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**FROM STASIS TO ECSTASY:
TRACING BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX'S "QUEER" INFLUENCE ON
FRENCH GOTHIC ART**

BY

JACKSON LARSON

B.A., Liberal Arts, Saint John's College, 2016

M.A., Museum Studies, University of New Mexico, 2019

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Art History

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ABSTRACT

I trace the progression of figural sculpture in the Latin West from the *static* statues of the late-tenth century to the *ecstatic* statues of the mid-thirteenth century. I explore the various reasons for the return of freestanding figural sculpture and suggest that the return is indicative of an eroticization of the Christian holy figures. Bernard of Clairvaux's erotic theology precipitated a flood of Dionysian devotional imagery in Cistercian monasteries across France and Germany. I suggest that Bernard of Clairvaux's erotic theology in the twelfth century resulted in a synthesis of *eros* and Christian devotion that allowed latent classicism to find purchase in Christian art. I submit that Bernard's influence on European art is a form of "queering"—a process by which hegemonic structures are subverted or augmented. I draw from the work of art historians Kenneth Clark, Leo Steinberg, and historian Stephen Moore, to suggest that the artistic

breakthroughs in the thirteenth century were heavily influenced by Bernard's erotic mysticism. I draw upon the work of medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum to trace the ontological and theological shifts that allowed for such transgressive depictions of the body in the thirteenth century. I argue that, prior to Bernard's influence, depictions of the glorified body primarily referenced the *resurrected* body, whereas in thirteenth century depictions of the glorified body increasingly began to make reference to the *prelapsarian* body. I trace the eroticization of European art in the thirteenth century to the influence of chivalric culture, Bernard's "queer" theology, and the evolving doctrine of the glorified body.

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INTRODUCTION

Art is the most passionate orgy within man's grasp.

— John Donne

The path to paradise begins in hell.

—Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*

The art and theology of the Middle Ages attempted to fix and control the forces of desire and decay—to still the writhing, undulating, turbulent passions once and forever.¹ Reliquaries and tomb effigies of the period enshrined the end of change itself.² Ascetic practice sought to make the body static, incorruptible, jewel-like.³ Stasis held the promise of immortality and eternal life.⁴ Listen closely, however, and one can still make out a Dionysian drum beat, barely audible, beneath this brittle crystalline facade—the interminable rhythms of sex, death,

1. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body In Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 111.

2. *Ibid.*, 175-76.

3. *Ibid.*, 178-79.

4. *Ibid.*, 230.

and Nature babbling and gurgling like a river under ice.⁵ In the twelfth century, the incantatory sound of Bernard of Clairvaux's (1090-1153) sensual prose added itself to this cacophony, forming cracks in the icy facade. Eventually, the dam broke. The river's pent up force burst forth, erupting in a frothy Dionysian elixir that spread across Europe like a tidal wave, finding its ultimate expression in the erotic, ecstatic, decadent art of the Renaissance.

Since primeval times, the human body has been a subject of art and a locus of Divine contemplation.⁶ The Middle Ages—a time marked by an absence of freestanding figural statues—was no exception.⁷ Historian Walter Otto suggests that before man created statues and images the living body was the artist's medium:

God, had, as yet, no history which could be related and imitated. His myth lived in cult activity, and the actions of *cultus* expressed in plastic form what He was and what He did. Before the faithful visualized the image of their god, and gave verbal expression to His life and works, He was so close to them that their spirit, touched by His breath, was aroused to Holy activity. With their own bodies they created His image. His living reality was mirrored in the solemnity of their actions long before this mute or inarticulate myth was made eloquent and poetic.⁸

5. For reasons that I hope will become obvious I have chosen to capitalize "Nature." Nature is associated with Dionysus—the God of madness, wine, vegetation, fluids, and fertility. Capitalizing Nature is my way of re-asserting the centrality of Dionysian forces in historical considerations.

6. Here, the term "primeval" refers to the dawn of cult activity, see Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), 7-46. Although sculpture is the primary focus of this paper, I mention cult activity in order to problematize our understanding of "art." Medieval art more closely resembles Hans Belting's conception of pre-Renaissance art whereby images invoked the presence of that which they depicted, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

7. I make a distinction between *sculptures* and *statues*. The word "statue," derives from the latin verb *stare*, meaning "to stand." The term emphasizes the three-dimensionality and individuation of the statue, i.e. that fact it literally and figuratively stands *by itself* without ligatures or external supports.

8. Walter F. Otto. *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 22.

So it was in the Middle Ages, as it was in primeval times, that when statues did not express God's form the living, breathing human body did. During the period when taboos around idolatry prevented sculptors from making human effigies the creative impulse was simply redirected so that it was enacted in the living body—in gestures, dances, processions, rituals, and ascetic practices. By means of incredible discipline, ascetics attempted to make their bodies as rarified as the gold and gems that decorated the reliquaries of saints.⁹ As relics, the bodies of the saints became the foci around which cult rituals turned. These ephemeral performances—the elegance and grace of courtly gesture, the solemnity of liturgical ritual—were vital art forms, the human body was their medium. In this way, artistic obsession with the human form never disappeared, however, much of the evidence did.

In the Middle Ages, taboos around idolatry largely prevented artists from sculpting the human form in the round. The lack of effigies from this period make it more difficult to conjure the vibrancy, brilliance, and theatricality of the time. One can find traces of the medieval body's dynamism, eroticism, and vitality in the statues of the thirteenth century. In France, the impish archangel statues at Reims Cathedral fawn about the Virgin Mary like Cleopatra's entourage of obsequious eunuchs, capturing the pomp and circumstance of court life.¹⁰ In Germany, the Naumburg master's statues, e.g. the iconic portrait of Uta von Ballenstedt (Fig. 1), look as though they were ripped from the pages of Vogue magazine. They are high fashion models in manner as well as attire. Just

9. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 178-79.

10. For a great portrayal of Cleopatra surrounded by her "obsequious eunuchs" see Janet Suzman as Cleopatra in "Antony and Cleopatra" by William Shakespeare (1974, TV). Directed by Jon Scoffield. Trevor Nunn Production. Royal Shakespeare Company's TV version. Act III. I find the Mary trumeau figure at Reims surrounded by her sexless angels to be reminiscent of this scene. In the play, Shakespeare makes a clear analogy between the mercurial queen Cleopatra and the Dionysian.

as the dynamic 1980's dance style "voguing" is a living embodiment of fashion photography, the Naumburg statues offer a snapshot of the kaleidoscopic forms that the living body took in the Middle Ages.

When freestanding sculpture finally returned to Europe it was deemed a "rediscovery" of classical forms, as if they had simply been misplaced. This explanation is only a half-truth. Classicism was not so much *rediscovered* as *rearticulated* in the Christian vernacular. Many scholars have taken issue with the idea that Christianity "conquered" paganism following Constantine's conversion.¹¹ Peter Brown was one of the first to problematize the idea of Christian "triumph" over pagan antiquity.¹² Ramsay MacMullen argues that the religious world of antiquity maintained its essential character only "under new



Figure 1
Uta von Ballenstedt
Naumburg Cathedral, West choir
Germany
c. 1245-1255

11. Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997)

12. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971)

management.”¹³ If the essential character of antiquity was never truly *lost* then it cannot be said to have been *re-discovered*.

“The West” can be broadly be defined as a cultural dialectic between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. I maintain that the Greco-Roman, that is to say the pagan, was never truly “conquered” by the Judeo-Christian. To be sure, early figural statues took inspiration from the art of antiquity, however, these artistic forms were abandoned for primarily ideological reasons. The reintroduction of figural statues was, therefore, the result of a complex renegotiation of the theological significance of the human body. Was the mortal body worthy of the praise that a sculptor’s hand lends? This question, driven on by an irrepressible desire to celebrate the body in art, led to a theological excavation of our origins. Man’s wretchedness had to be reconsidered.

The doctrine of the resurrection presumed that the perfect human body existed.¹⁴ The glorified resurrected body, refashioned by God, was a body free of wretchedness—a body that was unquestionably worthy of praise and emulation. This ideal, however, existed in a static vision of the afterlife, one that was far removed from the organic, dynamic, earthly body. This crystalline vision of the afterlife would have to be shattered before the earthly body could be fully embraced and celebrated in art. This process of redefining and “humanizing” the afterlife was slow, mounting in the twelfth century with the ideas of Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Saint Thierry, and and culminating in the fourteenth with Dante’s *Commedia*. All the while, the irrepressible process of re-negotiating

13. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 122.

14. The evolving doctrine of the resurrection can aptly be described as a discussion of the body’s *perfectibility* towards immortality. William of St. Thierry suggests that the body would have grown perfect in Paradise had man not eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, see William of St. Thierry, *On the Nature of Body and Soul*, bk. 2, cols. 710-12; trans. Déchanet, 100-7. Cited from Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 167.

Christian doctrine to allow for figural sculpture persisted. It seems that metaphors of God as sculptor and artificer, extant since the dawn of the Middle Ages, began to be more cleverly used to justify man's role as sculptor. Furthermore, figural reliquaries served as a kind of Trojan horse for the gradual reintroduction of figural statues.¹⁵

Early sculptures of the glorified resurrected body, however, were stiff and static. Furthermore, when the human body was depicted in sculpture it was subordinated to the Church. In cathedral relief sculptures, the human form was literally inextricable from the architecture. Reliquaries were freestanding, but they first took the form of caskets, sometimes in the shape of churches, and only gradually and cautiously did they begin to assume human form, first as dismembered limbs, and then slowly as fully formed human effigies.¹⁶ Symbolically speaking, the human body was seen as only a fragmented expression of Christ's assembled body—the Church.¹⁷ Individual identity was, therefore, often subordinated to this collective Christian identity.¹⁸ The late tenth century reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy (Fig. 2), one of the first fully formed human effigies in the Latin West, marks a great leap forward in representing the

15. Twelfth century theologians, like William of St. Thierry's, understanding of person as a "living statue" crafted by God allowed for a kind of redemption of figural sculpture as an act of mimetic devotion. For William's ideas of body as living statue, see William of St. Thierry. *On the Nature of the Body and Soul*, bk. 2, Pl 180, cols. 202-26, esp. cols. 710 and 717; trans. by J.-M. Dechant in *Oeuvres choisies de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry* (Paris: Aubier, 1943), 100-1 and 120-21. Cited from Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 166.

16. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 202. Bynum isolates the shift toward reliquaries shaped like fingers, feet, ribs, heads, etc. to the twelfth century, after 1150. The reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy, therefore, is a rare early example of a fully formed effigy.

17. *Ibid.*, 202.

18. Bynum notes that it was only in the twelfth century that theologians began to speak about individuality in the modern sense, e.g. individuation not as numerical difference but what we moderns mean by individuality (individual distinctiveness). Bynum. *The Resurrection of the Body*, 255. Footnote 108.

individuated human body, however, Sainte-Foy's chest is still depicted as a Gothic cathedral.¹⁹ By merging the human body with the body of the Church these effigies were less susceptible to accusations of pagan idolatry. My argument here relies on a close analogy between medieval identity and figural statues. I suggest that individuation of artistic representation of the body from two-dimensional relief sculpture to three-dimensional statues is indicative of an individuation of identity. Collective identity is preeminent when figural sculpture is subordinated to the Church edifice. The birth of "the individual" as a dominant mode of being runs parallel to the birth of freestanding figural statues.²⁰



Figure 2
Sainte Foy Reliquary Statue (Detail)
Conques, France
c. 1000, with Gothic additions

19. My decision to focus on the Latin West comes from a desire to understand and problematize the paradigm shift known as "the Renaissance" and "humanism." In order to truly understand this shift I have limited my inquiry to the Latin West. I define "the West" as a culture whose two most dominant forces are the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian. The "Latin West" is an abbreviation of that subsection of the West that can be distinguished from the Greek East or Byzantine.

20. Some exception can and will be made for reliquaries which follow a slightly different, though completely interrelated, progression.

Furthermore, I suggest that the liberation of the sculpted human form from the Church is also indicative of a sexual liberation. I maintain that the sculpted human form is erotic by nature. Medieval historian, Jan Ziolkowski, speaks of the “radical newness” of three-dimensional carvings of the Virgin and child in the Middle Ages.²¹ He notes that the term “statuesque” has a sexual connotation.²² He writes that, “we should know that the stirring beauty of the human figure when represented in the round can induce sexual arousal. The adjective *statuesque* connotes not only proportion and stateliness but also feminine comeliness in a curvaceously three-dimensional way.”²³ In this way, freestanding figural statues brushed up against taboos around temptation as well as taboos around pagan idolatry.

The return of freestanding sculpture to the Latin West ran parallel to the process of reintegrating *eros* with Christian devotional practice. I argue that the true sculptural breakthroughs in the thirteenth century occurred only in so far as there was a significant reconciliation of man’s carnal and divine natures. In antiquity, man’s carnal and divine natures were reconciled in the gods themselves, who were often endowed with insatiable libidos. How many Greek myths begin out of lust? Furthermore, the Greek’s maintained an ideal human body, primarily male, so beautiful that it often stole the gaze of the gods from their heavenly perch. The Renaissance restored the cult of male beauty to its preeminent position in society.²⁴ Endymion’s sweet surrender to sleep is replicated in Saint Sebastian’s surrender to arrows. Apollonian ideals of

21. Jan Ziolkowski, “Notre-Dame: The Virgin in Nineteenth-Century France” in *The Juggler of Notre-Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity: Volume 2: Medieval Meets Medievalism* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2018), 171.

22. *Ibid.*, 171.

23. *Ibid.*, 171.

24. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 73-4.

masculine perfection are reborn in depictions of Jesus and Adam.²⁵ From the sultry hip-swish of the *Kritios Boy*, to Bronzino's male-flesh-scapes, the art of antiquity and the Renaissance is a veritable banquet for the "queer eye."

The sexual permissiveness that seems to define the Roman world waned in the Christian Era.²⁶ The process of Christianization purged many of the pagan and homoerotic elements from art.²⁷ Historian James Saslow characterizes the Middle Ages as a brief lapse in what he terms the "erotic innocence" that characterized antiquity and the Renaissance:

Renaissance means rebirth: specifically of Greek and Roman literature, art, philosophy, and science, and more broadly, of a thirst for secular and empirical knowledge. Beginning with Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio and the classically trained humanists, so called for their focus on human affairs, turned European eyes from the supernatural back down to the natural world: from the after life to this life, and how to run it efficiently as a society and live it well as an individual. With all of their digging into the past, some of what they unearthed inevitably exposed the homosexuality prominent in pagan myth, chronicles, and art. These rediscoveries revolutionized the European vision of time itself. Until then, the Christian West had recognized only two periods of history—before and after Jesus. In coining the term "medieval," Renaissance thinkers recast the

25. For an example, see Nicola Pisano's depiction of the crucifixion on his pulpit for the Baptistery of Pisa (Fig. 19, my figure image only includes Pisano's depiction of Heracles.) I argue that Pisano's pulpit is given too prominent a role in art historical chronologies of the Renaissance. My decision not to include an image of Pisano's pulpit this early in the paper comes from a desire to shift the historical focus on that period (the middle of the thirteenth century) to France.

26. None will deny the dramatic change in sexual mores that precipitated following the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 337 C.E.. The exact reasons for the change in Western sexual mores are, however, a matter of debate. Boswell cautions us against using "The Bible," which was not widely disseminated in the early medieval world, as an explanation for the shift in attitudes towards homosexuality, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 91-115. There are also many social and political reasons to consider. Christianity came to power in a time of great crisis. Ruralization of the urban cultural centers in Rome likely had a great impact on the increasing intolerance towards homosexuality. Provincial views increasingly replaced those previously held by the Roman establishment see Boswell. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 119-121.

27. Broadly speaking, we find that early Christians generally condemned aesthetic and sensual indulgence which were associated with pagan rituals. See Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

Christian era as the barbarous interruption of a Golden Age whose lost wisdom and erotic innocence they yearned to restore in a third modern age.²⁸

Saslow's description of the Renaissance provides a helpful working definition, however, it also contains some common assumptions that are worthy of interrogation. The characterization of the Middle Ages as a barbarous interruption of a liberated "Golden Age" has stubbornly stuck around. Today, the term "medieval" is virtually synonymous with barbarism. There are no shortage of historians willing to condemn the Middle Ages as an unfortunate misstep on man's road to inevitable glory. However, are we really to believe that the people of the Middle Ages were so fundamentally different from ourselves? Were they not goaded on by the same bodies and desires? The tides of civilization unquestionably wax and wane but do they not belong to the same sea?

The problem with Saslow's description of the Renaissance is that it accepts the premise that history's linear progression is indicative of social progress. Saslow speaks of the Renaissance in terms of a triumph of the secular over the religious, the empirical over the mystical, and the natural over the supernatural. Implicit in this definition is the idea that the Renaissance was a triumph of the *rational* over the *irrational*. To be sure, the Renaissance was a rebirth of the Greek worship of beauty and reason, qualities associated with the sun-god Apollo, however, wherever the clear light of Apollo's intellect shines Dionysus—the god

28. James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1999), 79. While I appreciate the term "erotic innocence" for its resonances with Adam's innocence in the Garden, I find it to conjure an overly pastoral picture of the sexual life and attitudes of antiquity and the Renaissance. The sexual permissiveness of Ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy might be better described as the result of decadence and rather than innocence.

of madness—is not far behind, lurking in the shadows.²⁹ History is not linear, it moves in circles. At no point has Apollonian civilization been freed from its Dionysian origins—the savage realities of sex, death, and Nature will always triumph. One can speak of the relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian as a Hegelian dialectic, however, the term has been corrupted by Marx and Engels who also view history in terms of progress. The idea that the Renaissance is the dividing line between our “savage” origins and our “enlightened” modernity is as pernicious as it is common.

The meaning of the terms “humanism” and “Renaissance” have been contested since their introduction by Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt in the nineteenth century.³⁰ Art historian Leo Steinberg argues that the term “humanism” has too often been used to evade the erotic and irrational motivations for the Renaissance.³¹ Steinberg asserts that appeals to humanism ignore “a disturbing connection of godhead with sexuality.”³² He traces the emphasis on Christ’s nakedness in Italian painting to the rise of the Franciscan order around the year 1260 and suggests that the new emphasis on the *incarnation* of Christ resulted in a new emphasis on the *carnality* of Christ.³³ I agree with Steinberg, however, far more radical artistic developments were occurring simultaneously in France.

29. For the qualities associated with Apollo, see Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 30. For the qualities associated with Dionysus see, Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 202-8. Otto outlines the curious association of Apollo with Dionysus in antiquity. Dionysus lived with Apollo in Delphi and shared the Delphic festival year. The grave of Dionysus was believed to be in the sanctuary of Apollo. Otto shows that the Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic is well founded even in its most original cultic context.

30. Jakob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Dover, 2010)

31. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. Second Ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 28.

32. *Ibid.*, 28.

33. *Ibid.*, 28.

In Paris, a life sized nude Adam statue, dated c. 1260, was made for the Notre Dame cathedral (Fig. 3). It was originally one of a pair, though tragically Eve is now lost. These statues, of which only Adam survives, mark the return of the “erotic innocence” referenced by Saslow.³⁴ The Notre-Dame Adam (Fig. 3) is the very definition of erotic innocence. His posture is upright, poised, elegant. His gaze is not downturned, indicating his repentance for his transgression, but playful and alert. He is unencumbered by shame. Although he holds his hand over his genitals out of modesty it cannot be said that he is embarrassed. His exaggerated contrapposto, one leg engaged and the other slack, displays a kind of nonchalance. There is, perhaps, even a hint of the cheekiness of Donatello’s *David* (Fig. 4). The statue references man’s prelapsarian innocence in the Garden of Eden, before he realized he was naked.



Figure 3
Notre-Dame Adam
Attributed to Pierre de Montreuil
Notre-Dame in Paris, transept south façade
Paris, France
c.1260

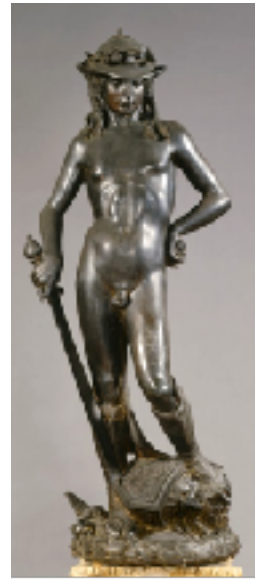


Figure 4
David
Donatello
Florence, Italy
c. 1440 - 1432

34. James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*. (New York: Penguin House, 1999), 79.

In the Garden of Eden, man was briefly uninhibited by shame. Previous depictions of Adam exaggerate Adam's guilt, or use the opportunity to moralize about the dangers of temptation. The Notre Dame Adam, in contrast, actually tempts the viewer with Adam's beautiful nakedness. Adam may have originally held an apple which was later replaced with a sign of benediction when it was restored, although we cannot be sure. The possible addition of an apple would only slightly change the tone of the statue. The apple would bring the theme of seduction to the fore, allowing us to contemplate Adam's fickleness, however, Adam remain's self-possessed. There is nothing in his posture to indicate weakness of character. At most, we can charge him with naiveté.

If one imagines the sign of benediction replaced by an apple, however, his previous alert gaze now appears dreamy, hypnotized. And yet, it may be that this

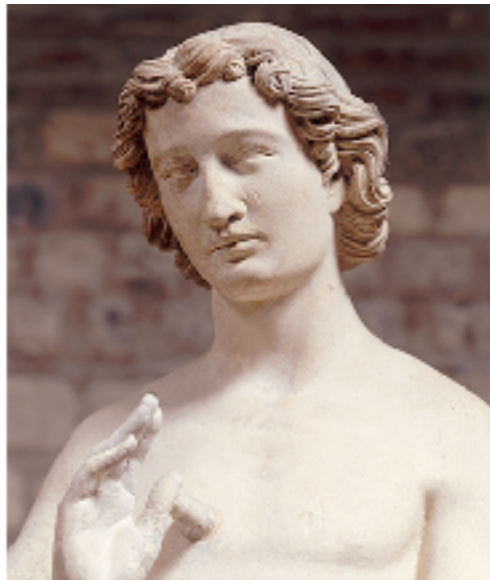


Figure 3
Notre-Dame Adam (Detail)
Attributed to Pierre de Montreuil
Notre-Dame in Paris, transept south façade
Paris, France
c.1260

dreamy quality is not as much a condemnation of Adam as the rebirth of the Greek archetype of the beautiful boy whose distant gaze made him inaccessible, and therefore more erotic. The Notre Dame Adam statue is pregnant with a Greco-Roman, i.e. pagan, eroticism that had laid dormant for centuries, waiting for the right conditions to bloom once again. The statue, however, represents more than just a resurgence of the Greco-Roman aspect of Western culture, it also represents a reintegration of Dionysian principles into the Judeo-Christian framework. In the Notre Dame Adam, man's Dionysian origins are renegotiated to allow for the return of an erotic innocence.

Clark makes no mention of the Notre-Dame Adam (Fig. 3) in his seminal work *The Nude: a Study In Ideal Form*. Its absence leads him to characterize the Renaissance as miraculous. He writes,

How pleasure in the human body once more became a permissible subject of art is the unexplained miracle of the Italian Renaissance. We may catch sight of it in the Gothic painting of the early fifteenth century, revealed in the turn of a wrist and forearm or the inclination of a neck: but there is *nothing* to prepare us for the beautiful nakedness of Donatello's David.³⁵

Clark seems to have been unaware of the Notre-Dame Adam at the time of this writing. It was only about forty years ago, after the publication of Clark's study of the nude, that the statue's exact provenance and state of authenticity was established.³⁶ The Notre-Dame Adam (Fig. 3) is so apparently anachronistic that it would have been practically reckless to assume its authenticity. Clark was either simply not acquainted with it, or was unconvinced of its authenticity.

35. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: a Study In Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 54. (Emphasis mine)

36. The Adam statue was known to have originated from Notre-Dame de Paris since its entry into the collections of the Musée des Monuments Français in 1887, however, it was not until Colombier's reinterpretation of Gilbert's monograph, and the discovery of a drawing from the Robert de Cotte collection, that it was located on the back of the south arm of the transept, see "Apôtres de la Sainte-Chapelle". Musée de Cluny. Accessed July 8th, 2021, <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/en/collection/apostles-from-the-sainte-chapelle.html>

Otherwise, he would have immediately recognized in Adam's soft smile and languid pose the definitive return of pleasure in the human body to European Art.

The Notre-Dame Adam (Fig. 3) is the apotheosis of French Gothic sculpture. The life sized nude Adam statue, hip thrust out in contrapposto, is the only clear medieval predecessor to Michelangelo's *David*, and predates Donatello's *David* (Fig. 4) by nearly two centuries. While the Notre-Dame Adam contains clear classical references, characterizing this artistic breakthrough simply in terms of re-discovered classicism glosses over the erotic and irrational motivations referenced by Steinberg.³⁷ The statues created around the middle of the thirteenth century suggest a significant reintegration of Dionysian principles back into European art. Hips loosen, wrists droop, lips swell—crystalline Apollonian refinement gives way to Dionysian passions. Clark writes that “in the nude of ecstasy the will has been surrendered, and the body is possessed by some *irrational* power.”³⁸ I argue that Bernard's synthesis of irrational, carnal desire with Christian devotion supplied the necessary theological foothold that allowed latent classicism to find purchase in European art. Furthermore, I argue that Bernard's metaphysics of desire began the process of redefining the afterlife to allow for Dionysian flux. To understand the progression from the restrained effigy of Sainte-Foy (Fig. 2) to the lewd swagger of Donatello's *David* (Fig. 4) we must look to Bernard of Clairvaux.

