

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

COMPARATIVE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY OF LOVE AND EMPTINESS:  
NONDUAL UNION IN BUDDHISTS AND BEGUINES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

HYEIN PARK

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2022

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS, METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	1
2. NONDUAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF NOTHINGNESS AND NO-SELF: MARGUERITE PORETE, AND HER BUDDHIST AFFINITIES .....	16
3. BECOMING DIVINE: NONDUAL UNION IN BEGUINE-BUDDHIST THEOLOGICAL MEDITATION ....	99
4. HOLY MADNESS AND DIVINE JOY: LOVE AND MELANCHOLY IN COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM.....	145
5. JOY THAT IS BLISS AND BEATITUDE: WHEN PORETE MEETS NONDUALIST TANTRIC UNION.....	198
Bibliography.....	245

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to recognize my advisor Dr. Dwight N. Hopkins for the past 11 years, from the days of Master of Divinity to the end of this doctoral program, at the Divinity School. Despite my shortcoming and eccentricity, I have not once been pushed or chastised. Being an international student from Korea, often my awkward expressions could have become hindrance, but his generosity and understanding has no bounds. I have always been met with humor and grace, and I could not have prayed for a better teacher and guide to whom I can always turn to with curiosity and trust. Prof. Hopkins opened my eyes with the esteemed history of Civil Rights movement and the Black Liberation Theology in the USA and the globe, first in 2010, when he visited my alma mater for a year. Without his recommendation, and enduring pastoral presence, my stay at University of Chicago wouldn't have even begun. Thanks to Dr. Hopkins' extensive cross-cultural experience and knowledge across the Americas and the Asia, I developed an interest in learning the Asian religion for the first time in my life, ironically. It was through Prof. Brook Ziporyn, whose expansive knowledge and creativity illuminates my mind each time I have conversation with him. His philosophical expertise in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist philosophy is something I only look up to, and never ceasing to be refreshing and inspiring. It is my honor to have Dr. Ziporyn as one of my dissertation committee readers. This sense of honor and gratitude should then be directed to Prof. Holly Hillgardner, whose fascinating work on Hadewijch and Mirabai instantly led me to follow the path of comparison and study of mysticism, as the topic of my dissertation. Dr. Hillgardner has agreed to be on my committee, had met with me for the Midpoint Review all through Zoom, during pandemic. I sincerely look

forward to thanking Dr. Hillgarder in person, for her graciousness in this journey and the dazzling beauty of her writing which I keep returning to.

I will remember these teachers' presence: Dean James T. Robinson, Professors Curtis Evans, Kevin Hector, Margaret M. Mitchell, Willemien Otten, and Richard Rosengarten. Their bottomless intelligence and kindness at the Swift Hall reminds me of the mystical sages I've only witnessed in legends and myths. It was truly a mixture of grace and good fortune to cross paths with these magnificent educators through coursework and exams. I am deeply grateful that Prof. Sarah Hammerschlag has given me the precious opportunity to support the largest introductory class. The classroom indeed radiated with brilliance and passion of the teacher and students, and I learned a ton simply by serving the beautiful minds and robust readers of Divinity School, even just for the Autumn. If not for Professors Christian Wedemeyer and Karma Ngodup, I would have remained half-empty, in terms of the inspiration of my dissertation: the world of Tibetan Buddhism. Their hospitality extended during and after the pandemic, and the kind suggestions at the in-person and online office hours have grounded the direction and methodology of this thesis. Naturally, any lack of precision and error is entirely my own. Truly I aspire to emulate the teachers.

As I spent one year plus a decade, I've come to respect and love these wonderful friends and colleagues very much. Through entering doctoral program, I was blessed to meet: Miriam Attia and Aaron Holt, Seth Auster-Rosen and Alex Matthews (and their divine feline Kālī and Tārā), Seema Chauhan, Vinicius Marinho, Dhruv Nagar, Paride Stortini, H.S. Sum Cheuk Shing, and Bruce Winkelman. Scholar-friends whom I've known since 2011: Olivia Bustion, Jason Cather, Matthew Creighton, Noriko Kanahara, Anil Mundra, Daniel Owings, Hannah Roh, Lilith Swygart, Héctor M. Varela Rios, Rachel Watson, and Virginia White. This is a shortlist of

angels with invisible wings who have balanced my despondent demeanor with their abundant confidence and infectious cheerfulness. I wonder how I came to deserve their friendship. Since there is no other adequate logic, I now believe in auspicious connections and forces of affinity that somehow brought us together in this universe. They are incredible scholars, who are extraordinary in every way. Upon their arrival, I had so much fun in a place known as where fun comes to die. I am proud to have known them and as the gift of deep thinking and determination has paved their path, I simply add my prayers for even brighter future. When it comes to prayers, I do not know a more devoted, ethically minded individual than my friend Chime Lama. When I was truly struggling during Chicago's second winter, Chime arrived and she gradually introduced me to the world of Buddhism, and to the way of being a balanced and a joyful sentient being. Though only one visit to Kunzang Palchen Ling, the esteemed Dharma teacher, Bardor Tulku Rinpoche handed me over his book *Living in Compassion* after hearing about my emotional struggles. Chime's luminous presence must have taken after the great lama, who was her father. She was a light to my nerdy solitude when we were both master's students. I miss the meals together, conversations and the poems and songs she created and shared with me. She has always been an artist, in the most genuine and diverse sense, and I sincerely hope that more people get to enjoy and be inspired by her continuing literary, musical and visual works of art.

None of this academic life was possible without Disciples of Christ, a denomination that provided me an intellectual, communal and financial home. As a denomination that embodies discipleship and scholarship, I discovered and learn from these teachers and ministers: Professors and Dean of Disciples Divinity House Kristine Culp and Rev. Dr. Cynthia G. Lindner; friend of DDH, architect Paul Steinbrecher; Former Dean of Students Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, my previous teaching pastor, and currently the President of our denomination. Rev. Judith Guy and

her spirited sisters whose inner and outer beauty shines, welcoming me into their lives. Mark and Daette Lambert couple embody a personhood and scholarship built on empathy, humility and heartwarming virtues. At the Swift Hall, many thanks to the consistent support from the current Dean of Students Anita Lumpkin, Associate Dean of Students Mimi Maduff, Rev. Americia Huckabee, Ms. Nathelda McGee, and Suzanne Riggle, without whom none of my studies (or life in general) could have proceeded as normal. I want to express all the wonderful staffs a profound appreciation. Also, I am ever indebted to Dr. David Berrier and Ms. Deborah Weaver for my mental and psychological sustenance, well-being and improvement. Their wisdom and counsel had been guiding me with ineffable sense of care and compassion throughout my doctoral program, and well before the crisis of global pandemic. To those who were previously unaware, bouts of my self-doubt or emotional turbulence was not a new phenomenon facing the rigor of University of Chicago, but had always been with me, in the name of Bipolar I disorder. Had I not sought out and gained awareness through working with these exceptional professionals, finishing dissertation would have remained but a dream. Directly and indirectly, the health of my mind, though imperfect, was built on their reasonable optimism for my own growth. I thank them deeply for continuously validating and encouraging my being, with their unmatched dedication and warmth.

Finally, no words of gratitude can express the love I've received from my family in South Korea, and how I feel toward them. I have been such an unusual daughter and a sister, but their faith, prayers, dreams in me never wavered. Each one of us is extremely different and unique, yet we have come this far and I thank God for protecting and uniting us as we are. I would like to dedicate to them, many more things, as much as I could— starting with this dissertation.

## ABSTRACT

Introduction surveys the field of mysticism, philosophy and religious studies in order to explain why the mode of ‘comparison’ is essential, especially when it comes to the contemplation of Marguerite Porete and Hadewijch, the French and Dutch Beguine mystics from 13<sup>th</sup> century; Their notoriously enigmatic mysticism, by which radical and unique meditations on indistinct union with Divine are expressed in erotic and ecstatic manner, may discover a counterpart in nondualist tantric traditions of Buddhism and the broader Indian discourse of self and soul. In short, I will argue for the significance of desire and emotion in the study of comparative mysticism. Following Chapter “Nondual Anthropology of Nothingness and No-Self,” therefore, attempts an interpretation of French Beguine Mystic Marguerite Porete, and her core notion of nothingness, first and foremost as Buddhist. In order to do so, the problem and method of comparative discourses will be examined and applied. My way of coping with this challenge is to primarily show how atypical, radical, and even ‘heretical’ Porete's theological anthropology of nothingness is; and how her mysticism actually becomes even clearer and more resonant when first compared to Buddhist philosophers such as Personalists (*pudgalavadin*), and more profoundly, the Tibetan other-emptiness followers (*zhentongpa*) whose teaching also contain an unorthodox interpretation of no-self and emptiness, both transcendental and theological. This chapter briefly introduces philosophers such as the Tibetan Dölpopa, German mystic Eckhart, and the Buddhist masters Nagarjuna and Santideva as the counterparts. Eventually, they all serve the purpose of understanding Porete's nothingness, in nondual relation with Buddhist no-self, that is not total nonexistence of self. Having grounded philosophical commonalities between the Beguines and the Buddhists, Chapter “Becoming Divine: Nondual

Union in Beguine-Buddhist Theological Meditation,” a comparison will be historically surveyed between Porete's deification and divinization side-to-side by Buddhist Goddesses tradition, focusing on common features between the Beguine mystic and Buddhist tradition. The chapter reviews the past and current scholarship that has taken keen interest in female deities, divine-human union and the problem of gender, both from Christian and Buddhist fields.

The penultimate chapter “Holy Madness and Divine Joy” is a prequel to the last, and the beginning of serious considerations of how love and desire play a role in mystical union. Here, the psychology in Dutch Beguine mystic Hadewijch, focusing on her noted mode of despair, and love-madness as a genuine human response to the fluctuating experience of nondual divine-human union. The chapter highlights the salvific meanings in Hadewijch’s emotional suffering, without dogmatism, judgment or stigmatization. The first time in my dissertation, I will engage with the relevant notion of ecstatic emotion in South Asian context, such as ‘Mahā-bhāva’— a term for ‘divine ecstasy’ or ‘religious madness,’ in the context of highest spiritual love toward the deity. Finally, in “Joy That is Bliss and Beatitude,” the dissertation culminates in addressing the enigmatic Porete’s joy, her union with Divine Love, modes of illumination via seeing and knowing. Porete’s joy, carrying the connotation of bliss and beatitude, finds profound affinity in Tibetan tantric Buddhist practices (Goddess worship, visualization of deity, esp.), with an influence of Kaśmīr Śaivism, a significant interlocutor of the French Beguine. Grounded by the philosophies and histories presented in the previous chapters, here, I will make a tentative yet irreversible conclusion that it is the nondualist tantric union, Buddhism and Śaivism, that truly resonates with Porete’s musings almost seamlessly. As evidence, the fundamental concepts in South Asian rapture, such as the notion of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) will be introduced, along with sense imageries and phenomena that intensify the ecstatic and erotic union.



## **INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS, METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### 1) Problems and Questions for Research

This dissertation is a comparative project that brings mystical traditions that have captivated me most: Medieval Beguine mysticism and Buddhist mystical contemplations of union. The goal of this dissertation is mainly about opening a dialogue way overdue; widening the horizon of the field so the mystics from different religious sphere may connect; Methodologically, a few fundamental concepts and notions will be explained; regretfully, therefore, the more important and essential job of creating a truly nuanced comparison—encompassing conceptual and/or linguistic precision— should be left to the experts who happen to be intrigued by an initiative of this kind.

With exponential growth of research, both have established their own fields of study. However, rarely are they in conversation— Significantly less interest and resources have been invested in promoting such dialogue. Since I advocate the rich commonality between the two traditions, this problem drives the central questions of my dissertation: What is the pre-existing hermeneutic gap, tension or distance within the mysticism studies itself? Given that the predominant focus of mysticism has been the mystic’s distilled mind and “pure consciousness,” how do we understand the status and role of human emotion in mystical experience?<sup>1</sup> The goal of my dissertation is to unpack these multi-layered questions, in order to show that comparative mysticism can indeed provide creative and vibrant sources for the transformation of soul/self.

---

<sup>1</sup> Foundational questions in my dissertation inherit the concerns already made in Grace M. Jantzen’s “Mysticism and Experience,” *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 313–15.

To ground the theoretical framework for conversation as the goal of this work, I will first present main philosophical and theological concepts co-present in Beguine mysticism and Tibetan other-emptiness Buddhist (*zhentong*) tradition. My study will then deploy literary criticism to interpret the images and metaphors in both traditions that graphically symbolize the aspects of nondual mystical union, with more common, comparative themes.<sup>2</sup> To address the very first question, the biggest challenge comes from the radically different understanding of divine in Christian and the pan-Asian nondual Buddhist traditions. Suggesting an alternative approach, the focus of my dissertation will be comparing modes and manners of union in mystical traditions East and West, beyond the mainstream comparative purview that previously attempted a solely metaphysical or linguistic analysis of divine and ultimate. Conceptual foundations are of course necessary, but the metaphysical debates, along with non-negotiable ontological positions between different philosophical and theological systems, have often obstructed any genuine comparative study of mysticism, disabling the recognition of mystical or spiritual commonality of these traditions. The primary focus of my dissertation, the Beguines and Buddhists are both known as serious ascetics for whom self-negation and discourse of nothing is crucial. After unpacking their philosophical commitments and theological differences, the Beguines and Buddhists will engage in a fruitful conversation in terms of how this negation serves bigger purpose of union with Divine Love, and/or the ultimate transcendence. In order to

---

<sup>2</sup> Lots of unpacking is required to facilitate understanding of “nonduality.” In Beguine mysticism, often the relational language of “mutual indwelling” or “immersion” is preferred as the component of love between God and soul is central for mystical union. Also, for a more extreme notion of nondual indistinct union, or the soul’s ‘identification’ with God, aquatic imageries are borrowed, as the fluidity of water symbolizes state of complete union. These images of water frequently appear in Both Beguines’ writings, and McGinn acknowledges they represent nondual idea of union— Although Chinese mystical tradition deserves detailed analysis on its differences, water is also significant metaphor. Readers will still benefit from comparative reading of nondual union in each tradition. In my dissertation, simultaneous effort will be made to engage with such vast and powerful notions from both Beguines, Buddhist, Daoist mystics, preserving their distinct cultural contexts on their own terms.

make place for apophatic mysticism, Sells turns to; “common mystical experience” that is “not a doctrine.. basic human response”:

Apophasis is a discourse in which any single proposition is acknowledged as falsifying, as reifying. It is a discourse of double propositions, in which meaning is generated through the tension between the saying and the unsaying.. At its most intense, apophatic language has a subject neither divine nor human, neither self nor other. It can be read as a relentless critique of religious traditions or as a realization of the deeper wisdom within such traditions. It can be read as grounded in the intimate specificities of particular traditions or as opening onto intercultural and inter-religious conversation. These possibilities may not be mutually exclusive.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, I fundamentally agree with this turn to human, even amid receiving and experiencing divine during mystical union. I think that approaching mystics this affective way contributes to their cross-cultural comparison, making the dialogue easier than logically mapping some of the irreconcilable differences in dogma.<sup>4</sup> The great feminist theologian Grace Jantzen already wrestled with central questions: “Is there a mystical core of religion?” and “Does mystical experience indicate an underlying unity among world religions?”<sup>5</sup> My dissertation is a brief ‘yes’ to these questions, aligning my intention with Sells, prioritizing a shared affect of mystical experience, rather than setting a curriculum of what should be. Therefore, n therefore focuses on the transformations of human emotion in Beguine mysticism in relation to comparable Buddhist expressions of joy and melancholia: “Like the lover, the emotional mystic too strives for the transcendence of personal boundaries in an ineffable union with the other,”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael A. Sells, “Introduction,” in *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12-3.

<sup>4</sup> This, of course, does not contradict that the content of mystical emotions is deeply touched and shaped by cultural and linguistic legacies of the particular religiosity. However, following Sudhir Kakar who brings modern study of psychology and religio-mystical foundations together, this dissertation also traces forms of mystical insights and affects that had already exhibited deep existential concerns readily sharable with modern audience: “Mysticism for me is not something that lies outside the vast spaces of the human mind. Its insights, experiences, and yearnings are a heritage of our condition as human beings; they are a part of our humanity. Shorn of religious trappings, the mystical quest is not apart from the dailiness of life but pervades and informs life in its deepest layers.” See Kakar, *The Analyst and the Mystic: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Religion and Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), ix.

<sup>5</sup> Jantzen, “Could There Be a Mystical Core of Religion?”: 62, 68.

<sup>6</sup> Kakar, *The Analyst and the Mystic*, ix.

For this reason, my dissertation proposes to respectfully engage with both religio-cultural spheres, from which profound similarities will be revealed between each tradition's spiritual orientation: the sense of boundless freedom, and the mystical attunement/communion between oneself and the ultimate. In the most basic sense, nonduality is defined as: "a consciousness that no longer bifurcates reality into seer and seen, knower and known, subject and object."<sup>7</sup> Beguine mystics' nondual aspect directs human soul into "melting," "indistinct union" (*unitas indistinctionis*) with God.<sup>8</sup> Whereas the idea of indistinct union is still a very much contested notion in Christian mysticism, nonduality has been one of the most central and broadly accepted concepts in Asian philosophy of religion in general. For instance, Chinese Buddhist and Daoist philosophies have contributed a much-needed plurality to the discourse, through the everyday ordinariness and naturalism of Chinese thought that exhibits radically different spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of genuine search for full and loving union with the divine, Beguine mysticism opens a new and path-breaking horizon for the study of mysticism, by elevating and establishing human emotion as the locus of their theological system. On the question of emotion, the Christian counterpart in my comparative project will be the thirteenth century Beguine mystics Hadewijch of Brabant and Marguerite Porete. I choose to study these women mystics, mainly because their expression of mystical theology enacts a unique and intense emotional experience with a passionate exposition of love and melancholy. The issue of emotion

---

<sup>7</sup> George William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 239.

<sup>8</sup> John Arblaster, "'Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea': Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries." *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (March 21, 2018): 173; 182; 187; 190.

<sup>9</sup> In Chinese philosophical system, God, Heaven, spirit or transcendent is differently construed and imagined since the tradition is mainly systematized as the nontheistic mysticism. Despite such difference, comparative study of Chinese philosophical tradition and Neoplatonist apophatic mysticism has been a steadily growing field. Though this comparative thesis focuses on the problem of emotion, it would ground a solid comparative basis by tracing a few key themes in Neoplatonism, such as Pseudo-Dionysius' *agnosia* or unknowing(ness), that resonate deeply with Daoist non-knowledge/non-knowinghood.

has not attracted as much scholarly attention until German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who appears in much later modern era. In both Christian and Asian mystical tradition, the field has been so often interpreted from the vantage point of philosophy— metaphysics and epistemology, in particular.<sup>10</sup> Upon examining the writings of Beguine mystics, I will claim that a careful look at the mystics’ inner, emotional life will more wholly constitute the multiple angles of mysticism.

My suggestion here then follows Schleiermacher and William James, in their deep concern toward the importance of feeling in religious experience. Schleiermacher and James both have been known for their concern and emphasis upon feeling, against the “hegemonic attempts of rationality and logic to be the ultimate authority of religious life.”<sup>11</sup> Deeper engagement with James reveals that critical reevaluation of James’s thought will be nonetheless necessary. Not only does James’s pluralist theory relate to the nondual Asian mystical philosophy, but it also endorses and signals a novel reading of mysticism that is most relevant to the study of Beguine mystical union:

The maximal conceivable truth in an idea would seem to be that it should lead to an actual merging of ourselves with the object, to an utter mutual confluence and identification. On the common-sense level of belief this is what is supposed really to take place in sense-perception.. Yet the notion once suggested, of what a completely consummated acquaintance with a reality might be like, remains over for our speculative purposes. *Total conflux of the mind with the reality* would be the absolute limit of truth, there could be no better or more satisfying knowledge than that. Such total conflux, it is needless to say, is *already explicitly provided for, as a possibility, in my account of the matter*. If an idea should ever lead us not only *towards*, or *up to*, or *against*, a reality, but so close that we and the reality should *melt together*, it would be made absolutely true, according to me, by that performance.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> So far, the most prominent way of conducting comparative mysticism has been between the thought of Meister Eckhart, Rhineland male mystics and their strikingly resonant counterpart, Asian philosophy of religion (with concentration on Buddhism). The crowning example of this would be D.T. Suzuki’s comparison of Eckhart and Zen Buddhism in his seminal work: *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Barnard, “Explaining the Unexplainable: Wayne Proudfoot’s Religious Experience.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 2 (1992): 248.

<sup>12</sup> William James, *The Meaning of Truth*, eds. Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 87-8.

This is a lesser-known aspect of William James. Of course, as a shrewd philosopher, James quickly resigns from such a radical, explicit possibility with a doubt (‘..philosophers doubt that this ever occurs.’) However, his interest in “responses to particular situations are completely spontaneous and effortlessly attuned” will not pass the Asianist readers’ eye as this resonate with the reference to Daoist ideal of *wu-wei*. As we move to nondual tantric discourse, it is revealed that such a state is commonly revered by other mystical camp: “*dhyāna* without effort.. which cannot be directed by one’s own will, but happens by itself” --- from the interpretation of Ernst Furlinger’s work in *Touch of Śakti* (2009), a major reference in the last chapter of the dissertation along with the rapturous state of Beguines.

Echoing Schleiermacher and James, contemporary scholars of mysticism Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach critique the rationalist concept of mysticism that only counts the mystical philosophy of a state of pure, contentless awareness as the prime ideal, forged by proponents of Asian philosophical mysticism (Walter Stace; Robert Forman). For example, scholar of mysticism Randall Studstill critiques Forman’s approach: “in the Upaniṣads *ātman* is also identified with Brahman, i.e., absolute Being, Consciousness, and Bliss (*sat-cit-ananda*). In other words, ‘pure awareness’ in the Upaniṣads is the experience of *ātman*/Brahman or Being/Consciousness/Bliss and clearly has affective and semantic dimensions far removed from either DMS or the PCE.”<sup>13</sup> Contemporary scholars of mysticism and psychology Kroll and Bachrach similarly worry that the “restrictive” mysticism results in the exclusion of most figures in medieval Christian mysticism.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Studstill, “Introduction,” in *The Unity of Mystical Traditions*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach. *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 51.

Reflecting on these tensions and questions, this dissertation will give best attempt to construct a model of comparative mystical theology that can synthesize long-standing, seemingly dichotomous views on mysticism. By studying Beguine mysticism nondual strands of Buddhist and South Asian aesthetic, mystical devotions together, my research aims to problematize and critically engage with the more prominent, intellectualized model of the field. As a way of calling for balance between reason and emotion in understanding mysticism, the affective mysticism of Beatrice, Hadewijch and Porete is the ideal candidate since these women's writings, with their distinguished theological acumen, not only fulfill James's standards of mysticism —ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity— but also hold the possibility of radical transformation through emotion.<sup>15</sup> As previously mentioned, the academic discourse of mysticism has been very much steeped in the philosophical language of rationality, mind and consciousness. My approach of comparative mysticism certainly values and builds upon such effort of knowledge. However, more concern will be given to restoring the ultimate concern in *relational* terms in mystical writings I will examine. Bringing different mystical traditions this manner will accentuate how common and human the experience of love and melancholy could be and have been, especially in pursuit of oneness with ultimate.

