Chapter 6

"Syon Gostly"

Crafting Aesthetic Imaginaries and Stylistics of Existence in Medieval Devotional Culture

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In 2013, translated excerpts of Marielle Macé's 2011 book *Façons de lire, manières d'être* were published as the article "Ways of Reading, Modes of Being" in *New Literary History*.[1] While her original book had been reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* soon after its publication, Macé and her theories began to receive more attention in Anglo-American critical spheres through their mention (via the English-language article) in Rita Felski's 2015 book *The Limits of Critique* (Sheringham 2011, 29). Felski lauds Macé's ideas about literature as one of several more positive, viable alternatives to traditional critique. She sums up Macé's approach as understanding literature as a "stylistics of existence":

> To speak of a stylistics of existence is to acknowledge that our being in the world is formed and patterned along certain lines and that aesthetic experience can modify or redraw such patterns. In the act of reading, we encounter fresh ways of organising perception, different patterns and models, rhythms of rapprochement and distancing, relaxation and suspense, movement and hesitation. We give form to our existence through the diverse ways in which we inhabit, inflect, and appropriate the artistic forms we encounter. (2015, 176)

Such a view of literature productively aligns with the idea of the aesthetic imaginary; in both, text, imagination, and aesthetics form and inform each other, held in tension as they shape the reader's life. Macé argues strongly for the integration of reading with the aesthetic shape of the reader's life, not just in terms of plot, but in terms of *style*: "Reading is not a separate activity, functioning in competition with life, but one of the daily means by which we give our existence form, flavor, and even style" (2013, 213). She expands on

this idea of reading shaping our life by emphasizing the idea of "conduct" in terms of how we perceive and interact with the world:

> We must consider reading as a conduct, a behaviour of attention, perception, and experience, representing mental, physical, and emotional navigation within linguistic forms. It is, furthermore, a conduct both "with," and even "directed by," books, when they orient one's life through the interpretation and application of reading to individual forms. (2013, 21–17)

This emphasis on response and acuity as meaning-making links Macé's theories of reading much more closely to aesthetics than, say, the emphasis on narrative as meaning-making as claimed by Ricoeur.[2] Not *what* happens in our lives and *what* happens in books, but *how* does it happen, *how* is it styled linguistically and aesthetically, and how does it provide an aesthetic lens for the rest of our existence?

"The gesture of reading determines forms in life . . . it forms the self and the environment by allowing us to bring nuance and existential value to our own sensations," Macé continues (224). So according to this approach, the gesture of reading forms our subjective selves, especially attention and sensibility, how we attend to the world and process the way it feels—the words we read on the page lend a certain flavor to the way we sense the world around us and how we feel about the world. Macé has thought through some of these issues of reading experience with reference to modern authors such as Proust. I would like to propose thinking through the formative power of literature with reference to texts from the distant past, texts equally stylistically crafted and stylistically crafting of their readers. In fact, proving how this kind of reader-response theory resonates in and with premodern texts crucially demonstrates (in contradiction to Macé herself and some other critics) that yes, authors before the twentieth century did espouse the literary-critical position that readers could be shaped by what they read—that in the distant past just as now, people *can change* and specifically hold in their minds different possible ways of being.[3] In "Ways of Reading," Macé builds on examples of Proust and poetry to suggest the profound influence of literature on the individual reader, one that, for me, stands outside of chronological, historical specifics:

> Reading offers components for the formation and deformation of our attention and how we use it, in the construction of subjective approaches and the long-term project of an individual adventure, in other words, an authentic literary factory of sensibility . . . . Reading is a veritable catalyst for stylisation of our mental lives: we often find, in literature, reasons for sharpening or reorienting our tools to apprehend the world. (223)

Again, it is not a counter-intuitive or completely surprising point to say that reading shapes the way we think, but it is a point with underappreciated, broad significance. A vital significance of literature (indeed, humanities) today, yesterday, and for thousands of years is that it provides these "reasons for sharpening or reorienting our tools to apprehend the world." I contend that reading's "construction of subjective approaches" stands outside of time, enabling us insight into the past when we analyze how texts all have the capacity to reflect the ways they influenced their historical readers' perception back out on the world.