I consider Bernard's influence on European art to be a form of “queering”—a process by which hegemonic structures are subverted or augmented. In the following section, “‘Queering’ as Methodology,” I will further explore the concept of “queering” and explain how I intend to apply queer theory in my

37. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54. ; Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 28.

38. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 273. (Emphasis mine)

inquiry. Due to the unorthodox nature of this inquiry, in which I attempt to trace dramatic ontological and artistic shifts over time, it is necessary to consider large periods of time together. To trace Bernard's influence on bodily representation in European art, I will first look to representations of the body from the late-tenth and twelfth centuries. By contrast, these early works set into sharp relief the paradigm shifts that occurred in the thirteenth century with the influence of Bernard's "queer" theology. The unorthodox structure of this paper, therefore, is firstly a product of necessity. Secondly, however, it only seems right that a paper that inquires into the nature of "queerness" might inflect some "queer" characteristics of its own.

In part one, "Stasis," I explore the symbolic meaning of the stasis that overwhelmingly defined medieval art. A deeper understanding of this Apollonian stasis is necessary to understand the significance of the Dionysian ecstasy that later appears in the art of the thirteenth with Bernard's influence. Here, I outline some of the artistic constraints around bodily representation in the Middle Ages. Generally speaking, these constraints are twofold—taboos around idolatry and taboos around temptation, though these concerns are interrelated. These restrictions resulted in highly static, Apollonian art, e.g. the reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy.

In chapter one, "The Static 'Incorruptible' Body," I attempt to grapple with pre-Bernardian medieval ontology. Medieval ontology is most directly accessed through the doctrine of the Resurrection. The doctrine of the Resurrection required that theologians provide answers to questions of form and substance, and define the relationship between body and soul. In this section, I draw heavily on the work of medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum to provide a general sense of the evolution of the doctrine of the Resurrection and medieval

ontology. Bynum demonstrates that medieval art, theology, and ascetic practice was overwhelmingly concerned with death and bodily decay.³⁹

In the Middle Ages, questions of identity were deeply grounded in the body.⁴⁰ However, due to taboos against idolatry, the human body, and consequently the Christian soul, was a forbidden artistic subject. I suggest that sculptural depictions of the body in the late-tenth and eleventh century, such as reliquary statues and tomb effigies, avoid some of the controversy by making explicit reference to the glorified resurrected body. These sculptures were not seen as idols but rather as aspirational projections of the jewel-like perfection achieved upon resurrection.⁴¹ In this section, I examine the reliquary-statue of Sainte-Foy, created around the late-tenth century as a quintessential example of the glorified resurrected body.

In part two, "Bernard's "Queer" Metaphysics," I introduce Bernard of Clairvaux and outline my reasons for considering him a "queer archetype." In chapter two, "Word Made Flesh," I look at Solomon's "Song of Songs," a text that was central to Bernard's theology. Bernard was by no means the first to interpret the Song, however, he was obsessed. He wrote eighty-six sermons on the Song before his death in 1153. Furthermore, unlike Origen's allegorical readings, Bernard emphasized the irrational, uncontrollable desire of the bride. Here, I draw heavily from historian Stephen Moore's essay, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," to outline some of the various historical interpretations, from the most literal to the most allegorical, of the Song and Bernard's sermons

39. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 111.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Hilary E. Fox, "The Aesthetics of Resurrection: Goldwork, the Soul, and the Deus Aurifex in the Phoenix" *The Review of English Studies* 63, no. 258, (2012): 2.

on it.⁴² I argue that Bernard did in fact use his mystic writings to sublimate his transgressive sexual desires, however, this fact should not discount their allegorical or spiritual significance. Bernard reconciled his carnal and divine nature by sacramentalizing his desire and redirecting it toward the godhead.

I consider Bernard's carnal epistemology and metaphysics of desire to be a form of "queering." In this section, I offer some examples of other "queer" archetypes, e.g. Dante Alighieri (c. 1265 – 1321), John Donne (1572 - 1631), and Flannery O'Connor (1925 - 1964), who all seem to share a similarly subversive and "enfleshed" epistemology. I look especially to Dante as a kind of philosophical twin of Bernard of Clairvaux, a connection which seems to have first been made by Dante himself who includes Bernard in the final Cantos of the *Commedia*.⁴³ Although some of these "queer" archetypes are highly anachronistic, I find this anachronism to be a form of "queering" in that it disrupts the neat delineation between the "modern" and the "pre-modern" and allows us to think in terms of shared sensibilities which transcend historical categories.

In part three, "Ecstasy," I look at Bernard's influence on Gothic art. Kenneth Clark writes that, "since the earliest times the obsessive, the unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images."⁴⁴ I suggest that Bernard's metaphysics of desire gave permission for these images to find relief once again. That Bernard was one of the most influential figures of his time is not contested.⁴⁵ The nature of his influence, however, is a matter of debate. In Chapter three, I

42. Stephen D Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," *Church History* 69, no. 2 no. 2 (2000): 328-49.

43. Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Henry Francis Cary. New York and London: The Colonial Press 1901. Bernard features prominently as a guide in Paradiso, Cantos XXXI-XXXII, 412-416.

44. Clark. *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54.

45. Dom Jean Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age* (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 1957)

argue that Bernard had a distinctly “Dionysian” influence on the art of the thirteenth century. The project of defining the “Dionysian” runs parallel to the project of defining the “queer.”⁴⁶ For now, suffice it to say that Bernard’s influence was Dionysian in that it reintegrated irrational, carnal desire back into Christian art and devotional practice.

In this chapter, I look at two-dimensional from thirteenth and early-fourteenth century France and Germany that seem to contain a particularly Bernardian/Dionysian eroticism. I focus on the most central image to Bernard’s mysticism—the divine kiss. I relate images of the divine kiss to images of the crucifixion by the Virtues which seem to preserve the sexual dynamic of the kiss. These works illustrate how the topic of mystic union was regularly used to sublimate transgressive sexual desire into hegemonic structures. Like Bernard’s sermons, these works implicitly invite their audience to add a “queer” inflection. Artistic motifs such as penetration by daggers, open wounds, and the ecstatic state of death, culminate to form a “queer” visual lexicon. This “queer” artistic vernacular mimics the writings of Bernard by hiding the “queer” in plain sight.

Furthermore, in this chapter I elaborate on the similarities between Dante and Clairvaux. I argue that Dante’s subversive work, *The Commedia*, which prominently features Bernard, marks the completion of the paradigm shift instigated by Bernard’s metaphysics of desire. This paradigm shift is Dionysian in nature. Otto writes that it is embedded in Dionysian cult ritual to recognize the “never-ending nature of desire.”⁴⁷ This never-ending desire is visualized in Dante’s *Paradiso*. Dante’s vision of heaven as a swarming hive of protean flux bears little resemblance to the steely, metallurgical, pre-Bernardian metaphors for

46. The Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic was notably used by Nietzsche (1886) to describe Greek tragedy, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923). My uses of the terms, however, departs significantly from Nietzsche’s work.

47. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 139.

the afterlife. In Dante's vision of the afterlife, Apollonian stasis has been replaced by Dionysian flux. Dante's *Commedia* marks the true paradigm shift that separates the Middle Ages from the Renaissance. Dante's vision of *Paradiso* stands in direct opposition to the medieval conception of the afterlife. Dante envisions heaven as a hive of protean flux—angels swarming about a great fecund flower. Dante's *Paradiso* is the dionysian whorl of desire that Early Medieval thinkers sought to still with their steely metallurgical metaphors for the afterlife. Bynum writes that, "the author of the *Divine Comedy* prolonged yearning until the resurrection—perhaps even to eternity—and projected the motion of desire onto heaven itself."⁴⁸ Like Bernard, Dante emphasizes on yearning, not satiety. Both revel in the thirst of longing. The ontological and cultural significance of Dante's vision of *Paradiso* cannot be underestimated. As Bynum demonstrates, the doctrine of the Resurrection and the afterlife was the primary locus of identity contestation in the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ She writes that, "whether the body in heaven was understood to continue and sublimate or to change, reject, and reverse the body of earth, images of the afterlife were the major loci in which theologians puzzled out and expressed human notions of destiny and the self."⁵⁰ Dante's Bernardian vision of the afterlife as a whorl of cosmic desire, therefore, marks a fundamental paradigm shift in medieval conceptions of the body and of the self.⁵¹ This metaphysical shift from stasis to ecstasy mirrors the artistic shift we see evidenced in the figural sculptures of the period.

48. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 304.

49. *Ibid.*, 111.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 302-304.

In chapter four, “The Prelapsarian Body: Eve,” I look at the radical sculptural breakthroughs occurring in France in the thirteenth century. The liberation of the sculpted human form is indicative of a proto-Renaissance. The artistic constraints that defined early medieval art are almost entirely abandoned and freestanding, eroticized figural sculpture is reborn, if only momentarily. I attempt to account for these artistic breakthroughs by reference to changing definitions of the glorified body. Previous representations of the body used references to the glorified *resurrected* body to break with artistic convention, however, thirteenth century works did so by making reference to the glorified *prelapsarian* body. Depictions of the Virgin Mary and Jesus began to incorporate references to Mary as the “new Eve” and Jesus as the “new Adam.”⁵² In this section, I suggest that the Sainte-Chapelle ivory is one of the first gothic sculptures to emphasize Mary’s connection to Eve by emphasizing Mary’s own erotic nature.

In Chapter five, “The Prelapsarian Body: Adam,” I look more closely at the Notre-Dame Adam statue. I find that the eroticization of sculpture came through two avenues: the theological and the cultural. I suggest that Bernard’s theology merged with the latent eroticism of chivalric and court culture. The royal court was a place where chivalry and theology merged. As chivalry and theology increasingly became avenues of erotic expression, so did the sculptures which decorated the cathedrals. The combination of these influences resulted in what is arguably the first medieval nude statue. Had the Black Death (1346 - 1353) not come to Europe so soon after perhaps the Renaissance would have come earlier. Finally, in the Coda, I reflect further on the implications of my conclusions and some of the possible future applications of queer theory in the discipline of medieval art history.

52. For a wonderful art historical analysis of Mary as the second Eve, see Beth Williamson, “The Virgin Lactans as Second Eve: Image of the “Salcatrix,” *Studies in Iconography*, 19 (1998)

“QUEERING” AS METHODOLOGY

You shall know the truth, and it will make you odd.

—Flannery O’Conner

The Middle Ages looked to the body as the primary locus of identity. In that spirit, I look to the body as the primary locus of “queer” identity. What can the medieval relationship to the body, and specifically the body in art, tell us about “queer” identity? I find Bernard’s relationship to the body, his blending of sex and spirituality, flesh and word, to be a form of “queering” whereby the vulgar and sacred are reconciled. Anthony Di Renzo outlines the similarities between Bernard’s “queer” ontology and the Middle Ages more broadly:

This unusual blending of the religious and the bawdy...is the paradox of the late Middle Ages. No other period in Western history was more obsessed with God, and no other period in Western history was more obsessed with the human body and its functions. Think of Bernard of Clairvaux's steamily erotic exegesis on the Song of Songs, or of the buttocks shaped drainpipes that stud the facade of some German cathedrals. There is a direct correlation in these examples between expressing one's faith and expressing one's physical urges. The responsorials in the *Missae Lusorum*, the gamblers' mass, consist of sneezes, yawns, belches, farts, and nose blowing. "Ornemus," chants the celebrant, "let us bet," rather than "oremus," "let us pray." For the medieval mind, there is a relationship between piety and bawdry, which today we might consider "dicey." The outpourings of the soul and the outpourings of the body are disquietingly similar. We can attribute this fascinating insight partly to the harshness of the times. Perhaps the imminent threat of death and the fleeting pleasures of the world made one think of the ultimate meaning of one's life in purely corporeal terms. It is also probable, though, that bawdiness and scatology in the Holy of Holies reflect a shift in the intellectual climate of the day. By the mid thirteenth century, the harsh asceticism of the early Middle Ages had begun to be challenged by a more humanizing influence that wanted to return Christianity to the physical world. Aquinas, adapting the pagan Aristotle, declared that the body is the expression of the soul,

not its shell. Giotto, in his beautiful frescos, gave the body weight, dignity, and dimension. Dante in the *Paradiso* has the souls in the sphere of Venus long for the day when they will be reunited with the bodies to more thoroughly enjoy the pleasures of heaven.⁵³

Here, Di Renzo eloquently describes the essential spirit of the Middle Ages—the ability to reconcile the religious and the bawdy, the flesh and spirit, and to find beauty in the monstrous. The Medieval spirit, broadly defined, was both more “spiritual” and more “enfleshed,” because it was a spirituality that sought to encompass the warts-and-all physicality of life. We can shed some light on the “enfleshed” medieval sensibility by simply acknowledging the centrality of the mystery of Christ’s incarnation and Resurrection to medieval thinkers. This mystery created an imperative to reconcile that flesh and the spirit. Those who have been deeply affected by this mystery can be said to have been touched by the medieval spirit. Perhaps this is why Flannery O’Conner, a devoutly catholic writer who dwelt on this paradox all her life, described her own sensibility as “thirteenth century.”⁵⁴

Flannery O’Conner offers one of the most penetrating observations of Middle Ages when she writes that “back then their religious life was not cut off from

53. Anthony Di Renzo, *American Gargoyles: Flannery O’Connor and the Medieval Grotesque* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 62-63.

54. A letter written by Elizabeth Ames, now held in the Yaddo Quest Files in the New York Public Library, includes the information that O’Conner described herself as “thirteenth century.” The passing comment is the subject of an essay by Brad Gooch, see Brad Gooch. “Thirteenth-Century Lady.” *Flannery O’Connor Review* 5 (2007): 23-34. The essay details in O’Conner’s constant clash with all things modern during a period of growing secular humanism and her sympathies with the sensibilities of Aquinas, whose *Summa* was likely published in Paris in the late thirteenth century, and Dante, whose *Commedia* was published not long after and has been called the *Summa* in verse, see *The Fordham Monthly*, Fordham University, Vol. XL, (Dec. 1921): 76.

their artistic sense.”⁵⁵ This synthesis of the religious sense and the artistic sense is also what makes the Middle Ages so incomprehensible to modern audiences. Martin Heidegger, one of the great progenitors of modern thought, defined the modern man as the post-Renaissance man, i.e. the post-medieval man.⁵⁶ The concept of the “modern” is laden with unchecked assumptions. More often than not, the word “modern” is simply intended to create distance from that which is perceived as brutish or barbaric, i.e. “medieval.” The modern man wishes only deal with the most rarified and essential matters and distances himself from all that fleshly and “base.” The modern man identifies himself with the mind, and perhaps the spirit, but regards the body as somehow alien to his true nature. The modern spirit, therefore, is marked by the Platonic fallacy that the flesh is an impediment to spiritual or noetic attainment.⁵⁷ The modern spirit approaches the material realm with a cold bureaucratic efficiency and sees nothing “divine” in brute matter. Those who reject this type of manichaeian thinking are truly odd, truly “queer.” Thus, there is some truth in the distinction between the modern and the medieval in so far as it refers to this ontological shift. O’Conner aptly described her own sensibility as “thirteenth century” because her highly

55. From a letter to Janet McKane from O’Conner (HB 529) quoted in Brad Gooch. “Thirteenth-Century Lady.” *Flannery O’Connor Review* 5. 2007, 24.

56. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 452.

57. I distinguish Platonism from the views of Plato himself. The Platonic fallacy is a product of Platonism, not Plato’s actual views which were probably quite different.

corporeal ontology was pre-modern.⁵⁸ In this way, O'Conner can be considered "queer" because her ontology and epistemology were so opposed to the modern spirit.

Di Renzo, and many others, have isolated the mid-thirteenth century as a period of dramatic change. Clark speaks of it as a "false dawn of the Renaissance," Steinberg speaks of it as the beginning of the sexualization of Christ. Di Renzo, however, simply notes a vague ontological shift.⁵⁹ What exactly changed in the middle of thirteenth century? In many ways, that is the true subject of this paper. It is my simple hope that I might offer a new perspective on this mid-thirteenth century shift which so many others have intuited. In the above passage, Di Renzo partially attributes this change to the influence of Aquinas and Aristotle.⁶⁰ To be sure, in the twelfth century there was an increasing imperative to reconcile Christian theology with Aristotelian ideas, however, Aristotle and Augustine alone cannot satisfactorily account for the shift we see in the mid-thirteenth century which seems to have just as much to do with the sexual, irrational, and the pre-rational impulses—ie. the Dionysian—as it does with any formal theological change. It is for this reason that I do not focus on Aristotle but rather on Bernard, who reintegrated Dionysian principles into Christian theology, a process which I regard as a form of "queering."

58. A letter written by Elizabeth Ames, now held in the Yaddo Quest Files in the New York Public Library, includes the information that O'Conner described herself as "thirteenth century." The passing comment is the subject of an essay by Brad Gooch, see Brad Gooch. "Thirteenth-Century Lady." *Flannery O'Connor Review* 5 (2007): 23-34. The essay details in O'Conner's constant clash with all things modern during a period of growing secular humanism and her sympathies with the sensibilities of Aquinas, whose *Summa* was likely published in Paris in the late thirteenth century, and Dante, whose *Commedia* was published not long after and has been called the *Summa* in verse, see *The Fordham Monthly*, Fordham University, Vol. XL, (Dec. 1921): 76.

59. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54.; Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 28.; Di Renzo, *American Gargoyles*, 62-63.

60. Anthony Di Renzo, *American Gargoyles: Flannery O'Connor and the Medieval Grotesque* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 62-63.

I use the term “queering” loosely. Typically, “queering” is considered to be the act that queer theory performs. Queer theory is not, strictly speaking, a theory. The term designates a veritable behemoth of scholarship and criticism spanning multiple disciplines. The field emerged from literary studies in the 1990s, however, queer theorists have virtually canonized Michel Foucault and drawn many of their theories from his 1978 work, *The History of Sexuality*, in which he argues that the concept of homosexuality originated from late-nineteenth century medical diagnoses.⁶¹ Perhaps the most influential figure in the field since Foucault is the feminist theorist Judith Butler. In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler asserts that gender identity is purely performative, i.e. socially constructed. The performativity of identity was first formally analyzed by the sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1956 monograph *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.⁶² However, we cannot credit Goffman with being the first to remark upon the performativity of identity. The idea is actually embedded in the cult of Dionysus—the god of masks—and perhaps most famously explored in the works of Shakespeare. Queer theorists tend to highlight the works of Foucault and Butler, however, because these thinkers exaggerate the socially constructed aspects of identity. Queer theory leans towards a postmodern understanding of human beings as a *tabula rasa*, i.e. a blank slate, shaped by society, and typically reject ideas of any essential nature. The term “queering”, therefore, is typically used to denote a style of literary criticism or the activity of deconstructing essentialized conceptions of gender. In a medieval context, however, I find this application of queer theory to be limited.

61. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1978)

62. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh UK: University of Edinburgh, 1956)

In his work, *Queer Theory and the Middle Ages*, Bill Burgwinkle suggests that Butler's theory of identity formation mirrors medieval conceptions of the body / soul dynamic.⁶³ According to Burgwinkle's theory, the medieval conception regards the body (the material) as inherently corrupt, while the soul (the immaterial) is constantly at risk of corruption.⁶⁴ In this way, the body / soul dynamic appears to parallel Butler's notion of identity formation whereby one's identity is both shaped and threatened by socio-cultural subjectification.⁶⁵ However, the medieval conception of the body / soul dynamic was far more nuanced and evolving. Bynum problematizes the dualistic understanding of the body and soul relationship.⁶⁶ In the Middle Ages, body and soul were often distinguished but not distinct.⁶⁷ Burgwinkle's parallel, therefore, may rest on problematic assumptions of medieval ontology. Perhaps a more nuanced understanding of medieval ontology can reflexively elucidate Butler's conception of identity formation.

Bynum occasionally refers to the problematized body / soul dynamic as a "psychosomatic unity," a phrase which she particularly associates with Bernard of Clairvaux and his contemporary William of Saint Thierry (1075-1148).⁶⁸ This movement towards viewing person as a psychosomatic unity—body and soul as one entity as opposed to a soul which inhabits a body—in the twelfth century

63. Bill Burgwinkle, "État Présent: Queer Theory and the Middle Ages," *French Studies*, Volume LX, Issue 1, (Jan. 2006): 79–88.

64. *Ibid.*, 79.

65. Judith Butler asserts that gender identity is purely performative, i.e. socially constructed, the by-product of social rituals and conventions. Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) This view differs greatly from the idea of performativity of identity which was famously remarked upon

66. Bynum. *The Resurrection of the Body*, 135.

67. Bynum. *The Resurrection of the Body*, 111.

68. Bynum. *The Resurrection of the Body*, 135. Footnote 59.

appears to have directly influenced artistic representations of the body in the thirteenth century. In this way, I consider Bernard's ontology to be a form of queering in itself.

Queer theorist Nikki Sullivan asks—"is queer a verb or a set of actions; a question of being or doing?" Medieval historian Bill Burgwinkle has suggested what he calls a "medievalist rephrasing" of the question—"is parody already a way of queering?"⁶⁹ Here, I use Bernard's theology as an example of "queering" as parody. While Bernard's theology is not exactly parodic, it shares some of the common features of parody in that it hides the transgressive in plain sight. Like parody, the works under consideration here adapt the hegemonic vernacular to new ends, subverting the orthodoxy while operating squarely within it. In this way, I follow Zeikowitz' suggestion that instead of searching for "models of prior and stable homo-selves," scholars should "disrupt the hetero-paradigm by searching for the homo inside the hetero."⁷⁰ It is not my aim, therefore, to argue that Bernard's identity was homosexual. As medieval historian and queer theorist Richard E. Zeikowitz observes, "queerness seems to resist localization in stable identities."⁷¹ Rather, I find in Bernard a "queer" archetype, and look to Bernard's influence on European art as exemplary of the process of "queering."

What is "queer?" The "queer" is often defined in opposition to the "hegemonic." In this sense, something is "queer" only in so far as it is subversive. However, the "hegemonic" is equally as nebulous and ill-defined. The term "queer" can also refer to same-sex desire. We moderns are used to understanding these two definitions as being in harmony with one another

69. Richard E. Zeikowitz. *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 4.

70. Zeikowitz. *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 4.

71. Zeikowitz. *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 4.

because we so often regard same-sex desire as subversive in itself, however, these two definitions are just as often in conflict. In Ancient Greece, for example, the love between men was considered more natural and noble than the love between man and woman.⁷² Likewise, in the Renaissance homosexual relationships were a matter of course.⁷³ We can still attempt to define the “queer” as same-sex desire that poses a threat to the dominant culture, however, it is important to recognize that same-sex desire is often inextricable from the hegemonic culture. The medieval institutions of monasticism and chivalry cultivated and ennobled same-sex intimacy at the same time that they prohibited sodomy.⁷⁴ Queer theorist and medieval historian Richard Zeikowits uses the term “homosocial” to describe these environments which sublimated same-sex desire.⁷⁵

At times, I use the term “queer” to describe unconventional or transgressive sexual expression. Elsewhere, I use the term to describe the socially or politically subversive.⁷⁶ “Queering,” in this sense, can be construed as any inflammatory or transgressive treatment of a particular subject. However, I maintain that the

72. Clark, *The Nude: a Study In Ideal Form*, 73-4.

73. Although it is often considered anachronistic to use the term “homosexual” in pre-modern context, I am using the term here to refer to homosexual *practice* rather than homosexual *identity*. For a general treatment of homosexuality in the Renaissance see Michael Rocke. *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*. Oxford Press. New York. 1996. See also Lisa Kaborycha. “Among Rare Men: Bronzino and Homoerotic Culture at the Medici Court.” The Medici Archive Project. Lecture given at the Metropolitan Museum. April, 2010.

74. Zeikowitz primarily focuses on chivalry. See Richard E. Zeikowitz. *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. For a discussion of same-sex intimacy in monastic communities see John Boswell. *Same Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*. Villard Bookd New York 1994. 259. For a discussion of homosocial culture in Renaissance Florence. See Lisa Kaborycha. “Among Rare Men: Bronzino and Homoerotic Culture at the Medici Court.” The Medici Archive Project. Lecture given at the Metropolitan Museum. April, 2010.

75. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 2.

76. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Thinking Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

“queer” is just as often inextricable from the “hegemonic.” Furthermore, the act of “queering” the discipline of art history may be intimately tied to ensuring that the “queer” is not neatly relegated to the fringes, but located in even the most mainstream cultural expressions. Despite the nebulous nature of these concepts, I suggest that the “queer” and the act of “queering” have fundamental characteristics that can be discerned by a comparison of “queer” archetypes. I seek to further elucidate these concepts by suggesting possible “queer” archetypes and examining their commonalities.

