Plenary One Workshop:
Women’s Kinship Networks: Space, Genealogy, Text

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Description:
Participants in this workshop will consider how early modern women manipulated and negotiated a range of spaces in order to establish kinship networks that lie outside of traditional (and usually more rigid) patrilineal prerogatives. Texts discussed will range from the theoretical to the historical and literary; will derive from both English and Continental sites; and will suggest in provocative ways how women created communities in which they might thrive both spiritually and intellectually. This workshop will enable participants to think in new ways about the relationships between women, space, and community and to consider how kinship networks could be deployed for strategic and creative purposes. Even within a supposedly rigid patrilineal economy, kinship could be understood in fluid ways and could be deployed as a rhetorical practice that allowed women to re-write their own place in familial, political, and religious culture. Participants are invited to bring their own disciplinary and interpretive skills to bear on the readings and are encouraged to move from the specific communities that these readings represent to the broader issues of kinship, family relationships, religious practice, and critical practice that they raise.

Questions for Consideration:
How do women construct and define kinship networks?
Within a patriarchal economy, what alternative forms of family or affiliation are available?
In what ways do texts and specific textual forms create spaces for women’s kinship and communities?

Readings:


**ACT 5**

What can 'gainst him a greater vengeance be,
Than make his foe more worthy far than he?

Had Mariam scorn'd to leave a due unpaid,†
She would to Herod then have paid her love:
And not have been by sullen passion sway'd.‡
To fix her thoughts all injury above
Is virtuous pride. Had Mariam thus been prov'd, §
Long famous life to her had been allow'd.

**ACTUS QUINTUS. SCENA PRIMA.**

*Nuntio.* When, sweetest friend, § did I so far offend
Your heavenly self, that you my fault to quit
Have made me now relator of [your] end,
The end of beauty, chastity and wit?
Was none so hapless in the fatal place
But I, most wretched, for the queen t'choose?
'Tis certain I have some ill-boding face
That made me cull'd to tell this luckless news.
And yet no news to Herod: were it new
To him, unhappy 't had not been at all:  
Yet do I long to come within his view,
That he may know his wife did guiltless fall:
And here he comes. Your Mariam greets you well.

*Enter Herod.*

She shall not die.

*Nuntio.* Heav'n doth your will repel.³

*Herod.* Oh, do not with thy words my life destroy.

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† Turned out to be virtuously proud.
‡ The messenger is apostrophizing Mariam.
§ If Herod were ignorant of the event I report (the execution of Mariam), there would be no bad news to report.
³ Report or resist.
I prithee tell no dying tale: thine eye
Without thy tongue doth tell but too much:
Yet let thy tongue's addition make me die,
Death welcome comes to him whose grief is such.

Nuntio. I went amongst the curious gazing troop,
To see the last of her that was the best:
To see if death had heart to make her stoop,
To see the sun-admiring phoenix' nest.†
When there I came, upon the way I saw
The stately Mariam not debas'd by fear:
Her look did seem to keep the world in awe,
Yet mildly did her face this fortune bear.

Herod. Thou dost usurp my right, my tongue was fram'd
To be the instrument of Mariam's praise:
Yet speak: she cannot be too often fam'd:
All tongues suffice not her sweet name to raise.

Nuntio. But as she came she Alexandra met,
Who did her death (sweet queen) no whit bewail,
But as if nature she did quite forget,
She did upon her daughter loudly rail.♦

Herod. Why stopp'd you not her mouth? Where had she words
To [darken] that, that Heaven made so bright?!
Our sacred tongue no epithet affords
To call her other than the world's delight.

Nuntio. She told her that her death was too good,
And that already she had liv'd too long:
She said, she sham'd to have a part in blood
Of her that did the princely Herod wrong.

Herod. Base pickthank!♦ devil! Shame, twas all her glory,
That she to noble Mariam was the mother:
But never shall it live in any story—
Her name, except to infamy, I'll smother.

What answer did her princely daughter make?
Nuntio. She made no answer, but she look'd the while,
As if thereof she scarce did notice take,
Yet mild, a dutiful, though scornful, smile.♦

Herod. Sweet creature, I that look to mind do call;
Full oft hath Herod been amaz'd withal.
[Go on.]

[Nuntio]♦ She came unmov'd, with pleasant grace,
As if to triumph her arrival were:
In stately habit, and with cheerful face;†
Yet ev'ry eye was moist but Mariam's there.
When justly opposed to me she came,
She pick'd me out from all the crew:
She beckon'd to me, call'd me by my name,
For she my name, my birth, and fortune knew.

Herod. What, did she name thee? Happy, happy man.
Wilt thou not ever love that name the better?
But what sweet tune did this fair dying swan†
Afford thine ear? Tell all, omit no letter.

Nuntio. "Tell thou my lord," said she—

Herod. Me, meant she me?
Isn't true,♦ the more my shame: I was her lord,♦
Were I not mad, her lord I still should be:†
But now her name must be by me ador'd.
Oh say, what said she more? Each word she said
Shall be the food whereon my heart is fed.♦

Nuntio. "Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me loose my breath."♦

Herod. Oh, that I could that sentence♦ now control.♦

Nuntio. "If guiltily, eternal be my death”—

♦ Remember.
† Precisely.
‡ Possibly, this phrase should be understood as a question and punctuated "Isn't true?" Otherwise, it means, "If it is true."
♦ Both utterance and death sentence.
♦ Overrule (a legal sense; see OED v, s_b).
Herod. I hold her chaste ev'n in my inmost soul.
Nuntio. "By three days hence, if wishes could revive,
I know himself would make me oft alive."†
Herod. Three days: three hours, three minutes, not so much,
A minute in a thousand parts divided;†
My penitency for her death is such,
As in the first 13 I wish'd she had not died.
But forward in thy tale.
Nuntio. Why, on she went,
And after she some silent prayer had said,
She did as if to die she were content,†
And thus to Heav'n her heav'nly soul is fled.
Herod. But are thou sure there doth no life remain?
Is't possible my Mariam should be dead?
Is there no trick to make her breathe again?
Nuntio. Her body is divided from her head.
Herod. Why, yet methinks there might be found by art
Strange ways of cure; 'tis sure rare things are done
By an inventive head, and willing heart.
Nuntio. Let not, my lord, your fancies idly run.
It is as possible it should be seen,
That we should make the holy Abraham live,
Though he entomb'd two thousand years had been,†
As breath again to slaughter'd Mariam give.
But now for more assaults prepare your ears—
Herod. There cannot be a further cause of moan,
This accident shall shelter me from fears:
What can I fear? Already Mariam's gone.
Yet tell ev'n what you will.
Nuntio. As I came by,
From Mariam's death, I saw upon a tree
A man that to his neck a cord did tie;†
Which cord he had design'd his end to be.

† That is, the first minute or first thousandth of a minute.

When me he once discern'd, he downwards bow'd,
And thus with fearful voice [he] cried aloud,
"Go tell the King he trusted ere he tried,†
I am the cause that Mariam causeless died."

Herod. Damnation take him, for it was the slave
That said she meant with poison's deadly force
To end my life that she the crown might have?" Which tale did Mariam from herself divorce.†
Oh, pardon me, thou pure unspotted ghost,
My punishment must needs sufficient be,
In missing that content I valued most:
Which was thy admirable face to see.
I had but one inestimable jewel,†
Yet one I had no monarch 13 had the like,
And therefore may I curse myself as cruel:
'Twas broken by a blow myself did strike.
I gaz'd thereon and never thought me bless'd,
But when on it my dazzl'd eye might rest,
A precious mirror made by wondrous art,
I priz'd it ten times dearer than my crown,
And laid it up fast folded in my heart:
Yet I in sudden choler cast it down,
And pash'd it all to pieces: 'twas no foe
That robb'd me of it; no Arabian host,
Nor no Armenian guide hath us'd me so:
But Herod's wretched self hath Herod cross'd.
She was my graceful moiety; 13 me accurs'd,
To slay my better half and save my worst.
But sure she is not dead, you did but jest,
To put me in perplexity a while;
'Twere well indeed if I could so be dress'd:" 14

12 Yet one I did have of which no monarch.
13 Half; cf. following line and act 4, line 88, and the endnote to act 4, line 88.
14 Rebuked, "straightened out."
Women Writing about Beguines

Did women in their chronicles and foundation histories write about these events and do their narratives about beguines register a sense of belonging to a movement of religious women? Grundmann cites Hadewijch (fl. c. 1220–40), whose writings, he asserts, indicate “a consciousness of the interconnections of the new feminine piety.” Hadewijch mentions beguines in Flanders, Brabant, Paris, Zealand, Holland, Frisia, England, and “beyond the Rhine.” That women knew the history of their collective struggle for acceptance into religious orders and were acquainted with writings by earlier women authors (as will be shown in Chapter 6) can be verified in a chronicle composed around 1490 by Magdalena Kremer at the cloister of Kirchheim unter Teck in Württemberg. Magdalena writes of the early days of women’s efforts to gain admittance to the Dominican order and of their subsequent expulsion. Remarkably, however, she uses this account to tell of a successful collective counteraction by women in response to being denied recognition and pastoral care. Many women, she asserts, went on foot to Rome and joined together to protest their situation to the Pope. Attributing the resolution of the problem to women’s collective effort, Magdalena describes their successful lobbying and the positive outcome:

[From many cloisters in German lands two or three sisters from each set out on foot, joined together, and traveled under great hardship to Rome where they protested their desperate situation and misery to our holy father the pope and besought him that he would again place them under the direction and protection of the Dominicans. The pope perceived their great earnestness and returned them to the care of the Dominicans. And where they previously had had one women’s cloister, they now had seven to one.]

