Christ in the Kitchen, Christ in the Chamber: The Language and Imagery of Domestic Space in Late Medieval Religious Literature

by

Louise Gabrielle Elizabeth Campion

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University of Warwick, Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies

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This thesis is for my beloved grandmother, Ivonne, who I dearly wish was still here to see it complete, and my aunt, Pauline, who is the most extraordinary woman I have ever known.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. I have discussed some of the imagery in Chapter One and Chapter Three in the following book chapter: ‘Shopping or Scrimping? The contested space of the household in Middle English devotional literature’, in Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds, ed. by Victoria Blud, Diane Heath and Einat Klafter (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2019), pp. 171-184. My ideas on these images have been considerably expanded and developed in this thesis.
Abstract

This thesis examines the language and imagery of domestic space in four understudied fifteenth-century Middle English religious texts. These texts are *The Doctrine of the Hert*, an anonymous guidance text for nuns, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, by Nicholas Love, a vernacular Life of Christ, *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*, a Middle English translation of the visions experienced by the German female mystic, Mechtild of Hackeborn, and the *Liber Celestis*, by Bridget of Sweden, a collection of over 700 visions experienced by Bridget, an aristocratic woman who became a nun following the death of her husband. The four chapters of my thesis are devoted to close readings of the significant patterns of domestic imagery in each of the texts outlined above, which have not yet been explored in any great detail. Alongside these close readings, I examine the ways in which fifteenth-century readers might have responded to the texts’ repeated recourse to household imagery as a means of explicating various aspects of spiritual life, including the taking of the Eucharist, the practice of confession, and the narrative of Christ’s life on earth. One of my salient research questions asks why the imagery of domestic space was so popular in fifteenth-century England. By way of answering this question, I identify five key areas of evidence that suggest that the household was becoming increasingly important to late-medieval people; domestic space was key to conceptions of family, comfort, privacy, pride, religious practice, and wealth. I also invoke several pieces of primary manuscript evidence that suggest that fifteenth-century readers were responding specifically to the household language in my four texts. This thesis is the first study to take note of the repeated patterns of domestic imagery in fifteenth-century religious literature, and to suggest a connection with the burgeoning importance of the household in late medieval life.
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Booke</td>
<td><em>The Boke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn</em>, ed. by Theresa A. Halligan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSL</td>
<td>Corpus christiorum, continuatio medievalis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCM</td>
<td>Corpus christiorum, series latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De doctrina</td>
<td><em>Speculum concionatorum, ad ilustrandum pectora auditorum, in septem libros distributum</em>, Auctore F. Gerardo Leodiensi, Ordinis Fr. Praedicatorum Lectore celleberrimo, 2nd ed. (Naples: Baptista Subtilis, 1607)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EETS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. S.</td>
<td>Extra Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>O. S.</td>
<td>Original Series</td>
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MED Middle English Dictionary [online: University of Michigan]. <www.quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

Meditationes Meditationes vitae Christi, in Opera Omnia Sancti Bonaventurae, ed. by A. C. Peliter (Paris: Ludovicus Vives, 1868), XII, 509-630

Meditationes S-T Johannis de Caulibus, Meditaciones Vite Christi olim S. Bonaventure attributae, ed. by Mary Stallings-Taney, CCCM 153 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997)

Meditations John of Caulibus, Meditations on the Life of Christ, ed. by Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller, and Mary Stallings-Taney (Ashville: Pegasus Press, 1999)


Revelaciones I Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones: Book I, ed. by Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsal: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), I

Revelaciones II Sancta Birgitta. Revelaciones. Book II, ed. by Carl-Gustaf Undhagen and Birger Bergh, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsal: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), II


SFSS Svenska Fornskriftsällskapets Samlingar
List of Manuscript Sigla

B  Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 131  
C  Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. III  
Ch Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 6690  
G  Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 145  
JR Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS English 98  
L  Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 330  
Lo Warminster, Longleat House, MS 14  
M  Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 132  
Mo New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 648  
R  Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C41  
T  Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B. 14. 15

Prefatory Notes

All Biblical quotations in English are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, while all Latin Biblical quotations are drawn from the Vulgate Bible.

In transcription from manuscripts, underlining indicates the expansion of an abbreviated word.

In the footnotes, every Middle English quotation is accompanied by a parallel reference to the relevant portion of its Latin source text. The Middle English is cited first, and the Latin second.
Introduction

Anne got out of bed and put on her dressing-gown and slippers. She felt extreme fear. Then she quietly opened the bedroom door. The kitchen was opposite, across a little landing, and the door was ajar. She pushed open the kitchen door.

Jesus was standing beside the table, with one hand resting upon it. Not daring to raise her eyes to his face, she saw his hand pressed upon the scrubbed grainy wood of the table. His hand was pale and bony, the skin rough as if chapped. Then he said her name, 'Anne', and she raised her eyes and simultaneously fell on her knees on the floor.

Iris Murdoch, Nuns and Soldiers. ¹

Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you: Because I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be.

John 14. 1-3. ²

If a believer wishes to share a dwelling place with Christ, is it necessary to wait until she is called to enjoy the welcome of the heavenly household? For Iris Murdoch’s Anne, a nun who is struggling to make sense of a lapse in her faith, this is by no means the case. When Anne finds Christ leaning casually against her wooden dining table, his awesome presence is by no means blunted by the mundane backdrop of the kitchen: Anne is understandably overwhelmed to find the Son of God waiting to greet her in her home, and she collapses at his feet. Indeed, it seems that Anne experiences an intimate encounter with Christ long before she trades the material household for the infinitude of Christ’s paternal home. Several hundred years before Iris Murdoch drew Christ into the earthly household, medieval religious writers were already making extensive use of domestic imagery as a means of readying their readers for their eventual entry to the celestial home, as described by Christ following the Last Supper. For many of these medieval writers, it seems that the language and imagery of household space is central

to the explication of numerous aspects of religious practice, and it is therefore the ideal preface to dwelling alongside Christ in heaven. The subject of this thesis is the function and meaning of such imagery in medieval religious writing, along with the responses of contemporary readers to it.

Most readers can probably call to mind an image from a medieval religious text that could be described as ‘domestic’. One might think, for example, of the Ancrene Wisse author’s famous warning, that his reader ought to remember that she is an anchoress and not a housewife, which appears as one of many domestic images in this text. The potential corpus for a study of domestic imagery in medieval religious literature is dauntingly huge, and could probably form the basis of fifty doctoral theses. Beyond Ancrene Wisse, I could delve further into the genre of didactic literature and examine the allegorisation of the soul as a household in the twelfth-century homily Sawles Warde, or I could perhaps comment on Julian of Norwich’s peculiar and unsettling vision of the blood that runs down Christ’s face during the Passion as rain drops falling from the eaves of a house, to cite just a couple of pertinent examples. The methodology of this thesis is not, however, simply to comb through as many medieval devotional texts as possible to produce a descriptive survey of domestic images in religious literature. Rather, the particular focus of this study is the language and imagery of domestic space in fifteenth-century Middle English religious literature, and the relationship between the imagined households of the text and the literal spaces in which these works were read.

With these aforementioned specific points of focus in mind, I have narrowed the enormous body of literature that might have been examined in this study to four primary texts, though I do also make occasional comparative

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3 Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts, ed. by Bella Millett, EETS O. S. 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), I, 156. All subsequent references to this text will be given as Ancrene Wisse.

4 Sawles Warde, in Medieval English Prose for Women From the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse, ed. by Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 86-109. All subsequent references to this text will be given as Sawles Warde.

references to other works. The four principal texts that I examine in this thesis are *The Doctrine of the Hert*, a fifteenth-century Middle English translation of a thirteenth-century Latin treatise; *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, by Nicholas Love, a fifteenth-century Middle English translation of a fourteenth-century *Life of Christ*; Bridget of Sweden’s Middle English *Liber Celestis*, a translation of a Latin collection of over 700 of her visions; and Mechtilde of Hackeborn’s *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, also a translation from Latin of a large compilation of revelations. Each of these texts will be introduced in much more extensive detail at the beginning of their respective chapters. It is important to note that these four texts have much in common. They are all fifteenth-century Middle English translations of earlier Latin works, a point to which I will return shortly. Beyond this shared route of entry into English, these works also had mutual readers, as I will show in the chapters to follow. Furthermore, all four of these texts make repeated and consistent recourse to the language and imagery of the domestic sphere as a means of explicating the salient concerns of their authors, from the proper conduct of spiritual practice, to the key events of Christ’s life, to vociferous criticism of corrupt Church officials. More than any other set of images or metaphors, it is the vocabulary of domesticity that facilitates the authors’ articulation of their respective narratives.

Much of what I take note of above, including my four texts’ mutual status as Middle English translations, their shared readers and their patterns of domestic imagery, amounts to a set of observations rather than a critical position. Indeed, the reader of this thesis is perhaps currently asking, why does any of this matter, and why, specifically, is it significant that these texts are apparently so preoccupied with domestic images? By way of response to these important potential questions, I will note first of all that the patterns of domestic vocabulary in these texts have not yet been examined in any great detail, and the implications of their repeated and sustained use of household imagery have therefore never been explored. While some individual domestic episodes from my principal texts have, on occasion, been excerpted and examined by scholars, the fact that these images appear as part of a broader schema of household language remains unacknowledged. Some of the texts
that I have selected for analysis have been the focal point of scholarly research for reasons other than their imaginative images. Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, for example, has received considerable critical attention for its role as a textual bulwark in the context of a fifteenth-century religious establishment uneasy about the advancement of heterodoxy, while Bridget of Sweden's writings have been examined at length for their significant role in underpinning devotional production and reading practice at Syon Abbey. These alternative points of critical focus have, perhaps, pushed the actual content of these texts to the margins of scholarly attention.

It is not my suggestion that the presence of domestic language in the Middle English religious literature of the 1400s is a uniquely fifteenth-century phenomenon. Indeed, a glance back at my earlier allusion to the domestic metaphors in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Sawles Warde*, which predate the fifteenth century by over two hundred years, would disprove such a proposition rather swiftly. Readers might also, at this moment, be thinking even further back to the presence of domestic language in scripture: the Psalms, of course, contain a reference to the household labour of sweeping. It is also the case, as I noted earlier, that all four corpus texts are translations of earlier Latin works. Much of the domestic imagery that I analyse in my discussion is, therefore, also present in these source texts, and I acknowledge the original quotations from these works in the footnotes throughout the thesis.

My recognition of the presence of domestic imagery in Christian literature spanning several millennia, from the Bible to the didactic manuals of the Middle Ages, arguably brings the question of why any of this matters, and particularly why these images are especially worthy of examination in a doctoral thesis when they appear in fifteenth-century religious literature, into even sharper focus. A specific emphasis on domestic vocabulary in a fifteenth-century English context is pertinent and productive because the literal

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6 Psalms 76. 7. Beyond the Psalms, numerous Biblical passages make use of domestic imagery. It is especially prevalent in the Gospel parables, which frequently invoke household referents in order to explicate their spiritual lessons. See, for example, Luke 15. 8-10, in which the quest for redemption is allegorised as a woman searching a room for a lost coin, Luke 6. 48, which posits the faithful as a man who builds his house on a sturdy foundation, and Matthew 25. 1-13, in which proper preparation for the eventual divine judgment is represented by ten virgins who must ensure that they have adequate oil to light their lamps.
household sphere, and therefore the backdrop against which numerous readers were encountering the imagined homely spaces of the four texts, was changing considerably, as I will shortly outline in extensive detail. This was an era during which the meanings and resonances of the household were developing powerful associations with notions of privacy, physical comfort and emotional warmth. Fifteenth-century readers were, therefore, frequently exploring imagined textual households within a literal space that was developing an increasingly powerful and important hold over their imagination. It would appear, furthermore, that the translators who brought my four corpus texts into the vernacular were aware of this burgeoning emotional attachment to the home. In several instances, I have identified moments at which the domestic language and imagery of the Latin source is amplified or augmented by the translator. I have also found multiple examples of fifteenth-century readers demonstrating a particular interest in these images. To examine the imagined domestic sphere in its fifteenth-century Middle English context is, therefore, to analyse its significance against a contextual backdrop that rendered it especially potent.

Why, then, have I specifically selected the four texts that comprise my corpus? The simplest answer to this question is that all four texts contain strong threads of domestic imagery. Arguably the most important reason behind my decision to make these texts my principal focus is the fact there is sufficient contextual evidence about each one to justify making a connection between imagined, figurative domestic space, and the way in which readers’ responses might have been shaped by their experience of the actual homely space in which they undertook their reading. Documentary evidence makes it possible to identify specific readers of all four texts, and it is therefore possible to build a picture of the literal environments in which their imagined households were explored. Furthermore, codicological investigations of some of the manuscripts of these texts reveal material evidence of a particular engagement with domestic imagery. It would be much more difficult, and rather speculative, to make suggestions about the connections between real and imagined space in relation to texts for which there is little specific
evidence of their medieval readership. The critical neglect of the domestic imagery in these four texts has, thus far, denied both literary scholars and historians access to the socio-historical implications of the prevalence of such images in late medieval religious literature. What did it mean for a fifteenth-century reader to discover a textual replica of a space to which they were developing a deepening connection, for multiple reasons? How did the framing of salient spiritual narratives and ideas in domestic terms impact these readers’ comprehension of them? These questions, among others, are at the heart of my discussion in the four chapters of this thesis. My contention is that there is a hitherto under-explored relationship between the imagined households of medieval religious literature and the literal domestic sphere that it is particularly pertinent to explore in a fifteenth-century English context. The argument that runs throughout this thesis is twofold. Firstly, I argue that there are significant patterns of domestic imagery in my four corpus texts: the household language in each one is never confined to a couple of individual instances. Furthermore, the texts’ domestic frameworks are often used to make notable alterations to devotional commonplaces, and therefore constitute some of the most innovative imagery in each one. Secondly, I suggest that it is particularly significant that the visual referent of the household is used so extensively in these fifteenth-century texts as they were read against the cultural backdrop of an increasingly important domestic sphere.

Theories of Space and the Domestic Sphere

It is important to acknowledge that this thesis sits within a lengthy theoretical tradition of interrogating the experience of space. The theoretical examination

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of space has had a significant effect on the shaping of critical approaches in literary scholarship in recent years. One especially influential work, of particular relevance to this study given my focus on the representation of the domestic sphere, is Gaston Bachelard’s *La poétique de l’espace*, an examination of the quotidian experience of the ‘intimate space’ of the household. At the core of Bachelard’s phenomenological investigation of domestic architecture is the suggestion that the dweller develops a profound emotional connection to the spaces in which they live, with the household leaving an indelible imprint on their identity. Key to Bachelard’s discussion of the relationship between dweller and dwelling place is the experience of the material objects that might be found in the household, including drawers and wardrobes. I draw attention to Bachelard’s engagement with the material culture of the domestic sphere as I, too, intend to examine the way in which the objects that might be found within the household impact the medieval dweller’s interaction with the space itself. Henri Lefebvre’s 1974 theorisation of the ways in which societies experience space, which quotes from Bachelard’s study on a number of occasions, has also been hugely influential. Lefebvre’s theory of space is reliant on its division into three categories: ‘spatial practice’, which denotes the relationship of a society to the spaces it produces, and the way in which these spaces are used; ‘representations of space’, which are conceptions of space that are eventually given a physical form, such as a map; and ‘representational spaces’, which include the symbolic resonances of physical space, along with the imagined spaces of art and literature. The last of these categories is particularly pertinent to the discussion in this thesis.

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8 For a discussion of the ways in which spatial theory has been used in the examination of medieval literature, see John M. Ganim, ‘Landscape and Late Medieval Literature: A Critical Geography’, in *Place, Space and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. by Laura Howes (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), pp. xv-xxix.


10 This is Bachelard’s particular focus in the third chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 74-89.


13 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 33.
Michel Foucault, meanwhile, has argued that space is best understood in terms of the way in which it is organised by society, and the power relations that determine who is able to occupy particular spaces.14 My summary of the arguments of these three spatial theorists does not, of course, represent an exhaustive list of all of the theoretical, philosophical and sociological examinations of space. Rather, my intention in drawing attention to these particular works, all of which have been especially influential in literary studies, is to acknowledge that critical theories of space provide the broader framework for my own discussion.

The work of such theorists as Bachelard, Lefebvre and Foucault has certainly contributed to a critical view of space as a valuable focal point of study, not least within medieval studies. In recent years, there have been a number of specific investigations into the character and experience of medieval space.15 The scope of these investigations is vast, encompassing discussions of a broad range of different spaces in Europe and beyond, including cities, monasteries, the theatrical stage, and the mappa mundi. Other critical engagements with medieval space have adopted a somewhat narrower focus. Spicer and Hamilton, for instance, draw together essays on the subject of sacred space across several different European contexts, including late medieval England and thirteenth-century Flanders.16 The essays in Flannery and Griffin’s recent collection, meanwhile, explore the relationship between space and reading in the Middle Ages, and the ways in which reading practice was shaped by where the encounter with the book was situated.17 Any attempt to discuss the myriad resonances of a category as capacious as ‘space’

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15 See, for example, Medieval Practices of Space, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages, ed. by Mayke de Jong, Frans Theuws and Carine van Rhijn (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Space in the Medieval West: Places, Territories and Imagined Geographies, ed. by Meredith Cohen and Fanny Madeline (Oxford: Routledge, 2014); Place and Space in the Medieval World, ed. by Meg Boulton, Jane Hawkes and Heidi Stoner (Oxford: Routledge, 2018).
16 Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ed. by Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). Of especial pertinence to this thesis is the contribution by Diana Webb, ‘Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages’. See pp. 27-47.
will inevitably result in some of its manifestations being left out. Indeed, several of the volumes noted above, on the broader character of space in the Middle Ages, prefer to focus on exterior space, with the interiority of domesticity largely beyond their purview. Perhaps in response to the fact that these more expansive surveys of spatial experience generally cannot find room for the domestic sphere, a number of studies have made the medieval household their central focus.\textsuperscript{18} These historical investigations do not, however, beyond the occasional illustrative literary reference, examine the \textit{conceptual} households of medieval texts in detail. One pertinent exception is Vance Smith’s \textit{Arts of Possession}, a study that posits the framework of household economics as central to the organisation of several fourteenth-century texts, including \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} and Chaucer’s \textit{Canterbury Tales}.\textsuperscript{19} Though its focus is very different from that of this thesis, as Smith is primarily concerned with fourteenth-century secular writing, with a particular focus on romances, this study represents an important precedent for my own work. A further significant collection for my present purpose is Kowaleski and Goldberg’s 2008 volume, \textit{Medieval Domesticity}, a multidisciplinary examination of the domestic sphere in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{20} I take particular note of this collection as it posits the theory that a distinctive model of domesticity began to emerge in the later Middle Ages, which prefigures an important aspect of my argument in this study. While there is clearly by no means a paucity of critical discussion of medieval domestic space, there is a significant gap in this scholarship for a specific investigation of the relationship between the imagined spaces of the spiritual text and the literal households of fifteenth-century England.


\textsuperscript{19} D. Vance Smith, \textit{Arts of Possession: The Medieval Household Imaginary} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Defining the Fifteenth-Century Household

It is important to define precisely what I mean when I use the term ‘domestic space’. Throughout this thesis, I use this expression alongside a number of synonymous variants, including ‘household space’ and ‘homely space’. This refers not just to the imagery of the physical structure of the house, but also to that of the material culture of the domestic sphere, such as the soft furnishings that might be found within the home, as well as numerous activities that are generally conducted in a domestic setting, including cooking, cleaning, laundering, hosting guests, and maternal care. While my definition of domesticity is expansive enough to include numerous aspects of the household experience, it is not so capacious as to include the domestic spaces inhabited by the urban poor or the rural peasantry. I am specifically concerned with the households occupied by middle-class urbanites, the gentry and the aristocracy, as the readers of my four principal texts belong to these categories. Furthermore, the specific circumstances of the urban poor and rural peasantry meant that they were largely excluded from the changes to the conception of domestic space that I will shortly outline, as their experience of fifteenth-century domesticity was very different.21

During this moment of considerable change to the associations of home, what vocabulary was available to fifteenth-century dwellers to articulate their relationship with this increasingly important space? The word ‘household’ had come into use in the very late fourteenth century, and generally denoted the residents of a home, including those connected by kinship and, where applicable, a retinue and servants, rather than the physical

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fabric of a dwelling place. ‘Household’ could also, in some later contexts, refer to the material goods that were owned by its inhabitants. The potentially multiple resonances of ‘household’ expanded on the more specific definition of the word ‘meine’, a term that came into use in the late thirteenth century to denote the collected people who lived under the same roof, often including servants. While these words largely refer to the literal function of the domestic sphere, to draw people and things together under one roof, the word ‘homely’, which came into use in the later fourteenth century, evokes some of the more conceptual associations of household space. Alongside its literal definition of ‘characteristic of a home’, ‘homely’ also carries resonances of intimacy, sometimes in a sexual context, familiarity, friendship, affection, kindness, gentleness, simplicity, and closeness to Christ. This multiplicity of meanings suggests, as Riddy remarks, that the home ‘was understood as an intimate sphere in which private identities were formed’. The late fourteenth-century development of fresh vocabulary to articulate the experience of domesticity, from the literal space to its numerous conceptual connotations, ought to be regarded as an important preface to the deepening of the relationship between the fifteenth-century subject and their home.

I will now outline the significant developments in the resonances of the domestic sphere during this era, alongside important changes to the ways in which late medieval people used and interacted with household space. My evidence is divided into five salient areas of change, all of which contributed to the deepening of the relationship between the dweller and their experience of

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24 See MED, s. v. meine (n. [1a]). For a useful summary of the uses of the word ‘meine’ in the Middle Ages, see Sarah Rees Jones, Felicity Riddy, Cordelia Beattie et al., ‘The Later Medieval English Urban Household’, History Compass, 5 (2007), 112-158 (pp. 118-119).
25 See MED, s. v. hōmlī (adj. [2]). The suggestion that Christ is ‘homely’, and thereby intimately familiar, is famously a favourite of Julian of Norwich in her revelations. See, for example, The Writings of Julian of Norwich, ed. by Watson and Jenkins, p. 137, p. 139, p. 147.
the space that they inhabited. These five areas are: changes to household design; a growing concern for privacy; a burgeoning market of goods that might be used to adorn the domestic sphere; and, relatedly, a rapidly expanding urban, mercantile culture; and the increasing overlap between devotional practice and domestic space. In order to give a comprehensive sense of this major cultural change, I draw evidence from literary studies, historical analysis, architecture, and archaeology.

The first category of change that indicates a burgeoning connection between dweller and dwelling place in the fifteenth century is the significant alteration of the design of many households during this period. Popular conceptions of the medieval household tend to characterise it as a hybrid space, in which both ‘public’ activities and ‘private’ living are conducted side by side. As Pearson and Richards suggest, the medieval upper-class household might be imagined as ‘a large semi-public structure, with its central and large hall for receiving visitors, for feasting and other commonly shared activities’. This definition, of the medieval household as a sphere in which public and private activities are afforded equal space, cannot be so neatly applied to the houses of the later Middle Ages. By the end of the fourteenth century, the understanding of the household as a site of public activity had begun to wane, which facilitated a conception of domestic space as primarily private. This shift in understanding of the salient associations of the household sphere had become even more pronounced by the fifteenth century, and the layout and organisation of many late medieval homes began to reflect this evolving conception of domestic space. The first evidence of this changing relationship with the household is the declining significance of the space of the hall, particularly in gentry houses. For much of the Middle Ages, the hall was the focal point of numerous households. As Cooper remarks, ‘the architectural prominenence of the hall, both inside and outside, announced its owner’s standing and the importance of his house in the community [...] the hall

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28 For a wide-ranging study of the medieval hall, see Michael W. Thompson, The Medieval Hall: The Basis of Secular Domestic Life, 600-1600 AD (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).
retained a powerful symbolic function as the seat of justice, as the focus of hospitality, and as a public display of its owner’s wealth’. Clearly, many of the associations of the hall are entangled with the exterior sphere beyond domestic walls: it was a space in which those who did not belong to the household were hosted, and it sent a powerful visual message about its owner’s public status. One might recall that famous literary representation of the hall at Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which this grand space is the site of the intruding Green Knight’s challenge, delivered under the open gaze of the feasting courtiers. In the literal late medieval domestic sphere, however, householders were beginning to eschew the large, public space of the hall in favour of spending a great deal of time in the much more enclosed space of the chamber. The late medieval chamber had a varied range of uses, much beyond the twenty-first century conception of the function of a bedroom. It was a space used for sleeping, as one might expect, but also for ‘dressing, washing, for living during the day, eating, receiving guests— in fact for anything that the occupant did not wish to do in front of the full glare of the household or preferred to perform in more intimate surroundings’. It was also used as a quiet space in which to conduct private prayer and devotional reading. Its status as an intimate space was denoted, Morgan suggests, by the presence of a bed, which suggested to any guests who might be invited to join their host in the chamber ‘that they were trusted and valued enough to view the object most intimately connected to its owner’s

33 Webb, ‘Domestic Space and Devotion’, p. 46.
body and soul'. Morgan's observation suggests that the late medieval chamber, like the hall before it, was used to convey important social messages to those who visited the household.

The centrality of the chamber to the experience of domestic space is reflected in the changing design of later medieval houses, which had many more rooms than their predecessors, several of which would often be designated as chambers. This development of a preference for multi-room houses appears to have begun, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the houses of the nobility. In the thirteenth century, Woolgar observes, even the royal household had few chambers; those that were built were for the king and queen only. By the fifteenth century, however, many manorial houses had multiple chambers, which were used by various different members of the household. Those aristocratic householders who paid to augment their homes with numerous extra rooms were keen to display the fruits of their investment. As the intimate space of the chamber became increasingly important, Grenville suggests, it began to be seen as ‘a formal room of state’. Indeed, the aristocratic chamber, and the building of several such spaces within the noble home, was a marker of status and wealth. If a householder had added multiple chambers to his house, he demonstrated that he had sufficient ‘money and space to have a specific room which separated a permanent bed structure from the rest of the house, [which] meant that any gatherings within the chamber were done [...] as a performance of power and social status, admitting guests into that semantically charged inner sanctum’. The increasing importance of the chamber as a yardstick of social standing indicates that, by the fifteenth century, the public theatre of the hall was no longer the primary space that conveyed the householder’s hospitality and wealth to visitors. This is not to say, by any means, that the hall had lost all meaning by the later Middle Ages. Many well-born householders continued to make use of their halls for feasting and entertaining, and halls did not

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37 Morgan, Beds and Chambers, p. 112.
disappear from the manorial domestic sphere altogether, as they were still being built in the sixteenth century. What can be ascertained, however, is that the development of the multi-room aristocratic household reduced the centrality of the hall to conceptions of its owner’s wealth, and the ownership of a large semi-public space was no longer the sole means through which social status was measured. As the chamber became increasingly central to numerous aspects of domestic life, from the private activities of washing and dressing to the social responsibilities of eating and hosting, the ability of the householder to furnish himself and others with intimate spaces is made salient to his societal standing. Indeed, the at least partial retreat from hall to chamber, evidenced by the changing layout of the manorial domestic sphere, suggests that intimacy was becoming increasingly central to the definition of domesticity by the fifteenth century.

While the phenomenon of the multi-room house has its origins in the domestic spaces of the upper echelons of fifteenth-century society, it by no means remained confined to these hugely wealthy householders. Throughout the 1400s, middle-class town dwellers were making use of their comparatively modest income to add extra rooms to their houses. The size of late medieval urban houses varied enormously, with some dwellings having just the one living room, and much of the rest of the property dedicated to commercial activity, such as retail, while others had multiple different spaces in which the inhabitants might withdraw from the public sphere. Those who had the means to occupy a larger dwelling lived, Riddy suggests, ‘in a [...] spacious style in houses comprising anything between four or five rooms and more than twenty’. This multi-room living facilitates what Riddy describes as a ‘burgeis’ state of mind, with ‘burgeis’ broadly defined as the socially

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39 In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the chamber is the space to which Gawain is directed shortly after his arrival at Hautdesert, and where he changes out of his armour and takes supper. See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by Andrew and Waldron, pp. 240-241.
41 Riddy, ‘“Burgeis” Domesticity in Late-Medieval England’, p. 21.
ambitious, materially comfortable, urban-dwelling middle class found in many English towns in the later Middle Ages. This proto-bourgeois manner of living enabled those with the necessary means to separate the different activities of quotidian life. The middle-class dweller could conduct their work, often undertaken in a domestic setting in the Middle Ages, in a room away from the space in which they performed their more intimate domestic duties, such as sleeping, washing, and parenting. This emerging desire to build houses that facilitated the broad separation of public and private, though there remained occasional overlaps between the two, gave rise to ‘particular notions of privacy, discretion and settledness’.

The concern for what one might call the intimate domestic values identified by Riddy is very much in evidence in the design and layout of the late medieval multi-room house. Gardiner observes that ‘late-medieval houses were very carefully structured spaces with public and private areas’. This suggestion is echoed by Schofield, who notes that the separation of ‘work and home’ was an increasingly important factor in the design of fifteenth-century homes, and continued to be so into the sixteenth century. It certainly seems that those who engaged with the growing mercantile culture of late medieval urban life, on which I will shortly give more detail, invested much of their profit into building a spacious home in which public and private life could overlap as minimally as possible. As Grenville has noted, it was ‘merchant households [that] were materially more comfortable and socially more complex- a complexity that seems to be reflected in the development of the plan to create increasing numbers of separate rooms’. That the increasingly commercial culture of the late medieval town facilitated the building of the middle-class multi-room house is further evidenced by the fact that larger

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42 Riddy, “Burgeis” Domesticity in Late-Medieval England, p. 21. See MED, s. v. burȝēis (n. [1.a]).
46 Jane Grenville, ‘Urban and Rural Houses and Households in the Late Middle Ages’, in Medieval Domesticity, pp. 92-123 (p. 117).
households were generally in town centres, which enjoyed considerable wealth, rather than at the edges of the urban environment.47

It is important to note, here, that the observation of a proliferation in more spacious urban homes does not mean that England’s urban centres were full of enormous dwellings reminiscent of the recently augmented manorial household. As Riddy has suggested, the fifteenth-century multi-room household was likely a bustling, crowded space, in which sleeping quarters were probably shared and a modest number of rooms were used for a range of different activities.48 The substantial evidence of a growing desire to occupy houses that gave their dwellers the option of separating public from private life cannot, therefore, be interpreted as any indication that the multi-room domestic space facilitated a quasi-monastic style of living, in which each member of the household retreated to the solitude of a personal closet. What can be deduced from the proliferation of the spacious urban home is that the fifteenth century saw a burgeoning interest in the value of intimate space, somewhat removed from the public glare of work and trade. Crucially, late medieval people were clearly aware of the capacity of the physical fabric of the multi-room household to foster a particular ‘domestic’ mindset. Furthermore, occupying a multi-room household enabled the fifteenth-century middle-class urbanite to distinguish himself from those town-dwellers who lived in considerable poverty, often conducting both work and private living in a single room. For both the nobility and the socially ambitious middle-class, it seems that the ability to afford to furnish oneself and one’s family with ample intimate space had become an important symbol of social status in fifteenth-century England.

I will now consider the ways in which the evolving house was used by its occupiers. This is especially pertinent in relation to gender, as the late medieval conception of its relationship to the household sphere seems to have diverged somewhat from our later understanding. Social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu have frequently designated the household as feminine space,

in which women undertake the unpaid labour of domestic chores and child
rearing, while men's lives are primarily understood in relation to their
engagement with the exterior sphere.\textsuperscript{49} It is rather difficult, however, to apply
this model of sharp division between the male and female relationship with
domestic space to the late medieval household. While women were largely
responsible for taking care of domestic chores, they were not an exclusively
female responsibility. In households that were comfortable enough to employ
servants, male staff were often tasked with jobs that have since developed
specific associations with female labour, such as cleaning.\textsuperscript{50} The fact that
domestic labour does not seem to have been the preserve of the female
members of the household perhaps explains why women, especially urban
women, were often to be found \textit{outside} the home, engaging with various
economic activities. While it was most unusual for women to hold a prominent
role in guilds, or to hold office on town councils, they frequently sold various
goods at the urban marketplace.\textsuperscript{51} Married urban women would, in some
cases, trade goods that they had produced separately from their husbands' businesses.\textsuperscript{52} Widows often learned their husbands' trade so as to continue to
earn money following his death.\textsuperscript{53} It would certainly appear that the later
Middle Ages, particularly the fifteenth century, marked an era of greater
economic independence for women.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite this apparent evidence of medieval egalitarianism, women did
not have 'equality' in the sense that contemporary feminist theory would
recognise today. While it is inadvisable to suggest that men and women were
assigned strict and inflexible gender roles, it is also important to acknowledge
that some aspects of domestic life \textit{did} have a particular association with

\textsuperscript{50} Salih, 'At Home', p. 126. On the subject of the absence of strict gender divisions in the tasks
assigned to medieval servants, see P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Household and the Organisation of Labour
in Late Medieval Towns: Some English Evidence', in \textit{The Household in Late Medieval Cities}, pp.
59-70 (p. 61).
\textsuperscript{51} P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life', in \textit{Towns and Townspeople in the
107-128 (p. 107). For a comprehensive account of women and work in the later Middle Ages,
\textsuperscript{52} Goldberg, 'Household and the Organisation of Labour', p. 65.
\textsuperscript{53} Goldberg, 'Household and the Organisation of Labour', p. 69.
\textsuperscript{54} Goldberg, 'Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life', p. 122.
women. Though Goldberg is one of the principal architects of the suggestion that late medieval women ought not to be understood exclusively as domestic workers, he does suggest that a couple of spaces within the home had specific associations with female responsibility. The kitchen, and any area in which food was prepared, was regarded primarily as the woman's sphere. In the case of the manorial household, this association meant that women were associated with one of the most important aspects of quotidian life. As Swabey notes, such households often served meals to a large number of guests each day, while Woolgar observes that a large portion of the noble domestic budget, sometimes 40% of income, was spent on food and drink. The increasingly popular chamber, too, also appears to have had a particular association with women, as it was a space in which the wife of a household might withdraw to pray quietly, or perhaps host female friends and relatives.

While women were by no means confined to the domestic sphere, certain spaces inside it do appear to have fostered particularly feminine activities. The broader umbrella of ‘domestic space’ does, moreover, seem to have been associated with women, more specifically with their proper conduct. As Salih suggests, much medieval literature establishes an ‘opposition between the good woman in the household and the bad woman in the street’, while Johnson observes that homely space was regarded as ‘the woman’s sphere of legitimate activities’. It is worth noting, too, that the perception of the relationship between gender and domestic space is very likely to have differed between social classes. While ‘gender was not an especially significant factor

56 Swabey, Medieval Gentlewman, p. 10.
57 Woolgar, The Great Household, p. 111.
58 Goldberg, ‘The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity’, p. 138. The notion of the chamber as a particularly feminine space was first advanced in rather romantic terms by Georges Duby: ‘Masculine power ended on the threshold of the room in which children were conceived and brought into the world and in which the sick were cared for and the dead washed. In this most private sanctum, woman ruled over the dark realm of sexual pleasure, reproduction, and death’. A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World, ed. by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1988), II, 80. Duby’s hypothesis is challenged by Riddy, ‘Looking Closely’, p. 215.
in the organisation and use of space’ for middle-class householders, it was very important in governing domestic arrangements in the vast homes of the aristocracy. Woolgar has suggested that women in this particular household environment ‘were largely segregated, a group apart’, which helped to foster the traditions of chivalry and courtly love. I take note of the particular role of gender in the evolving fifteenth-century domestic sphere as it is often a factor in my analysis of domestic imagery in this thesis. While the interactions between gender and domesticity are indeed somewhat variable during this period, much of my discussion will show that the conceptual household held a particular appeal for women writers and readers.

The Household as Private Space

I will now examine the second category of household change: the growing concern for privacy. This is closely related to my first area of discussion, as the addition of extra rooms to a property, so that members of the household could retreat to a space beyond the more public areas of the house, such as hall or workshop, is indicative of a desire to draw a boundary between the spheres of public and private. It is worth interrogating this notion of privacy in greater detail, as while it was indeed becoming increasingly important to fifteenth-century people, its definition in a late medieval context rather differs from the twenty-first century conception. As the multiple rooms of the bourgeois urban household were often crowded with both people and objects,

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63 This is not to say that male readers were entirely uninterested in texts that invoked domestic images: many of my four principal texts were also used by men. On the appeal of texts with a household theme to male readers, see Cordelia Beattie and Anna Maslakovic, ‘Introduction- Locating the Household: Public, Private, and the Social Construction of Gender and Space’, in The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c. 850-c. 1550, pp. 1-8 (p. 4).
64 On the subject of the emergence of an understanding of privacy in the late Middle Ages, see Diana Webb, Privacy and Solitude: The Medieval Discovery of Personal Space (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).
it is difficult to suggest that medieval privacy was defined by a feeling of solitary calm. Even in the grandest households, chambers were often shared between several people, with visitors sometimes occupying the same room as their servants. In manorial households, the provision of separate rooms was, Woolgar suggests, ‘a mark of status and honour, not of modesty’. The increasing anxiety around the preservation of privacy is not, therefore, indicative of a growing notion of individualism. Rather, as Duby usefully suggests, ‘private life is [...] family life, not individual but convivial and founded on mutual trust’. As the household is the physical container of the family, and the space in which so much family life is conducted, it is reasonable to suggest that the experience of the home is central to the late medieval emergence of a particular concern for privacy.

Where there is evidence of late medieval people exhibiting anxiousness about how their privacy might be guarded, they are almost invariably concerned with protecting the integrity of their household; this is especially the case for bourgeois urban householders. Significantly, this concern for the careful maintenance of privacy coincides with the development of a definition of the household as a contained unit, over which the head, usually male, exerted power. By the middle of the fifteenth century, there was, according to Rees Jones et al, ‘an idea of the household as a male-headed economic unit and an ideology of household management’. To be given the title of ‘householder’, which conferred one’s status as the head of one’s domestic unit, was indicative of a significant degree of privilege. As Rees Jones has found, ‘not all co-resident groups were accorded the dignity and status of a “household” within civic administration’. Those who lived with their families in considerable poverty in single-room dwellings were probably not, therefore, considered to be ‘householders’ by those in positions of power in urban governance. Householders had many responsibilities, including an obligation

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68 Rees Jones, Riddy, Beattie et al, ‘The Later Medieval English Urban Household’, p. 120.
to manage the way in which those who inhabited their domestic unit behaved while in public space. Leet courts gave those with the status of householder the power to ‘[police] a wide range of economic, nuisance and petty criminal legislation’. Householders were required to ensure that their cohabitants obeyed the law, and, on occasion, that other households in their local community paid their taxes. That the responsibilities of the householder extended much beyond the smooth running of the domestic sphere itself might be taken as evidence that the space of the home was becoming increasingly important to late medieval people. Clearly, the sense of belonging to a well-governed household was considered by those in towns’ offices of power to be valuable in regulating behaviour beyond domestic walls. In the later medieval town, ‘the household was becoming a place of private government in which the head of the household exercised authority over the co-resident group including children and servants “sharing the same hearth”’. The successful management of a household was, therefore posited as a model of good order and discipline across the urban and civic spheres. Given the centrality of the household to ensuring a cohesive and well-regulated town, it is unsurprising that late medieval householders took great care to guard their domestic sphere against the potential disorder that the exterior gaze might bring.

Some of the earliest evidence of late medieval householders demonstrating a desire to place firm borders around their sphere of domestic governance can be found in the late fourteenth century. A very large portion of this evidence is indicative of a concern that those outside the household unit might be able to see into the private space of the home. Harding, for example, cites a 1350 case in which a husband and wife ‘succeeded in getting judgments against five different neighbours to block up a total of thirty windows through which their “private business” could be observed’. Riddy, meanwhile, gives the example of a 1356 assize of nuisance case in which a couple complained

that their neighbour’s servants would walk ‘through a door in the wall to [their] garden, “tread down the grass [...] and other things growing there, and see and hear their private business”’. Assize of nuisance cases from the early fifteenth century are indicative of very similar concerns. In 1427, a fishmonger named William Kylshyll lodged a double complaint against his neighbour, a widow. Firstly, he was frustrated that she was allowing water from her gutters to drip onto his timber house, ‘so that it threatens ruin’, and perhaps even more egregiously, ‘she has three windows less than 16 ft. from the ground overlooking his premises, through which her servants and tenants can see the private business [of Kylyshyll], his tenants and servants’. Earlier, in 1400, Robert Asshencombe had complained that his neighbour had intrusive lights, windows, and walls in a poor state of repair and, very unpleasantly, ‘openings to latrines’ that were very close to his house, which therefore afforded the neighbour access to the ‘private business of [Asshencombe], his tenants, lessees and the members of his household’. Most interestingly, and particularly in the latter two cases, the complainants’ concerns about the defendants’ access to ‘private business’, a common refrain of all four examples cited, are applicable to all of the members of the household, and not the complainant on an individual basis.

What, then, were litigious late medieval householders worried that their neighbours might see? According to Riddy, many of the activities that were defined as ‘private business’ were related to ‘bodily functions: getting washed and dressed, women dealing with their periods, both sexes defecating, as well as engaging in sexual activity, within marriage as well as outside it’. This suggests that the late medieval definition of intimate, private activities maps rather neatly onto our contemporary conception. There is, however, an

74 Riddy, “BURGEIS” Domesticity in Late-Medieval England’, p. 32.
77 Riddy also observes that assize of nuisance cases are generally concerned with collective privacy, rather than that of the individual. See “BURGEIS” Domesticity in Late-Medieval England’, p. 34.
important difference between the late medieval understanding of the parameters of privacy and that of more recent definitions. The twenty-first century householder might withdraw into a lockable room in order to use the toilet, or perhaps shut the door of their bedroom while they get dressed in the morning, so as to ensure that their private activities are not witnessed by their domestic cohabitants. In the late medieval urban household, those who shared the space do not seem to have been so concerned with guarding their privacy against the prying eyes of one another. This is perhaps because it was wholly impracticable to do so. As the multi-room urban house was busy and crowded, there may have been only ‘partial privacy, at best, for attending to personal hygiene’. It is reasonable to surmise, therefore, that the growing interest in the protection of privacy in the late Middle Ages was primarily motivated by a desire to guard the members of the household against the exterior gaze of neighbours and people in the street, rather than solitude for individuals within the domestic sphere. As Riddy usefully observes, late medieval privacy is not defined by anxiousness about ‘modesty, shame or withdrawal, but power and possession’. This is not to say, of course, that late medieval people never spent any time alone, perhaps to read or sew; those with larger houses might well have been able to do so. Primarily, though, the late medieval conception of privacy was concerned with preventing the interiority of the household from overlapping with the exterior sphere of intrusive neighbours and the streets of the town. An increasing understanding of the value and importance of the domestic sphere was, therefore, an essential component of the late medieval conception of privacy.

**Markets and Mercantilism: Investing in Domestic Comfort**

The two closely related areas of change that I intend to discuss now, the rapidly expanding mercantile culture of the late medieval town and the growing interest in the purchase of goods to adorn the home and make it more comfortable and attractive, might be taken as evidence of a desire to invest in

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79 Riddy, 'Looking Closely', p. 216.
80 Riddy, ‘“Burgeis” Domesticity in Late-Medieval England’, p. 34.
the household beyond making alterations to the physical fabric of the house, which I discussed earlier. Late medieval urban space was characterised by a proto-capitalist culture. The marketplace was at the heart of the late medieval town, and the site of considerable quotidian public activity. While the market did not, of course, appear spontaneously in late medieval urban space, with evidence to suggest that marketplaces were in use from the twelfth century, much larger numbers of people were engaging with the culture of trade and commerce by the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This commercial culture is especially in evidence in London and its surrounding areas, such as Kent, as the cosmopolitanism of the city coupled with the fact that both London and Kent had major ports afforded those who lived there access to a very large range of goods. Indeed, the items listed in numerous sixteenth-century wills from Kent offer evidence that their authors enjoyed access to a great variety of domestic items. This growing interest in the purchase of many different goods coincided with a rise in disposable income for those in the upper tiers of urban society, particularly merchants and artisans. Items that had once been rather difficult for those beyond the nobility to afford, including fur, iron, some kinds of woollen cloth and linen, were being purchased in far greater quantities by socially ambitious urbanites by the fifteenth century. Ceramics, too, were a popular purchase for those with ample disposable income, with many pottery items imported from the continent into English ports, including London, Exeter and Southampton. As Gaimster and Nenk have noted, London customs records ‘for the period 1380-1480 show a steady rise in the numbers of ceramic imports of north-west

82 On markets in medieval towns, see Grenville, Medieval Housing, pp. 159-161.
European origin’, which is indicative of a growing demand for such items.\textsuperscript{88} Archaeological evidence of late medieval ceramic remains at multiple domestic sites might be taken as a further indication of ‘increasing purchasing power, social mobility and material comfort and sophistication—particularly for those communities living in towns and ports with access to national and international markets’.\textsuperscript{89} Crucially, many of these ceramics were not bought primarily for their ‘practical’ use as, for example, drinking vessels or crockery. Rather than being positioned in the working sphere of the kitchen, they were displayed on the dining table, while elaborately patterned ceramic floor tiles immediately announced that the household had sufficient funds to adorn his domestic space.\textsuperscript{90}

The materialism that was fostered by this embryonic capitalist culture was, for some, the cause of considerable anxiety. If urbanites became too preoccupied with the trappings of material goods, they risked squandering their spiritual and moral wealth in favour of material riches. As Rosser remarks, by the fifteenth century ‘greed was widely held to be a distinctive characteristic of civic culture’,\textsuperscript{91} with merchants and the broader culture of mercantilism held to be primarily responsible for this perceived moral decline. This suspicion of those who engaged in commercial activity was frequently reflected in the rather frosty literary portrayals of mercantile culture.\textsuperscript{92} Margery Kempe, for example, admits that she took far too much interest in what her neighbours thought of her, and envied them if they wore clothes as stylish as her own.\textsuperscript{93} This jealousy draws her into the commercial activity of brewing, which, in a ventriloquising of a hugely conservative and moralistic view of household economics, she claims to undertake through covetousness and pride.\textsuperscript{94} Clearly, this emergent commercialism brought the tensions

\textsuperscript{88} Gaimster and Nenk, ‘English Households in Transition’, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{89} Gaimster and Nenk, ‘English Households in Transition’, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{90} Gaimster and Nenk, ‘English Households in Transition’, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{91} Rosser, ‘Urban Culture and the Church’, p. 369.
\textsuperscript{92} For an extensive discussion of this subject, see Roger A. Ladd, \textit{Antimercantilism in Late Medieval English Literature} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{The Book of Margery Kempe}, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS O. S. 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 9.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{The Book of Margery Kempe}, ed. by Meech and Allen, p. 9.
between material and spiritual wealth, as well as between poor and good taste, to the forefront of late medieval culture.

How justified, then, were objections to the exposure of large numbers of urban dwellers to an increasingly internationalised market of material goods? The proto-capitalist culture of the later Middle Ages does indeed appear to have propagated a strong interest in the purchase of items that did not have a primarily practical function, but were rather intended to make the household more comfortable, attractive, and also demonstrate the wealth of its occupier; this is the fourth area of significant change in attitudes towards domesticity that I identified earlier. The later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were, according to Riddy, an era during which the ‘domestic comfort’ of middle-class urban dwellers improved considerably. While this rise in living standards is partly attributable to the more spacious homes that the householders in this social bracket had recently started to occupy, one might also associate it with the consumer items that were bought to adorn the multiple rooms of the urban home. One particular domestic item that neatly encapsulates the multiple concerns of the financially comfortable, stylish urbanite, including comfort, attractiveness and display of status is the cushion, in which many late medieval householders invested. As Goldberg has found, ‘cushions would appear to be a predominantly urban phenomenon from at least the third decade of the fourteenth century until the second half of the fifteenth century’. Cushions were frequently purchased as sets of up to twelve, and they often appear in inventories alongside a number of other decorative domestic textile items, including wall hangings and chair covers. If a household inventory lists multiple cushions, this might be taken as a ‘crude barometer’ of the wealth of the household. Indeed, one of the salient motivations of the urban merchant in the purchase of cushions was to

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95 Riddy, “‘Burgeis’ Domesticity in Late-Medieval England”, p. 29.
96 This interest in cushions does not appear to have been confined to England. Many fifteenth-century Flemish paintings, particularly those that depict the lives of the Holy Family with a domestic inflection, include cushions in their household interiors. See, for example, Petrus Christus, *Virgin and Child in a Domestic Interior*, c. 1460-1467, oil on wood panel, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City. (See Appendix, Figure 1).
display the financial stability of the household to those who might be invited into it. As Thrupp notes in her classic study of the medieval mercantile class, ‘the quantity of cushions about [the householder’s] house and the equipment of his kitchen testify to love of ease of comfort and good living’. Cushions were generally to be found decorating the hall and chamber, both of which were rooms that guests might have been invited into, where they would recognize the soft furnishing as a symbol of their hosts’ capacity to spend money on non-essential items. Where cushions do appear in chambers, it is likely that they were a key part of the make-up of the bed. The cushion might be regarded, then, as an item with multifaceted resonances, as it is both an item of intimate comfort, and a symbolic marker of the fruits of one’s engagement with the public sphere of the mercantile economy.

As I have already discussed, the space of the chamber, where cushions were often to be found, seems to have had a particular association with women in the later Middle Ages. Might it be possible to further deduce, then, that the cushion was an item in which women were especially interested? There is, indeed, evidence to support such a claim. My earlier discussion established that women often engaged with the economic activity of the urban sphere. This involvement with the commercial activity that secured domestic income meant, according to Goldberg, that bourgeois women were often afforded a significant role in determining what this household money was spent on. Where women did have a say in assigning priorities for homely spending, they were, Goldberg suggests, keen to purchase items for the beds and chambers of the house. This likely female taste for cushions is further supported by considerable evidence that late medieval women were especially associated with textile items more broadly. Through the examination of testamentary evidence, Burkholder has surmised that women were primarily responsible for the purchase of textiles in the late Middle Ages, as they left the majority of textile items in their wills: 75.8% of women, generally widows,

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bequeathed household textiles, compared with just under 40% of male testators.\textsuperscript{104} This pattern is perhaps reflective, Burkholder suggests, of the fact that ‘women were far more commonly associated with cloth in its various forms; they were the ones who traditionally spun, wove, sewed, washed, and repaired textiles’.\textsuperscript{105} It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that women were particularly interested in making use of the cushion in order to symbolise their household wealth.

While the apparently feminine cushion is a very useful marker of a growing interest in comfort and domestic adornment, it is by no means the sole indicator of this late medieval trend. Alongside their investment in cushions, mercantile households also demonstrated their wealth through the purchase of, for example, carved wooden furniture, which looked impressive and probably cost less than cushions.\textsuperscript{106} As Thrupp notes, the fifteenth century also brought improvements in the craft of numerous domestic items, including wrought-iron hearth backs and high-quality flooring.\textsuperscript{107} The burgeoning perception of the household as a space in which one wished to be as comfortable as possible is by no means an exclusively bourgeois, urban phenomenon, significant as it was. While the interest in the market of domestic goods does not appear to have percolated to the poor peasantry, who generally preferred to spend their spare income on food and drink, it does appear to have worked its way upwards, to the manorial household.\textsuperscript{108} Many great medieval houses had beautifully patterned tiled floors which, though attractive, felt chilly underfoot. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the occupiers of these households were purchasing carpet to place over the cold tiles, particularly around the bed in the chamber.\textsuperscript{109}


\textsuperscript{105} Burkholder, ‘Threads Bared’, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{106} Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{107} Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London, p. 142.


\textsuperscript{109} Woolgar, The Great Household, p. 72.
same time, manorial dwellers began to wear slippers to further guard against the cold.\footnote{Woolgar, The Great Household, p. 72.} While the great medieval household had always, of course, been concerned with the ostentatious display of status, the fifteenth century saw it adopt an interest in the comfort of its residents, which was achieved through the purchase of various different items. As in the case of the urban household, the later Middle Ages saw the material possessions that adorned the manorial domestic sphere become more important markers of wealth and social standing. In light of the declining use of the hall in the later Middle Ages, this development might be taken as further evidence that this was an era in which the conception of domesticity was predicated on a particular interest in the interiority of homely life. Status, comfort, and decoration might all be displayed and experienced through the material goods that populated the space of the physical house.

**Christ at Home: Spiritual Practice in Domestic Space**

I come, now, to my final category of change: the significant overlap of spiritual practice and the domestic sphere in the later Middle Ages. While much of my discussion in this category is focused on the domestication of the devotional practice of those in the upper echelons of late medieval society, as they made huge investments in the weaving of their spirituality into the fabric of the household, I will first briefly examine the more modest intermingling of religion and home in the bourgeois house. The starting point for this discussion is the focal point of my fourth category of change: the cushion. While the cushion was indeed a marker of wealth and status, and therefore a potential distraction from spiritual concerns, according to the more anxious voices of the later Middle Ages, it was also likely a key item in spiritual practice. The bourgeois householder might kneel upon a cushion for prayer, as in a chapel, or perhaps lean against one while undertaking spiritual reading. Morgan has recently shown that the bedchamber was a hugely important site of devotional practice in the late Middle Ages, and given the likelihood that cushions were placed on beds, they might well have been a ‘prop’ in their
owner’s spiritual activity. Of course, the suggestion that the bed is an appropriate site of encounter with God has a Biblical precedent, with the Song of Solomon suggesting that God waits for the believer in a verdant bed. While this scriptural referent is based upon an imagined floral bed, in which the divine and the believer might enjoy mystical union, by the fifteenth century this association of the bed and spirituality had become much more literal, defined by the materiality of bedsheets and cushions. The resonances of the cushion in a late medieval context are, then, somewhat vexed, as this object is simultaneously symbolic of potentially distracting material wealth and a companion to religious practice. In Goldberg’s view, ‘the distance between the domestic and the holy within bourgeois culture appears not to have been that great: their homes contained religious images and painted hangings’, alongside the symbolically tricky cushion. Indeed, when bourgeois householders did engage with the marketplace that afforded them access to cushions, ceramics and numerous textile products, they often purchased items that enabled them to emulate the space of the church in their domestic setting. As Webb remarks, the ‘furniture and fittings [of the household] replicated in miniature those of public ecclesiastical buildings’. The material goods that middle-class urbanites selected to adorn their private sphere were simultaneously indicative, perhaps not entirely comfortably, of wealth, status and the spiritual credentials of the household.

While bourgeois householders made use of their material goods as a means of closing the gap between their domestic and devotional lives, those with even greater financial means built their spiritual devotion into the very fabric of their homes. Nearly all manorial households had their own private chapels, and had done so since the twelfth century. The domestic chapels of

111 Morgan, Beds and Chambers, pp. 45-76. The space of the bedchamber as a site of prayer is also explored by Webb, ‘Domestic Space and Devotion’, p. 46.
112 Song of Solomon, 1. 15.
113 The interior of the bedchamber, in which cushions and soft furnishings are often visible, is routinely the backdrop to prayer and important religious scenes in European fifteenth-century art. See, for example, Hans Memling, The Annunciation, c. 1465-1470, oil on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (See Appendix, Figure 2).
115 Webb, ‘Domestic Space and Devotion’, p. 32.
116 Grenville, Medieval Housing, p. 118.
the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries appear to have been rather small, and generally on the first floor of the house; Grenville notes one example that was merely ‘a small room over the porch’.\textsuperscript{117} By the fifteenth century, the manorial domestic chapel was growing in size: it was most frequently located on the ground floor, and could occasionally be two storeys high.\textsuperscript{118} The relocation and augmentation of this domestic-ecclesial space might be taken as evidence of a desire among noble householders to render spiritual practice a major priority of household life. As large private chapels became more common during the fifteenth century, the noble householder was required to invest in significant numbers of ecclesiastical staff. In, perhaps, the noblest house in England, that of Henry VI, Woolgar notes that between 1448-1449, the domestic chapel ‘had 49 members: a dean, 30 cantors […] 10 choirboys, a choirmaster and a master of grammar, a priest to read the daily Mass of the Virgin and another, the reader of the gospel at High Mass, besides a yeoman, a serjeant and two servants’.\textsuperscript{119} The manorial household was also routinely the site of attempts to emulate the spiritual routine of the religious institution, particularly for its female inhabitants. Cecily Neville, the fifteenth-century aristocratic woman who will make a number of appearances throughout this thesis, appears to have mimicked the reading practices and quotidian routine of the conventual sphere.\textsuperscript{120} The fact that late medieval householders were keen to shrink the distance between their domestic and devotional lives as much as possible suggests that the homely sphere was regarded as key to the shaping of their spiritual identity. Given that the spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England was rather anxious, as I will note on several occasions in this thesis, this desire to reduce the gap between ecclesial and domestic space would not necessarily have been entirely comfortable. Indeed, it is reasonable to note that the positing of the household as an appropriate space in which to emulate monastic and ecclesial practice might result in a waning desire to enter the Church, monastery, or convent. I would suggest, however, that this

\textsuperscript{117} Grenville, \textit{Medieval Housing}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{118} Grenville, \textit{Medieval Housing}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{119} Woolgar, \textit{The Great Household}, p. 177.
risk is mitigated by the fact that all of the texts under discussion in this thesis are created, used and approved by the institutions of the established Church, and are therefore designed to supplement attendance in literal spiritual spaces, rather than replace it.

The evidence that I have presented above does not, of course, constitute a series of new findings about fifteenth-century conceptions of the domestic sphere. I would suggest, however, that the collective significance of the five salient areas of change that I identify above has perhaps not yet been fully appreciated. By the fifteenth century, the household was central to conceptions of privacy, intimacy, comfort, family, pride, order, discipline, wealth, and religious practice. The ubiquitous importance of domestic space in multiple aspects of later medieval life is indicative of a deepening relationship between the dweller and their dwelling place by the fifteenth century. One might go slightly further, perhaps, and suggest that the association of the household with such concepts as intimacy, family and comfort suggests a flourishing emotional connection between the householder and the space in which they lived. Given the growing importance and cultural significance of domestic space in the later Middle Ages, it is not at all surprising that fifteenth-century readers might have found the appearance of the language and imagery of the household sphere in their spiritual reading particularly resonant.