What is a “queer” archetype? In her essay, “Dante's Left Foot Kicks Queer Theory into Gear,” queer theorist Marla Morris looks to Dante as a queer archetype.⁷⁷ She writes,

Dante's critiques of the Church in the *Divine Comedy* are aggressive, ardent, zealously prophetic. He critiques, in a rude-positive way, or in an in-your-face way, the scandals of the medieval papacy: This is called “queer” politics. He also subverts notions of identity: Witness Tiresias “who changed his form from a [man]...into a woman.” Sexuality as a shifting, changing way of being in the world is “queer.” A queer sensibility attempts to subvert the apparent neat and tidy relation between sex and gender. Queer politics, thus, serves to undermine rigid categories of identity. The birthing of queer identity means grappling with ambiguity and complexity around the notion of what it might mean to be a person...Like Dante, queer theorists/activists are “zealously prophetic, politically messianic, indignant, nervous...theatrical.”⁷⁸

The queer archetypes under consideration here tend to share the shifting, changing way of being in the world described by Morris. This is a Dionysian quality. Dionysus is the “god of many forms.”⁷⁹ I adopt Morris’ definition of queering as a prophetic, messianic, and theatrical activity. Broadly speaking, I define queering as the act of confronting the dominant culture with the

77. Marla Morris, “Dante's Left Foot Kicks Queer Theory into Gear” Chapter 2. *Counterpoints* 118. (2000): 15-16.

78. Morris. “Dante's Left Foot Kicks Queer Theory into Gear”: 15-16.

79. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 110.

Dionysian and demanding a reconciliation. I can think of no greater example of this form of queering than Dante's *Commedia*, in which Dante must descend to Dionysian depths before he is allowed to climb to Olympian heights.

I agree with Morris' characterization of Dante as a queer archetype. Zeikowits notes that Dante himself may have invited a queer reading of the *Commedia* by comparing himself in it to the youth Ganymede.⁸⁰ Dante identifies with Ganymede while being carried in his sleep by Saint Lucy to the threshold of Purgatory.⁸¹ In Canto IX of the *Purgatorio*, Dante dreams that, like Ganymede, he is hunted by a powerful eagle that snatches him up to the heavenly sphere of fire.⁸² According to Greek myth, the beautiful Trojan prince Ganymede was abducted by Zeus in the form of an eagle to serve as his cupbearer in Olympus.



Figure 5
Jupiter/Zeus Abducting Ganymede
Multifigure terra cotta group
Late Archaic Period c. 480 - 470 B.C.E.
Greece

80. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 4.

81. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. trans. Henry Francis Cary (New York and London: The Colonial Press 1901) *Purgatorio*, Canto IX, 177.

82. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. *Purgatorio*, Canto IX, 177.

Ovid's version of the story emphasizes Zeus' erotic attraction to the handsome prince.⁸³ Consequently, Ganymede became an archetype of homosexual male love. The word "catamite," referring to a sexual relationship between a boy and a man, is derived from a Latin form of the name Ganymede, *Catamitus*. By drawing a parallel between Ganymede and himself, Dante was not necessarily indicating same-sex attraction, instead he may have been pointing to a deeper kinship with Ganymede's queer persona—their shared ability to travel between worlds.

Dante evokes Ganymede's ability to occupy a liminal space between worlds.⁸⁴ While being abducted by Saint Lucy Dante proclaims, "a golden-feather'd eagle in the sky, With open wings, and hovering for descent; And I was in that place, methought, from whence Young Ganymede, and his associates 'reft, Was snatch'd aloft to the high consistory."⁸⁵ Ganymede's sexual persona is androgyne. He occupies that rare moment between youth and maturity where his masculinity has not fully crystalized. A Late Archaic Greek terra-cotta statue emphasizes Ganymede's androgyne prepubescence (Fig. 5). Ganymede's truncated form is child-like. His features are soft, feminine, nymphic. The statue depicts the abduction in mid flight, his body suspended as he is suspended between man and woman, youth and man. A similar queer persona can also be found in the blind prophet Tiresias, who according to Greek Myth was transformed into a woman for seven years. As a blind prophet, Tiresias occupies two worlds, present and future. And yet, he does not fully occupy either. His blindness prevents him from fully occupying the world of the senses, and so he stumbles through a liminal space of darkness and prophecy, somewhere between

83. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008, 10.

84. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Purgatorio, Canto IX, 177.

85. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Purgatorio, Canto IX, 177.

this world and the next. Tiresias's ability to occupy this liminal space between worlds is made literal by his ability to occupy both genders. Dante, whose visionary poetic ability virtually defined the afterlife, has a similar ability to travel between worlds. As visionary and poet, he too occupies this strange liminal space with Ganymede and Tiresias.

I suggest that "liminality" is a queer attribute. I define "liminality" as the ability to straddle two worlds or two interpretations—to resist binary or manichaeic thinking. This ability to dwell in paradox is a common characteristic of the queer archetypes under consideration here. Paradoxical duality is also a Dionysian quality.⁸⁶ To this list of queer archetypes we might rightly add Dante's own poetic hero—Bernard of Clairvaux.⁸⁷ Bernard's erotic mysticism occupies a space between the abstract and the concrete, the etherial and the enfleshed. I suggest that Bernard's singular ability to occupy this liminal space between the sensual and the abstract, the flesh and the written word, gives him his preeminent role in Dante's *Paradiso*.

In order to more precisely define the queer, it may be helpful to sketch out a definition of the "hegemonic." For my purposes, it is important that the definition of the hegemonic can be construed broadly enough that it remains applicable in the Middle Ages and today. Many of the failed attempts to apply queer theory to the Middle Ages derive from overly narrow definitions which make no attempt to tailor themselves to fit their purpose. Much of modern queer theory has its roots in the school of French linguistics following Saussure, as well as literary and film theory, disciplines which are not easily be adapted to the art

86. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 110.

87. Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 92.

and culture of the Middle Ages.⁸⁸ For this reason, I define the hegemonic as a pervading Western predisposition. Feminist Susan Griffen eloquently speaks to this Western predisposition in her book *The Eros of Everyday Life*. She writes,

Just as the natural process of human birth is reversed in Genesis to make woman born of man, so mental process has been reversed in the mythos of this civilization so that the physical universe is depicted as proceeding from abstractions. Plato's idea of earthly existence as a poor shadow of eternal ideas not only permeates the dominant traditions of Western philosophy but also reflects our fundamental posture towards existence, a hierarchy of values in which abstractions, theories, principles, ideas, mathematical equations, logic, and analysis are elevated above what is called concrete, corporeal, sensible, palpable, tangible, solid, physical, material, and contextual.⁸⁹

Here, Griffen outlines the two central inversions of Christianity—to make *woman* born of *man*, and to make all *things* born from *Word*. These inversions represent the West's attempt to free itself from all that is fleshly and female. By inverting the natural order in this way, Christian cosmology attempted to make the most incontrovertible necessity of woman, flesh, and Nature—woman's progenerative power—redundant.

Christian discourse had to contend with the idea that Jesus was born of a woman. Bernard writes,

There was only one mode of birth that was worthy of God, and that was to be born of a Virgin. Equally, who could come from a Virgin birth except God himself? The maker of mankind, if he was to be made man and destined to be born of man, would have to choose, to create a mother whom he knew to be worthy of him, who he knew would be pleasing to him. It was his will that she should be a virgin, so that he could proceed from an unstained body, stainless, to purify mankind of its stains.⁹⁰

88. For a broad overview of how queer theory intersects with the field of medieval studies see Bill Burgwinkle's "État Présent: Queer Theory and the Middle Ages" *French Studies*, Volume LX, Issue 1, (Jan. 2006): 79-88.

89. Susan Griffen, *The Eros of Everyday Life: Essays on Ecology Gender and Society*. Anchor Books Doubleday. New York 1995, 77-78.

90. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon 2: Opera omnia* (1968), 364-368.

Mary's virginity is another way of exiling her Dionysian fecundity—her womb becomes simply another instrument of God's steely Apollonian will. Christian cosmology could not abide the primordial mystery of childbirth, it simply allowed of too much flux. Mankind's origins could not remain in that mysterious watery womb world or some primordial sea. The Western mind insisted that our origins be brought into the light of day and defined with Apollonian clarity. Immaculate conception is another way of inverting the natural order, of liberating our origins from a murky Dionysian chaos.

Griffen suggests that this Western animus towards the fleshly and the female derives from a deep-seated fear of death and dependency. Griffen writes,

When in a dream of himself as a child Freud asked his mother where he came from, and she showed him bits of soil on the palm of her hand, he was terrified. The knowledge must have evoked fear, not only of death but of dependency. Because, if death is at a remove in time, dependency is present. Perhaps this is why a dialogue over dependency is built so solidly into a discourse of gender. In the Western tradition independence has been configured as masculine, dependence as feminine... That such a dependance embarrasses masculinity is clear even in the idealized trajectory of male development, which requires first that a man free himself from his mother's apron strings and then from his wife's. It has a subtext: the process requires mastery of women (which is to say of nature).⁹¹

Griffen observes that our fear of dependency is linked with a kind of Heideggerian anticipation of death. I agree. Man's dependency on Nature is a keen reminder of our mortality. Furthermore, as Griffen points out, mankind's dependency on Nature is bound up with mankind's dependency on woman. The project of mastering Nature is one of mastering all that is female and fleshly. However, this project did not necessarily begin out of some primordial misogyny. Nature is a cruel mistress. Earthquake, tsunami, tidal-wave, hurricane, volcano—Nature's boundless fecundity is tempered only by her ruthlessness. This principle is embedded in the cult of Dionysus. Dionysus is followed, wherever he

91. Griffen, *The Eros of Everyday Life*, 75-6.

goes, by childbearing women.⁹² These same women who follow his song are known to, on occasion, murder the very sons which they had so tenderly raised from infancy.⁹³ Griffen is apt to note the similarities between gaining independence from Nature and gaining independence from the mother. However, Griffen's analogy of apron strings does not go far enough. As Dionysus shows us, individuation from the mother is not a matter of embarrassment but a matter of survival. A mother's apron strings, like the umbilical cord, *must* be severed lest they become a noose.

Griffen's apron strings analogy is predicated upon the theories of psychoanalyst Erich Neumann. Neumann posited that developmental psychology offers a microcosmic view of larger cultural patterns. Like Griffen, Neumann observes that, "the masculine has identified itself with consciousness and its growth where-ever a patriarchal world has developed."⁹⁴ Following this premise that the West associates consciousness with the masculine, and the unconscious with the female, Neumann elaborates upon the symbolic significance of individuation from the mother:

The dialectical relation of consciousness to the unconscious takes the symbolic, mythological form of a struggle between the Maternal-Feminine and the male child, and here the growing strength of the male corresponds to the increasing power of consciousness in human development. Since the liberation of the male consciousness from the feminine maternal unconscious is a hard and painful struggle for all mankind, it is clear that the negative elementary character of the Feminine does not spring from an anxiety complex of the "men," but expresses an archetypal experience of the whole species, male and female alike. For in so far as the woman participates in this development of consciousness, she too has a

92. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 178-180.

93. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 180.

94. Erich Neumann, Ralph Manheim, and Martin Liebscher, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 432.

symbolically male consciousness and may experience the unconscious as “negatively feminine.”⁹⁵

Unlike Griffen, Neuman contends that the process of individuation and the struggle for independence is a common feature of *man* rather than a unique frailty of *men*. Like Griffen, however, Neuman observes that this struggle for independence is fueled by a fear of mother Nature, and the inevitable death she represents. In his seminal work, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Neumann speaks of a “primordial human fear” of the mother that extends across cultures. In his analysis of the association between the Mother archetype and death, Neumann writes that “the womb of the earth becomes the deadly devouring maw of the underworld, and beside the fecundated womb and the protecting cave of earth and mountain gapes the abyss of hell, the dark hole of the depths, the devouring womb of the grave and of death, of darkness without light, of nothingness.”⁹⁶ Here, Neuman articulates Griffen’s observations in Dionysian terms. Civilization is an attempt to conquer and control mankind’s dependency on Nature. The steely intellect of the Apollonian consciousness is the blade that cuts through the Dionysian wilderness. A once noble attempt to liberate mankind from the yoke of Nature, however, has reached a dangerous extreme. In attempting to free ourselves from our dependency on Nature, even to the point of attempting to conquer death itself, the West’s Apollonian impulse has become pathological.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid. Female archetypes such as the “great mother” or “devouring mother,” notably explored by J.J. Bachofen, James Frazer, Carl Jung, and Erich Neumann, are typically rejected by modern feminists. These archetypes are more easily circumvented in certain disciplines, however, they are indispensable within the discipline of art history. From Venus of Willendorf, to Isis Lactans, to the Madonna and Child—mother archetypes are one of the most enduring motifs of Western Art. Here, I argue that the renegotiation of the mother archetype, i.e. the Dionysian, is a form of queering. The concept of the Dionysian, which is closely associated with the female principle—fertility, birth, and mothering, is a way of problematizing (or queering) female archetypes.

The ancients understood that the Apollonian owed deference to the Dionysian.⁹⁷ Otto writes,

The Olympian realm towers above the abyss of the earth bound...but the race of its gods arose itself from these depths and does not disavow its dark origins. It would not exist if there were not eternal night before which Zeus, himself, bows, or no maternal womb, the source of elemental being with all of the forces which watch over it...Olympian metamorphosis, still the light and the spirit above in heaven must always have beneath them the darkness and the maternal depths in which all being is grounded. In Apollo all of the splendor of the Olympic converges and confronts the realms of eternal becoming and eternal passing. Apollo with Dionysus, the intoxicated leader of the choral dance of the terrestrial sphere—that would give the total world dimension. In this union Dionysiac earthly duality would be elevated into a new and higher duality, the eternal contrast between a restless, whirling life and a still far-seeing spirit...And with this marriage, Greek religion, as the sanctification of objective being would have reached its noblest heights.⁹⁸

The marriage of the Apollonian with the Dionysian represents the highest achievement of which humanity is capable. One cannot achieve Apollonian heights, however, without excavating to Dionysian depths. And yet, the West would just assume exile Dionysus' primal depths to obscurity. Perhaps not without reason. After all, Dionysus is the undoer of civilization.⁹⁹ We cannot forget that it was the cult of Dionysus that not only practiced human sacrifice but also that incomprehensibly savage rite of ripping a man apart with one's bare hands.¹⁰⁰ Such savagery has no place in civilized society. Nonetheless, Dionysus is also an embodiment of fundamental principles of existence—of an essential

97. Neumann et al, *The Great Mother*, 432.

98. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 208.

99. The French classicists, including Michel Foucault, emphasized the "Dionysian" as a counter-force to traditional norms and power structures, see Sanna Tirkkonen, "Power, Religion, and Simulacrum—Foucault on the Cult of Dionysus" *Stasis*. vol. 3. no. 2. (2015): 302–321.

100. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 113.

duality that holds life and death together cheek by jowl.¹⁰¹ The project of descending to the flesh and reconciling the female is intimately tied to reckoning with our mortality. This reckoning was the central project of the medieval exegete who spent his days and nights meditating on the nature of death and the resurrection.

Griffen suggests that it was the fear of the sensual, the fleshly, and the female that spurred the Western mind to seek shelter in the abstract. It was this same fear that caused many medieval exegetes, including Bernard, to flee the temptations of the flesh and seek shelter in monasteries. Moore writes that that primary struggle of male celibacy is to overcome “the sexual, the sensual, the fleshly, the female.”¹⁰² Monasteries were not only as a means of escaping the fleshly and the female, but all that it represents—our mortality and our dependency on Nature. The ascetic project is one of subordinating the Dionysian flesh to Apollonian means of discipline and refinement. Paradoxically, however, Bernard’s queerness is a direct result of his own flight from the fleshly and the female. Moore eloquently speaks to this paradoxical queerness:

The woman of the Song—and, by extension, woman in general—is symbolically annihilated in the very gesture through which she is idealized. The symbolic world created by these male celibates in their allegorical appropriations of the Song is as free of the polluting presence of real women as the chapterhouse at Clairvaux, and inner sanctum of homosocial sanctity and the literary setting of Bernard’s eighty-six sermons on the Song, delivered to an implied audience of women-free men, the minutiae of whose daily lives are so disposed that they are almost never obliged to lay eyes on a flesh-and-blood daughter of Eve. The ecclesiastical tradition thus presents us with the paradoxical spectacle of male ascetics preening themselves in front of the mirror. Allegory enables them to look upon the female body in the Song without having to see it. In its contours they see only themselves.¹⁰³

101. The phrase “cheek by jowl” is borrowed from Otto. See Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 136-7.

102. Moore, “The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality”: 331.

103. *Ibid.*: 339-340.

Bernard's queerness is an example of Jung's *enantiodromia* which is defined as "the emergence of the unconscious opposite in the course of time."¹⁰⁴ So it was that Bernard's flight from the fleshly and the female led him directly into the bosom of the Virgin Mary from whose breast he famously suckled.¹⁰⁵ Just as Jung's principle of *enantiodromia* states that extreme aversions lead to their realization, Moore suggests that allegorical exposition of mystic union is the "ruse" by which "the exegete eagerly embraces that from which he is actively in flight."¹⁰⁶ In this way, Bernard's aversion toward the temptations of the flesh led to the development of a deeply carnal mysticism. While Bernard managed to distance himself from the temptations in the chapterhouse at Clairvaux, he did not manage to still his desires. Instead, he integrated his erotic impulses into his devotional practice. Jesus became the object of all his quivering, panting, throbbing desire. Bernard used the language of physical union to express mystic union with Christ. Regardless of Bernard's conscious intentions, his carnal mysticism subverted the West's wandering eye—always drifting toward the etherial—by fixing its gaze on the flesh.

Bernard's queer influence was unconscious—an unforeseen consequence of his own sexual displacement and sublimation. These terms will undoubtedly raise the eyebrows of a great many scholars who find discussion of sexual or

104. Carl Jung, *Psychological Types* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 426. Jung writes that, "This characteristic phenomenon practically always occurs when an extreme, one-sided tendency dominates conscious life; in time an equally powerful counterposition is built up, which first inhibits the conscious performance and subsequently breaks through the conscious control."

105. Léon Dewez and Albert van Iterson, "La lactation de saint Bernard: Legende et iconographie" *Citeaux in de Nederlanden*. 7 (1956): 165–89.

106. Moore, "Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality": 339.

unconscious motives to be reductive and best and slanderous at worst.¹⁰⁷ Caution around these terms is warranted. Bynum takes issue with the term

“sublimation” to describe mystic union. She writes,

Physical union with Christ [in the sacrament] is described in images of marriage and sexual consummation...Although scholars have, of course, suggested that such reactions are sublimated sexual desire, it seems inappropriate to speak of "sublimation." In the eucharist and in ecstasy, a male Christ was handled and loved; sexual feelings were, as certain contemporary commentators (like David of Augsburg) clearly realized, not so much translated into another medium as simply set free...The image of bride or lover was clearly a central metaphor for the woman [and man] mystic's union with Christ's humanity. In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen actually dressed her nuns as brides when they went forward to receive communion. And Hadewijch and Mechtild of Magdeburg, women given voice by the emergence of the vernaculars, found in secular love poetry the vocabulary and the pulsating rhythms to speak of the highest of all loves.¹⁰⁸

Bynum's caution derives from a desire to defend the integrity of mystic tradition from those who would seek to use psychoanalytic theory to gloss over the religious dimension. Elsewhere, Bynum admits that asceticism and eroticism were often indistinguishable.¹⁰⁹ I find much of the polemic against psychoanalyzing mysticism to come from a concern that it will be used to negate the allegorical and spiritual dimension. My referring to Bernard's activities as “sublimation” is a matter of expediency. Whether Bernard's erotic life was “translated” or “set free” is inconsequential to my argument that Bernard's erotic theology provides a missing link in art historical chronologies.

Nonetheless, I find the term “sublimation” to be accurate. Freud (1815-1896) defines “displacement” as the act of shifting the target of an emotional urge to a

107. Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Cambridge MA and New York: MIT Press and Zone Books, 1992).

108. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 133-4. Emphasis added.

109. *Ibid.*

substitute target that is less threatening or dangerous.¹¹⁰ “Sublimation” is the process of redirecting sexual urges towards more socially acceptable activities. It is another form of displacement.¹¹¹ Bernard’s project of raising carnal love to spiritual love fits this definition of sublimation. Recognizing this, however, need not minimize Bernard’s spiritual achievements. Even Bernard’s friend and biographer, William of Saint Thierry, seems to speak of Bernard’s decision to join the monastic order as a form of displacement. He writes,

It once happened that when Bernard was looking around, his gaze fell on a woman, but he at once corrected himself, blushed within himself, and blazed with annoyance at himself. A pool of freezing water lay near; he jumped into it and remained there until he was nearly frozen and, by the power of grace, his lust had been cooled. He was then clothed with the love of chastity in the same way as Job, who said, “I made a pact with my eyes that I should not think upon a virgin.” Meanwhile he was thinking to himself and pondering that saying, “It is not safe to sleep close to a serpent or to live long with a snake,” so he began to think about flight from the world....Making a search for such a place, he came upon the newly founded Cistercian plantation, a new way of monastic life.¹¹²

It is strange that William should choose to describe Bernard’s decision to join the Cistercian order in this way, as though one glance upon a woman had left him no choice but to retreat from the world entirely. Indeed, this idea is reinforced by Bernard himself who told his monks—“To be always with a woman and not to have sexual relations with her is more difficult than to raise the dead. You cannot do the less difficult; do you think I will believe that you can do what is more difficult?”¹¹³

110. Don Hockenbury, Sandra E. Hockenbury, *Psychology* (Macmillan, 2002), 459.

111. *Ibid.*

112. William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*. trans. Hilary Costello (Collegeville, Minnesota: OCSO Liturgical Press), 9-11.

113. *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, Sermon 65, par. 4, in OB, vol. 2 (1958): 174-75. quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast : The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (University of California Press, 1988), 15-16.

It is difficult to reconcile the harsh words of Job, and the vow to “never think upon a Virgin,” with Bernard’s many sensual descriptions of the Bride. Bernard writes, “you must not give an earthbound meaning to this coloring of the corruptible flesh, to this gathering of blood-red liquid that spreads evenly beneath the surface of her pearly skin, quietly mingling with it to enhance her physical beauty by the pink and white loveliness of her cheeks.”¹¹⁴ His writings indulge in the most sensual descriptions even as they admonish their reader not to give “earthbound meaning” to the image. It is the curse of the modern mind that we know not any other kind of meaning. If we cannot give earthbound meaning to the scintillating physicality of this description, what kind of meaning should we give it?

Ultimately, sexual sublimation is an accurate, although inadequate, answer to the question—why did exegetes express their desire for God in the language of sex? Historian Denys Turner explores the question in his book *“Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs.”*¹¹⁵ Turner argues for a less Freudian understanding of the reintegration of *eros* into the monastic order, tracing it instead to an Ancient Greek conception of *eros*. Turner argues that the concept of *eros* was brought down by Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 - c. 253) and Pseudo-Dionysius (5th - 6th century AD), who derived their understanding from the Ancient Greeks.¹¹⁶ The concept of *eros* in this sense, as mediated by Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius, was used to describe the intense longing for the departed Christ.¹¹⁷ The sexual frustration of the celibate monks, therefore, only intensified

114. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 20:1.

115. Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 471.

116. *Ibid.*, 89.

117. *Ibid.*

the accuracy of this metaphor of longing for the departed Christ. In this way, the allegorical (spiritual) meaning of the sermons should not be understood in opposition to the carnal (physical) imagery. While we cannot disregard Bernard's unavoidably homosexual desire for Christ—literally the kisses of his mouth—Bernard also saw in the image of the divine kiss the redemption of man's nature. Displacement, therefore, can only go so far in helping us understand the sexual metaphors central to Bernard's theology.

Theologian and queer theorist, Richard Cleaver, suggests that the difficulties that arise in attempting to understand Bernard's mysticism come from a "Platonic fallacy" at the heat of the modern outlook.¹¹⁸ He writes,

It is no accident that a major vehicle of Bernard's teaching was a series of sermons on the Song of Songs, the erotic poem that is also sacred scripture. His reading reflects his experience—outer and inner—of emotional attachments to men. We are accustomed to considering his experience as "mystical," a term that in this context might as well be "magical." This is because we have fallen for the Platonic fallacy that flesh and spirit are completely at odds.¹¹⁹

The modern mind infected with this Platonic fallacy has difficulty reconciling the carnal and the mystical. Bernard suffered from no such affliction. In this way, Bernard's theology is queer because of its mystic dimension rather than in spite of it. Bernard's erotic fantasies synthesized the sexual and the spiritual into a singular embodied devotional practice. Cleaver's assessment complicates Turner's argument that Bernard's conception of *eros* was descended from Plato. Bernard's understanding of person as "psychosomatic unity"—body and soul as one unified entity—is in direct opposition to Platonic understandings of person as spirit. Bynum writes,

118. Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 14-45. Furthermore, Cleaver suggests that Bernard's relationship with Archbishop Malachy of Armagh was homosexual in nature.

119. *Ibid.*, 14-45.

First, [medieval] theologians generally agreed that body is necessary for personhood. Although certain early thinkers...used Platonic concepts that made the soul the person, schoolmen after the mid-[thirteenth] century usually understood "person" as a composite of body and soul. According to this definition, a self is not a soul using a body but a psychosomatic entity, to which body is integral.¹²⁰

It is significant that Bynum explicitly dates the ontological shift towards viewing person as a psychosomatic unity to the mid-thirteenth century. This is the exact time that I argue this ontological shift becomes evident in French Gothic sculpture. Bernard subverts the Platonic fallacy by demanding that we fully reconcile the flesh and the spirit, the earthly and the divine. The art of the thirteenth century suggests that such a reconciliation was underway.