I would like to test the generative applicability of Macé's stylistics of existence by bringing it to a type of text very far removed from Proust. A large and popular genre of literature from the later Middle Ages called gospel meditations, or lives of Christ, leads readers through Christ's life and encourages them to participate imaginatively in it, to imagine themselves present in the biblical scenes as they read and meditate on the text. The language is very vivid, very detailed and descriptive, and often the tone explicitly directs the reader's sensations. For instance, while describing the blood dripping down Christ's face, one of these gospel meditations would typically read, "Behold how the blood dripped down"; and again the same "behold" command repeated for numerous other graphic moments throughout the narrative.[4] This kind of imperative "behold" seems to be the ultimate formation of attention-shaping—such directions train the inner sight and the outer sight at the same time, shaping the reader in the style of a specific aesthetic imaginary. In other words, according to Macé's rubric, this writing style shapes how we picture these images in our mind's eye, which influences how we see things with our physical eyes around us, how we hold sights in our gaze. Michael Sheringham summarizes this aspect of Macé's approach similarly: "As we go back and forth between the text and our everyday surroundings, we can view the world through the borrowed lens of the book, and also, if we wish, reshape our lives in harmony with the writer's vision as imparted through his style" (Sherringham 2011, 29). Critics of medieval religious prose see part of the effect of such devotional rhetoric as authors using this aesthetic lens to shape *deliberately* the individual's life, steering their emotional responses toward compassion in particular.[5] In essence these texts use reading to sharpen the outer senses of the reader so they might also be directed inside, to the reader's moral and ethical self—guiding self-development through the power of imagination.

So while the idea of an aesthetic imaginary expands to include the ways in which stylistics of literature influence the reader's stylistics of existence, I will also bring into play community and society. What happens when we take this relationship between literary style, reading, and the formation of the

self, and put it in a larger context of readerly community? Charles Taylor, in his *Modern Social Imaginaries*, describes the social imaginary as "that common understanding that makes possible common practice and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (2004, 23). Thinking in a Macé way, it is possible that through a common reading experience, readers partaking in and being shaped by the same stylistic lens of the same text(s) might come to view the world in a shared aesthetic way. How are readers sharing certain texts bound together in that shared shaping, aesthetically speaking? This is, of course, a question that recalls Brian Stock's influential articulation of a "textual community": "We can think of a textual community as a group that arises somewhere in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organization. It is an interpretive community, but it is also a social entity" (1990, 150).[6] Taylor's social imaginary conveniently links the concept of the aesthetic imaginary and Stock's textual community as "an interpretive community" while is also a "social entity" (Ibid. 23); but really to me it seems legitimate (indeed, exciting) to take Stock's concept in a new direction, revising his definition of textual communities from "microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script" to, in my following examination, microsocieties organized around the common *aesthetic experience* of a script.

In fact, stepping forward slightly from the emphasis on a community as interpretive (in both the Stock and the Stanley Fish sense), the situation I will delineate below, concerning a medieval monastery, perhaps finds a better resonance in Elina Siltanen's more recent conception of a "reading community" that is "constituted by the approaches encouraged by particular texts themselves—both the poems and the theoretical or other writings circulating within the community" (2016, 78). In other words, the texts direct the constitution of the community through their "approaches," which in this case I specify as *aesthetic approaches* shaping the community. While Siltanen's reference to poems recalls the modern poetry groups she is analyzing, replacing poems with "devotional prose" adapts this idea to the medieval monastery. Crucially for both Siltanen's poets and the monastic members, "the process of joining a community and becoming a reader involve an escape from the singularity of one's own experience" (Siltanen 2016, 78). Precisely in this way are medieval sisters and brothers subsumed into the monastic collective through their reading experiences, and in the case of brothers, their writing experiences as well. The voice of the prose narrator, often ventriloquizing the divine or the saint, leads them out from their own singularity into a common, collaborative devotional position.