Before I bring this introduction to a close, it is very important to acknowledge that not all of the readers who encountered my four principal texts did so within the spatial context of the secular household. At various points throughout this thesis, I examine the responses of conventual and monastic readers, who encountered my texts’ domestic images within their respective institutional environments. These readers are both male and female, and members of the Bridgettine, Carthusian, Cistercian and Franciscan Orders. Given the diversity of these readers’ institutional backgrounds, it would be unwise, as well as much beyond the scope of the present discussion, to attempt to offer a universally applicable characterisation of fifteenth-century English monastic and conventual space. Where the particular domestic circumstances of the institutional reader might be seen to have a significant role in shaping their interaction with any of my texts’ household
imagery, I do, of course, acknowledge this on an individual basis. I am also
keen to note, moreover, that these enclosed religious readers would have been
exposed to the shifting attitudes towards the value and importance of the
domestic sphere prior to their entry to the convent or monastery. Their
encounters with the conceptual households of the religious text would,
therefore, compel them to recollect their experience of quotidian life beyond
institutional walls. It is here that my approach is perhaps most shaped by the
Bachelardian notion, that the house one is born and grows up in maintains a
grip on the imagination through to later life. As Bachelard suggests, ‘we are
very surprised, when we return to the old house, after an odyssey of many
years, to find that the most delicate gestures, the earliest gestures suddenly
come alive, are still faultless’. While these institutional readers might not
literally return to the houses of their early lives, their encounters with textual
kitchens, cushions, and dining tables would have enabled them to do so in a
figurative sense. In the fifteenth-century context of an increasingly significant
household sphere, this imaginative journey back in time would have been
especially compelling. Indeed, the significant shifts in the social, economic and
cultural circumstances of fifteenth-century England render the image, memory
and experience of the household especially potent for a broad range of
readers. As I will now show, my four texts often use imagery that is especially
pertinent to the areas of change outlined above, as they variously make
reference to the household as a site of intimacy and as spiritual space, to
domestic commodities, to the layout of the home, and to the house as a site of
good order and discipline.

121 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 15.
Chapter One: The Kitchen of the Heart, Spiritual Furniture, and Noble Visitors: Mapping the Domestic in *The Doctrine of the Hert*

In his mid-thirteenth-century life of Lutgard of Aywières, a Cistercian nun from the Low Countries famed for her miraculous inability to learn any French, Thomas of Cantimpré recounts a conversation between Christ and Lutgard. In this exchange, Christ observes that Lutgard is so profoundly moved by the plight of the weak and sick that he gives her the ability to heal any ailment, grave or minor.¹ This divinely bestowed power, however, presents Lutgard with a considerable problem: she is sought out by overwhelming numbers of sickly people, and is therefore unable to devote herself fully to the worship of Christ. In anguish, Lutgard asks for her healing grace to be exchanged for something that might be more beneficial to her, and Christ responds by granting her a deeper understanding of the Psalter. This, too, however, is an imperfect fit, as Lutgard finds that she makes little headway with her study of scripture, and laments this particular grace as unsuitable for ‘an unlettered, uncultivated, and uneducated nun’.² In search of a more appropriate spiritual gift, Christ specifically asks Lutgard what she wishes to receive from him:

> Then the Lord said to her, ‘What do you want?’ ‘I want your heart.’ ‘No, rather it is I who want your heart’, replied the Lord. ‘So be it, Lord, on condition that you temper your heart’s love to my heart and that I may possess my heart in you. Indeed, with you as my shield, my heart will be secure for all time’.³

Lutgard’s bold request to Christ clarifies precisely where her spiritual priorities lie. She is not concerned with ministering to the masses, nor does she feel any urge to engage in any great depth with written scripture. Rather, what she most desires is to feel intimacy with Christ, and this is best achieved through a profound connection to the divine heart. This exchange between

Lutgard and Christ is hallmarked, I would suggest, by several of the salient preoccupations of thirteenth-century spirituality. Perhaps most obvious is its focus on the Sacred Heart as a precious and coveted object synonymous with achieving the ultimate closeness with Christ. Moreover, the divine heart is not the sole object of desire in this passage. Christ, too, wishes to take possession of Lutgard’s heart, and thereby seal her within the security of his holy love; this reciprocal melding of divine and devout hearts is a further commonplace of the spike in devotion to the Sacred Heart that characterises the spirituality of the period. For the believer to be intimate with Christ is, therefore, to seek the mutual exchange of hearts.

The above exchange from the life of Lutgard reveals the twin loci of intimacy between Christ and the devout to be their reciprocally proffered hearts. This centralising of the heart is evident in the texts of numerous devotional writers. One such example is The Doctrine of the Hert, a text likely produced in a similar context to the one in which Lutgard received her visions. The Doctrine is a fifteenth-century Middle English translation of a thirteenth-century Latin treatise, De doctrina cordis, which was arguably produced in a Cistercian milieu in the Low Countries and directed primarily towards an audience of enclosed female religious. As a guidance text, the purpose of the Doctrine is to educate its readers in the proper preparation of the heart for union with God. In order to communicate its lessons on the subject of spiritual union, the Doctrine routinely overlays the familiar trope of the heart with the imagery of the domestic sphere; the intimacy of homely space serves as a metaphor for the closeness that one might eventually hope to find in the chambers of the Sacred Heart. Indeed, domestic space is a favoured image of

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5 Devotion to the Sacred Heart, along with the broader imagery of connections between the heart of Christ and that of the believer, is also central to the spirituality of Mechtild of Hackeborn and the German convent of Helfta, which will be the subject of my discussion in Chapter Two of this thesis.

the *Doctrine* translator, and readers are routinely encouraged to elide the intimate spaces of heart and home.

I will first give some key details about the *Doctrine’s* Latin source text and its multiple vernacular translations, with a particular focus upon the context in which the Middle English treatise was encountered by its fifteenth-century readers, before characterising the purpose and content of the text. The mid-thirteenth-century *De doctrina cordis*, written in the wake of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council’s emphasis on clerics’ pastoral duties, instructs its readers in how they might best prepare the devout heart for spiritual union. The text is divided into seven books, each of which is further split into chapters, with each section devoted to the explication of a particular gift of the Holy Spirit. These seven spiritual gifts are paired with a different aspect of the preparation of the heart, from guarding it to cutting it. Over the course of these seven books, the treatise advances from basic advice on confession and penitence to more contemplative ineffability in its later sections. Of *De doctrina’s* seven books, the first is by far the longest, comprising thirty chapters and accounting for over half of the treatise as a whole. The question of how this carefully structured plan for spiritual advancement might have been used by its audience does not yield a single answer, as it appears that *De doctrina* was adaptable to a number of different purposes. In her discussion of the uses of the Latin text, Whitehead proposes four possible devotional

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7 On the subject of pastoral care in the Middle Ages, see *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett*, ed. by Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), and William H. Campbell, *The Landscape of Pastoral Care in Thirteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

8 The seven pairs in *De doctrina* are: praeparare- donum timoris (to prepare the heart with the gift of dread); custodire- donum scientiae (to guard with the gift of knowledge); aperiire- donum pietatis (to open with the gift of piety); stabilire- donum fortitudinis (to stabilise with the gift of fortitude); dare- donum consili (to give with the gift of counsel); levare- donum intellectus (to lift with the gift of understanding); scindere- donum sapientiae (to cut with the gift of wisdom). See *Speculum concionatorum, ad illustrandum pectora auditorum, in septem libros distributum*, Auctore F. Gerardo Leodiensi, Ordinis Fr. Praedicatorum Lectore celeberrimo, 2nd ed. (Naples: Baptista Subtilis, 1607), p. 5. All subsequent references to this edition of the Latin text will be given as *De doctrina*. For a similar useful summary of the structure of *De doctrina cordis*, see Christiania Whitehead, Denis Renevey and Anne E. Mouron, ‘Introduction’, in *The Doctrine of the Hert: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. by Christiania Whitehead, Denis Renevey and Anne E. Mouron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010), pp. ix-lxii (p. xiv).
contexts in which the treatise might have been used. The first takes note of De doctrina's 'close generic affinities with the medieval homily', which suggests a connection to preaching. Whitehead's second proposed use posits the treatise as guidance text for those embarking on the religious life, while the third notes the possibility that De doctrina might have been used as a catechetical aid. The final hypothesis differs somewhat from the previous three, as Whitehead notes that some manuscript contexts place the Latin text alongside some 'sophisticated affective and devotional texts', and it might, therefore, have been used as an aid to contemplation. Clearly, the users of De doctrina regarded it as an adaptable text, with a range of different resonances to be drawn out by its divergent audiences.

For many years, any scholars who wished to determine the author of this most flexible of texts were confronted with a list of candidates even more extensive than that of De doctrina's potential uses. More recently, a comprehensive review of the evidence by Nigel Palmer alights upon Gerard of Liège, a Cistercian likely to have lived in a monastery in the Low Countries, as the most probable author of the treatise. In his attribution of De doctrina to Gerard, Palmer notes that the work of this Cistercian monk is 'strongly indebted to the more recent developments in the Paris schools under Hugh of St Cher', himself a prominent figure in the authorship debate. Above all, however, Palmer is keen to stress that a comprehensive understanding of De doctrina hinges on the recognition of its audience as Cistercian, rather than the definitive identification of its author. This intended Cistercian readership encompassed both men and women, with Palmer noting that 'the implicit audience is [...] one of monks and nuns living in enclosed communities'. Palmer further observes that 'the author's care to include women readers'
suggests a particular concern for the pastoral care of women religious, and *De doctrina* might, therefore, have been particularly directed towards Cistercian nuns.\(^{19}\)

It is perhaps the flexibility of *De doctrina* that contributed to its huge popularity throughout Europe. This widespread appeal is evidenced by 208 surviving manuscripts of the Latin text, with a further 70 recorded in catalogues but not extant.\(^{20}\) Alongside these numerous Latin manuscripts, a further indicator of the wide appeal and circulation of *De doctrina* is its translation into several European vernaculars. Four manuscripts of French versions of the text are extant, along with a further four Dutch manuscripts, seven in German, one codex in Italian, and multiple early printed versions in Spanish, which are dateable to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.\(^{21}\) Most pertinent to this thesis, of course, is the translation into Middle English. The Middle English *Doctrine* survives in four fifteenth-century manuscripts: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McLean 132 (hereafter *M*), Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B. 14. 15 (hereafter *T*), Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V. III. 24 (hereafter *C*), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 330 (hereafter *L*).\(^{22}\) In three of these four manuscripts, the *Doctrine* finds itself in the company of other spiritual texts. In both *C* and *M*, the *Doctrine* travels with two texts intended for a female religious reader, *A letter of gouvenance sent to a religious woman* and *A letter sent to a religious womman of þe Holy Gost and first of þe frute of charite*.\(^{23}\) *L*, meanwhile, puts the

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\(^{19}\) Palmer, ‘The Authorship of *De doctrina cordis*’, p. 50.


Doctrine alongside a short penitential lyric, ‘O Man Unkynde’, which appears in the closing folios of the codex in a different hand from the main text. The presence of these additional texts alongside the Doctrine offers some useful clues as to the possible uses of the treatise in fifteenth-century England. The fact that L is brought to a close with a lyric that offers a reminder of the great sacrifice made by Christ during the Passion, to which the reader is apparently impervious, perhaps draws out the penitential elements of the Doctrine. In the case of M and C, the presence of two auxiliary texts addressed to women is a strong indication that these manuscripts were used by female readers.

The Middle English text was written for a non-Latinate audience of women religious. In a new prologue, the translator offers a detailed indication of how this text might be read by its intended fifteenth-century audience:

I, þerfore, oon of thohe whiche ourle lord hath clepid to his servise in religioun, alpogh I be no trew servaunt of his, have compilid this tretise that is clepid ‘the doctrine of the herte’, to the worship of God principally, and to edificacioun of symple soules. This new readership of nuns requires the translator to adopt a different approach from his Latin source. In her discussion of the alterations made by the Middle English compiler, Mouron suggests that his purpose is ‘moral and spiritual’. This reading coheres with the conclusion drawn by Whitehead and Renevey, who describe the translator as ‘an ultimately conservative figure, accentuating the basics, backing away from criticism of superiors, talking down to his reader, lowering the intellectual and theological demands of the treatise, confining himself to a pre-conceived professional and regulated female audience’. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the Middle

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25 The Doctrine of the Hert: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary, ed. by Christiania Whitehead, Denis Renevey and Anne E. Mouron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010), p. 3. All subsequent references to this text will be given as Doctrine.


English *Doctrine* is a far less mystical text than its Latin precursor, with little desire to assist its reader in advancing to the higher echelons of mystical contemplation. The *Doctrine* translator envisages a reader, then, ‘whose task is to feel, not think’.28

I will return to the subject of the *Doctrine*’s Middle English readers in greater detail later on, but for now, I will examine the structure and content of the text. Like its Latin source, the Middle English text is split into seven books, each of which couples a gift of the Holy Spirit with a method of preparing the heart for spiritual union.29 In a further point of similarity with *De doctrina*, the first book of the *Doctrine* is by far the longest, comprising roughly half of the treatise as a whole. Arguably the crucial difference between the Latin and Middle English texts is the fact that the imagery invoked by the *Doctrine* translator is largely unhooked from its scriptural basis, thereby rendering its potential resonances considerably more ambiguous.30 Indeed, the *Doctrine* translator’s scraping away of much of his source imagery’s Biblical overlay can make deciphering the spiritual lessons of the text rather more of a challenge; this is particularly apparent in the *Doctrine*’s use of kitchen imagery. Alongside this vivid culinary imagery, the *Doctrine* makes use of a number of metaphors and allegories in order to assist its reader’s comprehension of key spiritual concepts. The second book, for example, makes extensive use of the familiar trope of the besieged castle for the beleaguered Christian soul, surrounded by

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28 Whitehead and Renevey, “Open þin hert as a boke”, p. 148. The privileging of feeling over thinking is also key in my discussion of Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, in Chapter Four.
29 As with the Latin, this gives seven pairs, which are: making the heart ready with the gift of dread, keeping the heart with the gift of pity, opening the heart with the gift of knowledge, stabilising the heart with the gift of strength, giving the heart with the gift of counsel, lifting the heart with the gift of understanding, and, lastly, cutting the heart with the gift of wisdom.
30 On this subject, see Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxiii-xxiv.
sinful enemies who seek entry while the soldier-Christ is away, fighting a spiritual battle elsewhere.31

Of especial pertinence to this thesis is, of course, the imagery in the Doctrine that makes use of the language of domestic space. Household images are the structural framework of the long first book of the Doctrine, with the translator first asking his reader to imagine her heart as a small house, which must be carefully cleaned and modestly furnished so as to be ready for the arrival of the wearied soldier-Christ, who is in need of refuge in the wake of his tireless battle against sin. From here, the translator invites his reader to imagine her heart as a busy kitchen, in which she should prepare meat to feed to Christ, her most noble visitor. The metaphors of domestic labour, including sweeping and mopping, represent the expulsion of sin through confession. This prepares the reader for Eucharistic in-dwelling, in which Christ will receive a meal from the believer in reciprocation for the one that he prepared for her. My discussion of the Doctrine’s domestic imagery fits into a body of existing work on the vocabulary of the household in the text. In his essay for the Doctrine companion volume, Gillespie undertakes an extensive analysis of the kitchen imagery in the Doctrine.32 Many of the other examinations that serve as a foundation for my discussion of the Doctrine’s domestic images involve contributions from the editors of the 2010 edition. As part of her discussion of medieval architectural allegory, Whitehead discusses the household images in the first book of the Doctrine, with a particular focus on the spiritual furnishing of the house of the heart,33 while Renevey has also analysed the homely metaphors of the text on more than one occasion.34

31 On the subject of the besieged castle trope, see the discussion in Christiania Whitehead, Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 87-116. One of the most recognisable incarnations of this trope appears in Ancrene Wisse, pp. 146-147.
33 Whitehead, Castles of the Mind, p. 123-128.
The fact that there is a relatively substantial precedent for the discussion of household space in the *Doctrine* might prompt readers of this thesis to ask precisely why I have chosen to include it in my own analysis of domesticity in medieval devotional literature. My justification for its presence here is multifold. Firstly, I intend to build upon the analysis of the scholars cited above by taking note of a further episode in the text that has not yet been discussed through a domestic lens. I will also analyse the domestic imagery in a late fifteenth-century spiritual text in French, *Le dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Crist*. This text, written for Margaret of Burgundy during her marriage to Charles the Bold, reworks key passages of the *Doctrine* into a dialogue between Margaret and Christ, and derives considerable inspiration from the domestic passages in its source text. Margaret's response to the *Doctrine* is not the sole example of reader reaction to the domestic language of the text that I intend to discuss. I will also examine the way in which the *Doctrine*'s fifteenth-century English readers might have responded to the extensive domestic imagery in the treatise. Many of the domestic images that I will discuss in this chapter are hallmarked by their incorporation of homiletic commonplaces that were probably originally drawn from twelfth and thirteenth-century preaching manuals.35 Later in this thesis, in the second and third chapters, I will show how the fifteenth-century Middle English translations of the works of two women visionaries, Mechtild of Hackeborn and Bridget of Sweden, rework these commonplaces via their visionary authority. The discussion of the imagery in this first chapter will, therefore, serve as a useful referent for the conventions that are later adapted by these hugely popular visionary women. For now, though, my focus is the *Doctrine*, in which, I would suggest, domestic imagery is the dominant organising trope of the text. Moreover, its household metaphors have a particular resonance across the strata of the *Doctrine*'s fifteenth-century readers.

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Housework, Spiritual Furniture and a Knock at the Door: Welcoming the Noblest Guest of All

I will begin by examining a domestic metaphor from the initial pages of the Doctrine’s first book, in which the well-regulated household is invoked as an allegory of the reader’s carefully ordered self. The translator begins his extensive engagement with the language of domesticity by asking his reader to imagine her heart as a household, into which she will shortly receive a worthy guest. Her visitor is Christ, who seeks a place of refuge in the wake of a bloody and exhausting battle, fought on her behalf:

This worthi gest, whom an hert made redy shuld receyve, is oure lord Jhesu Crist, that sekith amonges his childryn a restyng place, the whiche to here helth hath tenderly yivyn his herte blode, and þerfor he, beyng wery and woundid, axith of hem a restyng place in þeire hertis.  

These opening moments of the allegory make a strong appeal to the reader’s emotional faculties, as they draw the familiar conception of Christ as the wounded lover-knight into the intimate space of the reader’s heart. In his analysis of these early lines, Renevey notes that the yoking of the lover-knight trope with the language of domestic space ‘helps the reader to enter into an introspective mood’. The Doctrine’s exhortation to look inward subsequently asks its reader to ready the house of her heart for Christ’s arrival by undertaking a number of domestic chores:

Now sister, yif thou wilt receyve worthily this blissed champioun, first thou must make clene thyn hous of thin hert, and þan þou must aray it, and afterward kepe wel þe yates of þe same hous. The brome wherewith the hous of þin hert shuld be made clene is drede of God, for as Salomon seith: Timor Domini expellit peccatum. ‘Drede of God puttith away synne’, and þat is be confessioun. Seynt Austyn seith: ‘A soule þat knowith here synnes and of that knowleche becometh dreful is anone enduced to be shryvyn’. Cnowleche of the synnes be þe mouthe in confessioun is nöping ellis but puttyng ought filthes of the hous of oure herte be the dore of the mowth with þe brome of the tung. But first, or

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thow go to confessioun, thow must serche thi conscience bi bisy examynacioun and afterward swepe it bi diew confessioun.\textsuperscript{39}

Preparation for confession is, here, reconfigured as an act of quotidian domestic labour, with the component parts of the reader’s exterior self, such as her tongue and mouth, repurposed as household tools that must be used in the thorough readying of her interior consciousness. This focus on introspection is reflective of what Bryan identifies as the late medieval taste for texts that furnish their reader with the ability to “see themselves” in the content of their books.\textsuperscript{40} For the lay reader, the allegorisation of the consciousness as a household would reflect the literal interior of the domestic sphere in which reading is conducted, and thereby create a parallel between rigorous spiritual preparation and good domestic order.\textsuperscript{41} The Doctrine’s emphasis on the importance of confession is likely a consequence of the decision taken by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that all Christians should confess at least once per year, thereby necessitating the production of manuals that guided their readers in their confessional practice.\textsuperscript{42} In light of this directive, it is unsurprising that the Doctrine author should wish ‘to maintain the inner state that confession triggers as a permanent, daily state, configured and sustained via the memorization of the visual aids provided by the treatise’.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the Doctrine translator asks his reader to make confession as regularly as she undertakes her household chores, thereby framing the practice as a salient component of her daily routine.

As I observe above, the purpose of undertaking a thorough clean of the heart-household is to ready it for the arrival of Christ in the Eucharist, who is wounded, exhausted, and in need of shelter. This defines the reader’s

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Doctrine}, p. 7. \textit{De doctrina}, p. 7. While the Middle English retains a scriptural quotation from the Latin, ‘Timor Domini expellit peccatum’, it excises the Latin text’s citation of its origin in Ecclesiasticus 1. For a very similar passage that makes use of the imagery of sweeping, see \textit{Ancrene Wisse}, p. 119.


\textsuperscript{41} I discuss the fifteenth-century conception of the household as a site defined by order and discipline in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 21-22.


\textsuperscript{43} Renevey, ‘Household Chores’, p. 174.
conception of receiving Christ in the Eucharist as an act of domestic hospitality afforded to someone in urgent need; the spiritual nourishment of the believer remains firmly in the background. The wretched state in which Christ finds himself is the translator’s focus in most of the lines that precede the domestic instructions cited above. Again, the translator makes a strong appeal to his reader’s emotional faculties, pre-emptively chiding her for refusing to make room for Christ in her heart-household:

We ben cause of his grete laboure and werinesse, þat was woundid to the dethe foroure wikkidnesse. What unkynde wrecchis be we that wil not gladly receyve suche a champion into oure hous of oure hertos, the whiche for oure love wagyd batayle with oure enemy and had the victorie and the maystry, coming fro the batayle al forsprenclid with blood, blew, wery, and woundid.⁴⁴

It is the merging of this imagery, of Christ as traduced and vulnerable with that of the quotidian activities of domestic labour, that prevent the resonances of this metaphor from being limited to the mundanities of household labour. The fact that the arrival of the bloodied and wearied Christ is imminent means that, while household chores are indeed undertaken with a predictable regularity, their successful completion is urgently necessary, and will be richly rewarded with a visit from this most important of guests. The Doctrine translator’s imagery of domestic labour therefore yokes the emotional potency of the image of the wounded Christ with the far more muted register of the language of quotidian housework in order to compel its reader to undertake confession. That the translator should draw upon the image of the wounded Christ to pull his reader towards penitence is by no means surprising. In her discussion of the popularity of confession as a topic in medieval sermons, Ross observes that it is ‘through encountering the wounded Christ [that] believers are led to confession’,⁴⁵ while further noting that ‘the call to confession generally accompanies the homiletic challenge to recognize that humanity’s sins impact the Divine, on the one hand, and to

⁴⁴ Doctrine, p. 6. De doctrina, p. 6. The opening line of the Middle English translation is reworked to omit a citation of Isaiah 43. 24.
acknowledge the divine offer of mercy, on the other'. In reminding his reader that all of Christ's suffering was endured on her behalf, and that she would be cruel to refuse this brave warrior his shelter, the Doctrine translator certainly emphasises the consequences of refusing to repent one's failings. It is not the sole aim of the translator to encourage his reader simply to maintain a permanently clean and ordered conscience. The presence of the wounded Christ ought also to become an enduring one in this domestic space, with confession making his arrival possible.

Once the household has been washed and swept, it must be furnished for Christ. The Doctrine translator opens his instructions by referring to the Old Testament story of the woman who prepared her home to receive Elisha the prophet, an episode drawn from the Book of Kings. In her house, she places a bed, a table, a seat, and a candlestick:

This devout woman perceyvid wel and set good eygh þe prophete comme ofte bi here hous. She seyde to here housbonde thus: 'I perceyve wel that this man, þe whiche ofte tymes gooth by oure hous, is a blissed man, therfor I pryay yow make we to him a litel hous, and set therin a litel bedde, and a mete-table and a stole, and also a candilstik with light.

It is striking that the Doctrine translator should use this story, of a devout woman at home preparing to receive a holy guest, as a springboard for his own allegory. Clearly, he is keen to give his own story a sturdy Biblical basis while further validating and reinforcing the instructions that he has given to his reader throughout this first book, that she should imagine herself in the guise of the householder. The Doctrine's implication, that the role of householder is a devotionally exemplary position, would be particularly resonant in the context of fifteenth-century lay spirituality. This was an era

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46 Ross, The Grief of God, p. 22.
47 II Kings 4. 8-10.
48 Doctrine, pp. 8-9. De doctrina, pp. 16-17. The Doctrine omits the Latin text's preface to this metaphor, which cites Matthew 12. 43-45 and Luke 11. 24-26. Both of these Gospel passages relate one of Jesus' sermons, in which he describes the expelling of an evil spirit from a man, who is allegorised as a house. The spirit resolves to return to his house, which has been swept and emptied in his absence, along with 'seven other spirits more wicked than himself'.
49 Whitehead also discusses the prefacing of the furnishing allegory with this Biblical story, as she suggests that 'this framing narrative effectively acts to authorize an account of contemporary domestic labour which might otherwise have been considered too trivial or mundane to bear spiritual information'. Castles of the Mind, p. 124.
during which the household was beginning to play an increasingly significant role in its residents’ spiritual practice, with laypeople keen to seek guidance on how they might balance their quotidian lives with their religious practice.\(^{50}\)

The suggestion, here, that the role of householder carries a spiritual gravitas that has its roots in Biblical narrative would be especially stirring for these readers.

It seems that the *Doctrine* reader should adopt the same taste in furniture as her Biblical model, as the items that she must prepare for Christ are identical to those of the Old Testament story:

> In the same wise yif thou wilt receyveoure verry prophete Helyse, Jhesu Crist, into þe litel hous of thin hert, thow must ordeyne for hym gostly thees foure thinges: a bed, a met-table, a stole, and a candilstik with light. By this bed thow shalt undirstonde pees and rest of conscience; be this met-table, penance; be this stole, the dome of þin own conscience, and bi this candilstik with light, the knowleche of thi conscience.\(^{51}\)

Much like the domestic chores discussed above, the furniture that one must place within the heart-household facilitates the deepening of the introspective mindset that ought to be triggered by confession. In her analysis of this section of the allegory, Whitehead observes that ‘the choice of furniture and its significance within the *Doctrine*’s household bears a curious similarity to the moralizations of ecclesiastical and temple furniture in commentaries and liturgical manuals of the twelfth century’.\(^{52}\) The implications of the *Doctrine*’s shifting of these spiritual furnishings from the church to the imagined household are multifold. Firstly, the positioning of this furniture within the domestic sphere ‘serves as a singularly early example of a devotional shift in which the mediated, ecclesiastical encounter with Christ is gradually supplemented by a private and emotional encounter sited inside the home’.\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) The popularity during this era of Walter Hilton’s late fourteenth-century *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, which instructs a wealthy gentleman in how he might weave his daily responsibilities into his spirituality, might be taken as evidence of this interest. See Walter Hilton’s *Mixed Life Edited from Lambeth Palace MS 472*, ed. by S. J. Ogilvie-Thompson (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1986). On the burgeoning relationship between the domestic sphere and spiritual practice during the fifteenth century, see my discussion in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 30-33.

\(^{51}\) *Doctrine*, p. 9, *De doctrina*, p. 17.

\(^{52}\) Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 126.

\(^{53}\) Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 126.
All of this spiritual furniture is put to work in the service of strengthening the reader’s introspective mood. The seat of divine judgment is reworked to signify the conscience, with which one will judge oneself, while the seven-branched candelabra of the temple becomes the candle of self-knowledge. The meat table on which the meal is placed reworks the altar, as the food is human penance, through which the individual will feed Christ. These updated resonances underscore the extent to which the imagined household of the *Doctrine* might be read as a carefully ordered, controlled rendering of the inner self. If the soul is properly cleaned and appropriately furnished, which is to say suitably confessed and contrite, the individual plays a prominent part in determining their own deliverance from sin.

When Christ arrives at his scrupulously clean and appropriately furnished lodgings, then, where does he take his rest? As one might expect from a warrior who has fought so tirelessly, he immediately goes to bed, with the *Doctrine* translator explaining:

> The bed of þis Helyse, Jhesu Crist, is pees and rest of conscience, as Davith seyth: *In pace factus est locus eius*. ‘His place’ he seyth, ‘is made in pees.’ And perfor, sister, whan that evyr þou puttist þin hert in rest, thow puttist oure lord Jhesu Crist in his bed.

To maintain a peaceful and ordered conscience is, therefore, to facilitate Christ’s recuperation in the wake of his battling on the reader’s behalf. In his interpretation of this passage, Renevey suggests that the *Doctrine* translator attempts to ‘address the maternal sensitivity of the female reader of the treatise’, with the reader now required to discard her cleaning tools and adopt the homely labour of parental care. Indeed, it would appear that the maintenance of a well-regulated soul enables something of a shift in roles between Christ and the reader. If the household is suitably tidy, Christ is able to cease battle and go to sleep, and the reader takes up the responsibility of caring for him. In keeping an ordered household and providing Christ with the

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54 Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 127.
55 As Whitehead notes, the soul has ‘an unusually proactive role in the work of salvation’. *Castles of the Mind*, p. 127.
57 Renevey, ‘Household Chores’, p. 176. For a similar discussion of this passage, see Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 127.
requisite furnishings to facilitate his refuge, the *Doctrine* reader is able to reciprocate the considerable toils that Christ has taken on her behalf.

Even with the wounded and exhausted Christ now sleeping within the heart-household, it remains vulnerable to the corrupting advances of sin. The household, therefore, must be secured:

Tho gh thi hous, sister, be þus clensid and arayed, yit yif oure lord shuld dwelle þerin, þe yates þerof must be wel kept. The yates þat shuld be kept ben thi fyve wittis, that is, tastynge, touching, seyng, herynge, and smellyng. Bi þes fyve yates þe soule goth outh to outeward þingis, and outeward þingis comyth into the soule.\(^{58}\)

The state of introspection achieved by confession and contrition can, therefore, only be maintained by the careful guarding of the five senses, which ought to be sealed shut like the gates of a house. To fail to manage one’s sensory faculties would be to turn outward, and thereby invite disorderly sin into the soul. In order to further ensure the security of the heart-household, the reader should also employ a porter to stand guard at its gates. This porter should be discretion, and the reader should ensure that she remains alert at all times.\(^{59}\)

Þis porter may be no sleeper, for yif discrecioun slepe, what merveyle is it þough þeves entre in bi þi yates? Thus I rede in holy writ þat Ysobeth was killed in his bed, in as moche as þe womman that wynwed whete, þe wiche shuld had kept þe yate, was aslepe.\(^{60}\)

The only person that might be allowed to sleep within the heart-household is, it would appear, the combat-weary Christ. That the *Doctrine* translator should make reference to this particular Biblical episode, in which Isboseth is murdered in his bed, serves as a stark warning of the importance of maintaining a studiously regulated household. Inside the *Doctrine* reader’s house, it is Christ who is asleep in bed, and therefore rendered vulnerable by his host’s lack of attention to keeping his dwelling place secure. Given the

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\(^{58}\) *Doctrine*, p. 16. *De doctrina*, p. 41. For two very similar passages that also repeatedly allegorise the five senses as potential routes of entry to the soul, see Book II of *Ancrene Wisse*, pp. 20-47; Sawles Warde, p. 86.

\(^{59}\) I refer to the porter as ‘she’ because the *Doctrine*’s allegory of the porter guarding the household of the soul has strong echoes of the female porter in Book I of *Moralia in Job*, by Gregory the Great. *Moralia in Job*, ed. by Marci Adriaen, CCSL 143 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), pp. 47-48, pp. 50-52.

\(^{60}\) *Doctrine*, p. 19. *De doctrina*, p. 51. The Biblical parallel of Isboseth being murdered as he slept is taken from II Samuel 4.
fifteenth-century preoccupation with maintaining a secure and private household, the *Doctrine* translator’s anxiousness about a poorly guarded consciousness would have been especially pertinent for the lay reader.\(^{61}\)

The danger of employing an inattentive porter is emphasised by the *Doctrine* translator in dramatic fashion. If one does not ensure that the five senses are kept in check with sufficient diligence, one facilitates the entrance of sin; this unwelcome presence transforms the soul from a household into a public space of commerce:

> Yif þei entre, leve it wel, þei wil make of þi conscience a commune market place, the wiche shal be þan a place of crye and noyse and not a place of restful silence, a place of proper goodes, and a place of byhyng and selling and where shal nopjing be unsold.\(^{62}\)

This metaphor, of a sacred space in which the presence of Christ ought to be keenly felt but is traduced by the sinful actions of the impious, might be read as a vague allusion to the Gospel episode of Christ evicting the moneylenders from the temple.\(^{63}\) In the context of the *Doctrine*, the failure to properly guard one’s senses results in the collapse of order achieved by proper attention to one’s devotional duties, and precipitates sensory chaos. The heart is no longer a calm, quiet space, representative of the monastic sphere in opposition to the exterior realm of chaotic commerce. Rather, it is transformed into a loud and disorderly space, in which the careful arrangement of her heart-household is dismantled, as its component parts are sold off to the highest bidder. While this detail would likely have been wholly inconsequential for the thirteenth-century monastic reader, for whom the rejection of commercial goods was a salient aspect of life as an enclosed religious, it would likely have been less

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\(^{61}\) I discuss the fifteenth-century preoccupation with domestic privacy in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 20-24.  
\(^{63}\) Matthew 21. 12-13. Interestingly, the Latin text does not mention this seemingly obvious Biblical similarity either. The *De doctrina* author does, however, in his explication of this metaphor, cite a variation of Isaiah 25. 2: ‘Vnde haec est ciuitas posita in tumultum, sicut dicit Isaia 25’, with an alternative spelling of ‘tumulum’ given in the margin. See p. 52. The full Biblical passage reads: ‘Quia posuisti civitatem in tumulum, urbem fortem in ruinam, domum alienorum: ut non sit civitas, et in sempiternum non aedificetur’. [‘For thou [God] hast reduced the city to a heap, the strong city to ruin, the house of strangers, to be no city, and to be no more built up forever’]. Alongside these possible Biblical parallels, one might also detect a monastic flavour to this metaphor, with the disapproval of the marketplace’s ‘proper goods’ denoting personal possessions, which were not permitted in the monastery or convent.
comfortable for the fifteenth-century lay reader, whether aristocratic or middle-class. In associating commercialism with chaos, the translator posits the calm space of the household in direct opposition to materiality and financial exchange. In light of the growing market of domestic goods available for purchase during this era, the fifteenth-century household was certainly not removed from the realm of commercial activity. Rather, it was a space for which the mercantile sphere was enthusiastically producing goods.\textsuperscript{64} This is a moment in the \textit{Doctrine} at which the text is less successful in reflecting the lay reader's experience back at her, and she is therefore compelled to draw out only the allegorical meaning of this passage.

These lines, which see the walls of the household fall away in order to accommodate the bartering tables of the marketplace, come at the conclusion of this metaphor of cleaning, furnishing and securing in order to welcome the wounded Christ. It seems pertinent to briefly summarise the overall resonances of this lengthy allegorisation of the heart as a household. That this extensive episode should end on a relatively bleak note, with the \textit{Doctrine} translator warning his reader about the potential for the introspective mindset to collapse, and underscoring this pre-emptive chastisement with an emotive reminder of Christ's sacrifice, perhaps offers a clue as to how it might have been read. As Renevey remarks, 'household space conceived as a mental image in \textit{The Doctrine} serves then exclusively as a means of configuring the believer's consciousness'.\textsuperscript{65} For the enclosed nun, the intended reader of the \textit{Doctrine}, the devout consciousness is regularly confessed, contrite, and acutely aware of the need to reciprocate Christ's sacrifice by remaining open to him at all times; this means the relinquishing of her external sensory faculties. The imagery of the interior space of the household, and its eventual contrast with wholly divergent exterior space, is used by the \textit{Doctrine} translator as a means of controlling his reader's piety, and warning her against the dangers of looking outward, rather than within.

In the section to follow, I will examine a pertinent metaphor from the \textit{Doctrine}'s third book. This particular image, which has not yet been discussed

\textsuperscript{64} I discuss the burgeoning mercantile sphere in my introduction to this thesis, at pp. 24-30.
\textsuperscript{65} Renevey, 'Figuring Household Space', p. 77.
alongside the extended metaphor that I have analysed above, also makes use of the language of cleaning and visiting. The third book of the *Doctrine*, which at just nine pages long is considerably shorter than the opening chapter, is devoted to instructing its reader in how she might open her heart with the spiritual gift of knowledge.66 For this mode of preparation, the translator guides his reader using two primary metaphors: she ought to open her heart as a book that might be read, and, secondly, as a door that should be opened to the person who knocks upon it. This latter metaphor, my focal point in this section, sees the *Doctrine* translator explain to his reader that ‘this manner of openyng of þe hert is love, and þis gest þat knokkith at þe dore is Crist Jhesu’.67 Once again, then, the translator refigures Christ as a guest who wishes to reside within the devout heart. In a further reference to the imagery used in the first book of the text, the translator cites a portion of the Biblical book of Revelation to explain that Christ is invited into the believer’s inner self once confession has been successfully undertaken:

Thou openyst þin hert to God whan þou clensist þi conscience by confesioun and repente þe for þi mislyvyng. Thou openyst also þin herte to God whan þou dost good dedis. He þat wold come in, sister [...] seith thus: *Ego sto ad ostium, et pulso: si quis mihi apperuerit, intrabo ad illum.*68 ‘I stonde at þe dore’, seyth oure lord, ‘and knokke. Hosoever wil opyn þe dore to me, I shal entre into him’.69

The domestic character of this metaphor is somewhat looser than that of the one that is explored at such length in the opening book: a door is not inevitably, of course, a door to a house. This excerpt does, however, reiterate Book I’s association of cleaning and confession, which is again the preparatory

67 *Doctrine*, p. 65. *De doctrina*, p. 203. I discuss a further image of Christ knocking at a door in Chapter Three of this thesis, on Bridget of Sweden’s *Liber Celestis*, at pp. 165-175.
68 This is a slightly altered citation of Revelation 3. 20. In the Vulgate, this line reads, ‘Ecce sto ad ostium, et pulsa: si quis audierit vocem meam, et aperuerit mihi januam, intrabo ad illum, et coenabo cum illo, et ipse mecum’ (the Middle English translation is given in the body of the main text above). The *Doctrine* truncates the portion of the quotation that I have italicised to ‘si quis mihi apperuerit’, which reduces these lines from ‘if any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door’ to ‘if anyone opens to me’.
69 *Doctrine*, p. 65. *De doctrina*, p. 204. Though the *Doctrine* retains the allusion to Revelation, the translator omits two further scriptural anchors from his rendering of the metaphor. These are a reference to Isaiah 26. 12, which advises that the Lord will bring peace to the faithful, along with a citation of the Song of Solomon 5. 2, in which the divine spouse dreams of Christ’s ‘knocking’, and Christ responds by asking his beloved to ‘open’ to him.
act that readies the believer for the visitor—Christ’s arrival. For the reader of
the *Doctrine*, encountering this metaphor of welcoming the most noble of
guests might prompt them to recollect the extensive household imagery of the
first book. This close association with the earlier metaphor of the divine
visitor gives the impression that a strong thread of domestic imagery runs
throughout the *Doctrine*.

Such a reading is further bolstered by the fact that the Middle English
translator truncates *De doctrina*’s return to the figure of the visiting Christ
significantly, which therefore renders its domestic character considerably
more pronounced. The *Doctrine*’s version of the metaphor of the knocking
Christ is three brief paragraphs long: the first introduces the figure of Christ at
the door, the second explains that one opens the door through love, and gives
the citation from Revelation, while the third explains that when Christ knocks
with his hands, that signifies a call to recollect his generosity of sacrifice. When
he knocks with a rod, this signifies Christ’s chastising of the dweller for her
transgressions.\(^70\) This reduces just over two pages in *De doctrina* to under a
page. While the Middle English text adheres tightly to the domestic character
of this metaphor, *De doctrina*’s commentary is much more extensive. The
*Doctrine* translator excises a lengthy discussion of the different functions of
the left and right hands, based on a citation of the hands of the female Wisdom
in Proverbs 3. 16. The omission of this section results in the excising of a
number of scriptural referents, to Wisdom 7. 11, Deuteronomy 32. 15, Psalm
103. 28, and Jeremiah 5. 7.\(^71\) The Middle English text also removes a
commentary on the names that Christ gives to his divine spouse—Sororem,
Amicam, Columbam and Immaculatam— which are taken from the Song of
Solomon 5. 2.\(^72\)

The *Doctrine* translator’s citation of the line from Revelation is
particularly instructive for shaping the reading of this passage. In the brief
Biblical episode to which the translator alludes, Christ announces his arrival
and waits upon the response of the believer:

\(^{70}\) *Doctrine*, p. 65.
\(^{71}\) *De doctrina*, p. 205.
\(^{72}\) *De doctrina*, pp. 206-207.
Behold, I stand at the gate, and knock. If any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.\textsuperscript{73}

While the allusion to the impending arrival of Christ in his Eucharistic state is indeed \textit{implicit} in the allegory of preparatory cleaning in Book I, the translator’s citation of these Biblical lines in this later metaphor places even greater emphasis on the fact that the arrival of the guest-Christ precipitates participation in the Eucharist. The connection between this particular passage and receipt of the Eucharist has been noted by Hamburger, in his analysis of the wall paintings at the German convent of St. Walburg: ‘commentators customarily interpreted the imagery of knocking in Revelation 3. 20 in eucharistic terms: the door at which any man could knock, seeking entrance to the banquet, was identified with the side wound leading into Christ’s heart’.\textsuperscript{74}

To open the door of one’s own heart to Christ is, therefore, to reciprocate the offering of his heart, with the Eucharist envisaged as a mutual encounter between devout and divine. Against the backdrop of the heart-household in Book I, the door in this later allegory very comfortably translates as the entrance to a house. As the reader has already been advised to set up a table, candle and chair for Christ in the earlier allegory, it seems reasonable to imagine that the Eucharist is being positioned, here, as a private meal shared between the devout soul and Christ. This allegory, therefore, offers a hugely interiorised rendering of the Eucharist, and suggests the domestic sphere as an appropriate backdrop for this sacramental encounter. Given that the spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England was decidedly anxious, with the ecclesial establishment keen to assert the importance and authority of the Church, it seems rather risky to suggest that the private domestic sphere is a suitable space in which to receive the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{75} Once again, the lay reader is challenged to draw a strictly metaphorical inference from this passage.

\textsuperscript{73} Revelation 3. 20. The association of Christ with the image of the door appears elsewhere in the Gospels. On two occasions, at John 10. 7 and John 10. 9, Christ declares that he \textit{is} the door, through which the meek will enter and be saved.


\textsuperscript{75} In light of the fact that the \textit{Doctrine} arrived in England in the aftermath of Wycliffite discussions that had questioned the necessity of the physical Church building for successful spiritual practice, and directly criticised the Church for an excessive interest in riches and
In my earlier examination of Book I’s metaphors of household labour, I noted that the *Doctrine* translator’s domestic images afford his reader a considerable degree of agency in determining her engagement with the key tenets of her devotional practice; this is particularly the case once Christ has arrived in the house of the heart, and he need do nothing more than go to sleep. In the metaphor of Christ knocking upon the door, the agency of the individual is once again brought to the fore: before he can enter the believer’s heart, Christ must first receive a positive response from its occupant. While it is indeed the case, as I have previously noted, that the domestic language of both metaphors is intended to offer the readers of the *Doctrine* a firm helping hand in their spiritual direction, the imagined household sphere also invites its readers to take a decisive role in determining their own relationship with Christ.

**The Crucifixion in the Kitchen: Emphasising the Domesticity of the Eucharist**

The *Doctrine* translator’s Biblical metaphor of Christ knocking on the door is not the only occasion on which he explicates the Eucharist by using a domestic template. Having just discussed homely metaphors that punctuate the later books of the *Doctrine*, my analysis of the translator’s domestically inflected Eucharistic allegory necessitates a return to the dominant domesticity of the first book. Once he has instructed his reader in the thorough confessional cleansing of her conscience, the translator moves beyond the living quarters in which Christ will take his refuge and into the busy working environment of the kitchen, where an elaborate feast is being prepared to welcome the

oration, it seems rather uncomfortable to suggest that something as vital as the Eucharist might be enjoyed beyond the parameters of ecclesial space. For an example of Wycliffite writings that challenge the centrality of the physical Church building, see the early fifteenth-century treatise *The Lanterne of Light*, ed. by L. M. Swinburne, EETS O. S. 151 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1917), especially Chapter VII, on the material church. On the Wycliffite questioning of the importance of the Church building, see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (Gloucester: The Hambledon Press, 1984), pp. 150-151; Laura Varnam, *The Church as Sacred Space in Middle English Literature and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 3. The spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis, on Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. 
household’s noble visitor. Perhaps even more so than the third book’s image of the attendant Christ waiting at the door, in which the reciprocal character of the Eucharist is somewhat implicit, the translator’s decision to posit the kitchen as the site of this sacramental preparation places considerable emphasis on the Eucharist as a mutual encounter between Christ and the believer.

The Doctrine’s imaginative foray into the kitchen is reliant upon a set of images that the enclosed nun, the intended reader of this text, might associate with the secular life that she left behind upon entering the cloister. In his engagement with the kitchen imagery in the Doctrine, Gillespie takes note of the significant imaginative power of referring to a set of images from the assumed reader’s past: ‘for anchoresses and nuns that mythic feminized secular and/or courtly household is indeed irrevocably gone, but perhaps exercises a potent hold over their personal imaginary, a grip that needs to be engaged with and imaginatively focused’.

A further salient characteristic of the Doctrine’s kitchen metaphor is its startling merging of the bloody violence of the crucifixion, for this is a rendering of the Eucharist that is acutely aware of its pre-transubstantiation state, as the torn and violated body of Christ, with the familiarity of the domestic sphere. This, too, is noted by Gillespie, who remarks that ‘homely and domestic images often crop up in the most unlikely places in these [devotional] texts, with a shock of unlikeliness as much as of recognition’. It is also important to note, lastly, that the kitchen imagery in the Doctrine diverges considerably from the Latin De doctrina as the translator removes much of the scriptural underpinning that is present in his source text. The consequence of this is that the domestic resonances of the allegory are brought into far sharper relief. Without the textual anchor of scripture, the reader of the Doctrine runs the risk of engaging too deeply with the vivid imagery of the metaphor, and perhaps, therefore, might be inadvertently prompted to yearn for the secular domesticity that she has left behind.

Throughout the *Doctrine's* kitchen passages, the Eucharistic body of Christ is evoked in strikingly meaty terms. This invites the reader to engage in the sensory remembrance of her former secular home, as meat would have played little part in the conventual diet.\(^79\) The meaty nature of Christ’s body is made explicit as soon as the * Doctrine* translator begins his foray into the imagined kitchen: ‘Oure lord Jhesu, that so tendirly and so merciably hath made himself redy to þe for to be etyn in the blessid sacrament of the aughter, axith the same of the that thou make þin hert redy for to be etyn of him’.\(^80\) This is a notable amplification of the fleshliness of the source text, with the * Doctrine* translator’s suggestion that Christ is ‘tender’ reworking the Latin text’s commentary on his divine diligence:

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Attende, quod Christus Dominus tuus, qui seipsum in cibum tibi tam diligenter, tam studiose praeparuit in Sacramento videlicet Altaris (emphasis mine).\(^81\)
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This significant linguistic shift certainly supports Gillespie’s suggestion that the description of Christ as ‘tender’ is the moment at which ‘the fleshiness of Christ begins to permeate the text’,\(^82\) with the Eucharist understood in distinctly corporeal terms, rather than the transubstantiated bread. Indeed, in a further preface to his instructions in how the reader might ready her heart to be consumed by Christ, the translator insists upon describing the Eucharistic meal as flesh and blood:

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'My flessh' [Christ] seith, 'is very gostly mete, and my blode is very gostly drynke'. This is an excellent shewyng of love to mankynde: it passith al his oþir yiftes. Thus shalt þou considere þe excellent benefices of the sacrament of the aughter.\(^83\)
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\(^80\) * Doctrine*, p. 20.

\(^81\) * De doctrina*, pp. 56-57. [‘Note that Christ the Lord is himself the food so attentively and diligently prepared, namely for the Sacrament of the Altar’, (translation mine)].


\(^83\) * Doctrine*, p. 21. * De doctrina*, p. 64. This passage is the Middle English translator’s explication of a quotation from John 6. 56, that appears immediately before it: ‘Caro mea vere est cibus: et sanguis meus, vere est potus’. [‘For my flesh is meat indeed: and my blood is drink indeed’]. The addition of Christ’s voice to give the translation of this quotation is original to the Middle English. In the Latin, the author immediately explains, ‘Et in hoc est expression summae largitatis, & amoris’. [‘This is the highest expression of generosity and love’].
In having Christ himself describe the sacrament in these explicitly fleshly terms, it is almost as though the translator is attempting to invoke divine authorisation for his bold lexical acrobatics. The translator’s qualifying of the ‘meat’ and ‘blood’ as ‘gostly’, or spiritual, reads as something of a half-hearted attempt to remind his reader that, in the absence of the spiritual carapace that overlays these images in the Latin text, this metaphor should not be interpreted in literal terms.

The consideration of Christ’s profound benevolence in sacrificing his body to be the sacrament of the Eucharist ought to lead the reader to prepare her heart to be offered to Christ as food. Much like the description of Christ’s body, the reader’s heart is also described in materially meaty terms. The Doctrine translator begins his guidance for the correct culinary preparation of the heart by invoking the Old Testament story in which Rebecca asks her son, Jacob, to hunt for some meat to feed his father, Isaac. The reader of the text should understand herself as these kids: ‘By thes too kydes, þout shalt undirstonde þe body and the soule of every repentaunt synner’. Before these kids can be eaten, they must first be skinned and flayed:

Take þou þerfor, sister, þeþes too kedes, þi body and thi soule, and make þerof mete, able to be etyn and receyvid of hym, þin hevenly fadre, Jhesu Crist. First, þe nedith for to flee þes too kydes, for þi fadre wil not ete hem with þe skynnes. Thi bodi is wel flayn whan it is dispoylid and made nakid from al maner of temporale goodes. Thi soule is wel flayn whan it is dispoylid and made nakid from here own willes.

Once again, the preparation for reciprocal union with Christ is framed in distinctly literal, fleshly terms, with the devotional lessons frequently at risk of being lost in the vividness of the domestic imagery. The spiritual lesson of this passage appears to be that, if one wishes to be closer to Christ, one ought to turn one’s back upon material goods, and adopt Christ’s will, at the sacrifice of one’s own. It is rather challenging, however, to extrapolate these lofty messages from a text that appears to be so enamoured with the literal

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84 Genesis. 27. 6-9.
85 Doctrine, p. 22. De doctrina, p. 67.
86 Doctrine, p. 22. De doctrina, p. 67.
practices of culinary preparation. Even Christ seems to have been brought into the material reality of the kitchen and, moreover, he has somewhat pernickety tastes in food, which must be accommodated by his gracious host.

Indeed, as Christ cannot eat the kids until they have been skinned, the host must ensure that his meat is properly prepared. In a further entanglement with the literal practicalities of skinning and flaying, the *Doctrine* translator observes that some parts of the kid are harder to flay than others:

Also, þe skynne þat is upon þe hede of a best is more harder to be flayn þan any oþer party of the body [...] By þis hede, þou shalt undirstonde such cloysters þe wiche þenkyn þat thei ben more discrete, more witty, and more kunnyng þan oþer, and þeþor al such naturel witty cloysters ben more lothe to be spoylid and be made nakid from here own willes þan oþer symple cloysters.88

The skin on the kid’s head, the *Doctrine* translator explains, is the most difficult to remove; this ought to be understood in terms of the members of the cloister who are reluctant to cede their own will. Perhaps more so than the earlier portion of the flaying metaphor, in which the translator seems to linger somewhat riskily among the literal resonances of his culinary imagery, these later lines attempt to relate the symbolic meat back to the concerns of its cloistered readers. In aligning the kids whose skin needs to be removed by brute force with the willful nun, the translator evokes a somewhat uncomfortable set of resonances. In her analysis of this passage, Bishop, who also takes note of the simultaneous ‘metaphorical and literal’ character of the kitchen allegory, suggests that the difficult ‘flaying’ of the more obstinate nuns might be read as symbolic of the need to subject them to ‘violent discipline’.89

For the *Doctrine*’s more spiritually ambitious lay readers, this image might precipitate an interest in a more ascetic mode of devotion. Indeed, the image of skin being ripped forcefully from a head is a startlingly brutal one. The *Doctrine* translator’s metaphorical glance backwards, into the life of secular domesticity lived by his now cloistered readers, does not always prompt a liberating imaginative retreat into a previous existence. In this particular

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89 Bishop, ‘Reginald Pecock’s Reading Heart’, p. 146.
image, it grounds the reader firmly within the disciplinary strictures of the convent, and reminds her of the danger of retaining the wilfulness of exterior life. This portion of the text rather works against the Doctrine's earlier metaphors of cleaning and furnishing, which emphasised the importance of the soul's individual agency. In these images, independent will must be violently countered. Rather paradoxically, however, the cloistered reader must retain a sense of hermeneutic agency, as she is required to negotiate the very different resonances of these divergent metaphors.

The flaying metaphor reminds its readers that some nuns will be considerably less willing than others to undertake the necessary sacrifices to proceed towards spiritual union with Christ. In a further invocation of the language of flaying, the Doctrine translator advises his readers to look out for those sisters who seem reluctant to change:

Take he de þat right as an eele is a slyper fissh for to be flayn, right so summe cloysteris ben so slyper in new fyndyng wittes and resones for to excuse him, þat unnethe þei mow be flayn from here own willis.90

Much like the slippery, slithering eel, the wilful nun makes excuses in order to avoid joining her more amenable sisters. Unsavoury as these obstinate attitudes might be, conventual discipline is reliant upon the collective obedience of all of the sisters, which is made clear as the translator develops his kitchen allegory. Once the heart has been successfully flayed, with even the unwilling nun eventually acquiescing, it must then be roasted by the fire of tribulation.91 As the Doctrine translator reminds his reader, the 'cooking' of her heart is an essential component of her cloistral life:

Sister, whan þou entrest first þe cloyster of þi religioun þou puttist þin hert into Godis kychyn, þer for to be rostid in þe fire of tribulacioun. For right as a lordis kychyn shuld not be withoute fire, right so shuld not a cloyster be withoute tribulacioun.92

90 Doctrine, p. 23. De doctrina, p. 68. Curious as it may seem for the translator to lurch from images of flaying kids to flaying eels, the consumption of conger eel in some English nunneries has been noted by Gilchrist, Gender and Material Culture, p. 89.
91 Doctrine, p. 23. De doctrina, p. 69.
92 Doctrine, p. 23. De doctrina, p. 69. The Middle English translation reworks the equivalent Latin passage, which reads: 'Cum enim claustrum intrasti, cor tuum posuisti in coquina Domini, vt igne tribulationis coqueretur. Er sicut coquina non debet esse sine igne, sic claustrum Domini non est sine tribulacione'. ['When you entered the cloister, you put your heart into the kitchen of the Lord, to be cooked by the fire of tribulation. Just as a kitchen cannot be without fire, so can the Lord's cloister not exist without tribulation', (translation
Again, the *Doctrine* translator strays deep into the kitchen of secular domesticity. The fire of tribulation is stoked by the heat that comes from the sacrifice and hardship of the religious life, the rigours of which no devout heart should avoid. In order to ensure that all of the nuns’ hearts are cooked, even those who were so difficult to flay just a few paragraphs earlier, they should be roasted together:

> But because lene hennes shuld not brenne in þe rostyng for defaught of lardin, þei shuld be lardid with þe lardir of ðe ðer. Right so, al such in religioun þat wantyn þe fatnesse of devocioun and charite, þe wiche is þe fatnesse of þe hert, shuld be lardid be þe charitable ensample of other, and so to be made myghty in pacience for to suffer duresse of religioun [...] A lene hen is not want to be rosted with another lene hen, but with a fatte hen.

In now asking his readers to conceive of themselves as hens, the translator adds yet a further image to their already overflowing plates. The fatter hens represent the spiritually robust members of the cloister, while the lean birds are the less devotionally observant sisters. In order to ensure that these spiritually slender hens do not burn when they enter the religious oven, the fat hens should grease them with their abundance of devotion and charity. This is, then, an image intended to evoke the communal responsibility of the cloister to take care of one another’s spiritual progress. With its close attention to the minute details of cooking, however, the *Doctrine* translator’s ‘audacious’ imagery, once again casts a longing backward glance to the secular kitchen.

Having asked his reader to tease out the spiritual meanings of these remarkably detailed culinary metaphors, the *Doctrine* translator helpfully summarises what she ought to have learnt by this point in the text. The flaying, he explains, symbolises the forsaking of worldly goods and one’s own will

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94 The emphasis on communality in this part of the allegory is probably best explained by the *Doctrine*’s Cistercian origins; community was central to the ideology of the Cistercian Order. On the centrality of community in medieval Cistercian life, see Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘The Cistercian Concept of Community: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality’, *The Harvard Theological Review*, 68 (1975), 273-286.
upon entering the cloister.\textsuperscript{97} Roasting should be understood as the suffering that one endures during the religious life,\textsuperscript{98} while the basting with fat represents anointment with charity.\textsuperscript{99} This reminder of the culinary-spiritual transformations that the \textit{Doctrine} reader ought to undergo prefaces an extraordinary reworking of the crucifixion, which sees the events of Calvary drawn into the kitchen:

He [Christ] was flayn whan his cloþis were take from hym and was put naked upon þe crosse. He was rostid upon þe spite of þe crosse be þe Jues, þe wiche were his kokis, in gret tribulacioun. But he was not brennyd because þe þrid wanted not, þe wiche was þe fatnes of charite that flowid oute be þe fyve gret holis of his body.

What was ellis þe blood flowing oute of his woundis, but þe holy anoynement of charite? Good sister, put undir þe panne of thin hert and gadre inow of þis precious oynement, and þan schalt þou lakke no lardir in tyme of tribulacioun.\textsuperscript{100}

It is pertinent to recall that, at the very beginning of his kitchen allegory, the \textit{Doctrine} translator asked his reader to ready herself to be eaten by Christ in reciprocation of his own sacrifice, which saw his body transformed into the Eucharist. This remarkable image amplifies that sense of reciprocity to maximum effect, as the reader is asked to imagine that Christ endured precisely the same processes as her: he, too, was flayed, roasted, and basted with the fat of charity. In his analysis of this metaphor, Gillespie describes its rendering of the crucifixion as ‘unsettling because it presents the familiar Passion narrative in a strange and domestic light, with the crucifixion as a kind of macabre barbecue, whose physicality gets under the familiar defences engendered by long exposure to that brutal story’.\textsuperscript{101} Gillespie’s interpretation suggests that this domestication of the crucifixion is an attempt on the part of the \textit{Doctrine} translator to elicit a strong emotional response from his reader.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Doctrine}, p. 24. \textit{De doctrina}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Doctrine}, p. 24. \textit{De doctrina}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Doctrine}, p. 25. \textit{De doctrina}, p. 70. The bizarre domesticity of this image is even more pronounced in the \textit{Doctrine} as the translator omits the Latin text’s scriptural underpinning of the metaphor. The Middle English translator excises what appears to be a comparison between the Jews’ cooking of Christ and the story of Jesus cooking fish for the disciples in John 21. 9-12, along with a reference to Ecclesiasticus 38. 29. This latter Biblical verse describes the way in which fire destroys the flesh. The Middle English translator also omits \textit{De doctrina’s} explanation of the relationship between the blood of Christ and the fatness of Charity, which follows the Latin metaphor. See \textit{De doctrina}, pp. 75-76.
\textsuperscript{101} Gillespie, ‘Meat, Metaphor and Mysticism’, p. 156.
by refracting this most familiar of stories through a strikingly unexpected lens. As the cloistered nun would be routinely exposed to the story of Christ’s Passion, she might risk becoming too familiar with it, thereby causing it to lose its emotional force. The risk of alluding to such visceral domestic imagery, which might prompt the *Doctrine* reader to yearn for her pre-cloister life, seems to be negated by the need to imbue this most important of stories with a renewed power.