Lastly, the need for comparison becomes stronger when such an affective approach of Beguine mysticism in turn benefits rediscovering emotional and psychological insights. This is true within Chinese traditions as well.<sup>16</sup> This project will compare affect across mysticism from

---

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Dailey keenly observes that emotion plays the theological locus in Hadewijch's writings as the Flemish Beguine grapples with the painful "temporary and ontological limits," rendering moment of suffering into novel experience of transformation "that has no anterior referential reality, no trace other than the affect of suffering and hope." In *Promised Bodies: Time, Language, and Corporeality in Medieval Women's Mystical Texts. Gender, Theory, and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 117.

<sup>16</sup> It would be a grave misunderstanding to take Chinese tradition solely coping with philosophical concerns, as the role of desire and emotion is beautifully expressed in Chinese poetry as a separate literary genre. Nevertheless, I will have to delimit the scope of my discussion within *Zhuangzi* and *Daodejing* as philosophical texts, and their emphasis on heart-mind (心) which incorporates emotion: "Ancient or traditional Chinese conceived of mind as xin

different cultures. With equal enthusiasm, my comparative thesis will examine internal experience of mystics and sages, and how it may engender new theological and philosophical inquiries. For instance, Daoist canon Zhuangzi's rigorous speculative approach on the ineffable, ultimate *dao* can benefit from a fruitful discussion of emotion. As the readers may see, even the greater focus of discourse on emotion and Chinese philosophy has been heavily shaped toward the sagely equanimity, the sense of inner peace most naturally resonant with Stoic attitude. The French Beguine Marguerite Porete's case exhibits similar issues. In my research, however, the problem of emotion will touch on the latent and extant, sensuous/human and divine/spiritual/aesthetic emotions that can help resolve the difficulty of love and melancholy, whether in covert or explicit form, in one's endeavor to unite with the Divine Love.

There are certain reasons the dynamic currents of comparative mysticism came to a halt as a discourse, or a field. Philosophers and theologians, including Jantzen, did not hide their aversion of post-Kantian hermeneutics of mysticism, with rejection of "intense feeling" and "psychic phenomena" altogether as the "misplaced" foci of mystical union— respectively the core of Schleiermacher and James, that I happen to begin with. It is very unfortunate that such a tide of rejection also led the scholar of religion to bypass the tradition of mysticism, and especially, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Beguines, in the same regard. Although the concern for "complete merging of subject and object in a preconceptual unity" has been present in the minds of

---

(心), which stands for heart and mind in the fullest sense, the sum/interpenetration: emotions, reason and our vitality. The very character 心 represents a heart pumping blood. The richness of xin (心), and its disparity from the mainstream modern Western notion of the self, a Cartesian one, is patent... Accordingly we can understand 心, as a conglomerate of heart (emotions, sensations and desires), mind (thinking, imagining and volition) and vital energy that suffuses all bodily and mental processes.. This holistic 心, is not a given, but must be developed. In fact, there is a tradition in ancient China of cultivating oneself (xiushen, 修身) that spans Confucianism, Daoism and other schools whose goal is promotion of an integrated 心, to nurture our existence." from Jesús Ilundáin-Agurriza, "Zhuangzi—Playful Wanderer," *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 321-3. See also Songyao Ren, "The Zhuangist Views on Emotions," *Asian Philosophy* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 55–67.



thinkers, recent research on Beguine mystics is quite far from scholars' adherence to Kantian paradigm.<sup>17</sup>

## 2) Methodology and Resources

I am modeling after the method of Chicago school of comparison: the comparative history of religions (Jonathan Z. Smith), comparative philosophy of religions (David Tracy) and the Hindu-Christian comparative theology (Francis Clooney). Encountering each resource, I would like to remain fully descriptive in order to understand and preserve the insights, faithfully from these original texts. However, as generations of comparative theologians carefully noted that (Francis Clooney; John Thatamanil; Michelle Voss Roberts; Holly Hillgardner), this dissertation's comparative method values "back-and-forth learning" between each religious tradition in light of one another, following Clooney's suggestion.<sup>18</sup> As previously stated, my focus will be primarily building upon the underlying commonality between two unique, vibrant traditions in order to apply these understanding into the project of transforming our present.

With specific interest in mystical thought and practice forged by women, groundbreaking work has been conducted by Michelle Voss Roberts (Catholicism-Kashmir Śaivism) and Holly Hillgardner (Christian Beguine-Vaisnava Hindu tradition) respectively. Previous scholarship on women and mystical theology has been vast and rigorous.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, "Mysticism and Experience." *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 314.

<sup>18</sup> On the method of comparative theology, please see Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9-11. Most recent application of such method can be found in Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 9-10; 13-4; 141-2

<sup>19</sup> Among historians of mystical Christianity, Barbara Newman's work has been consistently hinting at the comparative possibility. Though briefly elucidated, Newman concludes that the nothingness and annihilation, especially in Porete's thought, does reveal profound commonality with Buddhist notions. See Newman's article, "Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s." *Speculum* 91, no. 3 (June 13, 2016): 627-30.

As stated above, the monumental crossover between theology, history of religions, philosophy of religions, feminist studies has been attempted for the last few decades. As much as the comparative theologians are finding connection with Buddhist philosophy, as my later section will reveal, a robust voice has been rising in terms of reading Buddhism with “theologic” (Duckworth 2015) especially regarding the Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and practice, imbued with the legacy from the tradition of Buddhist tantra. In this side of Buddhist world, the cosmology not only allows the presence of deities, but specifically powerful, enlightened female spiritual masters and supreme Goddesses. Although my limited description could not do justice to the complex history of discourse on atheistic and theistic nondualities in Buddhism, I have already probed the possibility of the transcendental and theological worldview within the Tibetan tradition in the previous chapter. Divine Feminine flows from the tradition, not standing apart from it, expanding how we can conceive nondual union.

My project certainly benefits from these intuitions. But it is not my goal to read a religious Other only to mirror my own. Finding commonality or convergence is truly meaningful as long as the reality of difference and otherness is respected, apart from an intentional attempt to discover a version of mine— an assimilation. Fortunately, this only provides us hopeful evidence that the horizon of comparative theology and philosophy seems to be getting closer than ever. For example, Tibetan Buddhism and the nondual mystical philosophy of Eckhart provides relevant insight. The latter section of ‘Is Mahayana Theistic?’ explains Tibetan Buddhism in relation to Eckhart; Although Porete, Eckhart and Buddhist figures within my chapter will not be compared based on a/theistic distinctions, it is worthwhile to connect with contemporary comparative scholarship, with deeper interest and engagement

with somewhat tabooed fundamental issue. Feldmeier's study concludes with enthusiastic yes to his own question, that he is convinced to see a God in Buddhist system.<sup>20</sup>

In this comparative project, I would like to lift up the centrality of emotion in mystical understanding and experience, as one of many different, fruitful aspects that the method of "cross-pollination" could generate in comparison.<sup>21</sup> To deepen the question of soul and self beyond the popular study of mystical consciousness, my dissertation will take on the study of psychology to effectively address the feeling of love and melancholy in the context of mystical union.<sup>22</sup> To accomplish this, an interdisciplinary engagement is necessary by first borrowing Hillgardner's analysis of Hadewijch. It is only natural that the intense longing of Hadewijch toward union with God, encountering the reality of non-fruit, expresses its unfiltered despair. It is the very torment, wounding and excessiveness of love and despair that frequently colors the inner world of Hadewijch.<sup>23</sup> Being so, my research recommends a theological engagement with

---

<sup>20</sup> Peter Feldmeier, "Emptiness, Bodhisattvas, and Meister Eckhart," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38 (2018): 198-200. In the most recent work, *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter: From Buddha-Nature to the Divine Nature* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019), the author deals with not only Eckhart, but the major philosophers (The Buddha himself, Buddhaghosa, Nagarjuna and Santideva) and mystic/theologians (John of the Cross, Eckhart, Ignatius of Loyola) in Buddhist and Christian traditions. Feldmeier's article above shares the content with fifth chapter of *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter*.

<sup>21</sup> The precise terminology is coined by John J. Thatamanil in *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 206. On how this strategy can be deployed for feminist interreligious reading. See Holly Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go: Christian and Hindu Practices of Passionate Non-Attachment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10-1.

<sup>22</sup> Especially for a conceptual analysis of melancholy, my research will benefit from the work by Alina N. Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God a Study of the Hermeneutics of Depression* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011). Citing Feld's work will function as literature review to foreground the historical context of melancholy, as a concept and a phenomenon. The engagement with melancholy is as monumental as the centrality of suffering itself, in the context of Jewish and Christian interpretation. Alina Feld's study shows that during the period of Enlightenment, account of melancholy has been subsumed under the rather normative discourse of faith and doubt, preserving yet codifying the negative and mystical character of melancholy into philosophical theology. As my research focuses on the women mystics in late medieval period, I will attempt to trace how melancholy was understood and experienced in their times.

<sup>23</sup> Comparative mysticism in my dissertation will necessarily involve how mystical experience would look and feel like in existence and what it entails for ethical and societal transformation. This kind of inquiry will of course examine the sacred desire toward total union with divine and the moments of fulfilment. However, more emphasis will be given to the evident failures, struggles and frustration by mystics and sages regarding their experience of lack/absence/non-fruit/suffering. For example, both Beatrice and Hadewijch vividly portray the tribulation/suffering/divine absence/nonfruit of Love (*minne*) paradoxically and intricately linked to the ideal of fulfilment/joy/presence/fruit. Especially, the analysis of Hadewijch's two modes of Abyss, and her phase of

psychology, together with accounts and narratives that precisely deal with intense emotional experiences, including themes prevalent in Beatrice and Hadewijch: “vehemence, insatiability, insanity of Divine Love.”<sup>24</sup> My comparative viewpoint will focus on how to affirm and not shy away from these experiences of grief, suffering and depression as the human vulnerability, integral and inseparable from mystical transformation itself.<sup>25</sup>

This dissertation will also consider the place of women in psychology and mysticism seriously.<sup>26</sup> Concretizing the status of love and melancholy through women’s perspective matters in this dissertation because it highlights the complex relationship between gender, race, class and religiocultural differences, which has often been marginalized or silenced in the previous discourse of mysticism.<sup>27</sup> Hence, at least within the scope of my thesis, I will invite and

---

Unfaith induced by God’s absence will be vital. Bernard McGinn, “Chapter 4: Mulieres Religiosae: Experiments in Female Mysticism” in *The Flowering of Mystics: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200-1350* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 200-22. Since the study of medieval mystical literature has preceded in profound depth, I am following and expanding Paul Mommaers’s understanding of mysticism as: “common experience of being human, with all its suffering, especially the pain of God’s absence, is integral to true mystical consciousness.” Ibid., 425, n. 106.

<sup>24</sup> McGinn, “Mulieres Religiosae,” 168. From this perspective, Flemish Beguine Hadewijch first reveals her continuity with Beatrice of Nazareth in expressing the “madness of love” (Poems in Couplets 16 ‘Love’s Seven Names’).

<sup>25</sup> Chris Cook, Andrew Powell, and A. C. P. Sims, eds. *Spirituality and Psychiatry* (London: RCPsych, 2009), 4. Mysticism, ecstatic emotional experience and its relationship with psychosis has gained more acceptance and interest over the years in academia. I will begin by reading William James’ famed study of mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, with “The Sick Soul” chapter in focus. In my dissertation, I will pay close attention to the aforementioned mystics’ emotional worlds as objects of case study, especially to those comparable to modern category of mental illnesses/disorders. This comparative methodology aims to bring a novel theological understanding out of one’s wealth of mystical consciousness and experience, expanding the vision of divine that deepens and enriches our own human existence. In order to successfully convey this approach, theological interpretation of what contemporary medical science one-dimensionally categorizes into mood disorder must be conducted. This means shedding new lights on mysticism that contains complex and valued sources, beyond rigid biomedical analysis which reduces mystical, or even any religious experience into mere pathology to be treated.

<sup>26</sup> Since this is a comparative project, I would include two Tibetan Buddhist women’s autobiographies: Sarah H. Jacoby’s *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) for unique role of love’s romantic desire in Tantric contemplation. On the other hand, Kurtis R. Schaeffer’s *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for the acute suffering, sorrow and melancholia experienced in female practitioner’s life. To suffice the category of mysticism, Both women delineate miraculous visions and experience of melancholy as well.

<sup>27</sup> Michelle Voss Roberts’s chapter “Gendering Comparative Theology” succinctly outlines “how the intersection of various identity markers (race, class, gender, sexuality)” shapes our entry into comparative theology, including the potentially oppressive/hegemonic and marginalized categories— hence a “postcolonial” gendering for “liberation” is requested in the comparative dialogue. Voss Roberts in *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights*

create a space for women's writings that nurture the "psychological and spiritual process by which integration and wholeness is achieved,"<sup>28</sup> to be broadly defined as mystical.

### 3) Hypotheses and Arguments

I argue the mystical traditions in my dissertation offer unique resources, especially when read comparatively. The purpose of this comparison is valued not by attempting to prove whether the core principle of each religious tradition is colorlessly same, but by widening and deepening the discourse of soul and self. My main contention is that the comparative reading of Beguine and nondual Buddhist and Hindu mystical philosophies can enhance the depth of our understanding of mysticism, both on conceptual and experiential level. My dissertation will introduce the global, water and liquid imageries —nectar, river, sea, ocean, wine— that signify a complete nondual union between Soul and Divine/Love. Comparative motifs functioning as effective means to an end, I hope to gain an entry into both Beguine and nondual tantric traditions with psychological, spiritual insights that cut across cultural differences.

Finally, my comparative mystical theology will culminate at reading the French Beguine mystic Marguerite Porete, whose thought has greatly inspired Meister Eckhart, according to Hollywood's study *The Soul as Virgin Wife*. Although Hadewijch and Porete both present the multiplicity and emotional extremities of inner self's/soul's transformation, it is Marguerite Porete's idea of "annihilation" and "deification" that radicalizes the controversial notion of nondual, indistinct mystical union between God and human soul. Porete's thought eerily reflects

---

*from the Next Generation*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 129-49. Literature review and synthesis of feminist comparative theology is best provided by Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 131-2.

<sup>28</sup> George Drazenovich and Celia Kourie. "Mysticism and Mental Health: A Critical Dialogue." *HTS Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (2010): 7.

the nothingness and emptiness in Buddhist philosophy.<sup>29</sup> The meeting and separation between Porete and Buddhism will be carefully analyzed in order to avoid hasty generalization or identification. Since there are countless resources on Meister Eckhart's thought and Buddhist studies, I would like to focus on Porete's conceptualization of annihilation, and the "ontological fusion with God,"<sup>30</sup> in her dialogical and poetic prose in *Mirror*.

#### 4) Aimed Contribution to Academic and Practical Knowledge

The presence of penultimate chapter investigates the love-madness in the context of Beguine Hadewijch's mystical union with Divine/Love. Though it is a single chapter, I aspire to uplift the formerly understudied aspects of mystical theology and philosophy: specifically, from the angles of emotion, women's voices, and implications for psychology and finally, mental health.<sup>31</sup> Having stated this, my dissertation intends to bridge between the theoretical/academic discourse of mysticism and practical/nonacademic experience of it by the wider public. Broadly, this dissertation may serve as an effort in raising mental, psychological, pastoral awareness for individual care and communal healing. Although Denys Turner has pioneered the reading of grief and depression in his work, *The darkness of God*, the polarities of emotional turbulence in ecstatic mystical experience has just begun to receive a much-deserved attention.

---

<sup>29</sup> Georgina Giorko, "Salvation: Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* through a Buddhist Lens," (unpublished manuscript, 2018). Another interesting counterpart for Porete in Chinese philosophy could be the Daoist masterpiece *Liezi*. From my reading, the notion of "annihilation of the heart" in *Liezi* resonates with Porete's annihilation of soul, in pursuit of higher spiritual state which purges and requires total loss of consciousness, cognition and perception. Also, *Liezi*'s union with "primordial cosmic forces" can be compared to Porete's "pre-created/uncreated" state of human soul and "death of reason." For astute background study of *Liezi*, please refer to Richard J. Sage, "'Annihilation of the Heart': The Ideal of Non-Perception in the *Liezi*," *PROBLEMOS*, (July 2016): 75–93.

<sup>30</sup> Arblaster, "'Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea,'" 180.

<sup>31</sup> John J. Thatamanil, "Foreword," in Michelle Voss Roberts, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), x.

I will openly discuss and emphasize the role, depth and breadth of these areas of study, mostly unattended or under-articulated by main academic discourse of mysticism. Given that the comparative mysticism has been dominated by the philosophical paradigms, my reconstruction eventually aims to go beyond conceptual issues, creating a space for human emotion and wholesome psychological process of self that incorporates knowledge and love in the context of mystical experience. The rigorous study of emotion and nondual union in my comparative research will not only expand the norms and categories for theological studies and interreligious dialogue, but also bring these insights to engage with modern readers who experience love and melancholy day-to-day basis, in their own search for transcendence. The mystics' passionate orientation toward ultimate concern vividly captures the pain, agony and the lack of blissful union, revealing their sheer vulnerability as human. The humanity of these mystics dismantles the self-perpetuating myth that mystics are at once enlightened, perfected, therefore unrelatable figures. Rather, comparative mysticism opens the gateway, introducing the travelled yet unfinished, ever-unfolding paths toward transforming one's inner, affective life.

I will strengthen and diversify the discourse of comparative mysticism by highlighting the emotional and psychological insights—. As far as readership and accessibility is concerned, I anticipate and sincerely hope to provide values and ways of meaning-making to modern audience so that the thesis communicates with vibrant current conversation on affective, internal and spiritual well-being. The study of comparative mysticism in my research will present the experience of love and melancholy as powerful and relevant resource for.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> From theological perspective, this concern is best articulated in Amy Hollywood's *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 112: "This is not to downplay the role of cognition in the mystical life, for most early and medieval Christian spiritual authors argue that the affective and the cognitive lives are deeply intertwined. Love is itself both the primary affect and a form of knowing. For those, like Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, for whom the apophasis (the unsaying, unnamings, noughting) of names and images of God plays a vital role, the soul is enjoined to move beyond *both* affect and cognition."

## CHAPTER 2

### NONDUAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF NOTHINGNESS AND NO-SELF: MARGUERITE PORETE, AND HER BUDDHIST AFFINITIES

This nothingness is the true nature of the soul, the beginning of a lineage that finds its noblest expression in annihilated souls in life. The noble seed of divine love enables this nothingness, which entails a completely dispassionate life within the world, living apart like a true noble.<sup>1</sup>

Is There a Soul in Buddhism?

To give the short answer first: “No.” As you might expect, the long answer is much more nuanced. The short answer depends on the commonly understood idea of “soul” as an unchanging personal principle that continues in time infinitely. This is the concept of “soul” usually implicit when one begins with the assumptions of a theistic religion. On the other hand, if by soul we mean simply that human beings have a spiritual aspect that is not ultimately bound up with physical processes, then Buddhism would be much more sympathetic to the idea. Buddhism may deny the existence of a “soul” but it is not for that reason “soul-less” in the same way as is materialist philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

*Reading Marguerite Porete’s Nothingness with Buddhist anātman (no-self)*

In many ways, this chapter begins with my questions, fascination, fear, doubt and confusion when I first read comparative theologian Hugh Nicholson’s claim that *anattā* (Pali: “no-self”) doctrine may be “theological.”<sup>3</sup> Despite being a student of theology, having not learned of the vast and mysterious other tradition, I could not fully fathom the depth of the argument. Several years later, the appeal and intrigue of the question came alive to me, from two directions. First inspiration and the main subject of this chapter is Marguerite Porete (1250 – executed June 1, 1310) and her controversial notion of nothingness and pre-creative state (later relatedly appearing as ‘uncreated’ in Eckhart) of Soul in indistinct union with Love/God– in her provocative work *The Mirror of Simple Souls brought to nothing, and who live only in the will and desire for Love* (*Le miroir des âmes simples et anéanties et qui seulement demeurent en*

---

<sup>1</sup> Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Arrow River Forest Hermitage, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://www.arrowriver.ca/dhamma/soul.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Spirit of Contradiction in the Buddhist Doctrine of Not-Self.” *The Journal of Religion*, 92, no. 1 (2012): 31-57. I will omit the summary of this particular article as most relevant points will be rephrased in this chapter.



*vouloir et désir d'amour*). Needless to mention, from the groundbreaking scholarship on Marguerite Porete in the nineties, the reappraisal and in-depth study of this magnificent mystic grew ever since. Porete's agenda to reach the nothingness of the Soul has been studied with history, literature, philosophy, and theology about three decades since. However, as this chapter unfolds, readers may find my reliance upon the preeminent interpretations from the golden era, as the guiding reference (Hollywood; Lichtmann; McGinn; Robinson; Sells et al.), precisely because the thorough philosophical and theological study of Porete's original and controversial work has laid the foundation for, from my perspective, comparison.

Although this chapter does not attempt a concept-by-concept systematic comparison among Buddhism, Porete and Eckhart, for the purpose of comparison, I will extensively consult with previous scholars, as their interreligious affinities would be of great use, across time and space.<sup>4</sup> It is my intuition that the “pure nothingness”<sup>5</sup> and nakedness upheld by Eckhart and Porete seeks the union of Love (divine) and Soul (human) that has stripped oneself of all dogmas and expectations, coming closest to the Buddhist notion of *anātman* and also *sūnyatā*. The lack or absence of any inherent, independent reality, however, should not be understood as nihilistic denial of each existence, yet a deep observation and refutation of misbelief on permanent identities— against any sensibility of “unchanging, permanent, absolute reality.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For more systematically oriented reviewers, amongst the literature of comparative theology, clear and compendious historical and doctrinal survey of Christology and Buddhist selflessness can be found in Hugh Nicholson, *The Spirit of Contradiction in Christianity and Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Although this volume schematically provides the most deft comparison between the histories of Christian identity and Buddhist selflessness discourse, including the Pudgalavāda. Its dense focus on Christological controversies regarding the notion of consubstantiality along with doctrinal and sociological development of No-self is what my chapter cannot deliver, therefore highly recommended. Also, for readers familiar with formal, classical, philosophical outlines, please see “Epilogue” where Sells first presents ‘Principles of Apophatic Language’ that runs through Porete, Eckhart and sufi mysticism. Then the central themes analyzed into three sections: Will and Willlessness; Bewilderment and Rationality; Event, Experience and Unsayings. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 206-17.

<sup>5</sup> MSS 132, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-6.

Even though comparative investigation on these a variety of religious systems has exponentially flourished the last few decades, it still remains very challenging to dare a comparison between explicitly *theological* tradition and Buddhist world of no-self. Theology, of course has been a designation and preoccupation with the study of Christianity and Abrahamic faiths for millennia, which Porete comes out of. However, as the data above implies, Marguerite Porete was executed as heretic and this indicates her theology did not comply well with what the authorities wanted to propagate. The status of human person, in Christian theology, is at the center of whole system since it reflects the very image of Divine. However, the interpretation can be radically different according to various tradition and at least for the Christian faith of West, it was most common that the state of human Soul was narrated on dualistic, masculine terms. Therefore, the re-imagination of Soul as feminine in Porete (and the Beguine Mystics' characteristic reformulation in thirteenth century) itself was already counternormative. Yet even more importantly, for this chapter's sake, the method of her mystical union was returning the will, and everything created, reverting back into nothingness. Read thoroughly, Porete's nothing can only be reviewed as soteriological and transformative as the realization of such brings "the union with Love, to whom this Soul's will is joined" (MSS 9, 20). The oppression this idea has invited, as previously explained, gives a glimpse of historical trace of preconceived notions of orthodoxy and reifications could at any moment erupt as sociopolitical restrictions.