Magdalena rejoices in the sevenfold increase in Dominican women’s houses, despite the hierarchy’s attempts to keep them out. Her version of
the events reflects not only the sisters’ feeling of accomplishment at winning their suit but also a sense of solidarity in their growing strength of numbers. Certainly, Magdalena’s picture of scores of German Adelheids and Hildegards marching on Rome in a kind of women’s second Germanic invasion seems a startling one for a female author in the late Middle Ages.

Literary historian Peter Dinzlachbacher has argued that formulations such as “we women” begin to appear for the first time in the fifteenth century. He identifies Christine de Pizan (1365–c. 1430), author of the Book of the City of Ladies, as the first woman writer to express an awareness of women collectively in opposition to the masculine world. If Dinzlachbacher’s hypothesis is correct, it marks a significant watershed in women’s thinking. As early as 1320, Dominican women had begun writing foundation accounts of the formation of their communities out of gatherings of beguines. Five of the nine Dominican sister-books composed between 1320 and 1350 at women’s houses in Switzerland, Alsace, and Southern Germany were prefaced by foundation narratives that had already been added in the fourteenth century. Three of the nine were later edited by Johannes Meyer, who cut out visions that he objected to and supplied didactic prologues and epilogues. Yet the ironic approach taken by the author of the Oetenbach sister-book clearly distinguishes her style from Meyer’s. She, too, mentions the moratorium on Dominican pastoral care of women’s communities but describes a different solution. In her narrative, the beguine founding mothers solve the problem by pitting the Dominicans friars against their rivals, the Franciscans. When the Dominicans hear that the women might join the order of the Poor Clares instead, they become alarmed and decide to take over their care again. In this way the women succeed in gaining the help of the men.

In the Oetenbach sister-book, as in several foundation narratives, the author relates how two of the beguine women subsequently make the arduous trip to Rome to get confirmation of their community’s acceptance. The chronicle tells how Hemma Walaseller and another sister took an elderly secular priest with them as their escort on their journey to Rome. Once there, the sisters again prove more effective than the men. With God’s help they see their matter quickly arranged “ahead of many a great lord who had been there long before them.” The chronicle expresses evident satisfaction in the sisters’ success, in spite of the disadvantages of being poor and female.

While fourteenth-century sister-books lack explicit “we women” wording, they celebrate female agency and initiative in the founding of beguine communities and in achieving the incorporation of these communities into the order. In these narratives, the beguine founding mothers observe the spirituality of the new men’s mendicant communities and solicit their guidance and friendly advice. But the stories depict the women as the primary agents and initiators of the beguine “gatherings.” Stressing the lay women’s desire for a life devoted to religion, the foundation stories portray the extreme privations they endured in establishing and financing a house, helped by lay women of the neighborhood. Thus the Oetenbach foundation story relates with characteristic irony how a woman named Gertraut von Hilzingen, who lived in the city of Zurich, gained a burning desire to live such a holy spiritual life as [the Dominicans] and so she took with her two persons of good will and they moved to an abandoned house that was in that city and there they established a cloister. And when they entered the house, the rain was coming in everywhere so that it was almost filled with water. Thus they moved in, relying on God’s mercy, and had at first nothing but water and bread. That was a poor state of affairs for such exalted brides of God.

Here, as in other foundation stories, solidarity is a prominent theme in descriptions of the way the beguine women supported one another. Thus the Oetenbach author relates, “Of the three sisters, one was named sister Mechthild von Woloshofen. She helped out in her father’s inn, but she had such sympathy for the other two that she left it and ate water and bread with them.”

Often solidarity takes the form of women helping other women monetarily. The foundation account in the sister-book of cloister Kathrinental (c. 1318/1343), near the Swiss town of Diessenhofen, tells of the community’s origins in a beguine gathering at Winterthur. In this narrative, the decisive initiative is taken by a widow named Williburg von Hüniken, a woman of considerable property. This enterprising and wealthy widow joins an already existing community of poor women and maintains them with her own funds while looking for a better situation for the group.
Where women and men work together in these narratives, it is in decidedly non-hierarchical relationships. Thus the foundation account states:

[When this] blessed Sister Williburg came to them and became well acquainted with the holy and blessed life that [the beguines] led, she became very eager to better their condition and that she might help them to a secure and permanent place where they could serve our Lord undisturbed and in a proper manner. And they heard of the good intention which the honorable priest Herr Hugh at Diessenhofen had to establish a cloister where forty women might serve the Lord. When Sister Williburg heard this, she hurried to him on foot and asked about his plans and told him of their needs and what she intended. This appealed to him and they agreed that they wanted to do all in their power to establish an honorable cloister of the Dominican order in that place. Then sister Williburg brought her group from Winterthur and they lived in a house until the cloister was built.\(^22\)

Acting in an equal partnership, Hugh becomes the chaplain and Williburg the prioress of the new community.

Unlike the accounts of Gandersheim, Quedlinburg, and Essen, great dynastic foundations for women established in earlier periods on the initiative of a noble patron, the fourteenth-century narratives stress the communities’ humble and independent origins. Donors come into the picture only after a group of pious, spiritually dynamic women has banded together to start a community on their own.\(^23\) Even though these stories were written a century or so after a community’s first gathering, after the cloisters had become wealthy and secure, they depict the hardships and celebrate the initiative of the beguine “founding mothers” as a way of creating a communal identity and a fictive golden age of beguine spirituality.

Christina Ebner (1277–1356), who composed the foundation story and sister-book of Engelsthal, the Little Book of the Overwhelming Burden of Grace, entered the cloister in 1289. Thus Christina may have known personally some of the former beguines who were present at the community’s incorporation as a Dominican house in 1244.\(^24\) Christina’s narrative tells how a certain Adelheid Rotter left the entourage of Princess Elisabeth of Hungary to live as a penitent in Nuremberg. There she joined a group of beguines, who asked her to become their leader. The women did not have sufficient funds to establish a cloister, but each one brought all that she possessed. Emphasizing the beguines’ earnest desire to live as a religious community, Christina depicts in the typical manner of the sister-books the women’s charismatic spirituality. She tells how the beguines organized themselves and invented a rule of order, relying on Adelheid, who was literate and had been at court. Through their self-fashioned ritual, they acted out their religious devotion.

They read the Hours as well as they were able. At compline they went to their mistress [Adelheid] and asked her what they should do on the following day, and that they did willingly. When they sat at table, their mistress sat at the head. After she had eaten a little, she read to them in German: and it occasionally happened that some of them fell into a swoon and lay unconscious like the dead, for they were totally absorbed in God, as though departed. When people heard of their holy life, they gave them freely all that they needed, especially Kunigunde, the Queen of Bohemia, who was very generous to them.

In 1239, when Nuremberg was placed under interdict because of the excommunication of Emperor Friedrich II (Hohenstaufen), the group of beguines left Nuremberg and went to a manor outside of the city, where, the narrator continues, “they had to do heavy work and cut their grain themselves, wash, bake, and do all the chores. This they did with great devotion and patience.”\(^25\) After they had lived as a self-organized group for some time, turning for advice to a local pastor, the women petitioned the first Dominicans to arrive in their region to join their obedience. But, as in the other sister-book foundation stories, the focus here is on devout beguine women starting a community on their own.

While poverty is an important theme in the women’s stories about their beguine foremothers, it is not a constant. It does not figure prominently, for instance, in the foundation story that Prioress Elisabeth Kempf (1415–1485) added to the Unterlinden sister-book (Colmar) when she translated it from Latin into German. The original, composed by Prioress Katharina von Gueberschwihr around 1320, had contained no account of the cloister’s founding.\(^26\) Elisabeth Kempf’s addition draws from other convent docu-
ments and tells the story of two very enterprising, noble widows who established and managed a lay religious community. Hiring a priest to conduct services, they organized a manner of life patterned on what they call the “old cloisters.” In planning the community, the first members consult their network of widow friends who offer their opinions and assistance.