The *Doctrine* translator is by no means alone in describing the body of the crucified Christ in unexpected terms. Numerous medieval religious writers choose to refashion this most familiar of images by using distinctly abstract metaphors. In his meditation on the Passion, for instance, the fourteenth-century hermit Richard Rolle likens the punctured body of Christ to a dovecote:

> Efte, swete Ihesu, þy body is like to a dufhouse, for a dufhouse is ful of holy: so is þy body ful of woundes [...] Now, swet Ihesu, I beseche þe, in euche temptacioun graunt me grace of some hoole of þy woundes, and lykyng to abide in mynd of þy passioun.102

Just a few lines later, Rolle describes Christ’s wounded body as a honeycomb, ‘for hit is in euche a way ful of cellis, and euch celle ful of hony’.103 Christ is reduced, in Rolle’s formulation, to his most fundamental associations: he is wounded, these wounds are a potential space of shelter, and he is sweet. In his analysis of the broader late medieval tendency to reconceptualise the wounded body of Christ through joltingly abstract images, Gillespie remarks that, ‘metaphorical perceptions of Christ […] operate particularly by removing the image of the laden cross from the linear narrative sequence of the historical events and by subjecting it to intense and continual visual and imaginative attention’.104 This reading might indeed be productively applied to the two examples from Rolle. In both instances, the reader’s ‘sight’ of the

103 Richard Rolle: *Prose and Verse*, ed. by Ogilvie-Thompson, p. 74.
salient material details of the crucifixion recedes until these most familiar
details of the crucifixion recedes until these most familiar
objects become invisible; there is no cross, no spear, nor baying crowd ‘visible’
in either metaphor. Instead, the reader is left with the essential corporeal
elements of Christ’s sacrifice- his torn and punctured flesh- and compelled to
refocus her attention on them via their startling appearance in a most
unexpected imaginative context.

Is Gillespie’s reading as applicable, however, to the *Doctrine*
translator’s culinary reworking of the crucifixion? In my view, it is not, as the
metaphor in the *Doctrine* functions in a slightly different way. Unlike the two
abstractions of the divine body that I invoke as a point of comparison, the
*Doctrine*’s kitchen-bound crucifixion does not see the visual anchors of the
Passion narrative fall away in quite the same fashion. The *Doctrine* translator
takes care to ensure that the essential images that his reader likely associates
with the narrative remain within the framework of his domestic metaphor: the
spit upon which Christ is roasted *is* the cross, the translator explicitly states,
while the flaying represents the removal of Christ’s clothes prior to his being
nailed to the cross. Also present in this curious tableau are the Jews as Christ’s
tormentors, who are said to be his cooks;\(^ {105}\) this would pose something of an
interpretive challenge to the *Doctrine* reader, as just a few short pages ago *she*,
as devout believer, was required to become a cook in order to ready her heart
for spiritual union. Arguably the most abstract part of the metaphor comes in
its closing lines, in which the blood that pours from Christ’s five wounds is
reconceived as copious cooking fat, which the reader ought to collect in the
saucepan of her heart so that she is never deficient in charity. Throughout the
*Doctrine*’s domesticated crucifixion, however, the reader is afforded a far more
panoramic view of Christ’s suffering that maintains a ‘visual’ focus upon the
salient characteristics of the dreadful events that take place on Calvary. At no

\(^ {105}\) In suggesting that Jewish people are responsible for Christ’s suffering and death, the
*Doctrine* draws upon one of the most prevalent tropes of a long history of Christian
antisemitism. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible
to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On the representation of Jewish
people in the Middle Ages, see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late
Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the
Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms: 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2007).
point does the translator zoom in upon the minutiae of the Passion and transfer these details to a specific and peculiar setting: no punctured flesh is transformed into a dovecote. By contrast, the cross, the whole of Christ’s naked and defiled body, his abusers and his five wounds all remain within the reader’s imaginative eyeline.

In the *Doctrine*, the rebuilding of the entirety of Calvary within the kitchen might be read as the merging of these two most divergent spaces, which facilitates the imaginative incursion of the violence of the Passion into the reader’s heart. The recollection of Christ’s suffering becomes, therefore, as quotidian as the experience of the household. As well as noting a place for the *Doctrine*’s culinary Passion alongside the broader schema of medieval images of crucifixional abstraction, I would also propose a further interpretive approach. In his discussion of later medieval Passion devotion, Bale notes that ‘medieval people made recreations, simulacra and models of Calvary in order to experience the Passion on their own terms and on their own turf’. One example of this is the Jerusalem Chamber, built at Westminster Abbey towards the end of the fourteenth century.

This room contained paintings and wall hangings that depicted images and Biblical lines that referenced Jerusalem, thereby drawing the Holy Land into the English capital. The *Doctrine*’s kitchen metaphor might be productively read, I would suggest, as a textual version of this devotional fashion, with the space of Calvary rebuilt in the imagined domestic sphere. For the enclosed female religious reader of the *Doctrine*, to encounter an *interiorised* rendering of Calvary might indeed be described as an experience of the Passion on her ‘own terms’. Clearly, the *Doctrine* translator is acutely aware of the centrality of enclosure in the quotidian life of his intended female religious reader, and rebuilds Calvary in his text as a space that is, too, sealed within four walls.

This discussion of the kitchen-bound Calvary brings to a close much of my examination of the domestic imagery in the *Doctrine*, with the focus of the

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108 This serves as further evidence of the elision of spiritual and domestic space in the later Middle Ages. On the overlap of spirituality and domesticity, see my discussion in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 30-33.
following two sections shifting towards the text’s fifteenth-century readers, and thereby the contexts in which the Doctrine was read. As something of a preliminary concluding remark, then, I would like to take note of a particular characteristic of the Doctrine’s domestic imagery, which it is pertinent to observe in both its imagery of cleaning and furnishing and its kitchen-bound rendering of the reciprocal Eucharist. On numerous occasions throughout the preceding analysis, I have variously noted moments at which the Doctrine translator appears to adopt an authoritarian approach, and exert a considerable degree of control over his reader’s spiritual direction, and others at which he seems content to facilitate a much more autonomous role for the believer. The latter approach is arguably particularly apparent in much of the Doctrine’s kitchen imagery, in which the translator relies so heavily upon a set of images taken from the cloistered reader’s former life that she faces the considerable interpretive challenge of teasing out the spiritual lessons from this nostalgic backward glance. In his summary of the function of the domestic imagery in the Doctrine, Renevey suggests that the Doctrine translator’s framing of the imagined household as a space in which an array of physical activities takes place means that ‘the internal memorization of the teaching provided by the author [...] depends upon the recalling of a bodily memory which would be able to identify with the physical efforts those tasks require’. The successful readying of the inner self for spiritual union with Christ is, therefore, rendered reliant upon the persistent recourse to the imagery of tasks performed by the outer shell of the body. As Renevey further notes, ‘consciousness of the self is [...] marked by a recurring recall to images making references to bodiliness’. While the translator might indeed be aptly described as conservative or authoritarian at numerous points throughout the Doctrine, it seems equally accurate to suggest that his domestic imagery is punctuated by intervals of an altogether less rigid approach. In asking his reader to recall the sounds and smells of the kitchen, or the process of properly furnishing a chamber in order to welcome a guest, while simultaneously extracting the spiritual value of these imagined activities, the

Doctrine translator must trust that his reader will not be so distracted by these stirring recollections that she loses sight of her journey towards Christ. The reader of the Doctrine must, therefore, assume a considerable degree of personal responsibility for her spiritual direction, and undertake the challenge of balancing the nostalgia of memory with her yearning for Christ.

**The Doctrine and its Fifteenth-Century English Readers**

Thus far, I have referred only in the most general terms to the Doctrine’s assumed audience of ‘cloistered readers’, without giving any specific information as to where and by whom the text was being read in fifteenth-century England. In the following section, then, I will flesh out my more general remarks by offering an overview of the identities of the Doctrine’s English readers. In common with the majority of the other texts that form my corpus in this thesis, the Doctrine’s readers can be broadly split into two groups: those who encountered the text within the convent or monastery, and those who read it in their own homes. The Doctrine seems to have held a particular relevance for women readers, who will therefore be my primary focus in the discussion to follow.111 For both conventual and lay readers, the household is a particularly conspicuous space. For the conventual reader, the domestic sphere is the one that she has left behind, yet with which she retains a powerful imaginative and emotional connection. In the case of the lay reader, the household is the very space in which she reads her text, with her literal, material surroundings perhaps replicated in the imaginative world of her spiritual reading practice. In both cases, it seems just to suggest that the reader’s connection to the domestic sphere has a significant impact upon her response to the imagined households that appear in the Doctrine.

I will begin by giving some further detail of the conventual readers of the Doctrine in fifteenth-century England. This is not to say, however, that one

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111 This is not to say that the Doctrine’s fifteenth-century readers were exclusively female. As Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron note, marks of ownership in C suggest that this manuscript was owned by the younger brother of William Waynflete, who was consecrated as Bishop of Winchester in 1447. See Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, ‘Introduction’, p. l. For a detailed study of the life of William Waynflete, see Virginia Davis, *William Waynflete: Bishop and Educationalist* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993).
can keep the discussion of conventual and lay readership of texts entirely separate. Of the four extant manuscripts of the *Doctrine*, outlined briefly in the introduction to this chapter, one can be pinpointed to a specific English convent; *T* is locatable to the London convent of St Boltoph without Aldgate, a Franciscan nunnery. On a couple of occasions in this manuscript, the scribe replaces the word ‘mynche’ or ‘sister’ with the specifically Franciscan ‘menoresse’, which implies that this particular version of the text might have been written especially for the nuns at Aldgate. It would appear that one of the defining characteristics of the *Doctrine’s* collective conventual readership in fifteenth-century England is its appearance within a Franciscan setting. Although unfortunately no longer extant, a fifth manuscript of the *Doctrine* is mentioned in the 1481 will of Margaret Purdans, a Norwich widow and prominent member of the Norfolk gentry; this marks the first of a number of appearances for Purdans in this thesis. In her will, Purdans bequeaths her copy of the *Doctrine* to a specific nun at another Franciscan convent, Bruisyard, in Suffolk: ‘And to the Convent of Nuns at Broisyerd, after the decease of the Lady Margaret Yaxley, I give the book called *Le Doctrine of the Herte*.’

Why, then, were late medieval English Franciscans seemingly so interested in the *Doctrine*? One of the central tenets of the Franciscan Order is the renunciation of material goods in favour of a life defined by the imitation of the poverty embraced by Christ and his apostles. This devotion to

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114 This, along with a similar association in the case of the Spanish vernacular version, is noted by Whitehead, ‘Catechesis or Contemplation’, pp. 79-80.


exemplary poverty did not, however, prevent the Franciscans from amassing libraries across Europe.117 As Parkes observes, the first attempts at the University of Oxford to provide a body of books ‘for the purposes of study [...] are to be found in the activities of the Franciscan and Dominican friars’.118 When Franciscans delved into the contents of their libraries, they appear to have had a particular interest in textual renderings of the figure of the crucified Christ, bloodied and traduced by the ordeal of the Passion.119 The *Doctrine*’s imagery of Christ as the gravely wounded visitor, in urgent need of shelter and sustenance, would, therefore, have been especially pertinent to a Franciscan audience. Furthermore, the importance of poverty to the spirituality of these Franciscan readers would have made the domestic metaphor with which I opened this chapter, of the modest furnishing of the household, particularly resonant. The imagined heart-household contains, to briefly summarise my earlier discussion, just four simple pieces of furniture: a bed, a dining table, a seat, and a candlestick. In light of the fact that the Franciscan order is rooted in the valorisation of poverty, the rejection of material goods and the embracing of the mendicant life, the markedly modest furnishing of the spiritual household would hold a particular resonance for these readers.120 The furnishing of the heart-household affirms that, in order to ‘welcome’ Christ, one is required to embrace modesty and scarcity. Though Christ is, of course, the noblest guest of all, he does not wish to be greeted by lavish excess.

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As I return to Margaret Purdans, and to the lay readership of the *Doctrine*, it is considerably harder to extract portions of the text that are particularly pertinent to its lay audience. Rather curiously, during a cultural moment at which English lay readers were becoming increasingly interested in reading religious texts, the *Doctrine* translator appears dismissive to the point of scorn of his potential lay audience. As Whitehead and Renevey remark, the translator is 'exclusively, doggedly, focused upon the routines and special circumstances of cloistered life'. Indeed, in the prologue to the Middle English text, the translator explicitly cites 'secular' life as inferior to the infinitely preferable religious path:

> Myght not wel thees wordes be undirstonde of suche that ben unkunnyng in religioun, the whiche also nowadayes ben moche unstable in theire lyvyng, folowyng rather the ensample of seculer folk than the ensample of sad gostly religious folk? I trow yis.

The *Doctrine* author specifies, here, that his work is for the specific attention of professional religious, who need to be guided away from the pernicious distractions of their lay counterparts. It seems that this bruising swipe against laypeople did not go unfelt by fifteenth-century English readers, as Margaret Purdans is the lone known lay owner of the *Doctrine* in any European vernacular. When one discusses the English 'lay readers' of the *Doctrine*, then, one can only confidently talk of one particular woman. It makes sense, therefore, to give some detail about Purdans' life, before examining how her encounter with the *Doctrine*’s domestic imagery might have been shaped by her quotidian life in one of Norwich’s gentry households.

In her extensive research into Purdans' life in the upper echelons of urban Norfolk society, Erler situates Purdans ‘at the heart of a diverse collection of Norwich friends and acquaintances who together compose what we might call a devout society, one which spans the city’s larger groupings of parish and neighbourhood’. Indeed, it seems that Purdans forged

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121 The lack of relevant passages for lay readers has been noted in Whitehead, 'Catechesis or Contemplation?', p. 78; Whitehead and Renevey, "Open þyn hert as a boke", pp. 143-145.
122 Whitehead and Renevey, "Open þyn hert as a boke", p. 139.
123 *Doctrine*, p. 3.
124 Whitehead, 'Catechesis or Contemplation?', p. 78.
connections between a vast span of significant figures, from enclosed religious to clergy, academics and numerous other women, both religious and lay.\textsuperscript{126} As the wife of a man who was twice Norwich’s mayor, Purdans herself was a member of Norwich’s governing class.\textsuperscript{127} If one is to assume that Purdans died in 1481, the year that her will is dated, she spent a large portion of this life at the top of the social pyramid as a widow: her husband, Richard, had died in 1436, shortly after the end of his second tenure as Norwich’s mayor.\textsuperscript{128} Following her husband’s death, Purdans remained at the centre of her ‘devout society’, preferring to maintain her role within Norwich’s secular circles rather than withdraw to the enclosure of a convent. Though Purdans chose to live her widowhood in urban Norwich, she maintained connections with more than one English nunnery. As Purdans’ will specifies that her \textit{Doctrine} codex should pass into the collective possession of the Bruisyard nunnery following Margaret Yaxley’s death, it is reasonable to assume that Purdans had already lent her copy of the \textit{Doctrine} to this particular sister.\textsuperscript{129} Purdans’ lending her book to Yaxley serves as useful evidence of a fifteenth-century culture characterised by distinctly porous borders between the literary interests of nuns and laywomen.\textsuperscript{130} Yaxley was the sister of Purdans’ daughter Alice’s second husband, Richard, and might therefore be considered a somewhat distant member of her family.\textsuperscript{131} That Purdans should give her copy of the \textit{Doctrine} to a woman that she knew and was, presumably, rather fond of suggests that she felt \textit{more} than just general admiration for the religious culture of Bruisyard. As Whitehead and Renevey remark, Purdans’ bequest might be seen ‘not only as a significant transaction between a lay woman and a local religious house with which she had spiritual links, but \textit{simultaneously} as a translation from lay to religious ownership determined by familial and

\textsuperscript{126} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{127} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{128} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{129} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{130} On the often identical reading choices of nuns and laywomen, see Felicity Riddy, ‘”Women Talking About the Things of God”: A Late Medieval Subculture’, in \textit{Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500}, ed. by Carole M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 104-127.
\textsuperscript{131} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 76.
genealogical ties’ (authors’ emphasis).\textsuperscript{132} Evidently, Purdans’ bequest of the 
\textit{Doctrine} is indicative of a reading culture sustained by the bonds of female 
kinship.

The \textit{Doctrine} is just one of three religious books that Purdans leaves to 
her fellow women readers, both nuns and lay. To the Benedictine nuns at 
Thetford, Norfolk, Purdans leaves her ‘English book of St Bridget’,\textsuperscript{133} 
presumably the English translation of Bridget of Sweden’s vast collection of 
visions, a text that I will analyse in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis. She 
also leaves ‘a book called Hylton’ to her secular contemporary, Alice Barley,\textsuperscript{134} 
which Whitehead and Renevey suggest is ‘very possibly the double text of 
Walter Hilton’s \textit{Scale of Perfection} and \textit{On the Mixed Life} that circulated in 
tandem in the late fifteenth century’.\textsuperscript{135} In her discussion of Purdans’ will, 
Erler remarks that its ‘focus […] on the needs of women seems a conscious 
one’.\textsuperscript{136} Indeed, Purdans’ book bequests are evidence of a particular concern 
for the spiritual education of women both within and beyond conventual 
walls. Given that different books were left to different institutions and 
individuals, it seems reasonable to suggest that Purdans might have 
considered carefully which texts would be most appropriate for each reader 
and their reading environment. This impulse to make provisions for women is 
 further evident in Purdans’ non-literary bequests, which include numerous 
 household items. To each of her servants, Purdans leaves ‘a pair of blankets, a 
 pair of sheets, a bedcover, and a flat basin’.\textsuperscript{137}

Alongside her concern for the spiritual development of her fellow 
women readers, Purdans clearly also felt considerable affection for the 
members of her household. Of course, it was within this environment of 
blankets, bedcovers and basins that Purdans undertook her reading of the 
\textit{Doctrine}, so it seems pertinent to ask at this point: how might Purdans’ 
response to this most obsessively monastic text have been shaped by her 
reading environment of the secular gentry household? As I have already

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Whitehead and Renevey, “‘Open þin hert as a boke’”, p. 143.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, ‘Introduction’, p. lv.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Whitehead, Renevey and Mouron, ‘Introduction’, p. lv.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Whitehead and Renevey, “‘Open þin hert as a boke’”, p. 142.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 77.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Erler, \textit{Women, Reading, and Piety}, p. 77.
\end{itemize}
suggested, the *Doctrine* translator’s insistence upon the superiority of the enclosed religious life would, as Whitehead and Renevey suggest, require her to ‘select carefully from those passages in the *Doctrine* that carry a potentially broader moral application’. Of all of the many images in the *Doctrine*, it is likely that the translator’s extensive domestic metaphors in the first book of the text would have had the most significant resonances with Purdans’ quotidian life. One might reasonably imagine, for example, that Purdans would recognise the visual referents of the *Doctrine*’s busy kitchen in her own domestic experience of mealtimes and culinary preparation. Of course, Purdans’ reading of the *Doctrine* takes place during a cultural moment at which the role of the domestic sphere within lay devotion is considerably amplified. This valorisation of the home as an appropriate space in which to undertake religious worship has been discussed by Whitehead, who suggests that:

> The production of books of hours for home use, the creation of private chapels within manors, the blending of coats of arms with emblems of religious piety in household decoration- all these innovations testify to the wish to encounter Christ at home, and to read the domestic community as a worshipping community in its own right.

This celebration of the value of homebound spiritual encounter is indicative of a desire to render the household as the salient space of identificatory devotion, with both Christ and the reader situated in this most familiar of environments. For Purdans, however, I would not suggest that *all* of the domestic imagery fulfils this role of comfortable identification. It is pertinent to recall, here, the initial domestic allegory of the *Doctrine*, of the cleaning and modest furnishing of the heart-household. Although Purdans was not vastly wealthy, she was certainly financially comfortable; this is attested in her will.

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140 Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 126.
by her numerous bequests. That Purdans was able to leave each of her servants a set of material domestic objects suggests that her household was not, by any means, as sparsely furnished as the imagined domestic sphere in this first book of the *Doctrine*: she had clearly engaged with the burgeoning mercantile economy. As stated above, this metaphor would have had rather literal resonances for the *Doctrine*’s Franciscan readers: the modest preparation of the imagined space of the heart neatly reflects the literal practice of material poverty in their quotidian lives. Purdans, by contrast, is required to navigate something of a mismatch between the *Doctrine*’s domesticity and her own experience. When this image is encountered by a materially comfortable lay reader such as Purdans, I would suggest, it asks her to embrace what Rice describes as ‘spiritual poverty’, a notion that will be pertinent on multiple occasions throughout this thesis. In her discussion of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a fourteenth-century religious text for laywomen in which the heart is allegorised as an abbey, Rice examines a metaphor in which the figure of ‘Poverty’ evicts worldly thoughts and goods from the heart. This echo of Christ removing the moneylenders from the temple, according to Rice, ‘attempts to ensure that the purifying foundation of the interior abbey will be compatible with a worldly life of commercial activity and modest acquisition’. This analysis is also pertinent to Purdans’ reading of the *Doctrine*’s metaphor of sparse furnishing. By embracing the spiritual poverty of a cleansed and uncluttered heart, Purdans gives herself a strong devotional foundation from which to reject any excessive engagement with the commercial world, and she is therefore able to enjoy some of the benefits of the emergent mercantile sphere. Texts such as the *Doctrine*, therefore, assist their readers in forging a paradoxical elision of spiritual poverty and material prosperity. Financially comfortable readers such as Purdans would be challenged to extract only the allegorical resonances of the texts’ allusions to domestic modesty; this is similar to the hermeneutic task of the *Doctrine*’s

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conventual readers, when faced with the vividness of the kitchen imagery. In Purdans’ case, then, the modest heart-household serves a far greater role as an imaginative space, rather than as an immediately recognisable identificatory one.

The Doctrine as Divine Dialogue: La dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Crist

The analysis in the preceding section demonstrates that, for women readers in fifteenth-century England, the domestic imagery in the Doctrine might be aptly read as the locus of response, recognition and hermeneutic challenge. In order to further investigate the particular pertinence of the text’s household images to women readers, the following section will look beyond the English text and, in fact, beyond the Doctrine itself. The text that I will examine in this section is La dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Crist, which is extant in London, British Library, MS Additional 7970.145 The Dyalogue is a relatively short text in French, spanning just nineteen folios, written at the request of Margaret of York, duchess of Burgundy, by her almoner, Nicolas Finet, around 1468. My foray into the reading practice of the highest echelons of the Burgundian court is justified by the fact that the Dyalogue appears to have been written with considerable knowledge of De doctrina, with especial attention paid to its domestic images.146 Indeed, the brief Dyalogue extracts De doctrina’s household metaphors, in which the woman is asked to ready the house of her heart in order to receive the visitor-Christ, and reframes them as a conversation between Margaret and Christ. This excises the authoritarian voice of the De doctrina’s writer, which has the effect of reworking the didactic steps to spiritual union as commands drawn directly from the mouth of the divine. It is worth noting that Margaret was the daughter of Cecily Neville,
duchess of York, a famously keen reader of devotional literature whose literary tastes will be a point of discussion at several moments in this thesis. I would tentatively suggest, therefore, that Margaret’s own tastes in religious reading might have been influenced by those of her mother, and thereby by the broader currents in the spirituality of the aristocracy in fifteenth-century England.¹⁴⁷

Margaret was born into the illustrious York dynasty in 1446, the sixth child of the Duke and Duchess of York and the sister of two English kings, Edward IV and Richard III. In 1468, negotiations for Margaret’s marriage to Charles, Duke of Burgundy were successfully completed, and she became his third wife and stepmother to his daughter, Mary.¹⁴⁸ As her husband was continually engaged in successive military campaigns and diplomatic affairs, much of Margaret’s married life was spent alone.¹⁴⁹ In 1477, after a string of largely unsuccessful military ventures, Charles died in battle at Nancy, and Margaret was faced with the daunting task of maintaining a semblance of order in an increasingly fractured Burgundy.¹⁵⁰ The character of Margaret’s married life, and the subsequent significant demands upon her during her widowhood, seems to have shaped her approach to books and reading. The majority of Margaret’s books, almost all of which are religious, were commissioned and acquired during her marriage, with very few texts entering her library following her husband’s death.¹⁵¹ It would appear, then, that much of Margaret’s devotional reading was undertaken during her extended periods of solitude in the Burgundian court. During her widowhood, her focus seems to have shifted from spiritual reading to a more outward engagement with religious practice; Weightman summarises her involvement with ‘the reform

¹⁴⁸ A full and detailed account of the complex negotiations for Margaret’s marriage is given in Christine B. Weightman, Margaret of York: Duchess of Burgundy 1446-1503 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), pp. 30-60.
¹⁵⁰ Weightman, Margaret of York, pp. 102-104.
of the church, founding and refounding convents, building churches and monasteries and giving generously to the church'.

Despite the apparent waning of her interest in books in the wake of her husband’s death, Margaret built a relatively extensive library of twenty-four volumes during the solitary years of her marriage. All of these books contain texts in French; there are no English or Latin texts in Margaret’s collection. Arguably most relevant to the present discussion is the fact that the vast majority of Margaret’s books are religious. Perhaps the most famous of Margaret’s texts is *Les visions du chevalier Tondal*, a lavishly illustrated manuscript which relates the story of an impious knight who is compelled to live a more devout life following a salutary journey through heaven and hell. Some of Margaret’s texts were mystical, with one of Margaret’s manuscripts containing Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation de Jesus Christ*. Alongside these texts, Margaret also owned works by Jean Gerson, Bonaventure, Boethius, Rutebeuf, Saint John Chrysostom, and Frère Laurent, whose popular *Somme le Roi* appears in one of her codices. She also had a life of St Colette of Corbie, in whom she was particularly interested. Margaret’s quotidian devotion was supplemented by two books of hours, one breviary and a gradual. Conspicuous by their absence are copies of *De doctrina* and the French *Doctrine*: it seems that Margaret’s sole interaction with the source text comes via Finet’s adaptation of its domestic imagery.

There is a further significant absence from Margaret’s library. In spite of their burgeoning popularity across fifteenth-century Europe, the bookshelves of the Duchess of Burgundy contain no works by female visionaries. This alone is not, of course, particularly noteworthy. As Cockshaw

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remarks, in a rather pejorative tone, Margaret ‘did not wish to be an intellectual [...] nor was she curious about culture; instead, she simply wished to be devout- with simplicity, with faith, and with devotion’. The content of the Dyalogue, however, suggests that Cockshaw’s characterisation of Margaret’s reading practice is too simplistic. Far from indicating that Margaret was happy to engage solely in the most basic exploration of her faith, the Dyalogue suggests a reader who wished to cast herself as a visionary woman. Indeed, the Dyalogue mimics the conversations between the female visionary and the divine that appear throughout the revelations of Bridget of Sweden and Mechtilde of Hackeborn, which will be the subject of discussion in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis. It is important to remember, here, that Margaret commissioned the Dyalogue specifically for herself, and therefore to her precise spiritual requirements. In cutting out the guidance text author and placing his words into the mouth of Christ, Finet facilitates Margaret’s refashioning of herself as a woman who receives her religious instruction directly from the divine. For Margaret, the instruction to make Christ at home within the self is considerably more intimate, as the commands are issued by the divine visitor himself.

Indeed, Margaret’s desire to imagine herself as a visionary woman is apparent before one even begins to engage with the text of the Dyalogue. The first folio of MS Additional 7970 contains an illumination in which Margaret kneels in prayer as the wounded Christ appears before her (see Appendix, Figure 3). The domestic backdrop of this illumination is unmistakeable: Margaret appears to be in her chamber; a rather lavish curtained bed looms behind her as she kneels in supplication. Of all of the spiritual furniture that Christ asks Margaret to put within the chamber of her heart, it is the bed that carries the strongest evidence of Finet’s visionary reworking of the domestic allegory. Having first invoked the Biblical parallel of the old woman preparing to host the prophet Elijah, to which I have already referred in my discussion

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158 London, British Library, MS Additional 7079, f. 1v.
159 MS Additional 7079, ff. 11v-12v.
of the Middle English text, Finet begins to describe the bed that must be readied within the chamber of the heart:

Et en après en ceste chambre espirituelle tu m'y metteras ung lit, c'est a entendre nette conscience en laquelle je reposeray avec toy, duquel lit l'espouse chante es Cantiques: 'nostre lit est flourisant'. Ma fille, tu me appointes et prepare ce dit lit quant de tout ce que tu as remors de conscience, tantost tu le amendes et purges par contricion, confession et satisfaction. Et est cestuy lit espirituel repos de dilection en moy, lequel nulle hayne, ire, impacience, ne nulls passions, ne multitude de impetueuse temptacion porra soullier, marchier, ne fouler.

Finet's reworking of the description of the bed is noteworthy because it mutes the 'guidance text' aspects of the source considerably, preferring instead to amplify its more visionary, contemplative potential. While Finet does outline the necessity of undertaking the complementary steps of contrition, confession and satisfaction, this penitential practice is not afforded its own set of metaphors; Finet does not retain the allegorical framework of sweeping and washing. Rather, the component parts of penitence are yoked to the bed itself, which, here, is the verdant bed of the Canticles and the *Song of Songs*, symbolising a clean conscience. This brings the *Dyalogue* into the lofty spiritual company of Bernard of Clairvaux who, in one of his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, suggests that this bed needs to be adorned with 'the flowers of good works [...] and praiseworthy desires, [and] with the perfumes of the virtues'. In highlighting the Bernardine potential of the bed, Finet facilitates Margaret's spiritual ambition.

Finet's contemplative refashioning of the bed is made all the more apparent as he develops his metaphor, with spiritual fervour allegorised as erotic love:

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160 Song of Solomon 1. 15.  
161 MS Additional 7079, ff. 13r-14r. ['And then you will place into this spiritual chamber a bed for me, which is to say a clean conscience, in which I will rest with you. The spouse sings of this bed in the Canticles: 'our bed is flourishing'. My daughter, you prepare this bed for me as soon as you amend and purify all that for which you have remorse in your conscience through contrition, confession and satisfaction. And this bed is a spiritual repose for delight of me, that no hatred, anger, impatience, nor passions, nor multiple impetuous temptations can soil, stain, or foul', translation mine].  
162 On the associations of the bed, primarily drawn from twelfth-century Cistercian convention, see Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind*, p. 138.  
Once again, Finet appears to draw upon a recognisably Bernardine conception of spiritual union. The cleansed conscience is not exclusively the penitential house of the heart, but also the embracing arms of ecstasy, in which Christ is enveloped as he lies in bed with the spouse. In the first book of the *Doctrine*, the imagery of domestic cleaning and modest furnishing gestures towards a mode of spirituality defined by careful moderation. This does not, by any means, appear to be Finet’s focus in the *Dyalogue*: the bed represents ‘fervent desire’, which ought to lead Margaret to contemplate the miracles of the divine and the Passion. Such an emphasis on ecstasy and spiritual ardour is further evidence that Margaret might have used the *Dyalogue* as a means of embodying a more visionary model of spirituality and, therefore, of fashioning herself into the contemplative woman who appears in the manuscript’s opening illumination. Finet’s text is, in my view, a rewriting of the first book of the *Doctrine* in the light of the works of such visionary women as Bridget of Sweden and Mechtild of Hackeborn. In my introduction to this chapter, I stated that one of the primary justifications for including the *Doctrine* in this thesis was to introduce some of the homiletic images that, in the later parts of my discussion, I will show to be transformed in the works of women visionaries. The *Dyalogue* offers something of a precursor to this later analysis, as it reveals the way in which a male writer takes the imagery of a guidance text and teases out its contemplative potential in order to accommodate the tastes of an ambitious female reader.

164 MS Additional 7079, ff. 14v-15r. ['And in this bed the devout soul kisses me and grips me in its arms with most clean chastity and true charity, which is to say with a fervent desire that she has for me, God, and for her salvation, and that of her neighbour. And again this bed is the contemplation of divine things, when the person thinks carefully day and night about God’s law, about the marvels, miracles and mysteries of the Passion and the charity of the Son of God, his promises and his kindness', (translation mine)].
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the language and imagery of domestic space was, in the fifteenth century, a salient framework through which the *Doctrine's* readers might understand their spiritual practice. For the *Doctrine's* lay readers, this homely vocabulary facilitates the ordering of the interior self by reflecting the literal private domestic sphere in which their reading is conducted. In the case of the text’s monastic readers, this reflection of physical circumstances is often less immediate, with the religious compelled to think back to a time prior to her enclosure, when she, too, inhabited a non-convivial household. Neither set of readers, though, finds their engagement with the *Doctrine's* domestic vocabulary to be invariably comfortable. At various moments, both lay and conventual readers are challenged to extract lessons from the text on a solely metaphorical level. For the lay reader, this comes when she is instructed to imagine sharing the Eucharist with Christ in the private household of her heart, rather than within the control of ecclesial space. The conventual reader, meanwhile, must read the *Doctrine's* vivid kitchen imagery, with its deep engagement with the vocabulary of flesh and culinary process, and retain a focus on her modest monastic diet. Indeed, while domestic imagery might seem, prima facie, to be a rather pedestrian visual referent, grounded as it is in the material and the literal, the hermeneutic shifts that the *Doctrine's* readers are required to carry out suggest that these images are not, in fact, quite so straightforward.

Furthermore, as my discussion of Margaret of York's *Dyalogue* indicates, domestic vocabulary offers a path to a particularly ambitious engagement with one’s spirituality, in which the wealthy laywoman is redrawn as a female visionary. As well as being the site of cooking and cleaning, the household is also the space in which one receives messages directly from God. Indeed, the two visionary women who are the subject of my discussion in the two chapters to follow, Mechtild of Hackeborn and Bridget of Sweden, certainly regard domestic images as central to their visionary vocabulary. As well as a conception of household imagery as compatible with the expression of visionary ideas and ambitions, Mechtild of Hackeborn, whose text I will
discuss in Chapter Two, shares the Doctrine's propensity for allegorising the heart as a house. This is indicative of the appeal, across both convent and lay household, of conceptualising the self in terms of the domestic sphere.
Chapter Two: The Domesticity of the Sacred Heart in Mechtild of Hackeborn’s Booke of Gostlye Grace

In his preface to the *Speculum devotorum*, a fifteenth-century Middle English Life of Christ written for a nun at Syon Abbey, the text’s author furnishes his reader with a summary of the sources that have shaped the work. The foundation of this text is the Gospel, along with the ‘doctorys’ who expound it, including Nicholas of Lyre, the Franciscan Biblical exegete.¹ Woven into a narrative fabric that is underpinned by these learned men are ‘summe reuelacyonys of approuyd wymmen’,² which refers to a selection of excerpts from the visionary writings of Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Elizabeth of Tōss, and Mechtild of Hackeborn.³ The *Speculum* author’s assertion of these revelatory women’s suitability for inclusion in a text intended for a female religious readership is of interest to my discussion because this thesis examines the writings of two of them, Bridget and Mechtild. Evidently, what binds all four women together in the eyes of the *Speculum* author is their orthodoxy; what they have in common is the fact that they are ‘approved’. The chapters in this thesis that deal with the works of Bridget and Mechtild demonstrate, however, that the writings of these orthodox visionary women are characterised by a wholly divergent approach to a shared imagery, that of domesticity. As my examination of Bridget’s *Liber Celestis* will show, her recourse to the language of the household sphere facilitates the expression of a markedly apocalyptic set of visions, in which humanity teeters on the precipice of an unfavourable judgment from a wronged God. Furthermore, Bridget’s domestic imaginary routinely reflects her own experiences as wife, mother, and manager of a large aristocratic estate. When Mechtild draws upon domestic vocabulary in her *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, the Middle English text that

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² *A Mirror to Devout People*, ed. by Patterson, p. 6.
will be my focus in this chapter, she alludes to an altogether different set of
significations and devotional concerns, many of which are defined by her
experience of conventual community and her joyous relationship with Christ.
As an initial thought for this discussion, it is worth noting that the different
ways in which Bridget and Mechtild make use of the vocabulary of domesticity
is indicative of the variability and vibrancy of orthodox devotional writing.

I will initially give some salient details of Mechtild’s biography,
including the convent of Helfta, the space in which she received her visions,
and I will also give a sense of the tone and content of her text. Mechtild of
Hackeborn was born around 1241, into a family of prosperous Thüringian
nobles. Only a very small portion of Mechtild’s childhood was spent within
these high echelons of the German aristocratic household, as she entered the
convent of Helfta at the age of seven, in 1248. Given that Mechtild’s family
had assisted with the endowment of the convent, it is perhaps unsurprising
that her life of religious enclosure began at such a young age. This familial
connection went beyond financial support. Mechtild’s family home was
situated in close proximity to the convent, which was then located at
Rodardsdorf. Arguably the most significant factor in precipitating Mechtild’s
entry into the convent was the fact that her older sister, Gertrude, was already
a nun there. One day, when she paid a visit to Helfta with her mother, Mechtild
was apparently overcome by a desire to remain at the convent. As Finnegan
recounts, the young Mechtild went to each sister in turn, pleading to be
allowed to stay, until her dismayed mother ‘finally yielded and went home
without her’. As a member of the conventual community, Mechtild was
assigned a number of duties, which included adopting the role of ‘assistant to
her sister, the abbess, in administering the affairs of the monastery although
her special duties were to direct the choir, train young novices, and teach in

4 Rosalynn Voaden, ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, in Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition
431-452 (p. 432).
5 Voaden, ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, p. 432.
6 Mary Jeremy Finnegan, The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics (Athens: University of
the convent school’. The convent also furnished Mechtild with a rich spiritual education.

What was to become the Helfta convent was first founded at Mansfeld in 1229, ‘by Count Burchard of Mansfeld and his wife Elizabeth for a small group of nuns from Halberstadt who intended to practice the Cistercian rule’. Helfta was not, however, formally brought into the Cistercian Order, though Cistercian spirituality was arguably its most significant influence in these early years. The fact that Helfta was not 'officially' a Cistercian institution meant that the Order’s mode of spirituality was not the nuns’ only influence, and Benedictine practice also shaped their devotion. In search of 'a more secluded environment', the convent was relocated to Rodardsdorf in 1234, and it was at this place that Gertrude, Mechtild's older sister, began her life as an enclosed nun. At the age of nineteen, in 1251, Gertrude was elected abbess, and in 1258 she chose to relocate the convent to Helfta, 'where larger quarters had been donated by her two brothers'. This second move brought the nuns under a Dominican spiritual influence, as it brought the Helfta nuns within close proximity of the Dominican convents of Halle and Magdeburg. Under Gertrude's guidance, Helfta developed a reputation as a religious community for whom learning was a salient component of its spirituality.

Indeed, any attempt to define the character of religious devotion at Helfta must foremost take note of the great emphasis that was placed upon the education of the sisters. The reasons behind this focus upon the value of learning are multifold. As Barratt and Stoudt point out, Helfta was situated at the heart of the territories of Thüringen, 'an area alive with cultural and

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10 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 175.
12 Halligan, 'Introduction', p. 33.
13 Finnegan, The Women of Helfta, p. 6. Bynum also notes that 'by the late thirteenth century [Helfta's] confessors were Dominicans'. Jesus as Mother, p. 175. Halligan also remarks upon the spread of Dominican influence in late thirteenth century Germany by noting that their institutions 'sprang up everywhere'. 'Introduction', p. 34.
religious activity in the thirteenth century [...] it is not surprising that Helfta, tucked in among these flourishing artistic centres, should become a focal point for women eager for education, learning, and sanctity'. Alongside its location in a nexus of cultural and spiritual dynamism, Helfta’s roots in the German aristocracy ‘facilitated the availability of core secular and religious writings’, while also offering multiple links with prominent noble families. As Bynum suggests, ‘the nuns were probably recruited primarily from wealthy noble families; a number were learned’. Of course, this meant that many of the women who came to take up their vocation at Helfta arrived with experience of a luxurious mode of domesticity. Somewhat unusually for women religious, the Helfta nuns were not excluded from learning Latin. It is not surprising, therefore, that this remarkably encouraging environment nourished Mechthild’s devotion, as well as that of two further celebrated women visionaries, Gertrude the Great, and later Mechthild of Magdeburg, who entered the convent following a life spent as a Beguine.

While the cultural and religious sensibilities of Helfta’s surrounding areas did indeed foster its love of learning, the inner life of the convent was also touched by rather more disquieting events beyond its walls. Life in thirteenth-century Germany was repeatedly interrupted by conflict. A

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14 Barratt and Stoudt ‘Gertrude the Great’, p. 454. Barratt and Stoudt also usefully summarise these sources of cultural and spiritual influence: ‘At the beginning of the century Landgrave Herman I had been a prominent patron of the Minnesänger, who performed their courtly love poetry in contests at his court in the Wartburg Castle. Great houses of worship were constructed; the Gothic sculptures of both Magdeburg and Naumburg Cathedrals date from the mid-century’. ‘Gertrude the Great’, p. 454.


16 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 175. Finnegan makes a similar point, while also noting that Gertrude herself might have drawn some recruits to Helfta: ‘the character and personality of the abbess inspired so much confidence that many of the distinguished families of the region sent their daughters to [Gertrude] to be educated’. The Women of Helfta, p. 11.


particularly notable period of unrest came with the Interregnum of 1256-73, during which the country had no emperor. Helfta was a ‘large and prosperous house’, and it was therefore vulnerable ‘to pillage by the turbulent nobility and pressure [...] from powerful local ecclesiastical bodies’. Indeed, officials at neighbouring churches were responsible for one of the most notable events of this period of turbulence. In 1295, the clergy at Halberstadt, which was part of the same bishopric as Helfta, ‘demanded money from the Helfta community; [...] when the nuns refused to pay, they were placed under an interdict’. This suspension from some of the salient activities of devotional life, including the receipt of the Sacraments, had a profound effect upon the community, and resulted in one of Mechtild’s most remarkable visions. Distressed by her exclusion from receiving Communion, Mechtild experiences a revelation in which she and her sisters take the body and blood of Christ directly from him, without the need for a priest as intermediary:

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Anone alle the congregacion come furth to þat table ande eche of þame knelede vndere þe aarme of oure ladye to receyue Goddyes body of oure lorde hande. Ande owre ladye helde a chaleys of golde with a pype or a qwele of golde ande helde hitt to owre lordes syde, þorowe whiche pype alle þaye sowkede þat holye lycoyre fulle of swetnesse whiche come oute fro the breste of oure lorde.
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This is a remarkably bold vision, in which the absence of clergy is seen as no barrier to the receipt of the Eucharist; if the woman visionary has direct access to Christ and his mother, clerics are rendered superfluous.

In common with the broader currents of thirteenth-century devotion, one of the most important aspects of religious practice at Helfta was the veneration of the Sacred Heart. It pertinent to note, here, that while the texts

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19 Barratt and Stoudt, ‘Gertrude the Great’, p. 455.
20 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 175.
21 Barratt and Stoudt, ‘Gertrude the Great’, p. 455.
22 The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn, ed. by Theresa A. Halligan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), pp. 254-255. All references to this text will hereafter be cited as Booke. All references to the Latin text are taken from the lone edition of Mechtild’s original text, Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae: Sanctae Mechtildis virginis ordinis Sancti Benedicti Liber specialis gratiae; acquirit sororis Mechtildis ejusdem ordinis Lux divinitatis, ed. by Dom. Paquelin and the monks of Solesmes (Paris: Oudin Fratres, 1875-1877), II (1877). All quotations from this text will hereafter be cited as Liber SG. The parallel Latin quotation for the Middle English cited above is at pp. 96-97.
23 For a detailed account of the significance of the Sacred Heart at Helfta, see Finnegan, The Women of Helfta, pp. 131-143. On the cult of the Sacred Heart more broadly, see Jean Leclerq
belong to different genres, there are multiple similarities between the *Doctrine* and Mechtild’s text. The works were composed within a few decades of one another, in the mid-late thirteenth century, in a Cistercian milieu, and both exhibit a particular interest in siting the heart of the believer in symbiosis with the Sacred Heart. Both, moreover, routinely imagine the Sacred Heart as a household, which is indicative of an especial interest in this cardio-domestic imagery among Cistercian-inflected circles in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Interest in the Sacred Heart arose from the huge popularity of devotion to the wound in Christ’s side, in which the believer could seek refuge and residence with the divine.

Also essential to the devotional outlook at Helfta was a profound focus on the importance of the convent as a community; the Helfta nuns were collectively responsible for recording Mechtild’s visions.24 They were written down around 1291 under the title of the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*, which had been suggested by Christ.25 The text is thought to have been primarily compiled by Gertrude the Great, herself, of course, a prominent Helfta mystic.26 She was assisted in her endeavour by another nun, whose identity has not been determined. The scholarly consensus is that Gertrude and her assistant wrote the text in Latin, which offers further evidence that the nuns at Helfta were highly educated.27 The text is divided into seven books, with each


24 On the *Liber SG* as the product of a collective endeavour on the part of multiple members at Helfta, see Margarete Hubrath, 'The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective Work of Several Nuns', *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein-Gesellschaft*, 11 (1999), 233-244; Anna Harrison, ‘“Oh! What Treasure is in this Book?” Writing, Reading, and Community at the Monastery of Helfta’, *Viator*, 39 (2008), 75-106.

25 This account of the recording of Mechtild’s text is based on information given by Halligan, 'Introduction’, p. 37.

26 The role of Gertrude the Great (also known as Gertrude of Helfta, and not to be confused with Abbess Gertrude, Mechtild’s sister) as chief compiler is supported by Barratt and Stoudt, ‘Gertrude the Great’, p. 453; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 178; Halligan, 'Introduction’, p. 37.

27 Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 178. One dissenting voice from the suggestion that the *Liber SG* was written in Latin is that of Voaden, as she suggests that the claim ‘seems to be based solely on Dom Paquelin’s [editor of the Latin text] interpretation of one vision’, before going on to point out that ‘there are German words scattered throughout the text’, perhaps suggesting that not every single one of Mechtild’s visions was received or recorded in Latin. See ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, p. 443.
book adopting a different thematic focus. These topical divisions can be broadly categorised as follows: Book I is concerned with the liturgy, and its visions are yoked to particular moments in the ecclesiastical year. Books II, III and IV pay close attention to the religious life, often with a great focus on the community, while Books V, VI and VII deal with the remembrance of the dead, with Mechtild’s own death recorded in Book VII. Only one manuscript of the complete seven-book text is extant today. This version was copied by Albert, Vicar of St Paul in Erfurt, in 1370, and is held to be an accurate version of its thirteenth-century source ‘because of its antiquity, comprehensiveness, and claim of fidelity to the account then preserved at Helfta’.

The fact that only one manuscript of the complete Latin text survives by no means reflects the enormous popularity of Mechtild’s visionary writings throughout continental Europe. Many abridged versions of her text are extant: there are 103 surviving copies of her Latin Liber SG, which omits some portions of the complete text, and a further 195 manuscripts of her text in various European vernaculars. Mechtild’s Middle English text, The Booke of Gostlye Grace, survives in two fifteenth-century manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 220, and London, British Library, MS Egerton 2006. In common with the large number of surviving vernacular versions of the Liber SG, the Booke is an abridgment of the Latin text, containing only Books I-V. To date, no definitive attempt has been made to determine the exact source of the Middle English translation. In the introduction to her 1979 edition of the Booke, Halligan gives brief descriptions of four Latin manuscripts, as well as one early printed copy, all of which were extant in England at the time of her

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28 For a detailed diagram of the content of each of the Liber SG’s seven books, see Hubrath, ‘The Liber specialis gratiae’, p. 237.
29 This is Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, codex 1003. This is the manuscript upon which the Dom Paquelin edition, cited above, is based.
32 Voaden, ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, p. 442. Voaden also usefully summarises the vernaculars into which Mechtild’s Liber SG was translated, citing Middle High German, Middle Dutch, Middle English, Middle Swedish, Old French, and Old Italian. See ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, p. 446. For further discussion of the vernacular transmission of Mechtild’s text, see Sara S. Poor, Mechtild of Magdeburg and her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 182-183.
33 Halligan’s edition of the text, used throughout this thesis, is based on MS Egerton 2006. For descriptions of both of these manuscripts, see Halligan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-7.
research. Her investigation of these manuscripts is, she suggests, an attempt 'to identify if possible the source of the English translation', but she does not extend her examination to the numerous Latin manuscripts extant throughout Europe, thereby limiting the scope of her inquiry.

One question around Mechtild's Booke that can be answered slightly more satisfactorily concerns the timing of its arrival in England. The first mention of the Booke appears in 1438, in the will of Alianora Roos of York, who left her copy of the text to Dame Joan Courtenay, who might have been a nun. As Voaden notes, 'it is curious that a work so popular and so widely distributed on the continent should not appear in England until this late date'. In a relatively early contribution to the English scholarship on Mechtild, Lochrie infers that the Booke might have been in England by 1434, as she suggests that Margery Kempe might have encountered it during a visit to Syon Abbey that year. While Margery's knowledge of the Booke is a matter of speculation, the association of Mechtild's text with Syon is supported by a much greater body of evidence. Blake, in a brief article about Mechtild's revelations, suggests that the Latin was likely brought into England 'by the Carthusians [...] and [...] translated into English by a Carthusian or by a brother of Syon'. Given the strong connections between the Carthusians at Sheen and the Bridgettines at Syon, Blake's hypothesis seems plausible, as

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34 Halligan, 'Introduction', pp. 8-10.
35 Halligan, 'Introduction', p. 8. The four manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Trinity College 32, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 21, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 353, and Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 1. 19. Halligan suggests that the process of examining the extant European manuscripts of the Liber SG would be 'irrelevant for the present purpose'. 'Introduction', p. 8. Blake is critical of this decision in his review of Halligan's edition, as he notes that 'because manuscripts are in England now it does not follow that they were in the fifteenth century'. N. F. Blake, review of The Booke of Gostlye Grace, Speculum, 56 (1981), 386-389 (p. 387).
37 Voaden, 'Mechtild of Hackeborn', p. 447.
38 Lochrie, Margery Kempe, p. 79.
40 On the connections between the houses of Syon and Sheen, see E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, 'Introduction: Syon Abbey and its Books: Origins, Influences and Transmissions', in
the ‘Carthusians were active in importing and translating Latin copies of Continental religious tracts, and [...] the brethren at Sheen were translators, scribes, and donors of books at nearby Syon’. Further tentative evidence of a Carthusian connection to the Book comes in Halligan’s identification of an autograph in MS Bodley 220, which reads ‘Wellys’. While Halligan cautions that ‘the name is too common for certain identification’, she speculates that the signature could belong to a Carthusian monk, John Wells, who moved between charterhouses in England from roughly 1425.

I will now broadly outline the general content and tone of the Middle English Book. Arguably one of the defining features of the text is the remarkably optimistic, even joyful tone of its visions. Indeed, this joyfulness is matched by Mechtilde’s self-assuredness as a conduit of the divine word. It is much more usual for the visions of prophetic women to be characterised by an almost overwhelming sense of anxiety that they are, in fact, wholly unworthy vessels for the communication of divine messages. In many instances, this disquiet about one’s suitability to be a channel of God’s word is explicitly yoked to gender; a woman cannot be the means through which the divine speaks to the mortal world. This unease about gender does not, however, appear to penetrate Mechtilde’s prophetic imaginary. As Bynum suggests, ‘[Mechtilde] has little sense of certain characteristics as male and certain as female’. Kline, too, notes that Mechtilde is ‘not self-conscious of, nor does she emphasize, her “femaleness”, a recurrent theme in women mystics of later

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41 Halligan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 52-53. This should perhaps not be taken to mean, though, that the Carthusians were responsible for circulating the texts among an expansive English readership. On the Carthusians’ careful controlling of devotional literature, see Gillespie, ‘The Haunted Text’, p. 139.


45 Bynum, _Jesus as Mother_, p. 225.
centuries’. For Mechtild, gender is only a marginal component of her visionary identity.

The joyous optimism of Mechtild’s visions reaches beyond her apparent rejection of the trope of inferior femininity. Her revelations are replete with positive, celebratory imagery of, for example, sunbeams bursting from the heart of Christ to greet the devout on earth. As Halligan observes, ‘it is not sorrow but love that sounds the prevailing note in her visions’. Perhaps most notable is the fact that Mechtild does not insist upon repeated encounters with the scourged, bleeding, and defiled crucified Christ. Indeed, the Booke does not feature a single full-body image of the crucified Christ, his gaping wounds visible for all to see. Rather, Christ is regal and victorious, reigning benevolently over humankind. Relatedly, Mechtild’s rendering of the Virgin Mary does not cast her as a grieving mother wracked with anguish in the wake of her son’s violent death. She is, instead, a serene celestial queen. When the wounded Christ is revealed to Mechtild, his wounds certainly do not drip copious blood. Rather, they are studded with precious jewels:

Oure lorde hadde opon his ryght foote als itt hadde been a saphyere, ande opon the left foote als it hadde bene a garnet. Off this sche hadde wondere, and þan oure lorde sayde to here: “Ryght als a saphyere be his vertewe voydes wykkede humours, ryght so my woundys puttyys awaye the venyme of þe sawle”.

For Mechtild, then, the Crucifixion does not solely signify the bloody corporeal traducing of Christ. Instead, his mortal death elevates his body into something resembling a reliquary, a precious vessel of material spiritual meaning.

One of the most notable aspects of the structuring of the Booke is the consistent yoking of Mechtild’s visions to the liturgy. Virtually every vision is

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48 For a discussion of the characterisation of Mechtild’s visionary protagonists, in which Mechtild’s rejection of a bloodied rendering of Christ is discussed, see Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 213.

prefaced by the noting of the point in the liturgical calendar at which Mechthild received it. Mechthild’s wedding of her *Booke* to a liturgical timetable is likely rooted in her experience at Helfta. As Finnegan has noted, Mechthild’s role as the convent’s chantress required her to educate the novices in both ‘the ceremonies of the choral office and [assist] them in memorizing the long liturgical texts’.  

Mechthild’s pastoral and didactic duty to her conventual community might, therefore, be said to shape the structure of the *Booke*.

If the liturgy offers the salient structural framework for Mechthild’s visions, the trope of the heart is, arguably, the *Booke*’s central organising image. The cult of the Sacred Heart was a key part of the Helfta nuns’ devotion, and the convent is often touted as the major propagator of this particular component of thirteenth-century spirituality.  

In line with this broader European religious trend, Mechthild’s *Booke* often reflects the focus upon the wound in Christ’s side, within which the believer is invited to take refuge. Even when Mechthild’s subject is the wounded heart, however, she does not draw upon the violent vocabulary of torn flesh. In one notable example, Christ simply tells Mechthild that he ‘openede [his] herte’ for her to enter; this is a markedly sanitised revision of the events that saw him receive the wound.

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50 Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta*, p. 27. Finnegan discusses Mechthild’s close relationship with the liturgy, and how it informed her devotion, in further detail on p. 34.


52 For an example of such an image, see *Booke*, p. 376. *Liber SG*, pp. 166-167.

53 *Booke*, p. 412. *Liber SG*, p. 197. The Middle English vision ends shortly after this line about the opening of Christ’s heart; it concludes with Christ telling Mechthild that he ‘took a sleep of love’ with her by dying on the cross. The *Liber SG*, however, continues for another few lines, with Mechthild’s vision of the congregation approaching Christ to present him with golden coins: ‘His dictis, videbatur sibi plures personas de Congregatione ad Dominum accedere, offerentes aureos denarius, qui figurabant bonam voluntatem; et visum est ei quasi flamma ignis eructare de pectore Domini, et confiare cujuslibet denarium in florem aureum, qui flos statim adhaeret pectori offerentis’. [’After the Lord had said these things, it seemed to her that several members of the congregation approached, offering him golden coins that symbolized their good will. And it looked to her as if a fiery flame burst out of his breast, melting each coin into a golden flower. These flowers clung at once to the breasts of those who offered them’. Mechthild of Hackeborn, *The Book of Special Grace*, trans. by Barbara Newman]
Shortly after Christ has invited her into his heart, he gives her instructions to look upon it: "'Beholde my heart'. Ande anone here thought þat þare come fro hys herte a fulle fayre roose ande hadde v levys whiche roose spredde alle his breste'. The request that a reader might 'behold' Christ's heart is generally an invitation to 'look' upon his suffering, which is visually manifest in the wound it bears. Here, however, there is no such emphasis upon Christ's agony, and he appears instead to invite Mechtilde to look upon his heart as a beautiful object, from which flowers spring forth. In Mechtilde's visionary imaginary, Christ's heart is not a material testament to his suffering, but is instead a kind of precious talisman, to which Mechtilde and her sisters are joyously connected. If one is to talk about 'the heart' in the context of the Booke, it is important to note that this image is much more expansive than solely the heart of Christ. As Whitehead has recently suggested, 'Mechtilde sees a community of hearts [...] and she is interested in the ways that those hearts interconnect and flow into one another'. On several occasions in the Booke, long cords unfurl from Christ's heart and run into Mechtilde's, the cord conveying divine love to the believer. Elsewhere, a golden cord is seen to link the heart of Christ to that of his mother. For Mechtilde, therefore, the heart is the locus of connection between Christ and all those he loves. It is a site of celebration, rather than solely the lamentation of the pain he suffered.

(New York, Paulist Press, 2017), p. 149]. All subsequent references to Newman's translation will be given as The Book of Special Grace.

54 Booke, p. 412. Liber SG, pp. 198. The Middle English text omits the lengthy Latin preface to the unveiling of Christ's heart as a rose, in which Mechtilde is invited by Christ into the 'desert of interiority', where she finds abundant flowers and trees. See Liber SG, pp. 197-198. It is only once Mechtilde and Christ have journeyed through this desert, in the Latin, that Christ introduces the image of his heart as a rose. This is not the only occasion on which Mechtilde associates roses with the wounds of Christ; for a further example, see Booke, p. 156. Liber SG, p. 49. On the association of roses with the wounds of Christ in the Middle Ages, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Virgin in the Hortus conclusus: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul', Medieval Feminist Forum, 50 (2014), 11-32 (p. 24).