Still and all, Porete and Eckhart face a different set of charges because belief in the divine essence in Christian theology is not a category of heresy or fallacy, but rather counted as the norm. Neither of these mystics denied this, it's transparent that the very opposite is true, through their works. It seems that there were few other factors why Porete's core ideas were received as nothing but heretical. Yet the most troublesome and revolutionary aspect could be found in the

feminized Soul's insistence becoming divine *herself*, achieving the co-equal status to the Creator God— Not only was this notion perceived as problematic, theologically, but also an unacceptable threat to the institution. The institutional discomfort and friction mainly arose against this divinization/deification by which human soul can be in utterly indistinct union with God. Besides, as the union was an immediate, melting relation between Soul and Love/God, it was carried without any aid of ecclesial, moralistic authority, or even sacrament, that symbolizes the body of Christ to the mass. Therefore:

Marguerite's body-soul integration unwittingly triggered a charge of antinomianism in a climate already primed for it. During the period immediately following the first burning of her book, Henry of Virneburg, Archbishop of Cologne, who later prosecuted Meister Eckhart, sent out a decree alleging that Beguines and Beghards of his diocese said that those moved by the Spirit were not under the law. This challenge to traditional patriarchal categories whose ethic of renunciation derived from a dualism of physical and spiritual experience and resulted in hierarchies of the more "spiritual" over the bodily, was bound to be threatening to the established order.<sup>7</sup>

Many citations from *Mirror of Simple Souls* (abbrv. *MSS*) in this chapter will reveal that Porete have a lot of subversive messages for internal and external affairs of faith, mostly deconstructing the latter. Her criticism is quite explicit toward any work of mediation (Reason, Virtue) or external authority ('Holy Church the Less'): "This daughter of Sion does not long for Masses, or sermons, or fastings or prayers" (*MSS* 16, 34). Scholars associate this chapter with the fifteenth article of Porete's condemnation— one of the historically preserved two.<sup>8</sup> Still, with

---

<sup>7</sup> Maria Lichtmann, "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: *The Mirror of Simple Souls* Mirrored," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 75. As my chapter is not a historical reading of medieval notion of heresy or orthodoxy, more detail on Porete's persecution can be found in "Introductory Interpretative Essay," in Margaret Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, and J. C. Marler (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), xxxviii-lxxxvi. All the citation of this primary source will be shortened as *MSS*, with chapter number, and the pagination of translation to be followed. Although this version is the primary source I rely upon entirely, as the majority of primary and secondary sources refer the author of *MSS* as Marguerite Porete, I will use the latter as referent. These essays noted are based upon the seminal observation by Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Colledge and Guarnieri cited in Paul Verdeyen, "Le procès d'inquisition contre Marguerite Porete et Guiard de Cressonessart (1309-1310)." *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 81, no. 1 (January 1, 1986): 52. Verdeyen's document provides the proceeding of Porete's Inquisition and neatly translated in Michael Anthony Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 117: "The first declares that 'the annihilated soul sets the

our post-postmodern mindset, the scope of censorship and level of persecution put under religious authority is simply astounding, but it carried enormous weight at the time of Porete's life, as she was subjected under the order of burning the body of her work (1306) and then of her very own. The French Beguine, called *pseudo-mulier* (fake/Pseudo-woman) by Inquisitor, indeed was a victim of "an extremely unfavorable time" during which religious and political orthodoxy actively sought out a heretic to hunt for.<sup>9</sup> Porete's German contemporary who "may have had access to a copy of"<sup>10</sup> *MSS*, the Dominican Meister Eckhart (1260 - 1328) also consolidates his thinking on nothingness and mystical union with God, sharing some of the most radical inspiration of Porete. It is not surprising that he, too, was attacked in the scandalized *Heresy of Free Spirit* in the late medieval Christian Europe.<sup>11</sup> In Eckhart's case, like Porete, the controversy around his mystical works only gave rise to popularity that lasts until today. Although my chapter is not a historical survey of heresy or inquisition in any of the traditions, it should be mentioned that the figures of this chapter and their ideas happen to be disputed as unorthodox. Charges of heresy exist in both Christian and Buddhist worlds, but this chapter is

---

virtues free and is no longer in their service, having no further use for them. Rather the virtues obey her will.' The fifteenth states that 'Such a soul has no concern for the consolations of God nor for his gifts, nor should she have such a concern, because she is completely intent on God and her concentrations would be distracted by such concerns.'"

<sup>9</sup> Lichtmann, "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart," 67-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 146-7. Unlike the dearth of evidence on theological accusation of Porete, Eckhart's defense against his condemnation and yet another papal examination *In agro dominico* may provide us a glimpse of Church's stance, as the posthumous announcement of heresy reconfirms "error or stain of heresy." Among the fifteen articles and the first of two final articles judged as heresy, I find the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and the "uncreated" aspect of the soul in the last mostly match Porete's theological anthropology. Translation can be found in *Meister Eckhart, the Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. and ed. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 71-81. From below an abbreviation *CWS* (Classics of Western Spirituality series) will be used for this volume. See more on Robert E. Lerner, "New Light on the Mirror of Simple Souls," *Speculum* 85 (2010): 91-116; also Lerner's "Meister Eckhart's Specter: Fourteenth-Century Uses of The Bull *In Agro Dominico* Including a Newly Discovered Inquisitorial Text of 1337," *Mediaeval Studies* 70 (2008): 115-34. For the powerful influence of Porete and Eckhart on the later mystics, see McGinn, "Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism," *Franciscan Studies* 72 (January 2014): 433-52. The transmission of Eckhart's mystical content with renowned Rhineland mystics, see McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005).

introducing thinkers whose ideas apparently gained wide interest and deep sympathy during their life, still very much alive and blossomed as the impactful part of the history of discourse.

With this as a background, the reflection on the annihilative path toward the deification may feel much solemn and sober. However, before the French Beguine faced a violent fate, condemned as heretic, her book has gained “tremendous popularity” and enjoyed an enduring posthumous legacy up until sixteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Despite the dark historical reality of Porete’s persecution, the radical practice of negation and message of true liberation through deification must have reached the hearts of many, through her genre-breaking, nontraditional spiritual writing. In *MSS*, two main characters speak in sync in the dialogical narrative: First, there is the Soul, ever in search of simplicity, and Lady Love who herself is the Divinity, to whom the Soul belongs, in whom the Soul dwells and is spoken for, as they will be eventually united as one:

**The Soul that is Free.** ..Now such a Soul is nothing, for through her abundance of divine knowledge she sees her nothingness, which makes her nothing and reduces her to nothingness. And yet she is everything, for she sees herself through the depth of her knowledge of her own evil, which is so profound and so great that she cannot find there any beginning, compass or end, but only an abyss, deep beyond all depths, and there she finds herself in a depth, in which she cannot be found. (MSS 118, 144)<sup>13</sup>

She is all his, never knowing how, and when she is one with him she is nothing. Then she has no more to do for God than God has to do for her. Why? Because he is, and she is not. When she has become nothing, she has kept nothing of herself, for this is enough for her, that he is and she is not. Then she is *stripped naked* of all things, for now she is without being, there where she had being before she might be. And so she has what she has from God, and she is that which God is, through the transmutation of love, there at that point *where she was before* she could flow forth from the goodness of God. (MSS 135, 172; my italics)<sup>14</sup>

In Porete, nothingness is far from nihilistic tone, but rather signaling an innermost, glorious state, *prior* to creation. According to Sells, through this “reversion to the pre-creative

---

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, xi-16.

<sup>13</sup> This significant passage marks the fifth stage of the devout Soul’s seven mystical states. In the earlier chapters, the dialectic is explained with God who “has everything” and how the Soul regards all else as “nothing” (MSS 13, 31). As the chapters develop, however, the focus of *MSS* narratives will be the state of nothingness itself, as the true and shared essence between the divine and human, doing away the theological chasm between the two.

<sup>14</sup> Though the main analysis of this chapter and majority of Porete scholarship focuses on Love and Soul as female voices (so as the Reason), this is not at all an exclusive representation as God and FarNear do appear as male-gendered.

state of nothingness,” the Soul is no longer delimited by the creatureliness, nor even by the creator. In Porete’s world, the state of nothingness often marches together with “nakedness” of the soul: one is “simply that one *is*.” Such a process is the key for the Soul to become “equal to everything.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Soul’s realization of nothingness and becoming nothing transfigures her into divine. On a different note, whether it is more traditionally familiar male-gendered Lord God or the prevailing, Lady Love the feminine divine, both expressions are appreciatively held in Porete, as long as the Soul is embraced in oneness with nothingness. The gender transversal of divine in Porete is quite spectacular not just in its being proto-feminist, but also encompassing the category by *queering* the whole discourse. The “overcoming of gender” in *MSS* is implicated in the process of bringing everything to nothing –will, desire, attachment and now, body– as the “eradication of any distinction between herself and the divine” lies at the core of nondual union. Literally, nothing stands in the union between Love/God and the Soul, and Porete’s vision simultaneously accomplishes the *apotheosis* of feminine with Lady Love, while applying the meditation of nothing into the gender, always at the risk of one-sided essentialization in and of itself. Multiplicity of gender manifests in Porete’s union, but “effacement of difference”<sup>16</sup> transcends any realm as conventional designation, which leads the Soul to “apophatic unsaying of gender essentialism.”<sup>17</sup>

In Porete’s world, this apophasis is often metaphorized in the image of burning fire, however for the sake of the cleansing and liberation, preparing for the apotheosis of Love and Soul’s indistinct union, not for the purpose of the utter destruction or non-existence. Yet this fire of annihilation so evidently added itself to the list of misconstrual and hate as Porete pushes her

---

<sup>15</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 187 (my italics).

<sup>16</sup> Amy M. Hollywood, “Sexual Desire, Divine Desire; Or, Queering the Beguines” in *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 160-1.

<sup>17</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 180.

apophasis to the extreme, leaving her meditation as wild and provocative as possible. My comparison here recognizes the pure centrality of nothingness in Porete's work, and this can be unveiled by apophasis. And the theme of incomparable freedom such apophasis brings, in my opinion, can be best translated into the meditation of Buddhist teachers. My humble suggestion here is to read Porete's nothingness, at maximum, interchangeably with Buddhist notion of no-self (Skt. *anātman*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*), that holds the nuance of mutual interdependence between ostensibly bipolarized realities, and the ultimate freedom devoid of defilements and falsifications. As each section opens up, it is my goal to relate Porete's nakedness and nothingness-as-fullness (of divine nature) in the state of mystical union to the fundamentals of Buddhist meditation. The linguistic and rhetorical dimension of apophasis has been widely studied, but this chapter is led by an intuition that this apophatic manner is always more than the technique of denial, as the cultivation and practice of negation is inseparable and indistinct from Porete's ultimate concern, or being united with and becoming Love. Porete (and shortly later Eckhart) will wrestle and contemplate on this question through apophasis, or "unsaying of essentialist deity"<sup>18</sup> that resists any forms of reification with no exception. And yet, has this resistance ever denied the *reality* of Love and/or Soul? This is the question that will be asked over and over in this chapter. Understandably the content of such awareness and meditation will vary as Porete comes from the Christian world, and there has to be a discussion concerning why of the Buddhist philosophers/contemplatives may putatively retain fundamental differences, previously regarded as non-negotiables: the specter of intrinsic nature in theology, for example. It is the burden of this chapter to uplift Porete, by virtue of being one of the most singular and unorthodox theologians/mystics, makes her so flexible for comparison. There's simply too much

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 205.

positive potential not to collaborate. For the purpose of comparison, it is essential to understand clearly what each mystic-philosopher/theologian strives toward (and against). In order to address the already posited question from the opening ('Can we think of Buddhist no-self *theologically?*'), I think it's only fair that a question may be asked in opposite direction, one of innumerable ways can be my own ('Can we read Porete's nothing as *Buddhist?*').<sup>19</sup> What would encompass a sense of property or quality that is so ineradicable and intrinsic to one's nature, without it, the Soul will cease to be? It is Nothing.

The spiritual diagnosis and prescription from Eckhart famously exclaims the soul's need to be totally empty of "created things" in order to regain the uncreated, "more pure and bare and poor."<sup>20</sup> And this movement is certainly preceded by Porete, rather aligning seamlessly with Buddhist extinguishment of desire and attachment toward liberation, for both Porete and Eckhart vocalize and centralize the way of detachment ("abandonment of all possessions [in the form of will, means, medium, and works]"<sup>21</sup>). In my opinion, comparison with Buddhist tradition can doubly illumine what Eckhart and Porete conveyed in an interesting manner. In turn, the deeper Buddhist message of freedom and liberation can shine brighter, beyond the frequent misperception of nothingness and emptiness as materialist, reductionist, nihilist view on the self and the world— as the comparison will inevitably bring reflection upon the two apophatic mystics, whose claim to nothingness and annihilation also resulted in a scandalous misunderstanding in their theological world. The whole chapter will be dedicated to unwrap the difficulty of comparison as the seemingly persistent presence of Soul and Love divine in Porete

---

<sup>19</sup> Reading Eckhart's nothingness as Buddhist has already been conducted by path-breaking works by Cobb Jr.; Masao; Nishitani; Suzuki; Tracy and many others. For the comprehensive list of these pioneers, see Lanzetta, "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart," 248n1.

<sup>20</sup> *Bened.*1, 222-3.

<sup>21</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 194.



immediately poses a problem of *ātman*, the inherent, real, universal, eternal principle, for centuries most Buddhists seem to refute and reject almost on automatic, dogmatic level.

In the matter of the person, or self, the Pudgalavādins position themselves as a third alternative—neither Brahmanical nor Abhidharmika. As is the way in such Buddhist debates, this will be articulated as the middle and moderate position between two unacceptable extremes—between the eternalism of Brahmanical thinking, which takes self to be an independently existing unity, and (on the other hand) the inadvertent nihilism of the other Abhidharma Buddhists, who have done away with a really existing self altogether.<sup>22</sup>

This is an interesting segway to introduce the second inspiration, the Buddhist peers of Porete, none of which is stranger to some hot controversy. An ancient Buddhist philosopher, the Pudgalavādin is a follower of *Pudgalavāda* (personalist) school (3 BCE-11 CE).<sup>23</sup> By affirming what the school represents, the notion of person (*pudgala*) as an enduring, and a real subject, this tradition has encountered bouts of disagreements and accusations. If Porete can be said to have stirred the Christian world by claiming nothingness, annihilation and deification, *pudgalavāda*, the teaching stands out with a person, in the Buddhist tradition where *no-self* is the norm and enduring person in the midst of flux is regarded absurd. As Buddhist philosopher Amber Carpenter noted above, Pudgalavādin was treading a very fine line between Brahmanical eternalism and nihilism, to comprehend Buddhist no-self properly— which, by that point, was mainly interpreted as complete denial of such, with almost doctrinal status of its own. Within my limited research, it seems quite debatable whether the Buddhist charge of heresy had carried immense punitive implications as it was for Marguerite Porete, or even the category of heresy is appropriate to apply. But, regardless, the existence and force of *Pudgalavāda* is important as an eminent example of diversification of understanding no-self, against the false, superimposed

---

<sup>22</sup> Amber Carpenter, “Persons keeping their Karma together: The reasons for the Pudgalavāda in early Buddhism,” in Tanaka, et al. eds., *The Moon Points Back* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Dan Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position: Or, How a ‘Performativist Account of the Language of Self’ Makes Sense of ‘No-Self.’” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2019): 697. Along with Carpenter, these two works provide most up-to-date, in-depth philosophical discussion on the topic of person/personalism in Buddhist context.

sense of self (*ātman*).<sup>24</sup> For instance, Carpenter will adamantly object to describe Pudgalavādins as “heretics” or “negligible fringe group” stating their robust status as Buddhists and the continued development of their core view. In other words, they were very popular.<sup>25</sup>

Were it not for the Pudgalavādin, whose existence opens the discussion to a broader context of Hindu and Buddhist debates on no-self *and* self, Porete’s theological anthropology may be totally incompatible. As briefly mentioned in the beginning, early Buddhist discourse on self or person (*pudgala*) delves into a similar analysis of mutual dependence, but this time with even minute analytic lens between the person and five aggregates (*khandhas*) that constitute the identifiable person.<sup>26</sup> Although Porete’s main method of negation is translated as annihilation, purification process is oriented toward accessing uncreated divinity, which might ring the alarm for Buddhist counterparts as the extreme of eternalism. For instance, Porete’s mysticism works under the premise of “everlasting supreme goodness” (*MSS* 136, 173) which is a description of divine immutability. If we focus on this aspect of God or Soul, comparison is not possible, as it immediately contradicts the Buddhist presupposition in general. However, if we anchor the discourse more toward and into the process of Soul’s *change* into Love/God(dess), being embraced into the nondual, relational communion, then we could lay a common ground as such a process can only be achieved through the total annihilation of self and will. I will qualify this the

---

<sup>24</sup> Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, trans. Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013), 193-4.

<sup>25</sup> Carpenter, “Persons keeping their Karma together,” 2-5: “..eventually, at least four different schools included ‘personalism,’ the *pudgalavāda*, in their view. The earliest espousers of this doctrine flourished, and in the seventh century CE, nearly a quarter of Buddhist monks in India were ‘*Pudgalavādins*.’” See *Ibid.*, 30-1nn1-2 that indicate the *pudgalavāda* (personalist) school was in fact “one of the most powerful and flourishing” of any Buddhist traditions, present at that time. *Ibid.*, 33nn18-9 on heresy. In Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position,” 702-5, 718n43; the charge of heresy, both historically and philosophically, is discussed at length, and effectively refuted as the *pudgalavāda* position is proven authentic Buddhist viewpoint.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey, “*Dukkha*, Non-self and the ‘Four Noble Truths,’” 32-4. See also Joerg Tuske’s chapter, “The Non-self Theory in Philosophy of Mind,” in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, 421-2 for classical inquiry on non-self through the dialogue between King Milinda and Sarvastivadan Buddhist monk Nāgasena.

level of self, person, and Porete's *Annihilated Soul*, at the center, therefore, bringing the discussion closer and comparable to Buddhist inquiry.

Contrary to attack on Porete as "a woman with attitude,"<sup>27</sup> such a process generates a certain humility in the Soul reflecting on the conventional nature on one's reality, mirroring the ultimate (here, as 'Lord God') that she is not. Porete's Soul negate herself during quiet moment of her contemplation:

First I considered and I said: "Lord God, I do not know whence you are, for that is comprehended only by your divine, supreme and everlasting might. Lord, I do not know what you are, for that is known only to your divine, supreme and everlasting wisdom. Lord, I do not know who you are, for that is comprehended only by your divine, supreme and everlasting goodness."

Similarly I spoke thus of myself: "I do not know whence I am: your might comprehends this. I do not know what I am: your wisdom knows this. I do not know who I am: your goodness comprehends this."  
.. "Lord, you are all one goodness.. Lord, you are; and so each thing is made perfect through you, and nothing is made without you. And I am not; and so every thing is made without me, and no thing is made by me.. And I am one only devil, in three evils, which are frailty, folly and wickedness"

(MSS 130, 163-4)

Porete's introspection often becomes harsh with her Soul's frailty, folly and wickedness, and as she also confesses not knowing or comprehending the true cause of divine, herself and every other thing inflicts the inner turmoil, I read this self-negation in MSS 130 paralleling the Buddhist meditation on *klesā* (afflictions/defilements) mainly comprised of ignorance, attachment and aversion. To clear the defilements, of course, Porete deploys the way of nothing, "apophasis of desire" for the Soul through "a state of utter selflessness, of annihilation of the will and reason."<sup>28</sup> For Porete, even having the best intentions for God cannot match "wishing for nothing in God" (MSS 49, 69). Soon after, Eckhart develops this notion of selfless soul, who is equal to nothing, as the ground "divine gives itself to." As Porete already has proclaimed, through nothingness, the Soul and the deity shares the ground. From my observation, in this very Buddhist manner, Eckhart also emphasizes the centrality of true freedom and "emptiness"

---

<sup>27</sup> Kent Emery Jr., "Foreword: Margaret Porete and Her Book," in *MSS*, trans. Marler and Grant, xxviii.

<sup>28</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 118.

with an astonishing application to the *deity*, who “must give up his *eigenschaft*, its attachment to and its quality of persons.”<sup>29</sup>

God himself never for an instant looks into it, never yet did he look on it, so far as he possesses himself in the manner and according to the properties of his Persons. It is well to observe this, because this simple one is without manner and without properties. And therefore, if God were ever to look upon it, that must cost him all his divine names and the properties of his Persons; that he must wholly forsake, if he is ever once to look into it. But as he is simply one, without any manner and properties, he is not Father or Son or Holy Spirit, and yet he is a something that is neither this nor that. (Ser. 2, CWS, 181)

It is this last part of Eckhart, the dialectic between extremes, is what would permeate the analysis of this chapter. Porete’s nothingness, to be properly understood, is mutually interdependent with *everything*: “the Freedom of Wishing for Nothing, which will satisfy the Soul in every way, this Nothing which gives everything” (MSS 79, 102). Likewise, Buddhist notion of no-self and emptiness, while clearly signaling non-substantiality in their signifier, often becomes misappropriated, merely as complete nonexistence. It cannot be, according to Nāgārjuna, as the correct view on emptiness considers it as the “middle path” (MMK 24:18) as the rest of verses describe emptiness as the underlying, enabling ground of all dependently originated causes and conditions.<sup>30</sup> This really makes me ponder the sense of life and vitality in Eckhart’s nothingness, that is the “prior ground” for everything and its transformation.<sup>31</sup> But even with variants of metaphors, in many ways, Eckhart too was misunderstood, and the real trouble with authorities always pointed to where Eckhart rephrased Porete’s way of nothingness

---

<sup>29</sup> Sells, “The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 136-7: “I have translated *eigenschaft* as ‘attachment,’ but it also connotes ‘possessiveness’ and ‘self’ [*eigen*] regard.’ In more abstract philosophical term, *eigenschaft* denotes a quality or property of a thing, and Eckhart is playing upon that sense as well.”

<sup>30</sup> “To call emptiness the middle path is to say that it avoids the two extreme views of being and nonbeing. It avoids the extreme view of being by denying that there are ultimately real existents, things with intrinsic nature. But at the same time it avoids the extreme view of nonbeing by denying that ultimate reality is characterized by the absence of being. It is able to avoid both extremes because it denies that there is such a thing as the ultimate nature of reality” (Siderits and Katsura 2013), 278.

<sup>31</sup> Beverly J. Lanzetta, “Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart,” *The Journal of Religion*, 72, no. 2 (April 1992): 255-9.

and annihilation. Porete writes, “the most noble soul is equal to everything and everyone.”<sup>32</sup> With such a tone of radical equality between the Soul and God permeating Porete’s *MSS*, it is difficult to apply a reductionist account to Porete as her goal is clearly explicated as liberation, freedom and oneness with divine, in the fullest sense— yet manifesting a transcultural mode of nondual union corresponding to Buddhist meditation of no-self, emptiness, combined with Goddess-oriented traditions.