Thus I wish to combine the aesthetic imaginary, the textual or reading community, and Macé's stylistic formation as a composite interpretive lens with which to illuminate the genre of medieval devotional literature and its

imaginative ethics. If reading is, in Macé's words, "one of the daily means by which we give our existence form, flavor, and even style," it seems logical that genres or canons of literature can impart a form, flavor, or even style that brings together groups or communities into a shared perception of the world, one that is shaped by the imagination and thus (according to established medieval theories of the imagination) formed by and forming a Christian ethics.[7] In other words, I will explore the idea that a shared reading by a group creates a community with a particular form, flavor, style—both aesthetically and ethically; that textual communities form aesthetic imaginaries with particular cohering characteristics. For the devotional texts and the monastic, religious readers I focus on here, imaginative piety forms the self as it forms a community of selves; the individual and the group co-form through the shared reading experience, through a common canon of literature that promotes a form of seeing, a flavor of perception, a style of attending to the world.

My case study for probing this hypothesis is the late medieval English monastic house called Syon Abbey, Isleworth, just outside London. It is part of the monastic order of St. Savior, founded by the visionary St. Bridget of Sweden (d. 1374). In one of her most important visions, Christ outlined a rule of living for this new order, stipulating a large group of sisters attended by a smaller group of priest brothers: a double house, though the two sides have minimal contact. Bridget's visions gave the order not only its rule, but also some of its liturgy, that is, the words of daily worship services. The main book of over seven hundred of her visions, the *Liber Celestis*, was read widely throughout England and Europe; Syon Abbey owned several copies as well as other English texts borrowing from her visions. Nuns at Syon had a relatively high level of literacy in English and, somewhat more limited, in Latin. Indeed, their lives were suffused with books: they would have spent much of their time reading and praying privately in their cells, or hearing texts read aloud in groups or at mealtimes, in addition to scriptural and liturgical readings during worship.[8]

Syon Abbey, I would like to argue, has its own unique flavor of being-through-texts, a flavor found in (1) the canon of Bridgettine works, (2) bespoke translations of writings of other visionary women, and (3) the texts that partake in their divine access by borrowing from their visions. For this microsociety, visionary texts provided a kind of "house style" of private devotion, public liturgy, gendered authority, and a shared ethics of behavior. So how does this indigenous aesthetic imaginary work? What is the stylistics of existence for Syon as a textual community?[9] As my evidence I look at two devotional texts that specifically invoke Bridget's visions. The first text is a life of Christ or passion meditation, the genre described above, called *A Mirror to Devout People*, or *Speculum Devotorum.* Intended for the Bridgettine

sisters of Syon, it is a compilation: a new text woven together from multiple sources with fresh interpolated material, in this instance compiled by a monk of the neighboring Carthusian monastery in the fifteenth century. In the Preface, the compiler (a.k.a. the author) gives an overview of the sources he uses, including, "summe reuelacyonys of approuyd wymmen" ("some revelations of approved women"), including Bridget of Sweden.[10] I examine a few examples of how the compiler stylistically frames these borrowings from visionary women's texts, and how the discursive presentation of these female authority figures then forms the reader *as a reader* and a viewer of the world, in perhaps not immediately obvious ways.