There lived in Colmar two widows, respected for their piety, upright life, and their noble families—Agnes von Wittelheim and Agnes von Herkenheim. On the advice of Walther, a lector at the Dominican men’s convent in Strasbourg... God gave them the desire to found a convent. They made their intention known to other widows in the neighborhood in order to hear their opinions about it. These women responded joyfully with advice and eager assistance. The two widows rented out the houses that they owned in Colmar for a yearly sum and moved with their sons and daughters to the outskirts of town to a place called “under the Linden,” where there was a house and some property around it. After a short time they left that place on the advice of two respected women who had joined their group, and moved, on the evening of the feast of St. John the Baptist 1222, to a place called Aufnahilen, which is next to the chapel of that saint. There were then eight of them... Soon afterward they built on the same location some houses and a long, wide, and high stone dormitory. They enclosed themselves in this building and there led a pious life in the fear of God. After the manner of the old cloisters, they had maids and laborers work their fields and vineyards and paid a priest of spotless reputation at their own expense, who said the mass for them almost daily.

In Elisabeth’s story, the two widows eventually make the arduous trip to the papal court to petition for incorporation into the Dominican order. In Rome, they do some research and visit the women’s cloister of San Sisto, established by Saint Dominic, in order to study its physical construction and the nuns’ habit and practices. Then, continues Elisabeth, “with great eagerness and persistence, they requested that Pope Innocent IV grant them a charter and dress of the Dominicans and asked that they be placed under the care and direction of the order and enjoy its privileges.”127 The account includes the text of Pope Innocent’s decree, issued in 1246.

In the Unterlinden case, as in the other narratives, it is primarily women who help beguine women. Its depictions agree with recent studies showing a high number of female patrons for beguine settlements. Forty-five percent were founded by women as the principle donors. Moreover, Walter Simons’s study calls the beguine movement “the only movement in medieval monastic history that was created by women and for women.”128 The sister-book foundation narratives strongly emphasize female patronage and self-starting mutual support. The Katharinenal account, for instance, not only mentions generous townpeople but also singles out by name specific women who helped the community financially.129 Like other stories that women wrote for each other, the foundation account of the Clarissan cloister of Pfullingen, composed by an anonymous sister around 1525, tells how two noble women established a cloister themselves and then traveled to Rome to receive permission to incorporate the house into the order of the Poor Claris.

On Saint Martin’s day in the year of our Lord 1251 this cloister Pfullingen was begun by the noble, well-born lady Mechthild and lady Irmel von Pfullingen, of the noble family of Rempen. And they went themselves in person to Rome and acquired permission, and with their property and with holy alms built this cloister. Let it be known that the first donation given was a little lamb or sheep that, by the grace of God, became an entire strain and herd. God be praised. Afterward, in the year 1252 on St. Omar’s day, the same women entered the holy order of Saint Clare.130

The narrative tells how years of military campaigns subsequently decimated the cloister’s holdings. But the chronicler emphasizes the women’s resourcefulness in protecting what little they could from the marauding soldiers. She recounts, for example, “Once the sisters took everything that they could carry and hid it in the refectory under the benches and [hiding the cache] stood before them close together in their cloaks.”131 Thanks to the women’s clever collective stratagem, the soldiers found nothing to confiscate and left the cloister.

For most of the convents that grew out of thirteenth-century beguine
sentiments, the origins were small, poor, and obscure, making it difficult to identify to what order they first belonged. Particularly in “Cistercian” cloisters, it is often unclear exactly what the nature of the women’s affiliation with the order was. Likewise, many self-established convents that received pastoral care from the Dominicans were never officially accepted into that order. The stories about the founding mothers of these houses, which became part of the sister-books in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, are a far cry from the earlier women’s narratives about great noble abbeys such as Gandersheim. Both Hrotsvit’s *Origins of the Convent of Gandersheim* (c. 973/983) and Bertha’s *Life of Adelheid, Abbess of Vilich* (1057) relate splendid foundations. In both of these accounts, the monasteries are organized by the wealthy and powerful parents of the first abbesses. Sister Bertha relates, for example, how at Vilich the noble father, Count Megen- goz, and mother, Countess Gerberga, daughter of Duke Godfrey, took an active part in overseeing the building of a monastery for their daughter Adelheid. Bertha relates how Vilich Abbey, built some seventy years before, was closely supervised by the exacting Lady Gerberga, who “remained steadfastly at the place where the monastery was to be built, accelerating the pressing work on the structure with magisterial foresight.” In this narrative, Adelheid’s parents donate the building and its furnishings, recruit the women who are to inhabit it, and arrange the privileges and safeguards that will protect their daughter and their investment. Bertha relates:

Then they collected together a community of virgins in that place who were to tend the Divine Service. From the convent of the Holy Virgin [where Adelheid was being schooled], they redeemed their daughter with a gift of land, and handed over to her the care of the future direction and government of Vilich. . . . When they had decorated the place worthily, they gave it into the hand of the Emperor Otto III, so that his protection would defend it in perpetuity. Graciously, he freed the place from all secular yoke and laws and bestowed upon it the liberties according to the laws and constitutions of the convents of Gandersheim, Quedlinburg and Essen, namely, that a judge or advocate could never demand serv-

ices thereupon nor could govern in the boundaries of the area of that convent unless it pleased the abbess and her congregation.

Clearly, these much earlier foundation narratives—composed by women but with a male audience and the illustrious donor families in mind—were not the models for the accounts that fourteenth-century Dominican women composed. It is doubtful that they even knew about them. Rather, the foundation stories in the Dominican sister-books appear to have been modeled on Gérard de Pracher’s (d. 1281) *Vita brevi* *Vita brevi* *Vita brevi* (Lives of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers), which was compiled in response to a mandate from the Dominican Chapter General in 1256 to collect any “edifying occurrences” within the order so as to chronicle its origins and development. Pracher’s *Lives* contains a number of monastic foundation histories of individual convents.

Gertrud Jaron Lewis asserts that the sister-books are more than simply feminine versions of Pracher’s work. Above all, they present a different view of women from the male-authored *Vita patrum*, *Vita fratum*, and *Vita brevi* *Vita brevi* *Vita brevi* Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum historiale*, all of which contain a few token saintly women but portray the vast majority of females as disreputable, silly, or, at worst, downright satanic. Lewis cites the “depressingly negative” and steady diet of misogynist tales offered to monastics, both male and female, in their daily reading as the backdrop against which the “unique and novel achievement of the authors of Sister-Books” stands out. If not an actual backlash, Lewis suggests, we have in sister-books at least images of virtuous women and—more important—a “conscious and feminine perspective.” Here women are not only the authors but also the subject and the audience for the texts. Women in the sister-books “talk directly about themselves, their own community, their values and attitudes.”

Wilhelm Oechl has called the sister-books “typically female, without a trace of objective history writing.” One wonders if a truly “objective” view would include such a categorization of what is female. But clearly these “histories,” written by fourteenth-century women, must be seen in their late-medieval context. If patterned on Gérard de Pracher’s work, they fit within a tradition of foundation narratives that is not female. Yet they differ in presenting a point of view that places women at the center rather than at the margins. These stories do not characterize women as subaltern,
passive recipients of pastoral care or as persons who have been "sent" to nunneries but as women choosing and actively initiating an alternative lifestyle, one entirely devoted to religion. The portrait of enterprising, resourceful, and determined beguine foundling mothers is, perhaps, not so unusual a view as has been supposed.

The literary genre to which these accounts belong and the political agenda they represent with be discussed in Chapter 6. The important point here is that these works were written with a particular aim in mind. Composed some one hundred years after the beguine communities had become wealthy and secure houses of regular Dominican nuns, the sister-books look backward to their beguine origins and the communities' most celebrated visionaries for models, in order to combat what they perceive as a falling away from spirituality in their own time. The anecdotes of the fervent piety of women in the community's past are designed to inspire the contemporary generation to renew its spiritual devotion. In the Töss sister-book, for example, the narrator reports that she asked Sister Elisabeth Bechlin, a resident of the cloister for sixty-two years, to provide an anecdote for her book. When Sister Elisabeth wanted to know what it was to be used for, the narrator replied that it was to provide a model, one that would inspire readers to strive for God's grace, because, as she laments, "the love of God is beginning to decline these days in many places in the hearts of men." The sense of spiritual decline that worried the compiler of the Töss sister-book in the fourteenth century would become far more acute in the following century as the social and religious landscape underwent rapid and radical changes.
Domenico e Sisto decided not to build the windows designed by the maestri, which were to have been on the street side of their clerestory-level corridor, but to build there instead three small altars, like small chapels, dedicated to St Dominic (an image of St Dominic was donated by Sister Perpetua Passeri; the nun in charge of the altar was Sister Maria Elena Nunez), St Joseph (cared for by Diana Bonese), and St Anne (looked after by Sister Francesca Altemps). Here, rather than open the convent to the city, a decision was made to develop an enclosure corridor in terms of nuns' own devotional interests, beyond the scrutiny of priests and confessors. Thus, in this case, the nuns' devotional interests took precedence over their urban visual prominence: a corridor produced by the precepts of ecclesiastical prescription to ensure the nuns' invisibility and separation from family and laity, was transformed into a space of personal devotion and spiritual transcendence, enhanced by housing devotional objects which were secured through the very familial connections enclosure was intended to deny. The boundary became the place where a new devotional practice began to assert itself. Corridors and interstitial routes designed to efface, hide, enclose and silence, were used by the nuns to gather and focus independent spiritual resources. Thus corridors were transformed from lines of dutiful connection between signal points coordinated by Trent (the choir, the golosie) to be instead bridges gathering altari and reliques bestowed by members of their families: in short, places of inner private devotion that transcended the precepts of Trent.