Between ‘all there is’ and ‘nothing at all,’ both the French Beguine and Buddhists defend themselves from accusation of nihilism, by necessarily promoting something graded and balanced. This might be especially true for Nāgārjuna, whose meticulous analysis is based on the study of identity and difference. For Porete, it is nothing, no-one but Love. Nonetheless, reading the seven states of the devout Soul/states of being in *MSS* 118ff. explores the Soul between relative and absolute divine goodness, Porete’s version of conventional and ultimate. Again, Porete’s contemplation exposes the constant struggle and the Soul’s movement toward union with Love, in spite of the peace and grace she seeks by not seeking. Pudgalavādins (personalists) with *pudgala* and the disputatious Tibetan Buddhist master Dölpopa, as later will appear in this chapter with Eckhart, focuses so much on the nondual primordial awareness, whose designations are shockingly reminiscent of *ātman* rather than *anātman*.<sup>33</sup> For Porete, her notion of annihilation is often mistaken as sort of annihilationism and her mystical union, as monstrous attempt for blasphemy. Buddhists, with perennial, cautious defense against the eliminative materialism, and simultaneously, carrying on the more obvious battles against the

---

<sup>32</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 194.

<sup>33</sup> Cyrus Stearns, *The Buddha From Dölpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltzen* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2010), 50-1; 260-1.

eternalism.<sup>34</sup> As American philosopher of Indian Buddhism, Daniel A. Arnold, also points out this tension, explaining that it is this extreme of annihilationism/eliminativism (*ucchedavāda*) that “proponents of Madhyamaka must particularly work to avoid; avoidance of the other extreme just goes with being Buddhist.”<sup>35</sup>

The comparative viewpoint can really help us zoom out a bit and see where the tradition stands. For example, nothing/ness in Porete (and Beguine mystics and Eckhart in general) has been often mistaken as *nihil*, although any language of abandonment or Soul’s detachment paves a way of permitting God to enter, precisely because the Nothingness is “the ground out of which flows the life of the Trinity.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the talk of *person* through Pudgalavādin reminds us that the Buddhist *anātman* (no-self), to a significant extent, is not a discussion of denial for its own sake. This explains why the discourse of nothing is often expressed in mystical aphorism, metaphor and poetry.<sup>37</sup> Both masters showcase prime examples of apophasis, by engaging with it distinct and away from mere linguistic exercise of cutting out (negation): Porete expresses a daring, passionate union with Love by the allusion of love, and Eckhart grounds his philosophical, theological mysticism in the source of life, beaming with true sense of renewal.

---

<sup>34</sup> It is the Indian physicalist/materialist *Cārvāka* (600 BCE) school that provides closest bases for annihilationism, which was refuted by “their Buddhists and non-Buddhist opponents.” Tom J. F. Tillemans, *The Moon Points Back*, 46. Also, when the Buddhist philosophers in this chapter cautiously mentions annihilation(ism) as eliminative extreme, it must be distinguished from Porete’s annihilation since the being of annihilated Soul in *MSS* continues, and become transformed into Love, the divine essence. Is Porete charged with eternalism, from Buddhist perspective? In order to address the potential clash between Porete’s and Buddhists, a separate discussion might be necessary. However, as my chapter will stress multiple times, Porete was persecuted with her atypical, radical notion of nothingness that closely parallels the critical, reflective, denuding, hence liberating aspect of no-self, rather than what Soul was conventionally believed to be in her time. Besides, this chapter will verify that not all Buddhist discourse abandons theological discourse completely, especially in the case of Tibetan *zhentong* tradition. In the meantime, please note that Eternalism has its own history and web of definitions in Christian theology and philosophy of time. See “Eternity in Christian Thought,” accessed January 19, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/>

<sup>35</sup> Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 220.

<sup>36</sup> Lichtmann, “Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart,” 85. Eckhart, as a great mystic and a teacher, does speak of “emptiness” in this sense (*CWS* 221-2; 271-2), but it is “nothingness” that preoccupies selected translations, both for Porete’s and Eckhart’s works.

<sup>37</sup> Sells, “The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister,” 114-5.

Read alongside each other, I think, both *anātman* (no-self) theory and Porete’s nothing(ness), as spiritualities of negation, share the paradox of nondefinability. As fundamentally a refutation of ‘essence’ in each tradition, even what might be the closest element to the heart may fiercely escape conceptualization. In other words, despite many pages ahead on this very topic, ‘what *exactly* is this notion of nothingness or no-self?’ is not a question I can directly address, and it is not possible rightly because none of the authors in this chapter ultimately defines what they are.<sup>38</sup> It is my hope that their nondualist mystical vision, intensely focused on spiritual liberation, encounters Buddhist understanding in unexpected harmony.

Previous to our generation, there has been a whole history and movement to divorce the transcendental aspect of subjectivity or consciousness, completely from the theological, by giving a thoroughly naturalist account of representation. Even though I am not a scientist, this motivation is rather understandable given the history of heresy and brutal persecution from religious authority before, during and after the era I am dealing with, especially when the scientific truth or natural evidence contradicted the preached dogmas, becoming a menace. Revolutionary minds such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant were philosophers, well-known for their critique of religious belief. Both decried an enthusiastic, fanatic zeal that leads toward antinomian, irrational, self-aggrandizing, oppressive, delusional states—especially when combined with divine inspiration.<sup>39</sup> In Porete and Eckhart, one may find the most perfectly distilled philosophical, moral reflections that announce its diversion from previous forms of affective or visionary mysticism. In *MSS*, Porete actually does not state divine attributes any

---

<sup>38</sup> On *anātmavāda*, the teaching of no-self, See Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position,” 720: “Nāgārjuna’s ‘personalist’ intuitions inform an argument to the effect that the question *what am I really?* is finally not a question that can or should be answered, since there is no kind of *thing* that being a person ultimately is.. the theoretical positing of new kinds of *things* can never coherently be thought to tell us what we really are, for the finally simple reason that there *is*—indeed, that there *can be*—no such thing as ‘what we really are.’”

<sup>39</sup> June McDaniel, *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 60-2.

further than what the predominant culture already provided, even though her reading is radically restructured. In a rather Kantian manner, Porete remains silent about *noumena* or *things-in-themselves*. Yes, the divine appears as Love, but even during the deification, nothing else is revealed than the Soul's being brought to Nothing, and dwelling in Nothing is the only way the Love endorses and commends (*MSS* 51, 71). The whole point of Porete's work is actually about this Soul, who is contemplating, wishing for, knowing and becoming Nothing, whose audacity is backed up by an impeccable integrity and independent wisdom. She is nevertheless fundamentally a mystic, because she traverses and transgresses the boundary between theology and anthropology; also, because she is an outright critic of Reason, believing only the divine light of Love/God can guide the Soul into the blissful union with Love ("This Soul has no thought, no word, no work, except for employing the grace of the divine Trinity."<sup>40</sup>). When Porete's Soul meditates on Love, often accompanied by Reason's doubt and question. Reason is an antagonist who contrasts the "superior, God-given insights" with its "dry-as-dust approach to spirituality."<sup>41</sup> But as her book progresses, readers will soon encounter the whole system of *MSS* relies upon true, Divine Knowledge, Illumined Knowledge and Exalted Understanding of Love, versus Reason's Understanding (*MSS* 12). In short, the Beguine mystic mirrors a way of nothingness and annihilation that cannot be comprehended or completed from a purely *conceptual* level. This chapter will function as a placeholder for concepts and categories, with their availability and indispensability, but the study is of very conventional use— as they will serve the following chapters' engagement with psychological and phenomenological dimensions in mystical self-transcendence. In many profound ways, the disputes between the mystic and sages predate the more formal division between philosophy and theology. Porete's Soul and her

---

<sup>40</sup> *MSS* 16, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Colledge, Marler, and Grant, "Introductory Interpretative Essay," in *MSS*, lxxii.



Nothing, in conversation with *anātman*, here interpreted by Buddhists who would not object to a “transcendental” reading of it, is vital to salvage that sense of experience, the realization of true freedom.

Porete also emphasizes that the state of union is always at peace, “lived of the divine life” (*MSS* 93, 117), far from the disquiet the Enlightenment thinkers guard against. Read together with Eckhart, the meditation of this Soul deeply and utterly investigates what it means to *be*—however empirically or rationally defined. With the path of nothingness and annihilation, Porete’s mystical imagination also widely opens the door for human Soul to step into the divine and become one with it. Whether every soul can follow through the exceptional entry is a totally different matter. The most significant point is that this movement of Porete naturally zooms in, bringing down the dialogues into the state of Soul, and what the Soul ought to do in order to restore the divinity in herself. If we sincerely pay attention to Christian mystics and Buddhist sages’ meditations, the central figures in this chapter in particular, mystical theology and philosophy, then, could present an invaluable historical precedent to any important first-person philosophical act that in and through itself manifests phenomenological awareness and transformation.<sup>42</sup>

Considering all of the theological and philosophical dimension surrounding the discourse of nothing and no-self, the ultimate question in this chapter is whether we can simply reduce the

---

<sup>42</sup> The most relevant discussion can be found in Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, 84-8. Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception responds to Hume’s denial of enduring subject, only counting the momentary, fleeting perceptions “explicable in terms of memory and recognition” (85). From my perspective, this transition is almost analogous to the tension and critique between an Abhidharmika and Pudgalavādin, establishing the latter as proto-Kantian. See also Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position,” 713. Even though Porete’s Soul and Love emphasize the indistinct union cannot be achieved by Reason or Understanding, in order to engage with the strands of Buddhist no-self, Kant’s insight is indispensable to lay a common ground regarding subjectivity and experience. If we take account that both Porete and Buddhists in this chapter pursue the highest insight of nonduality, either expressed in utter nothingness or emptiness, then this transcendental, *a priori* ground “conditioning the very possibility of all experience” in Kant’s first *Critique* (A101-2) is of greatest importance for comparison.

essence of religion into a discourse without an element of transcendence. For the case of Porete's mysticism, component of sacred ecstasy<sup>43</sup> or presence of Love complicates and deepens the mode of transcendence into a union with divine, that is inherently theological. This is why comparative study of Porete requires, first of all, a *theological* collaborator on metaphysical level, who likewise is able to speak of divine as Love, whose mystical outpouring of its effulgent light liberates and unites the meditator/practitioner into itself, like "ocean."<sup>44</sup>

As much as the Buddhist teaching pertains to origin and cessation of suffering, out of wisdom and compassion for those who suffer in this life, Eckhart's apophasis also intends to console those who are in "sorrow, distress and hurt."<sup>45</sup> When it comes to Porete, her version of *nirvāṇa* aligns the entire project of *MSS* with the freedom of the Soul through union with divine Love. As Porete is so intent on being "alone in the pure love of the love of God," pastoral speech is not prioritized as the meditation of Love is what Soul receives from Love, "without wishing for any of Love's gifts which are called consolations" (*MSS* 26, 45). This and upcoming chapters will be spent on thinking about this particular remark, Perfect Love, and wishing, willing and dwelling in nothing as a major pathway, and the only way, toward Love.

At this point, so as to distinguish my project from the more prominent strand of comparative philosophy, I should clarify that this chapter will not solely engage with the leading disciplines such as metaphysics or ontology. It is true that any meaningful discussion of

---

<sup>43</sup> "So there is in this Soul the beam of divine knowledge drawing her out of herself without herself, into an astounding divine peace, supported upon a crest of the outflowing love of that Jealous Lover on high, who gives to her supreme freedom in all places" (*MSS* 71, 92). This portion encapsulates Porete's core notions that keep up showing: element of ecstasy and centrality of Love, despite her critique of spiritual affection. My following and penultimate chapters will investigate this complex of notion of rapture in Porete, in terms of subtle transformation in meditative context, but not in the exclusion of religious experience.

<sup>44</sup> See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 234-7. Even with a sneak peek, the correspondence between Goddess-oriented Hindu Tantra and Marguerite Porete's mystical poetics (nondual union in, through, of Love; meditative absorption; gnoseological motifs; aquatic metaphors, to name a few) is almost uncanny.

<sup>45</sup> The Book of "Benedictus" The Book of Divine Consolation (*Bened.1*), CWS, 223.

comparative mysticism needs conceptual and theoretical grounding by the key figures and their thoughts. For instance, there are very technical expositions, for example, the usage of fire in Buddhist-Christian context, noticeably grounded upon such intellectual practice. In most cases, canonical authorships, from both traditions, often address philosophical points ignited by certain metaphors, generating further disagreements and disputes. From this chapter and on, I would like to appreciatively build upon these genealogies, yet lift up Porete, a philosophical theologian on her own terms, but who is also primarily a mystic, and a woman. This means that in addition to the field-defining citations, Porete's work requires different approach as her mysticism weaves theological prose with the style of secular love poetry.<sup>46</sup> In short, along with the intellectual rigor of philosophical treatises, the central figure of this chapter demands close reading of her own narrative, through her poetic inventions. Her characteristic understanding of divine and deification forms itself mainly through the lens of Love. Love is normally designated as a truly unruly emotion, and understandably became somewhat shunned topic from the mind of philosophers. To the contrary, rather than relegating the subject to a footnote or silencing it, Marguerite Porete's Love actually transcends its signification as a feeling, and takes the form of the Goddess, Ladyship, or fire, rendered as the center of her theological stage—the divine ideal of mystical union itself. However, the mystical, ecstatic quality of living the life of divinity, from my understanding, is shot through the meaning, presence and total absorption by Love, and thus cannot really be explained without deeper discussion of feeling, emotion and psychological insights on affect. And the analysis of Porete's Love is bound with the nothingness, Soul's not having any will at all, in order to have "but one single intention" (*MSS* 86, 111), that of Love/God. In my penultimate chapter, numerous examples will reveal Porete's penchant for

---

<sup>46</sup> Kent Emery Jr., "Foreword," in *MSS*, viii-xiii.

extinguishing any affection (even spiritual ones), feeling (begging for divine ones), longing, wishing that render this Love close to any entity momentary, exaggerated, embodied and emotional: pushed to a certain extreme, *human* love. With Porete's zeal toward transcendence and union with divinity in mind, the complexities and a few more difficult, seemingly self-contradictory, yet candid confessions about the state of Perfect/Divine Love will be read together, to assess and reconstruct her meditation later.

In the similar vein, I intuit the dedicated effort of the Pudgalavādins and, especially reading the Tibetan variant of *zhentong* (other-emptiness) may be of immense benefit, along the cross-cultural current of Porete and Eckhart. *Zhentong* philosophy, although introduced only by its glimpse due to its own magnitude, speaks of the “emptiness of the *unchanging* perfect nature (*nirvikāra-pariniṣpanna*, ‘*gyur ba med pa'i yongs grub*), which is not empty of its own nature.”<sup>47</sup> If the discussion of *pudgala* contains transcendental aspect, the Tibetan *zhentong* view in the context of tantras, buddhas and countless deities with ritualized visualization of them, is unabashedly *theological*, by which the notion of ultimate and absolute is not only allowed but actively pursued— thereby making otherwise impossible comparison possible here.

In short, *pudgala* and *zhentong* are outliers due to their transcendental stretch in a world of immanence where lacking any intrinsic nature is stressed as the basis. Porete was condemned for confluence of transcendence and immanence from where the strict line of separation had to be maintained. Paying due respect to each great tradition that came before their not only unique, but arguably outrageous ideas, the possibility of their convergence caught my attention as a reader. If a Pudgalavādin and Zhentongpa could switch their location with Porete and Eckhart across different time zone, they each might wind up in the talk of iconoclasm, for not so

---

<sup>47</sup> *The Other Emptiness: Rethinking the Zhentong Buddhist Discourse in Tibet*, eds. Michael R. Sheehy and Klaus-Dieter Mathes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 7.

dissimilar reasons. The task of this chapter is not historical, but comparative and intentionally ideational, in order to hear the voice of these thinkers clearly before any sort of judgment.

Affinities as nondual discourse that illumine our contemporaneous mode of living, and if these figures are rebels, they are indeed with a great cause that was inspired their mystical vision, driven by the search for truth. In order to appreciate Porete's theological anthropology, I will first start by defending Porete's most misunderstood and attacked area of ethics, mirroring her view with the meditation on compassion by the beloved Buddhist monk-philosopher Śāntideva (7-8 CE)— which can be doubly enhanced with the notion of *pudgala*. Then to pave the way for Porete's core nondualism, following larger sections will be spent on Eckhart's use of fire metaphor for nondual union, with a brief comparison between Eckhart and Tibetan *zhentong* view. This will, as I hope, situate and guide us to the multilayered, controversial bases of her anthropology and Porete's spiritual, romantic, meditative saga between Soul and Love can shine through the reflection of Buddhist discourse, whose rich history surprisingly encompasses the transcendental and theological— thereby connecting Porete's nothing and the Buddhist no-self.

### *Forever Contested: Porete's Theological Anthropology and Ethical Issues*

..Rather, he must leave it to God to do all that is needed, if he wants to enjoy the fruits of his labor, for of himself he can never achieve anything; and this you can see by your natural understanding. Now the wheat must rot in the ground, before it can yield any new fruit from itself, and in this the husbandman, however great his efforts may have been, can have no help. No-one but God knows how the grain rots, and how it revives so as yield fruit one hundredfold, and it is God who performs this work all alone, after the husbandman has done everything in his power, and not before that. (MSS 124, 156)

**Love.** This Soul, says Love, no longer performs any works for God, or for herself, or for her neighbors either, as has been said, unless God, who can perform them, does this if it is his will; and if he does not will it, she is no more concerned for the one than for the other; she is always in the same state. (**How this Soul no longer performs any works for God or for herself or for her neighbors.** MSS 71, 92)

The first passage cited above is almost never mentioned in any vicious critique of the Beguine mystic. Understandably, it sounds more like Eckhart, with the notion of labor, earthly

analogy and ground. The second, however, becomes exploited as an evidence to problematize Porete as an antinomian, taken entirely out of context of mystical union and divine operation. However, as the title suggests, this is not the only time Porete says the Soul needs no work, as the controversial core of her theology is regarding Nothing: “She wishes for everything, says Love, and yet she wishes for nothing; for this Soul, says Love, wills so perfectly the will of God that in her will she knows nothing, she can do nothing, she wills nothing but God’s will” (*MSS* 16, 34). Does this only affirm the ethicist’s suspicion that mystical consciousness of union, or deification, becomes a self-aggrandized gesture, ignoring any social and moral responsibility or criticism whatsoever? To answer this question, one should consider the ground of reasoning Porete begins with. First, Porete mostly abhors the dogma attached to work or virtue, especially the constraining, externally imposed ethical norms. For Porete, a practice of such without genuine reflection or realization of divine within our Soul is associated with “enslavement” (*MSS* 24, 44). In fact, the target of Porete’s poignant criticism is this entrapment within one’s complacency or “sufficiency” of so-called good, virtuous workers boast, negligent of the most noble, disencumbered path toward union with divine.<sup>48</sup> In order to truly hear Porete’s perspective, readers should stay focused on her own assertion no matter how controversial it may initially sound. For Porete, everything is centered around the freedom of her soul. Porete is declaring the independence of her soul, however, in the name of and in *relation* to God, through daringly direct, immediate dialogical connection. The inseparable connection between Soul and Love represents the sole divine authority in her writing. Only in this context can we understand the soul’s desire and right to “be excused by all men.. freed of any obligation” (*MSS* 41, 60).

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-2. See also *MSS* 55, in which the Soul delivers this exact criticism against those “who become lost in their works, because of the satisfaction which they have in their state of being” and the ones who “dwell and wish to remain.. with what longing and wishing give to them” (74-5).

Any presumed obligation or demand by Reason or ‘Holy Church the Less’ only interferes Porete’s Soul from her process of being brought to nothing. Repeatedly confirmed by Lady Love, this very nothing is what the Soul-in-annihilation knows, wishes for. “Within herself” and yet “not with herself,” the Soul also “has become” nothing (*MSS* 40-2). In this groundbreaking sense, the freedom instigated by Porete’s nothingness cannot ever be aforementioned “antinomian ‘freedom *from*,’” but “really a freedom *for* and liberation of God.”<sup>49</sup> Living in totally and divinely ego-free manner is described in a predominantly philosophical language of Porete. Yet, this “intellectuality” can never be constituted apart from being an “ethical ideal,” as the process of deification in Porete is fundamentally driven by the “desire for an *ennobling* realization of the soul’s inner life.”<sup>50</sup> Sells’ analysis again cannot be more apt:

Dame Amour is calling not so much for the abandonment of activity as for a reinterpretation of its meaning and agency.. The act of giving up activity would be considered “a work” by Porete and Eckhart. The rejection of human “work” is not a rejection of activity, but of the identification of the *agent with the ego-self*. Insofar as a work is just (i.e. carried out without self-interested attachment), the true actor is the divine who works in the soul. The giving up of creaturely agency does not result in a lack of productivity.<sup>51</sup>

Echoing Sells, for the disputatious notion of will-less, work-free state of the Soul, the “agency” of “work” under such interrogation has now shifted its weight to the divine: “rather it is Love who dwells in her, who has taken her will from her, and so *Love works* her own will in the Soul, and *Love performs* her works in her without her help” (*MSS* 7, 18; my italics).<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Lichtmann, “Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 85 (my italics).

<sup>50</sup> Kent Emery Jr., “Foreword,” in *MSS*, xiv (my italics).

<sup>51</sup> *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 193 (my italics). In endnote n. 42, Sells illustrates that Porete’s polemic of annihilation of agency (will) and activity (work) may find a comparative precedent in the tradition of *Bhagavad Gita*, closest to the yoga of *bhakti* which “involves a loss of self-regard through the transferal of all regard to one’s divine lover. Porete’s use of sexual allusion, the centrality of eros to the mystical path, is in the spirit of *bhakti*.. As in the Gita, the question is not whether one acts or does not act.. but whether one realizes that the acts are being carried out within one without his or her will” (296).

<sup>52</sup> See also Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 127-8: “The *Mirror* assures us that the freed soul, though it can do what it wishes, will never wish anything contrary to the laws of the Church.. In order to evaluate Dame amour’s claim that the soul is ‘excused’ from everything, it is necessary to examine the view of agency upon which it is based. Those who act contrary to their own will and pleasure act through a kind of counter-will that is just as much tied to human will and works as the natural will. Such action is only another form of enslavement to the will.. at the point of mystical union, the soul is free precisely *insofar as it is not the soul who is acting*. The divine (FarNear,

Considered from the freedom of the Soul who dwells in Love, “Virtues serve them with no demur and with no effort” (*MSS* 8, 19). The incorrectly accused *non-work* of Love in the Soul, then, should be read as a critique of tendentious, egotistical obsession with salvation and the externality of works promised toward it, devoid of true contemplation on divine, and an inner, spiritual state of human soul— not to mention the institutional environment disallowing any exertion of strong female agency or her participation outside predetermined bounds at all.<sup>53</sup> The rest of *MSS* 8 suggests that the union with Love criticizes a soul’s psycho-spiritual bondage and subjection to Virtues that governs one’s life with “Dread and ...torment in Hell until the day of judgement.”<sup>54</sup> Then, this counterintuitive attack on works or Virtues is only comprehensible when we regain our faith and love, under the context of Porete’s intense plea for our soul’s awakening. Naturally, the process of annihilation brings upon “true and perfect humility” (*MSS* 11, 23) within the Soul, who is already hypersensitive toward any sinful potential. However, recognition of the vice should be differentiated from the complete domination of our spiritual life and priorities by the same sin. In *MSS* 21, the voice of Reason, of course, takes issue with this critique of Porete, and Love intervenes to clear up some confusions. Before the Soul was united with Divine Love herself, Soul *was* “truly obedient” to Virtues. It is not that Virtues are denied, now that the state of union transforms the Soul *into* Love, “she is above them” (41). For Porete, this union means the recovery of pure divinity within the Soul, rising above and flying high as

---

Amour, or the Trinity) is acting in and through her.” Again, Porete’s description is worth reviewing with Daoist notion of *wu-wei*.

<sup>53</sup> This is not a speculation of mine without evidence as Porete is certainly not the only female mystic who was persecuted “on charges of witchcraft and heresy” during “a reign of religious terror that blackened the skies of Europe for two centuries with the smoke of execution, a holocaust disproportionately female in composition.” *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 161.

