“Raskolnikov deftly shows how gender is staged in the context of allegorical debates on death and life. Raskolnikov’s brilliance is to show how voices are split and allocated to various figures, often personified as male and female, and how these talking figures debate not only the place and meaning of the body, but questions of moral harm and the possibility of true knowledge. These debates are hardly philosophy in a recognizable sense, but they do engage philosophical questions through giving voice to various gendered characters. What emerges time and again is a self in a distanced relation to itself, often embattled, often split, for these dialoguing characters are and are not separate. What becomes clear throughout these debates is that the action involved is often capricious and arbitrary, and so the question of free will, of the efficacy of human action in the face of contingency, is posed again and again in a dramatic and dialogic genre whose action or plot lacks all signs of Aristotelian likelihood and probability. The book works in a subtle and surprising way to locate gender as a point of view, showing how personifications essential to the debate genre show the contours of gender and subjectivity as they are assumed through speech. This is a disorientingly smart and engaging text, essential to the early modern understanding of gender.”

—Judith Butler, Maxine Elliot Professor at the University of California, Berkeley

“In Body Against Soul: Gender and Sowlehele in Middle English Allegory, Masha Raskolnikov offers a theoretically bold and historically responsive understanding of the self in medieval English allegorical literature. As a historical alternative to modern psychoanalysis, sowlehele allows her to make brilliant sense of Foucault’s famous inversion of the Platonic dictum: ‘the soul is the prison of the body.’ As a literary preoccupation, sowlehele brings Raskolnikov closer than others have gotten to the strange operations of medieval prosopopeia. Persistently engaging and finely discriminating, Raskolnikov’s book-long treatment of allegory exhilaratingly shows what is so abundantly productive and useful about this hoary form."

—Carolyn Dinshaw, professor of English and social and cultural analysis, New York University

“A fresh, smart look at some medieval English allegories that focus on the split self. Full of subtle readings and challenging insights.”

—Barbara Newman, Northwestern University
In medieval allegory, Body and Soul were often pitted against one another in debate. In *Body Against Soul: Gender and Sowlehele in Middle English Allegory*, Masha Raskolnikov argues that such debates function as a mode of thinking about psychology, gender, and power in the Middle Ages. Neither theological nor medical in nature, works of *sowlehele* (“soul-heal”) described the self to itself in everyday language—moderns might call this kind of writing “self-help.” Bringing together contemporary feminist and queer theory along with medieval psychological thought, *Body Against Soul* examines *Piers Plowman*, the “Katherine Group,” and the history of psychological allegory and debate. In so doing, it rewrites the history of the Body to include its recently neglected fellow, the Soul.

The topic of this book is one that runs through all of Western history and remains of primary interest to modern theorists—how “my” body relates to “me.” In the allegorical tradition traced by this study, a male person could imagine himself as a being populated by female personifications, because Latin and Romance languages tended to gender abstract nouns as female. However, since Middle English had ceased to inflect abstract nouns as male or female, writers were free to gender abstractions like “Will” or “Reason” any way they liked. This permitted some psychological allegories to avoid the representational tension caused by placing a female soul inside a male body, instead creating surprisingly queer same-sex inner worlds. The didactic intent driving *sowlehele* is, it turns out, complicated by the erotics of the struggle to establish a hierarchy of the self’s inner powers.

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INTERVENTIONS: NEW STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL CULTURE
ETHAN KNAPP, SERIES EDITOR
Body Against Soul
GENDER AND SOWLEHELE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLEGORY

Masha Raskolnikov

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This book is dedicated, with love and admiration, to the memory of my father, Felix Raskolnikov (1930–2008), and, in loving gratitude for her inspiration and support, to my beautiful mother, Lenna.
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Writing for an imaginary “ideal reader” is one of the conditions of producing a long piece of writing. This book began in an attempt to respond, using medieval literature as an archive, to Judith Butler’s work on gender, embodiment, and, from my first semester in graduate school onward, the question of power’s psychic life, always already an allegorical situation; as I have moved forward on my own, it has been an honor to continue calling her my teacher. Anne Middleton has set for me an extraordinary and challenging example of scholarship and has given of her time, thought, and energy with an amazing generosity: she opened up the Middle Ages as a treasure trove for me, but without her guidance, I would still be lost in it. My work, both present and future, is inspired and informed by that of these advisers, both separately and in juxtaposition, in more ways than I can express.

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The writing of this book, and the dissertation that preceded it, could not have happened without the support of the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, and the Mellon Humanities Seminar; financial support from the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship; and the President’s Council of Cornell Women Affinito-Stewart Grant. I am also grateful to the supportive listeners at the New Medievalisms Conference and the Medievalists’ Writing Workshop, whose listening ears were invaluable as this book came together. An earlier version of the present study’s fifth chapter appeared in the *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 2005 as “Promising the Female, Delivering the Male: Transformations of Gender in *Piers Plowman*,” and some of my preliminary ideas about sowlehele were worked out in “Confessional Literature, Vernacular Psychology, and the History of the Self in Middle English” in *Literature Compass*.

Last and most important of all, I am so very grateful to have had the love and support of my family: my mother, Lenna Raskolnikov; my brothers, Alex and Marc; and my partner, Jennifer Tennant. Since childhood, my great-aunt Sophie Cherniavsky was my inspiration in seeking to live the life of the mind; I hope I have done honor to her memory, as well as to the memory of my father, Felix Raskolnikov, whose model I seek to follow as a scholar and a teacher.
The contending forces that constitute a self have been named, variously, flesh and spirit; ego, id, and superego; appetites and rational will; body and soul. The connection between these forces is simultaneously quotidian and utterly mysterious. Often, the speaking “I” expresses its relation to the body as if it were a subject addressing a mysterious, unpredictable object. Although it’s easy to say that we live our entire lives within or as bodies, the body itself (organs, arteries, strange liquids within) has no voice with which to express its materiality; its voice is produced by physical organs but expresses the thought of a nonmaterial being, variously called “soul,” “self,” or “subject” at different historical moments. That soul, the part that wields our voices, has depths that various kinds of soul-doctors, from psychologists to poets, must plumb, but its relationship with the material world has always been in question.

The works discussed in this book—medieval allegories that explore the relationship between the body and the soul—explore a kind of self whose very capacity for thought depends on placing these two hard-to-reconcile aspects of personhood into dialogue. In order to have such a dialogue, these works grant the Body a voice, while

granting the Soul embodiment. The resulting dialogue is anything but harmonious: the self, as described in debates between the Body and the Soul, is often divided and self-critical to the point of beratement, as when the Soul lambastes the Body for indulging its appetites—a standard trope repeated in every poem in this tradition. Medieval Body/Soul debates ask questions about the origins of, location of, and preventive measures against sin, understood as the most significant disease from which a self could suffer. These works explore as well how the workings of power produce, prohibit, and delimit the possible manifestations of personhood.

Continuation of the medieval tradition of debates between the Body and the Soul was scattered after the Middle Ages: Andrew Marvell, W. B. Yeats, and Anne Bradstreet wrote much shorter versions of the debate, for instance. But, but among these few postmedieval examples, Marcia Lee Anderson’s “Debate of the Body and the Soul: A.D. 1949” (this Introduction’s epigraph) might best capture the nature of this relationship. In the poem, Body and Soul seem to share a squalid tenement. The Soul annoys the Body by playing “celestial” music until all hours. The sounds of the Body’s “infernal plumbing” irritate the Soul and interrupt its attempts to meditate on spiritual matters. In the end, the Soul and the Body can agree only on moving out and finding their own homes apart from one another, homes described in terms that clearly show them to be, respectively, heaven and a grave. In other words, the nature of their conflict has so exhausted these two beings inhabiting the same space that this Body and this Soul can agree only on desiring death. The main difference between this modern poem and the medieval works it imitates lies precisely there. Anderson situates the two as living together, however unhappily: “Soul: I loathe this tenement. Such a façade / must have had a union architect. / It can’t have been God” (Anderson, lines 1–3), whereas medieval authors imagined Soul and Body as possessing the capacity or desire to dialogue only after death has separated them.

Medieval debates between the Body and the Soul do not really belong to any doctrine or school. Instead, they seem to rely on some notion of common sense to produce persuasive didactic approaches to the self. This book inquires into what passes for psychological common sense in these medieval works, and into the ways received ideas are systematized in them, for isn’t querying what it is that passes for common sense the very essence of contemporary cultural studies? Such allegories as the Middle English and Latin debates between Body and Soul, the Katherine Group’s “Sawles Warde,” and Piers Plowman take on philosophically and theologically abstruse topics such as the relationship between the soul and the body as if a good dose of common sense could really explain everything about materiality, discipline, and sin. Debates between the body and the soul and allegories like them dramatize the workings of the self
through personification allegory, creating dynamic narratives where rather static concepts had been. In such debates, the body is literally against the soul, meaning both that the two are pitted against one another and that they are figuratively placed side by side, as partners inexorably bound together, either by ties of love or shackles of obligation (and often, in these poems, both).

Body/Soul debates stage the intertwined philosophical, theological, and psychological topics of human nature as a personal relationship, acting out the quotidian medieval struggle of mastering one’s appetites or organizing one’s sins for purposes of thorough confession. In their own contexts, such debates offer homely, commonsensical scenarios, all the better to render natural and inevitable the relationships of power and mutual contention within the self that they describe and, by describing, create. In these debates, allegory works as a privileged mode for thinking about power and hierarchy in the Middle Ages. For instance, in the thirteenth-century “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt,” the most popular of the Middle English Body/Soul debates, Soul and Body bicker over why they occasionally missed church when they were living and united. The Soul claims that it was trapped inside the Body and carried off to go hunting by its brute force. In its defense, the Body claims just the opposite, that it could not manage the smallest sound or movement without the

2. The debates that are considered to constitute the medieval English Body/Soul debate canon consist of eleven disparate versions that appear in twenty-seven different manuscript renditions. The taxonomic imagination of Francis Lee Utley, whose chapter “Dialogues, Debates, and Catechisms,” in A. E. Hartung’s A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, Vol. 3 (Hamden, CT: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1972), 669–745, helped confine the dialogues discussed within the boundaries that have kept debate poems apart from other forms of literature, linking them with the sermon tradition to which they are certainly related, topically as well as thematically. Utley devotes an entire section to Body/Soul debate, and his organization of the dialogues in chronological order lends an air of genealogical science to the traditional approach that reified them as an ever-improving subgenre, which includes a total of thirteen dialogues (he includes both Old English and Middle English), all ascending toward “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt,” the poem I discuss in chapter 3. There are two Body/Soul debates in Anglo-Saxon—“Soul and Body I” from the Vercelli Book and “Soul and Body II” in the Exeter Book—along with some fragments from Worcester Cathedral. These, however, tend to be considered as part of the Anglo-Saxon canon and are not included in the few extant discussions of Middle English Body/Soul debates except as evidence of the topic’s ubiquity. The “Body/Soul” tradition usually identified in Middle English poetry includes the 23-line Early Middle English “The Grave”; an address by the Soul to the Body (with the Body lying mute) known by its first lines as “Nou is mon hol and soint”; the two poems considered in the following two chapters; and the fifteenth-century “A Disputation Between the Body and the Worms,” which, though not strictly a Body/Soul debate, seems to derive from that genre and is included, accordingly, in the Body/Soul debate section of John Conlee’s Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1993). In addition, there are a few fifteenth-century works, including a Body/Soul debate in the Porkington Ms. and both a prose disputation and a debate between the Body and the Worms in BL Addit. 37049. It might be remarked that only the two poems considered in chapters 2 and 3 are properly “debates” between Soul and Body, since only in these two does the Body “talk back” to the Soul.
Soul's help. The persistent question is about who has the power within the self, and, secondarily, about the nature and ethics of the relationship between its aspects. There is no resolution to this disagreement, only the inevitability of punishment, since both the Body and the Soul of the dead knight described in “Als I Lay” had refused to confess and repent in life. The sheer literalness of Body/Soul debates reduces the dualistic thinking that structured Enlightenment rationalism to the level of a sock-puppet farce, akin to a Punch and Judy show put on by a squabbling conjoined pair.

In modern times, the dualistic tendency to divide the soul (later “mind”) from the body and to establish a hierarchy wherein the latter is deceptive and only the former has access to eternal truths has been called Cartesian. In studying medieval texts, one encounters a version of this dualism centuries before Descartes, but these categories are less rigid and self-evident, perhaps even playful. Of course, dualisms of different sorts existed in the Middle Ages: for instance, one form of it appeared in such revered texts as Romans 7:14–18, “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin . . . nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh . . .” 3 In any translation, the grammar of Paul’s sentence implies that “I” am a being distinct from but implicated in “my” own body; in his Letter to the Galatians, Paul enjoins Christ’s followers to choose spirit over flesh, stating, “what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for those are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want” (Gal. 5:17–26). However important this dualism proved to be, another dualism, Gnosticism, which viewed the material world to be evil, was considered a heresy and persecuted; a number of later medieval heresies shared in this antimaterialist bias. The authors of Body/Soul debates seem to have kept the multiple dualisms in mind, blaming some evils on bodily appetites but carefully avoiding an outright condemnation of all flesh.

This dualist understanding of the self insists on the dueling nature of its components; thus, if medieval writers define the self as a soul yoked to a body, their interaction must be dramatized as conflict. As medieval thinkers imagined—and in so doing worked to discipline the possibilities for—the “self,” allegory took up the function of organizing the conflicted relationship between bodies and souls. In other words, the allegories discussed in this book envision the self as divided into component parts and examine those parts and how they come together, at times characterizing their union as a kind of violence done to both. Despite the yoking of incongruous powers that it describes by positing the self through its parts, the psychological allegory of Body/Soul debate at times claims a retrospective vision of a whole being, an integrated

self that may never have existed before its component parts were examined in this way.

In this book, I claim that at least some medieval allegories produce and express an immanent psychological theory, and that it is precisely the allegorical mode that enables a kind of flexible theorizing of the self that formal treatises cannot offer. What critics call, and teachers teach as, the genre of medieval allegory is not really a genre consistently concerned with obscure meanings, despite the fact that most writing about allegory assumes its figural or hidden meaning is what matters. The influential Latin allegories of the Middle Ages give flesh to various ideas and ideals, turning them into personified speakers, and dramatizing their actions to demonstrate a moral meaning or a theory about the world: If a personified speaker “wins” (most literally, in the pitched battle of Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, discussed in chapter 1), the idea that he or she personifies wins as well. This aspect of allegory is quite correctly understood as a function of allegory-as-personification and characterized by a trope that might or might not constitute a subsection of allegory—prosopopeia, a concept discussed in chapter 3. As examples of this kind of medieval allegory, Body/Soul debates do not point to a hidden meaning. The Body in the debate represents all bodies and an individual’s body at the same time, and also points toward sinners who may prioritize their bodily needs over the needs of the soul—honoring, in the author’s opinion, the wrong part of the self. In some of the Latin and Anglo-Norman allegorical debates discussed in this book, this moral message is dramatized through gender difference: If Soul and Body are male and female, it becomes clear which of the two is meant to be in the wrong. In others, primarily in the Middle English tradition that includes “Als I Lay,” the absence of gendered hierarchy itself becomes a marked issue, complicating any attempt to adjudicate between Soul and Body. The much better-known and more complex fourteenth-century work *Piers Plowman* brings these traditions together, making use of both ways to dramatize relationships between personifications over the course of its long narrative of self-seeking and soul-mending—what at least one scribe, in copying the Vernon manuscript, termed sowlehele.


5. For a study that focuses on precisely this aspect of allegory, reorganizing previous understandings of “allegory” as genre, see James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
Debates that literally pit body and soul against one another exist in a number of languages and are a useful index of regional and period differences in medieval allegorical writing, but they seem to have been particularly popular in England. Middle English Body/Soul debates appeared in many kinds of manuscript contexts, from the small miscellany apparently compiled by John Norwood circa 1400 for his own personal use, to the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, vast works that described themselves as devoted to sowlehel. These debates were relatively short, and therefore comparatively simple, works, but they attempted to query, in a mostly systematic and certainly thoughtful manner, how the divisions of the self functioned.

This book argues that allegorical personifications, particularly those of the soul and the body, participate in a narrative mode of doing psychology in the Middle Ages, anatomizing the self in a way that explicitly genders relationships between the self’s different aspects. While this tradition can be traced back to the warring personified virtues and vices of Prudentius’ Psychomachia, some of its richest examples come from didactic Middle English writings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I call these psychological narratives sowlehele, a Middle English term used here to describe a medieval phenomenon, which is discussed in detail in the next section. Works of sowlehele construct a notion of the self by dramatizing the relationships between its personified parts. In this book, I trace how works of this kind written in Middle English, a language


7. The first was edited by Nita Scudder Baugh as A Worcestershire Miscellany, Compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400. Edited from British Museum Ms. Add. 37, 787 (Philadelphia, 1956); the latter is one of the most studied medieval manuscripts and weighs at least fifty pounds. Yet the two have no fewer than twenty of the same pieces (poems, etc.) in common, almost all of them in Middle English. This is particularly noteworthy since BL Additional 37787, the small handbook, contains only twenty pieces in English and shares fifteen of those with the Vernon. Some of the works contained in the Vernon were edited as The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, 1892–1901), 37 and passim.

8. See the taxonomy by Francis Lee Utley, in “Dialogues, Debates, and Catechisms,” in Hartung, Manual of the Writings in Middle English. Having divided the category “Religious and Didactic Dialogues” into (I) Supernatural Figures and (II) Abstractions, he finds thirteen dialogues (he includes both Old English and Middle English) under the general rubric “Death” and the specific rubric “The Debate Between the Body and the Soul.”
that does not gender abstract nouns as male or female, were particularly free to experiment with allegorical gender in expressing tensions within the self, and therefore produced a unique kind of psychological thought.

Why does gender turn out to be central to this discussion of the psychological personifications of the self’s parts? Because it is important—perhaps surprisingly so—to the authors of these allegories, particularly when they were dramatizing hierarchies within the self. As an abstract concept, “the body” is neuter, but when it is personified, “Body” ceases to be an “it” and becomes a “he” or a “she.” Functioning as a person means being designated as one or the other. Much as in the interpellating moment when the doctor tells the newborn’s parents “it’s a girl,” when an abstraction begins to speak in a medieval allegory it is immediately sexed, speaking as a female or as a male being. The sort of narrative allegory that stages disagreements between abstractions is an excellent vehicle for enacting and reinforcing the realities of hierarchy, and assigning gender to allegorical persons becomes a virtue when it helps clarify relationships between concepts. But gendering abstract concepts female results in all kinds of problems within these allegories. From the authors’ medieval perspective, populating the innermost self of men as well as women with female beings was a problem; so, too, extending the metaphor of Body and Soul as a married couple meant straying into the vexed realm of marital sexuality. Sowlehele allegory thus comes to figure an anxiety about conceptualizing aspects of the self and placing them in relation to one another.

In “Gender and Personification in Piers Plowman,” Helen Cooper describes the situation of medieval personification allegory: Countless medieval allegories seem to have used female personifications to embody major

9. At the conclusion of Paxson’s Poetics of Personification, he goes over several answers to the simple question: Why are so many allegorical personifications gendered female? Without solving the mystery, he nevertheless brings his own study to a close by suggesting further inquiry into the matter: “Personification, understood according to such a feminist program of critical analysis, might perhaps turn out to be at the figural heart of cultural issues regarding representations of sexuality and gender” (174). Such statements as these underlie the necessity for the present study.

10. While this could be substantiated by reference to the past few decades’ work on the cultural abjection of nonconforming persons, at least some literary critics see this in looking at medieval allegory: “the very process of personification, of making into a person, invites that person to be imagined in human and therefore gender-specific terms, to be given actions and attributes appropriate to a woman, or, as most often in Langland, a man.” Helen Cooper, “Gender and Personification in Piers Plowman,” Yearbook of Langland Studies 5 (1991): 31–48, 34.

11. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in Lenin and Philosophy, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971). See also Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (New York: Routledge, 1997), for discussions of how the theory of the speech act can be read with Althusserian interpellation: Being named as something can be being made to be something, and of course performative speech acts can be understood as exceeding the limits of verbal speech.
concepts because most abstract nouns in Latin and the Romance languages are gendered as feminine. When English lost the gender structure that had characterized Anglo-Saxon, “for the first time in the history of Western culture, personification allegory was able to define the nature of the human form its concepts might take without grammatical constraint.”

This study traces some of the effects of this freedom on the psychological work done by Middle English allegory, starting with the Latin- and Romance-language context, and proceeding through a number of thirteenth-century English allegories that made use of the lack of grammatical constraint Cooper describes, before returning to Cooper’s analysis of *Piers Plowman* and a reexamination of its relationship to gender and the nature of the self.

Analyzing debates between the Body and the Soul and other allegories that participate in that tradition helps us define what was meant by “the soul” in the Middle Ages and understand it in relation (specifically, with “the body”) rather than in isolation. To account for the soul as a full participant in the body-soul pairing brings up the issue of the self’s composite nature. Such an accounting frames a relationship between parts of the person rather than isolating and, at times, idealizing the body in its inscrutability, as if it were possible to posit pure materiality as an object of study. Instead, I look at the idea of the self at a particular time and place, focusing on a specific tradition that was popular in England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in order to query how the self was being gendered, divided, and dramatized, to what ends and with what implications. Examining the medieval version of body/soul dualism promises to put the soul back where it belongs, into “body studies.”

Middle English allegory theorizing relationships between souls and bodies participates in the construction of a discourse about the workings of the person. I examine this range of discourses as a branch of medieval psychology that is a background neither to the modern self nor to contemporary disciplines of the self such as psychoanalysis and that does not fit comfortably within Latin philosophical and theological writings. Such an approach offers a return to the question of the self with a new twist, neither presenting a prehistory of that vague entity “the subject” nor describing the uncontested dominance of Latin clerical thought over all of medieval culture. Instead, it explores the varied and fertile literary and cultural development that I term *sowelhele*.

12. Cooper, 33.

13. What I call body studies was a wide-ranging field of study in the 1980s and 1990s: In medieval studies, it, and my work on the body, owes the greatest debt to the writings of Caroline Walker Bynum, particularly the essays collected in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Zone Books, 1992), and the volume *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995).
In his index to the manuscript, one of the scribes who copied out the famous Vernon manuscript names this compilation “Salus Anime or Sowlehele.” This study takes up the Middle English part of this term to account for certain uniquely medieval ways of describing and acting on the self. Sowlehele is a mode of didactic writing that makes use of allegorical narrative to educate sinners about the nature of their own sinning selves. Works of sowlehele anatomize the self—dividing it, naming its parts, and placing those parts in dialogue with one another. This term was regularly used in the Middle Ages, although not always to describe the writings considered works of sowlehele. Present-day critics often understand sowlehele in terms of a hybrid of medical and pastoral uses, as a sort of figurative medicine; for instance, in an article about devotional poetry, Susanna Fein writes that “in reading this poem of ’sowlehele,’ we swallow the medicine, and each time we reread the poem meditatively, discovering more of its embedded meaning, we increase the dosage and improve its effect.” The Vernon manuscript, which has the term sowlehele in its title, contains a range of works that have variously been understood as a collection intended for a monastic community, for novices, and for religious women. It contains many short devotional works, saints’ lives, a number of debate poems, and several long works, including the “Northern

14. The Middle English Dictionary defines the word as meaning: “(a) Spiritual well-being; the health of the soul; the good of the soul; (b) healing of the soul, salvation; ben relieved of ~, to be healed spiritually; (c) that which brings health to the soul; also, one who brings salvation; (d) pastoral care, cure of souls; (e) in oath and pious exclamation.” In the MED, the first use of the word, in its meaning of “spiritual well-being,” spelled “soyle-hele or swolehele,” is in a homily that appears in Vespasian D. XIV, published as Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century Ms. Vesp. D. XIV., ed. R. D-N. Warner, EETS 152. 1917 (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971). An alternate spelling receives its own entry: Soule-heil is defined as “(a) The good of the soul; (b) healing of the soul, salvation,” with its first use in a manuscript of an A-Text of Piers Plowman, “I haue walkid wel wide in wet & in dri3e and sou3t goode seintes for my soule hele.” Dublin, Trinity College 213 (D.4.12) 6:19. Obviously, the word bears a relation to the Latin “cura animarum,” but, like so many theological terms in vernacular translation, it takes on a life and a meaning of its own.

15. Fein describes the reading process in this way: “This poetry was not merely to be read (as we might be prone to think of reading as a simple straight-once-through process), but rather consumed in a metaphysical sense, so that it might bring “sowlehele” to the devout, penitent user. One needs to picture the meditant man or woman retreating regularly to a private spot, reading a text through many times over an extended period, quite likely committing it to memory, and pausing over its words and verbalized images to make connections, find patterns, discover signs and meanings, participate with compassion in its depiction of holy suffering, and absorb its objectified shape, that is, what it becomes when perceived whole rather than as a series of discrete signifiers” (“Herbs, Birds, and Cryptic Words for English Devotional Readers,” Essays in Medieval Studies 15 [1998]: 35–44).
Homily Cycle,” and an A-text of *Piers Plowman*, all of which lend themselves to meditative reading for the soul’s benefit.\footnote{For a detailed overview of the manuscript and its criticism, see J. Robert Duncan, “The Textual Context of the Vernon Manuscript” (PhD diss., University of Saskatchewan, 2000) and the collection of essays edited by Derek Pearsall as *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer), 1990.}

Using the term *sowlehele* has the benefit of allowing us to think in medieval terms about psychology. After all, psychology claims to study the psyche, whereas *sowlehele* claims to heal the soul, a difference between studying an object and acting on it. The medieval term focuses on the performative aspect of works like the Body/Soul debates; works of *sowlehele* enact and produce the very thing they describe. All the works discussed in this study can be put in this category, whether they were written in Latin, French, or English, but the Englishness of the term privileges, as does this study, the Middle English tradition. The implicit audience for works of *sowlehele* consists of laypeople and the clergy that minister to laypeople. This is not a type of writing confined to the university or the monastery, but neither is it a set of “folk” theories about the self. It is popular in that it is intended for the people, but not necessarily by or from them. Works of *sowlehele* cross the artificially constructed boundary between the academic discipline of psychology and the cultural studies of quotidian understandings of the self. Moderns might recognize aspects of what we now call self-help in these works, although this study discusses works that might be called “literary” in a way that few modern self-help books aspire to be.

The term *sowlehele* describes works that produce a performative, didactic, and pastoral discourse aimed at explaining the self to itself. The discourse is performative in that it enacts the very relations it describes; it is didactic in that its overt intention is a pedagogical one; and it is pastoral, particularly in its thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manifestation, in that this discourse is intimately implicated in the work of confession. These three characteristics of *sowlehele* are sometimes subverted by two factors. First, as manifested in medieval personification allegory, *sowlehele* is a gendered discourse, one haunted by the possibilities of sexuality, whether it be manifested as courtly love, marriage, or, surprisingly, depictions of same-sex bonds. Gender and sexuality are everywhere and nowhere in the poems discussed in this book. The gendering of personifications is essential for positing hierarchy and describing the love and hate of the self for itself, but it often proves problematic for the didactic project being enacted in these poems. Second, the dramatic narrative drive of these works also sometimes seems to subvert the didactic and pastoral purposes. These poems are not sermons, after all. They enact an unfolding story, whose events may at any moment distract from the message or even overturn
it, as when a reader might sympathize with the Body’s arguments for its innocence and not move forward into the ultimate condemnation the poem suggests.

Using the term sowlehele gestures toward the concerns this book has in common with the new approaches to lay devotion that have so enlivened medieval studies over the past decades, yet shows how it approaches a somewhat different object of study: the relationship of the self to itself in the Middle Ages. Works of sowlehele proliferated particularly in the wake of the decision to require annual confession of all practicing Christians. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 instituted a new requirement, generally known by its incipit as Omnis utriusque sexus. Each and every baptized Christian who hoped for heaven had to confess his or her sins at least once a year, a practice that had previously been reserved for the privileged few and for particularly spectacular sinners. Confession as a practice antedated this historical moment, but the decision in 1215 anchored confession in time (as part of the annual cycle of the church year) and diffused it across all ranks. Numerous new texts were needed to aid in the organization and thinking of confession, texts written for priests and for literate laypersons in a number of modes. Laymen and women, specifically, needed guidance for the very important process of preparation for

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17. See Jim Rhodes, Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), for a succinct summary of developments in the relationship lay populations and poets had to the significant theological debates of the fourteenth century, in the context of a study that never reduces poetry to a mere symptom of culture.

18. “All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own (parish) priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist, unless perchance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be cut off from the Church (excommunicated) during life and deprived of Christian burial in death. Wherefore, let this salutary decree be published frequently in the churches, that no one may find in the plea of ignorance a shadow of excuse. But if anyone for a good reason should wish to confess his sins to another priest, let him first seek and obtain permission from his own (parish) priest, since otherwise he (the other priest) cannot loose or bind him. Let the priest be discreet and cautious that he may pour wine and oil into the wounds of the one injured after the manner of a skilful physician, carefully inquiring into the circumstances of the sinner and the sin, from the nature of which he may understand what kind of advice to give and what remedy to apply, making use of different experiments to heal the sick one. But let him exercise the greatest precaution that he does not in any degree by word, sign, or any other manner make known the sinner, but should he need more prudent counsel, let him seek it cautiously without any mention of the person. He who dares to reveal a sin confided to him in the tribunal of penance, we decree that he be not only deposed from the sacerdotal office but also relegated to a monastery of strict observance to do penance for the remainder of his life” (H. Schroeder, Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937], 236–96; also in The Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215. (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html).
confession: the organization of a coherent narrative about a life characterized by sin. Such texts included popular manuals and guides to sin and the self; they also included works of literature concerned with the nature of the self and how it became entangled in the web of sin in the first place. These provided an alternative psychological discourse to layfolk as well as to those priests who labored far from the dizzying heights of medieval theology.

Everyday people needed tools and models to help frame their own confessions and to help them think narratively about their own selves. Works of sowlehele were distinct in their practical transformation of academic philosophical, theological, and medical theories into narratives, in their emphasis on applicability, and, because they relied on personification allegory to understand the self, their dynamic use of character to advance plot. Jerry Root has argued that “confessional practice made widely available a technical language and an institutional apparatus dedicated to individual salvation. Together the technical language of confession and its institutional backdrop constituted a new cultural construction of the self.” My contribution concentrates on the specifics of this process as they are expressed in a particular poetic mode, that of allegories that stage debates between aspects of the self—a mode suited to discussing the embodied self and also to using the rhetorical and philosophical resources that are becoming available in Middle English.

As this book will argue, some specific aspects of English grammar—particularly its gender neutrality—make a real difference to the kind of allegorical disputation being written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some English authors took advantage of the freedom afforded by not having most abstract nouns already gendered female, as they are in Latin and in most European vernaculars, to transform the tradition of populating the self with female allegorical figures. This made English-language allegories about the self distinctive and interesting, but that specificity does not render the kind of psychology being discussed in this book an exclusively English psychology. Just as in many medieval manuscripts Latin-language, French, Anglo-French, and Middle English texts were not rigidly segregated, there is no clear and distinct line one can draw to claim that only texts not written in Latin are capable of doing a certain sort of work.

What this book describes is a new twist on something that literary critics since (at least) Charles Muscatine’s 1953 essay “The Emergence of Psychological Allegory in Old French Romance” have termed psychological allegory. Muscatine’s article makes its claim about the psychological allegory of the

Roman de la Rose. Closer to the Middle English corpus discussed in most of this study, Robert Ackerman’s 1962 examination of “Als I Lay,” the most popular Body/Soul debate, makes repeated use of the term psychological realism, which may derive from Muscatine’s examination of psychology in allegory. More recently, Elizabeth Robertson’s 1990 study of the Katherine Group also relies on the concept of psychological realism, specifically defined by Robertson as a quality of “texts [that] detail the circumstances of the everyday life of a specific audience, anchoresses, in order to explore the psychological conflicts inherent in that life.”21 There are others, of course, but these critics use such terms about works that will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this book. Like the literal dualism personified in the Body/Soul debates it examines, my study literalizes a conventional claim: that some medieval allegories are psychologically realistic. By literalizing it, I permit it to become the object of detailed examination. Body/Soul debates make literal the combination of contentiousness and connection implied by the conventions of how body/soul dualism is usually discussed, by staging a debate between the two. Considering these debates as works of sowlehele does not force them to exemplify a systematic philosophical or psychological approach, but permits them to function, performatively, as a significant way to theorize the self—an alternative to Aristotle, Galen, and theological debates and treatises about the soul.

In taking the psychology of allegory seriously, my study is vastly indebted to scholars such as Muscatine, Ackerman, Angus Fletcher, C. S. Lewis, and Michel Zink, as well as to Robertson and many others. At the same time, it attempts to refocus the “allegory as psychology” question on the specifics of confessional culture’s approach to body, soul, and will. Additionally, this study strives to avoid treating the kind of psychology done by the allegories under discussion as realistic representations of how medieval persons actually thought, focusing instead on the ways in which psychological allegory prescribes and performs norms rather than describes persons.

A tension between contending forces such as soul against body is something that allegorical disputation captures particularly well. Such tension is also a central feature of almost any psychology, from Aristotelian faculties to Freudian ego, id, and superego.22 Angus Fletcher’s introduction to his influ-


22. Barbara Newman, as part of a discussion of “allegorical goddesses” that is crucial to this book’s first chapter, writes that “it is a rare psychological theory that can dispense with personification figures. Psychologists of the most diverse schools, from Prudentius onward, have attempted to clarify inner conflicts by representing them as struggles for dominance among competing forces within the psyche.” Newman, God and the Goddesses (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 43.
ential study *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*—in which he imagines allegorical personifications as something akin to obsessive-compulsives compelled to enact certain traits—claims that “we live in an age of psychological and psychoanalytic speculation, and we need to return periodically to earlier stages of that speculation, where perhaps we can find the starting point for both our more profitable and our more dubious explorings.”\(^{23}\) This project takes up Fletcher’s challenge and extends it to a consideration of the psychology of gender in the allegorical representation of soul/body dualism.\(^ {24}\) Without making strong claims about how medieval persons actually lived their lives and thought about their selves, I attempt to trace how they were instructed to think about themselves, asking after the psychological norms and categories available to those ultimately unknowable medieval persons.

The representations of the self available to medieval thinkers were largely based on models developed in ancient Greece and, as such, could not account for some of the problems posed by medieval Christianity. The other major source for psychological thinking was, of course, the Bible. The Pauline letters in particular had a vast and complex influence (of course, these were also inflected by Paul’s wide education in Platonic and neo-Platonic thought), but were never crystal clear about the nature of the self, generally using personal relations as metaphor for relationships between self and God or Christ and Church. Among the influential pagan psychologies, the most important is Aristotelian faculty psychology. This psychology names aspects of the self in terms of their activities: the term *faculty* is based on the Latin *facere*, “to do.” Although the aspects of the self that are described vary with different commentators and with later medieval revisions, what the different faculties generally “do” is cause the body to remain alive (the “vegetative” faculty), to desire and to do good (the “appetitive” faculty), to perceive external stimuli (the faculty of sense perception), or to move the body (the “locomotive” faculty). This division of the parts of the self into forces capable of action undergirds much of how we comprehend medieval psychology.


24. Psychoanalytic theory examines depictions of the mind, not that religious remnant, “the soul,” even if the Greek word *psyche* remains the discipline’s name. It’s possible to read the Body/Soul debate as a straightforward precursor to Freud. The expression of hysterical symptoms like psychosomatic illness could be understood as the scientific equivalents of the Body’s speech in the debates, and the Soul’s tutelary position could be understood as somehow similar to the complex, transferentially implicated position of the therapist vis-à-vis the patient. Instead, I argue that similarly schematic, similarly therapeutic, but actually quite different systems existed in the Middle Ages for organizing and helping the soul, the body, the self in the journey through life. This book asks after those systems, to the extent possible from the contemporary vantage point, in their own terms rather than in ours, a project already underway when Angus Fletcher posited the similarity between allegory and psychoanalysis in 1964.
Aristotle wrote about the relationship of the body and the soul in complex and contradictory ways. In *The Politics*, he famously wrote that women should be ruled by men: “it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient . . . again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind . . . the one rules, and the other is ruled. . . . The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.”\(^{25}\) However, his most important work on body and soul, the *De Anima* (a work on which many medieval philosophers wrote commentaries, and quoted in their own arguments about the soul) made a complex claim: “that, therefore, the soul or certain parts of it, if it is divisible, cannot be separated from the body is quite clear. . . . Not that anything prevents at any rate some parts from being separable. . . . [I]t is not clear whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the way that the sailor is of the ship.”\(^{26}\) In other words, according to Aristotle, body and soul are *not* separable—except when they are. We might want to look at the results of these words, since the statements themselves are so confusing. Aristotelian theory, as understood in the Middle Ages, certainly seemed to see the body as a valid source of knowledge, but perhaps one that could be separated at some moments from the soul—an idea supported by Paul’s statements about the flesh, in the aforementioned passages in his letters to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians.

Perhaps it was precisely the lack of clarity in Aristotle’s statement, and even in his sailor/ship analogy (which appears in the twelfth-century Latin Body/Soul debate discussed in chapter 1, the “Visio Philiberti,” and is also discussed in chapter 2 as part of a more extensive engagement with medieval philosophy), that made Body/Soul debate poems so important in the Middle Ages. After all, faculty psychology as imagined by Aristotle and reimagined by his medieval followers subdivides the soul or mind into faculties—even including some that pertain to bodily appetites—but never explains which part of the self is immortal. As a consequence, Aristotelian psychology fails to address the most urgent questions that Christians might want to pose in confession, questions that medieval persons, especially laypeople, might need answers to in order to construct a workable psychology: an understanding of the self that would be in line with the rest of Christian doctrine.

A second major theory at work in the Middle Ages was the medical model of the self, derived from Galen and his many academic followers or would-be followers. This is a largely physical model, with roots in the Stoic philosophical

writings that claimed the soul was an imperceptible substance extant in every member of the body—that the soul was, in fact, a “mixing” of the body’s humors. Humoral theory is an ancient Greek medical view that described the body as a balance of four substances (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile). When these substances were out of balance, the body was ill. Medieval and early Renaissance medicine explained many problems and described the human personality in terms of the humors (melancholy was caused by an excess of black bile, and so on), although it is unclear how these bodily fluids could combine to form, or even strongly influence, the putatively immortal soul, sent from Heaven and only briefly inhabiting the body.

Humoral theory’s skepticism about the metaphysical, though useful in some aspects of medieval medicine, did not respond to the fundamentally theological questions posed by seeing “the flesh” as one of the three great temptations, along with “the world” and “the devil.” In other words, it is also too Greek for medieval Christianity. Some commentators found that it violated Aristotle’s logic as well; because two (material) bodies could not occupy the same space at the same time, a material soul filling up a material body, though elegant and relatively practical, was an unsound proposition. In a system fundamentally concerned with the search for salvation and the attempt to overcome sin, neither Aristotle nor Galen could offer a full account of the self’s complex workings that would be satisfactory at the level of priest and parishioner. Sowlehele could not be accomplished by balancing the body’s humors, but only by working on the memory in confession and the soul’s control over the body in the renunciation of sin. Although these Greek thinkers were mediated for Christian culture by Cicero and then Augustine—and thence into the enormous trail of adaptations of his writings for all manner of purposes in Christian culture—they were still not suitable at the level of the everyday examination of one’s own motives and actions necessary for the smooth functioning of a confessional culture.