Each tiny chapel or altar had its own saint and its own nun in charge. For example, Sister Girolama Conti, who took the habit in 1584, was responsible for the altar of St Aura, which she restored and gilded, and for which she procured from the then Viagigente, Monseigneur Giovanni Battista Altieri, an authenticated part of a finger of that saint. Lamps burned before these small altars, indulgences (both plenary and partial) were sought out for them, and on feast days hymns, antiphons and prayers were sung, with the participation of the whole convent. In arranging for indulgences—'salutary for the faithful' in the words of the Council of Trent—to be attached to their private altars, inaccessible even to the priesthood, the nuns ensured that these areas of the convent, accessible only to them, were inscribed in their performances of good works, and became significant spiritual areas within the convent. Thus, in the crevices produced by formal enclosure we find new forms of devotion which were able to evade extra-conventual control. Personal, intimate, and yet open to the whole convent, these new forms of devotional activity ran in parallel to the official versions in the convent church below.

Devotion to an image of St Dominic of Soriano in one of the dormitories at SS Domenico e Sisto nicely encapsulates the domestic/institutional relation. In addition to the conventual church dedicated to St Dominic, the nuns wanted an oratory in their dormitories also dedicated to him. To this end, they obtained from Father Giovanni Battista Marini, himself related to one of the nuns, a copy of the miraculous image of St Dominic in Soriano—indeed a holy copy, which had touched the original without so much as
expense, and in the course of time, Clarice Colonna arranged for it to be adorned with paintings of the lives of Mary Magdalen, Mary Egiziaca and other hermit saints to whom she was particularly devoted. Thus the humble lay sister’s Virgin was erased to be replaced by an aristocratic nun’s holy images, which were in turn fully institutionalized. In these ways, images were adopted, chapels personalized, and devotions identified with specific nuns and locations within the convent were shifted and superseded in accord with the institutional, economic, political and social standing of individual nuns.

Occasionally Salamonia’s chronicle gives us a glimpse of a specific devotion of a particular nun. Sister Prassede Marini (d. 1641) entered the convent in 1594. As a child she had been saved from death after falling from a loggia by the intervention of St Vincent Ferrer in response to pleas from the Venerable Mother Sister Maria Raggi, a Dominican tertiary, and was subsequently intensely devoted to the Passion of Christ and to the Virgin. Marini set up an image of the Virgin of the Rosary above a small altar where, to the light of five candles, she would recite the rosary; on the Feast of the Rosary, she would light a great number of candles and carry the image in solemn procession around the cloisters.

Likewise, Sister Serafina Iacovacci, who entered the convent in 1576 and became prioress in 1628, was particularly devoted to St Barbara, and held an important feast in her honour on her saint’s day. During her tenure of the conventual sacristanship, she presented two silver reliquaries containing various saints’ relics to the convent, and a rich cross of gold to the image of the Virgin attributed to St Luke. Sister Maria Tenaglina, daughter of a noble Roman family, who professed in 1578, made by her own hand several cloths and friezes, embroidered in inlaid silk and gold, for the altar of St Dominic whom she held in special devotion. Holy gifts like these were remembered within convent records, and probably informally also, in close association with their nun-donor’s name and life, thereby binding specific altars and places within the convent, specific devotions and individual nuns in close association. Modern scholars have tended perhaps too hastily to assume that institutional space was inevitably anonymous and homogenous; these practices reveal conventual institutionalized space to have been highly personalized, performative, spiritualized and localized; that is, intensive as well as extensive. In other words, within convents there were both measurable (extensive) spaces and spaces not susceptible to measurement (devotional spaces, relational spaces, referential spaces).

Sometimes one catches a glimpse of how a particular devotion gathered momentum and changed character institutionally. For example, a socially insignificant lay sister at SS Domenico e Sisto, Alessia Peruggina, was wont to pray in front of a niche which held a small paper image of the Virgin. The well-connected Sister Clarice Colonna soon arranged for a chapel to be built there. A few years later, after the chapel was destroyed during the restoration of the garden and cloisters, it was rebuilt on a larger scale at the convent’s
Excerpts from Delaval's Meditations, pp. 8-21 & pp. 86-87:

On Mistress Carter: [8] “she [a household servant named Mrs. Carter] had allway’s accustomed me from a very little [9] child, to call her servant, and (though she weighted Upon my Aunt) to indeare her selfe the more to Me she allway’s call’d me her Mistresse.

I haue doted upon this ungratefull woman With all the tendernesse imagenable, when Euer I red any discription of a worthy good Friend I presently aply’d it to her in my Thought’s. and as I grew up my loue to her still more and more increas’d.

As soon as I was a lettle past 8 yeare Old she entertain’d me with compareing her Tender affection for me, with the severity And ill nature (as she call’d it) of my Gouernesse (who was a very good woman, and did but Her duty)

But M’th Carter neuer fail’d to indulge Me in every thing. . . . When I had a tasque set me, ether as to the Reading so many chapter’s in the French Bible, and so many in the English one, or That I was to learn some part of the holy Scripture by heart, before my play fellow’s Might come to me (which were order’s that [10] My Deare Grandmother had commanded shou’d Be obserued) M’th Carter wou’d often come in And earnestly plead for my liberty before My Tasque was done: yet wou’d she privately Aduise my Gouernesse to refuse it; telling her If I were not kept in Aw, at that Age I shou’d be Quite spoyl’d. . . .

[12] Had she not fill’d my thought’s with foleish Fable’s, I cou’d not haue been so long amused By her, but shou’d much sooner haue delighted In learning usefull truth’s. and by that mean’s Shou’d haue discouer’d all her design’s which Wou’d haue made me forsake her long ago.

As soon as I was ten yeare old she begun to Delude me with Tale’s of Fary’s, charged Me with great secresey, and told me that if She and I cou’d but get out often to walke Alone, the Queen of that unknown Land she Vs’d to talke to me of (prouided that she found I was very secret) wou’d be so graceous as to let me Se in priuate one of her Court, which Fary Wou’d be order’d to bring me a considering [13] Cap, which when I had wore a while upon the Intersestion of M’th Carter, (and still upon Condition that I continued very secret) Another Fary shou’d meet me in the Wood’s With a far greater present, which was a Wishing Cap, and as soon as I begun to wear It, what euer I desier’d I shou’d obtaine. All this I firmely beleiued, and wou’d not haue Reuereal the secret of this mater for any Consideration in the world.

Dayly was I longing for the apearance of My first Fary, (not doubting but the Second wou’d soon follow[]). and continually Was I puszleing my head what it wou’d be Best for me to wish for:

As to that M’th Carter bid me satisfy my selfe For the wearing of the first Cap wou’d make Me so perfectly wise, that when I put on the Second, I shou’d be in no danger of wishing For any thing but what was most to my Advantage.
So eagerly bent was I upon these thing’s that I thought it altogether needless to pray or to read the holy scriptures. and cou’d with [14] All my heart haue tore my Gouernesse in pieces when Euer she hinder’d M[is] Carter’s private walk’s And mine. beleiving firmly that the whole Hapynesse of my life, depended wholly upon my Being alone with her. for she had often assured Me the Fary’s were so nice of showing themselves That there was no hopes of meeting one of them But when we were in some retir’d shade far Of from all company, and that she her selfe had Many year’s observ’d all there rules (of which Great cleanliness was one, and secrisy another) Before she was honour’d with the sight of them,

When M[is] Carter wou’d not be troubled with Me (which hapen’d very often) I shou’d be sure In the morning to find a letter in our apoynt’d Place, with some complaint, or other of my Gouernesse. desierring me for quietnesse sake to Take no notice of her for 8 or 10 day’s, and then Afterward’s they that watch’d us wou’d grow Negligent, and we shou’d get an opertunity to Slip out together, such sort of thing’s she wou’d write, and I punctually observed all her Derecion’s.