My application of psychoanalytic theory to the figure of Bernard is by no means an attempt to pathologize him or minimize his contributions. I view Bernard's theology as an inevitable step in a larger cultural process of Jung's *enantiodromia*. Kenneth Clark writes that, "since the earliest times the obsessive, the unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give these linages a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European art."¹²¹ So it was that in Christianity's mad Apollonian dash to distance ourselves from our "primal" selves, to free mankind from the fleshly and the female, it only managed to reintegrate these primal impulses and re-articulate them in a new form. Otto writes,

Dionysiac condition is a primal phenomena of life in which even man must participate in all moments of of birth in his creative existence. This feminine world in confronted by the radically different masculine world of Apollo. In his world not the life mystery of blood and of the powers of the earth but he clarity

120. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 135. In footnote 59, Bynum includes Bernard among those who viewed the body as a psychosomatic unity.

121. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54.

and the breadth of the mind hold sway. However, the Apollonic world cannot exist without the other. This is why it has never denied in recognition.¹²²

Bernard was a key figure who reintegrated Dionysian principles back into Christian art and theology.

Bernard's religiosity does not make him immune to psychoanalysis. French philosopher Simone Weil writes that "to reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love."¹²³ The metaphor with painting is well taken. As Oscar Wilde writes, "the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium."¹²⁴ In the same way that we do not reproach the artist for the imperfections of the medium, but remain critics of the art nonetheless, so too should we be able to approach the writings of the mystics.

I suggest that Bernard's ability to reconcile the spiritual with the carnal, and dwell in this paradox, is a queer attribute. We find this quality in the writings of Hildegard Von Bingen, Dante, Bernard of Clairvaux, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and Flannery O'Connor to name a few. These writers took great relish in undermining the West's tendency to disregard the flesh as an impediment to spiritual or noetic attainment. The Western animus towards the fleshly and female has likely also led to the historical accounts of the Renaissance, e.g. those

122. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 142. Indeed, one might argue that even Christianity, despite its Apollonian premises, recognized that it needed Dionysus to survive, and remade his cult in the form of Jesus—the suffering crucified God born of woman—who reintegrated Dionysian duality back into the Christian faith. For a further discussion of the parallel between Jesus and Dionysus see Robert B. Palmer's introduction in Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, ix-3.

123. Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* vol 2. trans. Arthur Wills (London: 1976), 472.

124. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London, New York: Penguin Random House, 2003), vii.

referenced by Steinberg, that ignore the “irrational” and “erotic” motivations.¹²⁵ These biases may have also contributed to reductive readings of Bernard and resulted in historical accounts of the Renaissance that minimize his contributions.¹²⁶

Burgwinkle suggests that, “medieval theology fairly teems with texts that create, in the guise of theology, a theory of embodied sexual identity.”¹²⁷ If a coherent theory of embodied sexual identity exists in the theology, however, it remains somewhat intractable. It is difficult to parse the literal from the allegorical. The metaphors are too slippery to pin down—an image of a bride’s love for her bridegroom can quickly morph into a metaphor for the eucharist and its progenitive power. However, statues seem to be less slippery than words. In the thirteenth century, the influence of Bernard’s erotic theology bears its mark on the art of France. Here, we see a fundamental change in medieval conceptions of the body, and a theory of embodied sexual identity begins to emerge.

125. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance*, 331.

126. For a discussion of reductive of Bernard’s sermons see Cleaver, *Know My Name*, 14-45. Cleaver argues that the Neo-Platonic impulse has caused modern audiences to shy away from Bernard’s erotic/homoerotic content. My assertion that Renaissance chronologies ignore Bernard’s contributions derives from my interpretation of Steinberg.

127. Burgwinkle, “État Présent”: 81.

PART I - STASIS

CHAPTER I : THE STATIC INCORRUPTIBLE BODY

The Apollonian is *static*, the Dionysian is *ecstatic*. The god Dionysus is an embodiment of Nature's savage heraclitian flux. He dwells in paradox. The Apollonian intellect draws straight lines and Dionysus erases them. Dionysian ecstasy is the result of the erasure of the crisp Apollonian boundary between sex, birth, and death.¹²⁸ In Dionysus, the creative and the destructive principles are unified.¹²⁹ Otto writes that, "philosophy, the heir of myth, when it first emerged, already expressed the realization that death was based on and enclosed within the nature of being itself."¹³⁰ Similarly, Hegel tells us that "it is the nature of the finite to have within its essence the seeds of extinction; the hour of its birth is the hour of its death."¹³¹ Hegel likely had Genesis in mind when he penned these words, for Christian cosmology holds that the hour of man's birth was also the moment of his death. In the mouth of the Christian God, however, Hegel's sober axiom becomes a curse. When God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden, he curses them saying, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children...in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust

128. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 137

129. *Ibid.*, 139

130. *Ibid.*

131. Hegel, *Logik, Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 147. Cited from Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 135.

thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”¹³² In Christian cosmology, sex and death are bound up with man’s fall from grace. Since the fall, man is captive to the relentless tides of birth and death. Stilling these Dionysian currents is one of the central preoccupations of medieval art and theology.

Nietzsche describes Christian cosmology as a rebellion against all that Dionysus holds sacred:

For the Greeks a sexual symbol was...the most sacred symbol, the real profundity in the whole of ancient piety, Every single element in the act of procreation, of pregnancy, and of birth aroused the highest and most solemn feelings. In the doctrine of mysteries, pain is pronounced holy: the pangs of woman giving birth consecrate all pain; That there may be the eternal joy of creating, that the will to life may eternally affirm itself, the agony of the woman giving birth must also be there eternally. All this is meant by the word Dionysus: I know no higher symbolism of the Dionysian festivals...It was Christianity, with its heartfelt resentment against life, that first made something unclean of sexuality, it threw filth on the origin, on the essential fact of our life.¹³³

Nietzsche is one of harshest critics of Christianity. His insistence that Christianity was the *first* to make us ashamed of our origins, therefore, is part of his polemic. Regardless of when this shame first arose, however, the art of the Middle Ages was colored this Christian animus.

All art is either in flight from or surrender to these primeval forces of sex, birth, and death. A statue carved in stone is an attempt to freeze life’s incessant Heraclitian flux. The orgastic dance of the maenads is a delirious surrender to Nature’s ancient song. Art of ecstasy, however, is rare in the Middle Ages. Clark writes that “in the nude of ecstasy the will has been surrendered, and the body is possessed by some *irrational* power.”¹³⁴ In the Middle Ages, however, one was surrounded by warnings against such surrender. Beauty and pleasure were

132. KJV Gen. 3:16-19

133. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*. trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 90.

134. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 273. (Emphasis mine)

tinged with the threat of eternal damnation. Woman was to blame. Eve's temptation was resulted in the fall of all mankind and the perversion of God's intended order. The relief sculpture of Eve at the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, France (Fig. 6), created around 1130 serves as a wake up call for all who feel lulled by pleasure's song. In the Middle Ages, however, depictions of such surrender, like the Eve at Autun, were tinged with the threat of eternal damnation. The twelfth century relief sculpture of Eve's temptation is a celebration of sensual pleasure couched in an admonition. The serpent lurks everywhere—in her contorted posture, in the swirling hair that drips down her neck, in the curved branches of the apple tree, and in the vines that envelope her like seaweed rising from the ocean floor. She is a snake charmed by pleasure's song. The aquatic overtones recall the sea monsters that mark uncharted waters on maps, reminding us of woman's dangerous mystery. The awkward pose of her body casts judgment on her "spinelessness." She serves as a wake up call to all who those who feel similarly lulled by pleasure's song.



Figure 6
The Temptation of Eve
Relief fragment from the Saint Lazare
Cathedral in Autun, France
Attributed to Gislebertus
c. 1130

In his seminal work, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, historian Johan Huizinga writes that “in the Middle Ages the choice lay, in principle, only between God and the world, between contempt or eager acceptance, at the peril of one’s soul, of all that makes up the beauty and the charm of earthly life.”¹³⁵ Huizinga’s characterization of a fundamental choice between this world and the next that loomed like a shadow over the Middle Ages is essentially correct, however, we must be careful not to color this shadow so dark as to warrant the term “Dark Ages.” The choice between the material and the spiritual, sin and salvation, *eros* and chastity, tightly constrained the art of the Middle Ages was a paradoxical one—an impossible choice that led to innumerable contradictions and sublimations. The idea that one simply *chose* God over the world neglects the inescapability of the world and the body. Furthermore, such a dualistic understanding of medieval attitudes toward the physical world overlooks the primacy of the body in theological considerations.

Medieval theologians were not in flight from the body, they were obsessed with it.¹³⁶ Even in death one could not escape the body.¹³⁷ Thinkers dwelt far less on the numinous realm than they did on the destiny of hair, fingernail clippings, and aborted fetuses.¹³⁸ The overwhelming amount of theological and philosophical discussion was concerned with bodily decay and digestion.¹³⁹ While it is true that bodily desires were often regarded as moral “defects,” this resulted in the development of ascetic practices that sought to correct these

135. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and The Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Normanby Press, 2013), 33.

136. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 112.

137. *Ibid.*, 135.

138. *Ibid.*, 111.

139. *Ibid.*, 111.

“defects.”¹⁴⁰ If strictly adhered to, these practices promised to eventually correct man’s ultimate “defect”—his mortality.¹⁴¹

Despite the body’s primacy to medieval identity, it was nonetheless considered to be inherently flawed. The body was understood a mutation of God’s intended order. The limitations of the body—painful childbirth, decay, mortality—were understood as perversions of the body’s former prelapsarian glory. Our bodily condition was a punishment for our original sin. This forced celebrations of the body in medieval art to make reference to the uncorrupted body as it existed either before the fall or after the Resurrection. Medieval artworks couched celebration of the body in allegorical warnings of temptation. The twelfth century Eve relief sculpture at Autun celebrates Eve’s sensuality only in so far as it admonishes her for it. It is not until the thirteenth century that the threat of damnation fades from celebrations of the body in European Art.

In the writings of the twelfth century theologians, we begin to see a increasing recognition, sometimes reluctantly, of the many virtues of the body as a growing, sensing, desiring entity.¹⁴² Agustinus Triumphys of Ancona, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure, among others, speak of the soul’s desire for the body.¹⁴³ There is a distinct trend in the twelfth century toward speaking of the body soul relationship in terms of desire and yearning for completion.¹⁴⁴ Bynum writes,

140. Ibid., 113-114.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid., 245-246.

143. Ibid.

144. Ibid., 246. Bynum states that this shift in the twelfth century was philosophical and theological but not “aesthetic.” I argue that the shift had clear aesthetic implications. Bynum’s distinction is meant to highlight the philosophical and theological imperatives rather than detract from matters of taste or artistic form.

Although Bernard occasionally asks in puzzlement why souls desire the body —"miserable flesh," "foul and fetid flesh"—he answers that souls must crave the body not for its merits but because without it they are not complete persons. The desire of soul for body is a contortion, a twisting; it is the "wrinkle" of Ephesians 5.27. Without body, souls can be a "glorious church, without spot" of sin, but they cannot be completely happy, for they are not free from the "wrinkle of distraction" until they are embodied again at the end of time.¹⁴⁵

For Bernard, the soul's desire for completion became another way of sacramentalizing desire itself.

Furthermore, amidst the construction of the opulent Gothic cathedrals in the twelfth century, there was an increasing emphasis on the spiritual utility of the beauty of the material world. The supposed inventor of Gothic architecture, Abbot of Suger (1081-1151), famously wrote that "the dull mind rises to truth through that which is material."¹⁴⁶ These ideas likely found support from Platonic strains of thought circulating throughout Europe at the time.¹⁴⁷

Generally speaking, this Platonically inflected theology held that just as the shadows of the Forms are evident in their earthly manifestations, so too was the divine hand discernible in the physical world. In this way, physical beauty was a scaffold by which one could climb to celestial heights. However, Bernard differs by suggesting that body is essential to spiritual and noetic attainment. In his commentary on the Song, Bernard writes,

We indeed continue to live after the body's death, but only by means of the body do we gain those merits that lead to a life of blessedness. Paul sensed this, saying: 'The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made.' All creatures that he has made, creatures that possess a body and are

145. Ibid., 164-5.

146. Abott Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art and Treasures*. trans. Gerda Panofsky-Soergel. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 23.

147. Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 89. For a broader genealogy of Neo-Platonic thought in the Middle Ages see Oleg V. Bychkov, "The Reflection of Some Traditional Stoic Ideas in the Thirteenth-Century Scholastic Theories of Beauty" *Vivarium* 34, no. 2 (1996): 141.

therefore visible, can be understood by our minds only through the body's instrumentality.¹⁴⁸

In this way, re-discovered Platonic philosophy alone cannot account for the theological, ontological, and artistic shifts precipitating in the twelfth century. For a more complete picture we must look at Bernard's metaphysics of desire. Before we do, however, we must attempt to grapple with pre-Bernardian ontology as it was made manifest in medieval sculpture. For this, we can look to the late tenth century reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy, a work that is in every way an embodiment of the early doctrine of the resurrection.

Nearly a century before Bernard of Clairvaux was born in the north of France, a small reliquary statue was crafted in the south—a golden effigy to hold the relics of Sainte-Foy (Fig. 2). While the exact date of creation is unknown, the



Figure 2
Sainte Foy Reliquary Statue
Conques, France
c. 1000, with Gothic additions

148. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon Song of Songs*, 5:1.

golden reliquary statue was likely made sometime in the late tenth century. After the time of Charlemagne, it was obligatory for churches in the Latin West to possess relics, even if that meant stealing them.¹⁴⁹ According to the *Translatio*, an eleventh century text, Sainte-Foy's body was enshrined in Agen, where it rested until 866, when the monks of Conques carried out their plot to steal her relics.¹⁵⁰ Such a theft was not considered un-Christian, for it was believed that Sainte-Foy herself would intervene if she did not desire to be relocated.¹⁵¹ The saints were known to punish as well as heal.¹⁵² A saint's relics were considered to be as alive, perhaps even more alive, than you or I.¹⁵³ Sometime between 940 and 980, a new church dedicated to the Holy Savior was built in Conques.¹⁵⁴ In 983, Sainte-Foy was said to have miraculously replaced a man's eyeballs that had been dislodged from his skull a year earlier.¹⁵⁵ The man was thereafter referred to as "Guibert the Illuminated."¹⁵⁶ News of the miracle spread throughout France. Soon thereafter, the reliquary statue acquired its crown, ecclesiastical garments, and throne.¹⁵⁷

Standing less than three feet tall, the statue depicts the saint enthroned, arms outstretched, gazing heavenward (Fig. 2). Despite her diminutive size she is imposing. Here gaze is magnetic, severe, and all-surveying. The statue is gilded

149. Pamela Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum Sancte Fidis* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 9-10.

150. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

151. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

152. *Ibid.*, 33.

153. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 178-79

154. Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum*, 33.

155. *Ibid.*, 10.

156. *Ibid.*

157. *Ibid.*, 16.

from head to toe, covered with precious stones, antique cameos, and intaglios. Four crystal orbs punctuate the saint's throne. In candlelight, the effect would have been mesmerizing—the flickering flame adding an uncanny motion as it reflected off of the hammered gold and gemstones. Her body is not beautiful but it is ideal. She is not naturalistic because she does not seek to imitate nature. Instead, she is meant to express the glorified incorruptible body of the saint in heaven.

When a culture abandons their static, geometric ideals in favor of more naturalistic ones this is regarded as a mark of “progress,” however, as Clark eloquently states, the sculpted body is ideal before it is beautiful:

Historians who have written in the belief that all art consists in a striving for realism have sometimes expressed surprise that the Greeks, with their vivid curiosity, should have approached nature so reluctantly; that in the fifty years between the *Moschophoros* and the funeral stele of Ariston, there should have been so little “progress.” This is to misconceive the basis of Greek art. It is fundamentally ideal. It starts from the concept of perfect shape and only gradually feels able to modify that shape in the interests of imitation.¹⁵⁸

The same is true of medieval art, which was ideal before it was beautiful. The transition from the static, geometric forms of Early Greek and Byzantine art to the plastic, naturalistic forms of High Classic and Renaissance art should not be spoken of in terms of “progress,” but in terms of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Clark writes that “Apollo is clear and ideal before he is beautiful.”¹⁵⁹ The first Greek nudes, traditionally known as Apollos, were stiff, flat, and awkward, and yet they contained an Apollonian geometry and crisp definition of line. The luminous, rigid, geometric body of Sainte-Foy is kissed by Apollo's rarifying light. She is almost painfully brilliant. Her substance is not entirely of this world. Like the saint herself, the statue's materiality exists in a liminal space

158. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 31.

159. *Ibid.*, 32.

somewhere between this world and the next. High Classic art captured the *ephebe* in the bloom of youth, and embalmed this ephemeral state in stone. However, the medieval ideal was not some ephemeral state but the end of change itself. In the Middle Ages, the glorified body existed not in this world but in the next. The ideal body was found in the static, unchanging, resurrected body—an ideal for which no living model existed. Bynum explains that, “what twelfth century theologians, artists and spiritual writers envisioned when they thought of the selves in heaven were the reliquaries that glowed in cathedral treasuries and the holy people whose sanctity shone through the bodies ‘of ivory’ they wore on earth.”¹⁶⁰ The reliquary statue of Sainte Foy is a projection of this Apollonian ideal.

Sainte-Foy’s gaze is like a knife. Medieval historian Michael Camille writes that,

The animate aura of such cult images as...the statue of [Sainte-]Foy at Conques stemmed from their articulation of a whole set of hieratic conventions associated with power and magic—such as the glaring eyes, potent and penetrating to the beholder—that go back to imperial portraiture. Medieval optical theory judged spiritus to emanate from the eye like a ray, illuminating the world around so that the beholders could literally be trapped by the gaze of the image.¹⁶¹

Even her gaze is geometric. The Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi famously observed that there are no straight lines in nature. The straight line is an Apollonian rebellion against Nature’s organic curvaceousness—the steely blade that cuts through the Dionysian wilderness. In this way, the reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy is not some primitive precursor to the enlightened naturalism of the Renaissance, but a beacon of Apollonian perfection.

160. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 200.

161. Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 223.

The reliquary statue was highly transgressive for being one of the first freestanding statues of the human body to appear in the Latin West since Charlemagne's minor efforts to emulate Roman art in the tenth century. The golden effigy's resonances with the biblical golden calf are impossible to ignore. The reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy was unconventional enough to raise the eyebrows of the intellectual church-father, Bernard of Angers, at Chartres.¹⁶² Between about 1014 and 1020, Bernard made a total of three trips to Conques to investigate the cult that rose up around Sainte-Foy's relics and her alleged miracles. Bernard understood himself to be acting on behalf of the Church to stamp out any latent embers of pagan antiquity and superstition.¹⁶³ Upon investigation, however, Bernard ultimately vindicated the relic and its miracles. He compiled his investigations into a collection of forty-nine miracle stories, the *Liber Miraculorum sancta* or "Book of Miracles." This book spread the cult's fame throughout northern France.¹⁶⁴ Despite the statue's heterodox form, Bernard of Angers, recognized that the statue expressed a belief at the heart of Christian orthodoxy—a belief in the immortality of the glorified resurrected body.¹⁶⁵

Clark writes that, "since the earliest times the obsessive, the unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give these images a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European art."¹⁶⁶ The overwhelming absence of freestanding figural statues in the Middle Ages represents only a brief hiatus

162. Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum*, 9-10.

163. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

164. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

165. Thomas E. A. Dale, "The Individual, the Resurrected Body, and Romanesque Portraiture: The Tomb of Rudolf Von Schwaben in Merseburg" *Speculum* 77, No. 3. (2002): 735.

166. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54.

from a long lineage of sculpting the body. The Sainte-Foy reliquary resurrects this lineage. It too attempts to make the “vulgar” body “celestial.” However, in the Middle Ages, the vulgarity of the body was understood to be its very organic nature. Bynum writes that “[medieval theologians] were willing to sacrifice philosophical coherence for the oxymoron of incorruptible matter.”¹⁶⁷ So it was that the “unreasonable desire” to externalize and meditate upon the glorified human form ultimately overshadowed concerns of idolatry.

Generally speaking, the taboos around bodily representation in the Middle Ages were twofold—taboos around idolatry, and taboos around seduction and temptation. These taboos were intimately linked. The Sainte-Foy effigy breaks the taboos against idolatry by depicting the human figure fully and in the round. There is even an argument to be made that the Sainte Foy reliquary statue is erotic simply by virtue of her three-dimensionality.¹⁶⁸ Regardless, the effigy marks the return of the three-dimensional body as an acceptable subject of Western Art and begins the slippery slope that eventually culminates in the pagan and outright pornographic statues of the Renaissance.

Beneath Sainte-Foy’s ornamental jewels and gold, her body is formed of yew-wood.¹⁶⁹ Her head is made from a repurposed fifth century Roman portrait bust.¹⁷⁰ The Roman bust originally depicted a man, possibly a child.¹⁷¹ The male bust is covered with a layer of hammered gold. The masculine features are only slightly softened to depict the female saint. The result is more androgynous than female. Sainte-Foy is supra-sexual. This androgyny may have a theological basis.

167. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 112.

168. Ziolkowski, *The Juggler of Notre-Dame*, 171.

169. Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum*, 16.

170. *Ibid.*

171. *Ibid.*

Jerome (c. 342 - 347) speaks of the angels as supra-sexual beings.¹⁷² He criticizes as heretical the women who take pleasure in the idea that they will be resurrected without sex and “be like angels.”¹⁷³ Like Ganymede, the angels hover between this world and the next, their liminality reflected by their androgyny. Sainte Foy’s liminality is not that of the waifish Ganymede. Hers is the liminality of Tiresias the blind prophet of Apollo. Her gaze occupies the same liminal space of prophecy and vision. Her gaze is magnetic, transfixing. She is possessed with a severity of one who has seen too much.

Sainte-Foy’s androgyny may express the ascetic belief that sexual difference would melt away in the purging fires of the Resurrection.¹⁷⁴ John Scotus Erigena



Figure 2
Sainte Foy Reliquary Statue (Detail)
Conques, France
c. 1000, with Gothic additions

172. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 90-91.

173. St. Jerome, *Letter 84*, chap. m 6, ed. Labourt, vol. 4, 131, PL 22, col. 748. Quoted from Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 90-91.

174. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 147.

(c. 800-877) and Honorius of Autun (c. 1080-1154) viewed sexual difference as a perversion of God's intended order.¹⁷⁵ Bynum writes, "Honorius clearly retains Erigena's sense that all the particularities of the body (age, sex, rank) appear as a result of sin."¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the glorified body was not thought to retain sex characteristics in the afterlife. This attitude toward sex characteristics is somewhat surprising given the scrupulous attention paid to retaining every material bit of the body in the afterlife. Much ink was spilt on the destiny of hair and fingernail clippings.¹⁷⁷ Bynum writes,

No matter how important the soul might be in accounting for person, [medieval] thinkers assumed that continuity of material and of shape or structure was necessary for identity. Unless the same particles returned to the same structure, body was not the same; if body was not the same, person was not the same."¹⁷⁸

It is odd that amidst this deep concern for maintaining the exact structure of the body in heaven, sexual differences, such as genitalia, were often regarded as negotiable.¹⁷⁹ The exception to this attitude was Jerome, who devoted a great deal of attention to the resurrection of the genitals.¹⁸⁰ However, even for Jerome, the genitals amounted to little more than a consolation prize in heaven. Bynum writes that, "it is as if our genitals must be present in heaven, so that our victory over them—and our reward for this victory—can continue for all eternity."¹⁸¹

175. Ibid.

176. Ibid.

177. Ibid., 111.

178. Ibid., 136.

179. Ibid., 111.

180. Ibid., 100.

181. Ibid., 91.

Like scars, therefore, the genitals served as reminders of the suffering undergone by the body—badges for one’s sacrifices and achievements.¹⁸²

Gender transgression did not represent the threat to identity that bodily dissolution did. Bynum writes,

With the partial exception of Jerome...the most materialistic of fourth and fifth-century writers on bodily resurrection do not focus on maintaining distinctions owing to gender, sexual restraint, charismatic ability, or moral achievement...In the theological literature of late antiquity, the fear that our self will perish is not expressed in elaborate metaphors (or natural philosophical discussions) of hermaphrodites, cross dressing, gender transgression, sexual intercourse, and so forth, but rather in metaphors (and in technical treatments) of digestion and nutrition.¹⁸³

Status, age, and gender were maintained, but the primary concern was the materiality of the body. Medieval historian Thomas Dale argues that status, age, and gender were maintained after resurrection do to their moral basis—one’s rank in heaven was defined by one’s virtues and sacrifices in life.¹⁸⁴ It appears that considerations of sex and rank largely had a basis in ascetic doctrine, which was concerned with moral distinctions.¹⁸⁵ However, even distinctions of rank owing to moral achievement were secondary to the primary concern—the end of organic processes and bodily decay. Bynum writes that, “the doctrine of bodily resurrection was not...a displaced discussion of power or of status, of sensuality, gender, or sex, of cultural encounter and otherness; it was a discussion—exactly

182. Ibid, 137.

183. Ibid., 111.

184. Dale, “The Individual, the Resurrected Body”: 735.

185. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 91. The correlation between sex and rank varied among theologians, however, most maintained the inferiority of the female sex. Augustine writes that there will be rank and hierarchy in heaven and women and men will rise with their respective sexes. Although he maintains that God created women inferior, he qualifies that God did not have to create women in order to create inferiority, and that men too are subject to hierarchical degrees of virtue and excellence. See St. Augustine. Sermon 132. Cited from Bynum. *The Resurrection of the Body*, 100.

as its proponents said it was—of death.”¹⁸⁶ In sharp contrast to Bynum’s insistence that the doctrine of the resurrection was not a displaced conversation about sex, class, or rank, historians Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn have argued that the reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy and tomb effigies, like those of Rudolf von Schwaben in Merseburg, were created to accentuate and maintain hierarchy and rank.¹⁸⁷ In so far as rank was accentuated in the tomb effigies or reliquary statues, however, it seems to have been largely incidental—a measure of moral achievement.