A third major tradition of medieval psychology relates directly to the Aristotelian model, but with a Christian twist. This is Augustinian Trinitarianism, 27. See, for instance, “The Soul’s Dependence on the Body,” in Galen, Selected Works, ed. and trans. P. N. Singer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

28. This account is largely derived from E. Ruth Harvey’s The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (London: The Warburg Institute, 1975). According to Harvey, the history of medical descriptions of the soul (from the Stoics to Galen and on to Renaissance physicians) imagined it as a material element, composed of water or fire or blood. “However indispensable for the doctor, the material spirit was less satisfactory to the philosopher as a solution to the problem of the soul. It was argued that the soul must be in every part of the body imparting movement, life, and sensation to it; a material soul would then have to occupy exactly the same space as the body, which is impossible, for two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time” (31). Instead of a Stoic view of the soul, medieval theologians tended to adopt a post-Platonic one, which is strongly dualistic—the soul uses the body as a sort of “mortal dress” (32).
which divides the unified Trinity of God into memory, will, and understanding, and finds in the human mind a microcosm of this same unified trinity of capabilities. In works such as On the Trinity, Augustine produces a psychology out of his neo-Platonic theology, showing how, in order to reach God, the soul must learn about itself, for it is made in God’s image. In some of his other writings, Augustine stages a highly personal accounting by the self of the circumstances and forces that have driven it to sin and, out of sin, toward redemption. Like sowlelehele psychology, Augustinian Trinitarianism is a performative discourse that is at least sometimes (as in his Confessions and Soliloquies) produced in the form of a narrative. In essence, works of sowlelehele democratize for general use that which Augustine performs as part of an exclusive, personal, and privileged relationship with God. This difference, however, is one that matters: The personal accounting of the Confessions proves unique in the history of medieval psychology, and not one that can be generalized to other writers. Trinitarianism proves too esoteric to be applicable to the pattern of sin and redemption in writings of pastoral care and lay instruction such as those that proliferated after the Fourth Lateran Council.29

Augustine and the long tradition following him adapted his teachings on Trinitarian faculty psychology to practical instances, but the closer to the needs of vernacular culture such traditions came, the less they retained their specific connections between human beings and the pattern of the divine Trinity.30 The confessional tradition assumes that proper teaching precedes proper actions, and tends to proceed directly toward the particular and distinctive species of sins requiring understanding. That tradition, however, rarely suggests as directly as Augustine does that the individual penitent—especially the individual lay penitent—carries a model of the divine with her every thought, memory, and will.

29. See, for contrast, two works written before Lateran IV, Guibert of Nogent’s Monodiae, a very odd imitation of Augustine that culminates in the history of the writer’s abbey, and Abelard’s Historia Calamitatum, which, for all its charm, delves none too deeply into the sources of sin.

30. Andrew Galloway, in his article “Intellectual Pregnancy, Metaphysical Femininity, and the Social Doctrine of the Trinity in Piers Plowman,” The Yearbook of Langland Studies 12 (1998): 117–52, makes a similar point; see 125. He also offers three “complexly overlapping spheres or cultural horizons of reception and dissemination of Augustine’s Trinitarian ideas” (128), including that of academic commentators, Latin sermons on Trinity Sunday, and Middle English or Anglo-Norman homiletic materials and sermons. Particularly the third (but also the second) of these would have contributed to the body of texts that might be organized under the rubric of “sowlelehele.” Interestingly, Galloway notes that the vernacular texts “usually treat the Trinity more cautiously and briefly, and (unsurprisingly) do not reproduce Augustine’s most subtle psychological analogies” (131); indeed, Piers Plowman avoids making use of Trinitarianism for psychological purposes, because its author is more interested in examining “immediate social experience as well as social endeavor” (134). I cite this in support of my argument that, although Trinitarian psychology was clearly important in the Middle Ages, it did not necessarily reach the lay and the less-educated clerical audiences.
Each of these models—the Aristotelian, the Galenic, and the Augustinian—can account for the workings of the mind and certainly contain a place for emotion, or, to use the psychological term that distinguishes it from thought or action, affect. However, each of these models is very technical and complex, and the very proliferation of medieval works that did not make use of them may prove that they were ultimately more useful for theologians writing in Latin than for priests seeking to understand the souls of those they confessed. Partly in the course of transmitting such traditions to pastoral uses, and without always presenting rigid lines for its emergence, the Middle Ages could and did produce an alternative in works of sowlehele. Such works, rather than viewing all affect under the general rubric of the appetites, deal with the divisions within the self through a dramatic encounter between them. Works of sowlehele form an alternative, confession-oriented psychological mode to the more formal, Aristotelian-or-Augustinian mode, primarily written in Latin.

What makes the texts discussed in this book works of sowlehele, then, is that they served as part of the communication between priest and layperson—as part of a layperson’s individual and private devotion, or a priest’s search for models that might help communicate to parishioners—rather than as a discourse among members of the clerical class.31 Body/Soul debates were being written for centuries before Lateran IV, but their popularity soared in the thirteenth century. My premise is that in the aftermath of Lateran IV, medieval Christians were faced with the formidable organizational task of making coherent narratives out of their lives.

This task was not immediately clear to all; it was almost fifty years later that the real proliferation of manuals intended to be helpful in the creation of these narratives began, and then there was no stopping them. The requirement to confess was a requirement on the memory, which—as Mary Carruthers’s and Frances Yates’s magisterial studies demonstrated some time ago—often relies on the vividness of imagery for its functioning.32 The self and its sins had to be reified and organized into memorable categories. The categories proliferating out of the tradition of the French Somme des Vices et des Vertus (ca. 1279) by the Dominican friar Lorens d’Orléans, such as the Middle English Ayenbite of Inwit (ca. 1340) and the Book of Vices and Virtues (ca. 1375), may, at first,

31. Any list of such texts would have to include the Pricke of Conscience, Handlyng Synne, and the Ayenbite of Inwit, popular handbooks of sin that include stories as well as categories and subcategories of sinning; it would also have to include more explicitly literary works that stage the new interest in and understanding of the self, such as the debates between the Body and the Soul, the writings of the Katherine Group, and Piers Plowman.
seem Borgesian in their complexity. Medieval authors concerned with confession produced multiple, intersecting psychological systems. These systems were at once descriptive and normative. They described how a particular sin might be functioning in human life and, at the same time, served a delimiting, normative function organizing the range of sins considered possible, leaving some sins radically outside and beyond the pale.

In treating the psychological theories posited in these medieval works as deserving of study in their own right, this book aims to find an alternative to the fascinating but necessarily limited rubric of faculty psychology, which has long been used to explain virtually all medieval psychological thought. Faculty psychology and, to a degree, humoral theory were certainly important discourses for the Middle Ages, but they were not the only discourses, and they do not really explain the underlying thought that structures popular works like debates between the Body and the Soul. This book is not a psychoanalytic study of medieval psychology, although several of the models I discuss invite comparisons with Freud's more topographical models, such as the ego/id/superego. Neither does this study argue that the medieval works I discuss influenced later psychological models. Rather than viewing Body/Soul debates in the place of ancestors in some genealogical schema that delineates the history of psychology, I am ultimately concerned with literary analysis, specifically with analyzing the ways in which the dynamic narrative drive and characterizations in staged encounters between aspects of the self bring new dimensions to the work of *sowlehele*, and examining medieval popular culture, with its blend of piety and playfulness.

Despite the attention I pay to the historical context of medieval Christianity and to the contribution that reading medieval allegories as works of *sowlehele* makes to its history, these allegories are works of literature, not just historical


34. The obvious example here is the much-discussed prohibition on discussing even the possibility of homosexual desire/practice with parishioners in texts such as John Mirk’s *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock. EETS (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trubner, 1868), but it is difficult to say what other life possibilities were foreclosed by remaining pointedly unnamed.
documents. Their narrative arcs—meaning that the relationships they depict take place over a period of time (however brief) and have an opportunity to develop—prevent these works from functioning as static didactic phenomena. Works of *sowlehele* are not just a simplification of faculty psychology, in part because my term describes a process of self-making and self-healing as much as a category of medieval writings. *Sowlehele* is allegorical writing about the self that lends itself to literary interpretation rather than a psychological, philosophical, and/or theological one because its analysis of the self necessarily relies on figural language, narrative temporality, and conventionally gendered language for discussing embodiment.

## Homologies

**WHAT GENDER DOES TO ALLEGORY, AND ALLEGORY TO GENDER**

Examining the relationship between the body and the soul necessitates an awareness of the kind of metaphors that structured their relationship as a conflict. Allegories portraying the self’s internal hierarchies often used the rule of men over women to depict the relationship of soul and body. This is an Aristotelian homology, but it is also a conceit reiterated by Augustine, Jerome, and many others: Jerome wrote, famously, that “as long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul.” To understand spirit as male and flesh as female is already to enter the realm of allegory—after all, this move demands that one perceive material signifiers as pointing to a meaning beyond themselves.

But who’s signifying whom? In statements such as Jerome’s, “woman” seems to be functioning as a metaphor for bodiliness, and “body” seems to


36. The full quotation is a little more forgiving, but it is the first section that gets cited again and again: “as long as a woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman, and will be called man.” St. Jerome, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesius III 5*, in PL 26: 567a, cited in Vern Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1976), 365. See also Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 18. In Corinthians 11.3, St. Paul wrote that “Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife.” See also Ephesians 5.22: “the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.”
have become the thing being signified, the thing that femininity attempts to explain. Caroline Walker Bynum writes that “male and female were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy and order/disorder. In the devotional writing of the later Middle Ages, they were even contrasted in the image of God—Father or Bridegroom—and soul (anima)—child or bride.”

This mode of paired thinking is so ancient that it is virtually impossible to pinpoint its origins.

The medieval homology stating that body is to soul as woman is to man, and the demand for some conventional source for the eternal but loving conflict between both pairs, led medieval thinkers to an analogy: Not only are Soul and Body just like a man and a woman, they are also a husband and a wife. Such an analogy both posits a split (the Body loves its other) and mends that fissure in the same gesture. These things are united, albeit in a very medieval way, through and because of a hierarchal relationship. The homology also understands the necessity to discipline the speaking Body through the necessity of disciplining the chatty woman, and, perhaps, vice versa. The most famous of the analogies of body to wife is that of St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians (5:28–30): “Husband should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church because we are members of his body.” These words proved very influential. In City of God, Augustine argues that, since Adam and Eve were originally created to live together in a harmonious order of authority and obedience, a husband was therefore “meant to rule over his wife as the spirit rules the flesh.”

It is not a great leap from this sort of analogy to allegories that stage the domestic squabbles between Body and Soul as the relationship of a

37. Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption, 151. However, she then goes on to trace the great increase in “positive female figures” between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, which she attributes to the desire, by male writers of devotional texts, to humble themselves, becoming subservient to Christ by becoming female: “the male writer who saw his soul as a bride of God or his religious role as womanly submission and humility was conscious of using an image of reversal. He sought reversal because reversal and renunciation were at the heart of a religion whose dominant symbol is the cross—life achieved through death” (171).

married couple, and it is not surprising that allegory, a mode that gives voice and flesh to abstractions, can be used to capture the complicated interactions between such a pair.

Although Christianity has a reputation for body/soul dualism and for denigrating the body, which feminist critics often take up in deploiring dualism, in fact the promise of bodily resurrection and faith in Christ’s incarnation meant that the body was more respectable in Christianity than in other Mediterranean religions.\(^{39}\) Philosophies declared heretical—like those of the Cathars, Gnostics, Docetists, Eutycians, and, earlier, the Manicheans (among others)—had argued that Christ was never enfleshed, but the Church Fathers asserted the human bodiliness of Christ, even as they decried venial sin, the sin of the flesh. The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, declared that Christ was both fully human and fully divine.

Despite a high-level theology that knew better, the relationship that was used to explain the workings of the self in early works of *sowlehele* remained hierarchical dualism: good soul, uncomprehendingly trapped for a time in bad body. More often than not, the model of the body as debased also understood the body as feminine. Sometimes, however, perhaps because of the tendency of Latin allegory to present abstractions as “allegorical goddesses,” it was the Soul that was female, lifted to the status of unattainable courtly lady vis-à-vis the Body as her rough and unworthy courtier. However, and this is a crucial point for understanding the poetry discussed in this book, designating the Body as purely “bad” remained theologically problematic. Avoiding the various antiembodiment heresies necessitated that depictions of the relationship between souls and bodies included at least a gesture toward love and cooperation between the two, or something other than all-out war within the self, although the inferiority of the body and flesh were largely beyond questioning. In some early poems (like the Old English homilies), working through the tensions between making sure that the Body was lower on the hierarchy and yet maintaining that Body and Soul love one another was not a priority, but in the works of later medieval *sowlehele* discussed in this book, these issues seem to have fired the imaginations of the poems’ various authors, and became the basis for the kinds of elaborations and rewritings of a basic “Soul versus Body” model that took place.

To gender the soul female implicates Body/Soul debates in the tendency to produce idealized female figures as interlocutors for male philosophers. Such female figures get to transcend their gender rather than be debased by it. For later authors such as Jean de Meun, the gender of the female personifications

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of such abstract concepts as Reason permits some ironic play with the limits of their characters’ female authority. Surprisingly, the strong heteronormative and sexist bias in the metaphors that figure the relationship of body and soul comes to be troubled and undone in the course of the centuries, specifically in the English language.

One of the reasons for this surprising turn is specific to the English language: the freedom from grammatical constraint referred to in Helen Cooper’s article, mentioned earlier. In Latin writings, the selection of an allegory’s sex or gender may seem arbitrary in the way that grammar is arbitrary—a given noun is, after all, feminine, masculine, or neuter in Latin. Our authors inevitably know this, and abstractions tend to be grammatically female, so they may as well be described as towering female figures. English, however, does not arbitrarily assign the male or the female gender to inanimate nouns like “chair” or to abstractions like “philosophy.” Chairs or churches are neuter, and only become male or female when they begin to function as persons, to speak; thus, no grammatical necessity dictates that the English church be represented as female, since the noun had not implied this representation.

Curiously, Anglo-Saxon possessed a full set of noun genders, which all but disappeared in Middle English, although some lingering echoes of this grammar remained. Middle English thus finds itself free of the grammatical constraints that shape the conventions of personification allegory in other vernaculars. A number of medieval allegories—from the Latin works discussed in chapter 1 to Piers Plowman, discussed in chapter 5—use grammar as a metaphor, often for the problems associated with gender and sexuality. It is clear from the use of grammar as metaphor in Piers Plowman that, at least for the poet we call Langland, grammar is capable of signifying at the level of ontology, and grammatical gender is far from arbitrary. At one point, one of the characters declares that the study of grammar is “the grounde of al,” meaning by this, it seems, the ground of all education, and, through education, of discourse itself. Grammar is capable of both describing and establishing hierarchies between speakers and is thus a way of doing philosophy through allegory, or of writing allegory philosophically.

Some debates written in English replaced the hierarchies created by the relationship between husband and wife in Latin and Romance allegories of

40. Charles Jones, in Grammatical Gender in English: 950–1250 (London: C. Helm/Methuen, 1988), describes the persistence of noun gender’s remnants in English, changing the story from one of loss to one of diminution. In his Introduction, he claims that “any comment available in standard handbooks on the history of English led the student to the assumption that grammatical gender was catastrophically and suddenly ‘lost’ from the language’s rule system sometime ‘around’ the eleventh century” and argues, instead, that what he calls “echoes” of the gender classification of nouns endure for about 300 years.

Body and Soul with a multiplicity of other, frequently same-sex, models for hierarchy. Pointedly avoiding personifying either body or soul as female, they instead explored various forms of same-sex affiliation (teacher-student, foster brothers, mirror images) between male personifications in depicting the relationship of the self to itself. Such homosocial relationships model a same-sex power struggle within the self, which might be understood as both a depiction of certain misogynist norms (eliminating the female from the self) and an opening for contemporary critics to see the possibility for a queer reading. “Queerness” helps to describe, within the terms of this argument, the surprising turn away from loving and contentious differently gendered relationships to loving and contentious same-sex relationships within the self. The troubling of the heterosexual bonds between allegorical speakers, however, does not come out of any happy impulse on its authors’ parts to liberate the stodgily normative Body-Soul relation of the Latin- and Romance-language tradition. Liberation from those languages is not the goal, although many critics (Muscatine, Ackerman) have implied that it is. Ridding the self of female personifications, in Middle English writings, works in the service of medieval misogyny. After all, one may assume (and, indeed, certain textual details discussed in future chapters demonstrate) that it was troubling for medieval authors to imagine the self as filled or framed by female persons or personifications, even ones subordinate to male rule. The necessity of overcoming this weakness seems to have trumped even the centuries-old conventions of personification allegory inherited from late antiquity.

**Soul/Body Dualism from Foucault to Feminism**

This study aims above all for an intervention in medieval studies; however, examining the prehistory of bodies and souls in relation to one another is a project that engages the energies of a variety of scholars in myriad disciplines, and complicating and deepening that broader field of inquiry is part of my aim here as well. Some of the credit or blame for rendering “the body” such a rich topic for scholars goes to Michel Foucault, whose *Discipline and Punish* and subsequent writings are crucial to the contemporary aspect of this project.

In his lifetime, Foucault never actually completed his project on the Middle Ages, and even if he had, the project had shown every sign of focusing on an earlier period than the one this study examines. However, his work has proven to be a continuing provocation and encouragement to medievalists and others interested in working out the genealogy of the modern self, which, for him, was always implicated in techniques for disciplining the body. This study of
allegory and medieval poetry stands at the intersection of two related projects of Foucault—the project that he helped inaugurate of historicizing the body, and his later interest in the history of confession—two interests that Foucault himself never quite brought together. To think of body and soul intertwined, after Foucault, is to think of both as effects of the workings of power, acting to create the self as its effect. In fact, chapter 3 of this study examines Foucault’s importance in theorizing sowlehele at some length. However, Foucault’s work elided the specifically gendered dimensions of how power works to organize bodies and souls.

Femininity’s association with embodiment goes back at least as far as Plato’s *Timaeus* (the single Platonic dialogue that seems to have been available and popular throughout the Middle Ages), where matter is created in a female womb or “matrix.” Feminist critics have had a great deal to say about body/soul dualism as such, and particularly about what it has meant for women to be reduced to the synecdoche of the womb, to being merely and eternally on the side of “the body.” At first, feminist scholars writing in the 1970s and 1980s turned the ancient association of woman with flesh into a project of valorizing the body and women, insisting that attention be paid to these two previously silent and denigrated entities. This was a claim that posited the

42. The tradition of the *Timaeus* is rendered more complex and interesting in its rewritings within medieval allegory. Plato’s cosmogeny is the only one of his dialogues to be disseminated in the Middle Ages, and it is the part of Plato that is meant when medievalists speak of medieval “neo-Platonism”; this can be unfortunate, since the *Timaeus* is an odd duck in the Platonic corpus and has very little to do with Plato’s other, more interesting dialogues. However, it also happens to be the one that feminists such as Irigaray and Butler (and also thinkers such as Derrida) feel a particular need to discuss as one of the big justifications for sexism that resounded through the ages. An interesting article about the equation of woman with body in Plato, which, however, draws on Platonic dialogues that would not have been available for medieval thinkers to consult, is Elizabeth Spelman’s “Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views” in *Feminist Studies* 8:1 (1982): 109–31. The *Timaeus* is essentially a “flat” allegory, one with very little temporal movement—it isn’t a story but a description, an alternative cosmogeny. Arguably, the allegories that were written under its explicit influence (Bernardus’ *Cosmographia* is an obvious example) add to this allegory the element of action, narrative—and thereby, temporality. With Bernardus, for instance, female characters are no longer just lying there being wombs for matter; they are acting, even if in odd ways.