[15] Those houer’s that I cou’d not see M[is] Carter In, I impoy’d much more in reading then in Playing with my Girles. . . .

But Alas M[is] Carter had so fill’d my head With folly’s, that (vnlesse those times which I was forced to perform my tasque in) what I red was altogether Romances. I was but Some few month’s past ten year’s old, before I had red seuerall great volum’s of them; all Casander, the Grand Cyrus, Cleopatra And Astrea; thus vainely pass’d the Blosome time of my life. which shou’d haue Been spent in laying a good foundation of What is to be learnt in such Book’s as teach’s us [16] Heauenly wisdome.

By degre’s M[is] Carten [Sic] begun to talke to me much More dangerous discourses then she had done yet. my Ears she dayly fill’d with prayse’s of my Selfe, and told me that my growing Beauty in Some lettle time wou’d certenly make a conquest of many heart’s. and that the end I was To make of those too Fary Cap’s she had so Long been talkeing to me of, was only to Derect me wisely to chuse, whose passion of All those that wou’d pretend to me deserued Best to be my Husband.

By which mean’s she put the thought’s of loue Into my heart much to soon (which I quickly Chas’d away) but the pride which she instill’d Into me stick’s much closer.

I listen’d to all her Fable’s with as much Atention, as if her word’s had been Oracle’s And beleuing my selfe blest in the Friend I Had chose. . . .

[17] . . . So foleishly was I deluded, that I sought for no Other felicity then what M[is] Carter proposs’d To me; . . .

I was not quite 6 Month’s past 10 yeare old when M[is] Carter begun most perniceously to insinuate [18] Presbiterian princeples into me, in some interval’s Of time, when she did not talke
to me of Loue, and Fary Tales, . . . for at that time of my life she cou’d haue Turn’d me which way she pleas’d, as easely as she Might haue bow’d a tender Twig.

. . . [20] Yet I kept our Fary secret for some time (though I grew every day more and more to Doubt the truth of those idle Tales, I had so long Giuen credit too.[])

. . . [21] I uentur’d then to tell her [a new friend] all the perplexing Thought’s I had which till then I had kept wholly to My selfe, for I had been so taught the merite of Being secret, that I had said nothing to M’ris Carter of what my Gouernesse had told me; M’ris Corny (being a blessing sent me by God) herd Me tell her all my exteroordinary story with Great patience: and did not dispise me (as lustly she might) for my great ignorance But mildly instruct’d me, day, after day, in all Nesesary truth’s.; which before I wou’d neuer Llisten too.”

**On Her Grandmother:** [86] “She was a pious, and tender Parent her life was an Example of good work’s, and constant regular Deuotion’s, and at her death by her last word’s tis plane she found it aproaching to her without Any terrour, but was meditateing upon our Blesed Lord and Saviour’s Asension in her last Moment’s.

Her great goodnesse, and humility had made her Take the pains to teach me her selfe to read, which I did perfectly well, before I was 8 yeares old. she Also spent much time in giueing me dayly instructions As I grew up. all that part of the yeare, which I was So hapy as to pass with her.

My Aunt stanhope did indeed very generously Both clothe and feed me, and at my maryage added to my portion as her free gift 4 thousand Pound. but it was my Deare Grandmother Gorge that toke the greatest care of my mind; and [so] [87] Labour’d to implant early the loue of Vertu in my heart And as for her Gift’s to me, they were also in proportion To what she had to giue, greater then any others I Euer receiued; for in her life time she gaue me As long as the King pay’d her a pention no less Then a hunderd pound a yeare (which was as . . . great an allowance as my Aunt gaue me out of her plenty full estate) and at her death she Gaue me all that she had in the world to giue, Which was a thousand pound. which sum of mony seuerall year’s after when I receiued it, brought More quiet to my min as any other Gift that Euer was giuen me.

For it pay’d off all the Debt’s that I had contracted at Court, before I was mary’d.

When all things were concluded betwixt Mr DeLavaL’s Friends and mine, for our Maryage I absolutely refused to consent to it, till my Aunt Stanhope (in whose hands my thousand pound was left) had first pay’d me that mony to disposs Of as I pleas’d.

...What, in short, is the time of the things?

For scholars of Renaissance material culture, this last question might seem unremarkable and even tautological. After all, they might say, early modern things are early modern: a thing’s time is its own, not any other’s. A if to underscore this respectful insistence on temporal propriety, critics have often treated the Renaissance object as an ethnographic curio that materializes an early modern moment unfamiliar to us. Indeed, a recurrent strategy in scholarship on Renaissance material culture is to allege that its things are particularly worthy of attention because of their *strangeness*, at least to the palate of the modern literary and cultural historian. Championing a critical fascination with “marginal and strange details,” one such study claims that “the everyday in the Renaissance can be the uncommonly strange to modern taste”; another characterizes early modern domestic matter as “enticingly alien.” Thus the Renaissance object is made to belong univocally to a foreign moment-state whose supposed integrity and singularity are guaranteed by that moment’s difference from our own.

For philosophers of science, however, the question of a thing’s relation to time is likely to entail a more complicated answer. Recent work in the field has increasingly drawn attention to how an object is never of a singular moment but instead combines ingredients from several times. As Bruno Latour notes, “Every cohort of elements may bring together elements from all times. In such a framework, our actions are recognized at last as polytemporal.....I may use an electric drill, but I also use a hammer. The former is thirty-five years old, the latter hundreds of thousands.....Some of my genes are 500 million years old, others 3 million, others 100,000 years old, and my habits range in age from a few days to several thousand years. In light of Latour’s recognition that all things and actions are polytemporal,” it perhaps becomes easier to understand the words of Michel Serres in my epigraph to this chapter: “An object, a circumstance, is thus polychromic, multitemporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, and with multiple pleats.” Philosophers of science offer accounts of the polytemporal object that, to current scholars of Renaissance material culture, may seem every bit as strange as the things they study. Yet these accounts may also make considerable sense. Many “Renaissance” objects were not of the Renaissance as such but survivals from an older time: think, for example of the medieval monastic garments that, post-Reformation, were recycled for display in the public playhouses; or of London’s old Roman walls, still visible in Shakespeare’s lifetime alongside subsequent additions and renovations. Such polytemporal objects---of the English Renaissance, yet not of it---might be characterized as untimely matter.
In this book, I adapt Serres’s account of object to argue that the untimely matter of the English Renaissance is, in his words, both polychromic and multitemporal. What may at first seem like a pair of synonyms for “polytemporal” are, on closer inspection, two subtly different concepts, and this difference points to a significant disjunction in the meanings of “time.” “Time” can refer to a moment, period, or age—the punctual date of chronology. Hence “the time of Shakespeare” can be demarcated and numerically represented as a finite block (1564-1616, or the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). But “time” can also refer to an understanding of the temporal relations among past, present, and future. In this sense, the “time of Shakespeare” is not a historical period but rather a conception, or several conceptions, of temporality. As we shall see, time in Shakespeare’s plays is sometimes a progressive line that follows the arc of the sun, but it is also counterintuitively a plane in which the future is behind and the past ahead, and a preposterous folded cloth in which before and after are coeval. Serres’s notion of the polychronic draws on the first, chronological meaning of time in asserting that objects collate many different moments, as suggested by Latour’s polytemporal toolbox and genes. By contrast, Serres’s notion of the multitemporal evokes the second meaning of time. In its polychronicity, an object can prompt many different understanding and experiences of temporality—that is, of the relations between now and then, old and new, before and after.

The distinction between the polychromic and the multitemporal is particularly helpful for understanding theories of matter in the tie of Shakespeare. A strikingly wide array of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forms of English literary and cultural activity—devotional lyric verse, urban chorography, vitalist philosophy, and most insistently, Shakespeare’s own drama expound or enact theories of the polychromatic nature of matter. These theories range from the explicit to the implicit, the philosophical to the practical, and the religious to the secular. But each understands matter to collate diverse moment in time. In the process, these theories do more than just recognize the polychronicity of the object; they also insist on its multitemporal properties—that is, its materialization of diverse relations among past, present, and future. In some instances, Shakespeare and his contemporaries use objects to theorize a supersessionary temporality according to which the present or future differs and distances itself from the past. The object’s polychromic multiplicity, however, readily suggest modes of historical and cultural relationality other than supersession. Within the object’s many temporal “pleats,” as Serres characterizes them, the past sometimes acquires an explosive power to tear apart the present. And in yet other instances, past matter is also allowed to assume a more dialogic relation to the present, suggesting affinity and proximity rather than difference and distance between elements of then and now….
Excerpts from Isham’s My Booke of Rememberance

[3r] my mother taught mee my Booke:

[5r] in this time of my Granmothers sicknes I comming dayly to see her lighted upon her Bookes (which lay in her windo) wherein she much delighted and I gathered spirituall flowers out of the garden of her sweetnes wherein one booke I found of the nessissity of Repentance and in another the effects of faith . . . and I afterwards lighting upon prayes for this porpose writ them downe for my owne use, for at \
this/ time, as I remember I learned to writ having a natureall inclinacion thereunto,

. . . my mother gave every one of us a Psalme booke, in which I much delighted because of the verce

[8r] my mother gave me and my sister a prayer booke a piece, and I was much stirred \betimes/ to this spirituall exercise of prayer by reading of the exhortation and effecaty thereof, and as I remember my mother once wisht mee to use to say my praiers in the after Noone, besids morning and Evening. the which pious exercise as I take it she said her mother used,

[10v] my father called upon me to learn a Catechisme (of Mr pagitts a minister\which was much in/ request) I had learnt a litle at the begining in mine Infancy. and I could say most of that in the servis book by hearing her that tended us, now my mother bought me one with prufites. Which I liked well to redd, as I did, in those bookes which were bought for me. espeshally at the first, but my father would have us learne that without proufts I suppose because it was easier for memory for which I thought/" it hard enough. when I should leaame it without booke; and yet at these times I delighted so much in ballets that I could say many by hart, my father being much offened with me that I could not learn that which was better: at last I having learnt it my father hard me say it. and my brother and sister every Sabbath when our turns came, in the after Noone.

. . .

I am unwilling to omit many things conserging [your] servant my mother; because that my education, was much betteder by her meanes: I growing up with her as a branch with the roote, and never departing from her while she lived

[14r] I delighted in hearing [my grandmother’s] maide read when I was in bed. she having begun the olde testiment and was now further then my selfe knew, yea and I well remember that I never delighted in any thing or booke so much as in the holy histories of the Olde and new testament in the bible:

[16v] Now my mother let me keepe some bookes of hers. whereof one was called Christian praiers and meditations. which pleased me so well that I used almost every day to writ somthing out of it . . . [among the books my grandmother used was] Christian praires and medita- which was my great Granfather Ishams. which he marked in many places that he liked. she shewing it
mee and withall comending what a kind father inlaw he was to her: since I have bine very glad to meete with these places and somthing else of his owne writing yea it doth much rejoyce mee to aplie theses places for my owne use and to tred in the selfe same stepes towards heaven wherein my forefathers have walked.

[25v] my Brother let me read King James workes which I liked well of. both for devine and morall learning and instruction.

[26r] my friends thinking that the Booke of Marters made me mallancoly though I found no hearm it did my brother lent me Sir Phillips sidnes Booke (and after Spencer) which I hard much comended by some. and others againe discomended the reading of such Bookes of love. but I found no such hurt.

[27v] also I found great comfort in Doctor Prestons sermons which my Sister read to me.

[34r] also I thought to make use of my mothers writtings wherein I might find many good instructions for the bettering of my owne life (for me thinkes I enter in /to/ her very soule which tho her body be dead yet speaketh)

[38r] of a childe I delighted to heare old stories of my Gran-fathers. and Gran-mothers. related to me by my Nurs. who was a young Servant in the house; when my father was borne and by a maide that tended us. that lived in the house with my Granfather and father above 20 yeares. These would tell us many good things of them. How they walked before thee my God:
(a cleaning-up of the countryside and filmed simulacra of the world) and more perfect (statues sitting in an aerial museum), but enjoying an excess that is penalized by a diminution of the ("melancholy") pleasure of seeing what one is separated from.

And, also as always, one has to get out: there are only lost paradises. Is the terminal the end of an illusion? There is another threshold, composed of momentary bewilderments in the airclock constituted by the train station. History begins again, feverishly, enveloping the motionless framework of the wagon: the blows of his hammer make the inspector aware of cracks in the wheels, the porter lifts the bags, the conductors move back and forth. Visored caps and uniforms restore the network of an order of work within the mass of people, while the wave of travellers/dreamers flows into the net composed of marvellously expectant or preventively justiciary faces. Angry cries. Calls. Joys. In the mobile world of the train station, the immobile machine suddenly seems monumental and almost incongruous in its mute, idol-like inertia, a sort of god undone.

Everyone goes back to work at the place he has been given, in the office or the workshop. The incarceration-vacation is over. For the beautiful abstraction of the prison are substituted the compromises, opacities and dependencies of a workplace. Hand-to-hand combat begins again with a reality that dislodges the spectator without rails or windowpanes. There comes to an end the Robinson Crusoe adventure of the travelling noble soul that could believe itself intact because it was surrounded.

Chapter IX  Spatial Stories

“Narration created humanity.”

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor”—a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.

In this respect, narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes. By means of a whole panoply of codes, ordered ways of proceeding and constraints, they regulate changes in space (or moves from one place to another) made by stories in the form of places put in linear or interlaced series: from here (Paris), one goes there (Montargis); this place (a room) includes another (a dream or a memory); etc. More than that, when they are represented in descriptions or acted out by actors (a foreigner, a city-dweller, a ghost), these places are linked together more or less tightly or easily by “modalities” that specify the kind of passage leading from the one to the other: the transition can be given an “epistemological” modality concerning knowledge (for example: “it’s not certain that this is the Place de la République”), an “alethic” one concerning existence (for example: “the land of milk and honey is an improbable end-point”), or a deontic one concerning obligation (for example: “from this point, you have to go over to that one”). . . . These are only a few notations among many others, and serve only to indicate with what subtle complexity stories, whether everyday or literary, serve us as means of mass transportation, as metaphorai.

Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics, are part of them, from the alphabet
the monument—the Law establishes itself in it—and the architect escapes to Afri-or-America:

Drum zig ihn der Senat auch ein. the senate had to intervene.

Der Architekt jedoch entfloh nach Afri-od-Ameriko
The architect, however, flew to Afri- or Americoo.

(Max Knight, trans.)

The Architect’s drive to cement up the picket fence, to fill in and build up “the space in-between,” is also his illusion, for without knowing it he is working toward the political freezing of the place and there is nothing left for him to do, when he sees his work finished, but to flee far away from the blocs of the law.

In contrast, the story privileges a “logic of ambiguity” through its accounts of interaction. It “turns” the frontier into a crossing, and the river into a bridge. It recounts inversions and displacements: the door that closes is precisely what may be opened; the river is what makes passage possible; the tree is what marks the stages of advance; the picket fence is an ensemble of interstices through which one’s glances pass.

The bridge is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy. Thus, for example, it occurs as a central and ambivalent character in the stories of the Noirmoutrins, before, during, and after the construction of a bridge between La Fosse and Fromentine in Vendée in 1972.25 It carries on a double life in innumerous memories of places and everyday legends, often summed up in proper names, hidden paradoxes, ellipses in stories, riddles to be solved: Bridgehead, Bridgenorth, Bridgetown, Bridgewater, Bridgman, Cambridge, Trowbridge, etc.

Justifiably, the bridge is the index of the diabolic in the paintings where Bosch invents his modifications of spaces.24 As a transgression of the limit, a disobedience of the law of the place, it represents a departure, an attack on a state, the ambition of a conquering power, or the flight of an exile; in any case, the “betrayal” of an order. But at the same time as it offers the possibility of a bewildering exteriority, it allows or causes the re-emergence beyond the frontiers of the alien element that was controlled in the interior, and gives objectivity (that is, expression and re-presentation) to the alterity which was hidden inside the limits, so that in recrossing the bridge and coming back within the enclosure the traveler henceforth finds there the exteriority that he had first sought by going outside and then fled by returning. Within the frontiers, the alien is already there, an exoticism or sabbath of the memory, a disquieting familiarity. It is as though delimitation itself were the bridge that opens the inside to its other.

Delinquencies?

What the map cuts up, the story cuts across. In Greek, narration is called “diegesis”; it establishes an itinerary (it “guides”) and it passes through (it “transgresses”). The space of operations it travels in is made of movements: it is topological, concerning the deformations of figures, rather than topical, defining places. It is only ambivalently that the limit circumscribes in this space. It plays a double game. It does the opposite of what it says. It hands the place over to the foreigner that it gives the impression of throwing out. Or rather, when it marks a stopping place, the latter is not stable but follows the variations of encounters between programs. Boundaries are transportable limits and transportations of limits; they are also metaphorai.

In the narrations that organize spaces, boundaries seem to play the role of the Greek xoana, statuettes whose invention is attributed to the clever Daedalus: they are crafty like Daedalus and mark out limits only by moving themselves (and the limits). These straight-line indicators put emphasis on the curves and movements of space. Their distributive work is thus completely different from that of the divisions established by poles, pickets or stable columns which, planted in the earth, cut up and compose an order of places.25 They are also transportable limits.