One of the longest borrowings from Bridget's visionary text is in chapter 22 of *A Mirror*, within the Passion narrative. The compiler introduces the section:

> Another wyse ȝe maye thynke hyt, aftyr Seyint Brygyttys *Reuelacyon*, and þat I holde sykyrer to lene to and þat ȝe maye thynke thus. Beholdyth fyrste . . . þe Mount of Caluary, and the crucyfyours aredy, as hyt ys wryte in the *Reuelacyon* to doo creueltee. But sche tellyth hyt in here owen persone as sche seyth hyt doo, þe whyche I turne here into the forme of medytacyon not goynge be the grace of God fro the menynge of here wordys. Now thanne beholdyth wyth the forseyde holy lady how the tormentorys. . . . (ch. 22: 117–118, l. 45–53)
>
> [Another way you may think on it, according to Saint Bridget's *Revelations*, and that [way] I hold more surely to rely on and that you may think thusly. Behold first . . . the Mount of Calvary, and the crucifiers ready to do cruelty, as it is written in the *Revelations*. But she tells it in her own person as she sees it done, which I turn here into the form of meditation, not going (by the grace of God) from the meaning of her words. Now then, behold with the aforementioned lady how the tormentors . . . .]

Here the emphasis is on Bridget's personal telling, "in here owne persone," which he translates from her visionary writing style into the form of meditation appropriate for his genre—a generic and rhetorical *translatio* that retains the meaning. In a way such an explicit borrowing assures *A Mirror to Devout People*'s place in the Bridgettine canon and its validity as a Syon text. The author's comment highlights for the reader an awareness of genre and form as being shaped by the visionary Bridget in collaboration with the present author. This is an important self-authorizing strategy for him. But we see through *Bridget's* eyes here, "her person," we form our attention through her visions; this is us as readers "taking on" and testing out new perceptual possibilities: "behold with the aforementioned lady" directs us to perceive as Bridget perceives, inhabiting the Mount with all our senses as Bridget did in her rapture. Her aesthetic imagining becomes common practice for all the readers. In addition, such a stylistic involvement is deployed very

explicitly: the author draws our attention to Bridget's power over the narrative via "the menynge of here wordys," forming our attention to be like hers through the conduct of reading and meditation. Thus the female visionary (albeit through the male author) takes control of those very building blocks of medieval devotional practice: meditation—that is, concentrated thinking or rumination—on a text as a spiritual act closely aligning with prayer. The reader's aesthetic sense, in turn, is fine-tuned to the frequency of the text and its female narrative voice.

Paul J. Patterson, in his new edition of the text, notes in his introduction that the rhetoric changes during this Bridget borrowing section. The text much more frequently uses the imperative "behold," as Patterson explains: "As the text continually calls upon readers actively to look at the suffering of Christ, it increases the intensity with which they experience the Passion"—all of which is facilitated by Bridget's visions, as they learn how to see through her eyes (Patterson 2016, xlii). While other lives of Christ also use "behold," I would argue that when such a devotional imperative tone is *explicitly* linked to the beholding act of vision of a female visionary authority *and* the text is written for Syon, that devotional imperative tone shapes a recognizable Syon feeling or way of being. Now Bridget and compilation author together stylize readers' mental lives in such an imaginative exercise, forming the community through a shared sharpening of "our tools for apprehending the world," in Macé's words, or in this case, our tools for imagining the world of the crucifixion. Such immersion shapes the individual's inner visualizing capacities as it binds together the whole community in that visualizing capacity.

Something else interesting happens earlier, in chapter 11 of the *Mirror for Devout People*. Here the entire chapter derives directly from St. Bridget's *Revelations*, about Christ's life from when he was twelve years old until his baptism, as described to Bridget by the Virgin Mary ("Our Lady") in a vision (details not included in the Gospels). The last paragraph concludes:

> These be the wordys þat oure Lady hadde Seyint Brygytt of þe ȝougthe of oure Lorde Ihesu Cryste, and namely fro the tuelfthe ȝere forwarde, as hyt ys wryte, hoo lyste to see in the sexte Boke of *Reuelacyonys* of the forseyde hooly lady Sayint Brygytt, in the lviii chapetele the whyche I haue drawe here into Englyische tonge almoste worde for worde, for the more conuenyent forme and ordyr of these sympyl medytacyones, and to ȝoure edyfycacyon or eny othyr deuout creature þat cannot vndyrstande Latyn; the whyche ȝe maye thynke vndyr forme of medytacyon as I haue told ȝow of othyre afore. (ch. 11: 59, l. 63–69)
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> [These be the words that our Lady said to Saint Bridget concerning the youth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and namely from the twelfth year forward, as it is written, who desires to see in the sixth Book of the *Revelations* of the aforementioned holy lady Saint Bridget, in the fifty-eighth chapter, the which I have translated

> here into English almost word for word, for [the sake of] the more convenient form and order of these simple meditations, and to your edification or [that of] any other devout person that cannot understand Latin; the which you may think under the form of meditation as I have told you elsewhere before.]