<sup>54</sup> *MSS* 8, 19. See also *MSS* 90.



Love/God intended for her: “So this Soul is compared with the eagle... for Perfect Love has given her wings.”<sup>55</sup>

When it comes to ethical dimension, Porete’s intentionally provoking, daring rhetoric had invited multiple cases for misunderstanding. First, we can look into the true meaning of *MSS* 116, where the Soul “rejoices” in the affliction of her neighbors. If we just focus on the title, ignoring the fact that the chapter begins with “a full and perfect love” continuing the previous praise of Soul on “the power of the transformation in love of my Beloved” (*MSS* 115, 137), then the word of sadism might easily occur to a few readers’ mind.<sup>56</sup> Despite the title, however, the Soul continues to explain that “this is the way by which they will come to the haven of their salvation” (*MSS* 116, 138). In other words, this is Porete’s Eckhart-ian moment. In the penultimate paragraph of *On Detachment*, Eckhart writes:

Now, all you reasonable people, take heed! The fastest beast that will carry you to your perfection is suffering, for no one will enjoy more eternal sweetness than those who endure with Christ in the greatest bitterness. There is nothing more gall-bitter than suffering, and nothing more honey-sweet than to have suffered; nothing disfigures the body more than suffering, and nothing more adorns the soul in the sight of God than to have suffered. (CWS 194)

In truth, the path toward complete union requires a contemplative aptitude, followed by discernment and endurance for almost inevitable, certain dose of suffering the Souls will encounter and experience, as Christ himself evidenced. Hence, in some sense, Porete and Eckhart have showcased a robust medieval prototype of ‘tough-love’ sort of moral psychology. There is fine line between aestheticization of suffering and the disciplinary, more dictatorial imposition of it. In the context of spiritual cultivation and mystical union, the relationship

---

<sup>55</sup> *MSS* 22, 41. In *MSS* 11, Love also says this Soul is “the solitary phoenix” (24). In both passages, the Soul’s self-sufficiency and independent capacity to see and unite with God freely is emphasized.

<sup>56</sup> Apparently some scribes found this “scandalous” and had replaced or omitted the ‘rejoices’ part. See n. 2 for *MSS* 116. I think Porete should be understood in terms of Rom.5:3-4: “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (RSV).

between suffering and sublime becomes very much inseparable, as love and sorrow alternate and coexist with presence and absence of the Divine. This issue will be further investigated in my fifth chapter.

To make matters even more complex, right before she speaks of her seven states of spiritual ascent, now Porete's Soul contemplates on evil. When Porete claims something, she means it. Just at the moment her statements have reached the radical nondualism between human Soul and Divine Love, it is said: “..I am the sum of all evils.”<sup>57</sup>

For of my own nature I contain what evil is, and so I am all evil.. I am the everlasting praise of God, and the salvation of the human creature, for the salvation of every creature is nothing else than the knowledge of the goodness of God, which goodness of God does me such goodness, this goodness will be known by them through me, nor would it ever be known, were it not for my evil.

..What is more, never can I lose his goodness, for I cannot lose my evil; and this fact has assured me beyond all doubt of his goodness. And it is only the nature of my evil which has so invested me with such a gift, not any work of goodness which I ever performed or which anyone could perform; such works give me neither comfort nor hope, but only evil..

..Now you can understand how my evil is the cause of my receiving his goodness, because of my need; for God sometimes permits some evil to be done, for the sake of the greater good which will afterwards be born of it. For all those who have been planted by the Father and have come into this world have descended from the perfect into the imperfect, so as to attain to the more perfect. (*MSS* 117, 138-40)

This kind of bold, unconventional, subversive nature of Porete's theological anthropology casts significantly different light upon the Fall, as well as regression, when mystically understood, that is an essential part of Soul's reversion/return to nothingness. This dimension will be addressed later in this chapter. Once again, here we do not detect an active encouragement of command or commitment toward evil. Porete is offering a human response out of a candid, transparent reflection of herself, in the form of less doctrinally encouraged, forbidden thought experiment. In order to truly appreciate the goodness and the seed for salvation, the Soul decides to acknowledge and see through the reality of evil as it is, to the

---

<sup>57</sup> Full title of this chapter is “How this Soul shows that she is the example of the salvation of every creature.” Interestingly, Isabelle Adjani's character (Anna) in Andrzej Zulawski's film *Possession* (1981) famously says: “Goodness is only some kind of reflection upon evil. That's all it is.”; And also “I can't exist by myself because I'm afraid of myself, because I'm the maker of my own evil.”

fullest extent, not as mere privation of what the Divine Love has designated for her Soul. It is a perceptive, poetic, mystical, contemplative matter of embracing the reality of human nature, blossoming it into the totality of divinity. This level of reflection on evil seldom appears, but ultimately has a foundation in the Scripture, carrying a profound insight on the mystery of theodicy and humanity.<sup>58</sup> Porete's Soul is unapologetic, and won't shy away from pushing subversive rhetoric to enhance her own unorthodox theology, but it is not same as suggesting or encouraging any sort of destructive ethical deviancy: "But if this Soul, who is in such exalted rest, could help her neighbors, she would help them in their need with all her might" (*MSS* 16, 35). The real source of controversy she was hated for stemmed rather from teaching and assuming spiritually higher standard for perfection, being one with God, which clashes with governing authority and philosophical theologies of institution.

If read thoroughly, *MSS* presents the highest form of spiritual union, accompanied by perfection of virtues overflowing from the divine being itself. Porete never compromises her integrity as dwelling in Divine Love cannot contradict being "in union with divine justice" and this "goodness of divine justice" enhances and widens her spiritual sight (*MSS* 52, 72).<sup>59</sup> The Soul seriously ponders upon this subject:

Ah, God, how sweet is this consideration! He has provided us with the means of doing this, not that it is impossible for me to sin, if I will, but it is an impossibility that I should sin if my will does not wish it. So, we are fully able to fulfill his will, if we offer no objection, and need not seek it out. If anyone seeks for what he has, his perception is at fault; he does not have the art which brings such knowledge.<sup>60</sup>  
(*MSS* 109, 132)

---

<sup>58</sup> Notable biblical passages: "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45); "Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20), both in Revised Standard Version.

<sup>59</sup> But it is maintained that "This Soul lets the dead bury the dead, and the forlorn exercise the virtues"—Therefore, the radical freedom of Soul still has priority over her contemporaries' extant concept of virtue as a habitual, institutional dispositions and/or norms. But this does not mean Porete is trying to abolish all esteemed moral, ethical understanding or conduct. It is not virtue *per se* Porete critiques, as Humility is recommended as "the first virtue, mother to all the rest," (Marler and Grant 9) along with nobility, graciousness and the other spiritual aptitudes that attain to the true perfection of the Soul, "that exalted love of the Soul" (*MSS*, The Prologue, 10).

<sup>60</sup> For more exposition on evil and sin, please see *MSS* 102-8.

Prior to this chapter, in which the Soul's complete will-lessness causes an impossibility of sin, the Soul requests of Love to show her the consequence of what she does with her own free will. Here the Soul clearly says that "God hates every sin" and this is "what God does not wish." (*MSS* 107, 130). Quite contrary to the accuser's misunderstanding, Porete's soul, as she is free, noble and unencumbered at her deepest, has "no means of sinning, for without will no-one can sin" (*MSS* 89, 114). Yet again, this limited section cannot provide a neat, systematic summary of Porete's hamartiology, largely because Porete's anthropology of nothingness and nondual union does not take sin or evil as central subject of her matter, primarily because it is focused on annihilation and deification that radiates the Soul's noble spiritual potential. Though the passages above provide evidence of Porete's Soul to be, no doubt, morally admirable, it is true that her chapters do not seem to concern abiding by any codified norms— henceforth the viciously following critique of Reason, Virtue and other lesser duties, works and the institution that promotes them. The voices of Soul and Love hardly hide their suspicion and disdain for the rigid, oppressive institution and its misguided notions. Understandably, the very definition, judgment and imposition of sin had been inseparable from the discourse of salvation. The wild and radical creativity and outcry for freedom, against all such externalities, in *MSS* is the critical proof against the bigotry of Porete's contemporaries. Therefore, Porete devises her own, novel interpretation of fall, along with knowing and reverting to nothing, as a corrective to theological anthropology which often called out humanity deplorable. Porete imagined radical freedom of Soul at its purest state, robbed of single possibility of sin, corruption or bondage. Annihilation of human will could make sense only under such light. The Soul has already transcended the matter of moral scrutiny of determining right from wrong, proper from indecent, since her nothingness and union with Love has already reached the very life of divine. This is why the

chapters do not demand or *force* an ethics or any intricacy of it, given the cultural milieu that forcibly and readily vilified the feminine. If we carefully take account of the simple, genuine intention in *MSS*, it is almost impossible not to trust the transparency, worthiness and the luminosity of the Soul's nothingness.<sup>61</sup>

Having considered the accusations in this vein, what do we really make of her claims so far? In *MSS* 136, truly in the manner of beyond good and evil, Porete mysteriously remarks that “all works are forbidden to her in the simple life of the divinity... she has nothing with which she could do good; and therefore, it follows that she has nothing with which she could do evil.. that all things should be subjected to me; since all things are made for me, I take all things as my own, with nothing forbidden to me” (172-3). This is yet another frequently dismissed chapter, accused of promoting moral laxity or ‘bad’ stoicism. However, as I have previously reviewed *MSS* 71 in the beginning, in truth, Porete's explicitly and intentionally esoteric tendency gives the sole authority of all ethical dimension to the state of union with Love. But before we judge Porete as antinomian by popular definition, as the Inquisitors did, we can appreciate the full force of what is and has been proposed here: a human Soul's emancipation through divine goodness, participation in the divine life, by becoming one.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> In order for resistance and transformation in thinking to truly give birth to itself, what Sells calls “anarchic moment” should occur. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 209. “without *archē* or first principle.. the anarchic moment occurs upon the removal of the glowing mass, which serves as the beginning, source, or principle of the light.” Sells includes Eckhart and Porete's annihilation of the self as part of this anarchic moment. Here, an interesting analysis for such moment continues: “To explain away the anarchic moment is to turn apophatic language into conventional theology. Yet to insist upon the integrity of the anarchic moment is to highlight certain moral and intellectual risks.” This sentence summarizes the tension on Porete's apophatic that does seem to require an explanation, for its ethical ambivalence. On p. 211, Sells writes: “Dame Amour assures the annihilated soul that when she (the soul) abandons all works and will and takes leave of virtue, divine love will ‘work’ within her. Yet, in this context as well, the apophatic anarchic moment occurs at the point beyond all will and expectation, beyond assurance.” The relationship between mysticism and its ethical implication is not an easy one, but research on this subject has been thoroughly conducted in comprehensive, comparative setting. See G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Essays On the Ethical Status of Mysticism* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Colledge, Marler, and Grant, “Introductory Interpretative Essay,” in *MSS*, lvii: “..we suggest that some of her extravagances become more acceptable if we keep in mind—though her discursive treatment and her strange

Amy Hollywood succinctly comments on this issue: “Although the unencumbered soul can give to Nature what she will, such a soul is so fully united with the divine that she can never will anything contrary to what God wills.”<sup>63</sup> For a Soul who truly loves and lives like the Divinity, what would ethics look like? This is a point where the great wisdom of Eckhart fills in what Porete had rather left unsaid. In a variety of ways, Eckhart shares the radical anthropology of soul in nothingness and extensively produces contemplative, spiritual and pastoral guidance—which Porete’s shorter treatise wasn’t too particularly interested in. Hence, from my understanding, it is important to read Eckhart along with Porete, as Eckhart preached so eloquently on certain issues, almost on Porete’s behalf. In truly nondual fashion, the scholarship agrees that Porete and Eckhart’s central mystical theme has been living without a “why”:

The just man lives in God and God in him because God is born in the just man and the just man in God. In every virtue of the just man God is born, and he is filled with joy by every virtue of the just man..

The just man seeks nothing in his works. Those that seeks something in their works or those who work because of a “why” are servants and hired hands. And so, if you want to be informed by and transformed into justice, have no [specific] intention in your works and form no “why” in yourself, either in time or in eternity, either reward or happiness, either this or that. Such works are in fact, dead.<sup>64</sup>

In *Ser. 6.*, Eckhart already declared: “Whoever loves justice stands so fast by it that whatever he loves, that is his being; nothing can deflect him from this, nor does he esteem anything differently” (CWS 186). The loftiest ideal of justice and ethic in Eckhart’s world flows out of God’s being and his radical unitive anthropology of Soul: “the just man is like God: God

---

terminology do not make this easy—that the liberated soul is annihilated, ‘brought to nothing,’ and has lost every one of her own characteristics, so that she can no longer perceive any difference between God and herself.. in this deified state the soul is nothing, possesses nothing, because it is God who is and possesses and acts in her, not the Soul herself.” On the more Buddhist philosophical engagement of this topic, please see Brook Anthony Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good: Omniscience, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000). For a historical review of antinomianism through the lens of Tantric Buddhist rites, please consult with Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), esp. Chaps. 4-6.

<sup>63</sup> Hollywood, “Suffering Transformed,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 101.

<sup>64</sup> German *Ser. 39* in Bernard McGinn, Frank J. Tobin, and Elvira Borgstädt, eds., *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 296.

is justice. Therefore, whoever is in justice is in God and *is* God.”<sup>65</sup> It is hard to pinpoint the ethical *implication* for both Porete and Eckhart, due to their heavy focus on spiritual inwardness—highly critical of any work or virtue, external to the interiority.<sup>66</sup> However much contested, though, Eckhart and Porete both ground their mystical theology in the Soul’s unity with God, and it is my point that their ethics should also consist in this. In other words, Porete’s annihilation does have an implied ethic, supported by Eckhart, in fact the toughest ethic beyond the charge of nihilism: The Soul is now expected to live and behave, mirroring Love/God, so neither the agency of divine nor human is effaced. Eckhart’s emphasis upon justice and compassion is more obviously pronounced in relation to his mystical theology. For Porete, the annihilation “implied a return to primordial existence in God”<sup>67</sup> henceforth indistinctively the annihilated Soul will unite and take after the very being, which is the goodness of Love/God. On behalf of intellect/reason (not in the sense of Porete’s Reason, but the helping Thought), it is Eckhart who reiterates this line of understanding clearly:

Plato himself and all the ancient theologians and poets generally used to teach about God, nature, and ethics by means of parables. The poets did not speak in an empty and fabulous way, but they intentionally and very attractively and properly taught about the nature of things divine, natural and ethical... Hidden under the parables we are speaking of are very many of the properties that belong to God alone, the First Principle, and that point to his nature. Enclosed there are to be found the virtues and the principles of the sciences, the keys to metaphysics, physics and ethics, as well as the universal rules.<sup>68</sup>

When Porete does consider the suffering of Christ, her reflection is genuine and rigorous to the extent Christ’s agony is relieved through her Soul, willing to sacrifice everything (*MSS* 131, 166). But Porete never forgets to return to her own higher aim of the Soul’s union with

---

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>66</sup> In both *MSS* and *CWS*, compassion only appear 3 times. In *CWS*, love appears 414 times, justice (160), virtue (75), and ethics (17). Although Eckhart attempts to explain it away by his unique Scriptural exegesis, like Porete, his ethical reflection also often ends up as an elongated philosophical, esoteric meditation on the divine nothingness and nakedness, rather than delivering a specific moral advice.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard McGinn, “Introduction: Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Par. Gen.* Prologue, *CWS*, 93-4.

divine beyond fixation with anything else. Hence, the factum of suffering itself is to be contemplated yet overcome, for what and whom the independent Soul should become: “O, wearied Soul, says Love, what trials you suffer, how little gain you have! And all this because you have not obeyed the teaching of perfection with which I urged you to set you free from your burdens in the flower of your youth” (*MSS* 78, 100-1). As I have illustrated in the opening section, it would be absurd to think the deified Soul’s life apart from her ennobled, liberated, perfected being. Any strong language of abandonment, disregard or indifference toward Virtues is associated with the Soul’s previous state of bondage by Virtues that required mediation, standing between Love and Soul’s union. Whether disciplinary or self-imposed, suffering for its own sake, is also a form of bondage, losing its merit in Porete’s union. Can this be Porete’s way of compassion for fellow noble Souls to diminish the unnecessary suffering, for the sake of true freedom and liberation? If so, Porete’s version of moral psychology can provide an appealing beginning for constructing ethics, from her mystical ground.

From my perspective, this ground deeply reverberates Buddhist moral sentiment, epitomized by eighth-century monk-philosopher Śāntideva, who utilized the “epistemological argumentation to establish metaphysical support for his ethical thought.” As Jay Garfield puts it, for Śāntideva, “metaphysics and epistemology are central to our moral lives” and compassion is “the direct result of a genuine appreciation of the essencelessness and interdependence of all sentient beings.”<sup>69</sup> Śāntideva’s unlimited, indistinct expansion of compassion toward others provides an interesting pathway to accompany aforementioned Porete’s thoroughly introspective

---

<sup>69</sup> Maria Heim, “Śāntideva and an Ethic of Radical Compassion” in *Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 41. Here Heim cites Garfield, “Buddhist Ethics in the Context of Conventional Truth,” in *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness*, eds. The Cowherds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 89-90. Though in the form of divine decree, not in the analytic mode of Buddhist (no-)self, following from the essence of God as One true Lord, the crux of Christian ethic also teaches “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk. 12:31; RSV).



moral phenomenology. However, before comparison, it should be noted that the insights above are most recent reflections on Śāntideva's seminal work, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (BCA) 8.89-115, as the text has been thoroughly investigated, and argued against, despite its harmless intention. Surrounding BCA 8.101-3, in particular, well-known critique by Paul Williams has sparked debates regarding whether the fundamental doctrine of no-self automatically warrants selfless altruism, or the claim is not tenable, remaining practically vulnerable to a claim for selfishness<sup>70</sup>:

**8.101:** The continuum of consciousness, like a queue, and the combination of constituents, like an army, are not real. The person who experiences suffering does not exist. To whom will that suffering belong?

**8.102:** Without exception, no sufferings belong to anyone. They must be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any limitation put on this?

**8.103:** If one asks why suffering should be prevented, no one disputes that! If it must be prevented, then all of it must be. If not, then this goes for oneself as for everyone.<sup>71</sup>

Being part of the meditation on the equalizing, or, non-difference between self and other (*parātmāsamatā*), BCA 8.101-3 is questioned by Williams, from its very foundation. In truncated and brute version, it may be rephrased: "Why should one care if there's really no one real -*who's* suffering- anyway?" It is trickier to understand when the passage is aligned with even more fundamental Buddhist premise of *no*-self. In preceding verses, in Śāntideva's own

---

<sup>70</sup> Naturally, my summary here is an awfully simplified version of much longer and deeper history of debates on the status of conventional, and in its relation to the ultimate in Mādhyamaka metaphysics of no-self. Specifically on this topic of Śāntideva as Mādhyamika and responses to Williams' arguments, please see Bronwyn Finnigan, "Madhyamaka Ethics" in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, ed. Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 170-80. Finnigan clarifies that the conventionality of self should be distinguished from *falsity*, as it often results in denial, or "eliminating *all* conventional notions of self (including the notions of subject, agent, and the distinction between self and other)." This line of thinking cannot explain the "innocent, acceptable notion of conventional self," as Williams pointed out, or establish any rational ground for ethics, Finnigan suggests that one should do away with the "attitude of *attachment* to or grasping at self rather than the conventional notion of there *being* a self" (180). This interpretation seems to go along with the pudgalavādins' point as introduced in the beginning. Finnigan's chapter synthesizes all classical references on this issue: Barbra R. Clayton, "Compassion as a Matter of Fact: The Argument from No-Self to Selflessness in Śāntideva's Śīksasamuccaya." *Contemporary Buddhism* 2, no. 1 (2001): 83-97; Stephen Harris, "Does Anātman Rationally Entail Altruism? On Bodhicaryāvatāra 8:101-103." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 18 (February 2011): 92-123; Paul Williams, *Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra: Altruism and Reality* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*. trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

words, caring for other's suffering begins with the recognition of "my own suffering" and my experience of happiness and fear (*BCA* 8.94-6). Hence, the nonduality between self and other is a project that can't be conceived without the conventional distinction between me-as-a-person and the other. Within such distinction, however conventional it may be, is also presumed to stand the controversial "notion of an agent."<sup>72</sup> If we deny the working notion of an agent, Williams contends, there is no I or you who can ethically act, whom the Bodhisattva vows to salvage, in order to reduce suffering— thus no necessity for altruism.

Śāntideva has been carefully studied by theologians who took great interest in compassion, and one good response may be constructed that: "the very nature of Ultimate Reality is compassion. And the only way to be authentic to one's own nature is thus to be compassionate, universally and indiscriminately... It is simply the nature of things."<sup>73</sup> Of course, the ethical problem in this world stems from the truth that we cannot simply pass over descriptive ('what is') to prescriptive claims ('one ought').<sup>74</sup> The much valid question of Williams is deeply rooted in what Buddhist emptiness of self really mean, and how it means for morality. Does it mean that only the factum of suffering, as psycho-physical elements and passing incidents, are momentarily real and "persons are unreal?" Scholars agree that is clearly an Abhidharmic position.<sup>75</sup> As a Mādhyamika, Śāntideva, most likely, would not have chosen an interpretive scheme that destroys its own narrative. From my limited observation, this is what the previous insights from *pudgala* discussion could advance a more relevant and helpful construction.

---

<sup>72</sup> Finnigan, "Madhyamaka Ethics," 171.

<sup>73</sup> Feldmeier, *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, 126.

<sup>74</sup> Famously called "is-ought" problem in Buddhist ethics. See Finnigan "Madhyamaka Ethics," 174.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

Comparatively, looking back on Porete's annihilated Soul, her contempt of charity, even ones with good intentions, rather revealed the inherent limits of these customs. Forgotten was the divine sustenance of Perfect Love, and the Soul's potential for transformation and union into Love. As Śāntideva's ethic is very much grounded upon the metaphysics and ontology of empty selves, greater common ground may be found between Śāntideva and Porete, as two true nondualist contemplatives. First and foremost, just as much as the good Buddhist may persistently struggle with our tendency toward attachment, delusion and reification, Porete's Soul intends doing away with any sense of rigid, fixed Soul-grasping, in terms of both knowledge and feeling, by undoing and returning Will. There are unwholesome defilements (*kleśa*) in Buddhist context, and Porete similarly excoriates the Will, who has its own pestilence, discordant with the simple unity of divine nature. Her Soul's exacting introspection on this matter should at once quell any misunderstanding of individualistic antinomianism, as her contemplation on sin and evil becomes so sincere and self-interrogative, that one human folly is committed at the cost of divine goodness itself:

**The Light of the Soul.** ..Consider then what you owe for one of your faults, and you will find that you owe as much to God for one of your faults as his will is worth, of which you have deprived him when you did your own will. Now consider, to understand this better, what is the will of God. It is the whole Trinity, which is one will. So that the will of God in Trinity is one divine nature, and all this is what the Soul owes to God for one single fault. (MSS 108, 130)

Now, as the nondual scope in Śāntideva's *BCA* 8.101-3 experimented on the subject of suffering, Porete has utilized a similar rhetoric when it comes to sin, the will at fault, as it stretches from nothing to everything in her spiritual mirror, and this time more explicitly on the Soul's will and the will of God. If one unveils and clears away the defilements, Porete's nothingness and annihilated Soul claims that these two wills are essentially indistinct. Therefore, the Soul's contemplation burns down every created thing thoroughly, especially the errant Will,

the source of egoism. Although Śāntideva does not use language of burning, the ownerless suffering should be prevented and eradicated, first by correct understanding of suffering's nature and sense of self— to whom suffering does *not* exclusively belong. Humanity's sense of possession and self-obsession indeed requires endless humility to deconstruct itself, and nondual compassion can be generated when one can finally see the suffering of others as one's "own" (BCA 8.91-4). In this manner, although each path Śāntideva and Porete takes may differ from one another, their spiritual directions both suggest the moral life of no-self and the Soul brought down to Nothing, altogether, is one that is free of self-grasping and egoism.