Today, narrative operations of boundary-setting take the place of these enigmatic describers of earlier times when they bring movement in through the very act of fixing, in the name of delimitation. Michelet already said it: when the aristocracy of the great Olympian gods collapsed at the end of Antiquity, it did not take down with it “the mass of indigenous gods, the populace of gods that still possessed the immensity of fields, forests, woods, mountains, springs, intimately associated with the life of the country. These gods lived in the hearts of oaks, in the swift, deep waters, and could not be driven out of them. . . . Where are they? In the desert, on the heath, in the forest? Yes, but also and especially in the home. They live on in the most intimate of domestic habits.”26 But they also live on in our streets and in our apartments. They were perhaps after all only the agile representatives of narrativity,
and of narrativity in its most delinquent form. The fact that they have changed their names (every power is toponymical and initiates its order of places by naming them) takes nothing away from the multiple, insidious, moving force. It survives the avatars of the great history that debaptises and rebaptises them.

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterized by the privilege of the tour over the state, then the story is delinquent. Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces, where there is no longer any alternative to disciplinary falling-into-line or illegal drifting away, that is, one form or another of prison and wandering outside the pale. Inversely, the story is a sort of delinquency in reserve, maintained, but itself displaced and consistent, in traditional societies (ancient, medieval, etc.), with an order that is firmly established but flexible enough to allow the proliferation of this challenging mobility that does not respect places, is alternately playful and threatening, and extends from the microbe-like forms of everyday narration to the carnivalesque celebrations of earlier days.27

It remains to be discovered, of course, what actual changes produce this delinquent narrativity in a society. In any event, one can already say that in matters concerning space, this delinquency begins with the inscription of the body in the order’s text. The opacity of the body in movement, gestulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what indefinitely organizes a here in relation to an abroad, a “familiarity” in relation to a “foreignness.” A spatial story is in its minimal degree a spoken language, that is, a linguistic system that distributes places insofar as it is articulated by an “enunciatory focalization,” by an act of practicing it. It is the object of “proxemics.”28 Before we return to its manifestations in the organization of memory, it will suffice here to recall that, in this focalizing enunciation, space appears once more as a practiced place.

Part IV
Uses of Language

Chapter X  The Scriptural Economy

“Only words that stride onward, passing from mouth to mouth, legends and songs, keep a people alive”
N. F. S. Grundtvig

The dedication to Grundtvig, the Danish poet and prophet whose pathways all lead toward “the living word” (det levende ord), the Grail of orality, authorizes today, as the Muses did in earlier ages, a quest for lost and ghostly voices in our “scriptural” societies. I am trying to hear these fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language, the multiple voices set aside by the triumphal conquista of the economy that has, since the beginning of the “modern age” (i.e., since the seventeenth or eighteenth century), given itself the name of writing. My subject is orality, but an orality that has been changed by three or four centuries of Western fashioning. We no longer believe, as Grundtvig (or Michelet) did, that, behind the doors of our cities, in the nearby distance of the countryside, there are vast poetic and “pagan” pastures where one can still hear songs, myths, and the spreading murmur of the folkelighed2 (a Danish word that cannot be translated: it means “what belongs to the people”). These voices can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur. They move about, like dancers, passing lightly through the field of the other.

The installation of the scriptural apparatus of modern “discipline,” a process that is inseparable from the “reproduction” made possible by the
Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst interviewing survivors as part of the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, remarks on a tension between historians and psychoanalysts involved in the project. He describes a lively debate that began after the group watched the taped testimony of a woman who was an eyewitness to the Auschwitz uprising in which prisoners set fire to the camp. The woman reported four chimneys going up in flames and exploding, but historians insisted that since only one chimney exploded, her testimony should be discredited in its entirety because she proved herself an unreliable witness. One historian suggested that her testimony should be discounted because she “ascribes importance to an attempt that, historically, made no difference” (Felman 61). The psychoanalysts responded that the woman was not testifying to the number of chimneys destroyed but to something more “radical” and more “crucial,” namely, the seemingly unimaginable occurrence of Jewish resistance at Auschwitz, that is to say, the historical truth of Jewish resistance at Auschwitz. Laub concludes that what the historians could not hear, listening for empirical facts, was the “very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination” (Felman 62).

While the historians were listening to hear confirmation of what they already knew, the psychoanalysts were listening to hear something new, something as yet beyond comprehension. While the historians were trying to recognize empirical facts in the survivors’ testimonies, the psychoanalysts were trying to acknowledge that the import of these testimonies was as yet unrecognizable. Although undeniably powerful in their impact, the empirical facts of the Holocaust are dead to that which cannot be reported by the eyewitness, the unseen in vision and the unspoken in speech, that which is beyond recognition in history, the process of witnessing itself. The process of witnessing, which relies upon address and
response—always in tension in eyewitness testimony—complicates the notion of historical truth and moves us beyond any easy dichotomy between history and psychoanalysis.

Witnessing is defined as the action of bearing witness or giving testimony, the fact of being present and observing something, from witness which is defined as to bear witness, to testify, to give evidence, to be a spectator or auditor of something, to be present as an observer, to see with one’s own eyes (OED). It is important to note that witnessing has both the juridical connotations of seeing with one’s own eyes and the religious connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen, or bearing witness. By exploiting the double meaning of witnessing, I hope to expand the type of witnessing that counts as historical evidence. For there is an important sense in which the truth of history cannot be reported by eyewitnesses. I will argue that, on the contrary, only witnessing to what cannot be seen—the process of witnessing itself—makes ethics possible.

Eyewitness Testimony and Transference

Traditionally, the eyewitness is privileged by historians because, as Joan Scott points out, they presume that “knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct, unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent objects. . . . Seeing is the origin of knowing. [And] writing is reproduction, transmission—the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience” (Scott 22–23). Scott argues that when experience is taken as an origin and evidence is based on eyewitness testimony or the vision of the individual, then questions about how that experience is produced are left aside (25). Scott claims that even progressive historians who want to make visible the experience of those traditionally made invisible merely reproduce the terms through which the visible and invisible support each other: “Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don’t understand it as constituted relationally. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences” (25). The processes of subjectivity and experience are left out of a notion of evidence which presumes that eyewitnesses have direct access to an experience that exists in itself and can be translated directly into testimony. Indeed, the necessity of interpretation or elaboration is missing from a history that privileges eyewitness testimony.

Scott and other progressive historians and theorists of history are con-
We might also note that in all of Lagache's examples, working-off is substituted for acting-out through the catalyst of interpretation. Through interpretation or diagnostic elaboration of acting-out, repetition is transformed from compulsory behavior into more open possibilities. Working-through requires interpretation born out of self-critical reflection and dialogue. For LaCapra, the critical distance necessary for diagnostic interpretation to lead to transformation is based in acknowledging transference and retrieving what has been repressed (Representing 175). Recall that according to Freud, Bibring, and Lagache, what is repressed is merely acted-out, while what is remembered is the result of working-through or working-off. In a sense, we could say that working-through is the process of acknowledging that our own subjectivity is not our own but the result of dialogic and transferential relations with others. Working-through is the process of articulating and diagnosing the ways in which we totalize or deny otherness; its aim is transforming our relations with others and otherness. To return to Scott's analysis, we could say that treating eyewitness testimony as the direct transmission of experiential truth without situating or interpreting it tends to result in acting-out prejudices and preconceptions instead of working-through them in order to transform our sense of ourselves and others.

Vigilance and Reverse Causality or The Future Anterior

Taken alone, however, working-through—and its transformative power of interpretation or elaboration—is insufficient for opening ourselves onto otherness. Vigilance is also necessary. Vigilance in self-elaboration, self-analysis, self-interpretation, is necessary for a history of otherness. That is to say, vigilance in elaborating, analyzing, and interpreting the process through which we become who we are, the process through which we become subject and other. Vigilance in testifying and witnessing, vigilance in listening for the performance beyond meaning and recognition. Vigilance in listening to the performance not just as a repetition of the
law of exclusion but as a repetition of an advent of what is impossible to perform. Vigilance in listening to the silences in which we are implicated and through which we are responsible to each other.

This is a vigilance that Emmanuel Levinas suggests is necessary to recover the saying in the said. In other words, vigilance is necessary to recognize the unrecognizable in the process of witnessing itself. To demand vigilance is to demand infinite analysis through ongoing performance, elaboration, and interpretation. Infinite analysis is the affirmation of the process of witnessing that makes subjectivity possible. The demand for infinite analysis is the ethical imperative of subjectivity conceived in witnessing beyond recognition.