The compiler emphasizes his precise citation of Bridget in part because his readers would have valued such detailed reference to one of the canonical books of the Syon literary world, the *Revelaciones*, the complete collection of Bridget's revelations in Latin. In describing his translation from Latin to English as "word for word" he makes sure his loyalty to their saint, his respect for her text, comes through: her visionary style, indeed the style of Mary's speech, survives the translation to shape this community. By interpolating selections from the *Revelations* into this life of Christ, he interpolates genres: he draws the relevant information from the large and seemingly jumbled seven hundred revelations into his "more convenient forme and ordyr of these symple medytacyones." In that way the compiler is ensuring that Bridget's visionary authority gives shape to their daily prayer even outside the liturgy, and outside reading the *Liber Caelestis* itself.

The compiler continues on to consider how such formal textual conversion may affect readers in both their inward imagining and outward actions:

> For, thowgh hyt be schortly syde here vndyr a compendyus maner, ȝytt hyt maye be drawe ful loonge in a soule þat can deuoutly thynke and dylygently beholde the werkys of oure Lorde that be conteynyd therinne. And in sueche maner thynkynge, beholde inwardly and wysely the gret mekenesse, charytee, and obedyence of that worschypful Lorde, and also the pacyence and pouertee of oure Lady and Ioseph, and so be the grace to caste hym to folowe aftyr in lyuynge be hys powere and kunnynge. (ch. 11: 59, l. 69–79)
>
> [For, though it is briefly said here in a compendious manner, yet it might be drawn out full long in a soul that can devoutly think and diligently behold the works of our Lord that are contained therein. And in such manner of thinking, behold inwardly and wisely the great meekness, charity, and obedience of that worshipful Lord, and also the patience and poverty of our Lady and Joseph, and so by this grace to devote himself to follow after [them] in living by his power and cunning.]

Here is where the form of the meditation forms the reader. Devoutly thinking, diligently beholding, the ideal reader allows the act of reading to shape both her imagination's inward view of Christ's life, as well as her outward behavior. An aesthetics of imagination facilitates an ethics of imitation: Christ, Mary, Joseph, are all to be visualized and followed for their virtues of meekness, charity, obedience, patience, poverty. Of course, the genre of the gospel meditation as a whole sets out these biblical figures as imitable

models of ethical Christian living. Yet having the passage be in the voice of Mary, vocalized through Bridget, enables a collapsing of reader and holy woman that shapes the reader's attention to be simultaneously like Mary's and like Bridget's. That is why the precise words, the rhetoric of it, is so important to this compiler: he understands how literary style itself makes, in Macé's words, "reading as a conduct, a behavior of attention, perception, and experience." In other words, when the reader perceives as Mary, perceives as visionary Bridget, he or she brings that perception back into the world outside the book. As all the early readers of *The Mirror of Devout People* did, joined together by that particular devotional flavor, that Syon house style, whether or not they were religious or lay, leading the contemplative or active life.

We also see such a stylistic formation expressed in a text from earlier in the history of Syon Abbey, the vernacular translation of the special Latin readings for matins that the nuns used in their services. These readings are called *Sermo Angelicus*, Words of the Angel, because they were dictated to Bridget by an angel for this specific purpose for her order. An anonymous male author at Syon composed a fascinating series of introductions to this translation of the readings themselves, in a work titled *The Mirror of Our Lady*. This text survives in an edition printed by Richard Fawkes in 1530 and features a symbolically rich woodcut frontispiece, where St. Bridget sits with her pen poised, writing out her visions, which are represented in the space above her (Figure 6.1).