55 Mechtilde's rendering of Christ's instruction that the devout onlooker ought to 'behold' his heart places this portion of the text in the company of numerous later medieval religious lyrics that instruct their readers to 'look' upon the wounded heart. One such example is 'O Man Unkynde', which appears in MS Laud Misc. 330, alongside the Doctrine. This lyric asks its reader to 'behold and see' Christ's wounded heart. For a full transcription of 'O Man Unkynde', see Medieval English Lyrics and Carols, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013; repr. 2014), p. 241.

56 Whitehead, 'A Comparison of the Trope of the Heart in Mechtilde's Book of Ghostly Grace'.

57 For an example of such an image, see Booke, p. 127. Liber SG, pp. 34-35.

The resonances of Mechtild’s rendering of both the heart of Christ and that of the believer are, then, multifarious. It is simultaneously an exalted object, a site of connection, and a place that one might inhabit. The rendering of the heart as a dwelling place leads me to my primary point of focus: the domestic imagery in Mechtild’s Booke. The language of the household sphere is a significant component of Mechtild’s visionary vocabulary. While domestic space is not always explored within the context of Christ’s heart, the image of the heart as a house recurs throughout the Booke. To date, there has been no extensive analysis of the domestic imagery in Mechtild’s Middle English text, though it is occasionally noted as part of a broader discussion. In her study of the Helfta nuns, Finnegan observes that ‘realistic scenes of homely domestic activity pervade the writings from Helfta’, though she does not give specific examples from any of the visions of the Helfta women. In her chapter about Mechtild and her text, Voaden offers a commentary on one domestic image from the Booke, in which Mechtild sees a small house contained within a larger house. This same image is analysed by Hamburger, who further observes that Mechtild’s domestic sphere often overlaps with the space of the heart. My analysis in this chapter will build upon the observations of these scholars in an extended examination of Mechtild’s household imagery. This discussion will demonstrate that Mechtild repeatedly makes use of the domestic sphere as a backdrop for her visions, and the continued recourse to this homely vocabulary offers an edifying insight into the primary concerns of her visionary voice.

### Defining Mechtild’s Domestic Imaginary

The thematic and content preoccupations of Mechtild’s Booke share very little with those of Bridget of Sweden, her fellow ‘approved woman’. What Mechtild and Bridget do share, however, is a tendency to make use of domestic vocabulary in the course of reshaping devotional commonplaces, thereby

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asserting the defining aspects of their visionary voices. With this in mind, I will first outline the distinctive ways in which Mechtild makes use of domestic imagery. My starting point in this endeavour will be the household image that I alluded to in the paragraph above, which has received critical attention from both Voaden and Hamburger. In this vision, Mechtild sees a great and tall house, within which a further small house is contained:

Aftere this vysioun our lorde schewede this maydene a fulle fayre hows of grete hyght ande of grete brede ande within that grete howse sche sawe a lytyle hows which was made of wodde of cedre. Alle within hitt was coueryde with platys of syluere schynynge fulle bryght, owre lorde satte in þe myddele of that lytelle howse.\(^{62}\)

The smaller house, this vision goes on to explain, is made from cedar because it is sturdy, and will not rot. This little house is symbolic of Mechtild’s soul, while the bigger house represents God’s heart. A gate in the east side of the smaller house leads into the larger dwelling, and this gate fastens with a golden chain, which, when it is unlocked, makes God’s heart move.\(^{63}\) For both Voaden and Hamburger, this vision is distinctively Mechtildian because of its remarkable complexity.\(^{64}\) This is, indeed, an intricate rendering of Mechtild’s understanding of conventual enclosure: her heart is sealed within the heart of God, with Christ then also dwelling within this contained space.

What this domesticated image of layered containment suggests, therefore, is that enclosure is unsurprisingly key to Mechtild’s devotion. This is revealed all the more convincingly as this vision develops, though these later lines have escaped critical attention. Shortly after Mechtild has seen these heart-houses of reciprocal dwelling, Christ appears as a narrative voice to explain what spiritual task she ought to undertake in each part of her souls-house. This space is divided into compass points, and each one is home to a different devotional act that one must perform if one wishes to be ready to receive the Eucharist. Christ begins by instructing Mechtild in what she must do in the east part of the house, telling her that she should consider the fact

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that she has neglected to offer thanks to God, as well as whether she has been
diligent enough to remember to pray, and follow his commandments.\footnote{Booke, p. 185. Liber SG, p. 62.} In the
south part, Mechtild should consider whether she has been sufficiently
devoted to Christ’s mother and the saints, and ask whether she has followed
their example and teachings.\footnote{Booke, p. 185. Liber SG, p. 62.} In the west portion, Mechtild should think upon
how virtuous she has been, and whether she has been sufficiently meek and
obedient. She should also ask whether she has followed the rule of her
convent, and fought against vices.\footnote{Booke, p. 185. Liber SG, p. 62.} Finally, in the north part of the house,
Mechtild must consider whether she has been true to the Church, and
therefore to all of her fellow Christians, while also asking herself whether she
has loved Christ with sufficient ‘inwarde charyte’.\footnote{Booke, p. 185. Liber SG, pp. 62-63.} These are, arguably,
questions that might be asked of the self prior to confession. If at any point in
the traversing of the geography of the house Mechtild ‘fynde[s] anye foule
spotte or hurte in [her] sawle’, she should undertake ‘dyligente studye to
amend hitt’.\footnote{Booke, p. 186. Liber SG, p. 63.} As in the Doctrine, the metaphor of the careful preparation of
the soul-house through the self-discernment of shortcomings is again used to
ready the reader to receive Communion.

This separation of the soul-house into compass points suggests that
Mechtild is mapping her vision of domestic enclosure onto the wider world.
The ‘little’ house paradoxically represents a vast landscape through which
Mechtild undertakes an interiorised pilgrimage, during which she prays and
attempts to attain a deeper understanding of her devotion as she moves from
point to point. Mechtild’s compressing of the characteristics of external
geography into the sealed space of her heart-house reveals a crucial aspect of
her domestic imaginary, and her visionary vocabulary more generally. For
Mechtild, conventual enclosure, and thereby enclosure within the heart of
God, is the entirety of her ‘world’. Any attempt to define Mechtild’s use of
domestic imagery must therefore take into account that one of its essential
characteristics is its removal from the exterior world beyond Helfta’s walls. On
numerous occasions, including the one cited above, the category of domestic collapses into that of monastic, and the two cannot be disentangled. Moreover, this monastic-domestic often encompasses ecclesiastical space. As Mechtild moves between the divinely ordained divisions of her house, many of the devotional activities that Christ encourages her to undertake, including prayer and devotion to the saints, would have taken place in church. For Mechtild, the parameters of ‘the world’ are contained by the walls of Helfta, with monastic, ecclesial, and domestic space frequently coalescing within this enclosure.

It is not just Mechtild’s experience of conventual enclosure that she chooses to refract through a domestic lens. Salient scenes from the Bible are, too, brought within the imaginative parameters of a homely framework. One of the most striking examples of Mechtild’s domestication of Biblical narrative is her transformation of Christ’s tomb into one of her favourite spatial metaphors, the ‘fayre hows’. In this image, Mechtild becomes one of the women who visited Christ’s sepulchre following the crucifixion:

Ande whene sche wolde haffe entrede into þat hows sche fande two aungellys stondynge before the gate, ande thare wynges were sprede obrede in hyght so þat abowne in the hyght þare wynges towched togedders. Ande tho aungellys gaffe a fulle swete sowne of melodye as þowȝt hitt hadde bene of an harpe [...] Thys maydene þowȝt in here sawle that sche wente in, ande anone sche saluted oure lorde ande felle downe before his feete and kyssede his rede fresche woundes.\(^{70}\)

This image is noteworthy for several reasons. First of all, Mechtild erases the fear that Mary and Mary Magdalene feel when they see the angel at Christ’s tomb in the Gospel accounts of this episode.\(^{71}\) In Mechtild’s revised account, the angels make ‘sweet sounds’, and are by no means a source of anxiety. This is, in line with the broader character of Mechtild’s visionary vocabulary, a hugely positivised rendering of the visit to the holy sepulchre. Even more

\(^{70}\) Booke, p. 201. Liber SG, p. 70. It seems that the Middle English translator, in describing Christ’s wounds as ‘red and fresh’, slightly amplifies their ‘bloodiness’. In the Latin, they are again likened to roses: ‘Anima vero cum intrasset, ad pedes Domini cecidit, salutans et deosculans rosea vulnera Christi’. ['After she had entered, she fell at the Lord’s feet, greeting and kissing his rosy wounds’. The Book of Special Grace, p. 83]. It is also interesting to note that the tomb of Christ, here, carries echoes of the Old Testament tabernacle of the covenant, as the angels’ wings touch as they spread over the tomb. For this passage, see Exodus 25. 17-21.

\(^{71}\) The Gospel accounts of the two women discovering Christ’s tomb to be empty are at Matthew 28. 1-8, Mark 16. 1-8, Luke 24. 1-8, and John 20. 1-17.
strikingly, Mechtild is not told that Christ is risen, and that she should go and seek him elsewhere. Oddly, he is still *inside* the tomb, despite the fact that he has risen from the dead. This redrawing of the visit to the sepulchre again underscores the centrality of enclosure to Mechtild's conception of the world. Even Christ cannot escape the confines of the tomb: rather than leaving to go and seek his disciples, he waits to receive Mechtild in sepulchral isolation.

One of the consequences of Mechtild’s emphasis on enclosure is that when she does reveal a cognisance of exterior space, this is often inflected with her experience of physical conventual containment. The *Booke* is replete with the imagery of the natural world; one of Mechtild’s favourite spatial allegories is that of a verdant garden.\(^{72}\) These external spaces are, however, routinely modified by the hallmarks of interiority. In one vision, Mechtild sees Christ walking through a vineyard, which is contained within the space of her heart.\(^{73}\) Furthermore, the vineyard is doubly sealed by ‘a multitude of aungellys’, who stand around its perimeter ‘as thkke as hitt hadde bene a stone walle’.\(^{74}\) The vineyard represents the Church, and the fact that it is enclosed *twice* is indicative of the centrality of enclosure to Mechtild's conception of ecclesial space. Beyond these larger scale allusions to exterior landscapes, Mechtild frequently receives visions of beautiful trees. Once again, these revelatory experiences of the natural world overlap with the material reality of Mechtild's enclosure. In the second part of the *Booke*, Mechtild receives a vision as she listens to the Mass that marks Christ’s nativity. As she sits in church, she looks up at the altar and sees ‘a tree of a wonderfule grettenesse, ande þe hight þareof rechede vppe to hevyne, þe brede fulfyllede alle the worlde, and fulle of frewte it was, ande of levys withowtene nowmbrë’.\(^{75}\) This image represents a remarkable melding of the exterior with Mechtild’s interior life. Her attendance at church to hear Mass, one of the

\(^{72}\) Mechtild’s garden imagery has been the focal point of recent critical attention. On this subject, see Yoshikawa, ‘The Virgin in the Hortus Conclusus’; Liz Herbert McAvoy, “Flourish Like a Garden”: Pain, Purgatory and Salvation in the Writing of Medieval Religious Women’, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 50 (2014), 33-60.

\(^{73}\) *Booke*, p. 219. *Liber SG*, p. 79.

\(^{74}\) *Booke*, p. 219. *Liber SG*, p. 79.

\(^{75}\) *Booke*, p. 403. *Liber SG*, p. 30. This image of the tree growing from the altar appears much earlier in the Latin text: it is the ninth vision of the first book. The Middle English translator shifts this image of the tree to the end of the second book, in which it is one of the final visions.
essential components of the quotidian routine at Helfta, precipitates the transformation of the altar into a fertile and flourishing space. The tree that springs from it is so large that it reaches all the way to heaven, uncontained by material walls. Of course, these visions of the natural world do not see Mechtild draw upon any domestic vocabulary. They are, however, relevant to my discussion as they are indicative of Mechtild's tendency to draw the exterior inward, into spaces of enclosure.

It is important to note that the domestic images discussed above are all characterised by Mechtild's complex interweaving of monastic and household space. The domestic sphere is only ever activated as a metaphor within ecclesial space, when Mechtild is listening to Mass and preparing to receive the Eucharist. The tendency of devotional writers to make recourse to the imagery of the imagined domestic sphere within the literal spatial context of the convent has been examined elsewhere in this thesis, in relation to the Doctrine. It is pertinent, here, to repeat Gillespie's analysis of domestic metaphors in the first part of the Doctrine, which, he suggests, are primarily invoked for their alterity. Now that the household has been left behind, it is transformed into a key part of a 'mythic' past, '[which] perhaps exercises a potent hold over [the nun's] personal imaginary, a grip that needs to be engaged with and imaginatively focused'. In the context of the Doctrine's extended kitchen metaphors, Gillespie goes on to suggest, the charged vocabulary of the now abandoned domestic sphere risks tipping the nun into a dangerous realm of 'suppressed desire', its symbolic meaning effaced by its tempting literal resonances. The concerns of the Booke are altogether different from those of the Doctrine, and I would not suggest that Mechtild's use of domestic metaphor has the same objective. In the Booke, the intersection of the literal spaces of the Church and the convent with the imagined environment of the household seems considerably cleaner, with no risk that one might be tempted to rediscover the secular household. This is

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likely due, at least in part, to the fact that Mechtilde entered Helfta at such a young age, at which point the domestic and the conventual were melded into one. As the analysis of the images in the preceding discussion suggests, Mechtilde's rendering of the domestic sphere encapsulates the key characteristics of her life at Helfta; her metaphorical households are defined by enclosure and profound intimacy with Christ. Unlike the domestic imagery in the *Doctrine*, they are not constructed from an ambiguous or risky symbolic lexicon. When Mechtilde enters into one of her many metaphorical households, she is not engaging in the precarious remembrance of a prior secular life, but is instead affirming the defining values of her life at Helfta.

**The Image of the Heart as a Household: A Detailed Analysis**

The first image of the heart as a household that I intend to analyse builds upon the concluding point of the previous section, that Mechtilde's domestic sphere often adopts and emphasises the values and characteristics of conventual space. This vision of a hybridised heart-house appears in the second part of the *Booke*, and is introduced with a typically Mechtildean preface, which reveals that the revelation was received in church:

> In a masse tyme whan sche was lette with dyuerse þouȝtes and lakkede þe presens of God ande his gracysouse comfforth whiche sche was wonte to have, sche prayedeoure ladye, mediatrice betwyxe God and man, þat sche wolde gete here the presence of here dere beluffede sone.

In this moment, Mechtilde is plainly feeling distant from Christ. While she is physically present at Mass, her attendance at the literal space of the church does not foster a closeness with the divine, and her mind wanders. Her prayer to Mary facilitates her entry into an imagined space in which such intimacy becomes possible, with the contained parameters of the heart-household enabling Mechtilde's close proximity to Christ, and sharpening her focus on the Mass. Mechtilde's entry to this enclosed domestic space does not come about immediately. Before this component of her vision unfurls, she first sees a regal

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Christ sitting in a ‘hye sete’, which is ‘as cleere as the purete of crystalle’.\textsuperscript{79} As Mechtilde observes the elevation of the Eucharist, she sees Christ standing up from his gemstone throne, and ‘with his owne handdes he lyftede vppe his holye herte in lykenesse of a fulle lyght brennynge lampe fulle replete and fulle habundaunte’.\textsuperscript{80} It is not surprising that Mechtilde’s revelation of Christ’s heart should coincide with the presentation of the Eucharist, though it is striking that it does not appear as food. What takes place next, I suggest, lays the foundations for the character of the heart-household that Mechtilde will eventually enter.

As Christ stands with the burning lamp of his heart aloft, Mechtilde sees that it has been joined by the hearts of all of her fellow sisters who are also attending Mass:

Sche sawe also the hertes of alle þoo þat were þare presente in lyknesse offe lampys knettede to oure lordys herte als it hadde bene with smalle cordys, of whiche hertes sche sawe some of þame stonde vpperghyt fulle of oyle brennande, ande some lampys were voyde ande hynge donwarde ande turned the bottome vppewarde ande þe mowth downwarde.\textsuperscript{81}

The lamps that are upright, Mechtilde glosses, represent those sisters’ hearts that hear Mass with devotion and ‘holye desyre’.\textsuperscript{82} The lamps that turn downwards, by contrast, are symbolic of those sisters who are inattentive to what they might learn at Mass, ‘ande toke no hede to lyfte vppe þare hertes to God be deuocioun’.\textsuperscript{83} It is worth noting, first of all, that this portion of the vision appears to be a reworking of a parable from the Gospel of Matthew, in which ten virgins carry lamps as they await the arrival of the bridegroom Christ.\textsuperscript{84} Five of the virgins are wise, and carry sufficient oil for their lamps, and are therefore ready to greet the bridegroom when he arrives. The remaining five are foolish, neglecting to bring enough oil, and when Christ arrives they are away buying more, so miss the opportunity for spiritual marriage. Mechtilde’s transposition of this Biblical parable into a conventual

\textsuperscript{79} Booke, p. 369-370. Liber SG, pp. 158-159.
\textsuperscript{80} Booke, p. 370. Liber SG, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{81} Booke, p. 370-371. Liber SG, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{82} Booke, p. 371. Liber SG, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{83} Booke, p. 371. Liber SG, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{84} Matthew 25. 1-13.
setting enables her to revisit the anxieties that she introduced at the beginning of the vision. Her concerns about her own inattention to what she hears during Mass, which results in her inability to feel the presence of God, are here extrapolated to apply to the broader community at Helfta. The result is a powerful image of communal devotion, in which the ‘wise’ sisters achieve a reciprocal relationship with Christ, their hearts joining together.85

There is still a further step that Mechtilde must take before she is able to enter the house of Christ’s heart. As she looks out at the collected heart-lamps of her sisters, she is taken with a profound desire that her heart, specifically, should be ‘alle hoole [...] putte into owre lordys devyne herte’.86 This melding of her own heart with that of Christ is swiftly achieved:

Ande anone sche sawe ande knewe here owne herte fro þe mydelle of othere hertes reredde vppe ande in lyknes of a peese itt was caste into the devyne herte.87

This vision continually oscillates from a focus on the individual devout figure, Mechtilde, to the community within which she conducts her devotional practice. Most strikingly, the individual intimacy of the joining of Mechtilde’s heart to Christ’s comes about as a consequence of collective spiritual experience, in church during Mass. It is only once Mechtilde has witnessed the hearts of her sisters adopt the same form as Christ’s that she is able to achieve her own intimate union.

Within Mechtilde’s visionary imaginary, then, communality sits in close proximity to individuality, with collective devotion facilitating the spiritual advancement of the individual. Further evidence of this comes in the closing paragraphs of the vision, as Mechtilde sees herself enter into the house of

85 This image of the importance of conventual community is somewhat similar to that of the fatter hens basting the leaner hens in the Doctrine, which I discussed in the previous chapter, at p. 62.
87 Booke, p. 371. Liber SG, pp. 159-160. ‘Reredde’ means ‘lifted’. See MED, s. v. rēren (v. [1] 1). ‘Peese’ is a seed, specifically ‘the edible seed of a pea plant’. See MED, s. v. pēse (n. 1). In the Middle English, these lines conclude the paragraph on the image of the communal melding of divine and devout hearts. The translator omits a further exchange between Christ and Mechtilde, in which she asks how she might ensure that her heart remains merged with Christ’s permanently. As part of his response to Mechtilde’s question, Christ cites a portion of Psalms 100. 2: ‘Perambulam in innocentia cordis mei, in medio domus meae’. ‘[I walked in the innocence of my heart, in the midst of my house]’. This serves as an introduction to the domestic image that I discuss on the next page.
Christ’s heart. In a modification of the standard trope of the house of the heart - as an allegory of the soul of the individual believer awaiting Christ’s arrival, as in the Doctrine - Mechtilde finds that she is not alone:

Sche sawe oure lorde herte chawngede into likenesse of a fayre howse in whiche howse sche behelde fowre fulle fayre virgyns, þat es to saye thses fowre vertues: meknes, paciens, softnes, ande charyte, whiche charyte apperede in grene clothynge, as itt hadde ofte before.  

When Mechtilde wonders why Charity is dressed in green, Christ explains that her clothing represents the fact that ‘here vertue hase made many synners whiche were drye as stokkys to wexe grene ande floryschede agayne with fruyte of goode werkes’. Charity’s verdant clothing is a further example of one of Mechtilde’s favoured tropes, of fertility within the architectural. Here, an occupant of the house of Christ’s heart enables the flourishing of those who had once fallen short. Again, Mechtilde’s focus appears to be community: Charity’s fructive clothing is used to refresh and restore those in need of help, which is perhaps indicative of Mechtilde’s sense of duty to her sisters, and her fellow Christians more broadly.

This emphasis on the value of community is further developed as Christ continues his narration of the interior of his heart-household, and explains to Mechtilde why these four female virtues are dwelling there:

Oure lorde sayde furthermore to here: “Siff þowe desyre to haffe þe vse of my presens ande dwelle with me in this howse, stodye to conforme þe to the frendeschippes ande to the homelynys of þeis virgyns”.

In my earlier discussion, one of my key observations about the distinctive character of the Booke’s domestic imagery, which routinely overlaps with the

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88 Booke, p. 371. Liber SG, p. 160. The simple description of Christ’s heart as a ‘fayre howse’ is a modification of the rather more lavish rendering in the Liber SG. The Latin text describes the heart-house as large and golden, and beautiful and luxurious inside. The four female occupants, Meekness, Patience, Softness and Charity, are, curiously, not quite the Four Daughters of God (Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice). The Four Daughters are, of course, a recurrent trope of texts that make use of architectural metaphors, including Sawles Warde. The classic study of the Four Daughters of God is Hope Traver, The Four Daughters of God: A Study of the Versions of this Allegory with Especial Reference to those in Latin, French and English (Philadelphia: John Winston, 1907).


space of the heart, was that it offers an imagined space in which Mechtilde cultivates her closeness with Christ. Indeed, this coheres with multiple critical perspectives, including that of Hamburger, who suggests that the heart, specifically, is ‘foremost [...] a place of interiority where Mechtilde can withdraw in intimate dialogue with Christ’.\(^92\) The lines quoted above, however, are indicative of a further resonance of Mechtilde’s heart-domestic. When Mechtilde enters into the household of Christ’s heart, she does not do so solely as a means of achieving intimacy with him. Before she can enjoy his ‘presence’, and be welcomed to dwell within his heart, she must first become familiar and intimate with the four female virtues, who are the household’s sitting occupants. The implication of this is that intimacy with Christ is achieved through a prior closeness to this select community, who are bound by ‘friendship’. Nobody is ‘visiting’ this household, with the attendant implication that they will eventually leave once again. Rather, in a reflection of Mechtilde’s experience of conventual life, one is coming to ‘dwell’ with a devout community, apparently permanently. Taken as a whole, the imagery of this vision might be read as a valorisation of communal life as a pathway to union with Christ. Only when one has shared spiritual experiences with one’s community is it possible to enter the heart of Christ.

Not all of the *Booke’s visions* of the divine heart as a dwelling place see Mechtilde explicitly assert its transformation into a domestic sphere, and I would not, therefore, suggest that the two spaces are invariably coterminous. The image that I intend to discuss now sees Mechtilde invited to take shelter within the divine heart, but it is not prefaced by her explicit identification of the space as a domestic one. I include this image here because what takes place within the refuge of the heart inflects it with an identifiably domestic character. In this vision, Mechtilde recalls an occasion on which she could not rest on account of a terrible headache;\(^93\) while Mechtilde is a confident, robust conduit of the divine word, she is often physically weakened by bodily sickness.\(^94\) In her distress, she prays that Christ will reveal to her ‘a priuey

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\(^92\) Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, p. 134.
\(^94\) These repeated bouts of sickness often preclude Mechtilde from participating in various aspects of the liturgy and sacraments. One such instance appears in Book V, in which Mechtilde
place whareyn sche myght fynde reste'. In response, Christ presents her with the multiple wounds in his body:

Owre lorde þan schewede here iiij holis of his woundes ande bade here chese in whiche of þoo sche wolde abyde and dwelle. Ande sche wolde nought chese, botte commyttede þat to Goddes goodnesse þat he schulde gyffe here whate he wolde. Oure lorde þan schewede her þe wounde of his herte and seyde: “Goo in here þat þou maye haffe reste”.

That Christ initially presents Mechtilde with just four of his wounds as possible sites of refuge is a curious detail of this vision. Clearly, one does not choose for oneself whether to enter into the most precious portal of the divine body, the wound in Christ’s side. Mechtilde’s restraint in waiting for the benevolent Christ to allocate her a place of rest is rewarded when he allows her to take her recuperation in his heart, with access to this space given only by express invitation from the ‘householder’. Most curiously, however, the Middle English translator excises the lines that follow the excerpt cited above in the Latin text, which explicitly identify Mechtilde’s place of shelter as a house:

Quæ statim cum gaudio intravit Cor Dei. Eratque simile domui pulcherrimæ, in cujus medio jacentem invenit Dominum in lecto, viridi pallio gloriose contextum; anima autem ad præceptum Domini se juxta eum pausatura cum ingenti lætitia reclinabat.

Given the cultural context in which the Middle English text was read, it seems rather odd for the translator to excise an allusion to the domestic character of Christ’s heart. Might the translator have found the Bernardine image of Christ in bed rather too erotic for his fifteenth-century English audience? It certainly seems that the Middle English translator is, here, attempting to dial down the portrayal of Christ as lover. In the Latin, Christ is the attentive spouse, inviting his sick beloved to take comfort and recuperation in the most intimate of spaces. The Booke, however, reworks this image to render Christ much more

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97 Liber SG, p. 172. ['At once she entered the heart of God with joy. It was like a beautiful house, and in the middle she found the Lord lying in bed, gloriously covered with a green blanket. At his command, the soul lay down beside him to rest with great gladness'. The Book of Special Grace, p. 136].
paternalistic: he is the benevolent father figure, who offers his indecisive, ailing child a place to rest in the midst of her anguish.

Once Mechtild is inside this most privileged of spaces, her headache begins to ease, as she feels that ‘sche hadde als manye pelews of silke as sche felte herde peynfulle bettynges in here hede before’. Again, the Middle English translator omits any lines that portray Christ as a lover: ‘Visumque est sibi tot cervicalia se habere quot ictus dolorum tunc sensit capiti suo advenire; quæ singula, unum post unum, capiti amatoris sui cum magna gratitudine’. In the Latin, the comfort that Christ offers Mechtild is reciprocated, as she thanks him for the headache-easing pillows by giving them to him to use, too. This reciprocity is perhaps too close to that of connubial luxury and sensuality for the Middle English translator, who feels more comfortable with the cushions as part of a sickbed, rather than a site of erotic encounter. It is the detail of the cushions, in my view, that allows this vision to retain its domestic character, despite the translator’s omission of the Latin’s reference to the heart as a house. While the space of Christ’s heart is not, in this case, expressly said to be transformed into homely space, the physical comfort that its interior offers to Mechtild is equated with silk pillows, which are symbolic of domestic luxury. The space of Christ’s heart, therefore, facilitates an allusion to the domestic strand of Mechtild’s visionary vocabulary. As Mechtild feels the pain begin to dissipate, Christ offers a striking explanation of why she can now feel silk pillows in her head: “Wormes spynnes silke, ande of me itt es wryttene: I am a worme and no manne”. Christ’s remarkable assertion has its basis in a line from Psalm 21, which reads, ‘But I am a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people’. The Middle English text, however, omits the preface to Christ’s invoking of this scriptural allusion. In the Latin,

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99 Liber SG, p. 172. ['It seemed to her that she had as many pillows as the painful blows she felt striking her head. One by one, she laid each of them beneath her lover’s head with great thankfulness'. The Book of Special Grace, p. 136].
100 I discuss the increasing popularity of cushions in fifteenth-century England in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 27-29.
102 Psalm 21. 7.
Christ cites these lines in order to answer Mechtild’s question about why he clothes her in luxurious silk:

«Amantissime Deus, si dignareris me miseram in festo Paschali talibus adornare vestibus, quale est operimentum lecti tui? » Cui Dominus respondit : «Etiam mi prædilecta, per memetipsum et ex memetipso volo tibi vestimentia talia præparare. »

The Latin text, then, boldly equates the luxury of silk with Christ; the divine body provides the thread that makes expensive clothes, cushions, and bedlinen. This serves as a full-throated justification of the placing of luxury items in the domestic sphere, as they are embodied by Christ himself. The Middle English translator perhaps excises this passage as it might encourage readers of the text to engage in the excessive purchase of luxury domestic goods. While late medieval texts were often keen to encourage an affective response to Christ, the wrong mode of sensuality is being stirred here: readers should not, surely, imagine Christ’s corporeality when they run their hands over a silk pillow. Psalm 21 is a prophecy of Christ’s Passion, and is therefore concerned with his debasement and humiliation. Cast in the light of Mechtild’s relentlessly positive revisionism, however, this articulation of the great disdain in which Christ is held is refashioned to carry a much more positive meaning. Far from being a gross insult, the suggestion that Christ is a worm results in the crafting of a luxury domestic item that eases Mechtild’s suffering. The worm is noted for its capacity to create, rather than for its baseness and distance from humanity. The amelioration of this Biblical insult is, I would suggest, achieved through its association with the objects that characterise domestic space.

While the emphasis in this discussion has largely been the visionary transformation of Christ’s heart into a household, the focal point of the closing paragraphs of this section will shift to Mechtild’s heart, which is also reshaped as a domestic space. One such image appears in the second part of the Booke,

103 Liber SG, p. 172. ["Most loving God", she asked, "if you condescend to clothe my wretched self in garments like these at Easter, what kind of covering do you have for your bed?" "My best beloved, I want to make you clothing by myself and from myself". The Book of Special Grace, p. 136].

104 I discuss the growing interest in purchasing decorative domestic items in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 24-30.
in a vision received during a Saturday Mass. Having prayed to the Virgin Mary, Mechtild tells Christ that she would like to make a present of her heart to give to him. In response, Christ informs Mechtild of how he would best like to receive this gift:

Owre lorde answereande sayde: “Þowe maye nevere gyffe me a derere ne a more delectable presente þan ȝif þowe make to me a lyttele howse of þyne herte, in the whiche I may delyte and abyde þareyn. Pis howse schalle have botte a wyndowe þorowe whiche y maye speke to menne ande departe forth my gyftes”.

What is especially striking about the transformation of Mechtild’s heart into a household is the context in which it becomes a divine dwelling place; the Doctrine offers a useful point of comparison here. In the guidance text, the author instructs the nun to make her heart into a house in order to offer shelter to a bloodied, gravely injured Christ, who is in need of rest in the wake of his battle against sin. Mechtild, however, makes no reference to these desperate circumstances, and her heart-household is evidently not a place of refuge for a wounded and weakened Christ. Rather, the domesticated heart is couched in markedly positive, even celebratory vocabulary, as it is a present from Mechtild to Christ. When Christ enters this gifted space, he does so in order to take pleasure from his surroundings, and not to recuperate from his wounds. The Booke is, here, taking the homiletic commonplace of the guidance text author, in which he didactically asks his reader to transform her heart into a house for Christ, and reworking it into a divinely ordained instruction received by the visionary directly from the mouth of Christ.

The allegorical resonances of this heart-household transformation are, clearly, altogether different from those of the Doctrine. In her contemplation of this vision, Mechtild explains how she understands this domestic space and its features, paying particular attention to the meaning of its single window:

Offe þis sche hadde vnderstondyenge þat here mowth schulde be þat oone wyndowe, with þe whiche mowth sche schulde mynystre Goddes word be doctrine ande comforth to hem þat come to here.

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As in some of the visions that I have previously discussed, the intimacy that the individual attains from dwelling with Christ appears to have a significant connection to a broader sense of community. While Mechtild’s conception of domesticity is indeed profoundly influenced by the enclosure of her life at Helfta, the above image is characterised by a remarkable openness. When Christ dwells in Mechtild’s heart, this lends her the authority to open the window of her mouth and communicate his divine message. It is almost as though Mechtild is taken over, or perhaps even possessed, by Christ, who directly affords her significant spiritual authority.\textsuperscript{108} There is no sense, as one might find in such guidance texts as \textit{Ancrene Wisse}, that to open a window to the soul might be a source of danger, and leave the devout woman vulnerable to the advances of sin.\textsuperscript{109} Mechtild reappropriates this popular penitential image, a homiletic staple, in order to articulate her sense of responsibility to her fellow Christians as the earthly vessel of God’s message. As Rydel has suggested, ‘the central message [of the \textit{Booke}] is God’s loving desire for intimacy with the Helfta community and \textit{all Christians}’ (emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{110} The \textit{Booke}’s heart-households, whether Mechtild’s or Christ’s, appear to be a dominant allegorical vehicle for this message, with individual intimacy routinely yoked to a communal connection to the divine.

**Mechtild Feeding Christ: Domesticating and Reversing the Eucharist**

My analysis in the closing paragraphs of the section above indicates that, as well as being defined by intimacy, community, and serenity, Mechtild’s domestic imaginary is further hallmarked by a sense of reciprocity: if the Christian dwells within Christ, he will reside within the heart of the devout. In common with numerous religious texts of the Middle Ages, the \textit{Booke} often

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{108} On the notion of the female visionary’s mystical experience as comparable to possession, see Watt, \textit{Secretaries of God}, p. 77.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} The \textit{Ancrene Wisse} author repeatedly articulates his anxieties that the anchoress’ windows might be opened, which would therefore leave her vulnerable to the invasive forces of sin. These concerns are applied to the literal windows of the anchoress’ cell, which the author advises her to cover with black and white cloth, as well as her eyes, which are allegorised as windows. See p. 21. The anchoress ought to keep her eyes closed, the author suggests, as opening them might give sin a portal to the soul. See p. 25. The anchoress’ mouth, too, should be kept closed, to keep her heart safely sealed away. See p. 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Rydel, ‘Inventing a Male Writer’, p. 201.
\end{itemize}
articulates the reciprocal character of the relationship between Christ and Christians by alluding to the Eucharist. On occasion, the language of taking Communion overlaps with the vocabulary of domesticity. One example of this melded lexicon appears in the first part of the Booke when, during Mass, Mechtild is told to take heed of Christ when he says, ‘He that etys mye flesche ande drynkes my blodye dwelles in me and I in hym’. It is this interwoven discourse of dining and dwelling to which I will turn my attention in the following section of this chapter. On multiple occasions, Mechtild receives visions of herself serving meals to Christ, and thereby engaging in a kind of inverted Eucharist, often within the spatial context of the household. The examination of this particular trope brings to light a further defining characteristic of Mechtild’s domestic imaginary. Much of Mechtild’s household imagery is, of course, shaped by her experience of enclosure at Helfta, and therefore by the character of monastic and ecclesial space. The lone extra-conventual influence upon the Booke’s conception of the domestic sphere is Mechtild’s awareness of courtly convention. The strands of courtly tropes that are woven into the narrative of the Booke have been noted by Voaden, who suggests that, ‘the visions resonate with the language and imagery of courtly love and of courtly ritual, undoubtedly reflecting [Mechtild’s] childhood amongst the Thüringian nobility and the influence of the aristocratic culture at Helfta’. As the following discussion will show, Mechtild’s knowledge of courtly practices is particularly evident when her visions weave together the vocabularies of dining and domesticity.

The first pertinent image in this section appears in a vision received by Mechtild on Palm Sunday, as she considers ‘oure lordis workys ande specialye whate he dydde that daye whenne he was in erthe’. Mechtild’s contemplation of Christ’s experience leads her to think about how he might have spent his time during his stay in Bethany, at the house of Martha and

\[111\] Booke, p. 116. Liber SG, p. 28. These lines explicate the Booke’s citation of a short excerpt from John 6. 55, ‘Qui manducat meam carnem’. ‘[H]e that eateth my flesh’]. It is the addition of the Middle English translator, with the Liber SG citing only the quotation from the Vulgate.

\[112\] This imagery shares similarities with the kitchen allegory in De doctrina, which is also, of course, a reciprocal Eucharist. See De doctrina, pp. 57-80.

\[113\] Voaden, ‘Drinking from the Golden Cup’, p. 110.

\[114\] Booke, p. 150. Liber SG, p. 46.
Mary. Her meditation on this subject draws Mechtilde into another imagined domestic sphere:

Ande anone to here semynge sche was in the howe of tho two sustryne atte Betanye. Thare sche sawe a lytell howse besyde and fande our ore lorde syttynge atte a table. Anone sche wente to hym and askede hym whate he hadde done pat nyght before. Oure lorde sayde: “Alle pat nyght I occupied me in prayers, botte aboute the dawynge I sette me downe and a lyttelle I sleypede”.

Thus far, this imagery betrays little sense of Mechtilde’s awareness of courtly ritual. Most notably, this domestic vision appears to facilitate Mechtilde’s imaginative transcendence of her conventual surroundings, as she finds herself conversing with Christ in the house at Bethany. It should be noted, however, that what Christ has been doing in this household—praying and sleeping—broadly matches the character of conventual life. Furthermore, Mechtilde’s suggestion that Christ has his own ‘little house’ next door to Martha and Mary, in which he sleeps and prays, would likely have an especial resonance for the Booke’s Carthusian readers, as this small dwelling mimics the space and practices of the charterhouse. In placing Christ’s monastic cell-house next door to the Bethany house, Mechtilde implies that domestic intimacy and contemplative isolation are comfortable as neighbours. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a vision in which Mechtilde will draw upon courtly vocabulary, and therefore upon a set of images rooted in life beyond Helfta’s walls, should begin with these tentative imagined steps outside the convent. Having satisfied Mechtilde’s curiosity about what he did when he stayed with Martha and Mary, Christ advises Mechtilde that she, too, ought to offer him a place to stay: “Suche ane howse þowe schalte make to me in þyne sawle whairen þowe schalte mynistre me ande do me seruyse”.

The implication of these divine instructions is that the soul-house that Mechtilde builds for Christ ought to be modelled upon the household of Martha and Mary. A further inference might be that the ideal divine dwelling is equally

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115 Booke, p. 150. Liber SG, p. 46. This is an allusion to the Biblical episode of Christ’s visit to the house of Martha and Mary, at Luke 10. 38-42. A slight variation of Luke’s story appears in John 12. 1-8, in his account of Jesus’ raising of Lazarus, which takes place at the house at Bethany.

116 Booke, p. 150. Liber SG, p. 46.
shaped by what the sisters at Bethany symbolise, with Martha emblematic of the active life, and Mary embodying a contemplative model of devotion. It is notable, however, that the emphasis in Christ’s instructions seems to fall upon the value of active spirituality. When Christ comes to dwell with Mechtild, she will be in his ‘service’, and thereby appears to adopt the role of Martha. Mechtild might be a visionary, but she rarely presents herself as contemplative: she is far too concerned with her duties to the community. In her role as his active servant, Mechtild’s primary duty appears to be to serve food to Christ. It is this imagery of dining that transposes the tropes of courtly ritual onto the house at Bethany.

As the vision continues, Mechtild sees Christ sitting at a table, and she goes to serve him.\textsuperscript{117} The meal that Mechtild is tasked with presenting to Christ is an enormously lavish banquet comprising seven courses, each of which has a different spiritual resonance. First of all, Mechtild brings a silver platter filled with honey, which symbolises the sweet love that enveloped the earth when God sent his son to live among mortals.\textsuperscript{118} The second course is a dish of violets, a flower often emblematic of Christ, which represents ‘the meke conversacion of Cryste’, by which he made himself submissive in the service of humanity.\textsuperscript{119} Christ’s third dish is ‘the flesche of a lombe’, which is representative of the lamb who absolves the sins of the world, and thereby of Christ himself.\textsuperscript{120} This is followed by more meat, this time taken from a fatted calf, which symbolises ‘the swetnesse of gostelye grace’; Christ’s abundance of this is what has made the calf fat.\textsuperscript{121} The fifth course is the heart of a fawn, which represents Christ’s willing advancement towards death during his time on earth, the marvel of which ‘passys anye mannys witte to trowe’.\textsuperscript{122} The penultimate course is a roasted fish, which symbolises Christ himself, and ‘his bytttere passioun ande harde deyde for vs’.\textsuperscript{123} Finally, and remarkably, Mechtild serves Christ with his own heart, which is ‘made swete with dyuers

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{117} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{118} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{119} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{120} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{121} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{122} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{123} Booke, p. 151. Liber SG, p. 46.
\end{footnotes}
sweetenesses fulle of goode smelle ande plenteuoslye fulfillede with alle vertues'. Of course, no courtly feast would be complete without the addition of wine, with the Booke also giving detailed descriptions of what Christ drinks to complement his sumptuous meal. The first ‘fulle goode drynke’ that Mechtilde serves is symbolic ‘of the holye conuersacion of Cryste ande of alle his chosen sawles’. Secondly, Christ is offered red wine, which represents his Passion and death. The final drink is ‘clere wyne withowtyne anye lyes’, which represents the spiritual fervour that Christ instils in the souls of Christians.

The soul-house that began as a replica of the relatively modest dwelling of Martha and Mary in Bethany has been transformed into an aristocratic household, complete with an impressive banqueting hall. Mechtilde’s interpretation of what it might mean to emulate the ‘active’ devotion of Martha does not equate to domestic servitude, and she does not undertake menial labour, as the nun in the Doctrine is encouraged to do. Rather, she is reminiscent of a queen hosting a lavish feast for the most esteemed guest of all. Indeed, Mechtilde’s impression of emulating the spirituality of Martha casts her Biblical model as a noble hostess. The manner in which Mechtilde’s meal is served reveals a knowledge of courtly convention. Silver platters are used as the vessels for the sweet honey in the first course, while Mechtilde expressly notes that the clear wine that accompanies the food has no sediment, ‘obviously indicating that it had been properly decanted’. All of the components of this inversion of the Eucharist are appetising and well presented. This is a significant divergence from the Doctrine, in which the preparation of the nun’s heart for Christ’s consumption is couched in the violent language of flaying and cutting. Mechtilde’s considerably softer interaction with this trope of feeding Christ is congruent with the broader character of her Eucharistic imagery. As Bynum observes, ‘the Eucharist is not

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124 Booke, pp. 151-152. Liber SG, p. 46.
125 Booke, p. 152. Liber SG, p. 47.
126 Booke, p. 152. Liber SG, p. 47.
127 Booke, p. 152. Liber SG, p. 47.
128 On the subject of the discourse of queenship in Mechtilde’s text, see Voaden, ‘Drinking from the Golden Cup’.
129 Voaden, ‘Drinking from the Golden Cup’, p. 110.
primarily a symbol of Christ’s physical humanity or suffering; Mechthild’s visions are not primarily of the host as bleeding flesh or as an infant’. In some instances, Mechthild’s knowledge of courtly imagery inflects her rendering of the Eucharist. One such example appears in the first part of the Booke, and has Mechthild hear Christ asking her to set up a table:

“Sette furth a borde”. Ande anone sodanlye thare was a borde before oure lorde fulle sette al abowte with platerys and cuppyss of golde. Oure lordys face wiche semede a sunne with bryghtnes of a sunnebeyme fulfilled eche vesselle as for mete & drynke.131

Once again, this vision alludes to Mechtilde’s collection of beautiful visionary tableware. What is especially striking about this rendering of the Eucharist is the fact that there is very little sense that those present are about to take part in a feast that has Christ’s body as its main course. Mechthild makes no reference to Christ’s corporeal defilement, the violent act that facilitates the consumption of the divine meal. Instead, it is as though Christ’s body remains perfectly intact, with just his ‘essence’, the glare from the sunbeams that bounce off his face, charging the cups and plates with sustenance.132

The fact that Mechthild makes no reference to the brutal breaking of Christ’s body is all the more notable in the context of my primary point of focus in this section, the Booke’s reversed Eucharist. On multiple occasions, the food that Mechthild serves to Christ is symbolic of his own body. Prima facie, this seems rather macabre. Christ is presented with the flesh of the redeeming lamb, followed by a calf that has been basted in the fat of his own spiritual grace, before being served with a fish that represents himself, along with his own heart. As the vision draws to a close, Mechthild offers a welcome explanation of how the preceding images ought to be interpreted:

Alle thees [items of food] eche deuoute sawle gostelye mynystreys to God whene he bethynks on tham or haffes tham in mynde with

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130 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 214.
131 Booke, p. 124. Liber SG, p. 32.
132 This imagery carries strong echoes of that of twelfth and thirteenth-century Grail romances, in which the holy chalice is said to be full of bright light. In Chrétien de Troyes’ twelfth-century Conte du Graal, for example, the Grail is said to shine even brighter than the candles in the banqueting hall. See Chrétien de Troyes, Le Roman du Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal, ed. by Keith Busby (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), p. 137.
deuoute thonkkynge to God ande blessys ande worscheppes oure lorde lhesu for these ande alle othere gytetz ande graces.\textsuperscript{133}

Each of the courses that Mechtild serves to Christ equate with the believer’s contemplation of what each one symbolises, including the remembrance of the Passion. This feast is not, therefore, a somewhat grotesque instance of auto-cannibalism, but a manifestation of the devout Christian’s love for Christ. In the \textit{Booke}, to recollect Christ’s sacrifice does not necessitate a lunch into a violent semantic field. Rather, the courtly domesticity of this episode lends the scene a festive note of opulent hospitality, with the multiple courses of the lavish banquet representing the numerous ways in which one might contemplate Christ’s sacrifice. As Christ is so profoundly hospitable in nourishing Christians with the food of his body, believers must reciprocate by offering their love in the greatest abundance. The banquet that Christ receives is comprised of the believer’s thoughts upon his divine sacrifice. In a strong echo of the metaphor of Christ’s body as the thread of silk, devotion is here conceptualised via the experience of a series of luxurious and expensive items. For Mechtild’s wealthy lay readers, the notion that one might be able to use one’s experience of material luxury in the praising of Christ’s sacrifice would be an especially appealing notion.

\textbf{Domestic Transgressions and Transcendences: Mechtild in the Kitchen}

The imagery discussed in the above section, of luxurious food and lavish dining, places Mechtild at the centre of the imagined banqueting hall. As an aristocratic redrawing of the active Martha, Mechtild is an attentive noble hostess, furnishing her most special of guests with an abundant feast. In the metaphors that will be the subject of my analysis in the following section, Mechtild excuses herself from the aristocratic dining table and moves into the kitchen, as this space of domestic labour converges with her ecclesial and conventual environment. The first instance of this curious spatial overlap appears in the second part of the \textit{Booke}, in a vision that Mechtild receives shortly after attending Matins. As she leaves the service to go to sleep,

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Booke}, p. 152. \textit{Liber SG}, p. 47.
Mechtild sees Christ sitting in a 'hye seet', in yet a further example of Mechtild's persistent rendering of Christ as a regal figure. Christ's feet rest upon a stool, and when he invites Mechtild to take her repose with him, the sounds of the kitchen interrupt her divinely ordained rest:

"Reste the here opon my feete ande slepe". Sche obeyed anone ande leneade here hede on his feete so þat here eere was euen to the wounde off his feete. Ande þan sche herde þat wounde make a noyse als of a potte feruently boyllynge.

Unsurprisingly, Mechtild is bemused to hear the sound of a busy working kitchen from within the wounds in Christ's feet. When he asks her to tell him how she understands this image, Mechtild is unable to answer, and asks Christ for an explanation, which he willingly gives:

“A boyllynge potte sowneth as þif he sayde þus: Renne, renne, fro trauayle to trauayle, fro cite to cite, fro prechynge to prechynge. Ande this potte walde neuere soffre me to reste to I hadde fully brought into ane ende alle thynges whiche were necessarye to thyne euereelastynge helth”.

This remarkable and unusual image has already received some critical attention. In her discussion of the resonances of the boiling pot, Lochrie notes that it signifies '[Christ's] restless period on earth'. Voaden’s analysis concurs with this reading, while further noting that the image ‘reveals an appealing domesticity’, and with its focus on sound, betrays Mechtild’s preference for visions that rouse the bodily senses. The feet of Christ are often posited as a site of sensory spiritual experience. In the metaphor under discussion here, the sense stirred is that of hearing. Of course, it was while she was sitting at the feet of Christ that Mary, Martha’s sister, first ‘heard his word’. It is not solely the ears that are roused when one places oneself at

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137 Lochrie, Margery Kempe, p. 82.
Christ’s feet. Given the prominent Cistercian influence at Helfta, a further image of sensory experience that might have been familiar to Mechtilde appears in Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons on the Song of Songs. In a metaphor for the gradual progression of a contemplative relationship with Christ, Bernard chides the zeal of the eager religious, who ‘rashly aspire[s] to the lips of a most benign bridegroom’.\footnote{Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, trans. by Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), I, 16-17 (Sermon 3).} Before one might kiss Christ’s lips, one must begin the contemplative journey at Christ’s feet, as Bernard advises the novice religious to ‘prostrate yourself on the ground, take hold of his feet, soothe them with kisses, sprinkle them with your tears and so wash not them but yourself’\footnote{Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, trans. by Walsh, I, 17 (Sermon 3).} As I have previously noted, the Booke diverges from works by numerous other visionary women in that Mechtilde does not punctuate her revelations with frequent humble assertions of her frailty. In having a spiritual experience at Christ’s feet, however, Mechtilde implies that she is in the early stages of her contemplative journey.

This metaphor for the nascent contemplative yokes the domestic labour of the need to attentively monitor a boiling pot to Christ’s compelling desire to move from place to place, preaching and labouring in order to secure salvation for humanity.\footnote{This is a notably different rendering of Christ from that of Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, which will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, in which Love displays a keen desire to situate Christ indoors, his earthly mission characterised as a series of domestic visits.} It is rather curious that the Booke’s rendering of Christ as a mendicant figure should be crafted by a religious woman whose life is defined by enclosure; it would appear that Mechtilde’s characterisation of Christ is not invariably modelled upon her own spiritual experience. The domestic vocabulary of boiling pots in the kitchen, and thereby of interiority, facilitates Mechtilde’s access to Christ’s description of his life on earth, which is defined by the language of frequent movement beyond the physical limits of enclosure. I would suggest, therefore, that the Booke’s domestic lexicon enables Mechtilde to transcend the psychological borders of the convent, and imaginatively experience Christ’s exteriorised mode of spirituality. It is particularly pertinent that this interwoven vocabulary of interior and exterior
should be ‘housed’ by one of the wounds in Christ’s feet. Considerable critical attention has been afforded to the liminality of Christ’s wounds. To cite just one example, Merback suggests that they ‘locate perception at the pulsing boundaries of the body’. Mechtild is, then, exploiting the sense in which a wound blurs the specifically corporeal boundaries between internal and external, and expanding this to encompass the borders between the different characters of other physical spaces.

I will now examine a kitchen metaphor from Mechtild’s Latin text. This more detailed foray into the Latin source is necessitated by the fact that, most interestingly, the Middle English translator omits this particular image from his version. As I have shown in my preceding analysis of the Booke, the Middle English translator occasionally omits a few lines from certain visions, or puts his translated versions into a different order, but it is much more unusual for him to excise entire revelations. I would suggest that the omission of this kitchen metaphor reveals some detail about the intended purpose of the Middle English text, and it is worth interrogating why it does not make the cut. The metaphor appears in the second part of the Liber SG, under the subheading of ‘De Coquina Domini’, the Lord’s Kitchen. Though this is a relatively lengthy episode, it is worth citing it in full:

Cum quadam vice donum quoddam permagnificum accepisset ex divina liberalitate Domini, recognoscens vilitatem propriam, dixit cum humili subjectione sui: «O Rex munificentissime, nequaquam hoc tantae excellentiae tuae donum condecet me, quae indignam me reputo etiam ut immittar coquinae tuae ad abluendas scutellas tuas. » Cui Dominus benigne respondit: « Quae est coquina mea, et quae sunt scutellae meae, quas velles ablure? » Ad quod illa convicta respondere nesciens conticuit. Tunc Dominus, qui nonnunquam quaestionem movere solet, non ut expediatur, sed ut expediat, hoc eam responso simul et visione laetificavit. Ait enim: « Coquina mea est Cor meum deificum, quod in modum coquinae, quae domus est communis et pervia omnibus tam servis quam liberis, semper patens est omnibus, et promptum ad cujuslibet delectamentum. Hujus coquinae coquus est Spiritus Sanctus, cujus inaestimabilis suavitatis illud sine intermissione abundantissima liberalitate infundit, et replet, replendoque facit abundare. Scutellae meae sunt corda omnium Sanctorum et electorum meorum, quae ex

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145 Liber SG, p. 165.
Like the image of the boiling pot discussed above, this kitchen metaphor has been the subject of some critical analysis. In her discussion of the image, Pedersen suggests that Mechtild draws upon the space of the kitchen in order to 'illustrate God’s divine actions. She uses it as a description of the circulation of divine love which from its very provenance abundantly flows to creation'.

Pedersen’s analysis builds upon an earlier discussion by Voaden, who reads this kitchen as a feminised space, and suggests that 'kitchens, like women, are the source of nourishment, this vision also incorporates those images of enclosure which are so much a part of the visions of the Helfta nuns. Here the kitchen is clearly located within the house, the room surrounded by the building just as the Sacred Heart or a woman’s womb is surrounded by the body'. This reading is less convincing than Pedersen’s, as the kitchen is explicitly described as ‘open to all’: Mechtild does not explicitly inflect the space with feminine characteristics. Moreover, as I have previously noted, Mechtild is far less concerned with her ‘femaleness’ than most women visionaries.

Neither of these scholars remark upon the fact that this metaphor is left out of the Middle English translation, so there has been no examination of precisely why the translator seems to have been uneasy about including it.

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146 Liber SG, p. 165. ['Once, after she had received an especially magnificent gift from the Lord’s divine generosity, she acknowledged her own vileness and said with humble submission, “O Most munificent King, so excellent a gift is hardly suitable for me! I am not even worthy to set foot in your kitchen to wash your dishes”. The Lord graciously replied, “What is my kitchen and what are my dishes, which you would like to wash?” Confounded by this question, she was silent, not knowing what to say. Then the Lord, who sometimes raises a question not to be answered, but to answer another one, cheered her up with this reply, along with a vision. He said, “My kitchen is my divine heart, which is always open to everyone and ready to supply every kind of delight- just like a kitchen that is a part of the house common to everyone, slaves as well as free persons. The cook in this kitchen is the Holy Spirit, whose inconceivable sweetness fills it unceasingly with the most abundant generosity, causing it too to abound. My dishes are the hearts of all my saints and my chosen ones, which are constantly flooded with wondrous sweetness from the overflow of my divine heart’. The Book of Special Grace, pp. 131-132].


The opening lines of the metaphor give the impression that it might develop into a penitential lesson, with Mechtilde uncharacteristically asserting her ‘worthlessness’, and submitting herself to Christ’s service. It soon becomes apparent, however, that the kitchen is not a space in which to do penance: it is a remarkably democratic and open space, in which everyone is welcome to experience Christ’s superabundant love. This culinary space is, furthermore, characterised by its rendering of divine love in terms of its fluidity. Christ has an infinite amount of love to offer to humankind, which flows freely into the hearts of those who share in kitchen chores, and they reciprocate by sending their love flooding back to Christ. Washing dishes is not, here, invoked as a chore that might focus the mind. Instead, washing is synonymous with a distinctly liberal environment, defined by an uncontrollable overflow of love. This is markedly different from the rendering of the kitchen in the Doctrine, which is posited as a space in which to enact the trials and mortifications of living under monastic rule. Instead, Christ actually corrects Mechtilde’s assumption that to wash dishes is an expression of one’s humility and unworthiness. Mechtilde’s kitchen is, rather, an allegorisation of heaven, characterised by the usual celestial hierarchies of the Virgin Mary, angels, and saints:

Et ecce vidit beatam Virginem proxime Deo adstantem, cum omni multitutdine Angelorum et Sanctorum. Qui Angeli corda sua in modum aureorum discorun quasi de pectore suo Domino Regi suo praesentabant ad influendum. Quae singula torrens deificae voluptatis egrediens a profluvio divini Cordis copiosissima videbatur supereffluentia influere, quae rursus influentia de corde Sanctorum reinfluen cum mira gratitudine Cor Dominicum repetebat.\textsuperscript{149}

In reframing the kitchen as heaven, Mechtilde strips her spatial allegory of its didactic potential. The kitchen of the Doctrine is the space in which one prepares for celestial union with Christ by enacting the various penitential practices advised by the authoritative voice of the translator. By contrast,

\textsuperscript{149} Liber SG, pp. 165-166. ['And behold! she saw the blessed Virgin standing next to God, with the whole multitude of angels and saints. The angels presented their hearts to the Lord, their king, like golden platters taken from their chests to be filled. A torrent of godlike pleasure from the great river of the divine heart seemed to flow into each, filling it with the most copious overflow. This abundance, overflowing in return from the hearts of the saints, flowed back into the Lord’s heart and refilled it with marvellous gratitude’. \textit{The Book of Special Grace}, p. 132].
Mechtild appears to suggest that no such preparatory steps are necessary: far from being a space in which one readies oneself to be worthy of sitting in heavenly company, Christ himself advises that the kitchen is, in fact, the very site of celestial communion.

Mechtild’s revision of the allegorical resonances of the kitchen represents a notable departure not only from those of the guidance text, but also from those of a fellow female visionary. In two visions received by Agnes Blannbekin, a thirteenth-century Austrian Beguine and mystic, Christ is also to be found in a kitchen. In the second of these visions, he is busy preparing four dishes to feed the devout. Each of these dishes, when eaten, stirs an act of spiritual recollection in the diner: consumption of the first dish evokes compassion for Christ’s suffering during the Passion, while the second, made from almond milk, rouses compassion and sadness for the sins of one’s fellow believers. The third dish prompts prayer, while the final course is made from herbs and vinegar, which connotes the fear of God. Agnes, then, follows the guidance text model for her rendering of the kitchen, as it is a space in which to learn lessons that might make celestial union more likely. The only lesson that Mechtild learns in her kitchen, however, is that she is already worthy of God’s love, and therefore already welcome in the celestial community.

Mechtild’s kitchen is, therefore, a remarkably redemptive and positive reconception of a space of apparent servitude, which perhaps offers some clue as to why this image is omitted from the Middle English text. Its implication, that everyone is already adequately qualified to receive God’s love and enter heaven, is too radical and revisionist for a fifteenth-century English audience. Indeed, the emphasis of Mechtild’s kitchen on equality, with both servants and the free welcome to meet Christ, as well as its hugely liberal approach to the imagery of abundance and overflowing, is perhaps not appropriately suited to the spiritual needs of enclosed religious and the ambitious laypeople who attempt to emulate their practices. Mechtild’s kitchen is certainly not an

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150 Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin (d. 1315), ed. by Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Voegler (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1994), pp. 101-103. For an English translation of the two visionary passages that see Christ in a kitchen, see Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations, ed. by Ulrike Weithaus (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 30-31.
enclosed space, as it is open to all who wish to share it with Christ. This culinary space is uncomfortably removed from the strictures of conventual discipline, as it prefers equality, openness and abundance to the rigours of readying oneself for Christ.