43. In the “Introduction” to *Feminism and the Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), which contains many gestures of summarizing the discipline, Londa Schiebinger writes, “In the 1970s, feminists reinserted the body into history, bringing to light issues that had previously been considered too vulgar, trivial, or risqué to merit serious scholarly attention. . . . The mind/body dualism that long underpinned Western culture made males the guardians of culture and the things of the mind, while it associated females with the frailties and contingencies of the mortal body. Females, subject to unruly humours, unpredictable hormones, and other forces, have been identified so closely with nature that nature itself is often called ‘Mother Nature’” (1). Later, she writes, “In efforts to check the increasingly popular biological determinism, feminists in the 1960s introduced the term ‘gender’, distinguishing culturally specific forms of masculinity and femininity from biological ‘sex’, construed as anatomy, physiology, and
body as the “real” and language as a mediating (productive, disciplinary) force, and created a distinction between “sex” (the putatively unalterable material embodiment as male or female) and “gender” (a linguistically mediated social construction, open to adjustment by cultural change).

This version of feminist theory about the body came to be reevaluated: The firm association of “woman” with “body” (and the understanding of “sex” as a true material ground for existence) demanded a language of authenticity and immediacy that trapped women into particular modes of life and understandings of themselves. In the 1990s, feminist critics such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz argued that the body is neither the passive object of cultural inscription nor the unmanageable and unknowable representative of prediscursive reality. The constructivist position in feminist theory maintains that the sex/gender distinction cannot hold because all that we can know about “sex” comes to us mediated through language and culture; the body and its materiality may or may not be “real,” but the very question we ask about that reality comes courtesy of a discourse that posits the real and the linguistic/cultural as opposites, in a circular argument without end.44

The first chapter of Judith Butler’s Bodies That Matter consists of a series of considerations about matter, materiality, and the connection between those things and the performative nature of sex and gender. As part of elucidating what materiality means for feminist theory, Butler turns to an originary moment for Western conceptions of the self, Aristotle’s De Anima, citing the philosopher’s view that “the soul is the first grade of actuality of a naturally organized body,” and that they are as united as “the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp.”45 This language of the stamp, translated from the Greek schema, is a language of form, shape, and organization. Butler argues that a logical consequence of Aristotle’s thinking is that matter does not and cannot exist without a schema or stamp. The schemata of bodies can be understood as “a historically contingent nexus of power/discourse.” The consequence follows, just a few pages later, that not only cultural performance (gender, but I might also say the stuff of the soul) but also “sex” as an attribute of the body can and must be understood as performative.


This discussion of how matter matters is no neutral addition to the debate between idealism and “realism” that has raged for at least ten centuries: Butler’s argument is ultimately in the service of a political point. According to her reading, Aristotle’s thinking about the relationship of soul and body was radically rewritten by Foucault’s critique of disciplinarity, where what Foucault, also, calls “the soul” functions as the “materialization” of the prisoner’s body. The soul, Butler writes, “produces and actualizes the body,” or, as Foucault famously expressed it, “the soul is the prison of the body.” The study of the soul—whether as psychoanalysis in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries or as viewed in relationship with the body in the Middle Ages—is a way into the knowable and describable experience of living in a body. The third chapter of the present study is concerned with this argument, particularly with its inherently medieval quality and how specific Middle English texts might be used to return to and rewrite these important concepts.

In important works that helped inaugurate “body studies,” such as Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain, the body’s voicelessness is cause for concern, as if the body is a constituency with no vote in the democratic process. Critics of the constructionist position in feminist and queer theory find it problematic that if the body is understood as discursively constituted, it seems to lose some of its intractable realness by also being understood as a participant in language and culture. Such critics wonder if understanding bodily being as discursive will reduce claims about injury to the status of “mere” discourse, leaving no room to distinguish between symbolic and physical violence (the latter presumably far more serious than the former). I would suggest that medieval writings help show that such distinctions are already hard to come by.

The imagination of the later Middle Ages conceived all of this quite differently. Certainly, by the twelfth century, allegorical thinking (discussed at some length in chapter 1) saw the physical world and, indeed, historical events as standing in for and pointing toward less material, transcendent, divine realities. The discursive was never the merely discursive; it was the most real of realities. As the tradition of Body/Soul debates developed, the Body talked back to the Soul (as do, in other debates, subsections of the body such as the Heart, the Eye, the Hands, and so on), arguing in a markedly corporeal way, blending the discursive and the material in a way that seemed to be treated as largely unproblematic in other medieval writings.

Centuries before the experiments in bodily speech by such French feminists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, the medieval body had already established its own scandalous speaking style (to paraphrase Shoshana

47. Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 29.
Indeed, the medieval body-as-woman was positively chatty, as some of the debates between the Body and the Soul discussed in this book will show. Unfortunately, chattiness is a negative trait associated with women in the Middle Ages, a trait that disciplinary works such as “Sawles Warde” seek to constrain. The metaphorical and allegorical language used to describe the nature of and relationship between souls and bodies is, as it turns out, a gendered one. This book examines the consequences of this gendered language both for the emergence of a self-consciously literary tradition of Middle English writings and for medieval understandings of the self.

Overview of Chapters

In order to trace the workings of sowlehele, this book reaches back to allegories that predate the Fourth Lateran Council and as far forward as the late fourteenth-century Piers Plowman. Chapter 1 explores works that were central to the history of medieval allegory in the Middle Ages, Prudentius’ Psychomachia and Boethius’ The Consolation of Philosophy. Prudentius and Boethius each set up a problem that increasingly troubled writers over the centuries following: Abstract concepts describing the qualities that inhabit the self speak in female voices and often inhabit female bodies. It seems odd to some later writers that such powerful roles are permitted to female figures. The last section of the chapter turns to two twelfth-century Latin debates between the Body and the Soul that can be read as responding to the problems of allegorical gender and proper hierarchies within the self. The two Latin Body/Soul debates—one anonymous, the “Visio Philiberti,” and one by Hildebert of Lavardin, the “Liber de Querimonia”—repeatedly pose the question of how two elements as disparate in value and quality as soul and body could ever have been brought together, and how they might function in appropriate harmony.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on two thirteenth-century Middle English debates between the Body and the Soul. Chapter 2 shows how “In a Thestri Stude I Stod” (“In a Dark Place I Stood”) functions as a work of sowlehele, exemplifying how the poem’s temporality contributes to its didacticism. In this debate, the Body talks back to the accusing Soul, refusing the Soul’s theory that all sin is the fault of the flesh. I argue that the contending theories of blame that comprise this poem’s matter are engaged in the production of a technology of sowlehele in part because other psychological models provided in the biblical,

patristic, and ancient Greek writings about the soul that came down to the thirteenth century cannot fully account for this debate’s dynamics.

Having begun to examine the possibilities of sowlehele as a model for understanding representations of the divided self, I then turn in chapter 3 to the surprisingly homosocial nature of the Middle English version of the relationship of the self to itself in the most popular of the medieval debates between the Body and the Soul, the thirteenth-century “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt,” also known as “The Debate Between the Body and the Soul.” This chapter exemplifies the workings of pastoral power in sowlehele writings and shows how that power sometimes cannot help functioning in a queer way. By comparison with its Latin and Anglo-Norman counterparts, “Als I Lay” makes use of the specific grammatical possibilities available to English-language writers by establishing both Soul and Body as male, eliminating the female personification of the Soul from the conversation, and portrays its Body/Soul bond as one based in powerful same-sex affect. The poem can be read to exemplify Foucault’s famous phrase that “the soul is the prison of the body,” but, I argue, “Als I Lay” also complicates his metaphor by portraying Body and Soul as locked in a queerly loving ambivalence.

Chapters 2 and 3 show how Body/Soul debates offer a performative theory of the self, both in the sense that they dynamically stage the different possible relationships within that self and in the sense used by philosophers of language that these poems work to produce the selves they describe. However, the relatively brief poems cited here are just some among many works to appear in manuscripts such as the Vernon to give instruction and occasion for meditation. The book’s final chapters consider how the attempt to produce sowlehele functions in writings that are better known within medieval English studies. Chapter 4 looks at the early thirteenth-century personification allegory “Sawles Warde,” a prose section of the collection known as the Katherine Group, in which the highly gendered tensions of ensoulment and embodiment are described for an audience of religious women. In a reversal of the dynamics in “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt,” but not quite in a return to Prudentius’ war of female vices with female virtues, this work is populated almost entirely by female personifications. “Sawles Warde” transforms the contentiousness of the Body/Soul debate into a domestic scene, imagining the self as a household besieged by danger. Within the home of the Body, Wit’s wife, Will, threatens to stir up trouble, while visitors from without, such as Fear and Love of Life, undermine any sense in which this self might be considered hermetically sealed or safely closed off from the world outside its “house.” This allegory is an instance of sowlehele as a mode of writing specifically aimed at disciplining women.

Chapter 5 turns from the explicitly female-gendered character of “Will”
in “Sawles Warde” to *Piers Plowman*, where Will is instead figured as a man. In this concluding chapter, I consider *Piers Plowman* as a Middle English text that looks back to the questions of gendered representation in allegory posed by the early Latin allegories discussed in the first chapter. It is also a work that figures the problem of interdependence as an issue of gender and power, like yet unlike the thirteenth-century Body/Soul debates. *Piers Plowman* marks a crisis in the figurations of abstract ideas in female bodies (a tradition at least as old as Prudentius, if not Plato), a crisis intimately related to the development of *sowlehele* in medieval writings. It is a text that famously exceeds any and all generic descriptions, as it exceeds any pat conclusions reached by its own characters. However, reading *Piers Plowman* as a work of *sowlehele* opens up new ways of understanding the workings of gender, power, and discipline in the poem and, if it does not presume to resolve the questions it poses, helps resolve the questions posed by this book.
Barbara Johnson’s published lecture “Women and Allegory” poses the question, “What does it mean to personify theory as a woman?” as part of a larger critique of how contemporary critical theory gets personified by its critics (frequently as “dead” or as “dying”). Johnson’s discussion of allegory is prompted by an eighteenth-century allegorical painting that depicts “Theory” as a female form, prompting her to ask whether what we currently tend to call critical theory or poststructuralist theory is consequently a particularly female practice. This sighting of an allegorical image on the wall of the London Academy of Art represents one of those infrequent encounters between medieval literary studies and contemporary critical theory that enriches both, thanks to Johnson’s use of an epigraph from Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* that describes the convention by which the allegorical text is depicted as a veiled woman upon whose body various “masculine acts” of reading and glossing are performed. Johnson thus situates herself in relation to a centuries-old allegorical tradition.

1. Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction*, in The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory; ed. Michael Payne and Harold Schweizer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 53; the lecture that immediately precedes this one notes the necessity of personification as such in discussions of the so-called death of theory, asking, “What does it mean to treat a theory as an animate being? More precisely, what does it mean to personify deconstruction as animate only by treating it as dead, giving it life only in the act of taking that life away?” (17), without yet specifying how often that personified being is female.
and queries what it might tell us about the possibilities and limitations of what our culture imagines about women. How can women be irrational if Rational- ity is a woman? How can women be anything other than willful and capricious given that Will is a woman, too? How is gender distributed and instituted in allegorical texts, and what are the implications of these institutions for thinking about the embodied, ensouled self? What, in short, is the gender of the allegorical Soul and Body in Latin-language works, those that most directly inform the Middle English tradition? This chapter looks at how the use of female figures in some important medieval Latin allegories, including those of Prudentius and Boethius, installed gender hierarchy as an issue to be resolved in later medieval conceptions of selfhood.

One of the key preconditions of personhood in allegory is actually gender, since by beginning to speak, an abstraction ceases to be an “it” and clearly becomes a “he” or a “she.” It is both a truism and an abiding mystery to present-day readers of late antique and medieval literature that allegorical representations of abstract concepts are almost always female. This is no accident, scholars note: At the most basic level, Latin and Romance languages tend to gender abstract concepts as feminine nouns, from the “goddesses” Natura and Ecclesia (Nature and the Church) to incarnations of the vices and sins like Luxuria or Superbia (Indulgence, Pride). Critics have often emphasized the view that the literary convention of a female tutelary figure, such as Boethius’ Lady Philosophy, representing the abstraction Philosophia is an accident of grammar and therefore to be dismissed as mere accident. Similarly, Johnson’s essay

2. Ruth Mazo Karras describes an exemplum about a scolding wife and a drunken, misbehaving husband. In this case, John Bromyard reads the story as an allegory of humanity’s relationship with God, with God as the ineffectively scolding wife, whose admonishment “man” ignores at his peril. Karras adds, “The theological moral does not prevent the story from reinforcing the image of woman as scold (or of man as drunkard). But if the scolding woman stands for God, can she be all bad?” (238). “Gendered Sin and Misogyny in John of Bromyard’s Summa Predicantium,” Traditio 47 (1992): 233–57.

3. James J. Paxson summarizes the problem of allegory in relation to gender toward the end of his Poetics of Personification, noting that although the argument from grammatical gender has a great deal of scholarly authority (he dates it back to Joseph Addison), “in the classical rhetorical tradition, the female body itself, as well as female social and cosmetic practices, are the figurative images of figuration.” James J. Paxson, The Poetics of Personification (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 173.

4. This is particularly true of the critics who write about the Old French Roman de la Rose. The gender of Bel Acueil, a subsidiary love object for the narrator’s quest, would be troubling and undercut the heterosexual love story with the possibility of homosexual attachment if it were not repeatedly emphasized that the gender of “Fair Welcome” is male merely by accident. See the discussions by Douglas Kelly (for the “mere accident”) side, in Internal Difference and Meanings in the “Roman de la Rose” (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), esp. 105–22, and Simon Gaunt’s direct response to Kelly, in “Bel Acueil and the Improper Allegory of the Romance of the Rose,” New Medieval Literatures 2 (1998): 65–93 (see especially 68 and 84–85). For general studies of female tutelary figures in the writings and imagery of the Middle
comes to an impasse: She discovers that Reynolds’s painting closely echoes “Theory” in a Renaissance compendium of allegorical images by the painter Cesare Ripa, and is therefore not an original idea or invention by Reynolds. Ripa’s *Iconologia*, in turn, is not making a comment on culture: He assigns genders to abstract nouns according to those nouns’ grammatical gender in Italian. Like medievalists today, Johnson asks, is the odd appearance of this female figure at the Royal Academy of Art in London “mere” grammar, after all? Johnson concludes that the idea that grammatical convention underlies allegorical gender does not negate the possibility that such images “shaped the cultural messages addressed both to women and to men. It is just that the ‘cause’ of the cultural messages cannot easily be tied to intentions.”5 How these messages were shaped by the “mere grammar” of allegory and what they actually were remain questions.

Grammar alone cannot fully explain the prevalence of female personifications, but their dominating presence in medieval literature remains a familiar aspect of allegorical writing that deserves defamiliarization. Such figures are, of course, tokens: Lady Liberty on the New York City skyline does not guarantee American women’s freedom, and it is unlikely that the existence of a Lady Philosophy in the realm of representation made any difference for medieval women wishing to learn philosophy.6 Johnson doesn’t quite tell us what difference the female representation of Theory makes. But she notes her existence, there on the wall of the London Academy of Art, and in medieval literature are her relatives Reason, Nature, Holy Church, and Scripture.7 The oddness of these powerful female figures is this: They represent the very essence of

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6. Helen Solterer’s *The Master and Minerva*, like Johnson’s essay, begins with an allegorical depiction of a woman, this time a woman writing a response to a man’s words. Solterer notes the important role played by figurations of women responding to, disputing with, and ultimately yielding to the authority of learned men. These women are only sometimes allegorical, but always useful as representations of (male) intellectual mastery: “If these texts include women in a version of the master/disciple disputation, they do so in a manner that ultimately counts them out. By projecting women as privileged mouthpieces of clerical wisdom, [they] make them party to clerical claims on the knowledge of women.” Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995), 33.
7. Barbara Newman, in her book *God and the Goddesses* (see above), argues that these female tutelary figures represented the continuation of a pagan pantheon of female gods, which Christianity had all but erased (with the exception of Mariolatry). In other words, “allegorical goddesses” offer a challenge to a monotheistic male-centered Godhead, and, in the writings of mystics and certain poets, manage to do so without ever being accused of blasphemy.
rationality in a world where women are routinely equated with the irrational, the bodily, the appetitive, and, most especially, the capricious and badly disciplined will.

It is conventional to understand the European Middle Ages as a profoundly misogynist time and place (often figured as such in contrast to our own presumably more enlightened time). The medieval period left behind very few records of writings by women and produced a literature in which female characters appeared in almost exclusively romantic functions and almost never as full-fledged protagonists. Yet, within the Latin canon that informed all others, there existed this surprisingly self-conscious tradition of powerful, intellectually intimidating female figures, a tradition that did not fit with any assumptions that medieval society seemed to hold about women. Does this tradition subvert the famous misogyny of the Middle Ages, or does it recuperate and strengthen it? And must those options be the only ones for thinking about gender and allegorical embodiment?

This chapter looks at how the gender of allegory mattered to the Latin works that established the tradition of medieval allegory. As the rest of this book discusses, the female figures of Reason, Philosophy, and various Virtues that harangue and educate the narrators of allegory largely give way, in Middle English works written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, to an economy of male-male instruction, an economy that reflects the “reality” of the pedagogical scene and also permits the female to be anxiously excluded from the psychological battles waged within the (male) narratorial subject. The Middle English works do not exist in a vacuum, however, and this chapter examines early Latin and later French works together, as interdependent strains of a single allegorical tradition that influences writers in medieval England, if only to reverse or transform certain tendencies in their precursors. The tradition traced here, however, cannot claim positive knowledge of direct influence. Granted, without the Latin models neither personification allegory nor its gender conventions would have become such significant issues in vernacular writings. Thus, this chapter does not adopt an evolutionary model which demonstrates that the discussion of the self in Middle English debates between the Body and the Soul had the allegories of Boethius and Prudentius as their ancestors. Instead, an examination of these important antecedents permits us to see how the tradition of female allegorical figures speaking with male narrators informs the way gender is written into the production of works from the Body/Soul debates to *Piers Plowman*. This, in turn, becomes the basis of this book’s argument that understanding quotidian psychological thinking in the Middle Ages requires critics to consider how its underlying structures were affected by allegorical gender, a detail that only seems to be arbitrary in medieval allegories describing the self to itself.
Although a number of medieval works of philosophy are written as allegories, criticism for the most part makes the mistake of refusing to consider allegory itself as a philosophical mode; contemporary medievalists recognize and adhere to disciplinary boundaries that would not have occurred to the medieval writers we study. Contemporary writings about allegory have considered it as a psychological mode, at times by counterintuitively insisting on the psychological realism of some allegorical characterizations. Statements about the “psychological realism” of various medieval works imply that those works resemble present-day representations of the psyche, or even that they are in line with present-day psychological theories or, perhaps, simply with generally agreed-upon understandings of the self, things known by “common sense.”

Philosophy and what we now call psychology were no more separable in medieval thought than allegory was from either of the other two. This chapter, therefore, examines works in which philosophy, psychology, and what comes to function as narrative drive or the development of events and characters over a period of time are all mixed together for purposes of what at least some medieval writers call sowlehele.

Prudentius

THE HISTORY OF ALLEGORY AS A HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

When critics look at the beginning of medieval personification allegory, they turn to a fourth-century Latin poem, Prudentius’ Psychomachia, the first fully developed personification-based narrative fiction. The work’s title is some-

8. An exception to this statement is the sensitive reading of allegory in general and the Roman de la Rose in particular by Michel Zink in “The Allegorical Poem as Interior Memoir,” Yale French Studies 70 (1986): 100–126. Zink makes a connection between “allegory and subjectivity,” which he distinguishes from “allegory and the expression of psychological realities” (101). But even when Zink considers the development of subjectivity in French romance, he understands psychology to mean something familiar from this century’s psychological theories; he is looking for how “they” were really always just like “us,” which is what Fletcher also does. Although this study does not call for a politics of radical otherness about the Middle Ages, I would like to suggest that we pay just a little more attention to how we understand their modes of representing the self as specific to their own moment: Zink does this when he makes connections between allegory and medieval theories about dreams and memory. See also James Simpson’s Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry, which traces the different kinds of psychological hierarchy the two authors use in depicting the education of a single soul. James Simpson, Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille’s “Anticlaudianus” and John Gower’s “Confessio Amantis” (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13.