_Vigilance_ is defined in terms of watchfulness, alertness of observation, wakefulness, insomnia, from _vigilant_ which is defined as wakeful and watchful, keeping steadily on the alert, attentively or closely observant (_OED_). Following Levinas's thoughts on insomnia, I would like to suggest a second, radically different, meaning for vigilance. Just as witnessing can mean both seeing and not seeing, vigilance can mean both keeping watch and responding to something beyond your own control. Whereas keeping watch or observing is something that one intends to do, the wakefulness of insomnia is not intended but rather appears as a response to something or someone beyond oneself. Insomnia is not the vigilance of a self-possessed watchman but the vigilance of a self opened onto otherness itself. Otherness keeps me awake. Vigilance as insomnia is a response to the demands of otherness. This is vigilance as response-ability.

For Levinas, the vigilance or wakefulness of insomnia is “not equivalent to watching over . . . , where already the identical, rest, sleep, is sought after . . . . Insomnia—the wakefulness in awakening—is disturbed in the core of its formal or categorical _sameness_ by the other, which tears away at whatever forms a nucleus, a substance of the same, identity, a rest, a presence, a sleep . . . . The other is in the same, and does not alienate the same but awakens it” (Levinas 156). Levinas describes this awakening as a demand from the other. In vigilance the response to this demand is neither self-destruction nor the destruction of the other. As Levinas says, “Insomnia . . . does not get inscribed in a table of categories from a determining activity exercised on the other as given by the unity of the same (and all activity is but the identification and crystallization of the same against the other, upon being affected by that other)” (1987, 156). Rather, Levinas describes the relationship between the self and other as one of response-ability in which vigilance is a response to the other. In order to avoid this language of subjects and others that leads Levinas to talk about hostages, I would say subjectivity is a responsiveness to otherness and vigilance is a movement beyond ourselves toward otherness.

In _Otherwise Than Being_, Levinas maintains that justice and responsibility are inherent in the saying which makes the said possible: “It will be possible to show that there is question of the said and being only because saying or responsibility require justice” (1974, 45). Jacques Derrida takes over the Levinasian notion of vigilance when he discusses the future of justice. As Derrida's work suggests, justice is a process that never ends, not because human limitations keep us from our goal or because time is infinite, but because justice is never within the realm of the possible. Justice is response-ability itself, the infinite need to respond which can never be fulfilled once and for all in history. History is precisely what the vigilance inherent in demands for justice must continually call into question. History is of the past while justice is of the future. History is of the _actual_ while the future is of the _possible_, or, in Derrida's terms the _impossible_. Whereas historians work in past tenses—it was, it had been—justice works in the future anterior—it will have been. It will have been in the past so that it might become in the future. The future anterior blurs the distinction between past and future and suggests that time does not just flow in one direction from past to future but also from future to past.

Following Levinas, Derrida talks about a future yet to come, always deferred, in which the impossible becomes possible. This is why in order to open up different possible futures, more particularly to open up a future in which it is possible to think the impossible, we need to rethink history. Rather than embrace the historian's past as actual, we need to rethink that past as possible. This is to say, we need to find the conditions of the possibility for justice—for the impossible to become possible in the future—in the past. This implies a reverse causality whereby the future affects the past. The image of a better future affects the past that makes it (the future) possible. In a sense, we revisit the past for the sake of a different future. And, only by reading the conditions of the possibility of that future into the past (it will have been) can we open up alternatives to the present. In order to imagine the present impossibilities becoming possible in the future, we need to imagine them as possible in the past: the future opens onto otherness only insofar as the past does too. But, this requires a vigilance, an insomnia, that refuses to sleep the dogmatic slumber of historical facts inhabiting a determinant past in a world where the past has already caused the future and the future is just like the past.

**EPILOGUE**

**Difficult Forgiveness**

Forgiveness raises a question that in its principle is distinct from the one that, beginning with the preface to this book, has motivated our entire undertaking, namely, the question of the representation of the past on the plane of memory and of history at risk of forgetting. The question now posed concerns an enigma different from that of the present representation of an absent thing bearing the seal of the anterior. It is twofold: on the one hand, it is the enigma of a fault held to paralyze the power to act of the “capable being” that we are; and it is, in reply, the enigma of the possible lifting of this existential incapacity, designated by the term “forgiveness.” This double enigma runs diagonally through that of the representation of the past, once the effects of the fault and those of forgiveness have traversed all the constitutive operations of memory and of history and have placed a distinctive mark on forgetting. But, if fault constitutes the occasion for forgiveness, it is the word forgiveness that gives its tone to this epilogue as a whole. This is the tone of an eschatology of the representation of the past. Forgiveness—if it has a sense, and if it exists—constitutes the horizon common to memory, history, and forgetting. Always in retreat, this horizon slips away from any grasp. It makes forgiving difficult: not easy but not impossible. It places a seal of incompleteness on the entire enterprise. If forgiveness is difficult to give and to receive, it is just as difficult to conceive of. The trajectory of forgiveness has its origin in the disproportion that exists between the poles of fault and forgiveness. I shall speak throughout this chapter of a difference in altitude, of a vertical disparity, between the depth of fault and the height of forgiveness. This polarity is constitutive of the equation of forgiveness: below, the avowal of fault; above, the hymn to forgiveness. Two speech acts are at work here; the first one brings to language an experience of the same order
as solitude, failure, struggle, those "givens of experience" (Jean Nabert)—those "boundary situations" (Karl Jaspers)—upon which reflective thinking is grafted. In this way, the place of moral accusation is based—imputability, that place where agents bind themselves to their action and recognize themselves as accountable. The second can be heard in the great sapiental poetry that in the same breath celebrates love and joy. There is forgiveness, this voice says. The tension between the avowal and the hymn will be carried almost to a breaking point, the impossibility of forgiveness replying to the unpardonable nature of moral evil. In this way the forgiveness equation will be formulated.

Begun in this way, the trajectory of forgiveness will then take the form of an odyssey destined to lead forgiveness step-by-step back from the regions furthest removed from selfhood (the juridical, the political, social morality) to the place of its presumed impossibility, namely, imputability. This odyssey crosses through a series of institutions established for the purpose of public accusation. These institutions themselves appear to exist in several layers depending on the degree of internalization of guilt indicated by the social rule: it is on the judicial level that the formidable question of the imprescriptibility of crimes is raised, which can be considered to be the first major test of the practical problematic of forgiveness. This course will be pursued from the plane of criminal guilt to that of political and moral guilt inherent in the status of shared citizenship. The question then raised concerns the place of forgiveness at the margins of the institutions responsible for punishment. If it is true that justice must be done, under the threat of sanctioning the impunity of the guilty, forgiveness can find refuge only in gestures incapable of being transformed into institutions. These gestures, which would constitute the incognito of forgiveness, designate the ineluctable space of consideration due to every human being, in particular to the guilty.

In the second stage of our odyssey, we take note of a remarkable relation which, for a time, places the request for forgiveness and the offering of forgiveness on a plane of equality and reciprocity, as if there existed a genuine relation of exchange between these two speech acts. Our exploration of this track is encouraged by the kinship found in numerous languages between forgiving and giving. In this regard, the correlation between the gift and the counter-gift (the gift in return) in certain archaic forms of exchange tends to reinforce the hypothesis that the request for and the offer of forgiveness are held to balance one another in a horizontal relation. It seemed to me that, before correcting it, this suggestion deserved to be pushed to its limit, to the point where even the love of one's enemies can appear as a mode of reestablishing the exchange on a nonmarket level. The problem then is to recover, at the heart of the horizontal relation of exchange, the vertical asymmetry inherent in the initial equation of forgiveness.

The realization of this unequal exchange must then be carried back to the heart of selfhood. A final effort of clarification resting once again on a horizontal correlation will therefore be proposed with the pair, forgiveness and promise. In order to be bound by a promise, the subject of an action must also be able to be released from it through forgiveness. The temporal structure of action, namely, the irreversibility and unpredictability of time, calls for the response of a twofold mastery exerted over the carrying out of any action. My thesis here is that a significant asymmetry exists between being able to forgive and being able to promise, as is attested by the impossibility of genuine political institutions of forgiveness. Thus, at the heart of selfhood and at the core of imputability, the paradox of forgiveness is laid bare, sharpened by the dialectic of repentance in the great Abrahamic tradition. What is at issue here is nothing less than the power of the spirit of forgiveness to unbind the agent from his act.

There remains the attempt to recapitulate the entire course traveled in Memory, History, Forgetting in light of the spirit of forgiveness. What is at stake is the projection of a sort of eschatology of memory and, in its wake, of history and of forgetting. Formulated in the optative mood, this eschatology is structured starting from and built on the wish for a happy and peaceful memory, something of which would be communicated in the practice of history and even in the heart of the innumerable uncertainties that preside over our relations to forgetting.

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THE FORGIVENESS EQUATION

Depth: The Fault

The fault is the existentiell presupposition of forgiveness (I am using the term "existentiell" in order to emphasize the impossibility of distinguishing here between a trait that is inseparable from the historical condition of the being that we in each case are and a personal and collective experience shaped by a historical culture whose universal character continues to be alleged).