It is often neglected that Śāntideva and Porete open their respective chapter as 'meditation.' In addition to magnifying the space of freedom of Soul and deepening the emptied self in constant flux, an exertion of moral consciousness, and behavior is supported by fruits generated by contemplative practice. As Porete's dialogue between Reason and Love exemplifies the eventual transformation of knowledge into total spiritual union, the indispensable, correct cognition and conceptual world should be balanced with the *nonconceptual*. A change can be brought upon, when there is also a certain moral awareness, cultivated by meditative absorption, which is necessary in order to live, undergo and carve out an ethical experience in the midst of the moral vacuums and ambivalent territories. Another similarity between Śāntideva and Porete is that they both resist an ethical formation, solely through the classical utilitarian reasoning. They would ardently deny the two fundamental data utilitarian ethic is *grounded* upon: "the empirical results of social science and about the subjective feelings of individuals."<sup>76</sup> Given the shared ethical motivation of reducing suffering

---

<sup>76</sup> Charles Goodman, "Śāntideva's Ethics of Impartial Compassion," in *Readings of Santideva's Guide to Bodhisattva Practice*, eds. Jonathan C. Gold and Douglas S. Duckworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 218.

for all living beings, neither Śāntideva nor Porete would fundamentally object such an outcome (though already charged with utilitarian sense). However, it should be emphasized that Śāntideva and Porete would go much deeper and more rigorous than enhancing individual or collective self-interest by diminishing woes, because their moral teaching comes out of the metaphysical and ontological position. The ethical force is inexhaustible as it comes out of the purificatory process of nothingness and annihilation that unitively precludes the pure ground of absolute and the Divine. In Porete's case, it is the Soul joining the uncreated divinity. Śāntideva would express its understanding, embracing the numerous multitudes with compassion, with no limit.

Still, there are few clear differences to be addressed. Closer reading will be required for the motifs and implications as moral teaching of Śāntideva is based on the Buddhist nondual relation of self and other, not in the sense of ultimate Other in Porete or Eckhart, who is divine. Porete definitely stands out as nondualist in her theological background, though with a different kind of nondualism from its Buddhist counterparts. For instance, as I will bring up in the concluding section again, the character of nondualism in Porete focuses on the transmutation of Soul into divine substance, on the transcendental level that does not address any type of mediation— including the realm of immanence. Although the radical nondualism between divine and human is present, in reality, the method of negation culminated in the expression of annihilation and nothingness rather reflects the incompleteness of immanence, always more vividly. In the following sections on Porete's and Eckhart's use of metaphor for mystical union will present an example for this.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> The religious and mystical melancholy induced by this sense of lack or absence will be covered later chapter.

Relatedly, this potentially lingering tension due to the vast cultural difference between these figures shall be spelled out upfront: embodiment. Porete's theological anthropology of Love certainly takes primacy over ethics for the more urgent task of Soul's freedom, independence, liberation and union with Love. In this particular journey, body, suffering and even empathy in Porete is treated mournfully because they stand between the Soul and what the radical equality demands: "Insofar as one recognizes the equality of all things, an equality grounded in the absolute immanence of the divine which is the source of its transcendence, imagination becomes transfiguration and the limitations of embodied being are *overcome*."<sup>78</sup> Porete opts for complete negation of embodiedness, any utilization of icons, images, along with visionary experiences associated with "feminine spirituality":

These typical themes are absent or only faintly present in the *Mirror*. The book expresses no special devotion to the eucharistic sacrament; no fixation on the humanity and Passion of Christ; no special sense of feminine "embodiment" or cultivation of extravagant mortifications of the flesh; no regret or apology for a want of "clerk's learning." Nor was Margaret favored by unique, phantasmagoric visions that "embodied" her spiritual insights... The teaching of the *Mirror* is, in short, systematically impersonal and "genderless." The personal consciousness provided by individuated or communal "embodiment" is precisely what must be "annihilated."<sup>79</sup>

In Buddhist world, also, the center of analysis is the union between immanence and transcendence, but the extent of nondual inherence is expressed in terms of conventional and ultimate, radically embracing the immanent realm from the get-go. Bearing the mark of Mādhyamaka nondualism, Śāntideva offers a soothing remedy to the "disparagement" of embodiment/immanence, with its nondual unitive look at to the relation between conventional and ultimate. Śāntideva, following the footsteps of Nāgārjuna, emphasizes the fundamental dependence of ultimate/transcendent upon conventional/mundane (*MMK* 24:10) in order to bring about transcendence in the first place, as the conventional domain is the *only* place we may have

---

<sup>78</sup> Hollywood, "Suffering Transformed," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 109 (my italics).

<sup>79</sup> Kent Emery Jr., "Foreword," in *MSS*, xi-ii.

a “ground of ethical motivation.”<sup>80</sup> Only through such an acknowledgement and frame, can the anthropology of (no-)self, with both mental and physical aggregates, establish its own working microcosm. In short, the physical and sense-based nature of human existence is never left out in Buddhist analysis.

Before moving to Eckhart for following sections, I want to look at *MSS* 91, where Porete puts her unique theological spin on the interpretation as the fall itself, leading the Soul rather toward union with God, and not against it: “..for she has fallen from grace into the perfection of the work of the Virtues, and from the Virtues into Love, and from Love into Nothingness, and from Nothingness into the Illumining of God, who regards himself with eyes of his majesty, and who in this has illumined her with himself” (116). On the other hand, in *MSS* 94, Porete’s nothingness and the pure nakedness of Soul it brings as a result, confidently claims that these annihilated souls may not be overdetermined by Adam’s sin.<sup>81</sup> Porete demonstrates strong hope

---

<sup>80</sup> Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 315. See also Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, 222: “To avoid the extreme of *ucchedavāda* or ‘eliminativism,’ on the Madhyamaka view, is to affirm that ‘conventionally real’ (*saṃvṛtisaṭ*) things are ineliminable from a complete understanding of what there is and what we are like—” In light of the Buddhist selflessness and the *Pudgalavāda*’s notion of self, the noneliminative character of intentionality (and the self) is necessary to take account of “*what experience really is*” to make sense of the prior causation. See *Ibid.*, 227-9.

<sup>81</sup> This is the point where reading *MSS* carries a remarkable Buddhist appeal as Porete’s will-lessness and the method of nothingness and annihilation brings her positive anthropology of Soul, closer to the sensibility of “original sinlessness.” Harvey, “The Conditioned Co-arising,” 51 (my italics). Buddhists prefer the language of ignorance or (un)skillfulness to diagnose the cause of suffering, rather than “sin, which is a willful turning away from a creator God.” Hence, recognizing and removing the adventitious defilements reveal the inherent luminosity of our mind (*Āṅguttara Nikāya* 1:50-3; *Pabbhassara Suttas*). Buddhist analysis here does pivot around mental, and innumerable source on Buddhist nonduality deals with mainly with metaphysical and epistemological. However, the state of nondual union in Porete and Eckhart seems to beg a more ontological (though not in a restrictively defined sense) and phenomenological investigation of nondual reality and experience. On this vision of oneness, please see Rudolph Bauer, “The Beatific Experience of Being: A Phenomenology of the Chakrasamvara Tantra,” *Revista Científica Arbitrada de La Fundación MenteClara* 5, no. 0 (January 18, 2020); The uniqueness of both Porete and Eckhart lies in their theses boldly put to the forefront, despite the disapproving environment of classical theism. Again, theory of illumination, and gnosis, relatedly, is present in Augustine and Dionysius, but has become neither a dominant nor popular view in Christian theology of *West*. Hence, it is not surprising that Eastern Orthodox *theosis* (“deification,” “divinization”) is often compared to Indian and Tibetan Tantric Buddhist contemplation, as the tradition is more explicitly “theo-logic” (Duckworth) than other schools’ account. On comparative theologies between Tibetan Buddhism and Eastern Christianity, please see Iliana Abadjieva, “Theosis Re-Considered. The Dynamic Nature of Salvation: Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘Stages of Mystical Ascent’ in the ‘Life of Macrina’ Re-Visited through the Biography of Machig Labdron and the Tibetan Vajrayana Tradition of Chod.” PhD Diss., Boston College, 2006. ProQuest (3245880.); see also H. S. Horton-Parker, “The Light that Charity Knows: Tsong-Ka-Pa

and faith in souls imbued with such nothingness, for nothingness enables in The Soul: “natural perfection and harmony.. and sufficiency in all things” (119). And this natural perfection is the “primal state” lost on Adam’s disobedience, needing to be regained/restored by new way of divine obedience, which is complete apophasis of self, as exemplified in Christ’s *kénōsis*. But as the governing philosophy and practice in Porete purports to uplift and radicalize marginal perspectives in theology, in *MSS*, it is true that the Soul’s ascent, even to the point of deification, is rather at the center than traditional Christology would ever permit: “this nothing.. gives her everything, and in no other way can anyone have it” (*MSS* 81, 105).<sup>82</sup> Porete’s therapy to the Fall in the Garden of Eden, then, is this fall into nothingness by the “will-less soul” who now has effectively annihilated any possibility for moving, working, sinning against the repose in divine life.<sup>83</sup>

For Eckhart, although sin or fall is never quite the central issue for his anthropology, when the topic resurges, his position unmistakably returns to pastoral caution and warning (*Couns.*12, 262). Similarly, divergence is anticipated between Porete and Eckhart. The contrast becomes most explicit with Eckhart, who, as a male writer, either fails to, or simply is not wont to, capture the “erotic and sexual imagery” of the “nakedness of the soul” metaphor Beguine writers in general utilize. In Eckhart’s description, the nakedness expresses itself with verdant

---

and Maximus the Confessor on Love,” in *The Many Facets of Love: Philosophical Explorations*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 122-30; Michael E. Zimmerman, “Perception, Incarnation, and Transformation: Sacred Images of Human Corporeality.” *Call to Earth* 3, no. 2 (2002): 13–17; Chs 1-3 in Thomas Cattoi and June McDaniel, eds. *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body: Mystical Sensuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) also present wonderful comparative examples.

<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that *kenōsis*, though it is stressed to be modeled by all Christians, points to Christ’s renunciation of the *divine* nature, in the process of Incarnation— hence the descent from divine to human. Porete’s movement toward deification has more commonality with the tradition of divinization/*théōsis*, most prominent in Eastern Church. The procession and return, ascent of the soul, contemplation and illumination for the union of human and divine in Eastern theological anthropology mirrors Porete. See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) for the history of this concept.

<sup>83</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 73-4.



metaphors and the radical originality in Porete's intention becomes omitted: More specifically, her risk to positively reimagine the traditionally negative "association with women, the fall, nature, and sexuality."<sup>84</sup> In this sense, even though Eckhart's insistence on detachment and living without a why may really correspond with Porete's core messages, any vision of multiplicity is rendered and rejected first as "fallenness" against the pure metaphysic of One as he relied on the philosophical culture and language of the contemporaneous time, rather than the Beguines' innovation. Interpretation of such fall/fallenness of course is rendered impure and secondary.<sup>85</sup> As Eckhart repeats in a number of ways, "The greater the departure from the One that is convertible with being, the more offensive a thing is to God and nature."<sup>86</sup>

*Eckhart's Fire: Mystical Oneness or Mutual Dependence (with Hierarchy)*

The Japanese Kyoto School philosopher Keiji Nishitani, in his superb comparative work *Religion and Nothingness*, blends "elements from Mahayana Buddhism, the mystical philosophy of German theologian Meister Eckhart, the Zen writings of Dogen and Nietzschean nihilism."<sup>87</sup> With discussion of fire, Nishitani introduces "self-identity" (or 'selfness') distinguished from the language of being or "substance" –clearly out of respect for Buddhist sensibility against such notion. Nishitani states that true selfness of fire can be only explained in terms of fire's non-combustion, *non-self-nature*, distinct from the standpoint of *logos*, also from *energia*, the actual, observable work of burning that we may falsely be led to think what defines the home-ground of

---

<sup>84</sup> Sells, "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister," 142-3 n. 70: "...Eckhart uses this metaphor, but his notion of mystical union is based more on the notion of virginity and virgin birth.. With Eckhart, it is partially subservient to his reinterpretation of virginity and virgin birth and his placement of the birth metaphor within the Trinity."

<sup>85</sup> Hollywood has already made observation in this vein. See Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995), 280n85.

<sup>86</sup> CWS, *The Book of the Parables of Genesis (Par. Gen.)*, 99.

<sup>87</sup> "Black Illumination: the abyss of Keiji Nishitani," *The Japan Times*, last modified April 30, 2016, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/04/30/books/black-illumination-abyss-keiji-nishitani/>.

fire. Inspired by all of his eminent predecessors, Nishitani masters a synthesis between the core of how Eckhart utilizes the discussion of fire and the *śūnyatā* in which the language of being and nihility is both transcended: “This is not fire, therefore it is fire.”<sup>88</sup> Nishitani does suggest that understanding the absolute negation as self-nature requires more than Reason multiple times, which is a natural conclusion given his main interlocutors are mystics and contemplatives. Nishitani’s genius shines with the obvious influence of Eckhart and zen. However, the brilliant transcendence of *śūnyatā* is read theologically, leaving the space of self-identity/self-nature/selfness intact. If the discussion ends as a naturalistic observation of fire and heat as its property, there would be no issue as even Nāgārjuna approves this aspect of essence, as the nature of physical element.<sup>89</sup> But if the fire functions as an analogy of a self, subject, or as this chapter probes, of the mystical union between human and divine, then one should approach very carefully between the horizon of *śūnyatā* and *svabhāva*, the ultimate object of negation of former— conventionally, at least. Nishitani has opened the door of nondual discourse in a formerly unthinkable manner, and the upcoming sections will contribute by introducing Tibetan Buddhist interpretation of (other-)emptiness, a long-lost spiritual twin of Eckhart.

The fusion between the sacred and the erotic, ecstatic dimension of Love, in the context of mystical union, marks Porete’s mystical expression as the most enigmatic one. In contrast to Porete’s usage of fire that focuses on the effect of annihilation, purification and complete union between the divine and human, this section will point out that Eckhart’s fire, rather surprisingly, concentrates on *dissimilarity*. With this in mind, one can reasonably expect that Eckhart’s use of fire will generally maintain this pristine, “heaven’s form”<sup>90</sup> separated from matter/medium. It is

---

<sup>88</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 116-8.

<sup>89</sup> Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka*, 22-3.

<sup>90</sup> *Par. Gen.*, 102.

important to notice, for Eckhart, unity is initially conceived as a theological ideal, yet based on the strict distinction between the creator God and the creation, unlike the fiery, unitive annihilation Porete represents from the onset. From my observation, one of the interesting ways to mark Eckhart's schematization of indistinct union with God —however partial and *distinct* it may actually be— is his use of fire. Hence this section will examine Eckhart's use of fire analogy from CWS.<sup>91</sup>

Working and becoming are one. If a carpenter does not work, nothing becomes of the house. If the axe is not doing anything, nothing is becoming anything. In this working God and I are one; he is working and I am becoming. The fire changes anything into itself that is put into it and this takes on fire's own nature. The wood does not change the fire into itself, but the fire changes the wood into itself. So are we changed into God, that we shall know him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2).<sup>92</sup>

Although the paragraph above repeats the “perfect equality,” it is not hard to notice Eckhart's primary differentiation between the role and status of divine and human through the hierarchy between fire and wood. For this reason, Hollywood's qualification of Eckhart as “nondualistic *differentiation*” is only proper.<sup>93</sup> According to McGinn: “..Eckhart, like most identity mystics, insisted that absolute oneness continues to coexist with the distinction between

---

<sup>91</sup> In *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 134, with his exegesis of Eckhart's most well-known *Ser.52*, Sells traces the Meister's radical sermon to be composed after his condemnation. His “conceptual resonances to precise correspondences” to Porete is not publicly acknowledged in his own words. But the influence and inspiration from Porete to Eckhart is self-evident in his most unorthodox developments, and this is precisely the point proven by Hollywood's *The Soul as Virgin Wife*. Although an ontological lens of “nothing” is a more central theme than annihilation-toward-union in Eckhart, the relationship between the two themes gradually unites, especially in his German treatises, as will be discussed in this chapter's later section. As apophatic, mystical philosopher-theologians, the common denominator for Porete and Eckhart grows much larger than the difference. Nevertheless, the convergence of their thoughts is suggested to occur in Eckhart's later years.

<sup>92</sup> CWS, *Ser. 6: Justi vivent in aeternum* (Ws. 5:16), 189.

<sup>93</sup> Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 156 (my italics). In the preceding page, Hollywood notes: “Eckhart is not simply conflating the human and divine, as many of his critics certainly believed to be the case, for only when the soul becomes nothing and gives up her will and creatureliness is she transformed into equality and oneness with the godhead.. As one, God works and the soul becomes, just as fire works on wood and transforms it into itself. Eckhart thus maintains the radical dissimilarity between God and the human being while he also maintains their radical similarity or equality.” See also Hollywood 115-6 on fire-wood relation and its two natures. Eckhart's grappling with dual and nondual mode of loving union is preceded poignantly by German Beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg (1212-82). An excellent comparative study between Mechthild and Kashmir Śaivism on the element of dualism in mystical union, see Michelle Voss Roberts, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). Whether Porete shared such a task in mind is disputable, although my chapter is inclined to read into the state of nondual union, with the ultimate primacy.

creator and creature – distinction and indistinction are reciprocal concepts.”<sup>94</sup> Of course, despite the succinctness of this summary, there are layers of thoughts to be unpacked. As the majority of cases will show, Eckhart’s fire symbolizes the purity and highest perfection of God’s creation, and yet he (God) “has remained unmixed” with the created soul, the dry wood, which is there to secondarily reflect the fire’s nature of heat and brightness.<sup>95</sup> In Eckhart, the analogy of fire and heat, as property of fire, also make frequent appearance, but his insistence upon distinguishing the pure essence from its nature (heat that burns) again converges with more traditional territory of scholastic philosophy, further diverging from Porete’s *rapturous* radicality in indistinct union. In general, these critical distinctions between Eckhart and Porete on the use of fire tend to remain. But as the previous scholarship has unfolded the nondual convergence between them, I shall mention this exceptional moment in Eckhart’s system:

There is another token and simile that signifies this: the authorities say that beneath the heaven there is a vast extent of fire, and that therefore no rain or wind or any kind of storm or tempest from below can reach so close to the heaven that anything can touch it; everything is burned up and consumed by the fire’s heat before it can reach heaven. So I say that everything a man suffers and performs for God’s sake becomes wholly sweet in God’s sweetness, before it can reach the heart of the man who works and suffers for the love of God.. for nothing can ever come to the heart except by flowing through God’s sweetness, in which it loses its bitterness. And it is also consumed in the fiery heat of the divine love, which has wholly enclosed the good man’s heart.<sup>96</sup>

Although Eckhart’s German Works inherit the grand narratives from Latin Works, communicating them in different forms, the passage above does retain the French Beguine’s powerful theological anthropology, of annihilative, all-consuming fire. From the perspective of Eckhart, it certainly is a rare portrayal of fire, simply and purely burning for the purpose, close to the nondual union, “wholly in God’s love,” as Porete would also say, and “without any

---

<sup>94</sup> McGinn, “Unio Mystica/Mystical Union,” *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy M. Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 207.

<sup>95</sup> CWS, *Ser. 22: Ave, gratia plena* (Lk. 1:28), 194.

<sup>96</sup> CWS, *Bened.1*, 234.

accidental admixture of distinction,” for “everything that is in him is God himself.”<sup>97</sup> The use of fire stands in between such liminal yet critical spaces for mystical unity, both in Porete and Eckhart. It is important to note that, in Eckhart, still, a fire more often than not rather stands for divine distinction from what is not. The process of combustion is theologically reinterpreted. Although there is brief moment of complete union between wood and fire, Eckhart uses this as a pedagogical moment:

..Thus the grief that accompanies birth, change, and motion ceases, and the wood rejoices and delights completely in the full heat of the form of fire.. As long as anything is becoming something else, it always has the grief of unlikeness and restlessness. Fire, by heating and changing pieces of wood, “sees” them. It prepares them for the form of fire, but accompanied by a painful unlikeness that resists change. It “sees” the pieces of wood once again when they receive the form of fire through generation after the unlikeness has been cast off.<sup>98</sup>

Eckhart’s Fire in *Latin Works* follows from his earlier philosophical grounding. It is the “idea and likeness”<sup>99</sup> Eckhart firmly holds onto, wedding the Word/*Logos* in the Fourth Gospel with Greek principle. With this as a background, Eckhart seems more readily matching intellect as the notion of “uncreated”-ness, unlike Porete, for whom the bare-naked state of nothingness empties any voice of Reason. First of all, reverting, returning to the primordial state of the Soul in Porete would not require another moment of creation or formation as Eckhart delivers the process of union above. It is a transformation through *recovery* of nothingness via annihilation, but without having to undergo the almost grotesque, unnatural encounter between fire and wood. Followingly, although it is debatable whether Porete critiques rational mind/intellect as such, Porete’s fire of annihilation brings down everything into nothing, without any lingering distinction between unlikeness of medium from “likeness of the One.” Because Porete perceives the likeness through the lens of loving relation between the human and divine, the Soul’s

---

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-5.

<sup>98</sup> CWS, Selections from the Commentary on John (*Comm. Jn.*), 172.

<sup>99</sup> *Comm. Jn.*, 123.

“exemplary likeness” is celebrated rather than the much-grieved unlikeness. Kent Emery Jr. situates Porete’s reliance on love within the great tradition of theologians, who upholds the status of love higher than knowledge in mystical union, as in the moment of beatific oneness, “love itself is knowledge” (William of Saint-Thierry, *Golden Epistle*).<sup>100</sup>

In this sense, like Porete, Eckhart may share the vision of emptiness, nakedness and nothingness to be united with divine, but his ways and goals of such union beg for nuanced differentiation from her. In one of his German treatises, Eckhart solidifies his view echoing the commentary on John. First, Eckhart maintains his division between earthly, “material fire” and “the real true father of the spark” that only belongs to heavens. Although incorporating the role of matter/wood as “mother” and fire as the “father of the spark,” these parental metaphors are altogether fated to be forsaken, forgotten and denied to reach the true father, the heavens.<sup>101</sup>

In this regard, the case below similarly elaborates on the irreconcilable element in the midst of this union, whose transitory, unstable and imperfect nature speaks as adamantly as in the commentary above:

When fire works, and kindles wood and sets it on fire, the fire diminishes the wood and makes it unlike itself, taking away its coarseness, coldness, heaviness and dampness, and turns the wood into itself, into fire, more and more like to it. But neither the fire nor the wood is pacified or quieted or satisfied with any warmth or heat or likeness until the fire gives birth to itself in the wood, and gives to the wood its own nature and also its own being.. And therefore, before this may be achieved, there is always smoke, contention, crackling, effort and violence between fire and wood.. that nature’s hidden power secretly hates likeness insofar as it carries within itself distinction and duality, and nature seeks in likeness the One it loves for its own sake alone in likeness.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> “Foreword: Margaret Porete and Her Book,” *MSS*, xv. In xxix n. 26., Porete comes out of the esteemed tradition of scholastic and mystical theologians among which the role, relationship and priority between love and intellect in “contemplative beatific union was disputed.. Margaret seems to teach that annihilation in the divine will yields a higher illumination and clarification in the soul, a unified ‘intelligence’ that surpasses discursive reason.” This observation guides my future chapters as I will draw similar workings through the gnosis in Tantric Buddhist meditation.

