread of a much larger tapestry. The burgeoning field of gender studies requires that historians revisit familiar sources to unmask the truths of masculinity, femininity, and their interpretations and overlaps. Most of Christina's experiences are not unique. The nature of women's religiosity, when their experiences are re-examined under the lens of masculinity, reveals that part of achieving religious adoration meant that women became masculine. Both Hilda of Whitby and Hildegard von Bingen represent cases where women assumed roles that challenged normative gender standards. There is a layer of women's mystical experience that medieval societies perceived as largely masculine. By explicating the masculine and feminine nature of Christina's experience, her life serves as an example of how experiences, performances, and roles had the power to transform perceptions of gender and sex within the religious realm and perhaps the secular realm as well.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published Primary Sources

- Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. ed. by Patrick J. Gallacher. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Medieval Press, 1997.
- Anonymous. *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse*. ed. and trans. by C. H. Talbot. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Anonymous. *The Life of Christina of Markyate*. ed. by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, trans. by C. H. Talbot. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Augustine. *The Passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicity*. In *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1998.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. ed. by Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor. Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012.
- Geddes, Jane. *St. Alban's Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. ed. by Grace Harriet Warrack. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1901.
- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe, 1436*. ed. W. Butler-Bowdon, introduction by RW Chambers. London: Jonathan Cape, 1936.
- Rolle, Richard and Richard Misyn. *The Fire of Love and The Mending of Life*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.

Secondary Sources

- Atkinson, Clarissa W. *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

- Bartlett, Robert. *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994.
- Biedler, Peter G. *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*. Cambridge, MA: D. S. Brewer Publishing, 1998.
- Bitel, Lisa M., ed. *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe, New Perspectives*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Christian Era to the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Boyd, Stephen B., ed., et al. *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Brooks, Polly Schoyer. *Beyond the Myth: The Story of Joan of Arc*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999.
- Brown, David. *God of Grace and Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Brooke, Christopher. *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages*. Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring Press, 2003.
- Brunn, Emilie Zum. *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House Books, 1998.
- Bull, Marcus. "Origins." in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*. ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: MIT Press, 1991.
- . *Holy Feast and Holy Fast, The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

- , *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Cadden, Joan. *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993
- Carpenter, David. *The Struggle for Mastery: The Penguin History of Great Britain, 1066-1284*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Chibnall, Marjorie. *Anglo-Norman England, 1066-1166*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.
- Coakley, Sarah. *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Cohen, Jeffery and Bonnie Wheeler, eds. *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997.
- Collis, Louise. *Memoirs of a Medieval Woman: The Life and Times of Margery Kempe*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.
- Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Coon, Lynda L. *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Crane, Susan. *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Crocker, Holly A. *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Cullum, P. H. and J.K Lewis. *Holiness and Masculinities in the Middle Ages*. London, University of Wales Press, 2005.
- Dinshaw, Carol. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Elkins, Sharon K. *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Elliot, Dyan. *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Fanou, Samuel and Henrietta Leyser, eds. *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

- Farmer, Sharon A. *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Fletcher, Anthony. *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Flinders, Carol L. *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.
- Furlong, Monica. *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics*. Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1996.
- Gilchrist, Roberta. *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Gilmore, David. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Goodman, Anthony. *Margery Kempe and Her World*. New York: Longman Press, 2002.
- Hadley, D. M., ed. *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*. New York: Addison Wesley, 1998.
- Hamilton, Janice. *The Norman Conquest of England*. Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Heffernan, Thomas J. *Sacred Hagiography: Saints and Their Hagiographers in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Hendrix, Scott H. and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, eds. *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008.
- Herbert McAvoy, Liz. *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*. Woodbridge: D.S Brewer, 2004.
- , *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life*. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2011.
- Jantzen, Grace M. *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Jewett, Paul King. *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Laskaya, Anne. *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Laven, Mary. *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.
- Lawrence, Christopher. *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages*. Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring Books, 2003.
- Lees, Clare A., ed. *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Licence, Tom. *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950-1200*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Lochrie, Karma. *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- MacHaffie, Barbara J. *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006.
- Martos, Joseph. *Equal at the Creation: Sexism, Society, and Christian Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Masi, Michael. *Chaucer and Gender*. New York : Peter Lang Publishing, 2005.
- Massey, Lesly. *Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meanings in the Christian West*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Mulder, Anneke B., ed. *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

- Mulder-Bakker, Anneke B. *Lives of the anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*. Trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Murray, Jacqueline, ed. *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1999.
- Neal, Derek G. *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008.
- Neuburger, Verena E. *Margery Kempe: a Study in Early English Feminism*. New York: P. Lang, 1994.
- Peters, Christine. "Gender, Sacrament and Ritual: The Making and Meaning of Marriage in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe." *Past and Present*, 2000: 63-96.
- Perry, Ray C., ed. *Late Medieval Mysticism*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957.
- Petroff, Elizabeth Alvilda, ed. *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- , *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Phillips, Kim M. and Barry Reay. *Sex Before Sexuality: A Pre-modern History*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011.
- Pleck, Joseph H. *The Myth of Masculinity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.
- Powell, Raymond A. "Margery Kempe: An Exemplar of Late Medieval English Piety." *The Catholic Historical Review*, June 2003: 1-23.
- Prior, Mary, ed. *Women in English Society*. London: Methuen and Company, 1985.
- Ranft, Patricia. *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Reeser, Todd W. *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2010.
- Rigby, S. H. *Chaucer in Context: Society, Allegory, and Gender*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

- Roman, Christopher. *Domestic Mysticism in Margery Kempe and Dame Julian of Norwich: the Transformation of Christian Spirituality in the Late Middle Ages*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2005.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Siberry, Elizabeth. "Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*. ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith . New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Smith, Jonathan Riley. *The Oxford History of the Crusades*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Snyder, Janet. "From Content to Form: Court Clothing in Mid-Twelfth-Century Northern French Sculpture." in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, and Images*. eds. Désirée Koslin and Janet E. Snyder. New York: Macmillan, 2002.
- Stouck, Mary-Ann, ed. *Medieval Saints: A Reader*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1998.
- Staley, Lynn. *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Sturges, Robert Stuart. *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Swan, Laura. *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Thomas, Hugh. *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066- 1220*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Tibbetts-Schulenburg, Jane. *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, 500-1100*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Venarde, Bruce L. *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Volz, Carl A. *The Medieval Church: From the Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Wiesner-Hanks, Merry. *Christianity and Sexuality* . London: Routledge, 2000.