9. For instance, Jon Whitman also gives the Psychomachia as the first example of personification allegory in Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Of course, “the technique [of allegorical personification] goes back at least as far as the figures on the shield of Achilles in Iliad 18, in which Strife,
times used to define the entire genre, and, along with *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Psychomachia* stands as a model for and origin of the tradition of allegorical personification in the Middle Ages.\(^{10}\) This work inaugurates allegory’s involvement with the unsystematic psychological thought that this study terms *sowlehele*. It also posits the intimate involvement of all medieval personification allegory with the doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation. By making nonmaterial concepts appear as physical bodies, personification allegory was a way of thinking (in an acceptably nonblasphemous mode) about the complex implications of Christ’s incarnation as a man. After all, in the beginning of the Gospel of John, the Word was made flesh; personification allegory repeats this process again and again, albeit with lowercase-letter words such as *will*, or *philosophy*. While the Word assumes male flesh in biblical narrative, abstract concepts tend to become incarnate in female bodies. The female allegorical personifications invented by Prudentius help inaugurate the odd tendency of allegorical personifications to engage in activities (in this case, waging war) that contradict any literal understanding of what women actually did or could do in that period. But these personifications do more than this: By standing in, by virtue of their femininity and also by their own admission, for fleshliness-as-such, Prudentius’ virtues and vices permit Prudentius to work out the relationships between gender, psychology, allegory, and incarnational theology.

In the poem, personified virtues engage personified vices on a field of battle, the outcome in the virtues’ favor clear from the start. The battle is waged in a series of one-on-one conflicts ending with the vices’ defeat and concludes with the sisters Faith and Concord working together to build a temple in honor of Christ. The figure of Christ, whose incarnation in a human body and status as both human and divine are invoked repeatedly, is implicated in how

\[^{10}\text{Michel Zink’s elegant definition of a *psychomachia* is that it is “understood in the broadest sense as a description of the movements and the conflicts within psychological as well as moral consciousness.” See Zink, 100.}\]
the poem posits the relationship between the body and the soul, between the material world and its transcendence. Not only does the poem subdivide the self into new categories; the Psychomachia, whose title is Greek for “battle of/for the psyche,” inaugurates a tradition of allegorical approaches to psychology that are neither formal nor fully systematized.\textsuperscript{11}

From the beginning, the Psychomachia works to establish the dominance of the soul (a virtuous soul, of course) over the body, as if this dominance were not already a given. The supremacy of the soul is supported by analogies that connect it with the seemingly obvious dominance of the New Testament over the Old. Prudentius uses the Hebrew Testament as an allegorical prefiguration of the Gospels, performing his own act of allegoresis in the course of his personification allegory. The poem begins with a description of the life of Abraham, whose job is entirely one of prefiguration. This Old Testament patriarch stands in for the injunction “that every part of our body . . . must be set free by gathering our forces at home,” and an extended analogy follows between the rescue of Lot from Sodom as a predecessor for the rescue of the soul from sin.\textsuperscript{12} The “setting free” of the body in the Psychomachia is accomplished by a (temporary?) defeat of fleshly appetite. Although the flesh is defeated, however, the logic of the poem demands the cooperation of victors and losers—Concord, the penultimate speaker, voices the paradoxical peace-making impulse within the warlike poem when she insists on looking for a way to coordinate and unite the warring aspects of the self, insisting that “where there is separation there is no strength.”\textsuperscript{13}

The achievement of a coherent, unified self seems to be the poem’s goal, and to achieve this, Prudentius needs (allegorical) bodies. One line of development in the poem makes use of biblical patriarchs, but the more dominant theme—the poem’s plot—hinges on a battle between embodied vices and

\textsuperscript{11} A key to understanding the poem lies in the question of its title: Where does the battle of vices and virtues take place? Is the Psychomachia a battle within the “psyche” (is the immaterial space of soul turned into a battleground for the damaged and killed bodies of vices) or is it waged for the soul, winner take all? Critics cannot decide, and the ambiguity enriches the poem. See Brenda Machosky, “The Face That Is Not a Face: The Phenomenology of the Soul in the Allegory of the Psychomachia,” Exemplaria XV: 1 (Spring 2003): 1–38. Machosky discusses what it means to understand the Greek title of this Latin work as a battle “for the soul’s salvation” and points out that “the battle is for the soul, and yet occurs in the soul” (3, see also fn 6). The use of the Greek psyche resolves the tension between the Latin animus (as discussed later, largely intellect) and anima (largely, as Machosky puts it, “the principle of life” [4]) and the soul’s “noumenal form,” the passive division of the soul, which “responds to objects that assault the senses of perception” (20).


\textsuperscript{13} “Nil dissociabile firmum est,” Prudentius, 333, line 763.
virtues that, for whatever reason (grammar, a distancing effect from any “real” scene of warfare, the pleasure of reversing the regular order of things), turn out to inhabit female bodies. These bodies are not just passive receptacles housing abstractions: They are flung about in battle and injured, their boundaries violated by other bodies. To get to the point where concord between aspects of the self is possible, the poem’s logic demands both the mangled bodies of the vices and the indomitable bodies of the virtues that did the mangling, a concord between flesh and spirit (with spirit, of course, functioning as a first among equals).

Perhaps because he had no clear models of extended personification allegory to draw from, Prudentius is remarkably self-reflective about the sort of fiction he is crafting, the type of allegorical writing inaugurated with the poem. He attempts to keep the behavior of his virtues consistent with their named natures, but, when pressed, he seems to choose the battle aspect of the allegory over maintaining the strict boundaries of his characters’ identities. While virtues such as Patience triumph by enacting their virtuousness (Patience stands still and lets Wrath exhaust herself; perhaps uncharacteristically full of shame and expressing it as anger, Wrath commits suicide, leading to Patience’s victory), other virtues seem to go against or at least beyond their function by committing graphic violence against the vices, as when Faith causes Discord to be torn apart bodily, or Sobriety goes a little over the top by making Indulgence eat her own bloody tongue as restitution for having lived on sweet and luxurious foods (the punishment that the vices suffer, by contrast, tends to fit their named natures perfectly, prefiguring Dantean contrapasso). When a meek female Virtue causes violent “bodily” injury to a Vice, Prudentius seems to worry about how a female character could act so violently. He worries more about the character’s femininity than about the contradictory model of an incarnation of virtue committing truly grotesque acts of violence.

In one such encounter, something surprising and useful is going on at the intersection of gender and incarnation in Prudentius’ allegory. Immediately following the violent sword-thrust with which the modest maiden Chastity kills “Lust the Sodomite,” Chastity makes a victory speech comparing her achievement with that of Judith killing Holofernes, here imagined as the very spirit of lechery. Having committed an act whose violence contradicts her meek alle-

14. James Paxson observes that the graphic goriness of the battle scenes in the poem concentrate on violence inflicted on the teeth, tongue, and face: “Prudentius’ focus upon the imagery of the destruction of the face, therefore, is a literalized reverse of prosopopeia. It is the symbolic dismantling of the trope by which the text invents the figural characters who inhabits its actantial narrative” (Paxson, Personification, 69). Paxson uses this aspect of the poem’s carnage as a way into the exciting argument that this first personification allegory actually undoes personifications in the very place where they speak and personify, literally deconstructing the speaking self at the very moment of inaugurating medieval allegory as we know it.
gorical personality, Chastity must justify her own violence through reference of a biblical precedent. Prudentius seems fascinated by these moments when his characters violate their own named natures. Chastity must also emphasize just how far against her own necessary modesty she has gone, by pointing out that, yes, both she and Judith are women (“woman as she was [she] won a famous victory over the foe with no trembling hand”). Immediately after equating herself with Judith to justify her own violence, Chastity must then differentiate her own killing force from Judith’s, and the two turn out to differ in the same way as the Gospels differ from the Hebrew Testament.

What is extraordinary about this passage follows immediately, through a surprising digression. Chastity ignores the bloody battle being waged around her to speculate, “but perhaps a woman still fighting under the shade of the [Hebrew] law had not force enough, though in so doing she prefigured our time.” She, a fighting female personification, is surprised that a woman could fight (perhaps because that woman is not a personification?) but moves to resolve this surprise by describing the “our times” that Judith prefigured. The transformation that marks the possibilities of regenerative violence in “our times” also goes to the larger, stranger argument that Prudentius seems to be making in writing the first personification allegory: the new possibilities for embodiment, for a new compact between soul and body inaugurated by Christ’s incarnation as a man described by Chastity:

Since a virgin bore a child, since the day when man’s body lost its primeval nature, and power from on high created a new flesh, and a woman unwedded conceived the God Christ. . . . From that day all flesh is divine, since it conceives Him and takes on the nature of God by a covenant of partnership. For the Word made flesh has not ceased to be what it was before, that is, the Word, by attaching to itself the experience of the flesh; its majesty is not lowered by the experience of the flesh, but raises wretched men to nobler things. In this brief passage, we have moved from an act of violence by a woman to the contextualization of that violence within a biblical narrative, but now we have

15. Prudentius, 283, “famosum mulier referens ex hoste tropaeum non trepidante manu” (lines 64–65).
17. Prudentius, 284, “. . . post partum virginis, ex quo / corporis humani naturam pristinam / oriorem deseruit carnemque novam vix ardua sevit, / atque innupta Deum concepit feminam / Christum . . . / Inde omnis iam diva caro est quae concipit illum / naturamque Dei consortis / foedere sumit. / Verbum quipped caro factum non destitiit esse quod fuerat, Verum, dum carnis / glutinat usum, / carnis, / sed miseros ad nobiliora trahente” (71–74, 76–81).
digressed—because the violence was a woman’s, because woman is consistently equated with the flesh—into the realm of incarnational theology. What enables Chastity’s digression? The female body, committing violence, is shown to have been sanctified by Mary’s virgin birth and therefore licensed to struggle violently in the name of virtue, as Chastity has done. Mary is a typological antecedent for Chastity, just as Judith is Chastity’s pre-allegorical antecedent, and these two “real” female bodies help justify the female form taken by Chastity. The purpose of this typological genealogy is to produce the Word incarnate as flesh through a female intervention, thereby sanctifying both (some forms of) femininity and corporeality, concepts so often yoked together.

In the preceding passage, the divine remains unchanged by its encounter with the female body, but the body is utterly changed by encountering the divine. The mode of personification allegory that he is inventing as he goes along enables Prudentius to think through the implications of a flesh that is both human and divine. At least for Prudentius, to say that “the Word was made flesh” is an essential utterance permitting allegorical writing. Personification allegory always makes the word into flesh, gives the concept its prospopon or face; and though Homeric literature prefigured this kind of allegory, it is essentially a genre invented in the centuries after Christ’s life and death became significant to Western culture. It might be speculated, indeed, that this allegorical mode was invented in order to respond to the sheer surprising oddness of Christ’s incarnation. Personification allegory is a mode so intimately connected with incarnation that its purview must also include the question of how any soul, by definition a transcendent, nonmaterial being, can come to be incarnated in any body.¹⁸

Even at its supposed point of origin, Prudentius’ poem, this sort of allegory is centrally concerned with psychological questions such as the relationship of body and soul. In Boethius’ Consolation, Lady Philosophy argues that “human souls are of necessity more free when they continue in the contemplation of the mind of God and less free when they descend to bodies, and less still when

¹⁸. Jon Whitman, in his book Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval, offers a history of the connection between incarnational thinking and allegorical writing in terms of Origen’s philosophy and its incorporation of “Jewish, Platonic and Gnostic legacies” (69). Casey Finch, in the introduction to his edition of the works of the Pearl poet (an author whose work is outside the purview of this study), writes something very similar about his reading of the intellectual context of Pearl: “The act of incarnation fuses the divine and the human into an absolute contiguity. Similarly, the didactic purpose of the Pearl poet depends on the way in which literal and figurative poles of language are collapsed in his poetics . . . but at the same time [ . . . ] the fundamental theological separation of the earthly and the divine, of horizontal and vertical language, is paradoxically underscored in this process.” Casey Finch, The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 19. And later, Finch writes that what the reader of the Pearl learns is that “the physical is both separate from and a part of the metaphysical” (21).
they are imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood.” This represents a fairly common medieval view, but it subjects its proponents to the dangers of a Manichean dualism and must be expressed carefully, with full acknowledgment that soul and body must ultimately accept their union. In the *Psychomachia*, however, embodiment is described as itself capable of achieving a kind of sanctity. The body is clearly an effect of historical forces: After the Virgin Birth, it is different from what it had been before. In the narrative, Chastity tells the story of this transformation and, in so doing, also redescribes her own victory over Lust—the Virgin Birth, the birth capable of enacting such a transformation in the status of the flesh, is, for her, necessarily chaste, a birth accomplished without lust. Later in the *Psychomachia*, we are reminded that “Jesus mediates between man and God, uniting mortality with the Father so that the fleshly shall not be separated from the eternal Spirit and that one God shall be both.” The birth of Christ thus guarantees that the flesh, too, shall have someone who will speak for it in the court of heaven.

Brenda Machosky has argued that the whole point for Prudentius of inventing personification allegory and producing the *Psychomachia* had been “a need to present something that could not otherwise appear, the soul.” This is a wonderful phrase, partly because it is so counterintuitive. Is not the person of every human being, his or her gait and voice and personality, an appearance of the soul in the physical world? Are not the eyes, at the very least, the clichéd “windows of the soul”? But no: In the Middle Ages, the soul is far more mysterious and more difficult to manifest than that, especially if it is the soul in general (“Fight for Mansoul,” as Thompson’s Loeb translation titles the *Psychomachia*) rather than some specific person’s soul.

The *Psychomachia* does the work of sanctifying the body as a vessel for divine Incarnation and for allegorical incarnation, as the proper vessel for the soul. However, all of this changes at the poem’s end. There, the final dedication of the poem, addressed to Christ, explains:


20. Prudentius, 333, “Utque homini atque Deo medius intervenit Iesus, / qui sociat mortale Patri, / ne carnea distent / Spiritui aeterno sitque ut Deus unus utrumque . . . ” (764–66). In “The Face That Is Not a Face,” Machosky argues that “spiritus designates the conjoinment of the body and soul” (22), which permits her to argue that “the persona or mask of spiritus is psychomachia, the image of a soul in the figures of conflict,” and goes on to argue that spiritus resembles Jesus in also being a persona, a “face which unites the divine with the mortal” (23), with the difference between them being that “God can be figured as Christ but . . . there is no figure adequate to the human soul” (30).

Savage war rages, hotly, rages within our bones, and man’s two-sided nature is in an uproar of rebellion; for the flesh that was formed of clay bears down upon the spirit, but again the spirit that issued from the pure breath of God is hot within the dark prison-house of the heart, and even in its close bondage rejects the body’s filth. Light and darkness with their opposing spirits are at war, and our two-fold being inspires powers at variance with each other, until Christ our God comes to our aid.\textsuperscript{22}

As it turns out, in spite of the assertions of the good of incarnate existence, the body \textit{is} the prison of the soul; actually, the heart is (the spirit is buried in the \textit{carcere cordis}), and the flesh made of clay (\textit{viscera limo effigiata}) is the prison where the soul (Prudentius alternates the two Latin terms for “soul,” \textit{spiritus} and \textit{anima}, without apparent consistency) is incarcerated. The language of the prison house seems unavoidable, even in this poem, which had challenged that language early on.

Toward the end of \textit{Psychomachia}, Man’s nature is understood as double—body and soul warring with one another. The war between them rages within man’s very bones, one of the few textual indications of the battle’s location. Both sides of man’s nature are in rebellion, and it is their split that keeps man from peace and joy. The thing Prudentius’ virtues dread is division. Concord, whose very name demands unity, says “a divided will creates disorder in our inmost nature, making two parties in a heart at variance,”\textsuperscript{23} even as this conflict guarantees both the narrative dynamism of the battle plot and the possibility that, divided from it, the good will overpower the bad. What is so odd about this process is that the poem had begun with a multifarious split—a battle between many speaking and acting characters with the stated aim of freeing the body—but it ends with dualism, as if the virtues’ victory ultimately closes down the efflorescence of the self’s many aspects. Along the way, however, the \textit{Psychomachia} seems uncertain as to whether it is the bad body or the bad (divided) will that is at fault for the capacity for sinfulness that remains even after the virtues have slaughtered the vices.

Although it is not yet a debate between Body and Soul, this Latin poem is a battle \textit{within} and \textit{for} the soul staged in a manner that repeatedly thematizes the problem of embodiment. The body appears as both a site for corporeal

\textsuperscript{22} Prudentius, 343. “Fervent bella horrida, fervent / ossibus inclusa, fremit et discordibus armis / non simplex natura hominis; nam viscera limo / efigiata premunt animam, contra ille sereno / editus adflatu migrantis carcere cordis / aestuat, et sordes arta inter vincla recusat. / Spiritibus pungant variis lux atque tenebrae, / distantesque animat duplex substantia vires, / donec praesidio Christus Deus adsit . . . ” (902–10).

\textsuperscript{23} Prudentius, 333. “Ergo cavete, viri, ne sit sentential discors / sensibusin nostris, ne secta exotica tectis nascatur conflataodiis, quia fissa voluntas / confundit variis arcane biformia fibris” (758–61).
violence and a stage for female allegorical figures who are enfleshed enough to inflict hurt and to be hurt. Ultimately, the *Psychomachia* does not capture or represent a literal “psychology,” but rather posits precisely the problem that the rest of this book addresses: that the formal theological and scientific psychology of the Middle Ages cannot and does not address the needs of Christian culture, which seems to have always-already been a culture of confession (compare St. Augustine, although in his day the word itself was closer to “profession of faith”), even if this tendency becomes formally institutionalized only centuries after Prudentius.  

24. Michel Zink writes, although he does not develop this theme, that “In the Christian world, the psychological cannot be separated from the moral nor from the eschatological” (Zink, 105).

25. While *The Consolation of Philosophy* is generally considered a work of philosophy, it is written in the hybrid poetic style known as *prosimetrum*. This is a style of combining prose with poetry: Lady Philosophy voices a number of poems as part of consoling Boethius, which are interspersed with prose discussions between the two. See Bridget K. Balint, *Ordering Chaos: The Self and the Cosmos in Twelfth-Century Latin Prosimetrum* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009).
hierarchical mode characterized a series of later medieval works, including
the debates between the Body and the Soul, explicitly establishing the “didac-
tic” dimensions of *sowlehele* through the paradigmatic pairing of teacher and
student.

For medieval philosophers, thinking is something that happens in a situa-
tion that is at least figuratively dialogic, which means that thinkers are always
nominally dependent on the figures of their interlocutors, often allegorical or
allegorized as their students or their teachers. This is yet clearer from the later
twelfth century on, as dialectical forms come to dominate the medieval uni-
versity. The development of the *quaestio* and *quodlibet* modes, in which pos-
sible objections (from named or nameless other philosophers or philosophical
positions) are listed and refuted, produces the fiction that the author is, at all
times, responding to the objections and queries of an interlocutor—although
such a person might not exist, or might well have written his treatise centuries
before.26 In philosophical treatises, the names of male authors become synec-
dochal for their own thought. For instance, it is still conventional to note, in
the present tense no less, that “Aristotle says,” or even that “Aristotle argues”
(or “Barthes says,” or “Barbara Johnson argues”) when indicating some part of
the written work attributed to that author. However, in allegorical philosop-
hal dialogues, the author’s thought is not always spoken by the figure that bears
the author’s name, even though we now discuss words spoken by Socrates as
Platonic thought, and words spoken by Lady Philosophy as part of Boethius’
philosophical system.27

26. Alastair Minnis defines the *quaestio* as a pedagogical process undertaken by a master,
as if teaching a student. However, in his *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375:*
*The Commentary Tradition*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, with assistance from David Wallace
(Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), he offers a brief and useful definition (212), and plentiful examples
of entirely textual disputations that do not seem to have even the remotest origins in the class-
room. The *quaestio* or disputatio seems to be a faux-oral form that performs a fiction of pres-
ence. The origins of the learned *quaestio* are, of course, in university lectures, where a professor’s
interlocutors (and straw-man questioners) would be his students, but the written form of such
disputations certainly brings the dead as well as the living to philosophical account. The *quodli-
bet*, by comparison, seems to be a mode of topicality. Biannual disputational festivals (at Advent
and Lent) would be open to the public and cover topics suggested by audience members; this
was called an a *quodlibet* disputation. The improvisational answering of these questions con-
stituted something of a public ordeal, and lists of both questions and answers were included in
manuscripts. Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, in a survey-type article, write that “both types
of disputation, in the words of P. Mandonnet, were the academic equivalent of the medieval
tournament-at-arms” (“Medieval Philosophical Literature” in *The Cambridge History of Later
Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
Press 1982], 22). For a survey of this model’s development, see also Anthony Kenny’s chapter
on disputations in that same volume.