The statues of this period reflect an understanding of ascetic transmogrification of the flesh by which substance was formed and molded by one’s deeds. Dale notes the prevalent use of the seal and wax metaphor to describe ascetic life and its bearing on the physical body.¹⁸⁸ Hugh of Saint Victor described ascetic practice with the image of a seal making its mark in wax—by modeling one’s deeds after the lives of the saints, so too is one’s body molded like hot wax under a seal.¹⁸⁹ The generous use of gold in the Saint-Foy reliquary statue, therefore, has theological significance. Gold, like sealing wax, is quite malleable, and yet it is immune to corrosion and highly resistant to chemical reactions. It is one of the most stable elements. Gold may change form but its essential substance remains.

186. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 113.

187. Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, “An Unsentimental View of Ritual in the Middle Ages Or, Sainte Foy Was No Snow White” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6, no. 1 (1992)

188. Dale, “The Individual, the Resurrected Body”: 720-72.

189. *Ibid.*

Medieval historian Hilary Fox outlines the theological significance of gold in her analysis of the seventh century Old English poem *The Phoenix*.¹⁹⁰ The poem is a metallurgical metaphor for the Resurrection.¹⁹¹ Fox writes that “[the poem] is the poet’s extended meditation on destruction and restoration at the end of time; in the same way that he depicts God as the divine artist and the phoenix as his creation, the poet casts God as the goldsmith whose refining fires purge the soul and body of sin prior to their reforging.”¹⁹² Fox notes that the gold-working metaphor for the Resurrection was extremely precise.¹⁹³ The recast vessel metaphor also mitigated fears of bodily dissolution. Just as gold can be melted down, reforged from disparate parts and made whole again, so too was the body reforged at the time of the Resurrection.¹⁹⁴ Unlike Origen’s organic metaphors of germination, it managed to account for God’s highly interventionist role in the Resurrection.

The liberal use of gold in the Sainte-Foy statue likely refers to the medieval conception of God as craftsman (*Deus artifex*) and goldsmith (*Deus aurifex*).¹⁹⁵ Augustine elaborates on the metaphor of God as goldsmith, using it to describe ascetic practice. He writes that, “The furnace is the world, the unjust the impurities, the righteous are the gold, tribulation is the fire, and God is the

190. Hilary E. Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection: Goldwork, the Soul, and the Deus Aurifex in the Phoenix.” *The Review of English Studies* 63, no. 258 (2012): 19. The phoenix is commonly associated with resurrection. Fox notes that, “*The Phoenix* participates in an ancient tradition that associated the bird with rebirth in general, and in Christian writing, with the resurrection of the body and the soul at the Last Judgment.” Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection”: 1.

191. *Ibid.*: 2.

192. *Ibid.*: 10-11.

193. *Ibid.*: 19.

194. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 175-76.

195. Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection”: 19.

goldsmith.”¹⁹⁶ The saint’s virtuous deeds are reflected by her golden luminosity. Bernard of Angers, who approached the reliquary of Sainte-Foy with extreme skepticism, recognized in her materiality of a metaphor for the saints virtue. He writes that, “the brilliant gold [of St. Foy’s dress] symbolizes the light of spirituality...the four jewels of her crown, the four cardinal virtues.”¹⁹⁷ The poet of the *Phoenix* pays particular attention to the Phoenix’s “jewel-like” nature.¹⁹⁸ The metaphor has clear references to jeweled reliquaries.¹⁹⁹ Marcellus likens the remains of saints to pearls in Jesus’ heavenly crown. Likewise, Bernard of Angers described Sainte-Foy as “one of the brightest pearls of Heavenly Jerusalem.”²⁰⁰ In both form and material, the reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy perfectly articulates the doctrine of the glorified body as it was conceived in the Early Middle Ages.

The process of metallurgical purgation began on earth. Person was a “living statue” whose deeds either corrupted or rarified their bodily vessel. This ascetic achievement was also the aim of the grossly misunderstood practice of alchemy. Titus Burckhardt writes that alchemy’s spiritual aim was “the achievement of ‘inward silver’ or ‘inward gold’—in their immutable purity and luminosity.”²⁰¹ In this way, the alchemical and ascetic projects were one and the same, they both sought to make the body static and incorruptible.²⁰² Bynum writes that, “the controlled, lightened, and hardened bodies of hermits and holy virgins were

196. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalms* (Turhout, 1956), 782. Quoted in Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection”: 11.

197. Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum*, 46.

198. Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection”: 2.

199. *Ibid.*

200. Sheingorn, *Liber Miraculorum*, 74.

201. Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy*. trans. William Stoddart. (London, 1967), 13.

202. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 178-79.

understood to move during life toward the subtlety and impassibility they would have in paradise.”²⁰³ Just as the immense pressure of the earth makes diamonds from coal, so too did the incredible discipline of the ascetics make them brilliant, incorruptible, jewel-like.

Peter the Venerable’s sermon, composed sometime before 1109, in honor of the relics of St. Marcellus speaks of the theological significance of relics:

We anticipate for [the spirits of the just] a future resurrection in their bodies with immortality and in every sense incorruptibility. For this reason we don not debase as inanimate...the bodies of those who in this life cultivated justice; rather we venerate them as pearls suitable for the crown of the eternal kind, and, with the greatest devotion of which we are capable, preserve them as vessels of resurrection to be joined again to the blessed souls...Behold whose bodies you venerate, brothers, in whose ashes you exalt, for whose bones you prepare golden sepulchers. They are sons of God, equal to angels, sons of the resurrection.²⁰⁴

It is difficult to wade through Marcellus’ glittering and obsequious prose, however, we should take pause at Marcellus’ claim that relics are preserved as vessels of the resurrection to be joined again to the blessed souls. Though he does not come out and say it, there is a suggestion here that the reliquary statues are more than just projections of the saint in heaven but are themselves worthy of the eternal crown.

Unlike the Ancient Greeks, who fashioned their gods in their own likeness, early Christians understood humans to be fashioned in God’s likeness. To make sculpture was to imitate God—the original sculptor who fashioned the first humans out of clay.²⁰⁵ The reliquary-statue of Sainte-Foy is an explicit reference

203. *Ibid.*, 200.

204. *Ibid.*, 178-79. Marcellus describes the saints as “equal to angels.” Extrapolating from Jerome, it seems that the saints were likewise made androgyne, maintaining their distinguishing characteristics only as badges of their triumphs and sacrifices on earth.

205. Fox, “The Aesthetics of Resurrection”: 11.

to God as maker, artificer, sculptor, and goldsmith.²⁰⁶ It seems that Early Medieval statues avoided accusations of pagan idolatry by making *explicit* this reference to God's role as sculptor. In this way, sculpting was a kind of mimetic homage to God. Hugh of St. Victor writes,

For if a man, an artificer, can produce a statue, which for some reason he had made deformed, and render it very beautiful, so that nothing of the substance but only the deformity perish, and...can so scatter and mix all [the material] that he does not cause deformity or diminish quantity, what must we think about the Omnipotent."²⁰⁷

Sculpture had a reflexive ability to illustrate the activity of God. Men participated in God's craft by forming "living statues" that rivaled his own handiwork.²⁰⁸ forged by a craftsman. Fox writes that, "for Lactantius, Lupus, and others, the importance of God as craftsman (*artifex*) lies in his role as creator, and the emphasis is placed on the sublime workmanship manifested in the human form and its endowment with a soul capable of knowing its creator."²⁰⁹ Imitation of God was a mode of divine contemplation. Explicit reference to the metaphor of God as sculptor seems to have allowed artists to retake the role themselves and reintegrate figural sculpture into the artistic vernacular.

Many twelfth century thinkers, including Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry used the metaphor of person as recast vessel or statue to describe

206. Fox, "The Aesthetics of Resurrection": 1.

207. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, trans. Deferrari, bk. 2, pt. 17 chaps. 14 and 16; PL 176, cols. 602-3 and 604; 459 and 460. Quoted from Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 130.

208. In this way, the creative act itself can be understood as Dionysian. Otto writes, "He who begets something which is alive must dive down into the primeval depths in which the forces of life dwell. And when he rises to the surface, there is a gleam of madness in his eyes because those depths live cheek by jowl with life. The primal mystery is itself mad—the matrix of the duality and unity of disunity. We do not have to appeal to the philosophers for this...All peoples testify to it through their life experiences and their cult practices." See Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 136-7.

209. Fox, "The Aesthetics of Resurrection": 11.

the Resurrection.²¹⁰ However, Bernard and William's understanding of person as psychosomatic unity complicated the metaphor. It is not surprising that William often spoke of the body as a "living statue" forged by God, however, the problem that the statue metaphor was created to solve—to disallow of flux while maintaining continuity of matter—is abandoned by Thierry.²¹¹ Bynum writes,

Thierry repeatedly described the earthly body as a "living statue" forged by God. But occasionally William's statue not only lives, it also grows towards perfection as an expression of the morally developing soul. William's suggestion that the body would have grown perfect in paradise had not sin intervened is close to Augustine's idea of acquiring the *non posse mori* through eating from the tree of life; it is not a notion either that general resurrection is flowering or that the voyage of the separated soul is manifested in body. But there is at least a hint that soul needs body—throbbing, sensing, experiencing, growing body—as a revelation and expression of itself.²¹²

Like Bernard, William understood person as psychosomatic unity, therefore, body was not simply a static vessel, it was integral to the development and expression of soul. William focuses on the animus of the statue itself, its ability to change and grow. In the twelfth century, body and soul are more deeply integrated—Pinocchio becomes a real boy.²¹³ Unlike the Sainte-Foy reliquary, William's living statue does not just sit still, it moves.

210. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 175-76.

211. William of St. Thierry, *On the Nature of the Body and Soul*, bk. 2, Pl 180, cols. 202-26, esp. cols. 710 and 717; trans. by J.-M. Dechant in *Oeuvres choisies de Guillaume de St. Thierry* (Paris: Aubier, 1943), 100-1 and 120-21. Cited from Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 166.

212. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 166-7.

213. Pinocchio is in some sense "unreal" as an animated puppet, and is only made real when his developing moral life has allowed him to synthesize spirit and flesh. Pinocchio may, therefore, offer a helpful analogy to William's evolving understanding of person as morally developing soul that is a synthesis of spirit and flesh (psychosomatic unity) rather than simply an embodied spirit (animated matter).

PART II - BERNARD'S "QUEER" METAPHYSICS

CHAPTER II: WORD MADE FLESH

*A Word made Flesh is seldom
And tremblingly partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very food debated
To our specific strength*

—Emily Dickinson

Bernard of Clairvaux was born to a noble family at the chateau of Fontaines, on the outskirts of Dijon, France, in the year 1090. His intimate friend and biographer, William of St. Thierry, records a vision that Bernard had as a young child.²¹⁴ The vision was so compelling that it instigated Bernard's life of devotion.²¹⁵ In the vision, Bernard witnessed the moment of Jesus' birth.²¹⁶ As Thierry writes it, "the child Jesus revealed himself in his Holy Nativity to the little boy, awakening in him the beginnings of divine contemplation and

214. William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffry of Auxerre, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*. trans. Hilary Costello (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), xix.

215. *Ibid.* Book 1, 7.

216. *Ibid.*

increasing his tender faith. Jesus appeared to him like the spouse coming forth from his chamber. He appeared to him before his very eyes as the wordless Word was being born from his mother's womb, more beautiful in form than all the children of men."²¹⁷

What exactly did Bernard see that day? Thierry's poetic description of the event is difficult to envision. It is hard to reconcile the visceral imagery of a child being born from a mother's womb with something as abstract as the "wordless Word." This tension between the hyperphysical and the metaphysical is a fundamental characteristic of Bernard's writings in general. Bernard's writings reside in a paradoxical liminal space between flesh and spirit—they are both deeply sensual and deeply mystical.

The wordless Word is itself a paradox. How is it that the Word, which made everything that exists, wordless? Genesis states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."²¹⁸ The wordless Word is a paradox that rests at the heart of Christian cosmology. However, every writer grapples with some version of this paradox. How is it that words, symbols, and metaphors create anything concrete or meaningful at all? And by the same token, how can the sublime be reduced to squiggles on a page? These problems were especially pronounced for the mystics who sought to describe their sublime experiences. However, Bernard seemed to have a preternatural ability to behold and describe the ineffable.²¹⁹

217. Ibid.

218. KJV Gen. 1:1-2

219. Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the "Commedia"* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 92.

In Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Commedia*, Bernard is the final guide to assist Dante in making the ascent to the pinnacle of heaven.²²⁰ It is significant that Bernard, of all writers, is chosen as Dante's final guide. Even the great poet Virgil is abandoned in Purgatory, as though Dante recognizes that only Bernard can be trusted with the ineffable. Medieval historian Steven Botterill argues that Bernard represents the "power of human language to be adequate to the description of the 'candida rosa' of the Empyrean."²²¹ The author invokes Bernard's poetic ability to aid in describing that which transcends all imagining.²²² As Dante ascends through the celestial spheres, all gossamer and glitter, the author calls upon Bernard for his singular ability to make the etherial feel tangible and enfleshed.

Bernard's rare ability to make the etherial feel enfleshed derives from his highly corporeal ontology. Medievalist and Cistercian scholar, John Sommerfeldt, argues that the body is essential to Bernard's anthropology.²²³ Medieval historian, Carolyn Walker Bynum, suggests that Bernard had a "profound sense of the person as psychosomatic unity and of the earthly body as a means to glory and ecstasy."²²⁴ Bernard emphasized the ways that the body added to the experience of the soul and maintained that even in the afterlife the soul could not be

220. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. trans. Henry Francis Cary. "Paradiso," Cantos XXXI-XXXII, 412-416.

221. Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 92.

222. Ibid.

223. John R. Sommerfeldt, "The Body in Bernard's Anthropology" (Unpublished paper) Cited in Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 164.

224. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 165-6. In the Middle Ages the body was understood as essential to personhood. Conceiving of person as a "psychosomatic unity," therefore, implies more than just acknowledging the body as integral to self, the phrase suggests a conception of self that favors the body's contributions.

satisfied without the body.²²⁵ Bernard glorifies sensual experience when he speaks of “intoxication” upon resurrection.²²⁶ Whereas many medieval thinkers saw resurrection as a triumph over the body’s “baser” qualities, such as organic processes and even desire itself, Bernard focused on the spiritual significance of the sensual, erotic, ecstatic nature of the body.

Bernard is most well known for his many sermons commenting on Solomon’s Song of Songs—a sexual phantasmagoria in itself. Bernard’s prurient commentary further extrapolates upon the erotic imagery, emphasizing the throbbing, quivering, irrational desire expressed within. There is little wonder why historian Dom Jean Leclercq claimed Bernard’s sermons on the Song were the most well studied of their time.²²⁷ The original Song stands out in the Hebrew Bible for its unabashed celebration of sexual and romantic love. The Song opens with the startling lines—“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine.”²²⁸ In these first few lines, the reader is implicated in a disorienting *ménage à trois*. We seem to enter the Song halfway through and must suspend our obvious questions—*who* is speaking? Who is *he*? *Who’s* breasts? The Song asks a different kind of engagement of the reader—a sensual engagement.

The Song begins with a woman’s fervent proclamation of her desire for her lover.²²⁹ We eventually learn that her name is Shulammit. She describes herself

225. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 164-5.

226. Bernard of Clairvaux, “On Loving God,” chap. 11, paragraph 33, in *Opera*, vol. 3, 147. Cited in Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 166.

227. Leclercq, *L’amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu* (Paris, Éd. du Cerf, 1957)

228. KJV Song of Songs 1:2-4

229. *Ibid.*

to the “daughters of Jerusalem,” emphasizing her dark skin.²³⁰ She continues to extol the virtues of her lover, who only occasionally interjects.²³¹ At one point he states his intention to enjoy the fruits of his bride’s garden.²³² The Song is a series of flirtatious dialogues and erotic daydreams, punctuated only briefly by a wedding and the consummation of the couple’s love.²³³ In the final passage, Shulammitte compares love to death and *sheol*—the place of darkness where the dead go in the Hebrew Bible.²³⁴ Nothing could be more Dionysian than to find the depths of Hades in the heights of frenzied desire. Shulammitte repeatedly emphasizes the insatiable, uncontrollable, and irrational nature of love, and warns the daughters of Jerusalem not to begin a love such as hers until they are ready.²³⁵

The Song is contained in one of the *megillot* scrolls in the last section of the *Tanakh*, known as the *Ketuvim*.²³⁶ Solomon is said to have authored it during his reign as king of Israel, sometime between 971 and 931 B.C.E.. While Solomon is mentioned by name in the Song, there remains some debate over his authorship.²³⁷ The Song was only accepted into the Jewish canon of scripture in

230. KJV Song of Songs 1:5

231. NIV 6:4-9, 6:11-12, 6:14, 7:1-9 Although Solomon is mentioned by name in the Song, the identity of the lover remains unclear. It is likely that the Song was simply in the tradition of Solomon, meaning that it was in the spirit of his great wisdom.

232. NIV 7:6-9

233. KJV Song of Songs 3:6–5:1

234. NIV Song of Songs 8:4-8

235. NIV Song of Songs 8:4-8

236. Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 348.

237. Solomon is mentioned NIV Song of Songs 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11–12, For discussion of the dispute over authorship see Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation, With an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1995)

after some controversy.²³⁸ Early Jewish commentators allegorized the Song, finding its language of love and yearning to be a metaphor for God's love for Israel. Early Christian commentators understood it to describe God's love for the Church.²³⁹ In Bernard's many sermons on the Song, however, he uses the bride's description of her unbridled lust as a metaphor for his own desire for Jesus.

Much can be gleaned about Bernard by a cursory reading of the Biblical text that was most central to his metaphysics—Solomon's Song of Songs. Many interpreters have tried to soften the carnality of the Song. Bernard, however, remained true to its original Dionysian message—that love is irrational, as uncontrollable as death itself. In the closing lines of the Song, the bride warns the daughters of Jerusalem about the dangers of love:

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor awake my love, until he please.

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree; there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bore thee.

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it;

Note the Dionysian language of natural disaster. Note also the curious juxtaposition of garden imagery—"I raised thee up under the apple tree." In the Song, we are invited to think upon man's uninhibited prelapsarian nature and the intoxication of that untainted love between Adam and Eve in the garden. Unlike early commentaries on the song, Bernard remains true to the original text by emphasizing the unreasonable, insatiable nature of desire. Bernard writes,

238. Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Five Megillot" in *Tanak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 425-48.

239. Richard Alfred Norris, *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), xii.

“Of what use to me are the wordy effusions of the prophets? Rather let him who is the most handsome of the sons of men, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. [1:1]...Even the beauty of the angels can only leave me wearied. For my Jesus utterly surpasses these in his majesty and splendor. Therefore I ask of him what I ask of neither man nor angel: that he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. [9:2]”²⁴⁰

Bernard highlighted the unreasonable, insatiable nature of the love, stressing that only a soul totally drunk with love could dare to ask such favors from God.²⁴¹ It was apparently only in the past century that Christian commentators began to accept a more literal reading of the Song.²⁴² Moore writes that, “literal readings... which take its lyrical language of love and lust to mean what it seems to be saying—*I want your body and I want it now*—have become more commonplace in the past century or so, largely replacing the allegorical readings of the Song that proliferated and predominated in the preceding centuries.”²⁴³ Bernard was, therefore, well ahead of his time in taking such a literal reading of the Song.

Historian Stephen Moore suggests that male exegetes were likely uncomfortable with the gender inversion required in casting themselves as the female protagonist of the Song and the homosexual dynamic created by empathizing with Shulammitte’s lust for her groom.²⁴⁴ Moore writes,

For ancient and medieval Christian commentators, the Song simply could not be what it seemed to be. That would have been unthinkable. Yet allegorizing it only had the effect of turning it into something still more unthinkable—not just the expression of an erotically charged relationship between a nubile young woman and her virile young man, hidden away among the books of Holy scripture like a

240. NIV. Song of Songs, 1:1, 9:2.

241. Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism and Sexuality* (2007), 46

242. Moore, “Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality”: 340.

243. *Ibid.*: 331.

244. *Ibid.*: 332.

sex manual in a monastery library, but the expression of an erotically charged relationship between two *male* parties instead.²⁴⁵

Moore notes that even if one abstracts the object of desire to be the Church or the community as a whole, these were still “classically conceived as male,” therefore, the queerness remains.²⁴⁶ Bernard’s sermons demand a certain degree of gender fluidity. In them, Bernard identifies with the female protagonist and floridly describes an erotic relationship between himself, “the bride,” and Christ, the bridegroom. Subject and object, and distinctions of gender, are blurred in his overwhelming love for Christ.

Other Christian commentators struggled to normalize the sexual imagery in the Song. In the third century, Origen allegorized the Song, reading it as a proclamation of God’s love for the Church.²⁴⁷ However, Bernard’s use of the Christ as bridegroom analogy was greatly influential.²⁴⁸ Through the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux the image of Christ as longed-for bridegroom became the norm in medieval prayer.²⁴⁹ The Bridegroom image became more than just a metaphor for of the soul’s love for Christ or of Christ’s love for the soul but for their *fusion*.²⁵⁰

Western Europe witnessed an explosion of of the cult of the Virgin in the twelfth and thirteenth century inspired, in part, by the writings of Bernard who

245. Ibid.: 332.

246. Moore, “Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality”: 331.

247. Richard Alfred Norris Jr., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 1.

248. Rachel Fulton Brown, *From Judgment to Passion : Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 168-9.

249. Brown, *From Judgment to Passion*, 169.

250. Ibid.

identified Mary as the bride of the Song.²⁵¹ Bernard, Allan of Lille (born c. 1128), and Rupert of Deutz ' (c. 1075 - c. 1129) instigated a trend toward recasting Mary in the role of the bride.²⁵² Allan writes,

And so, although the song of love, Solomon's wedding song, refers particularly and according to its spiritual sense to the Church, in its most particular and spiritual reference it signifies the most glorious Virgin...So it is that in her eagerness for the presence of the Bridegroom, longing for that glorious conception of which she was told by the angel...the glorious Virgin speaks thus: *May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.*"²⁵³

This interpretation of the Song was widely adopted.²⁵⁴ While this interpretation succeeded in restoring a heterosexual dynamic, it simultaneously created another problem. By using the description of lust as a metaphor for Mary's yearning for the Christ child, Mary was now Christ's lover as well as his mother.²⁵⁵ I suggest that this interpretation of the Song accounts for the romantic dimension evident in thirteenth century depictions of the Madonna and Child. While many commentators on the Song sought to tidy up the gender inversions and allegorize the sexual dynamics, Bernard indulges fully in the sensual imagery to the point of ecstasy.²⁵⁶

Although Bernard retained some of Origen's allegorical symbolism, he also retained the moral messiness and heated passion of the metaphor. Bernard writes,

251. "The Cult of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages" The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accessed July 8, 2021, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/virg/hd_virg.htm.

252. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality": 340.

253. Allan of Lille. *In Cantica Canticorum ad laudem Deiparae Virginis Mariae elucidatio* 3-4. Cited in Moore, "The Song of Songs": 340-4.

254. Moore, "The Song of Songs": 340.

255. *Ibid.*

256. Norris, *The Song of Songs*, xx.

“I cannot rest,” she said, “unless he kisses me with the kiss of his mouth...if he has genuine regard for me, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. There is no question of ingratitude on my part, it is simply that I am in love. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love. Headlong love does not wait for judgement, is not chastened by advice, nor shackled by shame nor subdued by reason.”²⁵⁷

This passage comes without qualification or allegorization. Here, Bernard makes absolutely clear that his desire for the bridegroom is not a sober one but hot-blooded lust. Unlike his fellow commentators who sought to neutralize the erotic charge of the Song, Bernard fully embodied the irrational desire described within it. While Bernard remained celibate in the chapterhouse, in his mystic writings of his love for God, he held nothing back.