**The Booke and its Fifteenth-Century English Readers**

I will now turn my attention to the fifteenth-century English readers of the Booke, who are denied the opportunity to navigate the implications of the risky image discussed above. In common with the other texts under discussion in this thesis, the Booke had readers both within and beyond monastic walls. Perhaps Mechtild’s most significant English monastic connection was to Syon Abbey, and Syon itself, as Gillespie has noted, had four complete copies of Mechtild’s text in the brothers’ library, one of which was in English.\(^{151}\) Voaden has suggested that the very introduction of Mechtild’s text into England might be connected to Henry V’s establishment of Syon in 1415, and the foundation of the Carthusian monastery of Sheen just across the river.\(^{152}\) As Rydel has observed, ‘Carthusian and Bridgettine networks link nearly every surviving insular manuscript and reference to Mechtild of Hackeborn’.\(^{153}\) In light of the Middle English text’s address to ‘sisters and brothers’, Rydel goes on to suggest that the Booke was likely written ‘for a mixed-gender audience, possibly for the double house at Syon Abbey’.\(^{154}\)

Beyond its early readership at Syon, the Booke found its way into the hands of several illustrious users in the secular world. Perhaps the most significant non-monastic reader of the Booke was Richard III, who owned the more elaborate Egerton manuscript.\(^{155}\) Richard’s mother, Cecily Neville, a reader of three of the four texts under discussion in this thesis, also owned a copy of the Booke, as evidenced by the fact that Cecily leaves ‘the boke of St.

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\(^{155}\) Voaden, ‘Who Was Marget Thorpe?’, p. 12.
Matilde' in her will. One wonders, therefore, whether Cecily’s own reading practices and preferences influenced those of her son and his wife, Anne of Warwick. It is equally possible, Voaden suggests, that ‘Richard or his wife introduced Cecily Neville to The Booke of Gostlye Grace, as the other way around’. While it cannot be determined with certainty how or why Richard III came to acquire his copy of the Booke, his ownership of the text appears to be central to its broader readership in fifteenth-century England. In her discussion of Richard’s reading of the Booke, Voaden suggests that ‘the reading community for Mechtild of Hackeborn was congruent with, though not of course restricted to, families which supported Richard of Gloucester and which engaged in similar devotional activities’. Many of the families that Voaden identifies lived, like Richard, in northern England. Given the content and concerns of so many of Mechtild’s revelations, it is not at all surprising that so many elite northern families should have encountered her text. Christ’s heart is, of course, one of Mechtild’s favourite images, and the north of England in the fifteenth century has been noted for its particular taste for the imagery of the Sacred Heart.

Given that Mechtild’s Booke seems so comfortable with the association of spirituality and luxury, it is not at all surprising that the text was read and owned at the highest levels of fifteenth-century English society. With its suggestion that the believer’s thoughts on Christ’s Passion might be aptly conceptualised as a lavish banquet, along with the direct association of divine corporeality with expensive silk, readers such as Richard III and his mother would have seen their own domestic environment reflected in Mechtild’s

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159 Voaden, ‘Who Was Marget Thorpe?’, p. 17.
160 John B. Friedman, Northern English Books, Owners, and Makers in the Late Middle Ages (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 150. Further evidence that the Sacred Heart was especially popular with northern readers might be drawn from the extraordinarily vivid renderings of Christ’s wounded heart in London, British Library, MS Additional 37049, a manuscript that seems to have been produced for a readership of northern Carthusians. On the northern provenance of the manuscript, see Jessica Brantley, Reading in the Wilderness: Private Performance and Public Devotion in Late Medieval England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 4. Two especially vivid illustrations of the pierced and bleeding heart appear at f. 20r and f. 24r of the manuscript.
numerous heart-households. With its emphasis on domestic items that might be used to focus the mind on piety, the Booke fits within a genre of fifteenth-century religious texts for laypeople that ask their often wealthy readers to consider how their household circumstances might be useful in their contemplation of Christ. One text that takes such an approach is the Tretyse of Loue, a late fifteenth-century Middle English translation of a French religious treatise that borrows much of its imagery from Ancrene Wisse, originally written for an aristocratic woman. In the Tretyse, its writer asks its wealthy reader to consider meditating on the exemplary poverty of the Holy Family at the Nativity, as she lies in her large and comfortable bed:

Now I pray yow, ryght dere sustyr, remembyr yow stedfastly whanne ye lye in your large softe bed, wel arayed wyth ryche clothys and warme couerynge and hote furrys, so well at ese, and your lentylywoman so redy to serue yow, thanne thynke ye often wyth grete pyte how she that was the quene of angellys and Empresse of all be worlde, how hyr bed was streyght and harde and arayed wyth pore clothys.161

In this passage, the reader is clearly expected to consider the stark contrast between her domestic circumstances, defined by lavish beds and servants, and the comparatively desperate situation of the Holy Family. In their reading of these lines, Bartlett and Bestul suggest that ‘the text bestows a certain holiness on material possessions, since they can be used- paradoxically- as guides for contemplation on the abject poverty of Mary and Christ’.162 When domestic objects are invoked in the Booke, however, Mechtild’s readers are presented with an altogether different spiritual proposition. Far from being asked to consider the distance that the ownership of luxury material objects places between themselves and the Holy Family, readers such as Richard and Cecily are instead invited to consider the affinity with Christ that the possession of these items affords them. If one owns silk bedlinen and gives banquets on lavish tableware, one is engaging with objects that equate with the corporeality and sacrifice of Christ. For the Booke’s aristocratic readers,

therefore, this justification of the spiritual potential of luxury would render the text something of a guidance manual, as Booke users like Richard and Cecily would receive ample instruction in how to make use of the domestic environment in their piety.

The spiritual climate of the 1400s was not, of course, entirely comfortable, with religious authorities anxious about the memory of Wycliffism. As its Middle English origins were rooted in the orthodox hub of Syon, Mechtild’s Booke appeared to offer a salve to some of these spiritual tensions. Indeed, several scholars have commented upon the valuable orthodoxy of the visions. In the introduction to her edition of Mechtild’s text, Halligan remarks upon the Booke’s role as a counterpoint to the Wycliffite danger, as it ‘becomes a staunch ally of the traditional institutions’.\(^{163}\) Voaden, too, comments upon the ‘theological orthodoxy’ of the visions, and suggests that ‘the spiritual teaching they offer is easily understood and readily followed’.\(^{164}\) Given the fifteenth-century effort to reassert the importance of the established Church, it is likely that Mechtild’s emphatic focus on the liturgical timetable made her Booke a particularly valuable resource.\(^{165}\) As Marks suggests, the ecclesiastical campaign ‘involved a renovatio of traditional religion through liturgical innovations in the form of new feasts and greater elaboration in ritual performance’.\(^{166}\) Evidently, one of the Booke’s salient roles in a fifteenth-century English context was to bolster the traditional teachings and practices of an anxious established church.

For both conventual and lay readers, one of the primary properties of Mechtild’s writings seems to have been their capacity to assist with prayer. Here, I return to the spiritual practice of Cecily Neville. In her discussion of Cecily’s engagement with Mechtild’s writings, Grisé suggests that the saint ‘[fills] a niche as a prayer expert. This may be attributed to the attention paid in Mechtild’s text to liturgical time and ritual, and to the fact that her writing


\(^{164}\) Voaden, ‘Mechtild of Hackeborn’, p. 431.

\(^{165}\) On the fifteenth-century drive to assert the centrality of the Church, see Laura Varnam, The Church as Sacred Space in Middle English Literature and Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 230-231.

contains prayers that are easily extracted’. Indeed, those who used Mechtild’s writings to support their prayer practice often did not encounter the Booke in its entirety, but rather read selected excerpts from the text in devotional compilations. As Barratt observes, ‘references to Mechtild […] and extracts in both English and Latin from her revelations have been identified in a total of nine medieval devotional works and spiritual compilations’. As I noted at the very beginning of this chapter, Mechtild was an ‘approved woman’, and excerpts from her Booke often travelled alongside the writings of Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, and Elizabeth of Töss. This excerpting of prayers from Mechtild’s text would have significantly diminished her status as a visionary, transforming her hugely creative text into a tool for encouraging proper spiritual practice. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suggest that reducing the Booke to a series of disembodied prayers would have made Mechtild’s frequently domestic spatial imaginary much less visible.

For evidence of the diminishing of Mechtild’s spatial images, one might look to London, British Library, MS Harley 494, a very late fifteenth-century or perhaps even early sixteenth-century devotional compilation. This collection of prayers was owned by Anne Bulkeley, a wealthy Hampshire widow, and excerpts prayers from Mechtild’s text on more than one occasion. One such prayer extract appears on f. 26, which adapts a portion of the fifteenth vision of the Booke’s third section, in which Christ is speaking:

Also in þe mornynge [,] Offre thy hart to me [Christ], prayng that þou neuer do speke, think ne desyre that thing which myȝtt displease me, commyttyng all thy gouernance to me.

This is a notably cold and authoritarian adaptation of Christ’s proffering of similar instructions in the Booke, which is hallmarkmed by Mechtild’s typical

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169 For a transcription of the contents of this manuscript, see Alexandra Barratt, Anne Bulkeley and her Book: Fashioning Female Piety in Early Tudor England. A Study of London, British Library, MS Harley 494 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 171-266. My quotation from MS Harley 494 is drawn from Barratt’s transcription.
170 Barratt, Anne Bulkeley and her Book, p. 195.
focus on the superabundance of divine love, and the reciprocity between her own heart and that of Christ:

Furste whene þowe ryseste erlye greet ande doo reuerence to the floryschyng ande to the lufynge herte of þyne luffere fro whome alle goodnesse floweth owte ande alle blessednes in heuen ande in erth ande euere flowys ande schalle flowe withowten ende. Tharefore with alle þyne strengthes [...] putte þy herte to the herte of thy lover [Christ].

The excerpted Mechtilde of the Middle English devotional compilation is, then, a far less vibrant voice. While the Booke imagines morning prayer to be a glorious melding of hearts, the compiler of Bulkeley's prayer book refashions it into a preventative measure against its reader's potential wrongdoing. The conception of the heart as a site of loving mutual encounter, which is so often associated with lavish domesticity in Mechtilde's text, recedes entirely. Instead, the heart of the careless believer needs to be closely guarded by Christ, who appears to be more of a righteous judge than a lover. The loss of Mechtilde's cardio-domestic imagery from her devotional compilations prevents those readers who encountered her text in this abbreviated format from accessing some of the most positive and optimistic aspects of her visionary vocabulary.

A further example of a devotional compilation that draws upon the Booke to build its narrative is The Myroure of Oure Ladye, the text with which I will close my discussion in this chapter. The Myroure is a Bridgettine liturgical text first printed in 1530, 'but believed to have been written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century'. This religious treatise is designed to 'explicate liturgical practice for the sisters [at Syon], and in doing so the author explains that his book is a special kind of “mirror”, in which his readers will see the Virgin'. Given Mechtilde's particularly close attention to the hours of the liturgy, she is a perfect candidate for inclusion in the text. The Myroure is of especial interest to my discussion as it repurposes one of Mechtilde's domestic images in order to direct the Syon sisters in their spiritual practice. In her extensive study of the excerpting of portions of Mechtilde's writing in

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173 Krug, Reading Families, p. 168.
fifteenth-century England, Voaden notes the appearance of this domestic image in the *Myroure*, having cautioned that the extracts might be taken from either the *Booke* or the *Liber SG*, as they are not direct translations. The image in question is very similar to one in the second part of the *Booke*, which allegorises the sacrament of confession in domestic terms. One day, Mechtild is keen to receive communion, but she has no access to a confessor, and she does not wish to take the Eucharist without having confessed first. Her anxiousness attracts the attention of Christ, who assures her that her sins are already forgiven. In order to explain how exactly one might be forgiven without first confessing to a priest, Christ invokes the familiar Eucharistic metaphor of the imminent domestic visitor in order to explicate the practice of inward confession, which can be done in the absence of a clerical figure:

“Itt es nowe of þy synyns as whan a myghtyte king schalle comme into an in or into a grete place. Anone the howse is made clene that nothynge maye be seen thare þat schulde dysplese his syght. Botte when it falleth þat the lorde be so nerehande þat the fylth maye nought be caste owte or the lorde comme anone thaye geddere itt ande leyes itt in ane herne [lays it in an urn] that itt mowe be caste owte afterwarde. Ryght soo when powe haste a fulle wille ande a desyre to knawelich thy synyns ande in wille to falle nought in þame agayne, þan be þaye alle done awaye soo before me that I schalle no more brynge thame to my mynde, þif alle þay be rehersede agayne be confessioun”.

This allegory shares many thematic similarities with the one found in the first book of the *Doctrine*, though it is by no means exactly the same. In her version of the housework image, Mechtild is much less strict. If one needs to take the Eucharist very soon, and one does not have time to make formal confession, one can sweep one’s sins to one side and confess in one’s heart to God. In Mechtild’s reworking of this allegorical commonplace, then, this inward mode of confession receives divine authorisation.

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176 See *Doctrine*, p. 7. I discuss the *Doctrine* passage in Chapter One of this thesis, at pp. 45-46.
confessor is rendered redundant, as Christ directly approves Mechtilde’s participation in receiving the Eucharist by accepting her inward confession, though he does advise her to confess in the conventional fashion later on.

Mechtilde’s marginalisation of confession to a cleric, with its attendant implication that Mechtilde has a direct line to Christ, seems to have made the compiler of the Myroure uneasy. When this image reappears in the Myroure, the compiler feels it necessary to add some significant modifications:

And hereof ye haue a notable example in saynt Maudes reuelacions, bothe for diuine seruyce, & for howlsyng. That lyke as a man agenst a lorde coming to hym maketh clene his house, & yf he may not for hast, cast out all the vnclennesse before his entrey, then he swepehit yt vp togyther in to a corner & castyth yt outhe afterwarde. Ryghte so when a persone goyth to dyuynge seryuce, or to the howlsynge, & felyth grudgeyng in consyence, yf he may not get his gostly father to shryue hym, then he ought to sorowe hys synnes in his harte by contricion, and to shryue him therof to god and to swepe yt in to a corner of hys mynde tyll he may gette hys confessour, and truste in oure lorde mercy go to hys seruice or hys howlsyn. This is to be kepe in all times, and in all synnes as for dyuynge seruyce. It is also to be kepe in youre howlsynge, as for suche dayly defaultes, ot neglygences as ye ar not syker that they are not dedly. But & eny know himself gylyt in dedly synne; he ought not to be howsled tyl he be shryuen (emphasis mine).178

The portion of text that I have emphasised is the Myroure compiler’s careful explication of Mechtilde’s original bold metaphor. Readers of the text might use, the compiler explains, Mechtilde’s metaphor for sweeping sins into the corner of their minds if they do not have the time to confess before singing the Hours or participating in Mass. However, he cautions, it is not universally applicable, and is only relevant in the case of minor quotidian ‘neglygences’. If one has committed a deadly sin, it is invariably necessary to confess to a cleric, and it is not sufficient to confess inwardly, as Mechtilde advises. Rather bizarrely, the Myroure compiler seems to invoke Mechtilde purely so that he might correct her. This reworking of Mechtilde’s domestic metaphor is considerably stricter than its original incarnation in the Booke. Perhaps most crucially, it reasserts the salient importance of a male clerical confessor, who is relegated to secondary status in the Booke. In a recent discussion of the Myroure author’s

treatment of this image, Whitehead suggests that he is not only using Mechtild in order to build his narrative, ‘but he is also seeking to contain her’. The anxious spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England necessitates the full-throated reassertion of the importance of the clerical establishment.

In many respects, it is not at all surprising that the Myroure author should attempt to moderate the radical potential of Mechtild’s domestic imagery. According to Gillespie, the purpose of the writings of the four ‘approved women’ is to:

enact a careful balancing act between the celebration of a special charism that brings, on the one hand, renown (and pilgrims) to a particular religious house and, on the other, confirmation, reinforcement and potentially model behaviours for those journeying in faith and in the hope of grace; and between a style of writing and encoding of that life that reinforces and re-enacts the centrality of the institutional Church and its clergy in interpreting, validating, and transmitting that life to others, and in seeking to control and police its subsequent significations.

Evidently, Mechtild’s role in the eyes of the religious authorities is to bolster the authority of the traditional Church, and this necessitates the ‘policing’ of her often boldly positive writings. As my analysis of the Myroure’s reworking of her metaphor of the penitent householder suggests, this careful control of the resonances of her imagery is at the forefront of devotional compilers’ minds. Most interestingly, Grisé has observed that a large proportion of the prayers that have their basis in Mechtild’s writings are concerned with Christ’s blood and wounds. When one considers the general complexion of much of the content of the Booke, this seems rather surprising. Much of my analysis has demonstrated that Mechtild is not preoccupied by the abject corporeal suffering of Christ, and, relatedly, she does not advocate harsh penitential practices in remembrance of his sacrifice. That so many

Mechtildian prayers should engage with the imagery of Christ’s bodily suffering is further evidence of the ways in which the excerpts from the Book of Hours and the Latin are inflected with a wholly new set of concerns, which perhaps better reflect the trends of fifteenth-century English spirituality.

**Conclusion**

In a chapter that has analysed Mechtilde’s domestic imagery in order to highlight the vibrancy and creativity of the Book of Hours, it seems discordant to conclude by discussing the apparent dampening of these aspects of the text. This rather bleak endnote might be tempered by the fact that, as my discussion of the Myroure compiler’s careful commentary on Mechtilde’s householder metaphor demonstrates, those tasked with excerpting parts of her writings were not so anxious about their resonances that they chose to omit them altogether. Those who read the Myroure, whether at Syon or elsewhere, would still have to navigate the potentially radical implications of Mechtilde’s domestic allegory, and determine how much attention to pay to the compiler’s anxious glossing. As a very final and more positive thought, I would like to return to the character of the domestic imagery in Mechtilde’s Book of Hours as a whole. Mechtilde’s household vocabulary encapsulates the positivity and confidence of her identity as a conduit of God’s word. When Mechtilde contemplates Christ’s wounds, she does not find them to be visceral fleshly injuries that drip with copious blood, rather, they contain boiling pots that afford Mechtilde access to the story of Christ’s life on earth. I have noted on numerous occasions that Mechtilde’s conception of domesticity is bound up in her experiences of conventual enclosure; it is therefore often indistinguishable from ecclesial and monastic space. This means that one of the key purposes of Mechtilde’s domestic imaginary is to deepen her connection to her immediate surroundings, and thereby the experience of her enclosure. This is not, however, the sole purpose of Mechtilde’s homely imagery. As the metaphor of the boiling pot demonstrates, Mechtilde’s domestic language also affords her the opportunity to transcend the psychological borders of physical enclosure, as she is invited to observe Christ the nomadic preacher as he travels from
town to town. This dual purpose of her domestic imagery speaks to the variety and ambition of her broader visionary output: Mechtild is a confident vessel of the divine message, which she is keen to spread to the wider Christian community. The revelatory vocabulary with which she expresses these messages has, her domestic images attest, multifarious meanings and resonances. For Bridget of Sweden, the visionary woman whose domestic imagery I intend to examine in the next chapter, the language of the household sphere facilitates a deep engagement with the religious and political anxieties of the later Middle Ages. In considerable contrast to Mechtild, Bridget’s use of domestic vocabulary does not seal her within the conventual heart, but instead affords her the opportunity to comment sharply on a broad range of ecclesiastical leaders and spiritual ideas.
Chapter Three: Marriage, Storehouses, and Celestial Visitors: Domestic Frameworks in Bridget of Sweden’s Liber Celestis

The narrative of The Book of Margery Kempe reveals at several points that its eponymous central figure is decidedly unenthusiastic about the role that she is expected to play in her household.¹ Indeed, Margery famously rejects the domestic labour of household chores and the conjugal contract with her husband in favour of transforming herself into a Bride of Christ. Margery’s spiritual reinvention draws her away from the domestic sphere, as she pursues a nomadic life of pilgrimage that sees her traverse England, Europe, and the Holy Land, often inciting considerable hostility from those she encounters on her way. Yet, despite this decision to leave her domestic life in Norfolk behind, Margery seems to retain an understanding of the household as a possible site of spiritual identification. While in Rome, Margery visits the house in which Bridget of Sweden, the subject of this chapter, had lived during her own time in the city:

Sche was in þe chawmbre þat Seynt Brigypt deyd in, and herd a Dewche preste prechyn of hir þerin and of hir reuelacyonys and of hir maner of leuyng. And sche kneyld also on þe ston on þe whech owr Lord aperyd to Seynt Brigypte and telde hir what day sche xuld deyn on. And þis was on of Seynt Brigyptys days þat þis creatur was in hir chapel.²

Bridget, a fourteenth-century Swedish noblewoman who had also left her home behind in order to undertake multiple pilgrimages, certainly offers Margery a template for her own itinerant spiritual practice.³ Margery’s visit to

² The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS O. S. 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 95.
Bridget's Roman household, which includes a conversation with her former maidservant, suggests that it is not solely her Swedish predecessor’s nomadism that Margery wishes to emulate. Rather, Margery is also keen to take note of the spiritual experience that Bridget enjoyed within the sphere of her domestic enclosure. Margery’s kneeling on the spot at which Christ appeared to Bridget suggests that she, too, would like to be a visionary woman who receives her revelations within the intimate sphere of the chamber. In following a pilgrimage trail that leads her to Bridget's dwelling in Rome, Margery becomes Bridget’s embodied reader, emulating her departure from the household while still acknowledging the domestic sphere as a salient site of intimate spiritual experience. Bridget’s Middle English Liber Celestis, the collection of her visions that will be the subject of my discussion in this chapter, draws heavily on the language of domestic space and familial life; her departure from the home by no means dims Bridget’s appreciation of household language as a means of articulating her revelatory experiences. My examination of the importance of homely vocabulary in the Liber, alongside my discussion of the text’s fifteenth-century readers’ responses to these images, will shed new light on Bridget as a figure who does not straightforwardly reject the domestic sphere. Rather, she makes great use of its language in order to craft her visionary identity.

I will begin my discussion by giving some details of Bridget’s biography. Bridget was born into a wealthy and powerful aristocratic family in the Uppland province of Sweden in 1303, probably around the New Year. Her father, Birger Persson, was a lawmaker with considerable influence in his province, while Bridget’s mother, Ingeborg Bengtson, came from a similarly powerful family of legislators. In common with many visionaries, Bridget began receiving revelations during her childhood, and had her first

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4 Bridget Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), p. 33.

5 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 32.
'vision proper' at the age of seven. In 1316, Bridget married Ulf Gudmarsson, who, like her own father, was a knight and lawmaker from an influential aristocratic family. Over the course of her thirty-year marriage, Bridget gave birth to eight children, four daughters and four sons. As a wife and mother at the heart of one of Sweden’s most powerful aristocratic families, Bridget’s married life required her to manage a large retinue and direct the education of her eight children. As Sahlin notes, ‘while overseeing a large estate, [Bridget] reportedly instructed her children in the Bible and the lives of the saints, engaged in charitable deeds, and cultivated ascetic practices’. Indeed, Bridget’s engagement with an extremely ascetic mode of spirituality was a major part of her quotidian life. The brief vita that accompanies Bridget’s Middle English text in London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius B. I. notes that Bridget would drip hot wax onto her skin every Friday, in recollection of Christ’s Passion, and rip at her injured body with her nails if her wounds had healed by the following week. In one particularly memorable vision from the Revelationes Extravagantes, a portion of material that did not find its way into the primary collection of visions that became the Liber Celestis, Bridget is compelled to reject the luxury of a comfortable bed that has been prepared for her at home:

Contigit semel, quod, cum beata Birgitta, [...] parari fecisset lectum per quendam carpenterium sollemnium et curiosissimul solito in sua domo [...] tunc percussa fuit quasi ab vna manu tam valenter in capite, quod vix se mouere poterat pre dolore. Ducta igitur ad aliam partem domus, auduit quasi de pariete vocem dicentem sic: «Ego non stabam sed pendebam in cruce, nec caput meum habuit reclinatorium, et tu tibi tantam curiositatem queris et quietem.» Hiis igitur auditis domina Birgitta resoluta in lacrimis et subito statim curata est. Et postea, cum potuit, pocius in straminibus et pelle vrsina dormiebat quam in lecto.

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6 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 39. On the content of these childhood visions, see Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 36-38.
7 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 40.
8 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 46.
10 The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden, ed. by Roger Ellis, EETS O. S. 291 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 3. All subsequent references to this edition will be given as Liber.
11 Den Heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones Extravagantes, ed. by Lennart Hollman, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956), p. 175. ['Once it happened [...] that Blessed Birgitta had a carpenter make a bed more imposing and sumptuous than usual in her manor house [...] She then felt as though she had been hit in the head by a hand so hard that she could scarcely
This example is particularly pertinent as it sheds light on the potential for conflict between Bridget’s dual identities of aristocratic wife and mother, and that of a devout Christian woman simultaneously wedded to her faith and her husband. A high-ranking woman such as Bridget would have been expected to carefully balance the significant wealth that facilitated the purchase of the troubling bed with close attention to the importance of not losing sight of the salient lessons of her faith. As Morris observes, ‘[Bridget’s] revelations assume that a life of conspicuous consumption was proper for a woman of her class, but that high breeding carried with it a correspondingly high [...] expectation of exemplary behaviour’.\textsuperscript{12} Bridget’s integration of her ascetic practice into her interaction with the domestic sphere, however, arguably exceeds the norms of spiritual exemplarity.

Following her husband’s death in either 1344 or 1346,\textsuperscript{13} Bridget received a vision from God that compelled her to embrace a spiritual life and become a Bride of Christ. In her widowhood, Bridget took up residence at the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra, where her husband was buried.\textsuperscript{14} Beyond this monastic enclosure, parts of Bridget’s widowhood were spent travelling, both around Sweden and on pilgrimage across Europe and the Holy Land. One of Bridget’s favourite spiritual missions required her to travel across Sweden to deliver damning condemnations of the greed and corruption of prominent aristocrats.\textsuperscript{15} Bridget’s most significant journey, however, was the one she made to Rome in 1349. This was no ordinary following of the pilgrimage trail, as Bridget chose to relocate permanently, alongside her daughter, Katarina, and she never returned to Sweden. Bridget’s move had multiple motivations. Crucially, she regarded the city as the centre of Christianity. As Morris observes, ‘Rome [...] was the place where the saints and martyrs had lived, and

\textsuperscript{12} Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{13} On the debate around the precise date of Ulf’s death, see Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{14} Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{15} Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 15-16.
which she now wished to see in person’. Furthermore, the timing of Bridget’s move to Rome placed her in the city in time to participate in the celebrations of the Holy Year of Jubilee, which were due to take place a year after her arrival, in 1350. Rome was also the ideal location for Bridget to present the most senior of clerical figures with enthusiasm for Church reform, and to espouse her view that the Popes ought to return to Rome from Avignon. Bridget’s relocation to Rome was, therefore, motivated by a synthesis of her personal desire to nurture her spirituality by placing herself at the spatial heart of successive centuries of Christian history, and her deeply political interests in such matters as ecclesiastical reform and the location of the Papacy. In 1371, two years prior to her death, Bridget undertook a final pilgrimage to the Holy Land, taking with her a party of her confessors, two anchoresses, as well as three of her children. It was during this last pilgrimage that Bridget received some of her most famous visions, including her revelation of the Nativity. Following this final spiritual journey, Bridget returned to Rome, where she died on 23 July 1373. Her body was returned to Sweden, and Bridget was buried at Vadstena, the site that was soon to be consecrated as the Mother House of her Order. There were swift calls for Bridget to be made a saint. These were realised in 1391, when Bridget was canonised by Pope Boniface IX, and her canonisation was affirmed on a further two occasions in the fifteenth century, by Pope John XXIII in 1415, and four years later by Pope Martin V.

A further factor in the move to Rome had been Bridget’s wish to acquire ‘formal approval’ for the monastic rule that she had been divinely instructed to found. Between 1346 and 1349, Bridget received a collection of

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16 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 93.
17 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 93.
19 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 122.
20 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 18. For the Middle English version of Bridget’s Nativity vision, see Liber, pp. 485-487.
21 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 141.
22 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 151.
23 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 19.
24 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 17.
visions that instructed her to found a new religious order, which would have a strong focus on the Virgin Mary and be comprised primarily of a community of women.\textsuperscript{25} These visions were the celestial foundation stone of what would develop into the Bridgettine Order, initially known as the Order of the Most Holy Saviour. The Order would ‘consist of no more than sixty nuns and an auxiliary group of men thirteen priests, four deacons, and eight lay brothers’.\textsuperscript{26} In May 1346, King Magnus of Sweden gave his private estate of Vadstena to Bridget, with the intention that it would be converted into a monastery.\textsuperscript{27} This remarkable bequest is a testament to the connections that came with Bridget’s lofty status as an aristocrat, as well as her burgeoning reputation as a holy woman. The advancement of the spirituality of the Bridgettine Order was swift and widespread. Unsurprisingly, given Bridget’s residence in Rome during the final years of her life, the Order acquired large numbers of followers in Italy, as well as ‘Germany, England, Poland, Estonia, the Low Countries, and Spain’.\textsuperscript{28} Of primary pertinence to the focus of this chapter is the huge influence of the Bridgettine Order in fifteenth-century England. In 1415, Henry V laid the foundation stone of Syon Abbey at Twickenham, and the monastery became one of the wealthiest and most influential religious houses in fifteenth-century England.\textsuperscript{29}

The textual history of Bridget’s visions is by no means straightforward. By the time her words had found their way to the page, they had been mediated through a complicated network of scribes, editors, and confessors. As Sahlin observes, this inflection of Bridget’s revelatory experience with the voices of the multiple different clerics charged with disseminating her work ‘presents imposing problems for those who wish to interpret the \textit{Revelations} as direct reflections of Birgitta’s thought and visionary experiences’.\textsuperscript{30} Though

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Sahlin, \textit{Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Sahlin, \textit{Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Morris, \textit{St Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Sahlin, \textit{Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Morris, \textit{St Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 171.
she did not record her visions with her own hand, Bridget was a rigorous guardian of the words that God had spoken to her. When Bridget dictated her visions to her confessors, ‘[they] reportedly translated the revelations faithfully and read all translations aloud for Birgitta’s approval, so that she could ensure that they did not supplement or remove even one word from her visions’,\(^{31}\) Bridget’s first confessor was Mathias Övidsson, the canon of Linköping Cathedral.\(^{32}\) It is possible that Matthias had been Bridget’s confessor prior to her husband’s death, around 1344, and he became a frequent visitor to Alvastra during Bridget’s widowhood.\(^{33}\) Matthias was responsible for disseminating the contents of Bridget’s initial ‘calling vision’ around Sweden, and he also wrote a prologue for the first book of her visions.\(^{34}\) In 1348, Matthias accompanied the Swedish king in a crusade against Russia, which brought his time as Bridget’s confessor to a close.\(^{35}\)

During her time at Alvastra, Bridget came to acquire a second confessor, the Cistercian Prior Peter Olafsson, who had been present at the death of her husband.\(^{36}\) Prior Peter was Bridget’s close collaborator for the rest of her life, having come to know her around 1345, accompanying her when she relocated herself and her daughter, Katarina, to Rome. He was the primary translator of Bridget’s visions, and in this endeavour he was assisted by another religious, Master Peter Olafsson, who had been head of a Dominican religious house at Skänninge, not far from Bridget’s residence at Alvastra.\(^{37}\) In 1349, he also accompanied Bridget and Prior Peter to Rome, and stayed with her for the remainder of her life. During Bridget’s Roman years, Master Peter was responsible for instructing her in Latin, with which she apparently struggled.\(^{38}\) As she neared the end of her life, Bridget acquired a

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\(^{31}\) Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 27.
\(^{32}\) Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 69.
\(^{33}\) *Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones: Book I*, ed. by Carl-Gustaf Undhagen, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), p. 9. All subsequent references to this volume of the Latin text will be given as *Revelaciones I*.
\(^{34}\) *Revelaciones I*, p. 10.
\(^{35}\) *Revelaciones I*, p. 10.
\(^{36}\) Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, pp. 72-73.
\(^{37}\) *Revelaciones I*, p. 11.
\(^{38}\) Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 102.
final editor-confessor in Alphonso Pecha, a Spanish hermit who was a former bishop of Jaén, in Andalusia. The two had met in 1370 at Montefiascone, with Bridget having left the two Peters behind in Rome. In the absence of her two confessors, Morris suggests, ‘Alphonso became her confessor as well as her spiritual director, and he may even have been involved in writing down some of her revelations during this period’. Connecting with Alphonso was an astute decision. As Undhagen notes, he had many powerful acquaintances, including ‘popes, cardinals, royalty, nobility’. It was during the time spent with Alphonso at Montefiascone that Bridget received a vision from the Virgin Mary, which commanded her to “tell her friend Alphonso, the priest and hermit” to write and copy the books of her revelations which were divinely given to her and which until then had been kept secret. At this divine request Alphonso duly split Bridget’s revelations into books, arranging them rather loosely according to theme, and omitted any material that he felt might imperil her prospects of canonisation.

The complex and collaborative editorial history of Bridget’s visions does not by any means end with Alphonso’s divinely instructed organisation of her work. In 1380, Prior Peter left Rome for Sweden, and on his return collected a number of additional visions to add to the volume that Alphonso had already collated. In both 1377 and 1379, Alfonso’s edited versions of Bridget’s visions had been presented to two different canonisation committees, those of Pope Gregory XI and Pope Urban VI respectively. Prior Peter’s 1380 alterations to these earlier versions add extra chapters in Book IV and Book VI of Bridget’s primary work, as well as a separate group of visions, the Revelationes Extravagantes. Following this extensive process of multiple layers of editing, elaboration, and redaction of Bridget’s voice, an edition of her visions was produced at Vadstena by the Bridgettine monks.

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39 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 118.
40 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 119.
41 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 119.
42 Revelaciones I, p. 11.
43 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 118.
44 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 29.
45 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 30.
46 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 30.
towards the end of the fifteenth century. The brothers’ edition of their founding mother’s work was printed in 1492, by Bartholomaeus Ghotan of Lübeck, in time for the centenary of Bridget’s canonisation. The brief textual history that I have given here clearly demonstrates that, while Bridget was the divinely ordained conduit for God’s word, the process by which her visions were brought to the page was defined by a complex web of collaboration, mediation, alteration, and redaction.

The popularity of Bridget’s Order spread swiftly throughout Europe following her death in 1373. In line with this brisk gathering of followers, manuscripts of her visions were produced in the languages of several European countries, as well as in Latin. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, and throughout much of the fifteenth, many manuscripts of Bridget’s Latin text were produced. Today, there are around 150 extant Latin manuscripts; this sizeable quantity is a good indication of the popularity of Bridget’s visionary works. Alongside these many Latin manuscripts, a number of copies of the visions were produced in medieval Swedish. Beyond Bridget’s Latin and Swedish textual traditions, there is evidence of interest in her writings across much of Europe. Clearly, Bridget quickly acquired both eager followers of her newly founded Order and keen readers of her prophetic writings. A large portion of Bridget’s vernacular readers encountered her work in Middle English in fifteenth-century England, and it is to this version of her writings that I will turn now.

The writings of Bridget of Sweden were popular in fifteenth-century England, enjoying circulation among monastic and secular readers. Her

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47 Revelationes S. Birgitte (Lübeck: Bartholomaeus Ghotan, 1492).
48 For a list of these manuscripts, see Revelationes 1, pp. ix-xi.
49 On the extant Swedish copies of Bridget’s text, see Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 198-199. For further detail of the relationship between the Latin and Swedish manuscript traditions, see Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 7-8; Bridget Morris and Veronica O’Mara, ‘Introduction’, in The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars, ed. by Bridget Morris and Veronica O’Mara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 1-24 (p. 12).
collected visions were known as the *Liber Celestis*, and Ellis suggests that the text arrived in England ‘within at most 35 years of the Saint’s death’. Today, there are two surviving independent translations of the complete *Liber*: London, British Library, MS Cotton Claudius B. I., and London, British Library, MS Julius F. II. Both of these fifteenth-century Middle English translations are part of a group of manuscripts that draw upon the Latin version of Bridget’s visions prepared by Alphonso Pecha, which was disseminated in Italy around 1377. In his edition of the Claudius manuscript, Ellis suggests that both the manuscript and its Middle English translation are dateable to 1410-1420. Johnston is even more specific, advising that the manuscript was likely copied prior to the foundation of Syon Abbey in 1415. It has been mooted as having northern provenance, with Johnston noting that this gives reliable evidence of Bridget’s popularity ‘beyond London and Oxford’. Given the apparent interest of northern readers in European visionary women, as my discussion of Mechtild of Hackeborn’s English readership has shown, this theory seems plausible.

The Middle English *Liber* is a large collection of over 700 of Bridget’s visions, which are divided into seven books spanning numerous topics. Bridget experiences revelations that warn of the dangers of becoming distracted from one’s Christian faith, several detailed imaginings of the suffering endured by Christ during the Passion, alongside multiple revelations of evil figures who abuse and undermine the institution of the Church. Some of these visions are notably idiosyncratic, with, for example, Christ adopting the form of a giant bee in order to tell Bridget of the evils of

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52 On this group of manuscripts, see, see Ellis, ‘Introduction’, pp. xii-xiii; Roger Ellis, “Flores ad Fabricandam...Coronam“: An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of St Bridget of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England”, *Medium Aevum*, 51 (1982), 163-186 (pp. 165-166); Friedman, ‘MS Cotton Claudius B. I.’, p. 91n.


56 See, for example, *Liber*, p. 466.

57 See, for example, *Liber*, p. 17, pp. 479-480.
worldly life. Others are explicitly political, with Bridget calling upon the leaders of England and France to work towards peace in the midst of the Hundred Years War. A further defining characteristic of Bridget’s visionary imaginary is her sense that the world teeters on the brink of apocalypse. Her visions are delivered to people who have scant time to resolve their various defects, as they will soon be judged. Bridget receives these various prophetic insights via an extensive supporting cast of celestial characters, with each of her visions narrated to her by a heavenly figure. In the majority of cases, this narratorial mediator is Christ himself, who must prepare Bridget to adopt her new identity as his spiritual spouse. Alongside her divine fiancé, Bridget also has visions delivered to her by the Virgin Mary, God the Father, John the Baptist, St Agnes, St Denis of France, and St Ambrose, among others.

Much of the existing critical discussion of Bridget’s text focuses on its indisputable vastness and somewhat haphazard structure. Ellis, for example, suggests that, ‘the Liber attempts more than one narrative shape. At beginning and end it attempts a spiritual autobiography [...] Book IV appears to have attempted something similar, on a smaller scale’. Ellis substantiates his suggestion that the Liber is a patchwork of different narrative approaches by noting that ‘Books II-III shape their material differently, according to subject matter’. These remarks suggest that there is no cohesive narrative across the Liber as a whole, as is the case in the Latin, with different books adopting different approaches to the presentation of their revelatory material. Several critics concur with Ellis’ reading of the Liber as a text without a single narrative arc. Sahlin, for example, characterises Bridget’s writings as ‘an enormous, eclectic collection of visions and auditions of varying lengths’. A further popular point of discussion is the extent to which it is possible to discern Bridget’s voice both from those of her male editors, and the large

58 See Liber, pp. 163-169.
59 See Liber, pp. 342-345.
62 Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 21.
group of divine figures who narrate her visions. It is pertinent, here, to return to an issue I raised earlier in my discussion, that of interpreting the Liber as Bridget’s own words when her text has found itself under the pen of multiple different male editors. The critical consensus on the consequence of these successive layers of editing is that Bridget’s own voice is, unfortunately, lost. Ellis suggests that, ‘present mostly in the third person […] Bridget is carefully painted out of the picture as a distinct and separate figure, so as to oblige the reader to attend not to the human medium but to the divine message’. Voaden proffers a similar view, suggesting that Alphonso Pecha’s editing of the Liber, which must authorise Bridget as a female visionary, means that ‘almost nothing of [Bridget’s] personality emerges. Alfonso’s portrait of Bridget is a portrait of an empty vessel to be filled by God’. The apparent editorial erasure of Bridget’s voice from her own visionary output is, for Ellis, compounded by the fact that so many different celestial figures speak on her behalf, as he notes that ‘Birgitta has almost no independent existence in her Liber apart from the words which the heavenly figures give her to speak’.

These two flashpoints of critical discussion, of the absence of a narrative alongside the suggestion that Bridget’s voice is expunged from her work, generate an impression of the Liber as a somewhat chaotic text, whose ‘original’ author is absent.

For my own discussion, I will pursue a different approach from the critical perspectives outlined above. Throughout her Liber, Bridget repeatedly returns to the imagery of domesticity and familial interaction; she persistently explores her spiritual marriage to Christ, the practices of her faith and the broader Church, as well as the identities of some of the key celestial figures who interact with her over the course of the text, through a domestic lens. The

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63 On the mediation of female saints’ voices through their male editors’ presentation of their texts, see Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters, ed. by Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
significance of Bridget’s continual recourse to a vocabulary of domestic and family life is, I would suggest, twofold. Firstly, while the domestic imagery in the text does not, of course, constitute a narrative, it is a long thread that is stitched into the entirety of the Liber, linking books that take different approaches to their material. Perhaps even more significantly, Bridget’s continual framing of her visionary identity in domestic terms reflects, arguably, her experience as a wife, mother, and manager of a large household. Such a reading diverges from the popular notion that Bridget’s personality is lost in her text’s multiple layers of editorial revision, and among the cacophony of divine voices who narrate her visions for her.

Scholarship that deals specifically with the domestic content of the Liber is rather sparse, though some critics have remarked upon Bridget’s homely lexicon. In her 2003 monograph on architectural allegory, Whitehead discusses some of Bridget’s most striking domestic images, and gives a useful analysis of a lengthy allegorical rendering of the soul as three houses, which must be stocked with the necessary goods to sustain a fruitful spiritual marriage with Christ.67 In a 2007 paper, Myrdal suggests that ‘Birgitta drew the metaphors in her parables not only from the Bible and other sacred writings, but also from her personal experiences’.68 Beyond these more sustained engagements with Bridget’s domestic imaginary, critics generally only make very cursory reference to her homely and familial images.69 In this chapter, then, I intend to build on these previous discussions of domesticity in the Liber in order to craft an analysis of Bridget’s household images as a salient organising framework that runs throughout the text. This will show, I hope, that the Saint’s voice does not disappear into a fog of editorial revisions, and might be heard on each occasion that Bridget draws upon her experiences of the domestic sphere.

69 See, for example, Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, pp. 9-10; Sahlin, Birgitta of Sweden, p. 23.
Defining Bridget’s Spatial Imaginary: Authorising Difference

In common with the other texts under discussion in this thesis, Bridget’s Liber makes frequent use of architectural metaphors, many of which have a domestic inflection. Bridget often allegorises the church as a house, for example, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. Bridget’s engagement with the metaphorical vocabulary of space is by no means out of the ordinary, though her reconfiguration of some of these familiar allegorical frameworks is much more distinctive. While the images that I will discuss in this section are not always explicitly domestic, their distinctiveness serves as a useful preface to my forthcoming discussion, in which I will often remark upon Bridget’s departure from commonplaces. One of the most common spatial frameworks of medieval devotional literature is that of the castle, which is routinely used as a means of allegorising the soul, the chaste body, and the institution of the Church.70 These spiritual castles are generally defined by their attention to the fortification of the Christian virtues that they allegorise, from the impenetrability of female virginity to the locking out of sin. In numerous cases, the spiritual castle finds itself besieged by a clutch of shadowy external enemies, who symbolise a range of dangerous vices. In the first book of the Liber, Bridget crafts a seemingly conventional spatial allegory of a castle under attack, in which Christ narrates the tale of a castle he had built to house his friends:

I am maker of all, kinge of blis and lorde of aungels. I made to me a nobill castell, in þe whilke I put mi chosen derlinges. Bot mi enemis has vndirmined þe ground, and þai haue noied my frendes so mikill þat þai haue so streited þere fete in þaire stokkes þat þe merke71 is gone oute.72

In terms of its basic construction, this allegory is not particularly unusual. The castle that Christ has built is an allegory of the church, which shelters the

71 This appears to be a less usual spelling of ‘mergh’, meaning ‘bone marrow’. See MED, s. v. marwe (n. [1] 1a).
faithful, who are under attack from a group of violent enemies. Furthermore, Bridget’s rendering of the church casts Christian believers as members of an exclusive social elite. As Lord of this most important spiritual citadel, Christ has carefully selected its residents by hand. As Whitehead has noted, a consistent feature of religious allegories that draw upon castle imagery is their ‘alignment of virtue with high social class’. In light of Bridget’s position at the higher levels of Swedish society, it is no surprise to find that she equates Christian belief with lofty social status.

On looking beyond the more conventional aspects of Bridget’s castle allegory, it becomes apparent that her formulation of the church in this fortified guise is less usual than it initially appears. In the majority of spiritual castle allegories, which often represent the chaste soul sealed within the fortress of the body, the maleficent enemies of sin and vice mass at the periphery of the building, surrounding the outside and imperilling those within. For instance, one might look to the allegory of the soul as a noble lady sealed within the crumbling castle of the body in The Tretyse of Loue, a late fifteenth-century religious treatise written for an aristocratic female reader. Drawing largely on material in Ancrene Wisse, its author suggests that the corporeal castle is imperilled by circling enemies:

Ther was a lady som tyme in gret warre wyth hyr dedely enemyes þat had dystroyed the subsance of all hyr londe, and she all poore was beseged in an olde castell wyth hym rounde abowte, and thys castell was weyke.

In this allegorical formulation, the risk of the castle being penetrated by the enemies, which symbolise sin, hangs over its noble occupier like a Sword of Damocles. The fact that these enemies are all around the castle suggests that they have not yet been able to gain entry to the castle’s noble interior. The danger is certainly present, but remains on the outside, which allows readers of the Tretyse to contemplate how dreadful it would be for these malevolent forces to gain entry.

73 Whitehead, Castles of the Mind, p. 88.
74 I discuss the domestic imagery in the Tretyse in Chapter Two of this thesis, at p. 126.
The focus of the castle allegory in the *Tretyse* is, as is often the case, keeping the enemies *out* of the carefully sealed castle. In the allegory from the *Liber*, however, the spiritual elite who have been placed in the castle by Christ are not afforded the opportunity to consider the consequences of allowing their adversaries into their spiritual fortress: they have already entered. In Bridget’s castle allegory, the enemies do not surround the outside of the castle, but seem instead to be *underneath* it, as they undermine its very foundations. It is worth noting, moreover, that this undermining of the castle is phrased in the past tense, which suggests that it has already happened, and the damage to Christ’s spiritual coterie is already taking place. Indeed, the faithful have been physically harmed by the advancement of the enemies to the inside of the castle: they have had their feet straitened in stocks to such an extent that the marrow has been squeezed from their wounded limbs.76 With the innermost core of their bodies so dramatically diminished, Christ’s friends are intrinsically weakened. The castle of the church is, therefore, profoundly destabilised in more than one sense, with its physical structure attacked at the very foundations, and its faithful members gravely injured.

In his explanation of the symbolic resonances of the castle metaphor, Christ discusses how he built the structure that would house the chosen faithful, while also reiterating his anxieties about the undermining of the church:

\[
\text{Pe castell biforesaide is hali kirke, pe whilke I bigged of mi blode and of pe blode of mi saintes, and joined it toigdir with ciment of charite, in pe whilk I hafe put mi chosen frendes. Pe grounde of pis is trewe faith: pat is, to trow me ri3tfull iugge and mercifull. Bot nowe pis grounde is vndirmined, for all troues me oneli mercifull [...] Bot I am bothe rightfull jugge and mercifull, for I sall no3t leue pe leste sin vnponishedede, ne pe leste gude dede vnrewardede.}^{77}
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The significations in the first two lines of this metaphor are entirely conventional, and it is unfolded as many such images are to reveal a spiritual

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76 Bridget’s allusion to straitening in stocks is perhaps indicative of her awareness of Swedish provincial law, as being left to languish in the stocks until the feet rotted away was one of its punishments. See *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Liber Caelestis Books I-III*, ed. and trans. by Denis Searby and Bridget Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I, 59n. All subsequent references to this volume will be given as *Revelations I*.

Beyond the standard tropes and atomisation of this image, however, is a much more unusual message. The ground is undermined, destabilised at its very foundations. This unstable ground represents true faith, and relatedly, the belief that Christ will show both righteousness and mercy when he judges humankind. In this castle metaphor, Bridget is repurposing and redirecting homiletic commonplaces in order to deliver a lesson that diverges considerably from the usual message of such popular imagery.

In adapting this most familiar of metaphorical tropes, Bridget refashions a popular tool of spiritual treatises in order to assert her prophetic authority. In this instance, as in several other visions, Bridget makes use of her visionary authority so as to admonish the church for its failings. As Morris has noted, Bridget often attacked 'clerical excess', and foresaw a dreadful fate for those ecclesial figures who had lost sight of the faith upon which the church was built. The enemies who are pulling the church away from its foundations are, in Bridget's formulation, the rogue clerics who have unbalanced the careful calibration between Christ's mercy and justice in favour of mercy, the more comfortable of Christ's judgments. They are, perhaps, more dangerous than the vices that loiter around the periphery of a castle in the more conventional crafting of this image, as they are undermining the very principles upon which church and faith are built. Bridget's revision of the popular 'body-as-castle' commonplace suggests that her voice, and her use of spatial imagery more broadly, is more distinctive than previous discussions of her work might have suggested. While Bridget is indeed drawing on a very familiar bank of homiletic images, she is making use of her visionary authority to redirect their resonances to her own preoccupation, the corruption of the institutional Church.

Alongside her repurposing of the vocabulary of architectural fortification, Bridget repeatedly uses the vocabulary of domesticity and housebuilding in her strident warnings about the moral collapse of the Church and its institutions. It seems rather incongruous to conjoin the language of

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78 The image of the Church as founded upon Christ and the apostles is a recurrent Biblical metaphor. See 1 Corinthians 3. 10-11; 1 Peter 2. 5; Ephesians 2. 19-20. On this allegory of the ecclesial hierarchy as the fabric of the Church, see Whitehead, Castles of the Mind, p. 56.
79 Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 101.
domesticity, with its connotations of familiarity and comfort, with the lexicon of impending moral collapse. In refracting her warnings of religious apocalypse through a set of images more usually associated with quotidian life, Bridget renders her dire warnings all the more urgent, as they converge with the familiarity of domestic space. Furthermore, the peculiarity of Bridget’s drawing together of two seemingly divergent vocabularies renders her calamitous forecasts all the more memorable. Bridget’s anxieties about the inadequacies of those who are tasked with upholding the salient values of the Church are explored in the seventeenth chapter of Book I of the Liber, in which Bridget’s vision of the monastery that she is divinely ordained to construct is likened to the building of a house.80 Christ, who is the narrator of this vision, begins by issuing a reminder that, when one enters into this house, one ought to show meekness. The implication of this divine chastising, that those who come into Christ’s house are behaving improperly, soon develops into an extended criticism of those responsible for building the houses that are supposedly dedicated to the service of Christ. In a scathing judgment, Christ laments:

For þai þat nowe bigges howses to me, þai are like to maistir biggers, to whome, when þe lorde of þe bigginge comes, thai take bi þe here and drawes him vndirfete. Thai put clai abouen, and gold vndirfete. So do þere biggers to me. Pái set vp clai: þat menes, þai set vp temporall howses þat sall sone faile vnto heuen; bot of þe saule, þat is more precious þen ani golde, þat charge no3t.81

Bridget, here, seems to be exploiting the potential tension in the conventional suggestion that Christ is the foundation stone of the monastery. While this means, of course, that Christ represents its sustaining support, it also uncomfortably suggests that he might be aggressively trodden underfoot.82

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80 Bridget experienced this vision during the later 1340s, once she was living at Alvastra during her widowhood. See Revelations I, p. 81n.
81 Liber, p. 29. Revelaciones I, p. 290.
82 This reimagining of Christ as a noble lord who is abused by his builders carries a domesticated echo of an earlier reworking of this allegory in De gemma animae, a twelfth-century treatise on liturgical and ecclesial practice by Honorius Augustodunensis, a Benedictine theologian. In Honorius’ allegorisation of the Church, which refigures its conventional significations in order to explicate how different sectors of society uphold the Church, it is the ‘vulgus’, or ‘common people’, who are the foundation stones of the Church, and therefore simultaneously the basis of the institution and trodden underfoot. See Honorius Augustodunensis, De gemma animae, ed. by J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 172 (Paris: Migne,
These corrupt builders, or churchmen, fail to understand that putting Christ at the base of the institution ought to give it the sturdiest of foundations. Instead, they invert the spiritual hierarchy, treading Christ under their feet along with the precious gold of the souls that they ought to save, while erroneously placing worldly buildings above their devotion and pastoral duties. Though domestic metaphors generally offer their readers a means of imagining the careful preparation of their souls for Christ, as in the Doctrine, Bridget’s reworked version of the trope reveals the way in which clerical corruption prevents this kind of spiritual transformation.

The Episcopal Interior: Advice for the Homely Bishop

Bridget’s allegorisation of the construction of religious institutions as housebuilding is characterised by an ‘external’ model of domesticity. It is focused firmly upon the foundation and physical building of domestic space, rather than its interior character. In the set of images that I intend to examine now, Bridget turns inward, and frames her anxieties about the improper behaviour of ecclesial officials in terms of a notably interiorised domestic lexicon. The use of a metaphorical vocabulary that draws heavily upon the practices of quotidian routines of domestic life is by no means unique to the Liber. The image of a prudently maintained house, for example, carefully tidied and swept of dirt, often represents the regulated spiritual body, as in the Doctrine. In such metaphors of carefully managed domestic interiority, the figure who is expected to undertake the tasks of sweeping and tidying is, generally, a woman. Indeed, the allegorisation of the regulated, chaste body as an ordered house is a favourite didactic tool of the male authors of religious guidance texts with an intended female readership.83 In Bridget’s formulations of this trope, however, this conventional construction is reversed. Instead, it is Bridget, the female visionary, who refracts a set of instructions relating to how

83 On the role of male clerics in creating reading material for their female counterparts, see Anne Clark Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
a bishop might best perform his episcopal office through the language of everyday domestic life. As in her building allegories, Bridget repurposes the component parts of popular metaphorical tropes so as to articulate her anxieties about the corruption of senior ecclesial figures. In locating her advice at the heart of the bishop’s domestic life, Bridget heightens the urgency of her reproaches, as the danger of ecclesial corruption is aligned with such quotidian practices as eating and sleeping.

Bridget’s tales of the interior life of an unnamed bishop begin at the very first chapter of Book III, as she outlines the areas in which she will be advising this senior clerical figure:84

Wordses of informacion and monicion saide to a bishope of þe maner þat he suld hald in etinge, drinkinge, clethinge and praiinge, and howe he sulle haue him bifoře mete and efter in borde. And þe same he telles of slepinge. And howe in all he sulle excercize a bishopes offIce.85

In many respects, this introductory summary reads like the instructions of an author of a devotional guidance text, such as Ancrene Wisse or the Doctrine, to his readership of anchoresses or enclosed nuns. When one is living the highly regulated life imposed by the strictures of religious enclosure, the manner in which one eats, sleeps, and dresses becomes a manifestation of one’s devotion to Christ. Here, however, this familiar set of instructions for the careful regulation of institutional life is reformulated as a divinely ordained manner of living for one of the most senior upholders of the Christian faith. With Bridget’s visions delivered to a world on the brink of the final judgment, every

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84 Bridget received this vision, the first of Book III, in the 1340s. It is likely that she is specifically concerned in this book’s early visions with the Swedish episcopate, including Petrus Tyrgilli, of Linköping, who collected Papal annates and eventually became Archbishop of Uppsala in 1351. Bridget was perhaps also concerned with two further significant bishops, Hemming of Turku and Thomas Johannis; the latter was a key member of Bridget’s coterie, who assisted with the foundation of Vadstena. See Revelaciones I, p. 254.

85 Liber, p. 195. Sancta Birgitta. Revelaciones. Book III, ed. by Ann-Mari Jönsson, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri, 1998), III, 84. All subsequent references to this volume will be cited as Revelaciones III. The entirety of the third book of the Liber is what Searby and Morris describe as ‘a speculum episcoporum’, in which Bridget delivers ‘a collection of admonishments to high-ranking bishops and members of the hierarchy of the church in Rome’, with around half of the visions dateable to the 1340s, and half to the 1350s. See Revelations I, p. 253.
aspect of the clerical establishment’s life must be urgently examined for corruption.\footnote{Importantly, Bridget’s medieval readers would have encountered these visions about episcopal behaviour against a backdrop of successive Church councils that sought reform at various levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. On the subject of late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century Church councils, see \textit{Reforming the Church Before Modernity: Patterns, Problems and Approaches}, ed. by Christopher M. Bellitto and Louis I. Hamilton (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006); John Van Engen, ‘Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church’, \textit{Church History}, 77 (2008), 257-284.}

After she has advised the bishop in how he might dress modestly, in such a way that avoids showing an excessive interest in worldly wealth, Bridget moves to consider his proper conduct during meals. Once he has finished eating, he might be allowed to ‘haue his consolacion with þaime þat are homeli with him’.\footnote{\textit{Liber}, p. 197. \textit{Revelaciones} III, p. 88. The Middle English translator omits a line following the description of how the bishop might bring the junior clergy to dread God. This line suggests that the bishop should be both father and mother to those who must learn from him: ‘\textit{Attamen sicut mater ablactans infan tem perungit ubera cinere seu alicqu a alias amaritudine, donec infans dissuescat a lacte et assuescat cibis solidioribus, sic episcopus attrahat Deo familiares suos talibus verbis, quibus timeant Deum et diligant, ut et ipsorum sit pater per diuinam auctoritatem et eorum mater per spiritualem educacionem’. \textit{Revelaciones} III, p. 88, (emphasis mine). ‘\textit{Just as a mother giving milk to her baby anoints her nipples with ashes or some other bitter substance until she weans the baby from milk and accustoms it to solid foods, so too the bishop should bring his companions closer to God through the kind of conversation by which they may come to fear and love God, becoming in this way not only their father through the divine authority in him but also their mother through the spiritual formation he gives them’}. On first inspection, this permission to converse with those who are familiar with the bishop, which is to say the fellow dwellers in his episcopal house, appears to facilitate a rare moment of relatively unregulated interaction. Bridget soon develops this apparent permissiveness into an allegorisation of the proper manner in which the bishop might interact with the people whose spirituality he is tasked with shaping:

\begin{quote}
Neuirþeles, right as a modir, when sho will wene hir childe and make it to leue sokinge, so anointes hir pape with some bittir þinge, at make þe childe to withdrawe him fro þe milke and to vse him in som sadder mete, so suld a bishope draw his menȝe to gude wordes and to drede God.\footnote{\textit{Liber}, p. 197. \textit{Revelaciones} III, p. 88.}
\end{quote}

The feminisation of the bishop as a mother is not, of course, unique to Bridget. As Bynum notes, ‘maternal imagery was applied in the Middle Ages to male religious authority figures, particularly abbots, bishops and the apostles, as
well as to God and Christ’. This imagination of the most senior members of
the ecclesial establishment as maternal figures is, moreover, a particular
preoccupation of Cistercian writing. This observation is useful for the
analysis of Bridget’s own engagement with this trope because Cistercian
practice exercised a considerable influence over Bridget’s nascent spirituality.
It is tempting, therefore, to speculate that Bridget might be drawing upon
Cistercian images in order to craft her own metaphor of the bishop’s spiritual
authority.