27. Helen Solterer, in *The Master and Minerva*, notes that one exemplary medieval master
philosopher described himself as dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, Minerva; she notes in
passing, “intellectual traditions in Europe had long typed knowledge as a woman (*scientia*),
In contrast with the male authors, the female speakers of medieval personification allegory are the embodied bearers of the authorial position: The words placed in the mouth of the figure that represents "the author" would not be sufficient without the words of the female personification, even if the author's actual position is worked out between the two protagonists. Lady Philosophy represents a major aspect of Boethius' philosophical enterprise, while "Boethius," the character in The Consolation of Philosophy, represents another. When medieval thinkers wanted to cite Boethius on fortune or predestination, they cited words that had been placed in the mouth of Lady Philosophy just as often as or, indeed, more often than they cited words spoken by the figure named Boethius in the Consolation. Is Lady Philosophy anything more than Boethius in drag? Is she really permitted to be female? I argue that Boethius uses the sheer awesomeness of Philosophy's grand stature to make her into something more than himself, and that he makes her just female enough that her gender makes a subtle but significant difference, adding a sheen of philosophical irony to what she says. Here is the incredible oddness, which did not fail to strike the French and English writers of subsequent centuries who were influenced by Boethius: The authorial persona and its attendant authority is split between a female and a male character, or several of each.

Medieval personification allegory grapples with a number of major philosophical questions at every turn. It can hardly help itself, since its origin and initial purpose were, in part, the writing of philosophy such as Boethius'. and its highest form, wisdom, as a female deity (sapientia)" (Solterer, Master and Minerva, 29). Solterer goes on to say that, for Abelard, "the bellicose and the feminine come together in the form of the disputation. Under the aegis of Minerva, verbal battles are to be waged. That Abelard chooses this goddess as mentor shows how the scholastic activity of disputing comes to be figured through women. But if intellectual mastery is represented in part through the feminine, where do women figure in?" The present study intends to contribute, in part, to the very long answer to this question in its own terms. Solterer's study is, finally, more concerned with French literature and with the figure of female respondents such as Christine de Pizan, and answers the question in terms of such "real" women; at the same time, it helps us understand, with fine nuance, not the unanswerable question of whether "real women" benefited or were harmed by these representations, but "how medieval debates over the injurious power of representation were articulated through gender" (Solterer, 216).

28. In a sense, Geoffrey Chaucer translated the "Consolation of Philosophy" twice: once as his relatively faithful Boece, and once when a crucial piece of Boethius' reasoning is translated as a speech by Troilus in Troilus and Criseyde. The former document, naturally, includes Lady Philosophy as a character, but the latter (far more famous and significant) puts Philosophy's words into Troilus' mouth, undoing the original transvestite drama, wherein Boethius wrote his own philosophical ideas as words spoken by this grand female figure.

Consolation. But personification allegory was not developed as just a passive vehicle for something like the popularization of philosophy. Its form has an impact on its content in a number of significant ways, which even carry over into those vernacular allegories that are not explicitly concerned with philosophical matters.

The Consolation of Philosophy begins with Lady Philosophy driving away the Muses that had been consoling Boethius, dramatically staging a rejection of the arts in favor of her own philosophico-poetic artistry. To drive away the Muses is to exchange one kind of female figure for another (another kind of swap of Xanthippe for Diotima), but it is also, in the context of this early moment in the Consolation of Philosophy, a statement about the allegory's genre refashioned in a dramatic mode. The first way personification allegory transforms philosophy follows directly from what was discussed earlier: Medieval allegories stage the scene of philosophy as a dramatic disputation, adding detail for emphasis, amusement, and, perhaps, as a reenactment of the pedagogical scene they so often reference. Philosophy is often written as a pedagogical mode, very obviously designed to impart or make memorable certain specific lessons (memento mori chief among those taught by the Body/Soul debates) and to translate theological concerns into a more dynamic mode. Given how many philosophical and theological treatises are written as dialogues (from Augustine's “On the Free Choice of the Will” or “The Teacher” to David Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion), it is clear that such translations do not necessitate simplification, but that the incorporation of narrative into the lesson or treatise transforms the pedagogical scene into one that asks questions about the nature and limits of pedagogy, of what kind of self there is and, therefore, what it can be taught.

In addition to its role as an important example of allegory's philosophical potential, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy demonstrates a way in which allegory functions as a staging ground for an issue whose significance waxed and waned but remained persistently central in the Middle Ages: the debate about the limits and possibilities of free will in a God-ordered world. Personification allegory is such an apt mode for discussing this issue because of the specific limits imposed by allegorical characterization. Even a female Reason is not really free to be unreasonable, except in philosophical satire.

Allegorical characters do not have free will, but they often exist as a way of thematizing the limits of the will's freedom. The question of human freedom of will in a context of divine omnipotence and omniscience—the liberty to

30. For some of the discussions of Boethius' prosimetrum as poetry—discussions that tend to imply the joke that Philosophy did not drive the Muses away successfully, nor did she want to—see Seth Lerer, Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in the “Consolation of Philosophy” (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), and Gerald O’Daly, The Poetry of Boethius (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
choose sin or salvation, known as *liberum arbitrium*—was a major philosophical and theological concern throughout the Middle Ages.\(^\text{31}\) It appeared in allegory as the question of adhering or not adhering to generic conventions: Must a character named Kindness always be fully and adequately kind, a character named Sloth never, ever do anything that isn't characterized by laziness, and so forth? *The Consolation of Philosophy* culminates in a famous discussion of free will in the context of God’s omniscience and foreknowledge of events in human history.\(^\text{32}\) And yet the words about freedom of the will, attributed to Boethius, are spoken by an allegorical personification, Lady Philosophy, a character who must, of necessity, conform to her named nature and enact philosophical thinking at all times. She persuades Boethius that God functions on an eternal plane, where time functions differently and things that happen in a certain causal order for human beings have always-already occurred to a divinity who lives in an eternal present. The section of the work that deals most explicitly with the problem of the freedom of the will is repeatedly separated out and cited (most famously by Chaucer in Troilus’ despairing monologue in *Troilus and Criseyde*).\(^\text{33}\)

Lady Philosophy is the prototypical tutelary allegorical figure, setting the pattern for many to come, from Bernardus Silvestris’ Noys to Langland’s Holy Church. Boethius does not have to highlight the irony that his *Consolation of Philosophy*’s Lady Philosophy is utterly bound to speak philosophically and wisely—that she is not free to do otherwise. Other medieval authors think through this problem for him, and stage it again and again in their allegorical disputations.\(^\text{34}\) Lady Philosophy speaks at great length, after all, about a human free will that she herself is utterly denied by her named nature’s predetermined imperative to be wise and decorous, and, indeed, pointing out such constraints seems to be part of Boethius’ project in the *Consolation*. Lady Philosophy even


\(^\text{32}\) See Chaucer’s *Boece* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 395–470. See also Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Translations and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142, in which Copeland argues that the *Boece* aims to replace the Latin *Consolation* as the academic referent of Chaucer’s own *Troilus*, in the same way that Chaucer aims to replace Boethius as an *auctor*.

\(^\text{33}\) See Geoffrey Chaucer, “Troilus and Criseyde,” in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, Book IV, lines 953–1085. This passage paraphrases and adapts prose 2 and 3 in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. In the Explanatory Notes to this passage, Stephan A. Barney points out the striking and witty omission by Chaucer of Boethius’ defense of the will’s freedom, leaving this Boethian passage, and Troilus, in a philosophically unnecessary state of despair about the inevitability of fate (“Troilus and Criseyde,” in *Riverside Chaucer*, Bk. IV, l. 1048).

tells Boethius, who wonders about this freedom, that “it would be impossible for any rational nature to exist without it.”

Although she is the very personification of a rational nature, however, Lady Philosophy is fully delimited by her name.

This delimitation by name is something that critics of allegory have seen as problematic. Angus Fletcher worried that “an allegory of Justice, for example, will omit the contingencies that make a nonrepressive, tolerant justice so difficult to achieve. It omits the human detail.” Continuing to think about the particular example of Justice, Gordon Teskey wondered, “what sort of body does Justice have?” He perhaps answers his own question when he restates it a few pages later: “What is the stuff out of which Shamefastness is made? She is made of her gender.” Perhaps this is true of Shamefastness, but can this be true of every single female allegorical personification, and does the “gender” that makes up the substance of these personifications change from figure to figure?

The complicated negotiation of gendered embodiment within a discourse of universals is evident even in The Consolation of Philosophy’s early medieval dialogue. The bodies of allegorical figures can be described in terms of how they take up space, what they are wearing, how beautiful or terrifying they might appear. But a basic aspect of how they must be described is through the gender their bodies take on. When Lady Philosophy enters the cell where Boethius is poetically lamenting his fate (and drives away the Muses that had been keeping him company), she is described as “awe-inspiring... her eyes burning and keen beyond the usual power of men.” Unlike many of the

35. Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, Bk. V, prose 2, 149, l. 3. “Est, inquit; neque enim fuerit ulla rationalis natura quin eidem libertas adsit arbitrii” (Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis, ed. Ludovicus Bieler, Boethius, Opera I Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 94 [Turnholt, 1957]).


37. Teskey, Allegory and Violence, 21. Teskey goes on to argue that “the event of self-predication, whereby Justice is said to be just, leaves a residue that is not justice but the thing in which Justice must inhere in order to be true of itself.”

38. Teskey, 23.


40. In Boethius, ed. Bieler, “Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc vero pulsare caelum summī verticis cacumine videbatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum.”
female figures that followed her, Philosophy is not described from head to toe, a rhetorical trope called *effictio* and used to excellent effect in the romances of the Middle Ages for ladies both beautiful and loathly. Philosophy’s highly symbolic dress, though described at some length, is hard to visualize. The color of what she is wearing is difficult for Boethius to determine, because in order to emphasize the neglect that philosophy suffers in his age, her raiment seems to be covered in dust, and has been torn “by the hands of marauders.” Despite all of this pointed avoidance of physical specificity (unto a sort of surreal vision of a body constantly in metamorphic flux), the sole stable physical quality of Lady Philosophy is her gender.

Lady Philosophy embodies the contradictions of female personification in a way that later readers seemed to notice. Besides the way in which Jean de Meun’s Reason and, later, William Langland’s Holy Church respond to this convention, translators of Boethius dealt with the problem posed by her femininity—in one famous case, by the simple process of eliminating it. King Alfred, in his Old English translation of Boethius, took it upon himself to regender her as the masculine (and also less overtly scholarly) Wisdom (Gesceadwisnes), whereas “Boethius” becomes Mind (Mod). Of course, we cannot know why this was done, but it is hard to miss that this is a switch that makes the space of philosophy male only. Centuries later, *Piers Plowman* enacts a similar sort of switch when a female character named Anima in that poem’s B-text version becomes, in its C-text recension, a character named Liberum Arbitrium: curiously, both Lady Philosophy/Wisdom and Anima/Liberum Arbitrium are characters who discuss the possibilities and limits of the will. A key aspect of these Old and Middle English transformations of the discussion of free will is that they are conducted by male speakers, a product, as the rest of this book argues, of a desire to eliminate the feminine from psychological models of the self. In the tradition to which both Alfred and Langland are responding, however, Philosophy is female and bound to her named nature beyond any freedom to choose or deviate. Given that medieval femininity was fenced in by constraints, using a female personification to figure a lack of freedom seems only natural; using that female being to figure a lack of freedom and to discuss the complex limitations and possibilities of free will in the abstract, universal sense is an ironic paradox bordering on brilliance.

The problem of Philosophy’s free will or lack thereof can be understood, in part, through the medieval debate about predication, a debate that Boethius

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*De consolatione Philosophiae*, Bk. I, prose 1, l. 2.

freely entered into in another of his philosophical works, this time a non-allegorical one—his commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. The problem of predication is the question of whether, as Plato and neo-Platonists would argue, there exists a universal quality, say, “chairness,” that transcends the particulars of any given chair. Thinkers such as the fourteenth-century philosopher William of Ockham maintained, on the contrary, that “universals are nothing more than names—naturally significant general concepts, primarily, and secondarily the conventional signs corresponding to them.” Predication was a major issue to medieval thinkers. Whether universals did or did not exist outside of philosophical debates, allegorical writing guarantees that they do exist as literary categories.

In personification allegory, names are precisely one and the same as the categories they describe, with the word *Justice* naming and describing the character Justice. Personifications of abstract concepts are these concepts in their universal expression, and yet by being brought into a narrative scene, they exit the timeless realm of abstraction and begin to function in the sublunar, mortal world. They take up bodies, and so might be imagined to suffer the limitations that bodily capacity poses. Grammar or convention or the history of dualism compels personifications to take up female bodies, thus becoming susceptible to a limitation that complicates their functioning as a universal. This complication, of course, is an effect of this highly gender-inflected culture: Barring a burning bush, anything that speaks is a “he” or a “she,” and being a “she” never manages to be neutral, even if, as Boethius established in the sixth century, she is Philosophy.

**Vernacular Readings of Latin Allegory**

**THE ROMAN DE LA ROSE AND HOW GENDER MATTERS**

Despite a powerful discourse that considers the gender of allegorical personifications as the arbitrary accident of Latin grammar, medieval authors were not entirely blind to the implications of their practices around gender. Even if Prudentius and Boethius were quite subtle in the ways they played with the

42. I am referring here in very shorthand form (because to give the discussion justice would be a chapter in itself) to the debate that was inaugurated by *Isagoge* and continued through the fifteenth century; the first few centuries of this debate are well encapsulated in Paul Vincent Spade’s edition of *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham*, ed. and trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994).

gendering and embodiment of personifications, by the twelfth century Jean de Meun had noticed and humorously deplored some of the implications of using female figures to represent the reasonable, the rational, and the philosophical.

The *Roman de la Rose* demands to be read as a psychological allegory, and, insofar as it contains a series of characters that seem to represent the different states of mind possessed by a single person, it is one (even if not a work of psychological aid as such). The psyche being allegorized is not the male narrator’s, however, and this poses a problem. The poem is an anatomy of a female being, the Rose, whose being, as Guillaume de Lorris informs us early on, represents that of a lady whose identity is being concealed. The different manifestations of the Rose encountered by the Lover are aspects of the self that deal with the social world only. The *Roman de la Rose* contains nothing that would tell us about the relationship of the Rose’s will to her soul’s immortality, about her psyche apart from its relational aspects. Consequently, the *Roman de la Rose* does not offer a psychology that can be used to describe and diagnose the relation between the different sins of a single confessing subject, say, or what a woman or man is in the privacy of his or her own soul—the battle of an individual’s personal *psychomachia*. Such a description is not the poem’s intent, and for the purposes of this study, these limitations prevent it from being usefully read as a work of *sowlehele* in the way that debates between the personified Body and Soul of a single being might be, even if they are written in Latin.

In his portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, during a pivotal scene that parodies the teacher-student model made famous by Boethius, Jean de Meun playfully works through the implications of using female allegorical figures to advance a (male) author’s intellectual agenda through a marked exaggeration of one character’s femininity. In this scene, the Lover hears the lessons of Reason, Jean de Meun’s version of Lady Philosophy. But *this* Reason, who should be advising the lover to be reasonable, per her named nature, is gradually overwhelmed by the Lover’s attractiveness and offers herself as his paramour, a replacement for the Rose after which he quests. She is, of course, in the process offering him the option of being a lover of the rational, but the flirtatiousness of the tone is hard to miss:

Nevertheless, I don’t want you to live without a friend. If it pleases you, turn your attention to me. Am I not a lady beautiful, noble, fit to serve a worthy man, even the emperor of Rome? I want to become your friend, and if you wish to hold to me, do you know what my love will be worth to you? . . . I am the daughter of God, the sovereign father who made and shaped me so.
See here His form, and see yourself in my clear face. No girl of such descent ever had such power of loving as have I, for I have leave of my father to take a friend and be loved.44

This moment is a late and highly stylized development in the tradition of female speakers in medieval allegory, a moment of vernacular response to already established tendencies in the Latin authorities.

The thirteenth-century personification allegory of the *Roman de la Rose* represents a crucial step in the development of medieval psychological allegory, even if it is too busy being ironic to enact what Middle English scribes were to call *sowlehele*. Particularly in Jean de Meun’s continuation of Guillaume de Lorris’s allegory of love, the poem both synthesizes and parodies a huge swath of the Latin intellectual (and allegorical) tradition, while also actively engaging in the philosophical debates of its time. But despite Guillaume de Lorris’s promise that his allegory will represent the whole of the art of love, despite many characters’ attempts to advise the narrator in surviving overwhelming emotion, this psychology is not intended for healing. Even so, Jean de Meun’s playfulness about allegorical gender (in the case of Reason, and in the queer figure of Bel Acueil, a male entity personifying a woman’s initial welcoming to a man) shows that contradictions like the one between the purported irrationality of women and a female Reason were clear to at least some medieval authors.

The strong associative link between “woman” and “body” was discussed in the Introduction; it is both literalized and upended by Jean de Meun. Female forms were considered apt vessels for Philosophy or Reason for reasons beyond Romance grammar: By becoming personifications, what were abstractions like “philosophy” actually gaining? It at least seems that they are gaining a (female) body to inhabit, in a world where flesh was endlessly analogized with that which is gendered female. To equate the body with femininity is to place it very low on any epistemological hierarchy. This had worked for as long as the source of all true knowledge was divine illumination, an Augustinian concept immensely influential throughout the Middle Ages. However, with the

rediscovery of Aristotle’s De Anima in the early thirteenth century, it suddenly appeared that an authority (the authority) had argued that the bodily senses were also a crucial source of knowledge. Aristotle’s interest in the body as a source of knowledge sponsored a movement in Latin-language philosophical circles that may have prompted Jean de Meun, ever the most ironic of vernacular commentators on philosophical trends, to remember that the new scientific/philosophical interest in the body might have some impact on the conceptual understanding of “woman,” long equated with it.

By the thirteenth century, to give the entire notion of “the body” over to the realm of femininity, symbolically at least, is to relinquish a necessary source of knowledge. This did not mean a wholesale turn toward studying the ancillary problem of “women,” of course—rather, it tended to result in a decoupling of “woman” and “body,” for many but not for Jean de Meun. According to Sarah Kay’s analysis of the epistemology of embodiment in the Roman de la Rose, it is as if Jean de Meun half-jokingly offers the following new take on the workings of dualism: “If women are to body as man is to mind, and the body is a necessary source of knowledge, then women are a necessary source of knowledge.” This seems to justify Jean de Meun’s explicitly sexual rewriting of Guillaume de Lorris’s romantic quest for the love of the Rose, and its profound interest in getting inside the Castle where the Rose is imprisoned, if even by the back door. The philosophical quest for knowing a woman and the sexual quest for “knowing” a woman are one in Jean’s continuation of the Roman de la Rose.