Bernard’s sermons began a process by which the sexual and spiritual were synthesized into a singular erotically charged Christian devotion. Historian Anne W. Astell writes,

Unlike Origen, whose belief in two loves—carnal and spiritual, demonic and divine—led him to disassociate the literal and allegorical meanings of the Song, twelfth century exegetes upheld a unitary concept of love. They therefore approached the erotic images of the Song in a way that rendered them transparent to their divine tenor, sacramentalizing them, making them vehicles for an organic transference of the *affectus* to Christ the bridegroom.²⁵⁸

The idea of empathetic transference with biblical figures recalls the Franciscan desire to suffer as Christ suffered. However, Bernard sought to empathize with the *bride*, to feel the love of the *bride* for Christ, and to feel the touch of Christ as a lover. Bernard recognized that man’s prurient impulses should not be *denied* but *redirected* to God.²⁵⁹ Bernard writes the primary reason for God’s incarnation was

257. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon on the Song of Songs 9, 2:2* quoted from *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux vols. 2-5*. trans. Kilian Walsh and Edmonds (Spencer, Mass: Cistercian Publications, 1971-80)

258. Moore, “The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality”: 331.

259. Harvey Egan, *Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Liturgical Press, 1991)

that “he wanted to recapture the affections of carnal men, who were unable to love in any other way, by first drawing them to a salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love.”²⁶⁰

Bernard’s sensual writings derive from his deeply embodied epistemology.²⁶¹ He sought to appeal to the senses, and in so doing, appeal to the spirit.²⁶² Flannery O’Conner describes a similar epistemology in her 1961 essay, “The Nature and Aim of Fiction.”²⁶³ For O’Conner, as for Bernard, the writer’s medium was not abstract but physical, material, fleshly.²⁶⁴ She writes,

I think we have to begin thinking about stories at a much more fundamental level, so I want to talk about one quality of fiction which I think is its least common denominator—the fact that it is concrete—and about a few of the qualities that follow from this. We will be concerned in this with the reader in his fundamental human sense, because the nature of fiction is in large measure determined by the nature of our perceptive apparatus. The beginning of human knowledge is through the senses, and the fiction writer begins where human perception begins. He appeals through the senses, and you cannot appeal to the senses with abstractions.²⁶⁵

O’Conner shares Bernard’s candid acknowledgment of man’s sensual nature. Neither sought to circumvent or negate the senses because neither distinguished man’s sensual from his spiritual nature.

260. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. 20:6. Cited from Paul E. Szarmac. *Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 81.

261. Egan, *Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 166-179.

262. *Ibid.*

263. Flannery O’Connor, “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” in *Mystery and Manners* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1961), 67.

264. *Ibid.*

265. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

O’Conner’s insistence on the potency of sensual writing and the impotence of the unfleshed helps us understand why Dante’s *Commedia* is such a potent work of socio-political critique. She writes,

The world of the fiction writer is full of matter, and this is what the beginning [(amateur)] fiction writers are very loath to create. They are concerned primarily with unfleshed ideas and emotions. They are apt to be reformers and to want to write because they are possessed not by a story but by the bare bones of some abstract notion. They are conscious of problems, not of people, of questions and issues, not of the texture of existence, of case histories and of everything that has a sociological smack, instead of with all those concrete details of life that make actual the mystery of our position on earth.²⁶⁶

O’Conner, a brilliant social critic in her own right, understood that true social critique did not exist in abstraction but was made of “baser,” concrete, elements. O’Conner’s visceral, sensual relationship to language make her heir to Bernard. As social critic, she is heir to Dante—both depicted the spiritual in all of its blood, flesh, and gore.

O’Conner diagnoses the modern spirit with words that could just have easily been penned by Bernard. She writes that,

The Manichaeans separated spirit and matter. To them all material things were evil. They sought pure spirit and tried to approach the infinite directly without any mediation of matter. This is also pretty much the modern spirit, and for the sensibility infected with it, fiction is hard if not impossible to write because fiction is so very much an incarnational art.²⁶⁷

With few exceptions, Bernard and O’Conner’s embodied epistemology stands in opposition to modern and postmodern sensibilities. The modern spirit retains a Platonic conception of self as spirit, and a manichaeian understanding of the material world as a degenerate version of the pure Forms. The post modern spirit maintains Derrida’s deep suspicion of language and, therefore, does not allow a

266. Ibid., 67-68.

267. Ibid., 68.

sensual engagement with it. Like the Song itself, Bernard's sermons on the Song were meant to be performed—they represent an embodied sensual practice.

O'Conner and Bernard consistently subvert the West's desire to transcend the flesh—*this* is queering. The Western mind is like a child's balloon—perpetually drifting toward the etherial realm, it finds the concrete and fleshly to be little more than an irritating impediment, a child's sticky fist. John Donne (1572-1631) satirizes the manichaeian impulse to transcend the body in his poem "The Extasie." The poem describes a sexual-spiritual encounter between lovers. Donne plays with the dual meanings of the term "ecstasy" as religious rapture or self-transcendence, literally an *ex-stasis*, and ecstasy as embodied sensual bliss. Donne asks us to reconcile the spiritual and the sexual by casting the body and soul as lovers. The poem is impishly satirical. The lovers are unable to consummate their love in their disembodied state—a literal anti-climax. Donne thwarts the structure of a love poem, leaving the lovers, and the reader, unsatisfied. The poem gently rebukes the reader's desire to transcend the body. Donne playfully pokes and prods the reader, coaxing them back to the body. The poem ends with a general plea to descend to the corporeal realm. Donne writes, "So must pure lovers' souls descend T'affections, and to faculties, Which sense may reach and apprehend, Else a great prince in prison lies. To'our bodies turn we then, that so Weak men on love reveal'd may look; Love's mysteries in souls do grow, But yet the body is his book."²⁶⁸

Donne's plea to return to the body, "else a great prince in prison lies," echos Bernard's sentiments exactly.²⁶⁹ Bernard and Donne's understanding of person as psychosomatic unity does not, by itself, constitute queerness. Rather, their

268. John Donne, *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne* (New York: Random House, Inc. 2001), 39-40.

269. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 164-5.

queerness comes from their ability to reconcile our dual nature—body and soul, carnal and spiritual, vulgar and celestial—and subvert the Platonic fallacy which defines the modern spirit. Donne’s description of the body as book is likely a reference to John 1:14— “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”²⁷⁰ It is this mystery of the incarnation, the Word made flesh, that captured Bernard’s imagination. By reconciling his carnal nature with Christ’s divine nature, through elaborate sexual fantasies, Bernard embodied the mystery of the incarnation. Like Donne, Bernard associates the mystery of the incarnation with love’s mystery. Exploring love’s mystery, in all of its fevered longing and yearning, was a way of reflexively exploring God’s mysterious presence and absence from this world. Dante, O’Conner, Donne, and Bernard are queer by virtue of their liminality. They all share the ability to occupy the liminal space between flesh and words, between the sensual and the ineffable.

270. KJV John 1:14

PART III - ECSTASY

CHAPTER III: THE BERNARDIAN AND THE DIONYSIAN

Love is desire, not stasis.

— Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*

Bernard's metaphysics of desire aided the reintroduction of sexual imagery in devotional art. Bernard's synthesis of *eros* and devotion resulted in a particularly Dionysian strain of imagery. In Dionysus' cult, death is sexy. Thirteenth century images of the crucifixion display signs of maenadic blood-lust. These images mark the return of the pagan impulses repressed by the Olympian and then Christian religions.²⁷¹ Here, I will explore some of the works in which I find a particularly Cistercian-Bernardian eroticism.

The divine kiss was an image central to Bernard's metaphysics of desire. The image of the divine kiss can be seen in a miniature psalter created around 1230, in the region of Würzburg, Germany (Fig. 6). The origin of the psalter is most likely a Cistercian monastery in Ebrach.²⁷² The image depicts a female

271. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 273.

272. Corrine Shlief, "The Crucifixion with Virtues in Stained Glass: Wounds, Violent Sexualities, and Aesthetics of Engagement in the Wienhausen Cloister" *Journal of Glass Studies* 56 (2014): 334.

personification kissing the crucified christ. Christ smiles approvingly as the woman collects his sacrificial blood in a chalice. Christ and the woman are intertwined in an embrace, It is difficult to tell exactly where one stops and the other begins. The kiss creates a circuit through which Christ's life force runs through the woman like an electric current—the symbolism is made explicit by the blood which exits Christ's wound and enters her chalice. The image links the eucharistic power of the sacrificial blood with the divine kiss—she is literally tasting his flesh as she collects his blood in her chalice. The image depicts man and woman becoming one flesh just as mankind is joined with and unified in the body of Christ.

The woman is likely the Bride, *sponsa*, of the Song.²⁷³ Alternately, the woman could be a personification of the virtue *Caritas*, or "Charity."²⁷⁴ There seems to

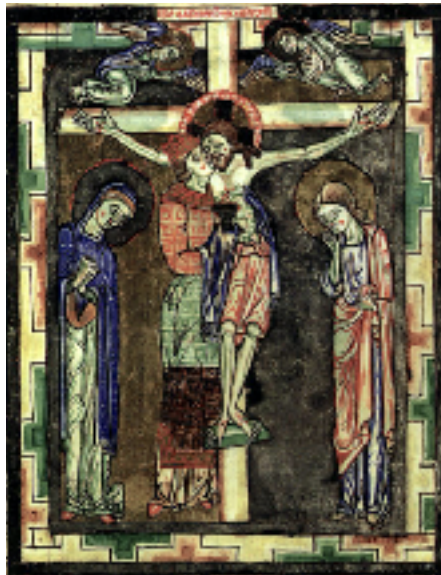


Figure 6
Caritas Kissing the Crucified Christ
From a Cistercian monastery in Ebrach
Würzburg Psalter, Germany
c. 1230

273. Shlief, "The Crucifixion with Virtues in Stained Glass": 334. The woman could also be Ecclesia.

274. Ibid.

have been a great deal of slippage between the medieval concepts of *eros*, friendship, love, and charity. The slippage between the Latin word *Caritas*, “charity,” and the Greek word ἀγάπη, “love,” may have arisen from amalgamations of Latin and Greek translations of the Bible. 1 John 4:8 reads, “*Deus caritas est*” in Latin, and “Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν” in Greek. In the King James Version this verse is translated as “God is love,” while in the Douay-Rheims Bible it is translated as “God is Charity.” However, the conceptual overlap cannot be entirely explained by etymological conflation. This conception of charity recalls Aelred of Rievaulx’s writings on friendship. In his book, *De spiritali amicitia*, Rievaulx quotes Ambrose, “your friend is the companion of your soul, to whose spirit you join and attach yours, and so associate yourself that you wish to become one instead of two.”²⁷⁵ Many have argued that Aelred’s writings on friendship were a sublimation of his homosexual desire for his fellow clergymen.²⁷⁶ Regardless, the concepts of charity, love, and friendship welcomed a sexual inflection.

The Würzburg psalter image (Fig. 6) is strikingly similar to an early fourteenth century German stained glass window depicting Christ being crucified by Caritas (Fig. 7). The image of Caritas penetrating Christ’s side with a dagger comes from a stained glass window in the south arm of Weinhausen Abbey. The figures embrace and smile at each other. Christ appears to be receiving her dagger with the pleasure one might receive a kiss. The window

275. St. Aelred of Rievaulx, *De spiritali amicitia* cited in Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 33.

276. Medieval historian and queer theorist John Boswell has argued that Aelred was “gay” because his *De spiritali amicitia* displays a conscious same-sex attraction. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 44. Boswell distinguishes homosexual—those who have same-sex attraction—from “gay”—those who are conscious of their same sex attraction.

develops the metaphor of the kiss, taking it to its logical coital conclusion.²⁷⁷ The fourteenth century glass illustrates a trend towards sexualizing the Christ figure, and further integrating the Bernardian spiritual-erotic continuum with devotional artworks.

Weinhausen Abbey was a woman’s monastery.²⁷⁸ Medieval historian, Corine Shleif, suggests that the glass was possibly an expression of the sublimated sexual desires of the female nuns who felt stifled in their same-sex environment. Shleif writes,

Looking within the picture, we see that a feminized Christ wants to be pierced by Love...[What] do the attractions and the lessons of this glass panel obtain through their overt gender reversals? Were the nuns channeling their sublimated



Figure 6
Caritas Kissing the Crucified Christ (Detail)
From a Cistercian monastery in Ebrach
Würzburg Psalter, Germany
c. 1230

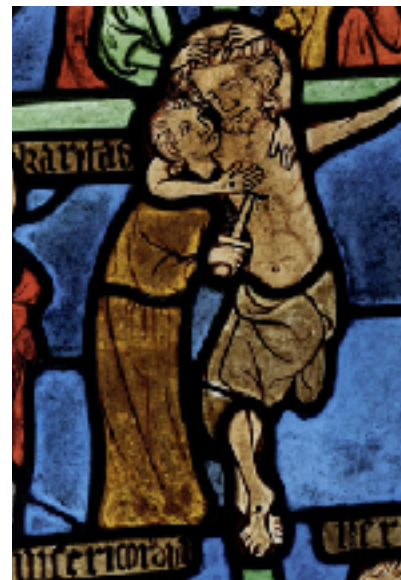


Figure 7
Crucifixion with Virtues
Stained Glass
Weinhausen Abbey, Germany
c. 1330

277. This sexual symbolism would have been immediately apparent to a medieval audience. The gothic ivories of the period use fingers, poles, and chess pieces as phallic symbols, while hoops, flowers, and folds in fabric symbolize the vulva.

278. Shleif, “The Crucifixion with Virtues in Stained Glass”: 334.

sexual energies into devotional practice? Or were they giving free rein to their sexual desires and veiling them as the expression of religious devotion?²⁷⁹

Shleif remarks on the overt gender reversals in the image. Like the Psalter image, the female personification is androgynous, there is little visual evidence to attribute sex. However, we assume the figure is female from the context. Assuming she is female, the sexual symbols are reversed—Caritas' phallic dagger penetrates Christ's vaginal wound. The androgyny of the figures allows a queer inflection, offering resonances with the homosocial feudal kiss.²⁸⁰

I suggest that the overt gender reversals are a mark of Bernard's brand of queer theology. Bernard's sermons require that the male exegetes cast themselves in the female role. Bernard had a unique ability to cast himself into the female role. In one of his sermons he likens his devotion to the experience of lactation, an experience of which he could have no first-hand knowledge:

While the bride is conversing about the Bridegroom, he, as I have said, suddenly appears, yields to her desire by giving her a kiss....The filling up of her breasts is proof of this. For so great is the potency of the holy kiss, that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness of conception, bearing witness, as it were, with this milky abundance. Men with an urge to frequent prayer will have experience of what I say. Often enough when we approach the altar to pray our hearts are dry and lukewarm. But if we persevere, there comes and unexpected infusion of grace, our breast expands, as it were, and our interior is filled with an overflowing love; and if somebody should press upon it then, this milk of sweet fecundity would gush forth in streaming richness.²⁸¹

279. Shleif draws attention to the "violence" in this image. However, Bynum has suggested that violence is absent here because out of love—Christ has chosen his death through Caritas. See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Violence Occluded: The Wound in Christ's Side in Late Medieval Devotion" in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White* (Farnham, U.K., and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010)

280. John Boswell, *Same Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), 185 and 217.

281. Moore, "Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality": 330.

This passage not only illustrates Bernard's predilection for gender transmogrification, it also illustrates his Dionysian relationship to devotion. Bernard's description of fluids that "gush forth in streaming richness" recalls thirteenth century illuminations of the crucifixion by the virtues (Fig. 8, 10), in which lusty women appear to engage in a kind of Dionysian revel, practically bathing in Christ's sacrificial blood. Clark writes that "just as the blood of Dionysus could flow into the cup of Christianity, so, in the history of art, Dionysian motifs had a longer and more fruitful life."²⁸²

A manuscript known as the Bonmont Psalter (Fig. 8), made by an upper Rhenish workshop for a Cistercian monastery in the diocese of Constance, around 1260, depicts Caritas piercing Christ's side as Ecclesia catches the gushing streams of blood in her chalice.²⁸³ The spear that penetrates Jesus' wound creates a wellspring of fluids. The women are ravenous, the chaos of the scene evokes orgiastic rites and Bacchic revels. A hint of sadomasochism lurks in the scene. A phallic spear enters Jesus', the fluids spurting forth from his breast evoke milk, semen, and blood—a Dionysian elixir that rains down on the ravenous women. The women appear drunk with Christ's blood. This image recalls Bernard's vision of the lactation of the virgin often depicted as a similar stream shooting from the breast into Bernard's mouth (Fig. 9). In this way, the mystic tradition turned the Christian holy figures into actors in a cosmic family romance.

The Sherenberg Psalter (Fig. 10), created for a Dominican' women's monastery in Strasbourg around 1260, depicts the same scene of Christ's crucifixion by the Virtues, however, in contrast to the sadomasochistic Bonmont Psalter (Fig. 8), the Shernberg psalter (Fig. 10) contains a far more amorous version of the same scene. The personified virtues appear to giggle in delight as

282. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 273.

283. Corine Shleif, "The Crucifixion with Virtues", 341.

they collect the blood from Christ's side. The Virtues coquettishly dance about, attending to their gruesome work. Incongruously, Christ smiles in delight as four women pierce his hands and feet with stakes. Christ's smile is similar to the smile depicted in the stained glass window at Weinhausen Abbey. The common denominator between these images is the passive, restrained, amicable Christ, who accepts his fate with pleasure.

The images of Christ being pierced by Caritas seem to make overt reference to the sexual dynamic of looking. The images invite the viewer to "penetrate" Jesus with their eyes as Caritas does with her arrows. The Cistercian, and contemporary of Bernard's, Gueric of Igny likened the gaze to an arrow.²⁸⁴ Corine Shleif traces the image of Christ being pierced by Caritas to the Song of



Figure 8
Christ Crucified by the Virtues
 Bonmont Psalter from a Cistercian monastery,
 diocese of Constance
 Second half of the thirteenth century



Figure 9
 The Lactation of St. Bernard (Detail)
 Master IAM of Zwolle
 Netherlands
 c. 1480-85

284. Corine Schleif, "The Crucifixion with Virtues in Stained Glass: Wounds, Violent Sexualities, and Aesthetics of Engagement in the Wienhausen Cloister" *Journal of Glass Studies* 56 (2014): 332.

Songs, verse 4:9— “You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of your eyes.”²⁸⁵ Sheif notes that King James Bible uses the verb ravish rather than wound— “Thou hast *ravished* my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast *ravished* my heart with one of thine eyes.”²⁸⁶ The King James Bible, therefore, retains some of the sexual connotation of the visual dynamic.

While the drinking of Christ’s blood is primarily a eucharistic motif, these works seems to illustrate a trend toward the intoxicating, liberating effects of the sacrificial blood. A missal (Fig. 11), created in Paris around 1270 to 1280, depicts a miniature Adam rising from the tomb to collect the sacrificial blood.²⁸⁷ Here,



Figure 10
Christ Crucified by the Virtues
Scherenberg Psalter
Strasbourg, France
c. 1260

285. Ibid. *Vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea, sponsa; vulnerasti cor meum in uno oculorum tuorum*

286. KJV (emphasis mine)

287. Christ is flanked by the Virgin Mary and Saint John, whose amorous closeness with Jesus is often noted as an example of male-love, see John Boswell, *Same Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*. (New York: Villard Books, 1994) 122, 138-39, and 259.

Adam—and all mankind by extension— is redeemed by Christ’s sacrifice. With Christ’s sacrificial blood, man reclaims his prelapsarian nature. One can only imagine the taste of such an elixir bestowed with the power to purify the man’s soul of its primordial stain—the effect would surely be intoxicating.

The missal is very much in the French style of illuminated manuscripts.²⁸⁸ There is a softness to Christ’s body—his spine arched and fingers elongated, the face and hair delicately rendered. The redemption of the body is evident even here in Christ’s depiction. The sinuous lines and dynamic posture betray a certain degree of relish in the human figure. The style of body and facial features are typical of French Gothic illuminations of the period and seem to have influenced the sculpture greatly. We find a similar stylization—slender limbs, bowed posture, long delicate figures— in the archangels at Reims.



Figure 11
Crucifixion
Manuscript Leaf with the from a Missal
Paris, France
c. 1270-1280

288. See the “Crusader Bible” for an example of the French style predominant at the time.

These images illustrate the far-reaching influence of Bernard's metaphysics of desire. In them we see traces of Bernard's erotic longing for Christ. In one particularly lurid excerpt from a series of prayers to Christ's body, Bernard personifies Christ's wound and addresses it directly. He writes, "Thou Rose of wondrous fragrance, open wide, And bring my heart into Thy wounded Side, O sweet heart, open! Draw Thy loving bride, All panting with desires intensified, And satisfy her love unsatisfied."²⁸⁹ Bernard's description likens the wound to an orifice. This association was not entirely uncommon. Shleif notes the prevalence of associating Christ's wound with the birth canal.²⁹⁰ A fourteenth century French Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg disassociates the wound from Christ's body (Fig. 12). The vaginal wound hovers in midair like the angels in Dante's *Paradiso* (Fig. 13). Bernard's description of Christ's wound as a fragrant rose, recalls Dante's *candida rosa*. In Canto XXXI of the *Paradiso*, just before we encounter Bernard, Dante describes the angels forming a "mighty flower or rose" in the sky by "fanning their plummy loins."²⁹¹ It is as if Dante is offered a peak up God's skirt. In this way, the ascent to the pinnacle of heaven is a kind of return to the womb. In their mystic visions, Dante and Bernard theatrically enacted their family romance on a cosmic scale.

The shared symbolism in the final cantos of the *Commedia* suggests that Dante's *Paradiso* is a completion of Bernard's Dionysian project. Bynum writes,

In the final cantos of the poem, body, fertility, and desire come together. Bernard guides the gaze of Dante deep into the ranks of the heavenly rose beyond "sorrow, thirst, or hunger"—beyond, this is, any contingency—to the place where

289. Bernard of Clairvaux, "Rhythmical Prayer to the Sacred Members of Jesus Hanging Upon the Cross," trans. Emily Mary Shapcote, found in "The Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" by St. Bonaventure (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1881)

290. Schleif, "The Crucifixion with Virtues", 341.

291. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. trans. Henry Francis Cary (New York and London: The Colonial Press, 1901) *Paradiso*, Canto XXXI, 412-413.

the Virgin sits, she who is already bodily assumed into heaven, There Dante finds, not the *requies aeterna*—the stasis—of the scholastic theologians, but the great wheeling motion of love. Unlike Tondal and Thurchill, whose heaven was barricaded with jewels and immobilized in crystal, Dante sees heaven as a flower. And that flower itself, like the souls who people it, spins and whirls with desire.²⁹²

Dante’s Godhead is no longer an image of jewel-like stasis but of hive-like protean flux—angels swarm like bees in a hive around a great fecund flower. In the sixteenth century book *The Gallic Bee*, Theophilus Reynauld famously referred to Bernard as the “Mellifluous” or “Honey-Sweet” likening him to “a diligent bee” who has “extracted the sweet essence from Scripture and the Fathers and



Figure 12
The Wound of Christ
Psalter from Prayerbook of Bonne de
Luxembourg
Before 1349



Figure 13
Eighth sphere (heaven of fixed stars) (Detail)
Sandro Botticelli
Florence, Italy
c.1480 - 1495

292. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 304.

refined it in loving meditation.”²⁹³ All of Bernard’s buzzing must have inspired Dante, for his metaphysics of desire find completion in Dante’s *Paradiso*.

Dante share’s Bernard’s understanding of person as psychosomatic unity. Bynum writes,

In canto after canto, the imagery itself has suggested that it is natural for soul to express itself in body...It is therefore hardly surprising that Dante the poet... speaking of resurrection in images of resumed clothing, ripening seeds, glowing coals, fertile wombs, and love he puts these images in the mouths of Solomon (author fo the erotic paean to heavenly marriage, the Song of Songs), Bernard (theorist of the Augustinian yearning for body), and his own Beatrice, beloved in her fleshy femaleness.²⁹⁴

However, Beatrice is only a phantom of fleshy femaleness. She exists only as misdirection and abstraction. Beatrice is a mirage pushing Dante’s desire into an ever vanishing horizon. Dante’s *Paradiso* is a satire of heaven. Despite Bernard’s assistance, there is nothing enfleshed about this image of paradise. Angels dance in opulent Busby Berkeley formation only to crumble before one’s very eyes like colorful images in a child’s kaleidoscope. Dante thwarts his own intention to make *Paradiso* feel tangible, visceral, enfleshed. In this way, the structure of the *Commedia* is replicated in Donne’s “The Ecstasy” which brings us to the brink of climax only to leave us unsatisfied. Both poets explicitly show the unsubstantiality of rarified soul and leave us longing for the fleshy comfort of the body.

Bynum insists that the afterlife was the primary locus of identity definition in the Middle Ages.²⁹⁵ These changing definitions of the afterlife in the thirteenth and fourteenth century would have had a profound effect on medieval identity.

293. Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc. 2000), 282.

294. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 302-303.

295. *Ibid.*, 111.

As the hermetic axiom goes—"as above, so below."²⁹⁶ The return of Dionysian *eros* to European sculpture was as much an eruption from below as it was a downpour from above—both man's prelapsarian origins and his destiny in the afterlife were redefined in Dionysus' image. Dante's vision of the afterlife, which I posit is a continuation of Bernard's project, instantiates desire and flux to a sacred position in the cosmic order—the pinnacle of heaven. The return of Dionysian principles resulted in radical sculptural breakthroughs of the thirteenth century.

296. The phrase is traced to pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana's first century work *Sirr al-khalīqa*, or "The Secret of Creation."

CHAPTER IV: THE PRELAPSARIAN BODY: EVE

The image of both sinful and saved humanity is the image of woman.

— Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast Holy Fast*

The urge to externalize and meditate upon the human form in art is irrepressible. However, taboos around idolatry in the Middle Ages greatly constricted this impulse. Aside from Charlemagne's minor efforts to emulate Roman statues in the ninth century, there is a dearth of freestanding figural statues in the adjacent centuries. Slowly, in the thirteenth century, freestanding figural statues begin to return to the Latin West. We can set this date earlier if we look at reliquary statues. In a way, reliquaries served as a kind of Trojan Horse for the return of freestanding figural statues. Although she bears no relics, the Saint-Chapelle Virgin ivory carving created in the thirteenth century (Fig. 14) is a descendent of the reliquary tradition. The Virgin Mary had few relics but many followers. The preciousness of the ivory serves as a kind of place holder for the Virgin's immaculate body. The ivory material of the Sainte-Chapelle Virgin likely has roots in ascetic practice. Bynum notes that, "Guerric of Igny uses Song of Songs 5.14 to speak of Christ's 'flesh of ivory' taken from Mary's 'ivory womb' and comments: 'We dwell to be sure in houses of clay, but what are of clay by reason of their material bodies, come to be of ivory through the virtue of

continenence.”²⁹⁷ Like gold, ivory was commonly used as a reference to the glorified body.²⁹⁸ The ivory material likely took the place of material relics. In this way, the Sainte-Chapelle ivory is a cautious evolution of the reliquary statue. One of the first steps towards freestanding statues created for their own sake.