<sup>101</sup> *Bened.*1, 221.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-3.

The same paragraph actually contains a line, implying the fire and wood being brought closer to mystical union: “..so that they both become one and the same unseparated fire, neither less nor more.” Following the overall indications from Eckhart, however, it should be clear that such a moment is exception, if not an ideal, for him: “The heat of fire and the being of the fire are quite different, utterly separated in nature from one another, and their only proximity is in terms of time and of place. God’s contemplating and our contemplating are wholly separate and different from one another.”<sup>103</sup>

The question remains then, why the fire represents so much grief of unlikeness on repeat, stressing the irresolvable dichotomy between this human life and the divine rather than the aimed union. In actuality, Eckhart’s fire is deployed to eventually transcend any materiality associated with fire (and wood, of course) itself, and show what is *not* the idea of likeness, or power of the One. The use of fire in Eckhart proves itself to be quite distant from how Porete portrays nondual union of Love and Soul. In Porete’s fire, one can witness the deification between the Soul and Love, humanity melting and being embraced into divinity. In fact, any discord in *MSS* intensifies when it comes to the voice of Reason, never between Love’s and the Soul’s harmonious longing. But Eckhart does engage with process of total purification, that may lead a soul in his journey to a destination not too far from Porete’s annihilation. After all, in both cases, Eckhart cautions against “all things that are not God.”<sup>104</sup> For Eckhart, the famed desert and the ground, not fire, function at best as metaphors for indistinct union, as fire and water do fluidly for Porete.<sup>105</sup> It is this unmatched flexibility of natural metaphor that allows diverse

---

<sup>103</sup> *Bened.2*, 246.

<sup>104</sup> *Bened.1*, 222.

<sup>105</sup> McGinn, “Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition.” *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 2 (1994): 174-7. As for Eckhart’s much preferred use of ground and fruit, it is interesting to see how the Tibetan other-emptiness (*zhentong*) tradition fertilizes such imagery as well, to describe path of enlightenment.

interpretations on its character. As the phenomenon of fire is so universal across cultures, different traditions have exploited different element from the innumerable signifiers of fire. Within Buddhist tradition, *Nirvāṇa*, the enlightenment in Buddhist tradition, etymologically means “extinction” of a fire.<sup>106</sup> In “Fire Sermon,”<sup>107</sup> it is understood that fire symbolizes all the sources of suffering, rightly to be eliminated in Buddhist contemplation. To the contrary, in Brahmanical tradition Buddhism broke away from, fire is not only at the center of Vedic sacrifice, but also purports the divine spark in each individual self, unitive with the universe (*brahman*).<sup>108</sup> Eckhart occasionally acknowledges such illuminating imagery (light, spark et al.) for divine essence, but it is Porete who consistently and powerfully captures the radiant, positive potential of fire—equally distributed from divinity to human Soul through the annihilative and unitive fire of Love. We shall come back to this.

*On Eckhart’s Sermons*<sup>109</sup>

In order to understand the complex dual structure of union in Eckhart, we should take a look into his sermons. One of many famed works of Eckhart, *Sermon 48* in particular has two (or more) important moments of nondual union. Scholarships have already reviewed Eckhart in comparison with renowned method of Zen deconstruction. However, the sensibilities expressed in Eckhart’s sermons may resound with few other important strands of Buddhism as well. The

---

<sup>106</sup> Peter Harvey, “*Dukkha*, Non-self and the ‘Four Noble Truths,’” in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> “The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, also whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant that arises with eye-contact for its indispensable condition, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say it is burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, with lamentations, with pains, with griefs, with despairs.” “*Adittapariyaya Sutta: The Fire Sermon*” (SN 35.28), translated from the Pali by Ñanamoli Thera. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.028.nymo.html>

<sup>108</sup> Steven Collins, *Nirvana: Concept, Imagery, Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81-4.

<sup>109</sup> CWS (Classics of Western Spirituality) has two volumes on Eckhart. Aside from two notations, this chapter entirely cites from *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*.



first part of *Ser.* 48, subverting his disparaging view on materiality in general, can be comparable to Yogācāra philosophy of mind and of perception, establishing his nondual perspective:

If it happens that my eye is in itself one and simple (Mt. 6:22), and it is opened and casts its glance upon the piece of wood, the eye and the wood remain what they are, and yet in the act of vision they become as one, so that we can truly say that my eye is the wood and the wood is my eye. But if the wood were immaterial, purely spiritual as is the sight of my eye, then one could truly say that in the act of vision the wood and my eye subsisted in one being. If this is true of physical objects, it is far truer of spiritual objects.<sup>110</sup>

Nonetheless, as one should bear in mind, this recognition of oneness shines as an exceptional moment in Eckhart as the phenomenon often succeeds a horrid struggle between the logic of resemblance (“all things that are unlike flee from one another”) and the totality of God.<sup>111</sup> So the kind of nondual union, in the style of Porete’s smooth, melting gift of love “with no intermediary” (*MSS* 5, 14), seems beyond his ken. However, Eckhart does express his nondual core through the metaphor of desert, which approximates Porete’s indistinction at his furthest:

Sometimes I have spoken of a light that is uncreated and not capable of creation and that is in the soul. I always mention this light in my sermons; and the same light comprehends God without a medium, uncovered, naked, as he is in himself... this light may have more unity with God than it has with any power of the soul, with which, however, it is one in being... and the simplicity of my being is the cause of that... but it wants to know the source of this essence, it wants to go into the simple ground, into the quiet desert, into which distinction never gazed, not the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> *CWS, Ser.* 48: Ein meister spricht: alliu glīchiu dinc minnent sich under einander, 197. From my comparative intuition, Yogācāra tradition in Buddhism also teaches similar critique of “subject/object duality” with an example of apple as an object, and our perception as a mental event. This strand of Buddhist philosophy, as Eckhart articulated above, emphasizes that there is correspondence and unity from these mental streams. Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 184. Please see *Comm. Jn.* n.100 (*CWS* 160-1) for the “naked” and empty nature of eye itself that enables vision. Likewise, “the intellect has no actual existence of its own so that it can understand all things” just as much the eye receives phenomenon without having any color of its own. Descriptions and citations below will complement this type of thinking, to emphasize the nakedness and primordial nothingness of the Soul in Porete and Eckhart should be understood as the true nature of self, when it is completely emptied, simply and unitively shared with the divine/ultimate.

<sup>111</sup> *Ser.* 48, 197: “...God must pour out the whole of himself with all his might so totally into every man who has utterly abandoned himself that God withholds nothing of his being or his nature or his entire divinity, but he must pour all of it fruitfully into the man who has abandoned himself for God and has occupied the lowest place”

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-8. On a related note, McGinn, in “Theological Summary,” 36-7, suggests that Eckhart’s view of plurality is actually more negative compared to Aquinas: “Unlike Thomas, for whom the plurality of divine attributes (e.g., existence, simplicity, goodness, truth, etc.) has a foundation in the inexhaustible richness of the divine essence as well as in our own mode of understanding, for Eckhart any plurality comes solely from the poverty of our way of conceiving God.” McGinn goes on to defend Eckhart’s ingenuity especially in regards to how the Meister magnifies the depth of indistinction among the Trinitarian “relational distinctions.” Such an explanation

Desert is a beloved metaphor of indistinction for Eckhart with Scriptural support: “..from the inmost ground of the divine nature and its desert? ‘I,’ says our Lord through the prophet Osee, ‘will lead the noble soul out into a desert, and there I will speak to her heart’ (Os. 2:14), one with One, one from One, one in One, and in One, one everlastingly. Amen.”<sup>113</sup> What reminds us of Porete here? First of all, Porete too conceived desert as the place of divine life, chosen for the Soul, where “Love laid hold of her, and brought her to nothing.” This process of annihilation enables the Soul to discover God “within herself, without seeking him, and too, she had nothing to seek for, for Love had laid hold of her” (*MSS* 93, 118). There are several riveting themes: notion of uncreatedness, nakedness, simplicity of soul— with its unitive ground, in Eckhart’s words, in its emptiness, so utterly one and simple, now indistinguishable and *identified* with God’s own. Such a pinnacle of radical thinking builds upon his earlier sermons as well. The empty and free spark of soul<sup>114</sup> anticipates following statement: “God’s Ground is my ground, and my ground is God’s ground.”<sup>115</sup> Only after Eckhart establishes such powerful notions, can the divine self-birth and breaking-through be aided for delivering this nondual unity between divine and human. Eckhart’s vibrant creativity becomes most fertile when and where

---

tentatively remedies the tension within Eckhart’s understanding of *unitas indistinctionis*. Current chapter will come back to this tension, in order to distinguish Eckhart from Porete.

<sup>113</sup> *CWS*, *Bened.2*, 246-7. With same Scripture, almost identical exegesis *Bened.1*, 230. Only this time the language of One is accompanied by what is “alien” and what “God hates”. For the use of desert and wilderness as the nondual metaphor, with the more analogous relation between Eckhart and the Dutch Beguine, please see Paul A. Dietrich, “The Wilderness of God in Hadewijch II and Meister Eckhart and His Circle,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 31-43.

<sup>114</sup> *Ser. 2.*, esp. 177-80 (*CWS*).

<sup>115</sup> *Ser. 5b.*, 182-3. In similar vein, Eckhart has expanded his notion of subject (apprehender)/object (apprehended) nonduality suggested by the ‘eye.’ Charlotte C. Radler, “And So the Prajña Eye Sees a Wide, Impregnable Country: Communal Spirituality in Meister Eckhart, Thomas Merton, Margaret Farley, and Mahayana Buddhism.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38 (2018): 239.: “His central idea of oneness reaches its crescendo at the end of the sermon, where Eckhart’s notion of the fusion of (non-)identities between God and the human being is inscribed in the metaphor of the eye. ‘The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me,’ Eckhart writes, ‘my eye and God’s eye are one eye and one seeing, one knowing and one loving.’” This vision of radical, total oneness appears in Pr. 12, DW 1 (*German Works*), 201. English translation of Pr. 12 is found in *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*, 267-70.

the transformation of soul participates in the ever-renewing life of divine, and vice versa. Here, soul herself is the locus in which divine self-birth occurs: “A virgin who is a wife is free and unpledged, without attachment, she is always equally close to God and to herself. She produces much fruit, and it is great, neither less nor more than is God himself.”<sup>116</sup> Hollywood calls this “empty space” of soul, who is pregnant with nothing, in which “God is born.”<sup>117</sup> Buddhist psychologist Mark Epstein’s observation marks an efficient comparison here:

One important thing to keep in mind in any discussion of Buddhist psychology is that the Buddhist negation of self is not a negation of personhood. In no way does the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, or voidness, imply that people or things do not exist at all. The etymological root of the word *sunyata*, in fact, has the meaning of a pregnant womb, not of an empty void. *Sunyata* derives from the Sanskrit verb “to swell.” It suggests the generative swelling of a seed that contains within it the potential of a whole organism, just as voidness contains within it the diversity of phenomenal existence.<sup>118</sup>

In this sense, nothingness and annihilation (Porete and Eckhart) and Buddhist emptiness may mirror each other when it comes to the transformation and process toward nonduality in each context. Sure it can be found where Porete mentions Christ himself as mirror (*MSS* 109, 132) and exemplar (*MSS* 63, 85) of her soul. But given the independence of Soul and her undeniable singular yearning for union with Love/God, I think it is a safe assumption to read the pure, state of Soul *herself* becomes the mirror who reflects the simple, non-dually shared divinity of Love after being brought down to the primordial nothingness. And it is not surprising to find comparative precedents in this kind of understanding.<sup>119</sup> Lastly but far from least, though more

---

<sup>116</sup> *Ser* 2., 178.

<sup>117</sup> Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 152 (my italics).

<sup>118</sup> Mark Epstein, *Psychotherapy without the Self: A Buddhist Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 215.

<sup>119</sup> Voss Roberts, *Dualities*, 25. The śaiva mystic poet Lalleśwārī (1320-92) describes the *malas* (impurities) as “smudges on the mirror of identity.” Again, when “purged of all impurities,” our mind, like a limpid mirror, reflects the true nature of ourselves to be connected with universal source, “the Self within.” Voss Roberts’ interpretation of Lalleśwārī also suggests the nothing-everything dialectic for nondual union and full liberation of soul. Although Porete is not the main object of analysis in this comparison (Mechthild is), nothingness and divine-human union seems to flow in the vein of Beguine mysticism. The most pertinent and comprehensive study on this subject has been conducted by Alex Wayman, “The Mirror as a Pan-Buddhist Metaphor-Simile.” *History of Religions* 13, no. 4 (May 1, 1974): 251–69. Through the cross-cultural availability of mirror, a beautiful and profound insight has been similarly made in the Buddhist literature writ large, and the great Daoist canon

pertained to the level of mind and awareness, it is worth noting that Tibetan Buddhist tradition has selected the actual divinatory mirror as the “image of emptiness” (*śūnyatā-bimba, stong gzugs*):

The Tibetan term evokes the metaphor of an image that manifests (*gzugs brnyan*), like a reflection in a mirror. These are understood to be a *reflection* or *expression of emptiness*. Withdrawn from fixations in the sensible world, such an expression refers to a yogic experience of emptiness that is visceral and somatic, not merely suspended in a split-off visible domain, nor a cerebral conjecture that occurs in a suspended abstract sphere of the intellect. The mere absence of any inherent identity, either the identity of a fixed self (*gang zag gi bdag nyid*) and/or the identity of the phenomenal world (*chos nyid bdag nyid*) are referred to as the “emptiness that lacks identity” or the “emptiness of essencelessness” (*ngo bo med pa stong pa nyid*). Though such an intimation of absence or a lack of presence is typically implied in conceiving rangtong emptiness, in zhentong contemplative thinking, the recognition of ultimate emptiness implies an acknowledgment of presence—a constant luminous presence.<sup>120</sup>

---

Zhuangzi. See Kelly James Clark and Liu Zongkun “*The polished mirror: reflections on natural knowledge of the way in Zhuangzi and Alvin Plantinga*” in Robin R. Wang, *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 173: “Note that human agency is only fully realized when one is freed from the shackles of self. Of the emptiness of mind Zhuangzi writes: “Hold on to all that you have received from heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind as a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself” (*Zhuangzi*, 7.94–95). Here to be empty means to make one’s mind as clear as a mirror which perfectly reflects reality; a mind polished free from impurities is returned to its natural state... by listening with spirit that is empty and as clear as a mirror...” Due to my limited understanding, a factual, historical relation between Daoist concept of *wu* (nothingness) and the Buddhist *sunyata* (emptiness) cannot be fully explained here. But the conceptual orientation of apophasis (negation, emptying, purification, fasting) to unite with the primordial ultimate, as reflected in the clean slate of mind, can be appreciated.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Sheehy, “The Dharma of the Perfect Eon: Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen’s Hermeneutics of Time and the Jonang Doxography of Zhentong Madhyamaka,” in *The Other Emptiness*, 71. Please review this chapter in full, to situate Dölpopa in relation to Yogācāra and Mādhyamaka systems, and how his interpretation of emptiness brings forth a new temporal, cosmological visions. See also Klaus-Dieter Mathes, “A Brief Analysis of Jonang Choklé Namgyal’s *Pointing-Out* Instruction on the Foundation, Path, and Fruit,” in *Reasons and Lives in Buddhist Traditions: Studies in Honor of Matthew Kapstein*, eds., Dan Arnold, Cécile Ducher, and Pierre-Julien Harter (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019), 245. I sincerely thank Prof. Christian K. Wedemeyer for suggesting these invaluable volumes. Upon my very recent discovery, the metaphor of mirror demands a comparative lens with broader Indian philosophical traditions, *Pratyabhijnā* (“Recognition”) system of Kashmir Śaivism, to be specific. This school’s significance in the study of nondual unity, especially regarding its influence and relation to Tibetan Tantric Buddhist tradition cannot be more emphasized. Please see Duckworth, “From Yogācāra to Philosophical Tantra in Kashmir and Tibet,” *Sophia* 57, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 611–23. The complex relationship between Śaivas and rival Buddhist schools is intricately explored in Isabelle Ratié, “The Dreamer and the Yogin: On the Relationship between Buddhist and Śaiva Idealisms.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 2010, 437–78. The analogy of mirror in *Pratyabhijnā* contrasts other prominent scholars who tend to disparage “the phenomenal world as an illusory experience” by salvaging the mirror’s capacity as a pedagogical tool, differentiated yet pointing to “infinite plasticity of consciousness,” with its very emphasis upon one’s original “identity with Śiva”: “An Indian Debate on Optical Reflections and Its Metaphysical Implications: Saiva Nondualism and the Mirror of Consciousness,” in *Indian epistemology and metaphysics*, ed. Joerg Tuske (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 215-7. Even from my very rudimentary understanding, this Śaiva account rather puts a positive light on the created reality. The philosophy of recognition also contains a magnificent potential for new construction of self and consciousness in this modern age of visualization. The full analysis of this teaching of mirror has an intellectual history of its own. The use of mirror and ontological status of its reflections seems to have drawn debates among major Indian schools regarding their view on perception, reality, externality of the reflected world, and most importantly, the truly luminous nature of consciousness. For the polemics, in addition to the

Far from an atheistic outcry, Eckhart's spiritual poverty empties out the human clinging and predicates which had long separated God, "distinct and reified," from us. It is by way of "pure, undifferentiated movement" between the created soul and the creator who now shares the completely equal ground, Eckhart nearly comes together with Porete's nondual union.<sup>121</sup> This fascinating sermon sets up a great example of apophasis with the famed prayer: "Therefore I pray to God that he may make me free of 'God,' for my real being is above God if we take 'God' to be the beginning of created things."<sup>122</sup> So it is not surprising to guess why Eckhart's painstaking work has been compared to work of deconstruction. But it could never mean a destruction, especially concerning any aspect of his theological scheme, as Eckhart staunchly defends his classical standpoints, as the Dominican priest. McGinn and Hollywood brilliantly captured what Eckhart's breakthrough does theologically. Even so, the last paragraphs of *Ser. 52* leaves an ontological trace that should be ultimately distinguished from Porete:

In my birth all things were born and I was the cause of myself and of all things; and if I would have wished it, I would not be nor would all other things be. And if I did not exist, "God" would also not exist. That God is "God," of that I am a cause; if I did not exist, God too would not be "God." ..But in the breakthrough, when I come to be free of will of myself and of God's will and of all his works and of God himself, then I am above all created things, and I am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and what I shall remain, now and eternally.. Then I am what I was, and then I neither diminish nor increase, for I am then an immovable cause that moves all things.<sup>123</sup>

According to McGinn, *Ser. 52* "can speak of the soul as its own creator" rightly because it is natural for Eckhart to imagine the soul *as* the Father and *as* the Only-Begotten Son

---

aforementioned Ratié (2010) article, the same author's previous work provides *Pratyabhijnā* analysis in relation to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti: "Otherness in the Pratyabhijnā Philosophy." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2007): 313–70.

<sup>121</sup> *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 148.

<sup>122</sup> *CWS*, 202.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

simultaneously in the process of spiritual birth. After all, it is Eckhart's sincere attempt to imagine the true "identity of the soul's ground and God's ground."<sup>124</sup>

*Eckhart and Zhentong*<sup>125</sup>

Therefore your soul must be unspiritual, free of all spirit, and must remain spiritless; for if you love God as he is God, as he is spirit, as he is person and as he is image—all this must go! "Then how should I love him?" You should love him as he is a non-God, a nonspirit, a nonperson, a nonimage, but as he is a pure, unmixed, bright "One," separated from all duality; and in that One we should eternally sink down, out of "something" into "nothing."<sup>126</sup>

*Sermon* 83, in light of *Ser.* 15, speaks for itself as a spiritual and mystical work as Eckhart delivers us a powerful instruction on how to truly love God: "...you can never be content with God.. such a contentment with him were to come, God would not be God.. 'Then how should I love God?' You should love God unspiritually, that is, your soul should be unspiritual and stripped of all spirituality."<sup>127</sup> It is this very paradoxical end of *Ser.* 83 above that signals and provides a bridge toward the way of comparative mystical philosophy I hope to develop in this chapter. Total negation, not in and of itself, but calls for renewal, in the most original, refreshing sense.

Eckhart indulges in apophasis, passionately and rightfully, much resonant with Buddhist method of negation. Yet neither Eckhart nor any Buddhist figure in this chapter would end at that linguistic exercise itself. Closing his sermon, Eckhart does imply that, ultimately, there is a way how one should love God. And this way of loving God engages with deconstruction of all

---

<sup>124</sup> CWS, "Theological Summary," 51-2. See *Ser.* 5b; *Ser.* 6; *Ser.* 22.

<sup>125</sup> Or, "empty-of-other" (*gzhan stong*, in different transliteration.) Regretfully, it is not possible to introduce and detail all the variants of other-emptiness tradition, not to mention the foregrounding debates, and different branches of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy in its entirety. Therefore, this chapter introduces Dölpopa, the proponent of *zhentong/gzhan stong* whose unique ideas distinguish *ultimate* self-awareness from relatives, hence from my perspective, becoming closest to its counterpart to the theological world of Meister Eckhart. For the textual origin and the detailed philosophical lineage development of *zhentong*, see Mathes and Sheehy, "Introduction," in *The Other Emptiness*, 1-27.

<sup>126</sup> CWS, 208.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

wrongfully preconceived theologies, pneumatologies and anthropologies. At the height of philosophical and theological contemplation, however, Eckhart never forgets to return to the nondual unity and simplicity, the grounding principle and goal of his mysticism— that which really and absolutely *exists*. Eckhart’s unflinching pursuit of divine, idea, and form in one’s intellectual soul, with its dualistic vision, admires the ineffable, and yet essential light that illuminates:

In relation to created being, it distinguishes four grades of beings in the universe. The first grade is those that are mere beings, the second grade is living beings, the third grade is the human intellect, and fourth grade is the angelic intellect and any other that might be separated, free from matter and image.. ..So it is fitting that what is highest and finest in the realm of intellect is as it were invisible and unknown to us and denoted by darkness, as in the text, “The light shines in the darkness.” John says “shines,” because the intellect, which begins in the senses, is clouded by the images through which and in which it knows.<sup>128</sup>

Douglas Duckworth, scholar of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, presents a remarkable aspect of Buddhist emptiness that parallels Eckhart’s project closely: “..The innate ultimate, which is the ultimate emptiness of these relative things, is never non-existent.”<sup>129</sup> A viciously criticized and debated point of view— from the context of Buddhist world where essence, substance or reality is archenemy—, this notion of “other-emptiness” proposed by Dölpopa (*dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan*, 1292-1361) claims that “the extreme of nonexistence” is “mistaken” and “reified” as it obfuscates “a dynamic, open presence that ‘grounds’ emptiness.”<sup>130</sup>

For Dölpopa, the ultimate truth is not the emptiness that is a lack of true existence or essence; rather, the meaning of ultimate truth is the basis of negation—what remains after negation is the primordial ground that has been (t)here all along. This ultimate truth is irreducible; it is the ground of being, the innate nature, or buddha-nature.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> *Comm. Jn.*, CWS, 153.