In common with a large portion of the Cistercian imagery of
maternalism cited by Bynum, Bridget’s version of the trope construes the
responsibilities of the senior clerical figure in terms of breastfeeding. In her
discussion of the use of maternal images in the writings of Bernard of
Clairvaux, Bynum suggests that, ‘breasts, to Bernard, are a symbol of the
pouring out towards others of affectivity or of instruction and almost
invariably suggest to him discussion of the duties of prelates or abbots’. Bernard
gives detailed instructions, in one of his sermons on the Song of
Songs, on the proper method of spiritual suckling, as he advises that those
tasked with nourishing their juniors should ‘be gentle, avoid harshness, do not
resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk, not
swell with passion’. This image is defined by Bernard’s concern that those
who need to be nourished by the Church are generously provided for; there
must be sufficient milk of clerical instruction to sustain the juniors who
require it. For Bernard, the abbot’s duties represented by breasts and suckling
are directed towards monks, whose faith is nurtured by plentiful preaching.
When one turns back to examine Bridget’s instruction of the bishop in the
Liber, it is immediately notable that there is no milk of spiritual instruction
pouring from the breasts in her image. Instead, the bishop is compared to a
mother who is attempting to wean her child from its milk, by applying
something bitter to her breast. This divergence from the purpose of

89 Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages
90 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 148.
91 Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 115.
92 Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, trans. by Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian
Publications, 1976), II, 27 (Sermon 23). On this image, see Bynum, Jesus as Mother, p. 118.
breastfeeding expounded by figures such as Bernard of Clairvaux comes about because, arguably, Bridget has a different sense of the primary role of senior clerics. Far from requiring these figures to provide gentle, maternal support to their junior colleagues, Bridget instead seems to use the breastfeeding image to call upon the episcopate to bring their junior clergy to greater theological sophistication. The bishop she addresses in these visions must, therefore, be rather sterner in his pastoral leadership.

As she explains the meaning of her breastfeeding metaphor, Bridget likens the process of weaning to the bishop’s drawing of his household towards the dread of God. Bridget’s use of the word ‘menȝe’ to describe the people that the bishop is drawing towards a deeper engagement with their spirituality is, in my view, a significant clue as to who falls under his maternal guidance. Its use in the context of the image under discussion here has a double resonance. In the first instance, one might interpret the significance of ‘menȝe’ in a strictly metaphorical sense. The bishop is, of course, responsible for the pastoral guidance of the many clerics over whom he exercises his authority. Bridget imagines this institutional hierarchy as a metaphorical household in which the bishop is simultaneously matriarch and patriarch, weaning his spiritual children and gathering them together as a cohesive ‘menȝe’, of which he is head. Alongside this metaphorical reading, a rather more literal interpretation of Bridget’s domesticated rendering of the collective clerical establishment might also be ventured. While my analysis is primarily concerned with Bridget’s treatment of the interior life of bishops, it is important to note that episcopal domestic circumstances are not always entirely synonymous with homely privacy. When Bridget refers to the bishop’s ‘menȝe’, she might also allude to the many clerics and bureaucrats who would have literally comprised the ‘household company’ of an episcopal house. A bishop’s house was by no means an exclusively private sphere, with much important business relating to the governance of the church conducted within its walls.93 Some of this governance would, of course, relate to the bishop’s overseeing of the spiritual development of the junior clergy.

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93 On bishops’ houses in later medieval Sweden, see Erik Ulsig, ‘The Nobility of the Late Middle Ages’, in The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Prehistory to 1520, ed. by Knut Helle
Lurking beneath the surface of Bridget’s domestic rendering of episcopal responsibility is, whether one pursues a metaphorical or literal reading, an anxiety about the potential for something to go wrong with the bishop’s nurturing of his ‘menȝe’. For the bishop to wean his spiritual children is something of a risk: how will the junior clerics deal with the greater spiritual burden of the ‘sadder mete’? If this bishop is as misgoverned as the church builders in Bridget’s earlier images, might some of these clerics be corrupted, too? Bridget articulates these anxieties in much more explicit terms when she comments further on the responsibilities of the bishop to his household:

if he knawe one of his meine sin dedeli, he suld stir him to amendment. And, if he will noght amend him, he suld put him awai fro him; for, if he hald him still for his bodeli comfort and profite, he sall not be blameles of his sin.\textsuperscript{94}

Once again, Bridget articulates the bishop’s responsibility to those in his charge in distinctly domestic terms. If the bishop finds that anyone among his household has been drawn towards sin, he must correct the errant cleric’s behaviour, lest he also be blamed for his misbehaviour. Bridget’s repeated formulation of the bishop’s relationship with his charges as that of the head of a household attempting to regulate those who live within it heightens the gravity of her suggestion that some of those who make up the clerical collective could be drawn towards sin. Household responsibilities, Bridget suggests, might be neatly mapped onto the bishop’s diocesan duties. The bishop and his clerical establishment are gathered under the same roof, whether in the metaphorical formulation of the hierarchy of the church or the literal space of the episcopal house, and both literal and figurative spaces are constantly threatened by sin. In the images of careful household regulation that I mentioned at the beginning of my discussion of Bridget’s bishop, in which religious women are encouraged to clear the houses of their souls of the filth of sin, they are the only occupier. The homely labour of cleansing the soul

\textsuperscript{94} Liber, p. 197. Revelaciones III, p. 88.
ensures their own spiritual wellbeing; there is no domestic retinue to be concerned with. In the bishop's household, however, there is a whole company of clerics to draw towards spiritual growth. This wholly different concern shifts the regulatory model away from the vocabulary of domestic cleaning and tidying to one of simultaneous matriarchal and patriarchal guidance, though even this might not prevent sin from entering the household sphere.

As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, the Liber is populated by an extensive supporting company of celestial figures, who enter the visionary stage at regular intervals to narrate Bridget's revelatory insights. In her vision of the bishop's destabilised marriage, which follows her rendering of him as weaning mother, Bridget's heavenly collaborator is the fourth-century bishop of Milan, St Ambrose. Before he begins to deliver his divine admonitions to the errant bishop, Ambrose first introduces himself to Bridget, and explains how and why he intends to address her: “I am Ambrose þe bishope þat aperis vnto þe, spekinge bi likenes, for þi hert mai noght take vndirstanding of gostli þinges withoute bodeli liknes”. Ambrose couches the metaphors and images that he will shortly begin to narrate in precisely the kind of terms that one often encounters in medieval guidance literature and spiritual manuals. In texts of this genre, authors justify their use of worldly metaphors for the spiritual life by pointing out that their readers, who might be laypeople or novice monastic communities at the earliest stages of their contemplative life, would not be able to comprehend the key facets of their spiritual education without this recourse to material semblances. Ambrose's opening justification is another example of Bridget's deep engagement with the tropes and conventions of devotional literature beyond her own visionary genre. In

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95 Bridget's choice of Ambrose to narrate this vision on the proper conduct of bishops is unsurprising, as he is regarded as an exemplary episcopal figure, with St Augustine remarking upon how impressed he was by Ambrose when the two met. See Augustine, Confessions, ed. and trans. by Carolyn J. B. Hammond (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1, 227-228. On Ambrose's life and episcopacy, see Neil B. McAlley, Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

96 Liber, p. 205. Revelaciones III, p. 102. Significantly, as Ambrose had been bishop of Milan, Bridget experienced this vision around 1349-1350, during a visit to Ambrose's shrine in the city on her way to Rome. See Revelations I, p. 254. Bridget's focus is no longer the Swedish episcopacy; with this vision she shifts her admonition to Giovanni Visconti, bishop of Milan during her visit, and who Bridget perhaps met in person. See Revelations I, p. 254. On Bridget's distaste for Visconti, see Falkeid, The Avignon Papacy Contested, p. 121.
placing the didactic explanatory remarks of a guidance text author into the mouth of a saint, Bridget repurposes this most conventional language as saintly authorisation for her own extensive use of worldly imagery. This endorsement underscores Bridget’s own visionary authority, lending a considerable additional degree of gravity to her distinctive metaphorical vocabulary.

Ambrose’s suggestion that Bridget cannot comprehend spiritual concepts without the aid of material metaphors is, of course, the preface to a vision about the state of the bishop’s marriage. This positioning is significant. In making the worldly similitude that follows Ambrose’s justification a domestic scene of the relationship between spouses, Bridget implies that the bodily likeness that is most pertinent to her visionary vocabulary is that of such homely interior life. What Ambrose is specifically sanctioning, therefore, is Bridget’s use of domestic imagery as a means of conveying her salient concerns about spiritual life and the clerical establishment. The fact that this is necessary at all suggests that the prospect of Bridget invoking such imagery as the vehicle for her clerical criticism might otherwise have been problematic. Once domestic vocabulary is unmoored from its commonplace purpose as a prompt for self-criticism and examination, as in the guidance text, it can be wielded as a tool for the rebuke of others. This saintly authorisation of Bridget’s visionary lexicon has significant implications for the interpretation of her distinctive voice in the Liber. In yoking Ambrose’s approval of the use of metaphor to a domestic image of married life, Bridget secures celestial sanction for the refiguring of the bishop in her own image, as she replicates her experience of marriage in her rendering of the bishop.

An anxiety about the encouragement of excessive engagement with worldly matters underpins the justification of corporeal metaphors found in religious guidance texts. As many of these manuals are directed towards audiences at the nascent stages of their spiritual journey, the risk of pulling these readers back towards a world from which they ought to be disengaging is particularly high. Bridget’s anxieties, however, lie with figures who are at a much more advanced stage of their spiritual path. In the vision, Ambrose begins the account of the bishop’s marital relationship by revealing him to be
an adulterous husband: ‘Pare was a man þat had a wife semeli and wise, bot his maiden plesed him more þan dide þe wife’.97 This very brief introduction to the bishop’s broken marriage reveals him to be a rather shallow figure, as he has a wife who is both beautiful and thoughtful, yet he is more attracted to his maiden, to whom Bridget does not ascribe any such complimentary adjectives. Having delivered this poor indictment of the bishop’s character, Bridget subsequently reveals what the bishop’s abandoned wife and favoured mistress symbolise:

By þis avowterrer I vndirstande þe bishop of þis kirke, þat suld be husband to holi kirke, knit þareto with faihte and charite. Bot he loues better þis werld þan þe kirke: and so he is one husband in nam and avowterer in wirkinge.98

This metaphor is something of an explicitly domesticated reworking of the Biblical image of Christ married to Ecclesia; the bishop has not been able to adhere to this divine precedent. 99 While the bishop might carry the moniker of clerical high office, his actions prove him to be a fraudulent figure, who breaks his marital vows of faith and charity. In framing immoral clerical behaviour as the undermining of a seemingly secure marital bond, Bridget lends her censorious warnings a significant emotional pull, thereby heightening the impact of her urgent calls for further interrogation of the veracity of the clerical establishment.

The precise nature of the behaviour that cleaves the bishop away from his rightful spouse, the Church, is outlined by Bridget as Ambrose’s account continues. Of especial pertinence to the discussion in this chapter is Bridget’s realisation of the bishop’s mendacious behaviour in distinctly spatial terms, as she describes how he passes each hour of the excessive time he spends with his mistress:

Pe first oure spendedes he in gladship of þe worlde, avisinge himselfe what luste and what likinge he mai haue þarein. Pe second oure he sleptis betwix þe armes of þe world: þat menes, he lies sekirli in grete castels, and grete maners with hie towres and hie walles, and wenes he

99 Ephesians 5. 24-32.
ma be sikir þare fore God and all his creatures, and he hase þarein grete gladnes.\textsuperscript{100}

This passage builds an impression of a bishop with scant regard for his duties as a senior figure, who expends a great deal of time in calculating how much pleasure he can glean from engagement with worldly matters. One manifestation of this indulgence in the material world is, Bridget suggests, the bishop’s decision to take up residence in the luxurious environs of grand castles and manors. In fact, Bridget frames the very act of sleeping in the embrace of the world, a notion charged with the insinuation of sexual incontinence of marital infidelity, as the engagement with buildings other than that of the Church. Bridget’s consistent framing of the bishop’s episcopal responsibilities as domestic duties, from the weaning of his clerical juniors to his faltering commitment to his spiritual marriage, casts the Church as a household whose order is under threat.\textsuperscript{101} Indeed, the Church is the homely hub from which the bishop ought to be regulating both his own faith and that of his devotional charges. Instead, though, the bishop abandons the mode of domesticity defined by duty and caretaking for an entirely oppositional one, which Bridget defines in terms of luxurious physical surroundings. The bishop’s poor behaviour in his ecclesial marriage is, perhaps, intended to stand in opposition to Bridget’s own steadfast spiritual union, for which she prepares throughout the Liber. Bridget, the female visionary with literal experience of marriage, is a more faithful spouse than a male leader of the institutional Church.

Underpinning this image of the bishop abandoning his marital home for the alternative surroundings of an altogether more indulgent model of the domestic sphere is, arguably, an anxiety about the inherent contradictions of clerical high office. A bishop’s faith demanded that he embrace spiritual poverty, while simultaneously teaching its importance. As Woolgar observes, however, ‘the episcopacy was [...] closely bound to an investment in material possessions, in buildings and a style of living that placed them among the

\textsuperscript{100} Liber, p. 206. Revelaciones III, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{101} In light of the fifteenth-century conception of the household as the salient site of domestic order and discipline, which I discuss in the introduction to this thesis at pp. 21-22, this likely held particular resonance for Bridget’s lay readers.
greatest magnates’. One of the major tests of a bishop’s office was, therefore, to ensure a sustained focus on his devotion in the face of the potentially corrupting influence of copious material acquisition. In Bridget’s formulation, this delicate moral balancing act is framed as the process of choosing which model of domestic sphere one would best like to live in. Most interestingly, the period during which Bridget resided in Rome was one of increased spending by the papacy. Clement VI was keen to invest in the ornamentation of churches, and favoured the notion that ‘[the Church] was [...] a double treasury, comprising both material wealth, on the earthly level, and spiritual grace, on the celestial level’. Bridget is anxious, it seems, that some might be unable to negotiate this balance. Once the bishop becomes distracted by his copious possessions and lavish domestic surroundings, he exchanges the Church for a different household, in which he sleeps among the comforts of earthly pleasures. This results in the abandoned spouse of the Church being ungoverned and unregulated, and the household company within all the more vulnerable to the lure of sin. As Bridget’s visions are delivered to a world that is, in her view, on the precipice of apocalypse, the suggestion that the Church has been emptied of its most senior figures seems even more desperate. In allegorising the duties of the bishop’s office as a set of domestic responsibilities that his frailties might render him unable to fulfil, Bridget offers her readers an urgent and emotionally compelling perspective on the consequences of ecclesial corruption, as she transforms her anxieties into a tableau of fraying familial relationships and abandoned households.

104 Of course, by the 1340s the Roman Church had indeed suffered a considerable blow to its authority, with a succession of popes residing in France during the Avignon Papacy. On the Avignon Papacy, see Yves Renouard, The Avignon Papacy 1305-1403, trans. by Denis Bethell (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).
Bridget as Revisionist Hagiographer: Remodelling St Agnes

Alongside Ambrose, a further explicatory voice deployed by Bridget is that of St Agnes, who makes a couple of appearances in the Liber. The text’s additional voices, according to Voaden, obscure access to Bridget’s revelatory voice, as ‘where interpretation [of a vision] is needed, it is offered by a celestial figure’.\textsuperscript{105} It is certainly the case that the instances in which Bridget speaks in the first person in the Liber are sparse, and much of the commentary on her visions is indeed proffered by an intermediary divine voice. Agnes’ role in the Liber is not, however, to speak over Bridget. To take note of specifically where and when in the text Agnes is invoked challenges the assumption that Bridget’s voice is invariably effaced by her celestial counterparts. In one significant instance, Agnes is called upon to explicate an image that is distinctly domestic in character. Given the nature of Agnes’ path to sainthood, Bridget’s decision to repeatedly associate her with household language is a bold one.

As her entry in the Legenda aurea narrates, Agnes was a fair virgin of thirteen years old, with whom the son of the prefect of Rome fell in love.\textsuperscript{106} Agnes, however, was impervious to his advances as she had already promised herself to Christ, as his spiritual spouse. Upon hearing that Agnes was determined to remain a chaste Bride of Christ, the prefect’s son fell gravely ill, and his powerful father demanded to know who was barring Agnes from marrying his son. When it became apparent that Agnes’ spouse was Christ, therefore revealing her Christian faith, the prefect summoned her for questioning. Following her interrogation, Agnes asserted her absolute devotion to her divine spouse, and thereby to her virginity, informing the prefect that her will could not be altered. As punishment for Agnes’ defiance, and her rejection of marriage with his son, the prefect condemned the Saint to

\textsuperscript{105} Rosalynn Voaden, \textit{God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries} (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), p. 95.
the shame of being sent to a brothel. When she entered the brothel, Agnes reasserted her devotion to Christ by praying aloud, and anyone who heard her devout proclamations had their own faith bolstered. Recovered from his illness, the prefect's son attempted to forcibly claim Agnes as his own, but he was killed by the devil before he could find her. Driven wild by grief, the prefect condemned Agnes as a cruel sorceress, whose rejection of his son had precipitated the young man's death. Agnes, however, in a profound act of mercy, raised the prefect's son from the dead, and he was resurrected as a devout Christian who loudly proclaimed the word of God as the truth. This clemency was not enough to placate the Roman officials, who continued to condemn Agnes as a witch. When an attempt to burn the Saint failed, she was instead speared by a sword, and died a virgin martyr.

There are a number of similarities between Agnes and Bridget. Arguably their salient shared experience is that of becoming a Bride of Christ; this commitment to spiritual union might reasonably be described as the defining event of both women's lives. This is not, it is important to note, the only detail of their stories that yokes Agnes and Bridget together. At the age of thirteen, both women were expected to enter into worldly marriage, and were presented with their male suitors for the first time. Their respective responses to the prospect of worldly wedlock, however, are notably divergent. While Agnes resolutely rejected the expectation that she would marry the Roman prefect's son, Bridget entered into an apparently happy marriage with her husband, gave birth to eight children and took charge of the couple's estate. The wholly oppositional responses of the two women to worldly marriage, and the subsequent nuptial life that follows the wedding itself, is a neat encapsulation of the reasoning behind my suggestion that Bridget's decision to persistently associate Agnes with the language of the domestic sphere is a striking one. In continually calling upon Agnes to explicate the visions that come to Bridget in a distinctively domestic framework, Bridget remolds her celestial mentor into a figure who, far from being the ultimate example of a woman who rejected worldly marriage and a life of connubial domesticity, appears to endorse this supposedly inferior mode of living. It is possible to read the explanatory voice of Agnes, therefore, as an augmentation of
Bridget’s own, rather than an obstruction of a reader's access to it. This bold reworking of a familiar saint serves as a celebratory authorisation of Bridget’s status as wife and mother from a somewhat surprising source; a reader’s experience of Agnes is refracted through Bridget’s own perspective. Bridget’s rendering of Agnes represents a further example of her use of domestic imagery to reshape established spiritual commonplaces.

The most pertinent episode appears in the closing lines of a vision in which Agnes instructs Bridget to devote her love to the Virgin Mary, who is likened to a flower. Agnes’ narration of God’s unfailing commitment to the rehabilitation of sinful souls is neatly encapsulated in the vision’s concluding domestic metaphor, in which God is likened to a laundress tasked with removing stains from white cloth:

> For God is a nobill lawnder, þat puttes a clothe þat is noȝt clene in swilke place of þe water whare, thurgh mouinge of þe water, it mai be clenner and whitter, and ȝete sho takes heede þat þe watir drowne noȝt þe clothe. So God suffirs þaim þat he lounes in þis werld be in disese of tribulacion and pouert, þat þai be clenner and more abill to blisse. And ȝit he kepis þaim, þat nowþir to grete disese ne heuenes fordo þaim. And þarefore oft he confortes þaim.107

Once again, it appears that Bridget is reworking the commonplaces of spiritual guidance texts for her own purposes. As Whitehead observes in her discussion of this image, Bridget reverses the convention of male authors furnishing their female readers with metaphors of domestic work, as she shifts this housework ‘to a heavenly household, and envisages God’s purification of the soul as an act of female domestic labour’.108 It is pertinent to note that Bridget’s feminisation of God does not seem to have been written with a female reader in mind. This vision appears towards the end of Bridget’s *speculum episcoporum*, which suggests that its intended readers were bishops. While it is tricky to determine why Bridget might have believed an image of a feminised and domesticated God would appeal to the episcopal establishment, it is easier to see why she selects Agnes to ventriloquise her words to this audience. One of Bridget’s earlier celestial narrators, St Ambrose, was an enthusiastic promoter of Agnes’

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108 Whitehead, Castles of the Mind, p. 132.
story, and wrote about her martyrdom in his fourth-century treatise on
virginity, *De Virginibus*. In presenting her episcopal contemporaries with a
figure who enjoyed approval from an exemplary bishop, Bridget invites her
envisaged reader to model himself on Ambrose’s spiritual interests, perhaps
in the hope that this might extend to other aspects of his religious life.
Crucially, however, Bridget departs from Ambrose’s account by asking her
reader to take note of Agnes’ knowledge of household labour, the kind of
activity that might have been performed by a married woman, rather than her
exemplary virginity. This image represents, therefore, Bridget’s balancing of
an appeal to longstanding episcopal interests with a desire to issue
instructions to the ecclesial establishment in the vocabulary of her own
experience, as wife, mother, and household manager. With Agnes’
authorisation, Bridget boldly remolds God in her own image, and suggests
that Agnes approves of the facets of a life that she rejected for herself.

The Crisis of the Homeless Christ: Five Responses

In this section, I intend to examine one of Bridget’s extended domestic
allegories. My principal concern in undertaking such a close examination of
one of Bridget’s lengthiest forays into the symbolic resonances of household
space is to analyse her engagement with a prevalent preoccupation of
domestic imagery in fifteenth-century religious literature, the prospect of
Christ being left without a home. Indeed, more than one of the texts that I
examine in this thesis seem distinctly uneasy with the figure of a homeless
Christ. The allegory that I will examine now is, arguably, Bridget’s most
sustained engagement with this widespread discomfort for the wandering
Christ.

The vision that is the subject of my analysis appears as the third
chapter of Book II, and runs over roughly five pages. With Mary as narrator,

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110 This is a particular concern of Nicholas Love in his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which I will discuss in Chapter Four.
Bridget introduces an itinerant Christ, who wanders the landscape in search of shelter:

[Christ] was in þe erthe as a pilgrime goinge fro place to place, and knokkid on mani mennes dores to haue commin in. Þe werld was a parcell of grounde in þe whilke was bigged fiue maner of houses.\textsuperscript{111}

In this formulation, the mortal world is redrawn as a vast housing estate, in which five different kinds of dwelling are built; each house represents a different category of person. Bridget’s suggestion that Christ will knock upon the doors of each of these houses carries a strong echo of the Biblical verse in which Christ knocks upon the door, and awaits the response of the believer.\textsuperscript{112}

Here, Christ the pilgrim knocks on multiple doors in search of shelter, and the subsequent paragraphs of the vision detail the variant responses he receives when he attempts to pass through these five doors. Each householder, Christ finds, has a different response.

When Christ knocks upon the door of the first house, he is dressed in pilgrim’s clothes, and pleads to be taken in so that he is not attacked by wild beasts or unsheltered during a storm.\textsuperscript{113} In his plea for a place to lay his head, Christ asks the householder to, ‘gife me of þi cleþinge, throw þe whilke mi colde mai be warmed and I mai hele mi naked. Gife me of þi mete, bi þe whilke I mai be comforted and fede, and take þi þanke and þi reward of þi God’.\textsuperscript{114}

Christ’s plight, however, falls on deaf ears. In response to the divine visitor’s request for food and warmth, the householder coldly replies:

\[\text{Þan answerde he þat was within, "þou art ouir inpacient, and þerefore þou mai noȝt accorde ne dwell with vs. Þow art ouir lange, and þarefor we haue no cleþinge for þe. Þou art ouir couetouse and gluterows, and þarefor we mai noȝt fille þe, for couetise has no grownde na ende".}\textsuperscript{115}

The Biblical underpinning of this passage is unmistakeable, as it seems that the householder is refusing to enact the Bodily Works of Mercy, which include

\textsuperscript{111} Liber, pp. 119-120. Sancta Birgitta. Revelaciones. Book II, ed. by Carl-Gustaf Undhagen and Birger Bergh, SFSS, ser. 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), II, 34. All subsequent references to this volume of the Latin text will be given as Revelaciones II.

\textsuperscript{112} Revelation 3. 20. I discuss this verse, and an image that also draws upon its resonances, in the first chapter of this thesis, at pp. 53-56.

\textsuperscript{113} Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{114} Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{115} Revelaciones II, p. 34.
the feeding of the hungry, the giving of water to the thirsty, the clothing of the 
naked and, most pertinently, giving shelter to a stranger.\footnote{Matthew 25. 34-40.} This first 
householder, then, is an emphatic opponent of the importance of practical 
charity.

Having been rejected by this first house, Christ goes to knock upon the 
second door. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid a further rebuke to his request for 
sHELTER, Christ comes to this house in a different guise. No longer a needy 
figure, he calls upon this householder to, ““oPin þi dure and se me. I sall gife þe 
what þe nedis. I sall defende þe fro þine enemis””.\footnote{Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 34.} Once again, however, his 
request for entry is rejected, and his offer of protection refused: ““Mine een are 
febill. It wald do þame harme to luke on þe. I haue enoghe. Me nedis noȝt of 
þine. I ame miȝti and stronge: who mai noie me?””.\footnote{Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 35.} This answer of spiritual 
self-sufficiency rejects, unusually, the figure of Christ as defender. In the 
Doctrine, by contrast, the weary soldier-Christ is rewarded with a place to rest 
inside the nun’s heart-household, his access to the domestic sphere 
guaranteed by the gravity of his sacrifice. For Bridget, however, the unfeeling 
response of the householder underscores the extent to which humanity is 
impervious to Christ’s suffering. Upon coming to the third house, Christ uses 
affective language in his appeal at the door, as he calls upon the householder 
to, ““oPin þine eres and here me; strech oute þi handes and fele me; oPin þi 
moute and tast me””.\footnote{Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 35.} Christ’s redrawing of himself does little to move this 
householder to proffer a welcome, as he responds to his visitor’s greeting 
rather sarcastically, calling upon Christ to, ““crie hier, for whi, I sall wele here 
þe. If þou be light, I sall drawe þe to me. And if þou be swete, I sall ressaiue þe 
and tast þe””.\footnote{Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 35.} This householder rejects the opportunity to receive Christ via 
sensory apprehension; he refuses to ‘taste, and see that the Lord is sweet’, in a 
further rebuffing of Biblical advice.\footnote{Psalm 33. 9.}

Thus far, then, not one of the guises in which Christ has presented 
himself to the first three householders has yielded any charitable response.
Via the voice of Mary, Bridget explains that the first householder is symbolic of ‘vntrew cristen, þat sais þe domes of mi son are vnrightwis, his promisses fals and his biddinges vntollerabill’. The second represents ‘Jewes harded in sin’, while the sarcastic third occupant stands for ‘painims, of whome ilke dai cries in scorn and sais, “What is he þat Criste?”, who are especially impervious to the afective appeal of Christ. It is notable that Bridget chooses to domesticate the categories of Jew and pagan, the latter a capacious term that likely encompasses Muslims, as these particular religious and racial groups are routinely placed in positions of alterity in medieval religious discourse.

With the crisis of his homelessness unresolved by these sinful and unbelieving figures, Christ continues to wander, and visits two further houses. It is only when he reaches the fourth house that his desire for shelter is met, finally, with a more favourable response.

As she opens her account of Christ’s experience of the fourth house, Bridget notes that it has a door, which is halfway open. Immediately, therefore, Christ’s access to this fourth house is made considerably easier than his previous three visits: with the door partly open, there is no need for him to knock to announce his arrival. The message that Christ delivers to this fourth dwelling calls upon its occupants to pay greater attention to his sacrifice, to which they are currently insensible:

“Frende, and þou knewe and toke heede howe vnprofitabill þi time is spendid, þou wald take me in to herber. If þou knewe and herde what I haue done for þe, þou wald haue compassion on me. And þou were avised what þou has greued me, þou wald forþinke and aske forgueuenes”.

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122 Liber, p. 121. Revelaciones II, pp. 35-36.
125 Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 35.
126 Liber, p. 120. Revelaciones II, p. 35.
While Christ does not anticipate a full-throated welcome from this fourth householder, the tone of his plea for lodging is considerably more optimistic than the previous three. If the occupant of the house were attentive to the gravity of Christ’s suffering on his behalf, not only would he offer shelter, but he would also plead for his failings to be forgiven. In response to Christ’s relatively gentle rebuke, the householder readily reveals an awareness of his shortcomings:

We are as it were dede men in abidinge, and desire of þe, and þarefor haue compassion on oure wretchednes, for we gife oureselfe to þe on þe most gladly wise. Se and bihald oure mischefe, and þe wretchedes of oure bodi, and we are redi to what at likis þe.\(^{127}\)

At last, Christ has come upon a householder who, though imperfect, appears to recognise the importance of granting him access to his dwelling. Christ’s plea for compassion is met with an identical appeal from the householder, who is aware of the need to secure forgiveness. This fourth household represents, Mary suggests, ‘þe Jewes and painems þat wald faine be cristen if þai wiste how, and wald do þat might plese mi son’.\(^{128}\) This seems, in light of Bridget’s presentation of Jews and pagans in the previous two houses, a rather different treatment of this category. Far from being the unfeeling, mocking figures of houses two and three, these non-Christians are presented through a much more favourable lens: the half open door through which Christ speaks his message might be read as a state of mind that is half ready to receive Christ. Bridget’s tentative optimism that these non-Christians might be able to welcome Christ prefaces the later fourteenth-century debates about universal salvation, which were certainly prevalent in England from the 1370s.\(^{129}\) Given that Bridget’s Middle English text appeared in England in the wake of these

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\(^{127}\) Liber, pp. 120-121. Revelaciones II, p. 35.


discussions, this passage might have had a particular pertinence for vernacular readers.

As the fourth householder is not yet fully ready to receive Christ, he must continue to wander to a further house. Happily, this fifth house is entirely open, and Christ’s address to its occupant reflects his belief that his search for a place to lay his head is now over: ‘“Frende, here will I gladli entir. Bot wit þou wele þat I seke softer reste þan on pelows of plume, more feruent hete þan wolle is wonte to gife, fresher mete þan bestis fleshe”’. This fifth rendering of Christ is of a remarkably demanding guest. The material comforts of the household, such as cushions filled with feathers or the warmth of wool, will provide neither sufficient comfort nor warmth to facilitate Christ’s rest. Acknowledging the inadequacy of his domestic furnishings, the householder offers Christ an extraordinary alternative set of homely comforts, which are derived from the violent breaking of his body:

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þare ligges hamers at our fete, with þe whilke we sall gladli breke ource fete and ource thees, and we sall gladli gife merwe and mergh to reste on þat sall flowe oute. We sall opin to þe with gude will ource bowels and entrels of ource bodi: entere þare. For right as þare is noþinge softer to þe at riste on þan ource merwe, so þare is noþinge bettir for warmnes þan ource bowels. Oure herte is fresher mete þan bestis fleshe: we sall gladli ordeine it to þi mete. Come in: þou arte wonder swete to þe taste and desiros to lufe.131

This is an extraordinary domestication of corporeal destruction, with the householder offering to break open his feet and thighs so that Christ might rest upon the marrow that flows out of his shattered bones, while also offering the divine visitor a place of refuge in his bowels. Remarkable as this passage seems, the association of marrow and bowels with enthusiastic devotion is not, in fact, Bridget’s invention. There is a Biblical precedent for this language in the Psalms, in which the narrative voice asks that his soul ‘be filled as with

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130 Liber, p. 121. Revelaciones II, p. 35.
131 Liber, p. 121. Revelaciones II, p. 35. [There lie hammers at our feet, with which we shall gladly break our feet and our thighs, and we shall gladly give marrow and tissue to rest on, which will flow out. We shall open to you with good will our bowels and organs of our body: enter there. For just as there is nothing softer to rest on than our marrow, so there is nothing better for warmness than our bowels. Our heart is fresher meat than the flesh of a beast: we shall gladly prepare it for your meat. Come in: you are wondrously sweet to taste and desirous to love’, (translation mine)].
marrow and fatness: and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips’. There are further Biblical allusions to the connection between devotion and the bowels; one pertinent example appears in the Song of Solomon, in which the touch of Christ is said to move the narrator’s bowels. The emphasis of these scriptural precedents is, however, rather different: their allusions to marrow and bowels suggest that one might praise God from the deepest recesses of the soul, but they make no allusion to the fleshly destruction that would be necessary to allow the divine to access the bodily interior. Bridget, by contrast, with her violent language of the hammers that need to be used in order to break the householder’s feet and thighs, is acutely aware of the literal corporeal injury that would be required in order to present Christ with this bodily pillow.

This preoccupation with the fleshly reality of the body is, I would suggest, one of the defining ways in which Bridget reworks the commonplace metaphor of Christ coming to dwell within the body of the believer. Precisely why Christ’s arrival necessitates this violent corporeal shattering is explicated, once again, by Mary:

[The Christians who occupy the fifth house] breke al þat is wronge in þame with þe hamers of Goddes commandementes, and aareies riste to mi son: bot noȝt in þe plumes of foules, bot in acorde of vertuse and in refreininge and chastissinge of euell aﬀeccions, þe whilke is þe merewe of all vertuse. Also, þai make warmnes to mi son, bot noȝt swilke as is be well bot in birninge and feruent charite, for cause þai gife noȝt alloneli þaire gudes to mi son bot þaimselfe. Also, þai aareies fode to mi son fresher þan ani fleshe: þat is, þare awen hert moste perfite.

The breaking of the bones with the hammers of God’s commandments facilitates a violently literal expulsion of sin from the body. Rather than undertaking menial domestic chores in order to cleanse oneself prior to a visitation from Christ, this fifth householder must shatter the very space in which his visitor might seek rest. One of the most interesting aspects of Mary’s narration of this

132 Psalm 62. 6.
133 Song of Solomon 5. 4. Julian of Norwich, too, alludes obliquely to the opening of the bowels, which she allegorises as the opening of a purse, as an act through which one might recognise God’s love and goodness. Julian of Norwich, A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love, ed. by Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 143.
striking image is her careful matching of each worldly domestic comfort— from feather cushions, to wool, to fresh food— to an alternative derived from the violent collapse of the body. No material item that one might proffer to Christ from the earthly household could be as comforting as the virtue, charity, or devout heart of the believer. This repudiation of domestic luxury renders the broken physical body of the devotee an oppositional environment to the worldly household. Bridget’s emphasis on the welcoming of Christ necessitating a corporeal apocalypse suggests that ‘true’ Christians do not need their physical body, and nor do they need material goods, as they will be united with Christ on a spiritual plain. This extraordinary imagery perhaps reflects Bridget’s own engagement with corporeal mortification.

This domestic allegory shuffles together multiple different models of Christ, including vulnerable stranger, defender and the affective experience of the divine, and sites every category of believer and disbeliever within a domestic framework. Bridget draws upon several Biblical passages throughout this extended metaphor, but read as a whole, it might be interpreted as an architecturalised rewriting of the parable of the sower, with the houses representing the different kinds of soil and Christ himself as the seed.135 The most striking aspect of the allegory is Bridget’s positing of the household as a space from which one might reject Christ, rather than happily prepare a place for him. This is a much less morally straightforward rendering of the domestic sphere than one might find in the spiritual guidance text genre, in which the tidy household is the expectant Christian soul. In my discussion of a similar image in the Doctrine, I noted that the image of Christ knocking on the door is often associated with the taking of the Eucharist. Might Bridget’s image be read in the same way? It is certainly interesting to note that the pagans of the third house are unresponsive to the taste of Christ, which perhaps suggests that they are unfit to participate in the sacrament. Indeed, it is possible to read Bridget’s metaphor as a meditation on precisely who is fit to take the Eucharist, with the household representing the body. Only true Christians are ready and willing to take Christ into the depth of their

bowels and marrow. The crisis of the homeless Christ is, in Bridget’s formulation, caused by an absence of people fit or willing to participate in the Eucharist.

Bridget and her Fifteenth-Century English Readers

In this final section of the chapter, I will examine the Liber’s fifteenth-century English readers, many of whom were women, along with the ways in which they might have responded to the domestic imagery in the text. It makes sense to begin an examination of the reception of Bridget’s writing in fifteenth-century England by turning to the centre of Bridgettine influence, Syon Abbey.

The Bridgettine rule placed huge emphasis on the importance of books, and despite its encouragement of poverty among the Order, permitted its members to have as many books as they wished.136 This culture of bookishness meant that Syon enjoyed two copiously stocked libraries, one for the nuns, and another for the brethren.137 While it is difficult to determine precisely which books the Syon nuns owned, as no complete catalogue of their library survives, a patchwork of evidence suggests that they took a keen interest in the popular currents of fifteenth-century spirituality. They appear to have engaged with works by Walter Hilton, Mechtilde of Hackeborn, and Richard Rolle, as well as books of hours, psalters, and breviaries.138 Unsurprisingly, both the brothers and the sisters at Syon had copies of their founding mother’s Liber in their libraries; it seems that the brothers might


have had more than one copy. The Syon sisters received their copy of the *Liber* via a 1495 bequest made by Cecily Neville, appearing for a second time in this thesis, who passed her copy of Bridget's text to her granddaughter, Anne de la Pole, then prioress of Syon.

The reading of Bridgettine works among aristocratic women was certainly prevalent during the fifteenth century, and Cecily was one of Bridget's most enthusiastic lay readers. One of her granddaughters, born in 1480, was named Bridget, perhaps in tribute to her grandmother's admiration of the saint. These wealthy, worldly readers such as Cecily were often keen to emulate the strictures of monastic life in their own homes. Interestingly, Johnston suggests that Cecily's piety was perhaps modelled on 'St Bridget's routine in Rome, and included a “lecture of holy matter” at dinner and a discussion of what had been read during supper'. It is also possible that Cecily developed a particularly keen interest in Bridget during her widowhood as, like Bridget, she was also responsible for a large household, and had committed to remain chaste following her husband's death. Evidence of female aristocratic interest in the fifteenth-century Bridgettines extends beyond Cecily. Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, shared Cecily's enthusiasm for Bridget, and for piety more broadly. In 1491, Margaret ordered the printing of the *Fifteen Oes*, a popular collection of Bridgettine prayers. Remarkably, in 1504, Margaret was granted permission to enter the enclosed monastic houses of the Carthusian and Bridgettine orders, so that she might eat and talk with their residents. Clearly, engagement with a Bridgettine mode of spirituality facilitated the ambitious piety of these aristocratic women.

139 Hutchison, *What the Nuns Read*, pp. 210-211.
144 Powell, ‘Lady Margaret Beaufort’, p. 220.
By the latter half of the fifteenth century, the donation of books to convents and monasteries was by no means the preserve of aristocratic laywomen alone, with materially comfortable urban women also participating in cementing the textual connections between the lay and monastic worlds.\footnote{On the subject of wealthy urban women as donators of books, see Ann M. Dutton, ‘Passing the Book: Testamentary Transmission of Religious Literature to and by Women in England 1300-1500’, in Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda’s Conference, 1993, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 41-54.}

One such spiritually ambitious urban woman was the Norwich widow Margaret Purdans, who in 1481 donated her copy of ‘an English book of St Bridget’ to the Franciscan nuns at Thetford, Norfolk.\footnote{Dutton, ‘Passing the Book’, p. 47. I give a detailed account of Purdans’ life in Norfolk in my discussion of her ownership and bequest of the Doctrine, in Chapter One of this thesis, at pp. 69-75.} While it cannot be determined with absolute certainty that Purdans’ book is a copy of the Middle English Liber, her ownership of the text suggests an interest in Bridget’s text among women at different levels of society. Indeed, it is possible to divide Bridget’s fifteenth-century women readers into three groups: enclosed religious, aristocracy, and wealthy urbanites. The different spatial contexts in which these women encountered the Liber might well have had a significant effect on their responses to Bridget’s domestic imagery.

In order to interrogate the question of reader response in depth, it is instructive to consider how these women might have responded to one of Bridget’s most extensive visionary engagements with the imagery of the domestic sphere. This episode appears towards the end of Book II, and sees Christ instructing Bridget in how to prepare three houses, which the couple will share once they are spiritually wed. The first house, Christ narrates, must contain the requisite food and drink for bodily sustenance. This nourishing food is bread, though it is not, as one might expect, the Eucharist. Indeed, Christ takes care to explain that the bread that will stock the larders of this first house is, in fact, the bread of ‘a gude will’, the consumption of which will expel the filth of sin from the body.\footnote{Liber, p. 181. Revelaciones II, p. 106.} The drink, Christ narrates, is the ‘premeditacion and forþogh of Goddes plesance in all þinges þat sall be
done’. Alongside these sustaining staples of the spiritual larder, the house must also contain the seasoning of divine wisdom, which flavours the bread of good will. Once this first house has been adequately stocked, the divine couple must turn their attention to their second dwelling place, which is to contain three different types of cloth. The first of these is linen, which symbolises the peaceful good will that the devout soul ought to extend both to God and one’s neighbour. Christ underscores the importance of maintaining kindness towards humanity at large by noting that, just as soft linen is worn against naked flesh, so must the devout soul clothe its heart in peaceful kindness. Alongside this linen, the spouse must also gather cloth made from the skins of dead animals, which symbolises good and merciful actions. Finally, Christ details the need for expensive silk, made by the work of worms, which represents virtuous abstinence. What the devout soul must abstain from, Christ outlines, is vain and excessive speech.

Into the third and final house must be gathered a relatively eclectic selection of goods, including agricultural tools, animals, and two separate containers for storing different kinds of liquids. One container should hold free-flowing liquids, such as water, oil, and wine, while into the other should be placed thick and viscous substances, including mustard, meal, and unspecified others. These thick liquids are emblematic of evil thoughts, the remembrance of which is as bitter as mustard, while the water, oil and wine symbolise the opposite, as they are aligned with morally good thoughts. This third house also needs two agricultural instruments. The first of these is a plough, for the cultivation of the land, while the second is an axe, with which the occupiers of the house ought to cut down imposing weeds or thorns. Just as the linen in the second house reminds its wearer of his responsibility to his neighbour, the plough serves a similar allegorical function. It is, Christ explains, symbolic of human reason, with which the devout soul ought to educate his fellow man about the importance of leading a godly life. In much

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151 Liber, p. 185. Revelaciones II, p. 112.
the same way as one cultivates arable land, one must nurture the growing spirituality of one's neighbours. The axe, meanwhile, reminds the devout proponent of God's words that he remains imperfect, in spite of his spiritual labours, as it symbolises the importance of examining his own intentions. Should the user of these implements find his land to be growing the weeds of pride, he ought to use the axe to cut through these blots on the spiritual landscape. As the container of the tools that facilitate agricultural labour, this house increasingly resembles a farmstead. With Christ's detailing of the animals that must populate this third dwelling place, such a reading seems all the more appropriate. The holy couple must acquire livestock for their third house, which symbolise the practice of confession. These animals will undertake the labour of carrying the soul to God, and their physical strength will prevent sin from intruding into this most virtuous of households. Once filled with the requisite materials for a successful gostly marriage, these plentifully stocked houses must be secured. Their doors will be made from hope, and they will be hung upon two hinges, one of which symbolises the importance of not falling into despair, while the other is a caution against presumptuous behaviour. The lock that secures these doors is emblematic of perfect charity, which prevents the corrupting influence of sinful enemies from accessing each house. When the rightful occupants of the houses wish to unlock the doors of their plentifully stocked nuptial estate, they must use a key made from a sincere desire to reside with God, strengthened by close attention to charity and good works. They must keep this key safe by cultivating a meek soul, remaining alert to sin, and continually thanking God for his kindness.

This celebration of domestic stockpiling sees Bridget boldly reframe spiritual marriage in terms of precisely the kind of homely affluence that she experienced with her husband, Ulf. The household panorama onto which Bridget plots her material renderings of spiritual commonplaces, with its multiple buildings and locked and unlocked doors, closely resembles the

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154 Liber, p. 188. Revelaciones II, p. 115.
157 On the autobiographical elements of this vision, see Morris, St Birgitta of Sweden, p. 21; Whitehead, Castles of the Mind, p. 134.
layout of the house that she occupied during her married life in Sweden. In Bridget’s formulation, the language of eroticism that conventionally accompanies discussion of mystical union, most notably in Cistercian writing, is replaced by the wholly unerotic lexicon of acquisition and accumulation. This reworking of the resonances of spiritual marriage would have been especially pertinent for Bridget’s aristocratic and urban readers, as their experience of a materially comfortable domestic sphere would likely have mimicked Bridget’s own. The resonances of Bridget’s domestic imagery are by no means consistent: in the allegory of the five houses, the shattering of the body constitutes an explicit repudiation of domestic objects. In this allegory, though, the suggestion that one might make use of one’s material goods in order to better understand one’s piety would have been especially useful to Bridget’s lay readers. Cecily might have been particularly responsive to this suggestion; Armstrong has determined that she wove her piety into the material fabric of her house, and adorned her walls with images of ‘the Passion, the legends of St. John the Baptist, St. George, St. Mary Magdalen’.

For the Liber’s conventual readers, however, perhaps at Syon or Thetford, this vision would have posed much more of an interpretive challenge. This house is clearly neither a church nor a monastery, with Christ keen to assert that the bread that should be gathered into the first house is by no means that of the Eucharist. In a particularly acute challenge for readers at Syon, none of the houses contain any books, and in his narration of the resonances of divine wisdom, Christ seems dismissive of the notion that books might be the source of a greater understanding of God. Both Franciscan and Bridgettine readers might, moreover, have struggled to find an affinity with the portrait of domesticity that Bridget crafts in this vision. While the domestic environments of Cecily Neville, Margaret Beaufort and Margaret Purdans facilitate a more literal interaction with this vision, the spaces inhabited by the Liber’s monastic readers would compel them to interact with this imagery at a purely allegorical level. This would be a considerable hermeneutic challenge, with

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158 *Revelations II*, p. 237 n.
monastic readers having to ensure that the lure of material acquisition did not overwhelm the text’s salient spiritual message.

It is pertinent to consider fifteenth-century readers’ responses to the Liber’s domestic imagery through this particular vision as there is some evidence that it had a notable hold over their imagination. That this image might be especially relevant to the English fifteenth-century reader appears to have been realised by the Liber’s Middle English translator, who slightly amplifies the domesticity of a portion of the allegory. In the Latin text, when Christ asks Bridget to gather sufficient amounts of the drink of spiritual forethought, he asks her to keep their stockpile ‘in fiscum nostrum’, in the couple’s ‘purse’, or ‘treasury’. The Middle English translator, however, ignores this brief shift away from the vision’s domesticity, and asserts that Christ asks Bridget to gather their drink into ‘oure hous’. Whereas the Latin text adds an additional metaphorical layer to this allegory of household stockpiling, of the soul as a space in which to store wealth and precious things, the Middle English retains a consistent focus on its status as an amply stocked household. This is indicative of an awareness of the pertinence of domestic imagery for fifteenth-century English readers, particularly those who encounter the text against a backdrop of a growing urban mercantilism, for whom the image of the soul as a copiously stocked household would be especially relevant.

Further evidence of this vision’s particular pertinence to a fifteenth-century English audience might be found in the fact that, on more than one occasion, it is excerpted from the Liber and circulates in manuscripts as a standalone portion of text. As in the case of Mechtild of Hackeborn’s Booke, parts of the Liber were routinely extracted as part of devotional miscellanies,

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162 Liber, p. 182. I am grateful to Roger Ellis for bringing this difference to my attention.
163 The episode of the three houses is not the only domestically inflected vision to circulate independently of the Liber as a whole in the fifteenth century. How Reson Schal be Keper of þe Soule is a short treatise that excerpts the fifth vision of Book VII of Bridget’s text, in which the careful guarding of the soul is allegorised in terms of a king who places his daughter inside a house. For a discussion and transcription of this text, see Domenico Pezani, “How Resoun Schal be Keper of þe Soule”: Una Traduzione del Quattrocento Inglese Dalle Rivelazioni (VII, 5) di S. Brigida di Svezia’, Aevum, 60 (1986), 253-281. For this vision in the Liber, see pp. 472-473.
even prior to the foundation of Syon.\textsuperscript{164} In his discussion of the *compilatio* that draw upon Bridget's text, Ellis observes that the image of the three stocked houses was particularly popular among late medieval readers.\textsuperscript{165} Indeed, two fifteenth-century manuscripts excerpt the vision: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C41 (hereafter *R*), and Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 145 (hereafter *G*). The main text in *R* is a life of the Virgin Mary compiled from visions that she voices in the *Liber*.\textsuperscript{166} At the very back of the codex is a text that gives an account of 'the life and death of Mary Magdalene', written in a later, seventeenth-century hand. While there are no marks that indicate who was using the text during the fifteenth century, a blank leaf at f. 3\textsuperscript{r} is inscribed at the top with 'Anto. Copley 7 Sept. 1599'. This suggests that *R* was used at some point by Anthony Copley, a sixteenth-century Catholic poet and author of *A Fig for Fortune*, a parody of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.\textsuperscript{167} Between the two lives of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, from f. 47\textsuperscript{v} to f. 53\textsuperscript{r}, is the allegory of the soul as a household from the *Liber*. This compiler brings all three of the visions that comprise this imagery, from chapter twenty-five to twenty-seven of Book II of the text, into his composition. The vision of the three houses is not, however, copied *exactly* as it appears in the *Liber*. On f. 48\textsuperscript{r}, the compiler splices an adapted portion of the twenty-ninth vision of Book I, another homely revelation, into the introduction of the first of the three houses visions.\textsuperscript{168} This interloping vision has echoes of the language of domestic preparation in the *Doctrine*, as here, too, the heart must be furnished for the arrival of Christ:

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thy hert [...] ys but a lytell gobett of flessh. I [Christ] wyll a byde and
dwell therin [...] Therfore in thy hert wyche ys my howse and
dwellynge place. Ought to be iii thyngs. The fyrst ys a bedde [to] rest in.
The seconde ys a sete or a chayr to sytt in. The thyrde ys lyght in oure
howse to see by.
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\textsuperscript{165} Ellis, ‘Flores ad Fabricandam’, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{166} For a brief discussion of this text in *R*, see Hutchison, ‘Reflections on Aspects of the Spiritual Impact of St Birgitta’, pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{167} For an edition of Copley's religious satire, see *A Fig for Fortune: A Catholic Response to The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Susannah Brietz Monta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
\textsuperscript{168} *Liber*, pp. 54-55. *Revelaciones I*, pp. 326-328.
Once again, Bridget’s distinctive preoccupation with the material corporeality of the heart and body is made evident, as she describes the cardio-household in distinctly fleshly terms, as a ‘little chunk of flesh’. The compiler of R makes a significant change to the vision as it appears in the Liber. In the Middle English, Bridget explains that the heart is, ‘mi [Christ’s] tabernakyll’ (emphasis mine).\(^{169}\) In R, however, the heart symbolises Christ’s ‘house and dwelling place’, with this reference to an essential item of church furniture excised. Interestingly, the suggestion that the heart of the believer in which Christ might dwell is the tabernacle is original to the Middle English text: the compiler of R seems to have had the same view of the heart’s function as that of the Latin text, which sees Christ describe the heart as ‘habitaculum meum’, or ‘my house’.\(^ {170}\) It seems plausible to suggest, therefore, that R’s version of the vision might have been prepared with knowledge of both the Middle English and Latin texts, though it is not entirely impossible that the compiler of R might have mistranslated ‘habitaculum’ as ‘tabernakyll’.\(^ {171}\) In reverting to the definition of the heart as a dwelling, the compiler of R renders this vision much more individualistic, with the reader asked to consider that she might furnish Christ with somewhere to live in her own soul, rather than in the collective sphere of the church. The fact that R’s compiler chooses to position this image of the heart as a household as the introduction to the three houses image suggests that he is attempting to give some direction in how the image of domestic stockpiling might be used. Indeed, the compiler’s inclusion of this vision reasserts the household as a site in which one might live and interact with Christ, rather than as a vast storeroom. The ultimate purpose of engaging with the imagery of spiritual union is, of course, to welcome Christ into the soul. In placing this vision of relative domestic modesty before one of copious

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\(^{169}\) *Liber*, p. 55. The full Middle English text is as follows: ‘And ȝit I dwell in þi hert, þat is bot a litill gobet of fleshe [...] Þarefore, in þi herte, þe whilke is mi tabernakyll, awe to be thre þinges: a bed to vs at rest in, a sete to sitt in, and a light to be lightened and comforthed in’.

\(^{170}\) *Revelaciones I*, p. 328.

\(^{171}\) Further evidence that this compiler was working with both the Middle English and the Latin texts, rather than one or the other alone, might be found on f. 50\(^{v}\), on which the compiler suggests that the drink that is stockpiled by the holy couple should be gathered into ‘owre howse’, rather than into a purse or treasury, as the Latin reads.
acquisition, the R compiler is perhaps attempting to contain the potential distractions of the imagery of affluence.

The second fifteenth-century manuscript to excerpt the imagery of the three houses is G, which extracts a relatively small selection of visions from the Liber.\textsuperscript{172} The editor of G suggests that the codex was produced for use at Syon, possibly from the original Vadstena manuscript.\textsuperscript{173} Its compiler begins G’s truncated engagement with Bridget’s revelations with the second chapter of the Liber’s first book, in which Christ introduces himself to Bridget by noting that he is the creator of heaven and earth, and that he wishes to make Bridget his spiritual spouse.\textsuperscript{174} This is followed by the fourth chapter of Book I, in which Christ explains the difference between a good and an evil spirit.\textsuperscript{175} There are then two further visions, the forty-first chapter of Book I, in which Christ ruminates on a number of people who rejected him, including Judas and Pontius Pilate, and the fortieth chapter of Book IV, in which Christ explains the difference between a good and evil death.\textsuperscript{176} The entirety of the three houses allegory succeeds the latter vision, and appears as it is in the Liber itself.\textsuperscript{177} If G was indeed prepared for use at Syon, why does its compiler furnish his intended readership with an image that is, in several ways, so far removed from their quotidian life? The vision that follows immediately after the allegory of the three houses suggests that the compiler of G has a taste for domestic imagery. Just as the compiler of R appears to have supplemented his excerpts from the Middle English Liber with readings from the Latin text, G contains the sixty-fifth chapter of Book VI of the Revelaciones, which is an extended meditation on the differences between Martha and Mary.\textsuperscript{178} This chapter is one of the few that is not translated into the Middle English Liber,

\textsuperscript{172} My readings from G are taken from the 1929 edition of this manuscript, The Revelations of Saint Birgitta: Edited from the Fifteenth-Century MS. in the Garrett Collection in the Library of Princeton University, ed. by W. P. Cumming. EETS O. S. 178 (London: Oxford University Press, 1929).

\textsuperscript{173} The Revelations of Saint Birgitta, ed. by Cumming, p. xxi.

\textsuperscript{174} The Revelations of Saint Birgitta, ed. by Cumming, p. 1. Liber, pp. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{175} The Revelations of Saint Birgitta, ed. by Cumming, p. 3. Liber, pp. 10-11.

\textsuperscript{176} The Revelations of Saint Birgitta, ed. by Cumming, pp. 4-10; p. 11. Liber, pp. 69-74, pp. 290-291.

\textsuperscript{177} The Revelations of Saint Birgitta, ed. by Cumming, pp. 12-25. Liber, pp. 180-189.