The Sainte-Chapelle ivory is one of the first freestanding statues that serves no reliquary function created in Western Europe since the Carolingian era. The return of freestanding sculpture was a gradual relinquishing of the reliquary function as well as an evolution of Church relief sculpture—jamb figures eventually abandoned their posts propping up the Church edifice and stood alone. This phenomena is especially evident in the jamb figures at Chartres and



Figure 14
Sainte-Chapelle Ivory
Paris, France
c. 1260

297. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 200.

298. The Old English poem, *The Phoenix*, which Fox argues defines the aesthetics of the Resurrections, is widely agreed to have been inspired by Lactantius' fourth century poem *Carmen de ave phoenice*. Lactantius especially focused on ivory in his descriptions of craft. *The Phoenix* build's directly on Lactantius' poem. Fox, "The Aesthetics of Resurrection": 2-3.

Reims cathedral. At Reims, the statues of the holy figures who occupied the court of heaven mirrored the bodies who occupied the French court. These courtly movements loosened the hips and postures of the jamb figures until their dynamism could no longer be restrained by the Church edifice. In this way, freestanding figural sculpture was reborn. Bernard's erotic theology and metaphysics of desire lubricated this process.

As we've seen in the case of the missal image of Adam collecting the sacrificial blood (Fig. 11). Thirteenth century images began to emphasize the redemption of man and the return of man's prelapsarian nature. The Sainte-Chapelle ivory shows the return of man's prelapsarian nature by drawing parallels with Eve's prelapsarian nature. Previously, analogies between Eve and Mary were typically made by juxtaposition, as in the bronze doors of Hildesheim (ca. 1007 - 1015), which depict the story of the fall of Adam and Eve parallel to the infancy and Passion of Christ. The Sainte-Chapelle ivory, however, is perhaps the first Gothic sculpture of Mary to emphasize her connection with Eve by emphasizing Mary's own eroticism.

The Sainte-Chapelle ivory was commissioned by Louis IX for his royal chapel, the Sainte-Chapelle, which he had built on the Île de la Cité in Paris in 1248 to enshrine the relics of Christ's Passion. There, the statue would have been displayed among the most precious relics in all of France. The statue is listed in the Sainte-Chapelle's first inventory taken in 1279, but it may have been created as early as 1260, at the same time as the Notre-Dame Adam.²⁹⁹ Although she stands only sixteen inches high, the Sainte-Chapelle ivory rivals the monumental sculpture of the period with its naturalism and dynamism. The Virgin leans back severely, echoing the shape of the tusk from which she was carved. Her hip is

299. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires médiévaux, Ve-XVe siècle. Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux* (Michigan: University of Michigan. 2003)

thrust out to one side to as if support the weight of her infant child. The S shaped curve of her body is accentuated by the sweeping folds of her surcott. The fabric of her surcott ripples around her left hip and liquidly cascades down her back. The naturalism of the drapery is unlike the highly regimented folds of the Byzantine and Romanesque styles. Its naturalism exceeds the Roman influenced drapery evident in the jamb figures at Reims. Unlike the monotonous rhythms of the Early Gothic drapery, the folds of her garments show a new variety, gathering in delicate creases under her arms, and then falling in structured and crisp folds around her feet. Even in the early thirteenth century, the Madonna's garments fall in a series of stark parallel lines. She is almost always depicted seated, and intended to be viewed only from the front. Her gaze is often cold and otherworldly. Then, suddenly, in the thirteenth century, the Madonna stands up.

The Sainte Chapelle Virgin is depicted fully in the round. Her expression is playful and alert, she is engaged with the world around her. Mary holds a piece of fruit in her hand. The serpentine curve of her wrist indicates an apple, a clear reference to Eve's seduction and fall. A jamb figure at the Strasbourg cathedral in France shows a tempter extending an apple to three virgins in the same manner. The jamb figures at the Strasbourg Cathedral, created around 1280, depicting the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. The apple as a symbol of pure temptation (Fig. 15). The seducer wears a sinister smile, eyebrows villainously arched. A foolish virgin shares his grin, flattering herself with the offer. Here, we see a direct correlation between the smile and lechery. Frogs, salamanders, and snakes crawl up the back of the tempter as he holds an apple in a way that mirrors the Sainte-Chapelle ivory. The Sainte Chapelle ivory contains the same references to the serpent's temptation and yet she casts no judgment on the viewer. Earlier statues make extremely literal references to the Mary's triumph over the serpent by depicting it trampled under her feet. However, the Sainte-

Chapelle ivory shows the redemption of mankind through Mary's own sensuality.

Early thirteenth century Madonna sculpture's often show Christ holding an apple while Mary is shown trampling a serpent, a reminder that after Christ's sacrifice humanity has been returned to its prelapsarian state. The Sainte-Chapelle ivory, however, displays this redemption by showing Mary and Jesus playing with the apple, undaunted by its seductive power. The Sainte-Chapelle ivory still contains a reference to the serpent but it is in Mary's own posture and exaggerated curves. This eroticism is furthered by the invocation of touch and taste implied by the apple. However, unlike the Eve at Autun, this sensuality contains no implicit judgment on Eve. Heretofore, this combination was only present in depictions of Eve's seduction, and carried it with an implicit warning about the temptations of this life.



Figure 15
The Seducer, from the parable of the Foolish Virgins
Strasbourg cathedral, South Portal,
West Facade
France
After 1230

The Sainte-Chapelle ivory is erotic firstly by virtue of her three-dimensionality. As freestanding sculpture, Mary's body is liberated in more ways than one. Furthermore, the Sainte-Chapelle ivory adds an erotic dimension to Mary's relationship with the Christ child. The Virgin and Child appear coquettish, exchanging furtive glances through upturned eyes. They caress the apple. The Christ child almost appears to hold out the apple as token of affection. Like all early depictions of the infant Christ, he displays an unnatural maturity. However, here Christ possesses a greater sexual maturity. He holds himself upright with self-possession. He seems to place a consoling arm on Mary's shoulder. Christ flirts with Mary. Their relationship more closely resembles that of a couple than of a mother and child. If she is the new Eve he is the new Adam. The erotic relationship is likely the direct influence of the most prevalent reading of the Song as and expression of Mary's yearning for Christ.³⁰⁰ Moore speaks to the incestual readings of the song. He writes,

Allegorical exegesis of the Song thereby becomes an ecclesiastically sanctioned space not only for an ordinarily prohibited homoeroticism, but for covert violation a still more solemn taboo [namely, incest]. Once again allegorical exegesis of the song creates a carnivalesque zone in which certain nonnegotiable moral strictures that structure everyday existence are effortlessly overturned—and, what is more, overturned in the name of absolute moral Authority. The apogee of queerness is, in this instance as in others, also the apogee of paradox.³⁰¹

The Song, and readings of it, created space for sexual transgression in religious art. This incestual dimension of the Sainte-Chapelle Virgin is a direct result of the nebulous psycho-sexual sublimation occurring more broadly within the theology Moore speaks of this "carnavalesque" zone in which the moral structures become "negotiable" in terms of queerness. He writes, "For the queerest cut of all is that the Virgin, through being enscripted in the Song, has now become Christ's lover

300. Moore, "The Song of Songs": 340.

301. Ibid.: 344.

as well as his mother.”³⁰² This eroticization also drew validity from Biblical reference Jesus as the “second Adam” and Mary as the “new Eve.”³⁰³ It was by reference to man’s prelapsarian nature that the body, in all of its curvaceous three dimensionality, was redeemed. However, it was only through Mary that medieval conceptions of the body were truly reworked. Mary became symbolic of flesh itself. Bynum writes,

Mary was the source and container of Christ's physicality: the flesh Christ put on was in some sense female, because it was his mother's. ...Christ (who had no human father) had to be seen as taking his flesh from Mary. This sense that Christ as body is formed from Mary's body led Hildegard to argue that it is exactly female flesh—the very weakness of woman—that restores the world. Thus flesh is to her, in her visions and in the theological exegesis they stimulate, symbolized by woman.³⁰⁴

Through Mary, the significance of the Dionysian—the female and the fleshly—could be renegotiated. Through Mary man’s flesh could be redeemed.

Paradoxically, woman is both the sin and the salvation of man.

Although Bernard’s sermon comes more than a century before the creation of the Sainte-Chapelle ivory, his contributions to the Christian discourse are highly significant here because, the Cistercians, also known as the Bernardines for their dedication to Bernard of Clairvaux, were largely responsible for the spread of the Marian cult in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³⁰⁵ Bernard’s understanding of

302. Ibid.: 340.

303. Biblical references to the new Adam and Eve are a matter of debate and open to various theological interpretations. Possible biblical reference to second Adam can be found in Romans 5: 15-19, while reference to new Eve can be found in Corinthians 15: 45-49. For the development of the idea see Marina Warner, “Second Eve” in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976) ; John Phillips, “Second Eve” in *Eve: The History of an Idea* (San Francisco: Flarper & Row, 1984)

304. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 265.

305. Ziolkowski, *The Juggler of Notre-Dame*, 54.

the relationship between Christ and Mary, therefore, would surely have influenced followers of the Marian cult. Bernard of Clairvaux initiates an analogy between spiritual union and sexual union with God. The redemption of *eros* through Jesus in Mary paved the way for the superimposition of chivalric romance onto the cult of the Virgin. In the Song, the bride (recast as the Virgin Mary) is said to have a neck is like “ivory tower,” a reference both to her purity and her inaccessibility.³⁰⁶ Just as the Virgin Mary occupied an ivory perch, so did the maiden, the object of courtly love, occupied her own ivory tower. Courtly love reinforced love for the Virgin Mary, whom courtly love exalted and rendered inaccessible. Mary became the quintessential unattainable bride.

Mary is the queen in the court of heaven, the indentation on her head mark the place where her crown would have rested. As a queen, her posture and gestures inflect a courtly affectation. I suggest that the exaggerated bow of the Virgin’s body is not solely dictated by the curve of an elephant's tusk, but by the affected mannerisms of court. Like the archangels at Reims, the Sainte-Chapelle ivory depicts the Virgin with similar almond shaped eyes, bowed posture, and exaggerated curve of the wrist.

The Sainte-Chapelle ivory wears the same fashions and coy smile as the archangel jamb figures at Reims (Fig. 16, 17). Both share a remarkable groundedness for their time. In sharp contrast, the jamb figures at Chartres are suspended between this world and the next. They appear to hang from the heavens like marionettes. The jamb figures at Reims and the ivory Virgin, however, have their feet firmly planted on the earth, their liminality reflected instead by their nymphic androgyny. Her features appear greatly influenced by manuscript illumination. The arm and hand contain the same slender elongation. The hair is falls in delicate curls around her forehead. She contains no traces if a

306. NIV Song of Songs 7:4.

pronounced Greco-Roman brow. Her delicate features are entirely French. Reims was the site of the coronation and anointing of the Kings of France, it was therefore intimately connected with the monarchy and court culture. Court culture, steeped as it was in homosocial chivalry, began to meld with the cult of the Virgin. The Mary at Reims is a queen in the court of heaven. She wears a crown and dressed in the latest fashions of court, her posture and attitude is indistinguishable from the archangels who's theatricality, I argue, was modeled on the flamboyant court mannerisms. These mannerisms, the particular way of holding one's surcote with an outstretched limp wrist, are evident in the archangels in the smiling archangel jamb figures at Reims (Fig. 16, 17). Their affected postures—hip swung out, shoulders back—are a display of their royal position. The affected manners of court, evident in these sculptures, prefigure



Figure 16
Archangel Gabriel
Notre Dame in Reims; Central
portal; right jamb statues
c. 1230 - 1245



Figure 17
Smiling Angel "Le Sourire"
Notre Dame in Reims; West front;
jamb statue from the left side of the
north portal
c. 1225 - 1290

what would eventually become the most mannered court in history. From these statues we can imagine what an elegant performance court life must have been—bodies that moved with such solemnity and flourish. The theatricality of the French court is well recorded in the seventeenth century, when court life unfolded like one grand choreographed performance. From these descriptions we can infer some of the brilliance of the medieval French court. Historian Chandra Mukerji writes that “the gardens of Versailles [were]...a stage on which the court played and tried to glitter so brightly that the glory of France would be visible throughout Europe and beyond...the attention to detail and choreography...made visible the elegance and apparent ease of the court’s ritual life.”³⁰⁷ Versailles, a descendent of the medieval French court, was a place where bodies moved with artistic precision—their elegant gestures a proclamation of their divinity.

The archangel’s gestures are particularly emblematic of courtly manners due to the close association of the archangels with chivalry. Huizinga claims that chivalry originates from imitating the host of angels around God's throne.³⁰⁸ Jean Molinet, the fifteenth century poet, referred to Archangel Michael’s feat of arms as “the first deed of knighthood and chivalrous prowess that was ever achieved.”³⁰⁹ The Archangels, therefore, can be viewed as models of chivalrous manners and affectation, and nowhere did these manners hold more sway than in court.³¹⁰ Huizinga speaks of chivalrous sublimation when he writes, “Now, all noble life was in its essential manifestations full of such beauty tainted by sin.

307. Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial ambitions and the gardens of Versailles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 198.

308. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 56.

309. *Ibid.*

310. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 30-31.

Knighly exercises and courteous fashions with their worship of bodily strength; honours and dignities with their vanity and their pomp, and especially love;— what were they but pride, envy, avarice and lust, all condemned by religion! To be admitted as elements of higher culture all these things had to be ennobled and raised to the rank of virtue.”³¹¹ Chivalry contained all latent *eros* which theology could not contain. Huizinga writes that, “the artificial system of courtly love is abandoned, and its subtle distinctions will not be revived, when the Platonism of the Renaissance, latent, already, in the courtly conception, gives rise to new forms of erotic poetry with a spiritual tendency.”³¹² Huizinga’s timeline is backwards. It was Bernard’s erotic spiritual poetry that planted the seeds from which the Renaissance sprouted.

As we have seen by analogy to Dante, Bernard’s mystic writings are homosocial in that they exile woman to abstraction. The same is true of chivalry and courtly love. Zeikowits argues that chivalry was homosocial by promoting the normalization of same-sex intimacy.³¹³ In this way, queerness was simply refashioned and redirected into the erotic, theatrical, homosocial dynamics of chivalry and court culture. Chivalry created a framework for a socially acceptable, and even laudable, expression of *eros* by directing it toward an unattainable maiden. In this way woman exists only as misdirection—her phantom presence a scapegoat for the blatant homoerotic content. Woman is a mirage on the horizon—infinately deferred. What remains are the homosocial and homoerotic dynamics between men. Just as Dante’s Beatrice retains her angelic

311. Ibid.

312. Ibid., 95.

313. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, 18.

purity as we bear witness to the sodomites in hell, the virgin's flower remains intact while the knights ritually bathe one another.³¹⁴

The Reims angels forsake naturalism for nymphic delight. As angels they are androgynous, they occupy a supra-sexual nether-realm. This androgyny is superimposed onto the Virgin Mary trumeau at Reims (Fig. 18). The smiling archangels at Reims and the Madonna and Child Trumeau figure at Reims were likely both carved by the famed "Joseph Master."³¹⁵ The jamb figures were originally made to be placed together on each side of St. Nicaise at the left door of the west façade.³¹⁶ Mary, with her angular jaw, high cheekbones and



Figure 18
Virgin and Child Trumeau
Notre Dame in Reims; Central
portal west façade; trumeau figure
c. 1236 - 1245

314. For more on Dante's Sodomites see John Boswell. "Dante and the Sodomites." *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 112 (1994): 63-76.

315. William D. Wixom, "Two Thirteenth-Century Walnut Angels". *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, vol. 61, no. 3 (Mar., 1974): 92.

316. Allen Wardwell, "A French Gothic Virgin of the Annunciation" *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 4 (1969): 7-13.

pronounced brow, is almost more masculine than the male archangels. Her femininity is an afterthought—a slight protrusion of breast, a few curls of hair around her neck. While this androgyny of the holy figures may have some theological basis, as with the reliquary of Sainte-Foy, here it appears to derive from the queer influence of court culture with its roots in chivalry.

We cannot forget that sage hermetic axiom “as above, so below.”³¹⁷ The return of Dionysian *eros* was as much an eruption from below as it was a downpour from above—both man’s prelapsarian origins and his destiny in the afterlife had to be redefined in Dionysus’ image in order to produce such radical sculptures.

317. The phrase is traced to pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana’s first century work *Sirr al-khalīqa*, or “The Secret of Creation.”

CHAPTER V: THE PRELAPSARIAN BODY: ADAM

*We call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses
of any single thing. We have forgotten that water can cleanse,
and fire purify, and that the earth is mother to us all.*

— Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

Art historian Kenneth Clark refers to the years around 1260 as a “false dawn of the Renaissance.”³¹⁸ Here, Clark is referring to Nicola Pisano’s Greco-Roman inspired pulpit in the Baptistery of Pisa (Fig. 19). Pisano’s pulpit is an echo of antiquity—it gives us no sense of the medieval body. Its *eros* and athleticism is entirely Greco-Roman. The medieval body can be discerned, however, in the sculptures of the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, Sainte-Chapelle, and Reims Cathedral. Clark refers to Pisano’s relief carving of the athletic nude *Heracles* (Fig. 19) as a momentary reappearance of the Apollonian archetype to European Art.³¹⁹ Apollo is the god of light and reason, his idealized body was an expression of the perfection, harmony, and proportionality of mathematical and geometrical law.³²⁰ Clark notes that, “the first great philosopher of mathematical harmony had called himself Pythagoras, son of the Pythian Apollo. So in the

318. Clark, *The Nude: a Study In Ideal Form*, 53.

319. *Ibid.*, 54.

320. *Ibid.*, 30.

embodiment of Apollo everything must be calm and clear: clear as daylight, for Apollo is the god of light.”³²¹ Clark isolates the last flicker of Apollo’s presence in Medieval art to a fifth century ivory carving of Adam (Fig. 20) sitting in his newly created kingdom. Although the ivory depicts Adam embedded in Dionysian Nature—a man among beasts—Nature has been tamed with Apollonian order. Each animal is clearly outlined and rendered with mathematical precision. Scales, feathers, fur, and hair appear as geometric latticework—there is no wildness here. In naming the animals, Adam had subordinated the wilderness to Apollonian definition and clarity.

Clark isolates Apollo’s next reappearance, in Pisano’s pulpit in the thirteenth century. A relief of *Fortitudo* (Fig. 19) shows the body with a similar Apollonian definition, athleticism has turned the unruly flesh into an efficient machine. Clark makes no mention of Apollo’s reappearance in Europe until Donatello’s fifteenth



Figure 19
Heracles
Nicola Pisano
Baptistry of Pisa, Italy
c. 1260

321. Ibid., 30.

century bronze *David* (Fig. 4).³²² Donatello's *David* is primarily Apollonian in theme. The slaying of the giant Goliath is a kind of subordination of Nature. David's body, however, droops with a Dionysian eroticism like an overly ripened fruit.

Clark understood well the erotic and irrational motivations for the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. He speaks of a current of irrational desire flowing through European art from the earliest times:

Plato, in his *Symposium*, makes one of the guests assert that there are two Aphrodites, whom he calls Celestial and Vulgar...and because it symbolized a deep-seated human feeling, this passing allusion was never forgotten. It became an axiom of medieval and Renaissance philosophy. It is the justification for the female nude. Since the earliest times the obsessive, the unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give these linages a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European art.³²³



Figure 20
Adam in Paradise (Naming the Animals)
Ivory Panel from a diptych
c. 400 B.C.E.

322. Ibid., 53-4.

323. Ibid., 54.

The Notre-Dame Adam gives credence to this theory. It is thought that the Adam statue was modeled on Praxiteles’s statue of Venus/ Aphrodite of Knidos, of which only Roman copies survive (Fig. 21).³²⁴ The resemblance is striking. We find in the Notre-Dame Adam a similar positioning of the feet and hand covering the genitals. Praxiteles’ Venus is said to be the first female nude in Ancient Greece, a rare gender inversion in the dominant cult of male beauty.³²⁵ In this way, Aphrodite was a kind of hermaphrodite—as the first of her kind she retains the the phantom presence of her male siblings. I find a similar gender-blurring in the Notre-Dame Adam. Despite the fact that Adam is male, he is simply another rearticulation of Venus. Only Venus was forced to cover herself. Clark writes that,



Figure 3
Notre-Dame Adam
 Notre-Dame in Paris, transept south
 façade
 Attributed to Pierre de Montreuil
 c.1260



Figure 21
The Ludovisi Cindian Aphrodite
 Roman Copy of Praxiteles’ statue
 from the fourth century BCE

324. “Sculptures des XIe-XIIIe- siècles—Adam” Collections du musée de Cluny. Accessed July 8th, 2021. <https://www.sculpturesmedievales-cluny.fr/notices/notice.php?id=3>

325. Nigel Spivey, “Revealing Aphrodite” in *Understanding Greek Culture* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 173–186.

Since the seventeenth century we have come to think of the female nude as a more normal and appealing subject than the male. But this was not so originally. In Greece no sculpture of nude women dates from sixth century, and it is still extremely rare in the fifth. There were both religious and social reasons for the scarcity. Whereas the nakedness of Apollo was a part of his divinity, there were evidently ancient traditions of ritual and taboo that Aphrodite must be swathed in draperies.³²⁶

By Clark's definition, the Notre-Dame Adam is the first medieval nude. Previous depictions of the naked Adam and Eve exaggerate their cursed condition and bestial nature. However, the Notre-Dame Adam is self possessed, poised, sensual. This is Adam redeemed—Adam glorified. Adam's bashfulness is mark of his femininity. The Notre-Dame Adam is Venus reborn. The sexual inversion is simply one of the mechanisms employed to make the "vulgar" Venus "celestial."

Clark also speaks of the Venus archetypes in terms of the "vegetale" and the "crystalline."³²⁷ The vegetale and crystalline are Dionysian and the Apollonian. Dionysus is the god of the vine, of the grape and of ivy, of Nature and fertility. Apollo is the god geometry and line. Clark associates the Apollonian with mathematical precision, clarity, and measured harmony, and the Dionysian with man's irrational, carnal nature.³²⁸ As the name implies, the vegetale Aphrodite is like Nature herself—ruthless, wild, and unruly. She is a jungle to be either tamed or devoured by. The attempt to make the vegetale Aphrodite crystalline is an attempt to fence in the wild fecundity of Nature—to tame the fleshly female body and make sense of her procreative mystery. The Notre-Dame Adam is the hermaphroditic first ancestor of man—the mother of all humanity who "gave birth" to Eve from one of his ribs. The Notre-Dame Adam, like the Venus she was modeled after, is a spiritual drag queen—a hermaphroditic reconciliation

326. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 72.

327. *Ibid.*, 74.

328. *Ibid.*, 273

between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Adam, as the mother of humanity, retains the Dionysian fecundity of Nature. However, this is Adam tamed by Apollonian grace and precision. Unruly Nature is subjected to an Apollonian geometric matrix. The prevalence of these hermaphroditic hybrids in Western Art begs the question—how many truly “female” nudes are there?

The Notre-Dame Adam (Fig. 4) of the thirteenth century marks the return of the Greek cult of male beauty to European Art. This cult is epitomized in the fifth century *Kritios Boy* which Clark deems “the first beautiful nude in art.”³²⁹ Clark draws a distinction between the term “naked” and “nude.” He writes,

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word “nude,” on the other hand, carries, in educated usage no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed.³³⁰

By Clark’s definition, the Notre-Dame Adam is the first medieval nude. Previous depictions of the naked Adam and Eve exaggerate their cursed condition and bestial nature. However, the Notre-Dame Adam is self possessed, poised, sensual. This is Adam redeemed—Adam glorified.

In his description of the *Kritios Boy* (Fig. 22), Clark draws a parallel between the homosocial culture of Greek athletes and the homosocial culture of medieval chivalry. He writes:

In our study of the nude it is the unlikeliness that is significant: not simply because Greek athletes wore no clothes, although that is of real importance, but because of the two powerful emotions that dominated the Greek games and are largely absent from our own: religious dedication and love. These gave the cult of physical perfection a solemnity and a rapture that have not been experienced since. Greek athletes competed in somewhat the same poetical and chivalrous spirit as knights, before the eyes of their loves, jostled in the lists: but all that pride and devotions which medieval contestants pressed through the flashing

329. *Ibid.*, 34.

330. *Ibid.*, 3.

symbolism of heraldry was, in the games of antiquity, concentrated in one object, the naked body.

Clark characterizes the Greek milieu as a fusion of religious devotion and love. These values were expressed in the cult of physical perfection, epitomized in works like the *Kritios boy* (Fig. 22). This fusion of religious devotion and love also describes Bernard's erotic mysticism. Likewise, these conditions fostered the return of the cult of physical perfection. In the thirteenth century, the homosocial environment of Greek athleticism was replaced by the homosocial culture of chivalry. Strictly speaking, the cult of physical perfection did not disappear entirely, however, in for the Early Christians this perfection was *ascetic* rather than *athletic*.