A Bridgettine sister and brother kneel below her, two figures in their distinctive Bridgettine habits whose much smaller proportions emphasize Bridget's larger-than-life presence in their spiritual world and literary canon. The entire composition encapsulates the aesthetic imaginary of Syon as a place centered on a single visionary holy woman and her visions of Christ's life as giving a mode of seeing—a "mode of being"—that shapes the readers and inhabitants of Syon.

Such an aesthetically driven textual community also reveals itself in the rhetoric of the first introduction of the text itself:

> yet more properly ye ar called doughters of Syon. [. . .] But ye are doughters of this holy relygion, which as a mother noryssheth youre soulles in grace in this Monastery that ys named Syon. And therfore as ye are doughtres of this bodely Syon, so ought ye to be doughtres of Syon gostly. For Syon ys as moche to say as a commaundement or byholdinge. And ye ought to be doughtres of commaundement by meke and redy obedyence to the byddynges of god, and of youre reule, and of youre soueraynes; ye ought also to be doughtres of byholdynge by contemplacyon . . .[11]
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> [. . . yet more properly are you called daughters of Syon . . . . But you are daughters of this holy religion, which as a mother nourishes your souls in grace in the monastery that is named Syon. And therefore as you are daughters of this

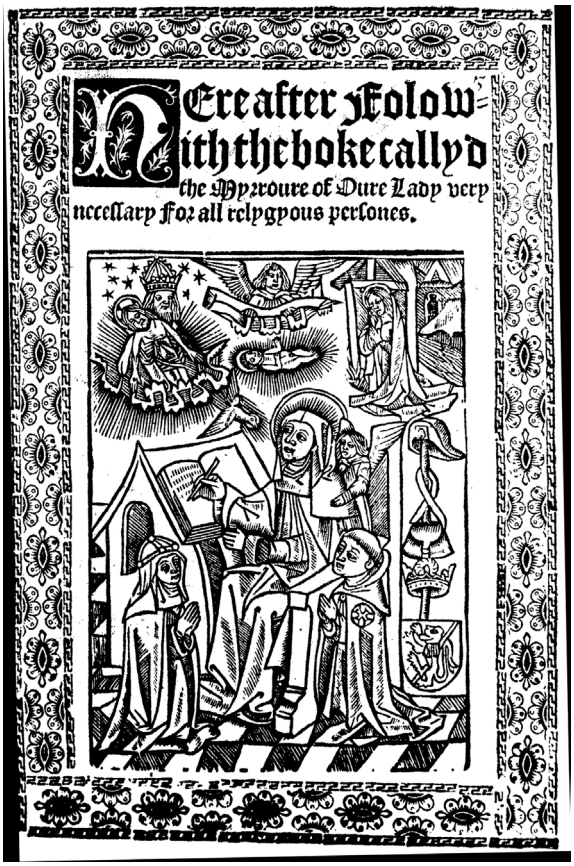

Figure 6.1 London, British Library C.11.b.8, *The Myroure of Oure Lady* (STC 17542), Frontispiece. Printed by Richard Fawkes, London, 1530.

> physical Syon, so ought you to be daughters of Syon spiritually. For Syon is as much to say as a commandment or beholding. And you ought to be daughters of commandment by meek and ready obedience to the biddings of God, and of your rule, and of your sovereigns; you ought also to be daughters of beholding by contemplation . . . .]