\textsuperscript{178} For this vision, see Den heliga Birgitta: Revelaciones Bok VI, ed. by Birger Bergh, SFSS, ser. 2 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991), VI, 210-221.
and the \textit{G} compiler appears to have preferred it to chapter seventy-two of Book IV of the Middle English text, in which Christ explains the lessons that might be learned from the respective spiritual approaches of Martha and Mary.\textsuperscript{179} Given that \textit{G} was produced for Syon readers, it is possible that the compiler chose to translate the Latin meditation on Martha and Mary as it more specifically encapsulates the twofold focus of the Bridgettine Order. As Morris notes, those who entered the Order were expected to balance ‘the twin roles of apostolic ministry and ascetic devotion’, and therefore engage in aspects of both the active and contemplative life.\textsuperscript{180} While the vision in the Middle English \textit{Liber} is a more narrative account of how Martha and Mary manifest their love for Christ, the Latin expressly asserts that one should learn how to manage the dual responsibility of action and contemplation:

\begin{quote}
   Tunc quoque Deus domum Marthe et Marie ingreditur, quando mens repleta bonis afeccionibus et pacata a securium tumultibus Deum quasi presentem cogitate et in eius dileccione non solum meditator sed laborabat die ac nocte.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

It is curious, then, that the \textit{G} compiler should take great care to furnish his Syon readers with a vision of Biblical domesticity that has a particular application to their mode of living, yet preface it with the imagery of a household that bears so little resemblance to their monastic life. The visions in \textit{G}, in my view, are selected to ready the reader of the text for spiritual marriage. In the first few chapters, the reader is introduced to her bridegroom, who explains who he is and what he does. She is then challenged to extrapolate the spiritual lessons from an allegory that risks drawing her attention to an acquisitive world that she is no longer a part of. When this Syon reader engages with the active life, she ought to be concerned with charity, rather than an excessive interest in the ornamentation of the domestic sphere. The compilers of both \textit{R} and \textit{G} plainly believe that the image of the

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Liber}, pp. 316-317.
\textsuperscript{180} Morris, \textit{St Birgitta of Sweden}, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Revelactiones Bok VI}, ed. by Bergh, p. 221. ['God enters the house of Martha and Mary when the mind, full of good affections and at peace away from the commotion of the world, reflects on God as ever present and not only meditates on but labours in his love day and night'. \textit{The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Liber Caelestis Books VI-VII}, ed. and trans. by Denis Searby and Bridget Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III, 135].
three houses, when coupled with other excerpts from the Liber, offers their readers a useful framework as they prepare for spiritual union.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, my discussion has shown that the imagery of the domestic sphere is Bridget’s favourite allegorical framework, to which she repeatedly refers. These frequent allusions to household imagery facilitate Bridget’s commentary on an extensive range of different topics. Indeed, it is the Liber, arguably more so than any other text under discussion in this thesis, that makes the most expansive and variable use of domestic vocabulary. In the case of the two texts analysed in the preceding chapters, it would be relatively straightforward to pull out the most frequent associations of their domestic images. In the Doctrine, household language is consistently connected with an ordered soul and preparation for the Eucharist. The Booke of Gostlye Grace, meanwhile, sees Mechtild craft a domestic lexicon defined by joy, conventual practice, and luxury. Both of these texts, furthermore, allegorise the Christian heart as a household. In the text that I intend to discuss in the final chapter of this thesis, Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, the household is repeatedly asserted as the defining site of Christ’s earthly experience. It would be much more difficult, however, to attempt to stitch together the domestic visions of Bridget’s vast Liber by noting their thematic commonalities. In her text, Bridget draws upon domestic language in order to remark upon topics as diverse as ecclesial corruption, moral apocalypse, spiritual union, the prospect of salvation, her understanding of the character of God, and the proper conduct of bishops. Though it is impossible to collate all of the occasions on which Bridget makes use of domestic language into neat topical categories, the variability of the Liber’s household imagery by no means prevents readers of the text from determining the defining characteristics of Bridget’s visionary voice. All of the images that I have examined in this chapter demonstrate that Bridget uses the language of domesticity as a means of asserting her distinctiveness as conduit of the divine message. While Bridget’s words might come from God, her domestically-
inflected delivery of them facilitates the daring recalibration of spiritual and homiletic commonplaces and, arguably most importantly, the valorisation of Bridget’s own experience of the *literal* household sphere. As I observed in my introduction, numerous scholarly responses to the *Liber* lament the fact that Bridget’s voice is barely detectable in her own text. Close attention to Bridget’s extensive use of domestic language, in my view, makes this critical perspective much more difficult to uphold. If readers of the *Liber* should seek Bridget’s own voice, they ought to look to her domestic visions, where it is frequently and boldly asserted.
Chapter Four: From Wanderer to Householder: The Domestication of Jesus, the Disciples and the Holy Family in Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ

I began this thesis by invoking a Biblical episode in which Christ allegorises Heaven as a vast, multi-roomed house that he is busily preparing for the eventual arrival of the believers who will populate its many rooms.\(^1\) Throughout the Gospels, this celestial household is anticipated by a number of earthly domestic encounters between Christ and his friends and followers. Of particular note is, of course, the account of Christ’s visit to the home of Martha and Mary,\(^2\) so popular among medieval readers. Beyond his fellowship with the sisters of Lazarus, Christ is also often to be found enjoying the hospitality of a range of different householders. The Gospel of Luke, in particular, places great emphasis on the fact that Christ repeatedly shared meals at the houses of several different hosts.\(^3\) Jesus accepts an invitation to a meal at the house of Levi, a publican, at which several of his fellow guests are sinners.\(^4\) On another occasion, Jesus is received at the house of Zacchaeus, a tax collector.\(^5\) These domestic anticipations of the heavenly household, from which those who have previously transgressed will not be excluded, are accompanied throughout the Gospels by a further narrative thread. Though Jesus is often to be found breaking bread at the homely table, the Biblical narrative of his life simultaneously underscores the fact that he is homeless, as he walks from town to town to spread his word. Indeed, the very process of becoming a Christian follower is predicated on the assumption that one must be willing to leave the domestic sphere behind. When a potential disciple tells Christ that he will follow him wherever he goes, Christ reminds him that, ‘the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay

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\(^1\) John 14. 1-3.
\(^4\) Luke 5. 27-32.
his head’.\(^6\) When another man pleads to be allowed to bury his father before joining the Christian cause, Christ advises him that he ought, instead, to go immediately to preach the divine word.\(^7\) Christ is, then, a nomadic preacher, and anyone who follows him must be prepared to emulate his willingness to abandon the enclosure of the home. In the text that I discuss in this final chapter, the early fifteenth-century *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, by Nicholas Love, the Gospel narrative strand that sees Christ portrayed as a travelling preacher is muted. In his reworking of the salient episodes of Christ’s life on earth, Love considerably amplifies Christ’s engagement with the domestic sphere, with his mission on earth defined by his movement between a network of different familial homes. The centralisation of the domestic sphere throughout the narrative of the *Mirror*, from the events of the Virgin’s life prior to the birth of Christ to the eventual Passion, renders homely space the major organising framework of the text. This is significant, as it posits the home as a key identificatory bridge between the Holy Family and the reader during a cultural moment at which the household was becoming increasingly important: domestic space is as valuable to Christ as it is to Love’s readership.\(^8\)

Before I discuss Love’s extensive use of domestic imagery in detail, I will give some essential details of the origins of the *Mirror*, its use in a fifteenth-century English context, and its scholarly reception. Love’s *Mirror* is based on the Latin pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which was likely written in the early fourteenth century.\(^9\) Until recently, much of the scholarship on the *Meditationes* identified Johannes de Caulibus, a Tuscan Franciscan friar, as the author of the text.\(^10\) In a recent extensive review of the evidence, Tóth and Falvay propose a different Franciscan friar, Jacobus de

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\(^6\) Luke 9. 58; Matthew 8. 20.

\(^7\) Luke 9. 60.

\(^8\) I list the major ways in which the household sphere was becoming increasingly significant for fifteenth-century people in the introduction to this thesis, at p. 12.


Sancto Geminiano, as the author of the text, which they suggest was probably written around 1300.\textsuperscript{11} The text appears to have been written for a Poor Clare, with the Meditations’ prologue addressing its intended reader as ‘dilecta filia’, or ‘beloved daughter’.\textsuperscript{12} The Meditations functions by presenting its reader with a selection of salient episodes from the Gospel accounts of Christ’s earthly life, alongside some more creative embellishments from its author, and instructs her in how she might meditate upon them. This practice of meditative reading, though not specifically Franciscan in origin, was hugely popular among the Order.\textsuperscript{13} In a summary of the function of the Meditations, Moorman suggests that the text ‘was deeply and thoroughly “Franciscan” in its method, with its appeal not so much to the mind and the intelligence as the heart and the emotions’.\textsuperscript{14} The intended function of this emotional reading is to augment the reader’s devotion, so that the words of scripture and doctrine might develop a more secure hold over her imagination. The Meditations’ overlaying of key scenes from the Gospel narrative with easily recallable images makes it much easier for the reader to draw significant episodes to the forefront of her mind. Texts that facilitate this honing of the spiritual imaginary enjoyed huge popularity in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the fact that the Meditations is extant in over one hundred manuscripts.\textsuperscript{15}

The Meditations survives in three slightly differing forms.\textsuperscript{16} Its longer versions see various scenes from the life of Christ, including the Nativity, the delivery of the sermon on the Mount, and six different sets of meditations on the Passion, each of which is designed to be used at a different moment in the liturgical timetable, divided into around a hundred chapters. Some of the

\textsuperscript{11} Peter Tóth and Dávid Falvay, ‘New Light on the Date and Authorship of the Meditations Vitae Christi’, in Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life, ed. by Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 17-93 (p. 93). This article responds to claims made by Sarah McNamer, that the Meditations might, in fact, have been written by a Franciscan nun. See Sarah McNamer, ‘The Origins of the Meditations Vitae Christi’, Speculum, 84 (2009), 905-955 (p. 907).

\textsuperscript{12} Meditations vitae Christi, in Opera Omnia Sancti Bonaventurae, ed. by A. C. Peliter (Paris: Ludovicus Vives, 1868), XII, 509-630 (p. 511). All subsequent references to this text of the Latin edition are given as Meditations.


\textsuperscript{14} Moorman, A History of the Franciscan Order, p. 261.

\textsuperscript{15} Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xi.

\textsuperscript{16} Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.
longer versions also include a digressive section on the nature of the active and contemplative life. A closing chapter advises the reader in how and when she might use the Meditaciones, guiding her in which portions of the text to read on each day of the week.\textsuperscript{17} A second, shorter version of the text is only around forty chapters long, and excises several different chapters, including those that are specifically relevant to Franciscan readers, the episode in which Christ visits Martha and Mary, and a late chapter on the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{18} The third version is even more dramatically abbreviated, and contains only the material on the end of Christ’s life, from the Last Supper onwards; this abridgement is often referred to as the Meditaciones de Passione Christi.\textsuperscript{19} Alongside these variant forms of the Latin Meditaciones are a further hundred-or-so manuscripts in which vernacular versions of the text are extant. The text was clearly enormously popular in late medieval Europe, with translations surviving in French, Italian, Swedish, Spanish, Gaelic, German, Dutch, Catalan, and Bulgarian.\textsuperscript{20}

The Meditaciones was no less popular in its English vernacular context. Love’s Mirror is the only complete translation of the longer Latin text into English,\textsuperscript{21} and it survives in sixty-four manuscripts.\textsuperscript{22} It cannot be established with absolute certainty, however, which version of the longer Latin text Love’s Mirror is based on.\textsuperscript{23} When, in the early 1400s, the Franciscan Meditaciones

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{17} Meditaciones, pp. 628-630.
\textsuperscript{18} Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{19} For an edition of this text, see Meditaciones de Passione Christi olim Sancto Bonaventurae Attributae, ed. by Mary Jordan Stallings (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).
\textsuperscript{20} Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{22} Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. ixn.
\textsuperscript{23} There have been some attempts to establish the precise source of Love’s text, but the different versions of the Franciscan Meditaciones have not yet been comprehensively collated against the Mirror. On this subject, see A. I. Doyle, 'The Study of Nicholas Love's Mirror: Retrospect and Prospect', in Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20-22 July 1995, ed. by Shoichi Oguro, Richard Beadle, and Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 163-174 (pp. 163-165); Michael G. Sargent, 'Bishops, Patrons, Mystics and Manuscripts: Walter Hilton, Nicholas Love and the Arundel and Holland Connections', in Middle English Texts in Transition: A Festschrift Dedicated to Toshiyuki Takamiya on his 70th Birthday, ed. by Simon Horobin and Linne R. Mooney (York: York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 159-176 (p. 174). I draw my Latin quotations from the Peltier edition of the Meditaciones, cited above, as this is generally regarded as the text that is closest
found its way into Love’s monastic cell, it acquired a translator with a wholly
different religious vocation. Love was the prior of a Carthusian charterhouse,
the Assumption of Our Lady, at Mount Grace in Yorkshire. The spiritual
practices of the Carthusian Order diverged significantly from those of the
Franciscans. 24 While the Franciscans coupled their embrace of exemplary
poverty with travelling from place to place to impart their spiritual message,
Carthusian monks withdrew from the public sphere, preferring the enclosure
of the cell to mendicant wandering. Life in a Carthusian charterhouse was
ordered by a severe rule that emphasised the value of poverty and solitude.
Monks wore a simple white robe, with a hair shirt underneath, and they were
not permitted to wear any animal skin or fur. 25 Their diet was limited to
‘bread, fruit, herbs, and vegetables, varied on feast days by fish and cheese;
one a week at least they fasted on bread, water, and salt’. 26 Under no
circumstances were the monks allowed to eat meat, even when they were
unwell. Quotidian life in the charterhouse was defined by strict maintenance
of silence and enclosure: the monks spent their days in separate cells, praying,
reading and working in total silence, which might only be broken in the event
of an emergency. 27 These individual cells resembled houses in miniature, with
each having one or two rooms, and a small enclosed garden at the back. Once
the monk had entered the charterhouse, he severed all contact with the world
beyond monastic walls. Only the prior and the proctor were permitted to

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24 For an account of the Carthusians and their practice in England, see E. Margaret Thompson,
A more recent treatment of the Carthusians, with a particular focus on the English order, is
Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages, ed. by Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout:
Brepols, 2008).
25 E. Margaret Thompson, A History of The Somerset Carthusians (London: John Hodges, 1895),
p. 33.
26 Thompson, A History of the Somerset Carthusians, p. 33.
27 Thompson, A History of the Somerset Carthusians, p. 35.
engage with the outside world, and any interaction with the public sphere was strictly related to the business of the charterhouse.\textsuperscript{28} The Order steadfastly refused to admit women, and its ‘ascetic strictness’ ensured that its adherents were consistently small in number.\textsuperscript{29}

Almost nothing of Love’s career before his appointment to prior at Mount Grace can be determined. The foundation of the charterhouse had been started by King Richard II’s nephew, Thomas Holland, in 1397.\textsuperscript{30} Following Holland’s death in a rebellion against Henry IV in 1400, the fledgling charterhouse was deprived of its patron, and therefore of significant funds.\textsuperscript{31} Mount Grace was supported for several years following its inception by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, and Thomas Beaufort, sibling of the king; both men had been enthusiastic supporters of the Carthusian Order over many years.\textsuperscript{32} Once Mount Grace had been formally recognised by the Carthusian Order, in 1410, Love was appointed prior, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that ‘he was a Carthusian monk of some maturity in some other house, in order for him to be named prior of a new foundation’.\textsuperscript{33}

There are no records, however, that account for his life in the years before he arrived at Mount Grace. It is similarly difficult to determine precisely when Love first came into contact with Archbishop Arundel, whose endorsement of the \textit{Mirror} is central both to the understanding of how the text was read in fifteenth-century England, and the history of its critical reception. Around 1409, Love granted Arundel confraternity at Mount Grace as an expression of gratitude for the ‘magnificent benefits’ that he had afforded to the charterhouse.\textsuperscript{34} The most explicit evidence of the relationship between Love and Arundel is the attachment of a Latin memorandum to some copies of the \textit{Mirror}, roughly around 1410. The text of the memorandum reads:

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{28}] Thompson, \textit{A History of the Somerset Carthusians}, p. 36.
\item[\textsuperscript{29}] Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii.
\item[\textsuperscript{31}] Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xiv.
\item[\textsuperscript{32}] Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xiv.
\item[\textsuperscript{33}] Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xiv.
\item[\textsuperscript{34}] Sargent, ‘Introduction’, pp. xiv-xv.
\end{itemize}
Though it was probably not Love’s original intended purpose for his translation, one of the eventual functions of the *Mirror* in fifteenth-century England was to provide Arundel with a textual bolster in his fight against the spread of heretical Wycliffite ideas. It is rather difficult to offer a concise account of the character of Wycliffism, as it represents a complex and somewhat nebulous set of ideas and spiritual concerns. To paint with rather broad brushstrokes, then, Wycliffism espoused the absolute authority of the Bible, which its adherents believed ‘formed the only valid source of doctrine and the only pertinent measure of legitimacy’. The movement was further concerned by evidence of corruption in the church, which saw senior clergy enrich themselves at the expense of extending Christian charity to the poorest, by the worship of images, including statues, stained glass windows and church paintings, and by devotion to the saints. Established practices around the sacrament of the Eucharist were another source of tension, with many dissatisfied with the language of transubstantiation to articulate the

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35 Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), p. 7. All references to this text will hereafter be cited as *Mirror*. [‘Memorandum: that around the year 1410, the original copy of this book, that is, The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ in English, was presented in London by its compiler, N, to the Most Reverend Father and Lord in Christ, Lord Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, for inspection and due examination before it was freely communicated. Who after examining it for several days, returning it to the above-mentioned author, commended and approved it personally, and further decreed and commanded by his metropolitan authority that it rather be published universally for the edification of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or lollards’. Sargent, ‘Introduction’, p. xv].

sacramental encounter with Christ. Crucially, Wyclif and his followers did not accept that the narrative of the Gospels supported many of the practices of the established Church.

Concerned by the advancement of Wycliffism, in 1407 Arundel drafted a set of Constitutions at a meeting of senior clergy, in Oxford. The Constitutions were eventually issued in 1409, and contained an extensive set of measures to prevent heterodox spiritual ideas from proliferating in the public sphere. Preachers were required to be licensed, and were not permitted to receive a license until their orthodoxy had been sufficiently determined.37 Once they had received their license, preachers were compelled to take care to ensure that their material was appropriate for their audience: they should not raise the faults of the clergy before an audience that contained members of the laity.38 Preachers were also forbidden to discuss the nature of the sacraments in any great length or depth, while theological discussion in universities was also brought within the regulatory ambit of the ecclesial authorities.39 Most pertinent to my discussion here is the seventh constitution, which ‘[forbade] the translation of any text of sacred scripture into English, and the ownership of any translation of the Bible made in the time of Wyclif or later without the express permission of the diocesan, and this permission was only to be given after the translation had been inspected’.40 The scope of this seventh constitution was expansive. It did not only apply, Hudson suggests, to specific translations of holy scripture, but also to any work that might have quoted from the Bible; its remit was therefore a vast array of spiritual literature in the vernacular.41 It was in this context, of an ecclesial establishment alarmed by a burgeoning heresy attempting to stem the flow of potentially risky ideas, that Love presented his translation of the Mirror to Arundel for approval.

The fact that the Mirror was officially approved by Arundel as a valuable tool in his campaign to assert the supremacy of traditional religion has informed a great deal of scholarship on the text. In a hugely influential

38 Hudson, Lollards and their Books, pp. 146-147.
1995 article, Nicholas Watson suggests that the Constitutions ‘need to be regarded as the linchpin of a broader attempt to limit religious discussion and writing in the vernacular’, and, furthermore, that they ‘worked [...] not by being wielded in public, but by creating an atmosphere in which self-censorship was assumed to be both for the common good and (for one’s own safety) prudent’. The Mirror, Watson further suggests, ‘seems to embody [the ideology of the Constitutions] so well that it is tempting to speculate [...] that it was written in part to order’. The consequence of the implementation of the Constitutions, Watson suggests, was to cool a formerly flourishing tradition of religious literature written in the vernacular. While the fourteenth century had seen the production of a wealth of complex and theologically ambitious writing, by such writers as Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, the 1400s heralded ‘the transformation [...] of an impressively innovative tradition of what [Watson calls] “vernacular theology” into its derivative successor’. Far from emulating the theological and intellectual ambition of the texts of the previous century, the Mirror is instead ‘designed to divert lay readers from doctrinal inquiry and to remind them of their childlike dependence on clerics who think for them’. In Watson’s view, then, the Mirror is irrevocably caught up in an authoritarian campaign to maintain orthodoxy in fifteenth-century England.

A number of scholars adopt a similar view to Watson on the character of the Mirror, as they also suggest that the text is primarily defined by its discouragement of complex contemplative thinking and the assertion of ecclesial authority. In the proem that Love adds to the Mirror, alongside the original prologue from the Meditationes, Love suggests that laypeople are spiritual children, who ‘nede to be fedde with mylke of lyȝte doctryne and not

with sadde mete of grete clargye and of hye contemplacion’. 47 This initial infantilisation of the laity prefaces a work, according to Beckwith, whose significant focus on the humanity of Christ ‘becomes a means of social and linguistic condescension, a model not so much of ascent as descent’. 48 Rather than ascending to the contemplation of the theological ineffable, readers ought to keep their feet firmly on material ground. Karnes takes a similar view, as she suggests that texts such as the Mirror, which encourage meditation on Gospel narrative, ‘are [...] least inclined to elevate the religious and social standing of the individual lay believer’. 49 Love’s narrow definition of ‘imagination’, which can produce only ‘material thoughts’, strips his translated text ‘of the elevated spiritual purposes that his source text had afforded them’. 50 Aers, too, suggests that Love makes significant alterations to his Gospel sources, with the intention of maintaining a firm grip on his readers’ minds. 51 Taken together, these critical perspectives craft an impression of the Mirror as a spiritually pedestrian and authoritarian text, which bears all the marks of the fractious religious climate of fifteenth-century England.

Alongside these readings of the Mirror’s content and cultural position as oppressively limiting are critical interpretations that read Love’s text beyond its status as an instrument of Arundelian control. Several scholars have observed that the Mirror was likely read in England prior to the appending of Arundel’s Memorandum. 52 Indeed, Falls has recently suggested

47 Mirror, p. 10.
that the initial audience of Love’s *Mirror* might not have been potentially errant laypeople, but the more junior members of the charterhouse at Mount Grace.\(^5\) Given the Carthusian enthusiasm for pastoral care, and the responsibility of the prior to provide it, Falls’ hypothesis seems plausible.\(^5\)

Furthermore, Ian Johnson has on more than one occasion encouraged readings of Love’s text that look beyond its apparent status as a blunt instrument for the quashing of spiritual ambition. While he acknowledges Love as a conservative figure, Johnson also suggests that ‘[Love] was confident in the power of his *Mirror* to help all souls towards a foretaste of heaven and salvation in itself: no mean ambition’.\(^5\) Elsewhere, Johnson has argued that the *Mirror* encourages its readership to ‘hope’, and therefore does not prevent them from making ‘spiritual progress’.\(^5\)

Beyond the specific status of the *Mirror*, Gillespie has argued that the fifteenth century was not, in fact, an era of unrelenting oppressive control of spiritual literature, with many ‘lively and challenging’ religious works finding their way into the public sphere.\(^5\)

My own view of the *Mirror*’s cultural status in fifteenth-century England is more congruent with the views espoused in this paragraph, though I do not wish to imply that I therefore disagree entirely with Watson and those who follow his line of argument, and boldly suggest that Love’s text is wholly empowering and challenging. It is instructive, here, to note Bradley’s observation, that the *Mirror* ‘[defies] any simplistic categorization of it as a tool of the

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establishment, or as an instrument of resistance’. I intend to argue, however, that the spatial framework of the household that runs throughout the entirety of the Mirror represents a particular aspect of the text to which Love’s readers would have felt particularly connected, and therefore, perhaps, inspired by.

Essential to my argument is the status of the Mirror as a text that encourages affective reading, which was particularly popular in the later Middle Ages. In his discussion of late medieval affectivity, Amsler usefully theorises this mode of reading as underpinned by three key practices. The first ‘involves the immediate somatic ways we touch, sense, perceive, vocalize, or perform a text with our eyes, hands, mouths and bodies’, while the second concerns what is done to the physical codex during the act of reading, including ‘holding a book close for comfort or protection, or touching or kissing reverentially a page in a prayer book’. The third, which is arguably the most relevant to the affective approach encouraged by Love’s Mirror, involves ‘the range of emotional, spiritual, somatic responses readers have to a text, such as crying, laughing, becoming angry, or becoming aroused’.

Several scholars have noted the affective response that Love’s profound emphasis on Christ’s earthly life, and more particularly on his eventual Passion, might evoke. As Stanbury notes, Love encourages a deep emotional connection between Christ and the reader by encouraging her to view the scenes from Christ’s life ‘as if [she] were there, [she is] told to adopt a pose and a gaze that mimes the posture of spectators’. When Love asks his reader to imagine himself to be present in these reworked Gospel episodes, he invokes a range of expressions, Beckwith notes, that aim to stir the emotional faculties: he should imagine, behold, understand, and take good heed of the images that Love lays before him. The instruction to ‘behold’, according to

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60 Amsler, ‘Affective Literacy’, p. 83.
63 Beckwith, Christ’s Body, p. 62.
McNamer, is more powerful than simply asking a reader to ‘look’, as it is imbibed with an ‘ethical imperative’. When the reader ‘beholds’ the wounded Christ, she is emotionally compelled to take account of his suffering, and imagine herself to be present, holding him in her arms; this is particularly the case in the account of the Passion. The focus of these critical accounts of Love’s affective strategies is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the emotional power of being encouraged to imagine physical proximity to the body of Christ, particularly following his debasement at the Passion. Franciscan affectivity, on which Love draws significantly in the Mirror, is notable for its ‘emphatic fetishizing of Christ’s torn and bleeding body as the object, indeed subject, of compassion and passion’. My concern, in this chapter, is the spatial framework in which this divine body is so frequently positioned in the Mirror, both before and during its grave wounding. Throughout the Mirror, Love invites his readers to share a range of houses with Christ, his disciples, his aunts, and his parents. The whole narrative of Christ's time on earth, from his birth via his ministry to his eventual death, is refracted through a domestic lens. The centrality of the household to the narrative of the Mirror is hugely significant, yet it remains notably overlooked by critics, as such a large proportion of the scholarly discussion of Love's text is focused on the religious and historical context of its reception. Not only is the reader encouraged to identify with Christ in the conventional affective mode, on the basis that they have their humanity in common, but because they both share a deep connection to the domestic sphere. The emphasis on household space in the Mirror should be read, therefore, as a salient aspect of the potential affective response to the text.

**Seeking a Home for the Mirror: The Diverse Domesticity of Love’s Readers**

Before I proceed with my analysis of the Mirror’s affective domestic framework, I will first examine the text’s Middle English readership. The fact that the Mirror survives in a large number of manuscripts is indicative of its

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popularity during the fifteenth century, with a broad range of readers keen to engage with Love’s domesticated life of Christ. While a large proportion of the Mirror’s readers were laypeople, whose probable responses to the text feature frequently in my analysis, Love’s text found a further audience within conventual and monastic walls. The Mirror’s range of readers can be broadly separated into three groupings: those who read the text within the enclosure of the monastery and convent, wealthy, aristocratic lay readers, who encountered the Mirror in very lavish domestic spaces, and bourgeois urban readers, who read the Mirror in comfortable but comparatively modest homes. The divergent domestic circumstances of these sets of readers would have shaped their responses to the Mirror’s organising household framework.

For many of Love’s monastic readers, the Mirror’s continual recourse to household imagery might compel them to recollect their lives prior to their entry to the monastery, while Love’s rendering of Christ as a figure who enjoyed a domestically infused mode of enclosure would resonate with their quotidian experience. It is pertinent, here, to recall Falls’ suggestion that the Mirror might initially have been used by junior members of the community at Love’s own Yorkshire charterhouse. In one passage that Falls cites to support this view, the home that Mary, Joseph and Jesus share appears to resemble the arrangement of the Carthusian charterhouse, with the Holy Family periodically withdrawing from communal living to sleep and pray in their own private chambers:

And þen aftur siche manere recreacione in comune. Þei wenten to priarie by hem self in hir closetes. For as we mowe ymagine þei hade no grete house bot a litel, in þe whiche þei hade þre seuerynges as it were þre smale chaumbres, þere especialy to pray and to slepe.

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66 Falls, Nicholas Love’s Mirror, pp. 33-35.
67 Mirror, p. 64. Meditationes, p. 533. It is Falls’ suggestion that this passage in the Mirror is modified by Love to amplify the Holy Family’s taste for individual solitude in their own private bedrooms. This is based on a reading from the version of Meditationes S-T, in which it is suggested that the Holy Family should be imagined as occupying a single room with several beds: ’Et qualiter post alaqualem recreacionem ad oracionem se convertunt in cubilibus suis; non enim erat eis domus ampla sed parua. Meditare etiam circa cubicula in aliqua camerula, scilicet unum pro quolibet eorum’. Meditationes S-T, p. 71. [’After some relaxation they returned to prayer in their little bedrooms; for their home was not large, but rather small. You might even think of it as three beds in some kind of little room, that is to say, one for each of them’. Meditationes, p. 61]. The Peltier edition, however, agrees with the Middle English: ’Sed qualiter post alaqualem recreationem, ad orationem se convertunt in cubilibus suis: non enim erat eis domus ampla, sed parua. Meditare etiam circa cubicula, scilicet unum pro quilibet
Love's description of the Holy Family's paradoxical domestic arrangements, in which their house is small, and yet somehow big enough for each member of the family to enjoy their own private room, has echoes of a section of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ advises his followers to pray 'in secret':

But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.68

In the Mirror, this Biblical instruction is given a homely inflection, as the domestic sphere of the Holy Family bears a striking similarity to the Carthusian charterhouse. In their enthusiasm for spiritual solitude, Mary, Jesus and Joseph share the same devotional tastes as the monks at Mount Grace. It is perhaps Love's rendering of the Holy Family's poor and simple domestic enclosure that endeared the text to several monastic contexts beyond the walls of Mount Grace. Indeed, the Mirror seems to have appealed to women religious of several different orders, including the Benedictines at Barking, Essex,69 and Nun Monkton, Yorkshire.70 It also seems that the text was read by Cistercian nuns at Sinningthwaite, also in Yorkshire,71 and by the Bridgettines at Syon Abbey;72 I will return to this particular manuscript of Love's text later in the chapter.

It is not at all difficult to imagine how Love's rendering of the layout of the Holy Family's home, perhaps written with Carthusian novices in mind, might also resonate with the Mirror's numerous lay readers. In his reading of the passage discussed above, Aers suggests that, while Love did perhaps model his holy domestic sphere on Mount Grace, it is also very similar to the

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68 Matthew 6. 6.
70 Bell, What Nuns Read, p. 157.
71 Bell, What Nuns Read, p. 168.
72 Bell, What Nuns Read, p. 190; p. 209.
‘artisan household’. Given that there was a growing enthusiasm for domestic privacy in the later Middle Ages, coupled with the fact that homes were being built with more individual rooms by the point at which Love’s text was circulating among the laity, Aers’ noting of this domestic sphere’s resonance with artisan householders is pertinent. While these dwellers might have seen the layout of their houses reflected in the homely circumstances of the adolescent Christ, it is less likely that Love’s significant emphasis on poverty and simplicity within this space would have translated as neatly to their domestic experience. These readers, who likely lived in close proximity to the burgeoning mercantilism of the English city, would have had access to a large market of material goods, many of which might have been purchased to ornament the domestic sphere. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, to note that there is codicological evidence to suggest that Love’s middle-class readers, who by the later fifteenth century appear to have been the primary readers of the Mirror, were particularly engaged with the text’s allusions to the material poverty of Christ and his parents.

One codex that bears the marks of such an interest is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 131 (hereafter B), a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript that can be pinpointed to a middle-class owner. Alongside the Mirror, B also contains some excerpts from Bridget of Sweden’s Liber, as well as several devotional texts in Latin and an English version of De Remediis contra Temptationes, by William Flete, a fourteenth-century Augustinian friar. The codex was compiled by John Morton, for the use of himself and his wife, Juliana. The Morton family lived in the mercantile centre of York, where they

73 Aers, Sanctifying Signs, p. 167.
74 I discuss the growing number of multi-roomed houses during this period in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 14-18.
75 Meale, “Oft sijþ is with grete deuocion”: The Early Ownership and Readership of Love’s Mirror, with Special Reference to its Female Audience, in Nicholas Love at Waseda, pp. 19-46 (p. 26).
enjoyed significant links with ‘its major ecclesiastical centres, and to those magnates with massive landholdings in Yorkshire’. Despite its users’ power and material comfort, the many marginal annotations in B routinely note passages that expound the poverty and humility of the Holy Family. Using the symbol of a cross in the margins, B’s annotator marks, on f. 13r, a section on the humility of the Virgin Mary, on f. 26r, a passage on the humility of the Holy Family, on f. 30r, a discussion of the dangers of worldly curiosity, and on f. 57v, Christ’s suggestion that he lived the lifestyle of those most affected by poverty. Alongside these portions of text that are noted with a cross, the user of B also adds ‘nota bene’ to the margin in several places, including on f. 29v, which emphasises the importance of humility, and f. 38v, where Christ’s own humility is noted at his baptism, performed by John the Baptist.

A second manuscript that exhibits a similar pattern of annotative interest in poverty, meekness and humility is Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS English 98 (hereafter JR). JR is a beautiful and expensively produced codex, far more lavish than B, and it also appears to have been produced in a mercantile milieu. Though the earliest owners of the manuscript cannot be determined, the closing folios of the codex, from ff. 137v-138r, record several sixteenth-century births and deaths from two gentry families, the Roberts family, from Middlesex, and the Horde family, from Surrey. In his discussion of the pattern of annotations in JR, Perry suggests that the marginal marks were perhaps made by a woman, or otherwise with a female reader in mind, as they often pertain to religious tropes of particular interest to women readers. Indeed, the user of JR marks several passages on the meekness of the Virgin Mary; for example, there are two marks in the margin on f. 10r, alongside passages that note the importance of Mary’s virginity and humility at the Annunciation. More broadly, the possibly

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80 For a full list of markings and annotations in B, see Perry, ‘Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 131: Manuscript Description’.
82 For a discussion of these family records, see Perry, “Some Spyrytuall Matter of Gostly Edyfycacion”, p. 109.
84 For a complete list of the annotations in JR, see Ryan Perry, ‘Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Eng. 98: Manuscript Description’ [online]. In Geographies of Orthodoxy: Mapping
female user of JR annotates numerous passages on poverty and humility, and the importance of rejecting the trappings of worldly life. Most interestingly, given that JR does not appear to have been produced for monastic readers, its user has placed a wavy line in the margin on f. 16v, alongside a portion of text in which Love gives advice to those who are ‘enclosed bodily in Celle or in Cloystre’. The annotator subsequently places the same mark against a long passage of text on ff. 16r-17v, in which Love expounds the value of withdrawing from worldly life. On f. 35r, the user responds to a long discussion of the dangers of engaging too freely with material goods by marking its closing couple of lines, which advise against living in ‘superfluyte’. The annotator also marks, on f. 49v, a line that describes Mary Magdalene’s use of her hair to wipe Christ’s feet as an example of her devotion to meekness.

Why, then, do these materially comfortable Mirror readers choose to annotate passages that appear to have far more relevance to the austere living conditions of, perhaps, Love’s own Carthusian Order? It is useful, here, to recollect Rice’s theory of spiritual poverty, whereby religious texts’ enabling of their readers’ interior purification facilitates safer outward engagement with the potential distractions of worldly life. I would suggest, therefore, that the annotators of B and JR are not concerned with the literal imitatio of the scenes that they so frequently take note of, but with the figurative interior poverty that might regulate their interactions with the burgeoning mercantile sphere. Indeed, the user of JR, on f. 46r, marks a passage from Love’s account of the Sermon on the Mount, which expounds the merit of being ‘pore in spirite’:

Bot to þe vertue of pouerte it is not onely beheyht fort come bot as in tyme þat is nowe present it is ȝiuene of cryst, by þe foreseid wordes at þe bygynnyng of his sermone, þat bene þees, Blessed be þei þat bene pore in spirite, for hir mede is þe kyngdom of heuen. Lo he seip not hir mede shal be, bot as nowe, hir mede is (Love’s emphasis).
The annotation of this particular passage, alongside the numerous further markings on poverty in *JR*, suggests a reader keen to embrace the spiritual resonances of poverty without having to enact the material deprivation that its literal practice would bring. As Perry suggests, ‘Love [...] does not actually expect his well-heeled audiences to dispense with all their worldly goods in imitation of the Holy Family’.\(^9^9\) Rather, as the annotations in *B* and *JR* indicate, readers of the *Mirror* should engage in the enthusiastic visualisation of the Holy Family’s material scarcity, and use the imagination of these scenes to shape their inward purification.

The final group of *Mirror* readers, members of the aristocracy, enjoyed even greater material wealth than the category examined above. One such reader of the *Mirror* was Cecily Neville, making yet a further appearance in this thesis, whose copy of Love’s text appears to have been bound with Walter Hilton’s treatise on the contemplative and active life.\(^9^0\) This joint volume was eventually bequeathed to Cecily’s granddaughter, Anne de la Pole, who was the Prioress at Syon Abbey.\(^9^1\) Cecily also owned the original Latin text of the *Meditationes*, which was likely read aloud during meals.\(^9^2\) Given her royal status as mother of kings, coupled with her significant wealth and lavish domestic circumstances, how might Cecily have navigated the huge emphasis on homely poverty in both the *Mirror* and the *Meditations*? As Dzon has noted, ‘we know from her will that Cecily possessed (besides much jewellery) a number of tapestries and draperies [...] which were exquisitely wrought and of great value’.\(^9^3\) Of course, it is possible that Cecily’s response to the *Mirror’s* emphasis on the Holy Family’s material poverty echoed that of the text’s mercantile readers, who were clearly keen to draw out the figurative resonances of such imagery. Indeed, Dzon suggests that Cecily’s lavish household goods might have served as spiritual props for the contemplation of

\(^8^9\) Perry, “*Some Sprytyual Matter of Gostly Edyfycacion*”, p. 110.
the material poverty of the Holy Family; they would certainly have reminded her of the sharp divergence between her own life and that of the servant king and queen, Mary and Jesus. It is possible that Cecily’s reading of the *Mirror* might have prevented her from taking an excessive interest in the distractions of domestic ornamentation. Clearly, neither Cecily nor the text’s domestically comfortable middle-class readers were tempted by the *Mirror* to engage in the *imitatio* of the Holy Family’s homely circumstances. Given that Love’s text places such profound emphasis on emotional feeling, as Dzon remarks, perhaps the *Mirror*’s lay readers preferred to *feel* its rendering of poverty, rather than enact it literally.

**Crafting Domestic Piety: Celebrating the Household as Spiritual Space**

In terms of the overall corpus of this thesis, Love’s *Mirror* is something of an outlier. Whereas the three texts that I discuss in the preceding chapters make use of domestic language as a means of shaping their metaphors and allegories of religious life, the *Mirror* weaves the imagery of the household into a literal narrative of Christ’s earthly life. The reader of the *Mirror* must, therefore, extract spiritual lessons from Love’s account of the major episodes of the life of Christ and his kin. From the very beginning of the text, arguably the essential message that the astute *Mirror* reader might deduce is that the home is a hugely important space, to be celebrated as the locus of the Holy Family’s own devotional practice. Throughout his narrative, Love situates Mary, Joseph, and Christ in a series of domestic contexts, as they spend private time in chambers and undertake a range of different household tasks. In defining the Holy Family in large part by their quotidian homeliness, Love renders the domestic sphere a space that is shared between the divine and the reader. In light of the fifteenth-century enthusiasm for domestic piety, Love’s

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95 Dzon, ‘Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal *Infantia Salvatoris*’, p. 249.
valorisation of the household as a spiritually significant space would have had a particular resonance for his lay readers.\footnote{I discuss the overlap between spiritual practice and domestic space in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 30-33.}

The \textit{Mirror}'s celebration of domesticity begins before Christ has even taken the first steps of his earthly life, with Love retaining a great deal of the Latin material that accounts for the Virgin's life prior to the birth of her son. Arguably the salient episode of this narrative of the Virgin's pre-motherhood life is her visit, while pregnant, to the house of her cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth, too, is expecting a baby boy, who will come to be known as John the Baptist.\footnote{For the Gospel account of this encounter, see Luke 1. 39-56.}

What is particularly striking about Love’s rendering of this important Gospel scene is his strong emphasis on the domesticity of the encounter between the two pregnant women. Love begins to highlight the particular character of the Virgin’s domestic life as soon as she and Joseph set off on the journey to Elizabeth’s house:

\textit{Now take hede how pis blessed lady qwene of heuen and of erpe gop alone with hire spouse and pat not vp on hors bot on fote. She lede np not with hire many knytes and barones nor pe grete companye of boure maidens and damyeles, bot sopely pere gop with hire a wele better companye, and pat is Pouert, Mekenes, and honest Shamefastnes, 3ei and pe plente of alle vertues, and pe best of alle pat isoure lorde god is with hire. She ha a grete and wirchipful company, bot not of pe vanyte and pompe of pe world.}\footnote{‘Boure’, in this context, likely denotes a lady’s chamber, which suggests that Love is specifically refuting the suggestion that Mary might have had chamber maids. See MED, s. v. \textit{bôur} (n. [2.b]).}

The affective opening of this passage is unmistakeable. Love asks his reader to ‘take heed’ that, rather than bringing ‘boure maidens and damyseles’ on her journey, Mary instead gathers a far more useful collection of Christian virtues. The implication of this passage, that these virtues might stand in the place of a conventional household retinue, yokes them to the successful running of the domestic sphere. Love gives his readers, here, a mobile reimagining of a text such as \textit{Sawles Warde}, in which the four virtues maintain a secure household. In suggesting that Mary takes the ‘company’ of poverty, meekness and modesty on her journey, Love is perhaps alluding to the somewhat
paradoxical character of her identity. Like Jesus, Mary is a servant-monarch: she is a celestial queen, yet simultaneously the epitome of female humility. Indeed, when Mary is staying with Elizabeth, Love recounts, she becomes so involved in the performance of domestic servitude that she forgets her heavenly status:

For oure ladye duelled þere þe terme of þre moneþes seruyng Elizabeth in al þat she myst, meekely, reuerently and deuoutly as a seruant, forgȝetyng þat she was goddis modere and qwene of alle þe worlde.100

Given that many of the Mirror’s lay readers would have been materially comfortable enough to afford a literal company of domestic servants, is Love suggesting that they, too, might need to navigate a similar paradox to the Virgin? It is instructive, here, to recall Rice’s theory of ‘spiritual poverty’, in which engagement with the imagination of modesty in religious literature facilitates the reader’s safe interaction with worldly materiality.101 If the wealthy reader is able, like Mary, to perform the ‘forgetting’ of her lofty status, then she might be able to comfortably accommodate a retinue of seemingly incompatible virtues alongside a mode of living that provides a literal company of domestic help. Given the growth of the mercantile sphere during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, late medieval Christians were increasingly compelled to consider how they might reconcile their engagement with materiality and prosperity with their religious ethics. Indeed, such discussions might be said to preface the later Protestant enthusiasm for the successful incorporation of prosperity into religious faith.102 In positing the household as the space in which both Mary and the reader find a balance between the divergent aspects of their identities, Love suggests that the domestic sphere represents an imaginative bridge between human and holy.

100 Mirror, p. 32. Meditationes, pp. 546-547.
101 Rice, Lay Piety and Religious Discipline, pp. 24-25.
As Love continues his account of the Visitation, he shifts from celebrating Mary’s company of spiritual servants to the collected residents of Elizabeth’s house:

A lord god what house was þat, what Chaumbur and what bedde in þe which duelleden to gedire and resteden so worþi Moderes with so noble sones, þat is to say Marie and Elizabeth, Jesus and Jon. And also with hem duellyng þo wirchifful olde men, Zakarie and Joseph. Þis was a blessed companye of men and women and of children.103

This commendation of the chamber that holds the extended Holy Family together reworks a spiritual trope in order to valorise domestic space. In Love’s formulation, the bed is by no means the verdant one of the Song of Songs, in which the spouse awaits an erotic encounter with the divine bridegroom.104 Rather, the bed is the site of familial conviviality, and the presence of Christ is as unborn baby, rather than spiritual spouse. The final line of this passage, in which Love declares the extended Holy Family to be a ‘blessed company’, is Love’s own addition to this meditation. In her discussion of this new definition of the Virgin and her relatives, Erler suggests that Love is adapting a traditional trope of patristic writing, in which the monastic life is likened to the bliss of heaven.105 Indeed, it is possible to be even more specific than this, and note that Love reimagines the Cistercian trope of the bed itself as the monastery, in which all of the monks are collected together:

And indeed in the Church the ‘bed’ where one reposes is, in my opinion, the cloisters and the monasteries, where one lives undisturbed by the cares of the world and the anxieties of life.106

For Love, the domestic furnishing of the bed is transformed into a microcosm of the familial household, rather than a religious institution. In celebrating the domestic sphere as the container of the extended Holy Family, Love posits the household as an environment in which one’s spirituality might be amply

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106 Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, trans. by Walsh, II, 241 (Sermon 46).
It is the household, here, rather than the monastery, that represents an ideal Christian community.

Love’s emphasis on the capacity of the household to nurture its inhabitants’ spirituality is developed throughout the *Mirror*. Indeed, Love routinely shows the family unit of Mary, Joseph and Jesus to be participating in spiritually fruitful household labour. In a chapter that narrates the events of Christ’s life through his adolescence, Love depicts the Holy Family as deeply engaged with the physical work involved in the running of their home:

 Beholde we þere þe maner of lyuyng of þat blessed cumpanye in pouerte and simplenes to gedire, and how þat olde man Joseph wrouht as he miȝt in his craft of Carpentary, oure lady also with þe distafe and nelde, and perwiȝ makynge her mete, and oþere offices doyynge þat longen to housholde as we mowe pinke in diuere maners, and how oure lord Jesus mekely holf hem boþe at hir nede and also in leying þe borde, makynge þe beddes and sech ðepere choores gladly and lowly minstryng, and so fulfyllynge in dede þat he seip of him self in þe gospel, þat, *Mannus sone came not to be seruet. bot to serue*.

This remarkably detailed rendering of homely life, which would facilitate an especially rich visualisation of this scene for its reader, refracts Christ’s meekness and mission to serve through the everyday practices of domestic labour. He is a participant in the housework that the Holy Family must carry out in order to sustain themselves, his humility manifested in his willingness to make beds and assist Mary in her domestic tasks. Like Mary, who ‘forgets’ that she is queen of heaven and earth in her willing participation in domestic servitude, the Son of God must also obey the principles of household order. According to Aers, the lines above posit the home ‘[as] the place in which subjects must be taught obedience, the basis of all social discipline’. Aers’ interpretation seems especially pertinent in light of the fact that the fifteenth-century householder was responsible for the careful management of the behaviour of those who lived under his roof, both within the domestic sphere and among the wider community.

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109 I discuss the role of the fifteenth-century householder in the maintenance of both domestic and community discipline in my introduction to this thesis, at pp. 21-22.
Love retains the strong Franciscan emphasis on poverty in his translation of this episode, perhaps because it might appeal to his probable initial Carthusian audience. He also, though, makes some subtle alterations to redirect the reader's response to the Holy Family's domestic life. The author of the *Meditationes* calls upon his reader to pity the engagement of Christ and Mary with domestic labour: 'Compatere ergo sibi, quam sic suis manibus laborare oportet: compatere etiam Domino Jesu, quia ipse eam adjuvabat, fideliter laborabat in his que poterat'. In the passage quoted above, Love deletes these calls for readers to pity the Holy Family in their engagement with domestic labour. This omission, I would suggest, is indicative of the fact that Love's fifteenth-century readers were engaging with the *Mirror* in an altogether different context from those of the *Meditationes* author. Some of Love's lay readers, reading the *Mirror* in their own homes, may very well have been carrying out similar household chores to those described in this passage. Love encourages his reader to seek the kind of devotional rewards won by Christ and Mary, as she carries out her own domestic chores. Making up a bed, Love suggests, is a signifier of one's Christian meekness; it suggests that one is engaging with the company of servants that Mary took with her on her way to the Visitation. The reader is furnished with the prospect, therefore, of exploring the adequacy of her own Christian character through her quotidian engagement with domestic space. The beholding of Christ, Joseph and the Virgin Mary studiously taking care of the running of their home should not stir the Middle English reader to feelings of pity. Rather, she ought to identify that she, at home, might share in a significant aspect of the manifestation of their piety.

**Cushions and Curiosity: Confronting Domestic Tensions in the *Mirror***

Thus far, I have discussed Love's celebration of the domestic sphere as a space that is shared between the reader and the holy figures of his adapted Gospel

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110 *Meditationes*, p. 533. ['Have compassion for [Mary], who had to work with her hands. Have compassion for the Lord Jesus as well, he helped her and faithfully worked at anything he could', (translation mine)].
narrative. This model of identificatory devotion functions both at the level of imagination, with the reader ‘seeing’ herself in Mary’s sparsely furnished house, and, in a more literal sense, as the daily reality of domestic work bridges the gap between the reader and the Holy Family. These images function by suggesting that the household is a framework held together by the interlocking values of simplicity, intimacy, and domestic labour. Love’s suggestion that the very structure of the household is underpinned by the salient facets of Christian devotion is, indeed, a defining aspect of his presentation of domesticity. This would have been especially appealing to the fifteenth-century lay reader, as its bold implication is that the secular domestic sphere is an inherently Christian space. In addition to this rendering of domestic space as a broad moral framework, Love also alludes to the specific detail of what the household contains as a means of commenting on the ideal mode of Christian piety. Via an engagement with the material goods that one might find in the medieval home, from cushions to bedding, Love harnesses the minutiae of domestic life to draw a link between the reader and the Holy Family. The everyday items that surround the lay reader, and in the case of Love’s institutional readers, the memory of these items, are transformed into learning tools, which are used to enhance spiritual progress.

The notion of an impoverished Christ is not, of course, unique to Love. As I briefly noted in the introduction to this chapter, this poverty in the Gospels is often interwoven with Christ’s status as a homeless, mendicant preacher. In the Mirror, however, Christ’s lack of material possessions is invariably linked to his position within the home, rather than outside it. The roots of this distinctly domestic poverty are, in the Mirror, in the very moment of Christ’s birth. In his chapter on the Nativity, Love gives a description of the scene shortly after Mary has given birth to her son:

Joseph [...] honoureng and wirchipyng þe child god and man, toke þe sedel of þe Asse, and made þerof a qwischyn our e lady to sitte on and a suppoyle to leyn to. And so sat þe lady of al þe worlde in þat simple araye byside þe crach, hauyng hir mild mode and hir louely eyene, with her inward affeccion, vpon hir swete derworth child.  

Prima facie, this episode does not appear to be particularly domestic. Much of this scene is exactly what a reader might expect to see in any rendering of the Nativity: Christ is lying in a manger, there are animals present, and his parents are filled with joy on the arrival of their son. On closer inspection, however, one notes that Love has given this most familiar scene a distinctly domestic inflection. Joseph attempts to make Mary more comfortable by fashioning her a cushion to sit on from the saddle of the donkey, a somewhat impromptu engagement with the kind of physical domestic labour that the Virgin undertakes throughout the *Mirror*.

Joseph’s spontaneous domestication of the Nativity stable is not Love’s own addition to his source text, and nor is the notion that Joseph undertook domestic labour on the occasion of Christ’s birth the original invention of the *Meditationes* author. Joseph’s fashioning of the cushion bears some similarity to the later medieval trope, which became especially popular in Germany, of Joseph removing his socks and trousers and sewing them into swaddling bands for the infant Jesus, as a display of love and reverence for his foster son. This image of Joseph, which became known as the *Josefshosen*, is often to be found in late medieval German paintings of the Nativity scene. The likely purpose of these images was to facilitate the rehabilitation of the figure of Joseph, who had often been portrayed in religious art and literature as foolish, elderly, and humiliatingly cuckolded by Mary’s pregnancy. As the Franciscans were especially keen to reframe the portrayal of Joseph into one of him as an effective, devout father and husband, it is unsurprising that the *Meditationes* should contain a variation on this *Josefshosen* image. In the context of fifteenth-century England, however, Love’s rendering of the cushion episode has a resonance much beyond the original objective of ameliorating

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the perception of Joseph. As I observed in my introduction to this thesis, the status of the cushion in fifteenth-century England was not solely functional. It was also associated with ornamentation, and the embodiment of the message that one had sufficient disposable income to spend on domestic adornment.\footnote{115} It is rather surprising, therefore, that Love should retain this symbol of financial comfort, with the poor Holy Family apparently sharing a taste for domestic adornment with wealthy householders in fifteenth-century England.

For other religious writers, the cushion remains a potent symbol of an excessive interest in worldly goods. In the Nativity scene of \textit{Book to a Mother}, a late fourteenth-century spiritual treatise ostensibly written by a cleric for his widowed mother, the anonymous author posits the household, filled with cushions and other ornamentation, as a space that stands in direct contrast with the circumstances of the Holy Family at the Nativity:

\begin{quote}
And loke, modir, also: þou shalt not fynde aboute Marie and hure childe none gaiȝe couerelites ne testres, curtynes, docers, \textit{quischines}, calabre, meniuer, ne non oþir pelure ne panter, ne boteler, ne curiouse cokis to ordeyne þe King and þe Quene erliche here dyner ne sopers, but a simple carpenter and his pore wif, fer fro home in a straungecontre-- þei nadde but simple cloþis at home, and so simple here—þis child in þe stalle before oxe and asse; and þis is a simple houshold, to rikene al ifere (emphasis mine).\footnote{116}
\end{quote}

The \textit{Book} author’s extensive list of all that the Holy Family did not enjoy, from cushions to curtains, represents something of a swipe at the market for domestic goods that the late medieval householder might well be participating in. This is especially bruising for the bourgeois reader, given the enormous

\footnote{115} I discuss the resonances of the cushion in fifteenth-century England in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 27-29. \footnote{116} \textit{Book to a Mother: An Edition with Commentary}, ed. by Adrian J. McCarthy (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981), p. 49. [‘And look, Mother: around Mary and her child you will not find any splendid coverlets, or a canopy over the bed, or curtains, or wall hangings, or cushions, or furs [calabre and meunier are both kinds of fur; meunier is specifically the fur of a grey squirrel], or, in fact, any kind of valuable fur. Nor were there any servants serving food or wine, or skilful cooks to offer the King and Queen their meals. They were but a simple carpenter and his wife, far from home in a foreign country, and as they only had basic clothes at home, so did they live simply here: the child in the stall by the ox and the ass. This is indeed a simple household, that brings the animals and the Holy Family together’, (translation mine)]. For a discussion of this passage, see P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England: a Material Culture Perspective’, in \textit{Medieval Domesticity}, pp. 124-144 (p. 133).}
popularity of cushions among the urban middle classes.\textsuperscript{117} Furthermore, squirrel fur had fallen in price by the fifteenth century and was no longer the preserve of the very wealthy, with bourgeois town dwellers particularly keen to buy it.\textsuperscript{118} Its presence on the Book author’s list of distracting domestic items might be read as a rebuke to those who covet such a luxurious material. The moral message of this passage seems relatively straightforward: if one wishes to emulate the Holy Family, who lived simply, the purchasing of decorative domestic items and the employment of servants is incompatible with such a mode of living. Love’s spiritual message, by contrast, is slightly more nuanced. The reader is encouraged to identify with the Holy Family by noting, first of all, that Mary and Joseph share the fifteenth-century enthusiasm for cushions. Readers of the Mirror should further observe that when Mary receives the cushion from Joseph, she is by no means distracted by it: she continues to sit ‘simply’, and her eyes remain on Christ. In my view, Love’s translation of this scene from the Meditationes gives his readers another episode that underscores the importance of practicing spiritual poverty. If, like Mary, the reader is sitting in a room that contains cushions, this is acceptable as long as it does not prevent her from maintaining her ‘inward affection’ for Christ. Mary becomes, here, a model for the financially comfortable reader: if the Virgin can maintain her devotion while in the company of domestic ornamentation, she ought to do the same.

The image of the cushion at the Nativity evoked material responses from more than one of Love’s fifteenth-century readers, both lay and institutional. In two Mirror manuscripts, Manchester, Chetham’s Library, MS 6690 (hereafter Ch),\textsuperscript{119} and Warminster, Longleat House, MS 14 (hereafter Lo), the codices’ institutional readers have left annotations in the margins

\textsuperscript{117} On the popularity of the cushion among bourgeois householders in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Goldberg, ‘The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity’, pp. 131-133.
alongside the appearance of Mary’s cushion. In another manuscript, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 648 (hereafter Mo), a lavish illumination of the Nativity, with the cushion present, accompanies the text.\(^\text{120}\) These codicological indicators of fifteenth-century interest in Love’s domesticated Nativity suggest that the cushion was a pertinent symbol, probably for different reasons, for a range of the Mirror’s readers.

\textit{Ch} is a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript of the Mirror that, according to Perry, ‘was possibly made for the use of a religious house and that retains the vestiges of an original chain which once secured the book in an institutional library’.\(^\text{121}\) The user of this codex annotates several passages, many of which, as Perry notes, are concerned with the geography of the Holy Land and the distance between particular holy locations.\(^\text{122}\) This is perhaps indicative of an interest in imagined pilgrimage. Alongside these annotations, which suggest a particular enthusiasm for an imagined exterior mode of piety, I note a second grouping of marginal marks, as the user of the manuscript also seems to have taken an interest in the Nativity, and the circumstances surrounding Christ’s birth. On f. 16\(^v\), the user adds a small ‘g’ marking alongside the passage that details Joseph’s construction of an enclosure and a manger for the animals in the stable (see Appendix, \textit{Figure 4}).\(^\text{123}\) Slightly later, on f. 17\(^r\), the annotator returns to the subject of Joseph’s virtuous labour, and adds the ‘g’ mark against the fashioning of the cushion.\(^\text{124}\) Finally, on f. 18\(^v\), the Ch user places the same symbol alongside the account of a golden idol toppling over in a temple, and the springing forth of oil at a tavern, which had been prophesied in the event that a virgin gave birth to a son.\(^\text{125}\) It is most interesting that two of the three annotations of scenes related to the Nativity in Ch mark instances of Joseph engaging in physical domestic labour. In his discussion of the annotation of geography and distance in this manuscript,

\(^\text{123}\) \textit{Mirror}, p. 38.
\(^\text{124}\) \textit{Mirror}, p. 38.
\(^\text{125}\) \textit{Mirror}, p. 41.
Perry suggests that it is indicative of an interest in ‘a tangible, veridical material history’, which facilitates a ‘better visualization of the scene’. This explanation might also be applied to the annotations of Joseph’s physical labour at the Nativity: the reader is given the resources to imagine Joseph making material things, which can then be used as anchors for her own meditation. The cushion is perhaps not, however, given its status as an emblem of an unwelcome engagement with worldly goods, the ideal textual aide for the institutional reader. While the image of Joseph engaging in handicraft might indeed offer the user of Ch a usefulimaginative bridge to the site of the Nativity, it would perhaps also serve as a somewhat risky reminder of the secular domesticity that this reader has chosen to leave behind.

The potentially distracting character of the image of the cushion certainly appears to have perturbed a user of Lo, another manuscript that was used in a religious institution. According to Perry, Lo was used as part of ‘a tightly organised framework of communal reading’ at Syon Abbey. The key evidence that this manuscript was used by the community at Syon appears on f. 4v, with the names ‘Jhesus, Maria, Birgitta, Elizabeth’ prefacing a reading schedule of chapters from the Mirror, to be used during Lent. The addition of this schedule certainly suggests that those who prepared this codex for use at Syon took a keen interest in directing its users’ reading. Indeed, Perry notes that Lo was probably examined before it entered into use at Syon, ‘perhaps by the canons, though, just as feasibly, by high-ranking members of the female side of the house’. These prefatory examinations have resulted in attempts to censor two portions of the text, both of which discuss Joseph’s behaviour before and shortly after the birth of Christ. The first instance of annotative censorship appears on f. 27r, with the examiner directing readers of the book to ignore the suggestion that Joseph could not bear to look at Mary when he learned of her pregnancy, as he was anxious that she might have committed

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128 On the listing of these names in the manuscript, and for a transcription of this reading schedule, see Perry, “Some Spyrytuall Matter of Gostly Edyfycacion”, pp. 116-117.
130 For a discussion of both instances, see Perry, “Some Spyrytuall Matter of Gostly Edyfycacion”, pp. 119-120.
adultery. This passage has been lined through, and the word ‘vacat’, ‘ignore’, split in two, with ‘va’ written above the first word in the sentence, and ‘cat’ in the right margin (see Appendix, Figure 5). The second ‘vacat’ instruction is on f. 31r, and it directs the reader to ignore the suggestion that Joseph fashioned an impromptu cushion for Mary following Christ’s birth. In this instance, the text has not been scored out, but a box has been drawn around these lines, and the word ‘vacat’ is written in the margin (see Appendix, Figure 6).