Jean de Meun is not necessarily alone in seeing the humor in medieval personification allegory and its generic conventions. Guillaume de Lorris’s section of the Roman de la Rose also tweaks the intersection of philosophy, psychology, and allegorical narrative, as is evident in another pivotal but small detail: how characters do or do not possess free will given their allegorical names, a question addressed earlier in terms of Boethius’ Lady Philosophy. In Guillaume’s portion, early in the poem, a character named Dangier (usually translated as Resistance) makes a small concession to the Lover. When he is caught and reprimanded by Shame and Fear, he is angrily reminded that he ought to behave as standoffishly as his name implies:

“How can you sleep at a time like this?” she said, “with all this misfortune? . . . Have you been lying down now? Get up immediately and stop up all the holes in this hedge; be kind to no man. It doesn’t agree with your name for you to do anything but make trouble. If Fair Welcoming is

open and sweet, you are to be cruel and violent, full of offensive words that wound."  

She goes on to tell a proverb about how a buzzard cannot become a sparrow hawk, transparently explaining that Dangier, a “villain,” cannot rise above his station no matter what he does. Dangier is an example of an allegorical character who stretches the limits of his named nature until forced to snap back into its confines: Insofar as he is a person, and subject to persuasion and charm, he can be nice to the Lover, but insofar as he is an allegorical figure for the Rose’s reluctance to yield to the Lover, he must not. Dangier’s will is not entirely free because he is an allegorical character; but of course the will of a serf subject to a lord is not entirely free, either. The difference is of both scope and the nature of allegorical characterization as a literary conceit.

What permits Jean de Meun to play in this way with the contradictions that structure medieval thinking is the conceptual flexibility medieval allegory affords. This form has the capacity to respond to shifts in philosophical thinking, like the one referenced previously, in a very literal way, by dramatically staging how the implications of such philosophy work. When allegorical figures speak, argue, or even do battle with one another, they are staging a way of thinking about the self by thinking about embodiment. Notions such as Philosophy or Liberty move from existence as abstractions to taking on some sort of body, as well as a moment in time and a voice.

**Staging Body/Soul Debate in Latin Allegory**

Even before Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun had created their witty critique of allegorical gender and the mode’s ability to limit character’s free will, the tradition of using female figures to represent abstractions had persisted from its inauguration by Prudentius and Boethius. Philosophical allegory experienced a particular flowering in the twelfth century, with a group of thinkers inspired by Plato’s *Timaeus* and one another. This group included

46. Dahlberg, 77; “Comment dormez-vous à ceste hore, / Fet-ele, par male avanture? . . . Levés tost sus, et si bouchiés / Tous les partuis de ceste haie, / Et ne portés nului manaie: / Il n’afiert mie à vostre non, / Que vous faciès se anui non. / Se Bel-Acuueil est frans et dous, / Et vous, soies fel et estous, / Et plains de ramposne et d’outrage: / Vilains qui est cortois, c’est rage . . . ” Lecoy, 3814–15; 3828–36.

47. For some of the other late antique/early medieval works that also took up the convention of female tutelary figures, see Martianus Capella’s *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, written in the early fifth century (available in English as *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, trans. William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson, with E. L. Burge [New York: Columbia
not only those who were directly linked with the cathedral school of Chartres but also those who picked up and extended their interest in humanist studies and literary applications of Platonizing philosophy. Among their many other accomplishments, the twelfth-century thinkers and poets whose writings and sometimes lives have often been linked as the “Chartrians”—Bernard of Chartres (although, apart from John of Salisbury’s quotations, his verifiable works are lost), Thierry of Chartres, Gilbert of Poitiers, William of Conches, and John of Salisbury—laid the foundation for a merging of philosophy, psychology, and literary allegory. In what follows, this book steps away from the chronological sequence of famous and influential works, Psychomachia–Consolation–Roman de la Rose, to examine works that are considerably less famous but deal very directly with the matter of how the self is organized, through staging debates between the Body and the Soul.

The debated and useful notion that such a thing as a Chartrian “school” existed contributed importantly to another idea, something of a commonplace in contemporary medieval studies, that the twelfth century “discovered” the individual, to use the title of Colin Morris’s study. More recently, however, the argument that it was individuality that the twelfth century discovered has come to be replaced with the contention that what was discovered, or perhaps reformulated, in that era was something more like psychology, or rather ways of talking about the self both descriptively and normatively. This “discovery”
can be described in terms of its contribution to twelfth-century science. In Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry, a study that examines two psychological allegories that offer the narrative of a single self’s development, James Simpson has shown how John Gower’s Confessio Amantis as well as Alan of Lille’s Anti-claudianus function as “psychological allegories of the individual soul.”\textsuperscript{50} Simpson goes on to write that “both poems are structured around a psychology, and both imply a very subtle psychology of learning, which profoundly modifies the scientific content of either poem. It is central to the argument of the whole book, then, that both poems are coherent psychological allegories, anatomizing and representing the education of a single soul.” Twelfth-century writers were certainly doing more than setting the stage for the specifically vernacular version of sowlehele psychology of the Middle English debates between the Body and the Soul, but those thirteenth-century debates would not have been possible without the kind of thinking about the soul and the body that was being done in the neo-Platonic allegories of the twelfth century.

The earliest standalone Body/Soul dialogues on record seem to have been written in Old English, not Latin, as sermons and homilies. “Body/Soul dialogue,” however, may be a misnomer for these Old English works, “Soul and Body I,” “Soul and Body II,” and the “Worcester fragments”: Before the twelfth century, no Body actually offers counterarguments to the Soul’s accusations or, it seems, talks back at all.\textsuperscript{51} The earliest work that took the Body’s speaking hope for finding a clear moment when the notion of the individual was invented faded and, I believe, came to be replaced with a series of complex eruptions of rhetorics of selfhood, none of which could claim originary status. Ultimately, the irresolvable questions about how and when our notion of the self came to exist may be partially resolved through close inquiry into the disciplinary discourses (like psychology, of the medical, theological, and sowlehele varieties) that emerged to both describe and normalize whatever it is that persons were thinking they were.

\textsuperscript{50} Simpson, Sciences and the Self, 13.

\textsuperscript{51} The division and personified conflict between body and soul was also developed in the tradition of Christian legends and homilies, visions of dead bodies whose souls lament as they are dragged away to hell or rejoice as they are lifted up to heaven—a tradition that exists in both Latin and the vernacular. Theodore Batiouchkof has written about the early Christian origins of the Body/Soul legend (“Le Débat de l’âme et du corps,” Romania 20 [1891]: 1-55; 513–78) and Louise Dudley about the connections between this legend and the Egyptian Book of the Dead (The Egyptian Elements in the Legend of the Body and the Soul [Baltimore: Bryn Mawr College Monographs No. 8]). However, the most proximate sources for the debate are homilies: Eleanor K. Heningham has argued that Body/Soul debates can be traced to the homilies of one Ephraem Syrus, d. 375 (“The Precursors of the Worcester Fragments, PMLA 55 [1940]: 299n]). See also two important Latin sources, the Nonantola version of the Body/Soul legend, originally edited by Batiouchkof as an appendix to his article about Body/Soul debates (see 576–78 of that article) and a pseudo-Augustinian homily, Sermon 49 of the collection Sermones Ad Fratres in Eremo (edited in the Patrologia Latina 40: 1332–34). The last two have been edited, and information about sources assembled, by Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder, ed. and trans., in Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1976). See also Douglas Moffat, The Soul’s Address to the Body: The Worcester
role seriously and is therefore considered in this study as a Body/Soul debate was written in Latin around 1100. Hildebert of Lavardin, Archbishop of Tours, produced an allegorical debate between a narrator named Hildebert and his soul called the “Liber de Querimonia.” Hildebert may have been drawing on a much older tradition of sermon literature but fusing it with the conventions of the Latin personification allegory and the philosophical work done by the disputational mode. The only other early debate of this kind, the twelfth-century Latin “Royal Debate,” also known as “Nuper huuiuscemodi,” is preserved in a single manuscript and organized as a series of very long set-piece speeches rather than as dynamic interchange.

It is unclear whether Hildebert’s personification allegory was the first or one of the first full-fledged debates between the Body and the Soul, but it was certainly part of a very early moment in the history of this homiletic trope’s emergence as a popular literary/didactic hybrid genre in which the Body really did talk back to the Soul. Hildebert’s work also provides the most direct and fruitful link back to the allegorical traditions of Boethius and Prudentius. Certainly, Hildebert was known to be in correspondence with the best minds of his day (including Anselm of Canterbury, Hugh of Cluny, and Bernard of Clairvaux), and may have been particularly well-positioned to observe and influence the way in which thinking about the body/soul relation in the homiletic tradition (speaking Soul, silent Body) may have become unsatisfying. He was also quite aware that there was another, Boethian tradition to draw from to create his own work, and he did so. This study does not attempt to

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52. According to Bridget K. Balint’s dissertation on the “Liber de Querimonia,” the Cosmographia appears in three of the twenty-two medieval manuscripts that contain Hildebert’s allegorical debate between Hildebert and Anima, which represents a number of scribes thinking that the two works went together nicely. See Balint, “Hildebert of Lavardin’s ‘Liber de querimonia’ in Its Cultural Context” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002), 90; see also n. 65.

53. Eleanor K. Heningham, editor of the so-called Royal debate, argues for the Royal’s primacy as the first Latin debate to stage a disagreement between the Body and the Soul. According to her research, it is likely that the “Royal” was a major source for the “Visio Philiberti,” which, in turn, was a major source for the thirteenth-century English Body/Soul debates discussed in the next chapter. Heningham was unaware of the existence of Hildebert of Lavardin’s work, and it is not clear how she would have positioned her argument had she taken his dialogue into account: She dates the “Royal” to the first half of the twelfth century, but there is no evidence proving it earlier or later than Hildebert’s; my chapter discusses Hildebert at more length simply because he is the link between the Boethian tradition and the Body/Soul dialogues. The “Royal” debate, also known by its incipit as “Nuper huuiuscemodi,” is edited and introduced by Heningham in An Early Latin Debate of the Body and Soul (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1937).

54. The preceding, like most of my factual information about Hildebert of Lavardin (and a useful translation of his allegory), comes from Balint, “Hildebert of Lavardin’s ‘Liber de querimonia.’” Balint, Ordering Chaos (2009), is the revised version of this dissertation. The Latin
trace a tradition of influence, although Bridget Kennedy Balint has argued persuasively that the “Liber de querimonia” “stands at the head of a stream of body-and-soul debates composed in Latin during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.” Instead of engaging this claim and the developmental model such engagement would entail, this study looks at selected resonant moments in the history of the kind of disputation that was being used as medicine for the soul. Hildebert’s poem certainly was that, and more. According to Peter Orth, the debate’s editor, Hildebert’s version of the Body/Soul debate survives in twenty-two manuscripts, which would be a great many if it were a Middle English work but is not so many for a work written in Latin by a significant figure in the Church hierarchy. While Hildebert’s poem seems to have been disseminated far better than the roughly contemporary “Royal Debate” (extant in a single copy), it was certainly not the most popular example of its type. The reasons for this are, most likely, contained in the allegory’s rather surprising and convoluted plot, which revolves almost entirely around the politics of allegorical gender.

Hildebert of Lavardin’s “Liber de Querimonia” is a hybrid of the homiletic Soul’s lament and the scene of a narrator consoled by a tutelary female figure embodying some abstraction. This new strain of poetry depicting the contents of the self as divisible into a Body and Soul was written in part as tribute to the dialogic allegorical structure of the Consolation of Philosophy, which, according to Balint, was the central influence on the text in terms of vocabulary and style. Like Boethius, Hildebert uses the prosimetrum form, alternating poetry with prose. Like Boethius’ Consolation, Hildebert’s “Liber de Querimonia” imagines the soul as a lady arrived to lecture to a hapless narrator bearing the name of the prosimetrum’s author. Hildebert’s narrator, rather than being imprisoned, has been absorbed in rebuilding his house, which had fallen down as a result of a fire (this circumstance and the Soul’s lamentations about its lack of proper lodging may be allegorical gestures toward an ultimately underdeveloped “body as castle” trope, discussed in a different context in chapter 4).

The “Liber” establishes itself as both like and unlike the surviving Old English homilies containing an address by the Soul to the Body. Instead of being a hulk of mute, dead flesh, the figure representing bodiliness is a living

edition of Hildebert’s allegory appears as Peter Orth, ed., Hildebert’s Prosimetrum De Querimonia und die Gedichte eines Anonymus (Vienna: Osterreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Arbeiten zür mittel- und neulateinischen Philologie 6, 2000).
narrator named Hildebert. Perhaps because Hildebert of Lavardin is using his own name as that of the narrator, the Body makes cogent and reasonable arguments in its defense, using skilled rhetoric. Hildebert objects that the Soul "ascribe[s] the entire cause of your corruption to the exterior man. . . . [Y]ou have used the body as your accomplice, [ . . . ] as a master uses a slave, or as an artisan a tool. . . . Why then do you paint another, an innocent, with the dye of your crime?" Naturally, the Soul still wins the argument, citing the authority of the Church Fathers, specifically the narrative of the Fall and the equation of Eve with the sinful flesh: "Our flesh was tempted, woman was tempted . . . because of the flesh inciting and the spirit incited as though by her husband and spouse, that first transgression came to be." Eve, the "woman" here, represents the original "wife" side of the pair being imagined; that "wife" is the body, or the flesh, and it is also, in the context of this dialogue, Hildebert, the narrator.

In his prosimetrum, Hildebert of Lavardin, like Boethius before him, makes use of his tutelary figure's gender as a way of making a philosophical point: Whether one reads the work as an interpretation of Boethius or an innovation similar to Jean de Meun's coquettish Reason depends on what one thinks of the Consolation of Philosophy as a work of self-conscious literary art. However, whether imitating a subtle point unsubtly or differentiating himself from Boethius, who missed the implications of his own writing, Hildebert assiduously addresses himself to the problem posed by having the top tier of the hierarchy permanently occupied by a female figure. By the personification allegory's end, he effectively inverses the genders of his speakers, and his Soul establishes herself as "husband" to the unruly and appetitive "wife," Hildebert's narrator, Hildebert. Late in the prosimetrum, after Hildebert has become Anima's "proud" wife, the allegory's last lines look back at its beginning with horror in this way: "A monstrousity [comes about]: the flesh becomes husband, the spirit, wife." The situation being described as monstrous toward the allegory's end is actually a perfectly apt description of the quasi-Boethian situation (the spirit gendered female, the body somehow gendered male, and


58. "temptata est enim caro, temptata est mulier . . ut ex subigente carne et subacto spiritu velut ex marito et coniuge primum illud gigneretur delictum . . . (Balint, Ordering Chaos, 184; Orth, 85, 998A–998B, 31, 35–37).

59. Balint, Ordering Chaos, 190. In Latin, this line is: "Inque creando nefas caro fit vir, spiritus uxor" (Orth, 95, 11, 1004A). The phrase "proud wife" occurs in this passage: . . . in the manner of a strict regimen or the stern and scrupulous admonishment of a husband to his proud wife." Balint, Ordering Chaos, 186. In Latin: . . . quam vel egro dieta vel superbe coniugi severior et morosa mariti correctio" (Orth, 90, 118, 1001A).
the two apparently married to one another) that began the “Liber de Querimonia.” The speaker’s initial gender and marital arrangement is to be retrospectively understood as a terrible perversion, while, for a contemporary reader, the fact that the genders of the prosimetrum’s two protagonists prove to be exchangeable cannot help seeming strangely, startlingly queer. This queerness may support the argument made in Tison Pugh’s Queering Medieval Genres about Hildebert of Lavardin as a poet who queers medieval genres, although Pugh’s argument concerns Hildebert’s lyrics and does not touch upon this debate.  

According to Balint’s succinct summary of the gender problem plaguing the “Liber de Querimonia”: “In Hildebert’s universe, the soul must be masculine in order to be virtuous; in order to reclaim virtue, Anima, the fallen bride of Christ, must assert authority over Hildebert, and the most effective way to do so is to be vir to Hildebert’s uxor.” The narrator, Hildebert, must undergo a conceptual sex-change in the course of the allegory in order for a proper hierarchical relationship to be established between himself (as Body) and his own soul. He does so, tells us that he’s doing so, and notes the strangeness of so doing.

60. Tison Pugh’s chapter on Hildebert of Lavardin and two other Latin poets in Queering Medieval Genres (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) discusses a contradiction in Hildebert’s poetic corpus. Among Hildebert’s lyrics, there are some praising same-sex love (these are set in a classical past) and others sternly condemning sodomy. Indeed, in the poem “De malitia saeculi,” Hildebert characterized same-sex desire as the “sexual incarnation of the fallen world . . . [which] can only be conquered by the flesh being ruled by the mind.” The poem reads, “Et, vice mutata, caro jam nimium dominata / Mentis ad imperium, det sibi servitium,” which Pugh translates as “Turn things around again, and let flesh, which has excessively dominated, / Give service to the command of the mind” (Pugh, Queering, 36). Pugh is quoting and translating Les Mélanges poétiques d’Hildebert de Lavardin, ed. Barthélemy Hauréau (Paris: Pedone-Lauriel, 1882), 68–69. This Hildebert, who insists that the same-sex loving flesh be conquered, closely resembles the author of a marriage model for Body/Soul relations, but seems to contradict the Hildebert of the boy-love poems “Cum peteret puerum” (“When He Sought the Boy”) and “Phoebus de interitu Hyacinthi” (“Phoebus on the Death of Hyacinth”), which are discussed in Pugh, 33–34. Pugh argues that, though his poems about boy-love may or may not tell us something about Hildebert’s real and hidden desires, the celebration as well as the condemnation of sodomy in his poetic corpus exists because medieval writers “could have believed that same-sex acts were both good and bad, both salvific and damning [because] . . . a significant strand of biblical teaching emphasized that the mighty and powerful shall be lowered and the weak and helpless raised in the kingdom of heaven” (25).

61. Balint, “Liber de Querimonia,” 66. Balint notes, “If we had begun with an appearance of a personified, female caro to a soul named Hildebert, all conflict would have been averted. As it is, though, the author reestablishes body and soul in their proper places by demoting Hildebert to wifely status, and restoring the soul to superiority by reassigning its grammatical gender and its status within the marriage metaphor,” 64. Somehow, readers of the allegory cannot help thinking in the subjunctive about all the problems Hildebert could have avoided—but surely he didn’t avoid them for a good reason. See also Balint’s more complex revisiting of this argument, Ordering Chaos, 89–92.
There are a number of words for “soul” in Latin, many of which are used interchangeably, in arbitrary or in deliberate fashion. The main difference between them seems to be the gender of the nouns: In addition to *anima* (f.), there are *animus* (m) and *spiritus* (m). Barbara Newman gives a very clear description of the convention of including only Anima in personification allegory:

The semantic fields of *anima* (f.) and *animus* (m.) overlap, but *animus* is more commonly linked with the “higher” mental faculties—mind, spirit, purpose, imagination, courage, will—while *anima* is linked with the vital breath and the “lower” faculty of quickening the body. One might have expected medieval writers, with their well-known preference for the mental over the corporeal, to personify and valorize the *animus* rather than the *anima*, but they almost never did.62

In medieval Latin debates between the Body and the Soul, the Soul is most often referred to as “anima,” which is also true of the Latin titles given in manuscripts to Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Old French Body/Soul debates. In addition to *corpus*, *corporis* (neut), the most frequently used word for “body,” there is also *caro*, *carnis* (f). These last two should map nicely onto the body/flesh distinction, with the feminine noun standing in for the fallible flesh, but, in practice, these are often used interchangeably. Latin-language authors, therefore, have a wide latitude in organizing the gender dynamic of the relationship between body and soul, and yet the most common form remains very stable.