Here perhaps is no clearer articulation of the community as both a mode of being and a practice of reading, as a mode of obedience and a practice of perceiving. Implicitly, the sisters are daughters of Syon as much as they are daughters of Bridget and daughters of Mary; motherhood and daughterhood becomes a foundational metaphorical trope. They inherit Bridget's way of thinking and being in the world; they inherit Bridget and Mary's privilege with God. Syon is both commandment and beholding: it is the formal Rule of St. Savior as much

as it is a new way of seeing oneself and the world around one. It is a "new perceptual possibility" in Felski's words (2015, 176). And this new perceptual possibility is formed by meditation, by devotional texts such as the *Mirror for Devout People* written specifically for this community. In their exhortation of such a "stylistic of existence," these male author/compilers demonstrate the remarkable potential of the aesthetic imaginary coming out of Syon.[12]

I conclude by returning to Macé's comment quoted before: "Reading is not a separate activity, functioning in competition with life, but one of the daily means by which we give our existence form, flavor, and even style." In the case of textual communities, reading did much more than connect people physically through the exchange of books, but also formed their communal life by giving them a common experience of reading through another's eyes, a common flavor—like the vivid point of view of visionaries such as Bridget. While meditation and attention and perception are all formed by reading, reading also shapes how gendered authority works for readers: readers could begin to see women and power differently both through authorial comments discussed above, but also by engaging with a canon completely motivated by women's visionary activity as a central, not peripheral, source of power. Syon Abbey offers us an example of where Macé's ideas of the stylistics of existence intersects with the idea of the aesthetic imaginary to give us a much deeper understanding of the way that literature shapes life.

NOTES

1. For valuable feedback on this piece I would like to thank the participants in the Boston 2016 seminar of the "Women's Literary Culture and the Medieval Canon" International Leverhulme Network, especially Barbara Zimbalist; the participants in the Aesthetic Imaginaries workshops, especially Susan Cumings; the editors of this volume, and the anonymous reader.

2. On this distinction between Macé and Ricoeur's approaches, see John Barton, "Old Testament Ethics: Story or Style?" in *Sibyls, scriptures, and scrolls: John Collins at seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 116.

3. See, for instance, Macé, "Rejoindre une phrase, s'y poursuivre," *Itinéraires* 2010–1 (2010), 87–88, doi: 10.4000/itineraires.2174.

4. The verb "to behold" and its important functions in Middle English devotional and visionary texts has been examined by Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 134–37; Michael Raby, "The Phenomenology of Attention in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*," *Exemplaria* 26:4 (2014), 347–67; and Vincent Gillespie, "'[S]he Do the Police in Different Voices': Pastiche, Ventriloquism and Parody in Julian of Norwich," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy (D. S. Brewer, 2008), 192–207 (194).

5. See, for instance, McNamer, *Affective Meditation*.

6. Stanley Fish previously developed the idea of an "interpretive community," in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

7. See, for instance, Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation & Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

8. For background on St. Bridget in England and on Syon, see for instance, Laura Saetveit Miles, "St Bridget of Sweden," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500*, *Vol. 1,* edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 207–215; E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Syon Abbey and Its Books: Reading, Writing, and Religion, c. 1400–1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010); Roger Ellis, *Viderunt Eam Filie Syon: The Spirituality of the English House of a Medieval Contemplative Order from Its Beginnings to the Present Day*, Volume 2 of The Contemplative Life in Great Britain: Carthusians, Benedictines, Bridgettines (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1984).

9. From the different angle of rituals and everyday practices, C. Annette Grisé has previously examined Syon Abbey as a textual community in her article "The Textual Community of Syon Abbey," *Florilegium* 19 (2002).

10. Paul J. Patterson, ed., *A Mirror to Devout People* (*Speculum Devotorum)*, EETS O.S. 346 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 for 2015), Preface, 6, l. 127. Further quotations are identified by chapter, page, and line number. All translations from the Middle English are my own.

11. John Henry Blunt, ed., *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, EETS O.S. 19 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873), 1.

12. While both of these texts were written for the Syon community, they also found audiences outside the cloister, among devout aristocratic and other lay readers. These readers, too, could be joined in this textual community in their own way, and come to view the world through Bridget's eyes or, in fact, as through the eyes of a real enclosed Bridgettine reader.

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