The question of why users of Lo are directed to exclude these passages about Joseph is an interesting one, particularly in the case of the direction to ignore the making of the Nativity cushion. In his analysis of this double censorship, Perry suggests that the ‘vacat’ instructions ‘[are] the result of some attempt to standardise details relating to the life of Mary in Syon, and that alternative narratives are here preferred’. What might these ‘alternative narratives’ be? Given Syon’s devotion to the Bridgettine visionary canon, it seems reasonable to surmise that those in authority at the monastery might have been keen to ensure the dominance of Bridget’s accounts of the salient events of the Holy Family’s lives. Bridget makes no mention of the suggestion that Joseph might have doubted his wife’s fidelity on learning of her pregnancy, while her vision of the Nativity does not see Joseph engage in spontaneous handicraft. Rather, once Joseph has led Mary into the stable, Bridget recounts, he ties the ox and the donkey to the stall, before lighting a candle for his wife and leaving while she gives birth. After Christ is born, Joseph returns to the stable to worship and weep with joy for his infant foster son. The importance of Bridget’s Nativity vision to Syon readers is reflected in the fact that it is repeated almost verbatim in the Speculum devotorum, another Carthusian-authored Life of Christ, written for a Syon nun. Clearly, the Mirror’s account of Joseph’s conduct presents something of a challenge for the institutional examiners of Lo, as Love’s additional details conflict with

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131 Mirror, p. 34.  
134 Liber, p. 486.  
135 Liber, pp. 486-487.  
Bridget’s version, received directly from God. That these censors might have been anxious about encouraging readers to engage with the notion that Mary was ever the subject of moral suspicion, particularly in light of her hugely prominent role as Bridget’s mentor in the Liber, seems rather unsurprising. Their apparent concern about the seemingly inconsequential cushion detail, however, is perhaps not fully explained by the suggestion that the examiners were keen to bring the Mirror into line with the Bridgettine narrative. The vetter of Lo does not regard the cushion detail as inconsequential because it alludes to a mode of domesticity that the community at Syon had left behind. The tension between worldly and spiritual wealth that Joseph’s cushion embodies might have been considered too risky for enclosed religious readers, as this familiar domestic item represents a dangerous symbolic retreat into a previous homely life.

The institutional annotators of both Ch and Lo are both plainly aware of the potential for the peculiar image of a cushion in the Nativity stable to prick the imagination of the reader, perhaps somewhat dangerously. Indeed, the peculiar cushion detail certainly seems to have stirred the imaginative faculties of the illuminator of Mo, which is a particularly lavish and extensively illustrated copy of the Mirror. Unlike the two manuscripts discussed above, Mo appears to have been made for lay use, possibly by a relatively wealthy producer of books.137 According to Friedman, some of the features of Mo’s decoration suggest that it was likely produced and used in the north of England.138 Mo contains several illuminations of key events in the Mirror, including the Annunciation, on f. 10r, Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus’ journey into exile in Egypt, on f. 27v, and the Sermon on the Mount, on f. 46r. The illumination that accompanies the Nativity episode is on f. 19r, in the very centre of the page, just above a red chapter heading that reads ‘Of the natuuite of oure lorde Ihesu criste’ (see Appendix, Figure 7). The image, which is surrounded by a floral border, shows Mary lying on a large bed, with a pillow at her head, and Joseph watching over his wife and newborn child. Jesus lies

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137 Falls, Nicholas Love’s Mirror, p. 144.
next to Mary in a crib, into which a bright red ox and a donkey are looking. There are three angels at the scene, one of whom seems to be stroking the ox, who watch over the Holy Family. The anxieties of the Lo censors were, perhaps, justified: this illuminator certainly seems to have used the image of the cushion to recollect a scene of domestic comfort. Indeed, this illumination situates the Nativity in a rather lavish household setting. With her large bed and pillow, Mary has far more material comfort than Joseph’s hastily improvised cushion might have afforded her. Most interestingly, this image does not depict a Holy Family struggling with poverty. Apart from the calves and angels, of course, this Nativity setting looks as though it could be drawn from the home of its wealthy lay reader. Indeed, the illuminator of Mo chooses to ignore the text’s focus on simplicity and frugality in order to underscore the notion that, in their enthusiasm for soft furnishings, the Holy Family shared a taste for domestic interiors with the fifteenth-century lay reader.

Following the birth of her son, as I have discussed above, Mary sits beside his crib ‘in [...] pore and symple worldly aray’. This material poverty is not reflected in the illuminator’s accompanying image, and the reader is therefore compelled to navigate the disconnect between image and text. While the visual image of the Nativity taking place within a representation of the fifteenth-century domestic sphere provides an identificatory bridge between the Holy Family and Mo’s user, it simultaneously fractures the connection between text and image content. Furthermore, where the Mirror appears in expensively produced and lavishly illuminated manuscripts such as Mo, this tension between the desirability of poverty and the rejection of luxury is embodied by the physical codex. Once again, then, it seems reasonable to deduce that lay readers who encounter Love’s lessons on the value of material poverty on the pages of a costly and elaborately decorated book are not expected to respond to them with a full-throated imitatio of the Holy Family’s

139 Mirror, p. 39.
poverty. Rather, close engagement with the imaginative renderings of material poverty in the Mirror ought to make it 'safe' for the reader to encounter luxury domestic objects, which might include expensive books, such as Mo. Once again, Love’s text can be seen to assist its reader in the striking of a careful balance between material prosperity and Christian ethics, which would have been especially pertinent against the late medieval backdrop of a growing mercantile sphere. The image that accompanies the Nativity scene in this manuscript furnishes its reader with a powerful visual underlining of this essential spiritual message. Rather than seeing her presence at the Nativity merely imaginatively, the reader ought to imagine instead that she is Mo’s rendering of Mary, reclining in a fifteenth-century bedchamber, and therefore able to maintain her spiritual poverty despite her engagement with material domestic culture.

In more than one instance in the Mirror, Love underscores this sense that it is possible to maintain one’s spiritual poverty in the face of mercantile domestic acquisition. While the overriding context of the Holy Family’s interaction with the household sphere is, indeed, that of material scarcity, a couple of notable exceptions are emblematic of the successful coexistence of piety and material objects. One instance of an innocuous rendering of domestic material culture comes as Love describes the Holy Family’s return from exile in Egypt. Interestingly, they do not go immediately to their own house in Nazareth. Rather, they break their journey with another visit to the house of Elizabeth: ‘after þei were passed þe flome Jordan, þen come þei forþermore to þe house of oure lady Cosyn Elizabeth, where þei weren specyal refreshed, and maden to gedire a gret and a likyng fest’. The relative comfort and material resources of Elizabeth’s house, which Love has previously described as ‘plentyuous and hauyng’, have two key purposes.

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141 I discuss the burgeoning mercantile sphere in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 24-30.
142 Mirror, p. 56. Meditationes, p. 529. This detail is not taken from the Gospels: it is Love’s own embellishment.
143 Mirror, p. 34. Love’s remark upon the relative wealth of Elizabeth and Zecariah appears in a short section on the birth of John the Baptist, which he adds as a separate chapter to his text. This expands upon around three paragraphs on the birth and circumcision of John, after which Mary returns to Nazareth, in the fifth chapter of the Latin. The Mirror’s comment on Elizabeth’s wealth adapts a sentence from the final paragraph of this fifth chapter in the Meditationes, in which the author notes that Mary had been staying in a wealthy household:
Foremost, they replenish the Holy Family after their arduous toil across the plains of the Holy Land. Love associates the material comforts of the domestic sphere with the Holy Family’s triumph over those who sought to cause them harm, the safety and security of the home offering an obvious counterpoint to the perils of exile. Crucially, however, Mary, Joseph, and Christ are not so enamoured of these homely riches that they lose sight of their pious humility. Love makes a point of noting that, following these celebrations, the Holy Family ‘went [...] in to þe Cite of Galile cleped Nazareþ, and þere þei duelled as in hir owne home ledyng a symple and a pore lyfe to gedere’.144 This Nazareth home, the Holy Family’s eventual destination, embodies their absolute devotion to spiritual poverty. The materially enriching household certainly does not, however, derail one’s commitment to such a salient component of Christian piety.

Love develops his association of domestic material culture and celebration as his account of the return from exile continues. Once the Holy Family are safely installed in their simple Nazareth home, they receive visitors, many of whom, Love notes, bring gifts:

Lo þus is þe child Jesus brouht home out of Egipte, and þan as we mowen þenk, þe sistres of our lady and ðe þyng folk and frendes comen to hem, welcomyng hem home and visityng hem with presents and þiftes as it was nede to hem, þat foden of hir owne bare housholde.145

The arrival of these gifts would, inevitably, make the Holy Family’s poor household considerably less ‘bare’. This detail, original to Love, is by no means delivered in a scalding tone of admonition. In fact, Love does not appear at all anxious about the apparently plentiful adornment of the domestic sphere, with the gifting of the happy visitors resonant of generosity, rather than the

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144 Mirror, p. 57. Meditationes, p. 529.
145 This detail of the Holy Family’s visitors bringing gifts is Love’s own embellishment. In the Latin, the author comments only very briefly on the poverty of the Holy Family’s way of living, and makes no mention of friends and family bringing gifts: ‘Ecce reduximus puerum Jesum de Ægypto, et eo reverso concurrunt sorores Domine et ali consortuinei et amici ad visitandas eos. Ipsi autem in Nazareth quiescent, et pauperem vitam ducunt’. Meditationes, p. 529. [‘Now we have brought the boy Jesus back from Egypt, and upon his return our Lady’s sisters and other relatives and friends rushed to visit them. They settled down in Nazareth and lived the life of the poor’. Meditationes, p. 52].
worldly vice of material greed. This is perhaps because the Holy Family do not actually buy these new items for themselves. Rather, their household of possessions is created by their kinship links with those who love them, and therefore those who admire their unswerving piety. It is possible that Love’s enthusiasm for gifting serves as an endorsement of the practice of making donations to religious institutions. The material gifts that the Holy Family’s visitors bring celebrate the sacrifice that they have made in foregoing homely comforts during their exile, a sacrifice that is irrevocably interwoven with their devotion to God. Domestic goods are, therefore, transformed into a material celebration of Christian sacrifice. Once again, Love furnishes his readers with an example of a ‘safe’ mode of engagement with the material domestic sphere.

It would certainly seem that Love’s primary concern with the material culture of the domestic sphere is not with household objects \textit{per se}, but the reader’s relationship with them. If she is able to maintain her spiritual poverty, in much the same way as the Holy Family, her exposure to homely riches is much less problematic. What Love is keen to caution against is, specifically, ‘curiosity’, and his anxiety over this worldly vice is frequently refracted through the vocabulary of domestic adornment. In a medieval context, ‘curiosity’ has a broad range of resonances, including an association with ‘skill, ingenuity, and cleverness’.\footnote{\textit{MED}, s. v. cūriôsitē (n. [1]).} Perhaps more worryingly for those tasked with directing the spirituality of fifteenth-century Christians, ‘curiosity’ is also imbued with connotations of ‘inquisitiveness’, and an ‘idle or vain interest [...] in worldly affairs’.\footnote{\textit{MED}, s. v. cūriôsitē (n. [2]).} As Harkness remarks, ‘in the medieval period curiosity was often decried as a sinful interest in knowledge either beyond the scope of human understanding or in vain, empty matters that lacked utility and worth’.\footnote{Deborah Harkness, ‘\textit{Nosce Teipsum}: Curiosity, the Humoral Body and the Culture of Therapeutics in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century England’, in \textit{Curiosity and Wonder from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment}, ed. by R. J. W. Evans and Alexander Marr (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), pp. 171-192 (p. 173).} Love, it would appear, subscribes to such a definition. Much of Love’s focus on the dangerous vice of curiosity comes in his account of the Holy Family’s domestic life during their exile in Egypt. Christ
and his parents live in Egypt for seven years, in ‘sume symple house [...] as pilgrymes and strangeres pore and nedy’. The fact that the Holy Family are compared to pilgrims emphasises their nomadism, and underscores the sense that their perilous position prevents them from enjoying any real attachment to the household. Their status as vulnerable exiles, alone in Egypt, keeps them from accessing the kinship networks that facilitate the adornment of their Nazareth home on their return. The house in which they spend their exile is, indeed, notably sparse and uncomfortable, entirely devoid of what Love terms ‘curious’ goods:

What hope we of hir housholde as of beddyng, cloping, and oþer necessaries wheþer þei hadden in þis superfluyte or curiosite? Nay with oute doute, þei þat loueden perfite pouerte wold not haue þouh þei miht þat, þat is contrarye to pouerte as is superfluite and curiosite.

The Holy Family's material sacrifice, here, is reflected in the fact that they do not engage with the mercantile economy in such a way that might result in their household having *superfluous* rather than *sufficient* supplies. Moreover, the little clothing and bedding that they do own is not ‘curious’, and thereby so aesthetically beautiful that it might cause a distraction from one’s devotional practice. To engage in the acquisition of superfluous, curious goods is to be drawn into the dangerous realm of such vices as greed and excess, with the household perhaps one of the spaces most vulnerable to its inhabitants’ propensity for ‘curious’ adornment.

One of Love’s most acute concerns in his discussion of the dangers of superfluity and curiosity is the fact that to become distracted by them might imperil the Holy Family’s poverty. These vices are, Love states, ‘contrarye’ to poverty, and as the Carthusian Order was rooted in the embracing of material

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150 *Mirror*, p. 54. Love's translation adapts the structure of the equivalent passage in the Latin, as the *Meditationes* author frames his discussion of the Holy Family's poverty as a series of questions about their living circumstances: ‘Et si ex opere manuum victum quaerere oportebat, quid de vestimentis dicemus? quid de utensilibus, scilicet lectis, et alis infra domum oportunis? Numquid duplicia habeant? numquid superfluæ? numquid curiosa?’. *Meditations*, p. 526. [*If they had to work for their food by the labour of their hands, what about their clothing and necessities like bedding and other items suitable for a home? Did they have two of anything? Anything extra? Anything elegant?*. *Meditations*, p. 45].

151 I discuss the growing interest in items of domestic ornamentation in the introduction to this thesis, at pp. 27-30.
austerity, it seems reasonable that Love should be suspicious of an excessive interest in worldly goods. If one engages in the mercantile acquisition of material objects, the household will be defined in terms of capitalist excess, rather than by simplicity and sacrifice. I would suggest, however, that Love is primarily concerned with the maintenance of his lay readers’ spiritual poverty. It is acceptable to own material goods, so long as the acquisition of them does not result in the erasure of one’s devotional focus, a risk embodied by the twin dangers of superfluity and curiosity. Love underscores this point in his lengthy discussion of curiosity as a most pernicious vice, citing St Gregory, who ‘seip, in als miche as a man haþ delite here beneþe in erþely þinges, in so miche he is departed fro þe loue aboue of heuenly þinges’.\footnote{Mirror, p. 54. Meditations, p. 527.}

Clearly, it is not the mere existence or ownership of ‘erþely þinges’ that imperils the lay reader’s piety, but her interaction with them. What Love rejects, specifically, is the notion that it is necessary to own more material goods than one actually needs: to own sufficient items is acceptable, but to purchase excessively is to become distracted. Read in the context of a mercantile culture that encouraged the purchase of non-essential decorative items such as cushions, Love’s message would have been felt especially keenly by his lay readers.

At Home with Christ: The Domestication of Jesus in the \textit{Mirror}

This chapter has, thus far, examined the ways in which Love harnesses his readers’ connection to the household as an affective framework through which to underscore their proximity to the distinctly domestic Holy Family, and as a means of enhancing their understanding of the key facets of Christian piety. I would now like to focus, specifically, on Love’s domestication of Christ, and the way in which this builds on the homely rendering of devotional practice that is so central to the narrative of the \textit{Mirror}. In yoking Christ to a space with which his lay readers were very familiar, Love heightens their sense of connection to him, again shrinking the imaginative distance between them. This renders Christ’s eventual violent death all the more emotionally compelling, as the
reader has shared the domestic sphere with Christ. In rooting Christ in a recognisably homely setting, Love makes this most familiar of spaces central to the successful understanding of his life. Indeed, it is a celebration of the lay reader’s quotidian experience.

Love’s desire to domesticate the character of Christ runs throughout the Mirror. It is realised in explicit terms in his anxious rendering of an adolescent Jesus accidentally left alone in Jerusalem, separated from his parents and their home. Of particular note is Mary’s acute distress in the wake of the separation from her son. With Jesus ‘lost’, Mary shuts herself in her chamber, and asks a series of anguished questions:

And þou my swete sone Jesu where art þou now or how is it with þe? and where art þou now herborede? Lord wheþer þou be gone vp in to heuen aȝayn to þi fader? For I wote wele þat þou art verrey god and goddus sone. Bot why þan woldest þou not telle me beforne? The fact that Jesus is alone in Jerusalem is, in effect, the beginning of his mission on earth. He must travel, from town to town, preaching his Father’s message. Love’s focus, however, is not this advancement of Christ’s earthly career. Rather, it is fixed firmly on his mother’s torment, which is specifically concerned with where he is ‘herborede’.

The emotional pull of Mary’s anxiety comes, primarily, from her concern that Christ might already be with his father in Heaven. She seems to scold her son for not having warned her that he would be leaving, her maternal love for him overwhelming her sense of his greater significance as the Son of God. In a moving foreshadowing of Mary’s loss of Jesus at the Crucifixion, Love establishes two oppositional ‘homes’ for him, that of the Holy Family in Nazareth, and his heavenly home with God. The notion that Christ would be wandering from place to place is troubling, in this context. He ought to either be at his earthly family’s house in Nazareth, or safely restored to his celestial home, with God.

154 The temporary loss of the adolescent Jesus in the temple is one of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary. On medieval devotion to the Sorrows of the Virgin, see Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion (London: Sheed & Ward, 1956), pp. 306-308.
Christ has not, of course, returned to Heaven at this point in the narrative. Love devotes considerable space to explaining how he spent his three days of absence from his anguished mother:

We mowe suppose þat he went to some hospitale of pore men, and þere he shamfastly praiede and asked herborgh, and þere ete and lay with pore men as a pore child. And sume doctours seyn þat he begget in þo þre dayes. Bot þerof litel forse, so þat we folowe him in perfite mekenes and Œper vertues.156

This speculative explanation of Christ’s time in Jerusalem is original to Love, departing entirely from the equivalent passage in the Meditationes:


Love’s reworking of this passage enables him to reject the aspects of his source that might undermine the function of the Mirror in its fifteenth-century English context. While the Latin makes no mention of the notion that Christ might have been forced to beg, Love introduces this suggestion of ‘some doctors’ only to reject it. This enables Love to distance his text from the original concerns of his Franciscan source, as begging was a central component of Franciscan spirituality.158 While the Latin text places Christ in both the temple and the hospital of poor men, Love deletes the Meditationes’ references to the temple, preferring to remove Christ from this site of debate.

156 Mirror, p. 60.
157 Meditationes, p. 530. The wording in Meditationes S-T is slightly different, but the sense of the passage is the same: ‘Vidisti igitur afflictionem matris in predicto negotio. Sed quid fecit prædictus puer in illo triduo? Conspece eum attente, quomodo se reducit as aliquod hospitale pauperum, et cum uerecundia se petit hospitari; et ibidem comedit, et hospitabatur cum pauperibus Jesus pauper. Conspece eiam eum sedentem inter doctores uultu placido, sapienti et reverenti, et audiebat quasi ignorans quod ex humilitate faciebat; et eiam illi uerecundarentur super mirabilibus responsis ejus’, (emphasis mine), p. 63. [‘In the aforementioned affair, you have seen a mother’s anguish. But what was this boy doing during those days? Watch him attentively, how he makes his way back to a kind of hospice of the poor, and with embarrassment asks to be given shelter. And Jesus the pauper eats there and is lodged with the poor. See him also sitting among the learned doctors, serene of countenance, wise and reverent, and he listened as if ignorant, which he did out of humility; and even they were dumbfounded at his wonderful responses’. Meditationes, p. 55].
158 On Love’s rejection of begging, see Falls, Nicholas Love’s Mirror, pp. 41-42.
This deletion reflects the function of Love's text in fifteenth-century England, as it would be unwise for a text intended to minimise the prospect of its readers asking challenging theological questions to furnish them with an image of Christ engaging in debate. The hospital of poor men, conveniently, is a space in which the activities of both the charterhouse and the domestic sphere are replicated: Christ prays, eats, and sleeps during his stay. Love's adaptation of his source, therefore, makes Christ's temporary homelessness more palatable to both his fellow Carthusians, encountering the Mirror in their enclosed cells, and his lay readers at home.

Throughout his narrative of Christ's life, Love continually domesticates the salient virtues that his readers are likely to associate with Jesus. Meekness, humility, and charity are repeatedly couched in recognisably homely terms, with the household becoming the key framework through which to understand Christ's ministry on earth. One of the most striking instances of this is in Love's rendering of the manner in which Christ gathers his disciples, which is replete with references to domesticity:

Nowe take we here entent to pe maner of him in his clepyng and gederyng of these disciples, and of his conuersacion with hem, how louely he spakes to hem, and how homely he sheweþ him self to hem, drawyng hem to his loue, withinförþe by grace and without forþe by dede, familiarely ledyng hem to his modere house, and also goyng with hem oft to hir duellynges, techyng and enfourmyng hem. 159

When one considers the Gospel accounts of the disciples, travelling from town to town to spread the message of the Christian ministry, one immediately calls to mind the fact that these earliest Christians are absent from home. 160 To follow Christ is, one might reasonably suggest, to embrace the kind of mendicant poverty that the Franciscan order was so keen to promote. For Love, however, to follow Christ is to become more deeply embedded within the domestic sphere, rather than to turn one's back on it. When he asks his prospective disciples to join him, Christ is 'homely' with them. While Julian of Norwich's famous use of this term is best understood at a metaphorical level, emblematic of the depth of her imagined closeness to him, Love literalises the

159 Mirror, p. 78. Meditationes, p. 542.
160 For these Gospel accounts of the gathering of the disciples, to which I refer in my introduction to this chapter, see Luke 9.59-60; Matthew 8.20.
resonances of a ‘homely’ Christ by yoking his pastoral care of the disciples to the household. Once they have been drawn to Christ’s love and mission, the disciples do not follow him from town to town, preaching to the local people. Rather, Jesus takes them to his mother’s house, with Love encouraging a Marian spiritual focus, here, and embeds them in the maternal love of his family home. In so doing, Love connects Christ and his new followers to the specifically domesticated virtues of meekness and humility, the importance of which is stressed throughout the Mirror. These disciples are not mendicant, with their first experience of Christ and the virtues that govern his earthly mission firmly rooted in the Holy Family’s household.

The fact that the very first place Christ takes his newly gathered followers is his mother’s house enables Love to establish the maternal character of his love for them. It is in this context, of his mother’s household company of virtuous meekness and humility, that Christ demonstrates how he teaches and cares for the disciples, ‘as pe modere is of hir owne sone’. In this image of a maternal Christ, Love translates the group of twelve disciples into an only son, creating a single focal point of his motherly love. The domesticated disciples become, therefore, the unified Christian community, the sons and daughters of Christ melded together by their devotion to him. This metaphor might resonate with Love’s monastic readers, as a community devoted to Christ, as well as Love’s lay readers, connected by their collective homebound devotion. To be ‘homely’ with Christ, both literally and metaphorically, is to share a maternal intimacy with him, and to develop a closeness modelled on the kind of kinship bonds that exist in a familial, household setting.

Love further emphasises the sense in which the household fosters a maternal intimacy between Christ and the disciples, and thereby the broader Christian community, by noting his recognisably motherly physical interaction with them. When Christ and the disciples stayed at a house together,

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161 Mirror, p. 78. Meditationes, p. 542.
162 The prevalence of kinship in the Mirror’s domestic narrative would have been especially prescient for Love’s lay readers, as the late medieval word ‘household’ had a particular resonance as the space occupied by those connected by the bonds of kinship. On this subject, see my discussion in the introduction to this thesis, at p. 12.
overnight, ‘it was [Christ’s] custome to ryse vp in þe niht hem slepyng, and if he fonde any of hem vnhilede, priuely and softly hil hem aȝeyne’. In crafting this vision of Christ, as a matriarch who watches over her children as they sleep, Love renders the affection between Jesus and the disciples domestically tangible. As Meale suggests, one might reasonably read Love’s motherly Christ as a ‘promotion of the feminine’, a celebration of the maternal love that cements the bonds of kinship. This domestication of the mission of Christ and his disciples would, indeed, appeal particularly to the female reader, with Love making use of the household as a means of drawing out the feminine aspects of divine love and guidance. It is not only the reader of the Mirror, then, who is characterised as a child in need of gentle spiritual guidance, but the disciples, too. Love’s domestication of the apostolic community, and Christ’s love for those who comprise it, invites the reader to share in its mission. Furthermore, as the apostles are Christ’s children, this is an image of inclusivity, I would suggest, rather than infantilisation. Love creates a rather empowering model of the household, with a distinctly domestic thread stitching the Biblical, apostolic community and the Mirror’s fifteenth-century readers together.

The ties that bind Christ and the disciples to the domestic sphere are defined by Love in explicitly emotional terms. To become ‘homely’ with Christ is to become entangled in the bonds of his own family home, redolent of the Virgin Mary’s love and virtue, which is subsequently replicated in Christ’s own maternal affection. Love’s development of Christ’s deeply emotional connection to the household, the very basis of his earthly ministry, culminates in a notably domesticated account of the Passion. The salient elements of Christ’s violent death, and all that precedes it, from Palm Sunday to his scourging and the Resurrection, take place against a household backdrop. Readers of medieval devotional literature will be familiar with the trope of the reader vowing to be crucified with Christ, her sorrow in the face of his bloody

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163 Mirror, p. 78. Meditationes, p. 542. [‘It was Christ’s custom to get up during the night while they were sleeping, and if he found that any of the disciples were uncovered [not covered by a blanket], he would quietly and tenderly cover them again’, (translation mine)].

sacrifice so great that she wishes for nothing more than to take her place alongside him, on Mount Calvary.\footnote{165} Love, however, seems to invert this, with Christ and his crucifixion coming into the home, the space that forms the affective connection between the divine and the reader throughout so many of the Mirror’s preceding chapters.

Beyond his mother’s house, the space in which the apostolic community is brought together for the first time, Christ is often to be found in Bethany, at the house of Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Following a supper with Simon the Leper,\footnote{166} shortly before Palm Sunday, Love places Christ at the house of Lazarus, along with his mother and disciples:

\begin{quote}
After þe forseide sopere in þe house of Symonde [Christ] went wiþ lazare and hees sistres to heere house, þe which was his comune hostery and namely þoo fewe daies folowyng in to his passione, for þere he ete on dayes and slept in nihtes with hees disciples and also his blessed Modere with his sistres.\footnote{167}
\end{quote}

This passage draws together the multiple kinship networks that define Christ’s time on earth under one homely roof, with a greatly augmented female component to Christ’s discipleship. Just a few days before the Passion, the point at which Christ will be cleaved away from these worldly bonds, he gathers his family and friends together. The disciples, here, are drawn into another familial home, the maternal love that defined the earliest point of their sharing in Christ’s earthly ministry transformed into a communal love, for Christ’s wider circle of family and friends. Thus, the house at Bethany

\footnote{165} See, for example, \textit{Pe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd}, a thirteenth-century meditation on the Passion, in which a female first-person narrator imagines herself as a spectator at Christ’s walk towards Calvary, where she will eventually join him on the cross. See \textit{Pe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd}, in \textit{The Wooing of Our Lord and the Wooing Group Prayers}, ed. by Catherine Innes-Parker (Ontario: Broadview, 2015), pp. 79-150.

\footnote{166} The Biblical basis of this meal, at which Christ is anointed with oil by Mary Magdalene, is likely Matthew 26. 6-13; Mark 14. 3-9.

\footnote{167} Mirror, p. 138. \textit{Meditationes}, p. 594. The precise meaning of ‘comune hostery’ is difficult to determine. The \textit{MED} defines ‘comune hostery’ as a ‘public inn’, but ‘hostery’ can also denote the ‘guest house of a monastery’, or a ‘lodging or abode’. See \textit{MED}, s. v. \textit{hostrīe} (n.). It is a rendering of the Latin phrase ‘refugium generale’, or ‘shared refuge’. This wording differs from the version of the text in \textit{Meditationes S-T}, in which this space is described as ‘refugium temporale’, or ‘worldly refuge’. \textit{Meditationes S-T}, p. 236. Love’s translation, which is closer to the rendering in the \textit{Meditationes}, might be an attempt to convey the communality of the space, as so many members of Christ’s kinship networks join him there. This meal seems to be an embellishment of the one described in John 12. 1-3, at which Martha and Mary serve Jesus supper, and Mary Magdalene anoints Christ’s feet with oil.
crafts a notably inclusive picture of Christian community, the household united in their emotional connection to Christ, who will, of course, soon be absent from the communal table.

Love continues to develop this sense of Christ's deep emotional connection to the house at Bethany as the Passion draws nearer. In Love's account of Palm Sunday, the house at Bethany is the space that frames these most familiar scenes from the final days of Christ's life. His arrival having stirred the people of the city to great excitement, Christ subsequently throws the merchants and money lenders out of the temple. Love's description of this episode places great emphasis on the fact that Christ is enacting God's will in the most public of spaces: 'And þer was he standyng opunly in þe temple preching and answering to þe princes and pharisees, alle þe day til it drowe towards euen'. 

This characterisation of Christ strips away the language of homeliness and familiarity that hallmarks Love's description of the earliest days of his ministry. It is a representation of Christ, as theological debater, that Love seems keen to avoid earlier in the Mirror. While the temple is a space in which princes and Pharisees might engage in challenging discussions with the Son of God, the household is the site of a different mode of spiritual engagement, based on feeling and a sense of intimacy. This by no means renders the domestic sphere a less desirable site of spiritual encounter, as Christ immediately seeks the enclosure of domestic space once he has concluded his preaching in the temple: ‘at euene he went with hees disciples to his homely hostrye Bethanye, goyng so simply porh þe cite, with þat litel cumpanye, þat came on þe morow with so gret wirchipe’. 

Having spent the day in the openness of public space, perhaps as a portent of his imminent arrest and trial, Christ desires domestic intimacy with his kin. The phrase 'homely hostrye' evokes a profound sense of domestic comfort, with the

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168 For the Biblical passages that recount this episode, see Matthew 21. 12-17; Mark 11. 15-19; Luke 19. 45-48; John 2. 13-16.
170 Mirror, p. 141. This detail, which emphasises the sense in which Christ regards the house at Bethany as a place of earthly refuge, is Love's own embellishment. In the Meditationes, the author merely comments on the fact that it is late by the time they return home: ‘Tota igitur die, ipse et sui jejunauerunt, et sero cum eis Bethaniam redit’. Meditationes, p. 595. ['All day long he and his followers fasted and it was late when he returned with them to Bethany'. Meditationes, p. 225].
Bethany household offering Christ a place of refuge on earth. Indeed, so deep is Christ’s emotional connection to the house of Lazarus that it is where he chooses to stay on the day before the Last Supper:

Also for als miche as þat was þe last day þat he thought to duelle in þat maner of bodily conuersacion with þat gude and belouede meyne Lazare and hees sistres. he occupiede him þat day þe more specialy with hem in gostly confort of hem, by hese edificatife and holy wordes, as he was wonte alwey to do, but nowe at more leyzer to streng þem and confort hem aȝeynus þe gret sorowe þat was to come after bycause of his passion.  

Of particular note in this passage, which is drawn from a chapter that is entirely original to Love, is the suggestion that Christ dwells in ‘bodily conuersacion’ with Lazarus and his sisters. Far from being ‘open’, as he is in the spatial context of the temple, Christ is here enclosed in close proximity to his beloved kin. This physical intimacy, facilitated by the domestic environment, begets the emotional intimacy of the edifying preaching that Christ performs in this household context. Love’s addition of this passage seems especially pertinent for his lay readers, in light of the fifteenth-century conception of the household as a site of spiritual edification and religious practice. His holy words are both spiritually nourishing and emotionally comforting, as they prepare his friends and disciples for his departure from this earthly, domestic intimacy. In the temple, preaching is defined by discussion and debate, with Christ standing as an orator to deliver his rebukes to the Pharisees. In the context of the household, however, it is far more personal. The Christian community, Love suggests, is encapsulated by the domestic sphere, the intimate space in which Christ will simultaneously provide spiritual edification and soothe their sorrow, in the face of his impending death.

\[171 \text{Mirror, p. 144. This original chapter replaces one in the Meditationes that sees Jesus foretell his death to the Virgin Mary. There is, however, a domestic inflection in the Latin source, which Love perhaps used as inspiration for his own homely scene in his original chapter. Christ is at the house of Martha and Mary, eating dinner with his disciples and Mary Magdalene, before taking his mother aside to discuss his impending death. See Meditationes, pp. 595-596.}\]
Christ's next step towards departure from his earthly mission is taken via another house, in which the Last Supper is held. Of particular interest in Love's rendering of this most crucial event on Christ's penultimate day on earth is the sense in which many of the salient facets of homely Christian community, underscored at repeated points throughout the Mirror, begin to fall apart. Love's original description of Christ's transformation into the bread that Christian communities will share until the end of time is hallmarked by a striking emphasis on the beauty and delicacy of his body as food:

when þei were washen and made clene. he seruede hem with þe seconde Messe of his owne precious body, þat was deyntep of alle deynteþes, as men vsen in bodily fedyng and festes, first to be serude with buystes and homely metes, and after with more delicate and deynteþes.\footnote{Mirror, pp. 148-149. This section is Love's own addition to his Latin source. The equivalent section in the Meditationes advises meditation on the fact that Christ gives himself to Christians as food, and the gravity of this sacrifice. Meditationes, pp. 597-598.}

In order to appreciate the extent to which Love departs, here, from the associations of 'homely' and 'precious' that he has cultivated throughout his narrative, one might turn to an earlier passage from his account of the domestic life of the Holy Family. When the young adult Jesus sat down to eat with his parents, they ate 'at one litel borde, not preciouse and delicate metes. bot symple and sobre as was onely nedeful to sustinance of þe kynde'.\footnote{Mirror, p. 64, Meditationes, p. 533.} This plain manner of eating exemplifies the way in which they continually forego riches and luxury in order to maintain their material and spiritual poverty. They eat plainly, with expensive and elaborate food a distraction from their piety, rather than a sustaining force. This emphasis on culinary simplicity collapses when Christ is transformed into the Eucharist. He has become the precious food, and the Last Supper is a meal of delicate 'deynteþes', the 'homely metes' a mere preface to this spread of riches. While 'homely' retains the positive connotations of familiarity and simplicity, it is \emph{not} the correct way to characterise the Eucharistic feast, which represents an altogether different mode of intimacy with Christ.

\footnote{For the Biblical accounts of the Last Supper, see Matthew 26. 17-30; Mark 14. 12-26; Luke 22. 7-39; John 13. 1-17. 26.}
That Love selects this crucial moment to move away from the language that defines his affective domestic framework is very significant. Aers, in a reading that offers a useful clue as to why the transformation of Christ into the Eucharist might take place against the backdrop of an unravelling domesticity, suggests that, ‘Jesus’ breaking and giving bread to his disciples is both a sign of the sacrificial breaking of his body and also a sign of the shattering of the community he has created’. This notion of a shattered community might be usefully applied in order to explain the disintegration of the resonances of ‘homely’ that have upheld much of the domestic narrative of the Mirror thus far. As the domestic community is premised upon the presence of Christ, his death deprives his kin of ‘bodily conversations’ with him; to share a household with Christ will no longer be the sole way in which to be ‘homely’ with him. Rather, to be intimate with Christ will be to consume him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in which he becomes the most precious food of all. The Last Supper marks the highly emotional conclusion of earthly ‘homeliness’ with Christ, and therefore a considerable rupture from the pre-existing significations of Love’s domestic language. Crucially, given the function of the Mirror in fifteenth-century England, this dismantling of the homely associations of Christ’s body enables Love to establish that the Eucharist is different from the frugal meals previously eaten by Christ and his kinship network. If one wishes to enjoy this mode of bodily intimacy with Christ, one must attend Church, the space in which the Eucharist is administered.

The collapse of domestic order that Love instigates with his recalibration of the connotations of homeliness goes far beyond the Last Supper. Indeed, Love’s viscerally violent account of the Passion sees the scourging and humiliation of Christ take place in a ‘house’; its previous associations of simplicity and intimacy are erased by the excesses of the bloody ordeal to which Christ is subjected. On Pilate’s instructions, Christ is ‘scourgete and beten. oure lord was despoilete, bonden to a pilere, and harde and sore scourgete, and so stant nakede before hem alle’. The gravely

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175 Aers, Sanctifying Signs, p. 15.
wounded and naked Christ is subsequently led into a house, in which he
searches for his clothes:

Aftere he was vnbonden fro þat pilere þei ladden him so beten and
nakede about þe house sekynge after hese cloþe, þat were cast in
diuerse places of hem þat despoilede him. And here haue compassion
of him in so grete colde quakyng and tremelyng, for as þe gospelle
witnesse þ þat þa haue harde colde.177

The household has become an environment that Christ is no longer able to
navigate, as he struggles to find his clothes, over which his tormentors have
full control. Love underscores the sense that the home is no longer
recognisable by suggesting that the cold weather, from which the household
would once have shielded its dwellers, penetrates the walls of the domestic
sphere. With the intrusion of these external conditions into the interiority of
the home, Love transforms this once comfortable space into the violated site
of Christ’s brutal humiliation. The image above is further characterised by
Love’s suggestion that Christ is continually moving through this particular
house: once his captors have untied him from the pillar, they lead him to
search for his clothes in ‘diverse places’. No longer is the domestic sphere a
site of stillness and restorative enclosure, as it was when Christ enjoyed the
homely company of Lazarus and his sisters. In her discussion of the Passion
scenes in the Mirror, Stanbury suggests that they are defined by the unceasing
movement of Christ: ‘Christ’s body is handled and essentially passed among
groups, who struggle to glimpse him, to torment him, or to hold him’.178 Love’s
dramatic reworking of the salient associations of the household, in my view,
render the elusiveness of Christ at this critical moment all the more
emotionally compelling.

Shortly before Christ is led out to be judged by Pilate, the architects of
his suffering gather to look at him, his humiliation compounded: ‘And ȝit þis
suffice not to hir malice. bot to more reproue and scorn of him þei gederet alle
hir wikkedeye companye [...] to wondre vpon him in þe hous’ (emphasis
mine).179 Once again, the household is made the site of the spectacle of Christ’s

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179 Mirror, p. 170. Love slightly adapts his source, which does not mention specifically that the
tormentors gather to look at Christ while inside the house: ‘Sed nec illis suffecerat quod ad
wounding and humiliation. Love’s sense that the household order is corrupted by the incursion of violent external forces is neatly encapsulated in his formulation of Christ’s tormentors as a ‘wikkede companye’. As a ‘company’ is emphatically associated, throughout the Mirror, with the central tenets of a spiritually poor and pious household, such a formulation dissolves these once salient connotations. The home is now defined as the focal point of Christ’s violent rupture with earthly life, as he is brutally cleaved away from the sphere that defined the foundation of Christian community. Love frames the journey to the Passion as a domestic apocalypse, with Christ’s emotional connection to household space subject to a viscerally violent process of erasure.

For Love’s lay readers, encountering the Mirror in their own domestic sphere, the disintegration of Christ’s relationship with the household would have a most profound emotional pull. In making the household the nexus of Christian community throughout his narrative, Love renders the collapse of this most central space all the more affecting. In the wake of this unrelentingly bleak debasement of the household, the material bridge between Christ and the reader, Love offers a sliver of hope. After Jesus has been buried, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and John walk back through the city. Mary Magdalene is keen that the Virgin comes to stay with her, in that most familiar of houses:

My lady I pray ȝow for þe loue of my maistre ȝoure sone þat ȝe wole let vs go to oure house in Bethanye, where we mowe best abide. For as þe knowen wele, my maistre louede wele þat place, and came gladely oft sîþes þere to, and þat house is ȝoures with alle þat I haue. Wherefore I pray ȝowe þat ȝe wole come.¹⁸⁰

While the Virgin Mary and John do not agree to go to the house at Bethany, instead taking Mary Magdalene along to Mount Syon, this emotional plea that they might gather in the place that has such powerful emotional resonances of Christ’s earthly career suggests that while the importance of the household might have been debased, it is by no means entirely extinguished. Magdalene’s

desire to go back to the earthly locus of Christ’s most intimate community of kin reinscribes the power of the household as a place of Christian devotion. The lay reader might imagine herself as Magdalene, her intimacy with Christ also irrevocably rooted in the household sphere. Christ warns the Christian community that they will suffer persecution and violence if they admit their devotion to him. One might suggest, therefore, that the traducing of the household that precedes Magdalene’s emotional recollection of Christ’s love of the house at Bethany is emblematic of such violent reprisal. Like Magdalene, the broader Christian community, emphatically associated with the domestic sphere throughout the *Mirror*, must hold tight to its faith, retaining their emotional connection to the space that draws them closer to Christ.

**Conclusion**

My analysis in this chapter has demonstrated that, throughout the *Mirror*, the domestic sphere is the salient affective framework through which Love invites his reader to identify with Christ. The notion of the household as the container of those who share the bonds of kinship is predicated on Christ’s presence within the home: kinship *is* Christian fellowship. Domestic space is the environment in which one hears about Christ, listens to his message, meditates upon his sacrifice, and emulates the spiritual conviviality that he enjoyed with his disciples, friends, and family. Indeed, the domestic narrative of the *Mirror*, the Latin basis of which is routinely augmented by Love, sacralises the household as the inherently Christian locus of spiritual edification. For the *Mirror*’s lay readers, engaging with this text in the context of both the burgeoning emotional attachment between householders and their dwellings and the increasing significance of the home as a site of religious devotion, Love’s rendering of the affective household would have been especially pertinent. The *Mirror*’s domestic narrative should not be read, however, as entirely permissive and liberating in its apparent encouragement of its reader to make the domestic sphere the nexus of her piety. While fifteenth-century religiosity was indeed carving out a substantial role for the household in the piety of the individual, it was also scarred by the legacy of Wycliffism. As well as being a site of happy encounter with Christ, then, the
domestic sphere is also a carefully regulated space of religious discipline, much like the allegorical households in the Doctrine. In his account of the end of Christ’s life, Love is keen to emphasise that the Eucharist differs from the simple food eaten by Christ and those around him earlier in the text, and that this sacrament must be taken within the parameters of ecclesial space. While the reader is welcome to imagine the presence of Christ in the household, and meditate upon the ways in which her own experience of domesticity emulates his, the physical encounter with the corporeal reality of Christ is strictly reserved for the Church. Love achieves a rather reasonable balance, therefore, between acknowledging the importance of domestic space in spiritual practice and asserting the authority of the Church. Indeed, my analysis of the Mirror suggests that the domestic encounter with Christ is central to fifteenth-century orthodoxy. Though this is a text most commonly associated with upholding ecclesial authority, the Mirror places great emphasis on the centrality of the domestic sphere to spiritual encounter. All of the texts that I have examined in this thesis have asserted the value and importance of the household in explicating a range of spiritual ideas, from religious discipline, to criticism of ecclesial authorities, to the communality of the conventual sphere. The texts discussed in the previous three chapters make use of domestic vocabulary in order to allegorise these notions, with the household often symbolising other holy spaces, such as the Church or convent. With his literal narrative of Christian domesticity, it is perhaps Love who comes the closest to asserting that the household itself is, in fact, sacred space.
Conclusion

Having closed the door on my final spiritual household, I will now draw out the salient points that this study has raised. My analysis throughout this thesis has shown that all four religious texts under discussion, drawn from the divergent genres of guidance text, revelations from visionary women, and Life of Christ, make repeated and consistent recourse to the language of the domestic sphere. I also hope to have shown that these patterns of household imagery were especially pertinent for the texts’ fifteenth-century English readers, who encountered their conceptual households against the backdrop of an increasingly significant literal domestic sphere.

On gathering together my four corpus texts, then, what might we determine that their use of domestic imagery has in common? The most important feature of their collective household vocabularies is, I hope to have shown, that recourse to domestic language is by no means occasional or incidental. Rather, every text calls upon the image of the household as a means of articulating the salient message or purpose of their work. In the case of the *Doctrine of the Hert*, discussed in Chapter One, the practices of penitence, contrition, and confession are allegorised as various domestic chores that take place inside the heart-household, which must be diligently maintained so that its reader is fit to receive Christ in the reciprocal union of the Eucharist. The household is repeatedly associated with the *Doctrine* translator’s major concern, the preparation of his reader for the receipt of the Sacraments. Sharing the *Doctrine’s* enthusiasm for the image of the heart as a household is the text discussed in Chapter Two, Mechtild of Hackeborn’s *Booke of Gostlye Grace*. As a visionary woman, however, Mechtild’s concerns differ significantly from those of the male guidance text author. Mechtild’s use of domestic imagery enables her to articulate some of the major hallmarks of her broader visionary lexicon. The heart-households in the *Booke* are defined by lavishness, optimism, joy, and abundance. They are also notably inflected with Mechtild’s experience of conventual enclosure and ecclesial space. Though their respective heart-households are very different, with the *Doctrine’s* defined by modesty and austerity and Mechtild’s characterised by an overflow
of love and richness, it is pertinent to note that both texts are particularly preoccupied with conceptualising the heart in this domestic fashion. The fact that both the *Doctrine* and the *Booke* were first generated in a thirteenth-century Cistercian milieu, in the Low Countries and Germany, and within a few decades of one another, suggests that further investigation of the Cistercian taste for the metaphor of the heart-household might be a productive avenue of further study.

In the case of Mechtild, then, it seems reasonable to surmise that her use of household imagery enables her to assert the defining characteristics of her visionary voice. The same can be said for the second visionary woman under discussion in this thesis, Bridget of Sweden, whose *Liber Celestis* I discussed in Chapter Three. While Bridget’s visionary voice differs hugely from that of Mechtild, she also uses domestic vocabulary in the course of asserting her distinctiveness as the conduit of the divine message. This is evident in two key ways. Firstly, Bridget routinely makes use of domestic architecture and household routines as a means of modifying the spiritual commonplaces of homilies and guidance texts. This is especially apparent, for example, in her multiple renderings of the destabilised Church. Furthermore, the *Liber*’s use of domestic language enables its author to weave her former identity as wife, mother and household manager into her visionary voice. Crucially, Bridget’s use of domestic imagery destabilises the critical claim that the *Liber* offers its readers no access to her own, authentic voice. In both of the visionary works under discussion in this thesis, the imagery making use of the space, objects, and quotidian activities of the domestic sphere enables their respective female authors to assert their most important visionary concerns.

The final text to be examined in this thesis, Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, is the only one to weave the household into a literal narrative, rather than a pattern of metaphor and allegory. Despite this difference in literary presentation, the *Mirror*’s network of households has much in common with the *Doctrine* in particular, as both texts posit the domestic sphere as the site of Christian discipline and spiritual education. My discussion in Chapter Four demonstrated that, in defining the household as an identificatory space with which Christ and the reader share a strong
connection, Love is able to communicate his most important message, that the good Christian ought to forge a bond with Christ that is as familiar and enduring as the quotidian experience of domestic space. Crucially, however, readers of the *Mirror* should not become so comfortable with sharing the household with Christ that they forget to also encounter him within ecclesial space.

Why, then, do these four religious texts make use of the language of domesticity in order to articulate many of their most important spiritual messages, ideas and visionary characteristics? The answer to this question arguably lies in the flexibility and capaciousness of domestic imagery. As in real life, the conceptual household can be vast and imposing, or small and modest. The material objects that populate the domestic sphere can be rich, lavish and luxurious, or minimal and austere. The diversity of the *literal* household, therefore, renders its imagery something of a blank canvas for the conceptual domesticity of the religious text. If one wishes to articulate the importance of maintaining an uncluttered and spiritually clean inner self, as in the *Doctrine*, the metaphor of the impoverished domestic space offers its author the opportunity to do so. Conversely, if, like Mechtild, the visionary woman wishes to celebrate the abundance of God's love, the materially wealthy domestic sphere serves as a metaphor for this sharing of divine prosperity. The household is also, of course, associated with the familiarity of daily experience. This renders domestic imagery the ideal vehicle for communicating the desirability of making one’s readiness to encounter Christ as quotidian as household chores, as in the *Doctrine*. In the *Mirror*, familiarity with domesticity is posited as something that both Christ and the reader share.

Domestic imagery is not invariably invoked, however, in order to stir feelings of comfortable familiarity. It is also occasionally paired with entirely divergent imagery as a means of making its spiritual message more striking. This is especially the case in Bridget’s *Liber*, in which the Saint’s anxieties about clerical corruption, and the attendant chaos that this is likely to bring, are articulated within a domestic framework. The *Doctrine*, moreover, draws together the space of Calvary with that of the kitchen, as the wounds of the
crucified Christ bleed gorily into the pots and pans of quotidian life. The domestic vocabulary of the fifteenth-century Middle English religious text is, therefore, far from straightforward. Its potential for variability, and its capacity to communicate a vast range of spiritual lessons and ideas, arguably explains why it is stitched into the very fabric of all four of the texts that I have examined in this thesis.

Of course, the domestic imagery that I summarise above is by no means a new invention in fifteenth-century England. As my frequent references to the Latin sources of all four corpus texts have shown, a large proportion of these images were already circulating across Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is also impossible to suggest, more broadly, that the use of architectural allegorical frameworks in the articulation of spiritual ideas is the innovation of fifteenth-century English religious culture. What I hope to have shown throughout this thesis, however, is that the domestic imagery in all four of my corpus texts had an especial resonance when encountered against the cultural backdrop of the increasing importance of literal household space. It is useful, here, to recollect the five areas of change that, as I suggested in my introduction, are evidence of an increasingly significant relationship between fifteenth-century householders and their domestic spaces: changes to household design, a growing concern for privacy, a burgeoning market of goods that might be used to decorate the domestic sphere, the expansion of urban mercantile culture, and the increasing overlap between devotional practice and household space. Throughout my discussion, I have noted language and imagery that, whether present in the earlier Latin texts or added to the fifteenth-century vernacular translation, likely had a renewed significance in light of these five areas of domestic change.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that there is evidence that the translators of all four texts were aware of the potential power and significance of their sources’ domestic imagery. In the Doctrine, this is most evident in the translator’s unmooring of his household allegories from their scriptural and exegetical framework. The effect of unhooking these images from their original basis is to render their sensory properties far more graphic, and therefore potentially problematic. This is especially apparent in
the extended allegory of the kitchen as the site of Christ’s Passion, and the considerable pruning of the third book of the text, which renders its major image, of Christ knocking upon the door to share the Eucharist with the believer, far more explicitly domestic. In the Mirror, Love’s frequent alterations to his Franciscan source embellish Christ’s engagement with the domestic sphere, insistently positioning him within homely interiority, rather than the exposed streets.

Generally, the Middle English translators seem keen to rebuild their source texts’ houses in the image of the quotidien domestic sphere. In the Middle English translation of Mechtild’s Booke, the bed is no longer the site of Bernardine eroticism, but a sickbed, with which fifteenth-century readers might be rather more familiar. This is not invariably the case, however, as I demonstrated in my discussion of Margaret of York’s Dyalogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne a Jhesu Crist. While the general pattern of fifteenth-century domestic imagery seeks to embellish the more materially domestic elements of its source material, the Dyalogue takes the household episodes from De doctrina in the opposite direction, remodelling them in the mould of such visionary women as Bridget and Mechtild. Just as domestic imagery lends these latter female visionaries the capacity to articulate their distinctive spiritual identities, it also enables Margaret to explore her spiritual ambition.

Evidence of the translators’ awareness of the power of domestic imagery is not always found in its amplification. This is especially the case in Mechtild’s Booke, in which a hugely liberating and permissive vision of the celestial kitchen, in her Latin text, is not translated into Middle English. Indeed, the reception of Mechtild’s Middle English text is indicative of a broader anxiety about the overwhelming joyousness and optimism of her visionary outlook, which is so often encapsulated by her domestic imaginary. Where portions of the Booke are excerpted into devotional compilations, they are removed from their frequently domestic spatial framework, which transforms Mechtild from a joyous conduit of the divine word into a far more authoritarian figure, whose prayers police the proper spiritual conduct of their users.
Alongsie the close readings of my corpus texts and their Latin sources, I have also examined the codicological evidence of fifteenth-century readers’ engagement with domestic imagery. These material encounters with my texts’ conceptual households offer further evidence of their particular pertinence in a fifteenth-century context. That two devotional compilations should excerpt the Liber’s long allegory of the plentiful houses, alongside other domestically inflected Bridgettine visions, might be taken as evidence of their compilers’ awareness of their particular capacity to draw their readers towards spiritual union. My examination of the manuscripts of Love’s Mirror, meanwhile, underscores that it is not only the architectural framework of the household that might be used to teach and learn a spiritual lesson, but the material objects inside the domestic sphere, too. Where the institutional user of a manuscript of the Mirror makes a marginal note against the image of the cushion at the Nativity, she gives herself a useful material anchor for her contemplation of the scene. In a second manuscript of the Mirror, however, its institutional inspector annotates this same scene with an instruction for the user to ignore it. Much like the translator who chose to omit the kitchen image from Mechtilde’s Booke, this censoring hand reveals an awareness of the power of domestic imagery to stir the imagination of its reader.

The censorship of the cushion episode in the Mirror manuscript signposts a further finding of my discussion, that engagement with domestic imagery would have made considerable hermeneutic demands upon different groups of fifteenth-century readers. Those who read the texts that I have discussed in this thesis can be separated into three groups: aristocratic readers, encountering domestic language in lavish surroundings, middle-class readers, who were materially comfortable, though not vastly wealthy, and monastic and conventual readers, who were engaging with the language of a space that they had left behind. Clearly, the fifteenth century was an era of distinctly porous borders between the religious institution and the lay household, with women such as Cecily Neville and Margaret Purdans often lending and bequeathing their books to friends and family in convents. This passing of books between different spaces would have led to an inevitable mismatch of many of the conceptual households in the four texts, and the
literal surroundings in which they were encountered by their respective readers. My discussion has shown that, where readers engaged with domestic images that bore little resemblance to their literal surroundings, they would have been challenged to extract only their spiritual or allegorical lessons. I have also shown that institutional readers would have been required to recollect their prior experience of domesticity in their engagement with its visual referents, while avoiding the potentially distracting imagery of household materiality.

Indeed, my discussion has shown that engaging with domestic imagery was not invariably straightforward. At various points, I have noted that the anxious spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England, hallmarked by a determined drive by the established Church to bring believers back under its authority in the wake of the Wycliffite heresy, might not always have been the most comfortable context in which to read texts that valorise and sacralise the experience of the household. Very importantly, the fact that all of the texts discussed in this thesis might be safely gathered under the umbrella of orthodoxy, despite their potentially troubling implications about the spiritual usefulness of the domestic sphere, is indicative of the boldness and vibrancy of religious writing in the later Middle Ages. Clearly, readers of these texts were trusted to navigate such images as the one in Book I of the *Doctrine*, which posits the household as a site in which the Eucharist might be shared with Christ. It is perhaps the case that the initial monastic readers of all four texts were trusted to encounter their stirring domestic images as they allude to a space that they had irrevocably left behind. For these readers, the household had become a potent memory, as Gaston Bachelard might have put it.1 While the potential for readers to become distracted by the lure of the literal resonances of the household sphere cannot be discounted, it should also be noted that domestic imagery responds to fifteenth-century spiritual anxiety in a different way. Throughout my discussion, I have noted passages that display considerable uneasiness at the prospect of Christ being left without a home, and therefore beyond the boundaries of the spiritual household. The

suggestion that the believer might reject Christ, and fail to offer him a domestic welcome, hangs over several of the episodes that I have discussed, especially in the *Doctrine, Liber, and Mirror*. Though much of this material is present in the Latin sources of these Middle English texts, I would suggest that this anxiety about the homeless Christ is imbued with a new urgency in the light of the fractious spiritual climate of fifteenth-century England.

I would, finally, like to note that my analysis has shown that large numbers of the readers who engaged with these domestically inflected texts were women. Though it cannot be asserted that the late medieval household was invariably the preserve of its female residents, this study has shown that the conceptual household seems to have held a particular appeal to the spiritual imaginary of women. This is likely because women *did* spend a considerable amount of time in the chambers and kitchens of the domestic sphere, and the suggestion that the materiality of the cushion, bed, and saucepan might play a significant role in the shaping of spiritual practice would, therefore, have been especially appealing. Given that domestic images in fifteenth-century literature are often stripped of their more contemplative or exegetical elements, it might be tempting to conclude that women readers are, therefore, being presented with simple spiritual images that reflect their material experience. I do not, however, find this conclusion satisfactory. As I have already observed, domestic images routinely challenged their readers to navigate their nuances and contradictions, and to draw out the spiritual lessons most pertinent to their particular circumstances. The evidence of women’s interest in domestic imagery might be seen as a testament to the vibrancy of female literary culture in the fifteenth century.

The significance of fifteenth-century religious texts’ recourse to domestic imagery has, thus far, been considerably understated. In the case of the *Doctrine* and the *Mirror*, household vocabulary has often been seen as part of a ‘simple’ spiritual lexicon, while the visionary writings of Mechtild and Bridget are so vast that their patterns of domestic metaphor have gone largely unnoticed. It is essential to acknowledge the fifteenth-century enthusiasm for domestic imagery, as spiritual texts were communicating key ideas about the configuration of the self, religious education, and the spiritual climate of late
medieval England through a spatial and symbolic framework that had developed significant cultural capital. It would be hugely productive for future work to interrogate the notion of the householder as a devotionally exemplary position in the late medieval and Early Modern period, as evidenced by a text such as the sixteenth-century *Werke for Householders.*² Indeed, further investigation into the conceptual households of the religious text could have significant implications for the study of medieval conceptions of space, as well as the cultural history of the later Middle Ages. In the present moment, however, I would like to end by noting that domestic imagery receives a new lease of life in the fifteenth century, an era in which the household represented far more than a simple and convenient metaphor.

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Appendix of Images

Figure 1. Petrus Christus, *Virgin and Child in a Domestic Interior*, c. 1460-1467, oil on wood panel, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.
Figure 2. Hans Memling, *The Annunciation*, c. 1465-1470, oil on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 3. Margaret of York receiving a vision of Christ in her chamber, in London, British Library, MS Additional 7079, f. 1v.
Figure 4. The ‘g’ sigla alongside the detail of Joseph making a manger at the Nativity, in Manchester, Chetham’s Library, MS 6690, f. 16v.
Figure 5. The first ‘vacat’ instruction, in Warminster, Longleat House, MS 14, f. 27r. Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire.
Figure 6. The second ‘vacat’ instruction, in Warminster, Longleat House, MS 14, f. 31r. Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire.
Figure 7. The domesticated Nativity, in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 648, f. 19r.