Figure 3
Notre-Dame Adam
Notre-Dame in Paris, transept south
façade
Attributed to Pierre de Montreuil
c.1260

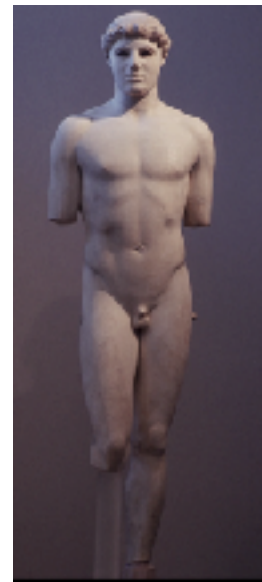


Figure 22
Kritios Kouros from Attica "Kritios Boy"
Greece
c. 480 B.C.E.

The eroticism of the Notre-Dame Adam is foremost a product of his three-dimensionality. He is depicted in the round, his back every bit as delicately rendered as the front. His plump buttocks shows a clear Classical influence, linked to the works Praxiteles.³³¹ The Notre-Dame (Fig. 3) Adam is less muscular compared to the *Kritios Boy* (Fig. 22) ideal, his shoulders drop down severely like one of Ingres's women. His ribs are visible, however he is not emaciated. His hand rests delicately over his genitals. He bears no signs of shame. He clutches the fig leaf as the members of court clutch their robes—with finesse. This is fig-leaf fashion. With the other hand he makes a sign of benediction. Like a dancer, Adam is relaxed yet poised. His gestures are not by rugged Greek athleticism but by the effete manners of court. This new French style drew its curvaceousness and softness of line and from French manuscript illumination, which share a similar elongation of the limbs, finely curled hair, and a softness of form.

Pierre de Montreuil is the presumed sculptor of the Notre-Dame Adam.³³² Adam's perfectly almond shaped eyes were likely inspired by the angels at Reims. Adam's soft transition between the brow and eyes, and delicate eyelids are similar to the Apostle statues from Sainte-Chapelle (Fig. 23) created around 1243 -1248.³³³ This connection reinforces the supposition that Pierre de Montreuil was the artist, for Montreuil was known to have worked both on the Notre-Dame Cathedral de Paris, and Louis IX's Sainte-Chapelle. However, they seem to precede both. The Notre-Dame Adam and Sainte-Chapelle ivory were likely

331. "Sculptures des XIe-XIIIe- siècles—Adam" Collections du musée de Cluny. Accessed July 8th, 2021. <https://www.sculpturesmedievales-cluny.fr/notices/notice.php?id=3>

332. Ibid.

333. "Apôtres de la Sainte-Chapelle" Musée de Cluny. Accessed July 8th, 2021, <https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/en/collection/apostles-from-the-sainte-chapelle.html>

influenced by the Reims jamb figures due to their stylistic siblings—the Apostle sculptures of Sainte-Chapelle (Fig. 23).³³⁴

The Notre-Dame Adam's face (Fig. 3) is distinctly French, drawn from manuscript illuminations which stylized and homogenized the human figure until it became as distinctive and unchanging as a signature. There was little difference even between the sexes. The manuscript format distilled the French figure into a few distinctive curly cues. The Notre-Dame Adam contains only a trace of the distinctive Greco-Roman brow. The primary influence for his face is the ink drawings of manuscript illuminations. There is a certain personal charm



Figure 3
Notre-Dame Adam (Detail)
Notre-Dame in Paris, transept south
façade
Attributed to Pierre de Montreuil
c.1260



Figure 23
Saint Jean Apostle
Sainte-Chapelle, Paris
c. 1243 - 1248

334. Historian Peter Kauman has suggested that the Notre-Dame Adam influenced the sculpture of Reims, see Peter Kurmann, “La Façade de la cathédrale de Reims : architecture et sculpture des portails : étude archéologique et stylistique” *du centre national de la recherche scientifique* vol. 2 (1987): 30.

to his eggplant shaped nose and plump chin. He is undoubtedly beautiful, but his softened features and individuality contain little of the steely, narcissistic distance of the Apollonian Greco-Roman ideal. There is something feminine, almost matronly in his face. Adam has reabsorbed Eve and become a single hermaphroditic ancestor. He is the father *and* mother of all humanity. The Notre-Dame Adam was originally created as one of a pair.³³⁵ Perhaps the Sainte-Chapelle ivory (Fig. 14) can help us conjure a semblance of the phantom Eve. It is somewhat poignant to consider the lost Eve, though her absence has some tragic irony to it—as if Adam’s hermaphroditism has made her redundant.

There is something of the Mona Lisa in Adam’s smile. Like the Mona Lisa, the Notre Dame Adam is a hermaphroditic ur-mother. Freud asserted that the ur-mother carries the sexual organs of both sexes at once and applied this to his analysis of the Mona Lisa.³³⁶ Freud traced the Mona Lisa to Leonardo’s childhood dream of a vulture which he associated with *Mut* the hermaphroditic Egyptian vulture goddess.³³⁷ Freud notes that Renaissance churchfathers cited the vulture

335. “Sculptures des XIe-XIIIe- siècles—Adam”, Collections du musée de Cluny. Accessed July 8th, 2021. <https://www.sculpturesmedievals-cluny.fr/notices/notice.php?id=3>

336. Wolfgang Schmidbauer, “Freud, Leonardo Michelangelo” in *Luzifer-Amor* 10, 120 cited from Klaus Herding and Nina Schleif, “Freud’s Leonardo: A Discussion of Recent Psychoanalytic Theories” *American Imago* 57, no. 4. (2000): 353.

337. Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo-Ein Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci (A Childhood Reminiscence of Leonardo da Vinci)* cited from Meyer Schapiro, “Leonardo and Freud: An Art-Historical Study.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 2 (1956): 147-78. With the exception of Schapiro and Ernst-H. Gombrich, Freud’s 1910 essay on Leonardo has been largely dismissed by art historians. Here, I am not interested in Freud’s conjectural understanding of Leonardo himself, however, Freud’s views on the Mona Lisa are subtle and perceptive and relevant to this discussion of hermaphroditic mothers archetypes in art. For an overview of the historical reception of Freud’s foray into art analysis see Klaus Herding and Nina Schleif, “Freud’s Leonardo: A Discussion of Recent Psychoanalytic Theories” *American Imago* 57, no. 4 (2000): 339-368.

as a natural prototype for the Virgin birth.³³⁸ While Freud's analysis is contested, he correctly intuited Mona Lisa's parthenogenic mystery. The Notre-Dame Adam is a similar ur-mother of mankind. His contented face suggests a kind of self satisfaction with his parthenogenic power of having "given birth" to Eve with one of his ribs. The Notre Dame Adam is a reconciliation between the mysterious Dionysian powers of generation, and Christianity's need to bring Apollonian clarity and fixity to mankind's origins. This is the same phenomena that Freud noticed in Leonardo's Mona Lisa, which was his attempt to deal with the Dionysian, threatening, and Apollonian, reassuring, aspects of the mother archetype. Klaus Herding and Nina Schleif write

*It is the threatening and the desirable aspects of this motherly attachment that produce the strange tension in the affective structure of Leonardo's paintings. Threat and desire—these are the antipodes that determine the artist's relations to women...A manifestation of Leonardo's trauma in his art can be found in the ambiguity of threat and desire that is best expressed in the smile.*³³⁹

Similarly, the threatening and desirable aspects of motherly attachment are at play in the Notre Dame Adam. As male ur-mother, the Dionysian mystery of mankind's origins is relegated once again to the masculine—that is to say the Apollonian—realm. Dionysian desire is tempered by Apollonian restraint. I associate Christianity's fear of the Dionysian with hegemony. The Notre Dame Adam represented a renegotiation, however limited, with man's Dionysian

338. Schapiro, "Leonardo and Freud: An Art-Historical Study", 48. In a treatise by Pierio Valeriano dedicated to Cosimo di Medici, the vulture is mentioned as a natural analogue of the Virgin Mary because of its fecundation by the wind—if a vulture could be impregnated by the wind then Mary could be fecundated by the Holy Spirit. See Schapiro. "Leonardo and Freud", 148. Although "vulture" is a mistranslation of the original Italian word for the bird "kite" many have defended Freud's hypothesis about the maternal symbolic content of the painting. In fact, some ways the correct translation has only fortified Freud's theories, bringing them more in line with contemporary psychoanalytic theory, see Klaus Herding and Nina Schleif. "Freud's Leonardo: A Discussion of Recent Psychoanalytic Theories." *American Imago* 57, no. 4. 2000. 345.

339. Klaus Herding and Nina Schleif, "Freud's Leonardo: A Discussion of Recent Psychoanalytic Theories." *American Imago* 57, no. 4 (2000): 346. (emphasis in the original)

origins. In this way, the Notre Dame Adam can be said to be a type of queering in that it forces a renegotiation of Dionysian principles in depictions of Christian cosmology. Not only is the Notre Dame Adam erotic, it is another example of a resurgence of the ur-mother archetype in Christian Art, the second being the Virgin Mary. Bernard of Clairvaux was largely responsible for the spread and success of the Marian cult. Bernard's metaphysics of desire was predicated on a kind of worship of the Virgin.

CONCLUSION

The whirling, throbbing, ecstatic art of the Renaissance goes by a different name in the Middle Ages—it still exists in the fevered visions of the mystics, in the pulsating rhythms of Bernard's sermons, and in the theatricality of court culture. The art of the Middle Ages enshrined stasis, redirecting the great river and erotic energies to the embodied arts—religious ceremony and court culture. The pagan and erotic impulses that raised so many monuments to the beauty of the human form in antiquity eventually found their way back into the hegemonic structures. For a brief moment in the thirteenth century, medieval eroticism is captured in stone. In the Notre-Dame Adam, the nude briefly returned to European Art. The eroticization of the body in sculpture found theological grounding in the erotic theology of Bernard of Clairvaux and references to man's prelapsarian body. Bernard's highly corporeal ontology and sensual prose aided in the reintroduction of the glorified sexualized body in Western art.

In the thirteenth century, Bernard's influence is keenly felt in the Sainte-Chapelle ivory and the Notre-Dame Adam. The Sainte-Chapelle statue may be the first Gothic sculpture of Mary to emphasize her connection with Eve by emphasizing Mary's own erotic and sensual nature. The ivory statuette perfectly combines the sublimated eros of chivalry with Bernard's sexual metaphors for mystic union. The Adam is the first distinctly medieval nude to appear since antiquity. He is Apollo superimposed with Aphrodite's coyness. Bernard's influence is also felt in images of the crucifixion by the Virtues turn the event into a Dionysian orgy. The images oscillate between their allegorical and erotic meanings before one's eyes. Queer artworks hides the subversive in plain sight. Bernard turned the holy figures into actors in his family romance. Just as Dante queered *Paradiso*, Bernard queered the holy figures.

The sculptures of thirteenth century France suggest that the years around 1260 were something more than a “false dawn of the Renaissance.” The Notre-Dame Adam and Sainte-Chapelle Ivory suggest that a larger cultural shift took place. For a moment, the conditions in France were favorable enough for a brief return of eroticized freestanding sculpture. Clairvaux’s reintegration of *eros* with Christian devotion in the twelfth century that allowed latent classicism to once again find expression in the art of the thirteenth century. Had the plague not come to Europe so soon afterwards, perhaps the seeds of the Renaissance would have taken root and bloomed earlier.

The Notre Dame Adam represents a reconciliation, albeit a limited one, with the Dionysian. Adam has reabsorbed Eve and become father *and* mother of all humanity. Adam is a hermaphrodite, self-satisfied with his own parthenogenic power. In the Notre Dame Adam, man’s origins have once again been rescued from a watery Dionysian womb world and brought into crisp Apollonian relief. However, the Notre Dame Adam represents a greater reconciliation with the Dionysian in that it represents a marriage of Greco-Roman homoeroticism and Judeo-Christian homosocial theology. This marriage is likely what caused Clark to refer to the years around 1260 as a “false dawn of the renaissance,” and what caused Steinberg to point to the years around 1260 as the beginning of the sexualization of Christ.³⁴⁰ It is also a period that Di Renzo and Bynum to point to an ontological shift in understandings of the body.³⁴¹ Furthermore, Bynum points out that it was also around this time that there was a theological renegotiation of

340. Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, 54.; Steinberg, “The Sexuality of Christ”: 28.; Di Renzo, *American Gargoyles*, 62-63.

341. Di Renzo, *American Gargoyles*, 62-63.

the body's role in identity and spiritual attainment, a shift driven in large part by Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁴²

342. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 135. See especially footnote 59.

CODA

*Of course magic was involved at the beginning of my quest.
But I have since crossed the shadow line, made magic real, created myself.
But to what end?*

—Gore Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge*

The queer aesthetic is heir to classicism and the courtly arts. A direct lineage can be traced from the *Kritios Boy* (Fig. 22) to Robert Mapplethorpe's subversive photographs of the 1980s (Fig. 24), from Louis XIV the sun-king to Ru Paul the drag-queen.³⁴³ Queering art history is the act of revealing that the queer visual



Figure 22
Kritios Kouros from Attica
"Kritios Boy" (Detail)
Greece
c. 480 BCE



Figure 24
Lisa Lyon
Robert Mapplethorpe
Photograph
1982

343. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition: Photography and Mannerist Print* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2004)

vernacular is bound up in the dominant traditions of Western Art. We need not look to the fringes to find examples of the queer aesthetic, it is hiding in plain sight. The homoeroticism of antiquity and the Renaissance has inspired queer artists, thinkers, and activists to this day. Classicism is as much a product of the queer aesthetic as the queer aesthetic is a product of classicism. The same can be said of the courtly arts. Fashion, like its cousin drag, is a queer art form. Both are vestiges of court. Paris Fashion Week and *Ru Paul's Drag Race* are the modern day Versailles. The rituals of drag are as much descendants of burlesque as they are vestige of the French royal court. Dionysus—god of masks—is reborn again in the he drag queen—master of sexual personae. The drag queen archetype is that eternal mother archetype—the diva. The drag-queen shows queering as parody for what it really is—a rude-positive reminder of our Dionysian origins.



Figure 25
Portrait of Louis XIV "The Sun King" (Detail)
Hyacinthe Rigaud
1701
Paris, France



Figure 26
Ru Paul (Detail)
Annie Leibovitz
Photographed for Vogue Magazine, 2019

Court culture, steeped as it was in chivalry, can be considered a homosocial institution for its valorization of same sex intimacy. However, the courtly forms are truly queer for being the progenitors of modern day queer aesthetic. The queer and the camp are as much a product of Louis XIV as Andy Warhol. When aristocracy was no longer bound up in monarchy it continued to exist in the “dandy” archetype—Lord Byron, Oscar Wilde, David Bowie. Baudelaire’s friend Barbey D’Aurevilly called dandies “the Androgynes of History.”³⁴⁴ The dandy as queer persona is crystalized in the figure of Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde as the sociopathic aesthete Lord Henry Wotton in *A Picture of Dorian Gray* is Dionysus reborn—he is the serpent in garden who convinces Dorian to taste from the tree of Beauty. Dionysus is always androgyne. Like the youth Ganymede, Dionysus is similarly suspended between youth and manhood as he is between man and woman. His androgyny is indicative of his fluid identity. Dionysus is the god of masks. The theatricality of gender is embedded in his cult. In the *Bacchae*, Euripides highlights this gender bending aspect of the god when Dionysus forces the Athenian King Perseus to dress as a woman, a nod to that queer aspect of Greek theatre wherein men dressed in drag to play the female roles. One can see how the God Dionysus becomes a kind of nexus of queer associations. This fact led me to define queering as the act of confronting or demanding a reconciliation with Dionysian principles. While the Queer and the Dionysian are not synonymous, I found that the process of attempting to define the Queer and the hegemonic ran parallel to the process of defining the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Here, I define the hegemonic as the Western posture towards existence which preferences the male and the abstract over the female and the fleshly. This predisposition is evident in Christian cosmology, wherein the natural order is

344. Barbey D’Aurevilly, *The Anatomy of Dandyism* (London: Glasgow University Press, 1928)

reversed so that woman is born from man and things are born from words. Bernard's enfleshed sensibility, his ability to reconcile the spiritual and the carnal, to dwell in this paradox, is a queer attribute. We find this quality in the writings of other queer archetypes like Hildegard Von Bingen, Dante, Bernard of Clairvaux, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and Flannery O'Connor to name a few. Writers who took great relish in undermining the West's tendency to disregard the flesh as an impediment to spiritual or noetic attainment. I argue that Bernard of Clairvaux's effect on Western art is a form of queering. Bernard sacramentalized bodily desire in the twelfth century the way that Andy Warhol sacramentalized popular and consumer culture in the 1960's.

Bernard's views on ecstasy implicate him in an artistic discourse that stretches back to the cult of Dionysus and culminates in Bernini's Baroque statue of the "Ecstasy of Saint Theresa" (Fig. 27). Bernini's statue of the saint in ecstasy was modeled from one of her recorded visions:

Beside me, on the left, appeared an angel in bodily form...He was not tall but short, and very beautiful...In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share.³⁴⁵

The Freudian imagery is laughable. Saint Theresa's vision of a beautiful boy penetrating her entrails with an arrow comes as close to a description of sexual intercourse as a nun can get without making it absolutely explicit. And yet it is the last line that is so peculiar. Saint Theresa finds herself conceding that the body has a "considerable share" in the sensations that she seems to prefer would

345. Simon Schama, *Power Of Art* (U.K.: BBC Books, 2006)

remain entirely “spiritual.” Bernard, Saint Theresa, Donne, and Bernini, therefore, used the concept of ecstasy to explore the body’s role in personhood.

Bernini’s statue is a perfect example of queering as parody. Bernini’s brazen depiction of orgasm in the sacred context of the Santa Maria della Vittoria is confrontational—daring the viewer to doubt his intentions. Simon Schama writes,

What did rapture, after all, look like? What if [Bernini] carved this woman, who herself had dared to describe her experience so graphically, as if at the height of her sexual pleasure, utterly abandoned to a flood of sensation, straining towards her spiritual consummation, body and soul indivisible? Who would dare challenge him? He would take his own, ample carnal knowledge and turn it into a sacred shock.³⁴⁶

Bernini’s predilection for “sacred shock” gives him a queer sensibility. Queer art hides the subversive in plain sight. Queer artists demand a reconciliation



Figure 27
Saint Theresa in Extasy
Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria
della Vittoria, Rome.
Bernini
1647–1652

346. Ibid.

between the spirit and the flesh, the sacred and the profane. It is no coincidence that one of the most iconic drag queens, Harris Glenn Milstead, infamous eating dog excrement on camera, went by the moniker “Divine” (Fig. 28).³⁴⁷ Today, however, the gesture is tired, its potency died out long before Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (1987). Any clown can demand a reconciliation of the sacred and the profane, few can actually achieve it. And would such an achievement even look like? Nietzsche claims that “the continuous development of art is bound up with the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian: in like manner as procreation is dependent on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual conflicts with only periodically intervening reconciliations.”³⁴⁸ A reconciliation with the Dionysian, therefore, is only one aspect of queering. It describes the mode but not the manner.



Figure 28
Harris Glenn Milstead “Divine”
Publicity Photograph

347. John Waters, *Pink Flamingos*. 1972. New Line Cinema. 92 minutes.

348. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism*. trans. WM. A. Haussmann (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 1.

To Bernard and Bernini's discourse on ecstasy we can add the sixteenth century poet John Donne. I suggest that Donne was in direct conversation with Bernard when he wrote "The Extasie." Donne's poem re-articulates the revolutionary concept of person as psychosomatic unity. It is a gentle nudge, an impish reminder, to descend to the Dionysian realm of physicality and flesh. This gesture is repeated in the the epistemological musings of Flannery O'Conner. Bernard and Donne shared the Dionysian recognition that the language of sex was also the language of death.

We see the Dionysian duality between sex and death in thirteenth century images of the crucifixion. Masculinity restrained by ropes and penetrated by arrows is one of the central motifs of the queer visual lexicon. The image of Christ crucified and Saint Sebastian penetrated by arrow are homoerotic psycho-sexual dramas—they offer up masculinity up on a platter to be devoured by the viewer's hungry gaze. In this way, Christianity's central image is queer. This realization problematizes Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze.³⁴⁹ In one of her more controversial statements, Mulvey claims that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female, The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly."³⁵⁰ However, this neat delineation between active/male and passive/female is subverted in the images of Christ.³⁵¹ Medieval historian, Sarah Stanbury asks—"Since the very concept of the 'phallic gaze' emerges from a regime of the visual that splits vision as male the object of the

349. Mulvey, "Visual Plasure and Narrative Cinema", 48.

350. Ibid., 27.

351.. Film theorist and feminist Elizabeth Cowie argues against Mulvey's tidy distinction between active/male and passive/female. She writes that, "visual pleasure is not a straightforward affair. It always implies specularising the object...and this is as true of women as of men." Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), 169-70.

gaze as paradigmatically female, can we speak of a 'phallic gaze' in medieval representation—if the central body in that system of representation is not female at all?"³⁵² As Steinberg notes, the initial stirrings of *eros* in medieval art take the male Jesus as the object of sexual desire.³⁵³ In Cistercian images of the crucifixion it is the male who possesses Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness," while the female penetrates or "ravishes" the passive male with her gaze.

In the increasingly eroticized depictions of the crucifixion of the thirteenth century, Jesus' gaze occupies the same middle distance as the Kritios boy and Saint Sebastian. His consciousness is remote. His psyche disappears, allowing the eye to wander unsupervised. This remote gaze is sharply contrasted with the confrontational, penetrating, and direct gaze of the holy figures in the Early Middle Ages. The reliquary statue of Sainte-Foy's gaze is confrontational. In the thirteenth century, this dynamic shifts. The images and statues begin to invite the gaze as Jesus does Caritas' spear. This shift of the visual dynamic marks a new erotic dimension in European art.

These passive sex objects are often marked by symbolic orifices. This trend has roots in Bernard's fetishistic description of Christ's wound. The double entendre between wound and orifice is unmasked as Saint Sebastian's penetration becomes explicitly sexual in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. In Pietro Perugino's homoerotic depiction of Saint Sebastian at the Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Cerqueto (Fig. 26). Perugino's Sebastian is depicted in Apollonian perfection, the tree replaced by a Grecian column. This is the resurrection of the Greek cult of male beauty under the pretense of Christian devotion. His expression is more narcissistic disinterest than martyred. Saint

352. Sarah Stanbury, "Regimes of the Visual in Premodern England: Gaze, Body, and Chaucer's Clerks Tale," *New Library History* 28 (1997): 266.

353. Leo Steinberg, "The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art": 331.

Sebastian is paired with Saint Roch. Although their pairing was originally due to their shared association with the plague, their wounds were eventually queered and became orifices. The imagery of death soon gave way to imagery of sex.

The fresco of Saint Roche at Santa Maria Assunta is badly damaged, but Roche is identifiable by the vaginal wound on his thigh which he reveals to us by lifting his cloak. A phallic arrow piercing Sebastian's thigh draws our eyes to Roch who caresses his wound. In the Renaissance, the erotic fascination with Christ's wound is more blatantly apparent. Carravagio (1571 - 1610) and Bronzino had a penchant for depicting figures fondling Christ's wound.³⁵⁴ Bronzino (1503 - 1572), infamous for his homoerotic paintings, edits the the wound from a gash to a beauty mark—a little Yin in the Yang



Figure 29
St. Sebastian and St. Roche
Pietro Perugino
Fresco
c. 1478

354. See Carravagio's Deposition and Bronzino's Pietà

In a response to Stienberg, Bynum calls attention to the fact that “Christ’s flesh was sometimes seen as female, as lactating and giving birth.”³⁵⁵ This gender inversion suggests a reconciliation with the Dionysian. I submit that this reconciliation is unconsciously embedded in the term “Renaissance.” The Renaissance was just as much a was reintegration of Dionysian principles as it was a rediscovery of the culture that made a god of Dionysus. The cult of the Virgin is an atavistic reversion to pagan mother cult —Mary is Isis reborn.³⁵⁶ Christianity only temporarily succeeded in subordinating the feminine and the fleshy—Dionysian—to the masculine and the abstract—Apollonian. After Christ is shrunk down to a helpless infant and placed on Mary’s lap the Christian reversal is undone—man is once again shown his proper place in regard to his mother, Nature. The image of breastfeeding, central to Bernard’s legacy, is a reminder of our inexorable dependency on woman and Nature. Whenever there is suppression of the Dionysian it returns with a vengeance. Bernard attempted to these Dionysian realities in the monastery only to be defined by them. Dante attempted to escape these realities only to be haunted by them in the form of the domineering Beatrice. Like Bernard, Dante’s aversion turned obsession. Bernard’s fixation on vaginal wound is reborn in Dante’s vaginal *Paradiso*—both are a return to the womb.

355. Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg” *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 403.

356. While there is still great debate amongst egyptologists, theologians, and art historians, it is widely acknowledged that the cult of Mary is in many ways a continuation of the cult of the Isis. This similarities between the cults are eloquently laid out by the nineteenth century writer Gerard De Nerval in his narrative *Isis*. Bettina Knapp outlines the argument in her essay “Gerard de Nerval’s ‘Isis’ and the Cult of the Madonna” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 3, no. 1/2 (1974): 65-79.

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