The most standard definition of the soul’s relationship with the body is given in a well-disseminated pseudo-Augustinian text, *De Spiritu et Anima*, most likely written by a Cistercian monk. The definition this treatise offers has become standard, even if the text it appears within never quite enters the philosophical canon: “The soul is a substance which participates in reason and is so fashioned as to rule the body” [*animus est substantia quaedam rationis particeps, regendo corpori accomodata*].63 This tag seems to have been quite

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63. A. V. C. Schmidt discusses the *De Spiritu et Anima* as a possible source for the Liberrum Arbitrium section of *Piers Plowman*, citing its usefulness as “a kind of encyclopaedia of psychology, which was widely read in the Middle Ages. This highly eclectic work attempts to synthesize Platonic, Aristotelian, and Biblical ideas. . . . [Such works] formed one of the chief sources, if not the chief source, of psychological doctrine and terminology” A. V. C. Schmidt, “Langland and Scholastic Philosophy,” *Medium Aevum* 38.2 (1969): 144. Schmidt offers a brief analysis of *De Spiritu et Anima*, William of Thierry’s *De Natura Corporis et Anima*, and Cassiodorus’ *De Anima*. According to Schmidt, these works were such useful sources for psychological knowledge because they were “noncontroversial” and “accessible,” and used a less technical
common. What is distinctive is that its choice of terminology for body and soul \( \textit{animus} \) (m) and \( \textit{corpus} \) (n) is not used in the literature that reflects this definition with the most clarity—Latin Body/Soul debates, with Hildebert’s “Liber de Querimonia” as just the earliest example.

It would have been far simpler to begin with a dominating, perhaps masculine Soul (\( \textit{animus} \) or \( \textit{spiritus} \)) who would justly rule over the narrator/Body. If the Soul were masculine, the Body could even be either \( \textit{caro}, \textit{carnis} \) (f), the Soul’s subservient wife, or \( \textit{corpus}, \textit{corporis} \) (neut); it would not necessarily matter. Later medieval English authors do just this, positing a masculine Soul’s domination of a masculine Body and fully excluding the feminine—this, in fact, is the literary/linguistic development traced in the next two chapters. Hildebert, however, seems too committed to his Boethian \( \textit{modus operandi} \) to begin the work with this simple arrangement; instead, he achieves the proper gender hierarchy in an incredibly convoluted manner whose progress makes up most of the matter of the “debate.”

Why set up the task of achieving the “correct” gendered hierarchy to be so difficult? Not only does it prove morally unacceptable; it also seems to necessitate a lengthy discussion of female sexual sinfulness. Somehow, the heterosexual dyad of husband and wife seems to suggest, to Hildebert-the-author’s apparent discomfort, ongoing conjugal relations taking place within the self. Sex is a specter haunting this debate, as indeed it seems to haunt the rhetoric of all Body/Soul debates (notwithstanding the fact that sex with another aspect of oneself can, at best, be understood as narcissism). In Hildebert of Lavardin’s rendering of this problematic theme, Anima’s lament to Hildebert, at the allegory’s beginning, is entirely about sexual sin: She complains, at some length, about having been prostituted by her own servant girl. In the “Liber,” whether because it is early or because it is idiosyncratic, that servant, the sinful \( \textit{ancilla} \), is the third character, a silent ill-doer in the Hildbert/Anima dialogue. And yet, as the allegory proceeds and it turns out that Hildebert is the Body of this put-upon Anima, his defensiveness and his eventual regret make it seem as though he is shouldering the blame for Anima’s mistreatment. In terms

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64. Balint notes that “the popularity of this metaphor \( \textit{domina/ancilla} \) to represent a proper hierarchical relationship cannot be overstated” and cites examples from Augustine’s \textit{In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos X}, Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s \textit{Poetria Nova}, and Peter Damien’s \textit{Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine}. Balint, PhD diss., 7n.
of fault or guilt, Hildebert-qua-Body and the servant girl seem to become a single being, as if Body and Flesh, which begin as separate characters, come to be viewed as a single, sinning whole—but somehow this union permits the normative, divinely sanctioned economy of a “proper” marriage of Soul and Body (with the Soul as husband) to exist.

In the years that followed the writing of Hildebert’s allegory, a tradition of Latin Body/Soul debate came into being. Some debates survive in single manuscript copies, such as the one that Hans Walther, its editor, titled “Streit zwischen Korper und Seele” (also known by the incipit “Conpar mea nobilis”) and the “Altercacio Carnis et Spiritus” (incipit “O Caro, cara vilitas”), analyzed thoroughly and well by Michel-Andre Bossy in a 1976 article in *Comparative Literature*. In both poems, the flesh and sexuality are inextricably linked, and the Soul is simply disgusted by the Body’s propensities, instead of being in any way implicated in them by marriage or partnership. In a way, these poems can be seen as participating in the tradition of Hildebert’s “Liber”; they might also, in naming the Body as sinning flesh, be somewhat guilty of a Manichean rejection of the bodily that other Body/Soul debates adamantly refuse. The Body/Soul debate with the greatest dissemination, however, was a peculiar thirteenth-century poem usually referred to as the “Visio Philiberti.”

The “Visio Philiberti” is a hugely popular poem that richly deserves an entire study of its own. It survives in at least 131 manuscripts, making it a Latin-language best-seller, and this plentitude alone apparently poses such an immense challenge to editors and critics that it has hardly ever been edited or studied, a gap that Neil Cartlidge has recently started to remedy with his 2006 *Medium Aevum* article. In the limited terms of this study, the poem


66. Neil Cartlidge argues, quite persuasively, that there are probably many more copies in addition to the 131 identified by Walther (Walther claims to have identified 132, but Cartlidge points out that one among that number is a placeholder for a missing and unexamined manuscript). Neil Cartlidge, “In the Silence of a Midwinter Night: A Re-Evaluation of the Visio Philiberti,” *Medium Aevum* 75: 1 (2006): 24–46. There are several fairly similar versions of the “Visio Philiberti.” The more popular, with 131 copies (incipit “Noctis sub silentio”) has been edited by Thomas S. Wright as part of the collection, *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes* (London: Camden Society, 1841). Attribution to Walter Mapes has always been questioned and has largely been debunked in the twentieth century. However, a very similar poem, with the incipit “Vir quidam existerat dudum hermita,” was edited by Edelstand du Méril in *Poésies populaires antérieures au XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1843), 217–30. There is an also an older edition by Theodor Georg von Karajan, in *Frühlingsgabe für Freunde älterer Literatur* (Vienna, 1839). The “Visio Philiberti” appears in partial form on the verso (f. 164v) of a manuscript, the Cotton Caligula A xi, which contains a copy of *Piers Plowman* B that begins on the following recto (f. 165r). However, I have been unable to determine with any certainty whether both
represents a different, although related, strain of thought about the Body and its position vis-à-vis the Soul, a richly philosophical representation of this relationship as evinced, in part, by the long critical tradition of (falsely, scholars now think) attributing the authorship of the “Visio Philiberti” to significant British philosophers, particularly Robert Grosseteste.67

The “Visio Philiberti” is introduced by a passage that shows up in only certain redactions, as a vision by a pious monk. The scene of disputation portrayed in it is framed by an external narrator, whose frightened and repentant response to the vision telegraphs the poem’s didactic intent. Yet the poem is less like a homily than like a philosophical debate: Soul and Body both make masterful use of a number of rhetorical devices in addition to the conventions of ubi sunt (enumeration of lost possessions and status) and other necessary elements of didactic deathbed situations. The gender of the Body does seem somewhat flexible. It is first addressed as “O Caro miserrima,” but when the Body responds to the Soul it is described, apparently by that third-person observer, as “corpus caput erigit.”68 Ultimately, however, the “Visio Philiberti” and many subsequent debates turn from the husband/wife model to a same-sex economy of social differentiation and do not spend much time playing with the “corpus/caro” or “animus/anima/spiritus” distinctions. In the single descriptive model of the Body and Soul’s relationship that the poem offers, the Body describes itself as an ancilla and then, as a virtual synonym, as pedissequa to the Soul’s (badly behaved) domina (who explains that God gave her the Body as a handmaiden).69 This same-sex hierarchy is very clear and needs poems were written in the same hand and whether there was any scribal intention to link the works together.

67. This was the attribution proposed by Hans Walther (in Das Streitgedicht) and is regularly mentioned by the few critics who discuss the poem, but Cartlidge says that the suggestion “outruns the evidence” (Cartlidge, “A Re-Evaluation of the Visio Philiberti” 42, n. 21). While such attribution is nothing like a secure ascription of the poem to any particular author, it is one of the oldest and most consistent aspects of the reception history of a poem that has received little critical attention beyond such attribution, and it functions as a sort of vote of confidence in the poem rather than a genuine evaluation of its qualities.


69. Wright: “et ut ancilla fierem tibi me donavit” (113); “si velle spiritus in operе ducatur / per carnem pedissequam suam, quid culpatur?” (130–31). Cartlidge, in a discussion of the Body’s arguments in its own defense, finds these characterizations of the Body-as-handmaiden unconvincingly humble, arguing that these “images of its subordinacy are far too artful and overdrawn to appear as anything other than hypocritical” (Cartlidge, “A Re-Evaluation of the Visio Philiberti,” 34). However persuasive they might have been intended to be in terms of the actual debate between Body and Soul, ancilla and domina are the terms that name their relationship, as affirmed by the Soul when she counteraccuses the Body of treachery, calling her familiaris proditrix (“household traitor,” 156), as Cartlidge himself notes, a “distinctively ‘feudal’ concept” (Cartlidge, 34).
no reversing: Social class seems to have a more stable basis than the gender of allegorical beings.

In place of a disputational scene in which a female personification of philosophy or reason lectures a male interlocutor, Soul and Body, both female, struggle with the fact that they are one but separate (this contrasts with Hildebert, who initially had trouble recognizing the stern Anima as his own soul). Michel-Andre Bossy notes that it differs from other Latin Body/Soul debates by presenting itself “less as a disputation between separate speakers than as a dialogue-in-monologue.”70 This sense of one being warring with itself, rather than two quite separate beings in dialogue, is the particular achievement of the “Visio Philiberti” as a work of psychological theory rather than an improved-upon, more amusing homily or a new spin on Boethius or Prudentius. As Cartlidge argues, rather than glibly recapitulating medieval dualism, the complex interactions between Body and Soul “testify not to a ‘mentality’ or an alternative theology, but to the instinctive recognition on the part of creative artists in the Middle Ages that theology is necessarily too complicated and too heavily qualified to be translated, without adaptation, into forms that are also dramatically effective or aesthetically appealing.”71 This poem is not a transcription of any particular school of medieval theology or psychology into dialogue form; it is a work of Latin sowlehele, which means that it attempts a balance between the didactic and the dramatic. Sometimes, the attempt of the “Visio Philiberti” to be “dramatically effective and aesthetically appealing” queers the scene that the poem describes, positing it as a scene of same-sex affection.

In its first speech, the Soul accused the Body of having tainted it, of having dragged it (certainly a physical metaphor) toward crime: “you always dragged me towards ill-doing / and so we will always be in sad sorrow.”72 When the Body responds, it does so in the language of seduction instead of the language of force: “the flesh seduces the soul,” she says, and, seduced, the Soul follows the flesh “like a bull led to the slaughter.”73 What may seem to a modern reader a boggling moment of queer figuration—of a female being corrupting another female being—is certainly not intended to be so. The phrase “like a bull led to the slaughter” works to disrupt this queerness, since “ductus” (led) marks the bull’s masculinity, all the more so since “bos” (bull) can be a neuter noun

70. Bossy, “Medieval Debates of Body and Soul,” 144. Michel-Andre Bossy also writes that previous scholars had “slighted the dramatic suppleness and individuality of [these] works in order to pigeonhole them in a rigid stemma” (150).
71. Cartlidge, 27.
but isn’t functioning as one here. However, the analogy with the bull is just that, an analogy. The female Soul is seduced as if it were nothing more than a male ox. Can this reading be intended by the author? Probably not. I’m sure that, instead, the economy of seduction in this passage is rendered in same-sex terms precisely to avoid the dangerously matrimonial language of such works as the “Liber de Querimonia.” Intentionally evoking same-sex relations or not, this queer moment is the only instance of either party in the debate using the language of seduction. In what proves to be a common tactic in Body/Soul debates, the poem quickly turns away from any mention of love between the two parts of the same being toward the discourse of discipline, as if the latter were ever entirely free of any touch of the queer.

The Soul’s response makes use, quite precisely, of the model where the Soul comes to be figured as the prison of the Body, in Foucault’s famous formulation, a language whose transformation back into love in the English tradition becomes the topic of this study’s third chapter:

When I wanted, flesh, to castigate you,
With hunger or wakefulness, or to tame you with a whip,
Soon the vanity of the world began to idolize you,
And drove you to become empty with trivialities.
And thus you took the mastery (dominium) from me,
You were my familiar betrayer (proditrix).
Through the enticements of the world you dragged me after you
And sweetly submerged me in the filth of sin.  

In this passage, which is the closest to actually discussing the relationship between the two beings that are really one (and is radically different from its Middle English counterpart, as discussed in chapter 3), the Body seems to have been merely distracted from the Soul’s attempts to punish/teach it. The language of “dragging” (traho, trahere) and of betrayal is what the Soul uses. It is only the detail that the Soul is submerged in sin “sweetly” (suaviter) that might suggest some joy being taken in the dragging process, but this sweet submersion is very different from the Anima/ancilla/Hildebert relationship of the “Liber de Querimonia.” Refusing the model of a queer heterosexuality of Hildebert of Lavardin’s allegory, the poems I discuss in chapters 2 and 3, in an apparent attempt to get away from the problematic and sexualized language of a marriage between Soul and Body, take up the queer same-sex model set up in the “Visio Philiberti.”

74. “Quando te volueram, caro, castigare / fame vel vigiliis, vel verbere domare, / mox te mundi vanitas caepit adulare / et illius frivolis coegit vacare. / Et ita dominium de me suscepisti / familiaris proditrix tu mihi fui / per mundi blanditas me post te traxisti, / etin peccati pu- teum suaviter mersisti” (Wright, “Visio Philiberti,” 151–58).
The Performative Work of Allegorical Debate

The relationship of soul and body is something that is being imagined and reinvented throughout the Middle Ages, but fully articulated literary considerations of this relationship thrive particularly in the thirteenth century—the century of the Fourth Lateran Council—and they thrive at the intersection of didactic literature, allegorical poetry, and pedagogical discipline. Together, debates between the Body and the Soul, and other descendants of the psychomachia tradition, contributed to the formation of a way of thinking that was never as simple a dualism as these poems’ titles would suggest. Latin debates between the Body and the Soul dealt with the issue of the self through disputational allegory, which permitted them to engage the fused philosophical and psychological issues that all medieval personification allegory highlights. Allegory also permitted such debates to stage the problem of the self in terms of the gender of its component parts, a surprising development that may have had more to do with the history of allegorical conventions than with the philosophy or psychology of the person.

Personification allegory functioned as a major mode of “doing” psychology in the Middle Ages, giving guidance to those who, though seeking to understand the nature of the self, would find the more formal tools and tropes in academic treatments of the self excessively abstract or irrelevant. Medieval allegory mixes the philosophical and the psychological and permits them to play off one another, never “dumbing down” the ideas in question, but rather putting them on the stage, using performative utterance to create and delimit the self and its possibilities. J. L. Austin’s well-known definition of the performative emphasizes social consent to an utterance that does what it says. Allegorical personification performs in this sense, “doing” philosophy by “being” Philosophy, while also the using more conventional definition of performance as something staged. Personification allegory functions as a performative psychological theory, and specifically as a theory that performs the relationship between the body and the soul.

Throughout this chapter, I have been wary of any claim that allegorical gender is based “merely” on the ancient structures of Romance grammar, which genders abstractions as feminine. In some of the earliest Body/Soul debates written in Latin, especially Hildebert of Lavardin’s “Liber de Querimonia,” and particularly in how the “Liber” differs from the later and far more popular “Visio Philiberti,” the playful work of gender in allegory becomes very clear. These works connect the Latin and the vernacular traditions by interweaving personification allegory, philosophy, and psychology. The informal quality of body/soul and afterlife theology that characterizes Latin Body/Soul debates, particularly the “Visio Philiberti,” marks them as works of sowlehele. In these
works, perhaps, we have proof that grammatical gender is more plaything than straitjacket to the nimble minds of Latin-language authors. The complex and often startlingly queer work of setting up hierarchy between Body and Soul through gender is possible because of the richly useful incarnational inherent to the Latin words for “soul” and “body,” although Middle English finds its own ways to create this play without gendered nouns, as the poem “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt” discussed in chapter 3 shows.

The convention of female tutelary figures guiding hapless narrators and/or battling evil within the self helps to install something that is figured as female into the very center of a certain conception of selfhood, as a voice that speaks within. The debates produced in this tradition had very different levels of circulation—from the considerable, popular dissemination of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy or the “Visio Philiberti” to the relative obscurity of Hildebert’s “Liber de Querimonia.” The English works discussed in the following chapters make use of similar tropes and figures even as they mold the notion of the self into new and different shapes and hierarchies. All of the Body/Soul debates—Latin, Old French, and Middle English alike—share a central concern with how the hierarchy that places the Soul in the dominant role is to be maintained at every level of the allegory, with how to depict the utterly joined quality of the Soul/Body relation with a minimal possibility for slipping into a depiction of sexual sin between them. The Middle English debates, “In a Thestri Stude” and “Als I Lay in a Winteris Nyt,” are able to do so in a language free of whatever arbitrarily grammatical constraints Romance languages possess, because, although remnants of noun gender remain for centuries, Middle English authors are not in any way bound to gendering abstract nouns as feminine. This permits works of sowlehele to excise even the same-sex feminine relationship of “Visio Philiberti” and to work through the hierarchies of male-male power relations, setting up a homosocial world where the love that must of necessity exist between Soul and Body expresses the ambivalent and complex politics of medieval love between men. In the following chapters, I return to the Latin Body/Soul debate tradition as well as to Prudentius and Boethius as part of understanding works as diverse as a psychomachia-like allegory for anchoresses and a quest to know the truth by a person who oscillates between being a man named Will and a personification of the will.

This chapter began with Barbara Johnson’s gesture toward the history of representations of women in allegory and, with that gesture, how the Middle Ages inhabit certain modern forms of thought. The medieval allegories discussed here did not constitute a sort of passive womb waiting for modern critical theory to inseminate it with meaning, like the chora of the Timaeus waits for the demiurge to create matter. My hope is that Johnson’s encounter
with Dinshaw’s analysis of allegorical reading, and with early modern allegory in general, was something more than merely accidental, just as Johnson and I both hope, without certainty, that all those female allegorical figures are the products of something more telling about the status of the female body in culture than “mere” grammatical norms.

In her essay, Johnson ultimately understands the workings of personification as intimately similar to the discourses of positionality within identity politics, of speaking “as if” and “for” given groups, whether minoritarian or majoritarian. She points out the problem of allegorical reference in the political sphere: Dominant groups see themselves as “personifications of the whole—humanity, reason, law, truth—not personifications within a psychomachia for control of the social text” (73). In other words, one danger of allegory is that it will totalize and simplify instead of dramatizing the complexity of conflicts between groups that might or might not be fully represented by persons bearing the labels of identity politics. Personification endows an abstraction with a body and a voice; but, as in seminal feminist works such as Denise Riley’s Am I That Name?: The Category of “Women” in History and in Johnson’s writings on allegory, questioning the validity of how an allegory refers and of the relationships it elucidates is also a crucial political activity.

Johnson’s description of the political sphere as a “a psychomachia for control of the social text” reimagines the conceptual capacities of the psychomachia and uses the language of allegory to transform, as the chestnut goes, the personal into the political. This analysis seems, to me, beautifully to promise that the work we do in seeking to understand the politics of personification in the Middle Ages both is important in and of itself and might prove applicable to discussions of modern souls and bodies. The chapters that follow are an attempt to read medieval allegory, the politics of gender, and the institutions of both philosophy and psychology in a way that neither chooses body over soul or modern over medieval, nor maps these onto one another. Like the optical illusion in which what looks one minute like a rabbit appears to be a duck the next, these chapters work on seeing complex things in multiple ways. Given time, it is possible to see both images and even to play with their necessary interdependence.


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