<sup>129</sup> *Distinguishing the Doctrine (dpon byang ba'i phyag tu phul ba'i chos kyi shan 'byed)*. *Shes rab rgyal mtshan's Collected Works*, edited by 'dzam thang, Vol. 6, 416. Cited in Duckworth, “Onto-Theology and Emptiness: The Nature of Buddha-Nature.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 1075.

<sup>130</sup> Duckworth, “Onto-Theology and Emptiness,” 1075.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 1076.

Not to mention the centrality of ground metaphor in their thinking, Dölpopa and his Jonang school may share tons with the Meister in his radical, unorthodox approach. For Dölpopa, while the reality of ultimate truth is likewise affirmed as the ground of all other relative truths, it is emphasized that such a ground is “not knowable by *ordinary* means.” To be more specific, this “transcendent, metaphysical ground” is “a mystical reality” to be accessed “through the meditative wisdom of a sublime being” and not “*conceptually*” (my italics).<sup>132</sup> Coming from a completely inversed culture and worldview, both Dölpopa and Eckhart, only three decades apart from each other, strive toward sublime, that is unconditioned, transcendent and yet really *real* (although it is mainline anti-realist Buddhists who will vehemently oppose to any claim to this, I should excuse any sort of overgeneralization as my chapters capture the outliers in each tradition). It is true that the other-emptiness and Buddhist practice accentuates the significance of direct, experiential yogic perception, for the “nonconceptual meditative equipoise.”<sup>133</sup> Realistically, however, this realization does not cancel either the painstaking philosophical discourse on emptiness, or Eckhart’s insistence on rational inquiry. Eckhart’s philosophical theology eventually envisions and paves the way for the soul’s mystical, *unspiritual*, unadulterated union with the divine being: hence his consistent emphasis upon contemplation.<sup>134</sup> Clearly, there’s a significant moment in Eckhart that any intellect, or knowledge, denudes itself of cognitive, perceptive and conceptual judgements that so often apprehends rationalism, as the focus is the indistinct “blessedness from God, by God and in God.”<sup>135</sup> Although the stratification

---

<sup>132</sup> Duckworth, “Other-Emptiness in the Jonang: The Theo-logic of Buddhist Dualism.” *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 2 (2015): 491.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>134</sup> Contemplative and gnoseological traditions often emphasize the act of seeing. *Seeing* nothing, knowing nothing, wishing nothing can be paralleled to “self-seeing, self-knowing, self-loving” (Sells, 136) although Eckhart’s emphasis upon will and willing is as central and great as Porete’s *loving*. The act of *seeing* in mystical tradition East and West has time-honored tradition of introspection and insight: perception, cognition and experience of transformation and liberation from any kind of distorted, misguided previous judgment or understanding.

<sup>135</sup> *Bened.2*, CWS, 246.



of mind's working over sensory perception exists ('the power.. by which we know and recognize that that we see is nobler and higher than the power by which we see'), and this rational faculty prepares one for blessedness, it is ultimately humbled before "God's contemplating... wholly separate and different from"<sup>136</sup> ours:

Therefore our Lord says well from his whole heart that everlasting life is to know God alone as the one true God (Jn. 17:3), not to know that we know God. How could a man know himself to be knowing God who does not know himself? For certainly that man does not know himself or other things in any way, but only God, God in whom he becomes blessed and is blessed, in the root and the ground of blessedness. But when the soul knows that it knows God, then it has knowledge of God and of itself.

...So I say that there is no blessedness unless man perceives and knows well that he contemplates and perceives God, and yet God forbid that my blessedness should consist in that. If someone is satisfied with something else, let him keep it for himself, but I pity him.<sup>137</sup>

Eckhart's zeal for "primordial, essential and original cause"<sup>138</sup> might smoothly consist with the unmediated, primal knowing (*ye shes*), where the nondual gnosis is situated and highlighted in relation to Buddha-nature, especially in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. I am connecting the other-emptiness (*zhentong*) of Dölpopa, as he will heartily agree with Eckhart, the *crackling* dichotomy and hierarchy between what is ultimate and real (Buddha-nature for Dölpopa) and what is not does exist. In this sense, Dölpopa's *dualistic* view between the unconditioned and conditioned, comparatively speaking, coheres with the complex interplay between distinction and indistinction of Eckhart, as he speaks from the "God and world in

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. Note that the metaphor of fire appears again to express "utterly separated" nature between divine ('being of the fire') and human contemplation ('heat of the fire').

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. On the first paragraph, McGinn writes: "Eckhart is attacking the view that beatitude consists in a reflexive act (knowing that we know God) rather than in direct, 'medium-less' awareness. Reflexive knowledge is a necessary accompaniment, but is not the essence of beatitude" (CWS, 345 n. 34). Contemporary Buddhist philosophers designate reflexivity, in a completely inverse manner, taking great interest in what is closest to Eckhart's latter focus on direct awareness. For instance, Westerhoff distinguishes introspective (observant of one's own mental state, transitory) from reflexive awareness, a precondition for such cognition that pertains to "an underlying nondual nature where the mind directly knows itself." *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, 184. On this very topic in Buddhist philosophy, please consult with Arnold, "The Svasaṃvitti Doctrine: Dharmakīrti's "Methodological Solipsism," in *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, esp. 158-88.

<sup>138</sup> *Comm. Jn.*, CWS, 137.

classical theology.”<sup>139</sup> Also, as Duckworth is raising this stance from a Buddhist point of view, it should be noted that a reification has been a long-standing issue for interpreting Buddha-nature and emptiness as well. Aside from the philosophical acumen, when the method of negation (mainstream Buddhism/self-emptiness) or the talk of essentialism (other-emptiness gone awry?) becomes once absolutized, exposing itself to a routinized stasis, then even the sharpest Buddhist meditation can become an object of “monological determinism.”<sup>140</sup> In fact, Duckworth spends the rest of this article and loads of valuable works, to revive the sense of creativity, dynamism, energy, lived and embodied “unity of presence and absence,” refusing to opt for either entity/presence or nonentity/absence.<sup>141</sup> For the minds who have affinity with Christian Neoplatonism and its heavy influence on mysticism, the movement of *exitus* (flowing out) and *reditus* (return) might come in handy, for comparative thinking. Despite seemingly infinite ways to compare Eckhart and Dölpopa’s *zhentong*, I’ll go along with notion of attunement Duckworth has appropriated.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Duckworth, “Self-Awareness and the Subject-Object,” in *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 78. This chapter lays out the significance and meanings of self-awareness in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. See esp. 74-80 for his section ‘Mind and Gnosis’ in which the author analyzes nondual gnosis in Dölpopa’s system along with Tibetan scholars such as Śākya Chokden (1428–1507) and Longchenpa (1308–1364). The rest of Duckworth’s chapter describes the well-expected criticism by Mādhyamaka, represented by Tsongkhapa from Tibetan Geluk tradition. Any arguments or oppositions in Buddhist tradition discussed in my chapter is related to categories of real, distinction and ultimate, completely inverse to the what Christian theology regards as such. This Buddhist premise only is powerful enough to assume why comparative mysticism between Buddhist and Christian has suffered so much duress. The discourse of gnosis / supermind (*yeshes*) and nondualism (both theistic and atheistic) hence becomes necessary as the mystical unity cuts across previously separated categories.

<sup>140</sup> Duckworth, “Onto-Theology and Emptiness,” 1086.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 1084.

<sup>142</sup> The concept and usage of attunement has been developed by German theologian Schleiermacher. Although brought forth out of Christian theological context of feeling and ecclesiology, Schleiermacher’s focus on non-inferential, immediate consciousness (both individual and communal) is highly relevant and applicable to what Porete, Eckhart and Buddhist contemplation gestures toward. On this subject, see Kevin W. Hector, “Attunement and Explicitation: A Pragmatist Reading of Schleiermacher’s ‘Theology of feeling’” in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, eds. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 215-42.

In line with attunement, then, readers may question why I have not delved into Eckhart's treatment of Trinitarian Persons and their relations after all. Despite its closeness to the aspect of sublime he wanted to reach, Eckhart's portrayal of Trinity or nondual union seems to rather lack the sensibility of attunement. The dialectical dynamism between presence and absence Duckworth characterizes as "attunement"<sup>143</sup> presupposes a kind of relationality, beyond the language of causal efficacy and rationality Eckhart's writing fundamentally grounds itself upon. Originally conceived as the movement, Eckhart's understanding of creation and return mostly falls under the metaphysics of One, through which the creature's unlikeness mirroring the One is constantly deemed undesirable. In this sense, finally, the penultimate ending of *Ser.* 83 is worthy of examination.

You should perceive him without images, without a medium, and without comparisons. But if I am to perceive God so, without a medium, then I must just become him, and he must become me. I say more: God must just become me, and I must just become God, so completely one that this "he" and this "I" become and are one "is," and, in this is-ness, eternally perform one work, for this "he," who is God, and this "I," which is the soul, are greatly fruitful.<sup>144</sup>

When the Eckhartian pure, unmixed, bright "One" is deprived of the mystical dimension, a stiflingly rational conclusion to merely conflate God (theology) and I (ontology) resurfaces. Additionally, despite his own assertion of gender equality in *Ser.* 6 ("When God made man, he made woman from man's side, so that she might be equal to him."), this recognition remains on the somewhat minimal level. My worry seems to actualize when Eckhart's Trinity-turned-into-man/God-unity meets the logic of self-identity, via a full-blown "all-male"<sup>145</sup> Trinity:

The Father gives birth to his Son in eternity, equal to himself.. Yet I say more: He has given birth to him in my soul. Not only is the soul with him, and he equal with it, but he is in it, and the Father gives his Son birth in the soul in the same way as he gives him birth in eternity, and not otherwise.. and I say more; He gives me birth, me, his Son, but he gives birth to me as himself and himself as me and to me as his being

---

<sup>143</sup> Duckworth, "Onto-Theology and Emptiness," 1082.

<sup>144</sup> CWS, 208.

<sup>145</sup> Although I have made these critical designations spontaneously, it turns out most of them coincide with the feminist considerations and critique already indicated in *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 196-7.

and nature. In this innermost source, there I spring out in the Holy Spirit, where there is one life and one being and one work.<sup>146</sup>

Should we say, Eckhart simply is expressing the soul's maximum extent of blessedness, as the natural outcome of practicing the intimate spiritual poverty? Although it may be possible, it is hard not to intuit that in Eckhart's contemplation there is a danger of onto-theological transposition from God to birthing of soul, now an I-consciousness who is believed to be self-caused, self-sufficient and also, the intellectual One— supposedly and conveniently in the form of rational man again. This lurking potential directly averts and threatens what the nothingness of Eckhart's mysticism has proposed: "The solipsistic, autonomous 'I' is a hollow and ontologically famished no-thing."<sup>147</sup> We may question the gender of the soul in pivotal *Ser. 6*, but especially when such a radical spiritual transformation is described in the language of birth, a complete omission of the Holy Spirit or the role of a woman, either in the image of virgin, wife, or *mother*, whether symbolically or literally, in the entire analogy is likely to confirm this suspicion. Outside *Ser. 2* in which the virgin-wife is actually main character of the whole narrative, female representation in Eckhart stays at the margins. In his exposition of knowing nothing, Eckhart preaches that "God is neither being nor rational.. Therefore God is free of all things, and therefore he is all things."<sup>148</sup> This could be the comparatively intriguing component, much resonant with Dölpopa, in Eckhart's enigmatic spirituality. Still and all, Eckhart's own ideal of nondual union, especially the aspect he has inherited from Porete and Beguine writers, seems to be at odds with the philosophical principles laid out in his *Latin Works* influencing, grounding and permeating the rest of his sermons. Throughout his sermons, this complex inner

---

<sup>146</sup> CWS, 187.

<sup>147</sup> Radler, "Depth, Ground, Abyss," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, edited by Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 313-4.

<sup>148</sup> CWS, 201.

conflict in his work has given birth to a unique philosophical-theological synthesis. In such a subliminal pursuit of his soul, Eckhart maintains his focus on “utter freedom and a pure nakedness” which Aristotle would name a “something” (*Ser 15*).<sup>149</sup>

As part of his study on Tibetan tantric meditation, Duckworth supports the “non-ideational” and “participatory” nature of attunement that cannot be captured either by conceptual or cognitive dualities. One should practice contemplation and conciliate oneself with “pure phenomenality.”<sup>150</sup> In both Christian and Buddhist contexts, the possibility of attunement detects and implicitly critiques an onto-theology gone bad. Nothing can be worse than a stale discourse when it comes to seeking truth and faith: “the subject matter of theology becomes *resolved*, pinned to a fixed essence and definite closure.. thereby loses its open-ended dimension, its *openness to mystery* that arguably sustains the life and vitality.”<sup>151</sup> Hereafter, for the mystical union or attunement in my chapter may diverge from Eckhart’s approach for few reasons. First, the meditation and experience of such oneness cannot thrive, if we are ever to agree that multiplicity (and/or/of creation) is essentially *fallen*. Even when Eckhart’s devotion to Simple One, the Divine, and (His) naked being is purest at its form, it becomes so much harder to wholeheartedly appreciate and embrace the multiple manifestation of created phenomena, the very reality a soul is meant to live through. Secondly, represented by *Couns. 10*, as apparent as it could be, in Eckhart, the supremacy of “rational soul” cannot be more stressed. Sense faculty is downplayed against what essentially belongs to the noble soul, pinnacled by solitary force of the

---

<sup>149</sup> *CWS*, 190-1.

<sup>150</sup> Duckworth, “Radical Phenomenology,” in *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature*, 140-1. Duckworth continues to comment that attunement, as a “nondual cognition,” is not representable by subject-object distinction. Hence, the attunement “is often evoked by poetic metaphor rather than propositional prose.” This characterization is more readily applicable to Porete than to Eckhart. Still, the Tibetan Buddhist contemplation may have ample resources to offer and accord with Eckhart’s notion of ground of indistinction with the “sheer open horizon of experience.” See also Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79-91.

<sup>151</sup> Duckworth, “Onto-Theology and Emptiness,” 1081.

rational “man.”<sup>152</sup> As a thorough exegete of scriptures, Eckhart’s otherwise brilliant creativity passes over the popular dichotomy of superior/inferior<sup>153</sup>, and man/woman: “..what is passive always thirsts for what is active when drinking it.. the woman signifies what is passive, the man what is active.”<sup>154</sup> Contemporary Eckhart scholarship points out that such a formulation is logical given the intention of Eckhart to explain away mystical union “philosophically,” and “always tied down to a *bekantnisse* (knowledge).”<sup>155</sup> Such knowledge, in theory, should not be equated with rationality in Dionysian apophasis as both senses *and* intellectual operations should be abnegated in the latter apparatus. Unfortunately, as readily as Eckhart’s mode of negation may exclude the domain of sensible or visionary experiences, but not ever so quickly with the intellect— And yet Eckhart nonetheless returns to contemplating on the divine, said and traced to transcend, above and beyond reason (*über redelîcheit und über vernunft*).<sup>156</sup>

### *Porete’s Fire of Annihilation in Light of Buddhist Fire-Fuel Analogies*

Who should have scruples about taking what he needs of the four elements, of the brightness of heaven, of the heat of fire, of the moisture of water and of the earth which supports us? We take the service of these four elements in every way that Nature needs, and Reason does not condemn it. (MSS 17, 37)

[Objection:] Fire could touch fuel even though distinct from fuel, just as a woman touches a man, and a man touches a woman.

[Reply:] Fire, being distinct from fuel, would surely be able to touch fuel  
If fire and fuel were mutually independent. (“An Analysis of Fire and Fuel,” *MMK* 10:6-7)<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> CWS, 109; 191.

<sup>153</sup> *Couns.* 20. Of the Body of our Lord, CWS, 273.

<sup>154</sup> *Par. Gen.*, CWS, 102. Notes that Eckhart’s parable also implies passivity for women, but this is rather traditional designation on the basis of sex, and carries a wildly different connotation from Porete’s. In *MSS*, the Soul’s passivity is “total” as it is the precondition to draw God’s full occupancy and performance in the context of union. Colledge, Marler, and Grant “Introductory Interpretative Essay,” in *MSS*, lvii.

<sup>155</sup> Elisa Rubino, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Eckhart,” in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 306-7.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Siderits and Katsura, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle way: Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, 112-3. I’ve put up this passage, only because I think it’s interesting and rarely mentioned. In a strange way, this passage deserves in relation to Porete’s understanding of Love and fire as its metaphor. It is true that man and woman can be in simple contact, unlike fire and fuel that immediately rise to effect. However, mindful of Porete’s example, when the commentary says “..we

I have briefly discussed the remarkable prevalence and availability of fire as religious metaphor in both cultures. However, in the previous analogue by Buddhist philosophers, fire usually gets deployed for explaining causality, motion, inference and divine essence. This tendency was also largely shared by Eckhart. Despite the recurrence of fire, this section does not aim to do conflate the usage of fire in Porete and Buddhist philosophers, as the analytic lens should suit the purpose of writing, and be distinguished properly. Also, the target of analysis is too vastly different. For Porete, fire takes a noticeably romantic turn, here to represent Love, a nondual state of blissful union, that has burnt any “means between these Souls and the Deity” (*MSS* 64, 85-6). In Buddhist analogy, fire-fuel example contemplates the complicated potential toward a “subject and the appropriated” (*MMK* 10:15), the *pudgala* and skandhas. Given that the exact same passage gets appropriated in opposite directions, it should be noted that this section ultimately serves the nondualism of Porete, perhaps marking the closest parallel to school of Śaiva theology. However, because Porete’s nothingness takes place before the state of union, though not too strictly in temporal sense, fire should be investigated first as one of the most pivotal metaphors for Porete’s annihilation and nothingness. Porete’s annihilative fire brings the Soul to Nothing in *MSS*. This notion of Porete’s fire certainly can benefit from philosophical understanding of all categories above. But an intense discussion of soul, self and person, this

---

know the man and the woman can exist separately” and despite the consideration of “coming into physical contact or being intimate” somehow woman-man relationship cannot liken itself to the level of mutual dependence of fire and fuel “in the sense that each depends for its existence on that of the other” (Ibid.) This might be a modern affirmation of each individual regardless of, or transcending sex, And yet, apart from discussing two grown adults as separate subjects, even on purely physical level, one individual’s existence depends on the birth, thus on parents’ mutual interdependence. Perhaps the most obvious reason for Buddhists to interrogate fire-fuel analogy as natural science, abdicating this line of reading is that, then, it might contradict the orthodox interpretation of annihilation of desire and the cycle of birth, as warned in the Fire Sermon. Unlike Eckhart’s preference for birth imagery, Porete’s Fire of Love negates all trace of futile embodiment or sin by burning self-will to the point of the Illumined nothing. Albeit borrowing the language of the intimate, sensual desire, it is working as an image of meditative absorption, mystical union. Now, this kind of paradox in Porete requires comparison with Buddhist Tantra, in a sense that Miranda Shaw calls “Passionate Enlightenment” or “Passionate Non-Attachment” according to Holly Hillgardner.

time, should be synthesized with total experience of Love, the nondual indistinction between human and divine, on mystical terms.<sup>158</sup> Now, this section situates Porete's fire that burns the self-will manifesting nothingness in the Soul, in parallel with *anātman* (no-self) in realization of *śūnyatā* (emptiness). With fire in particular, one of the most relevant, detailed and more analytic interpretation of the analogy can be already amply found in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*), which provides a more favorable hermeneutic support for the predecessors –Pudgalavādins– from Early Buddhism. Porete's fire may find resemblance and voice through the comparison with these Buddhist readings, insofar as one does not lopsidedly project a theological anthropology into the Buddhist discourse of self (and selflessness), and vice versa.<sup>159</sup> Porete and Eckhart both are really exceptional in providing excellent model of comparison, in which the theological (transcendent) and anthropological (immanent) seek the mode of union by interdependence. Their nondualism is so rigorous to the extent the pendulum of the discourse powerfully swings toward anthropology of self/soul, and what one ought to be in this world, at this very moment. And this is the point where and why the comparison between Porete and Buddhism can most fruitfully begin. It should be noted that this section does not argue that Porete's fire completely concurs with Nāgārjuna's analysis, it possibly cannot, rightly because the Buddhist philosopher engages with the matter conceptually, logically, sequentially, ontologically. Indeed, Porete's fire metaphor won't be accomplished without further reading of

---

<sup>158</sup> Porete is certainly not the only Beguine mystic who utilized this metaphor of fire. See Hollywood, "The Soul as Hausfrau: Mechthild of Magdeburg's The Flowing Light of the Godhead," chap. 3 in *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, esp. 79-89. On a related note, fire is not the only metaphor mystics enjoyed. See McGinn, "Ocean and Desert."

<sup>159</sup> Needless to mention, the vivid imagery of blazing, sacred fire of purification and union is more central in the rich tradition of Indian tantric rituals and Kashmir Śaivism. My next chapter will discuss this dimension of fire that requires *theological* analyses as the categories and terms (theology, mysticism, Divine, divinization and so forth) are widely circulated in contemporary scholarship of Indian Tantric traditions, Goddess cults and Śaivism, thus more open and accessible to the project of comparative *theology*.



the romantic and poetic aspect of union. In my next chapter, I will delve into the topic, by looking into the study of Śaivism and tantric influence on the nondualist mystical theology.

In this section, as the focus is more on anthropology of nothingness and no-self for the moment, I want to briefly introduce the recent interpretations of Nāgārjuna's fire-fuel analogy, holding the key to serve the irreducible mystery of appropriating person, *pudgala*. Let us regroup ourselves and consider Arnold's analysis of fire and fuel relation:

As throughout Nāgārjuna's work, the guiding question here is whether these relata (fire and fuel) are intelligible as such apart from each other, or whether instead it is only *as related* that they can come into view as the kinds of things they are taken to be. Exemplifying the same logic evinced by Candrakīrti's ordinary-linguistic critique of Dignāga, Nāgārjuna chiefly challenges the idea that either "fire" or "fuel" could be autonomously intelligible; if, that is, the terms of the relationship are intelligible as such *only insofar as they are related*, what can it mean to ask what either of them "really is" apart from the relation?<sup>160</sup>

In this vein, fire is understood as the "appropriator" of fuel,<sup>161</sup> implying the relevance of this analogy to the discourse of *person*, self and selves. Apparently, within the Buddhist world, the Pudgalavādin's primary language of the 'mutual-relatedness' or 'belonging together' pertaining to constitution of person with "real unity" has been source of controversy: Can this be another imposition of "existence of an immaterial, substantial, independent, substratum" many devout Buddhist hearers have resisted?<sup>162</sup> Though it may sound like an odd(ly refreshing) remark that denies the foundational Buddhist presuppositions and sensibility, even with my limited observation, confusion or self-contradiction cannot be the destination of *pudgala* discussion. Rather, the case of *pudgala* is only acknowledging the workable notion of person, who is carrier and unifier of aggregates in coherent relation ("as *persons* are also already in

---

<sup>160</sup> Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, 224. For a detailed discussion of Buddhist designations of dependence (notional and existential), see Westerhoff, "Interpretations of Svabhāva," in *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*, 20-52.

<sup>161</sup> Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, 226 (my italics).

<sup>162</sup> Carpenter, "Persons Keeping Their Karma Together," 30.

view.”<sup>163</sup>), already very much at work— as we are breathing, talking and writing at this moment undeniably experiencing every bit of it. How could such a commonsensical notion cause a controversial stir? After all, it would be truly absurd to separate the aggregates, and links of dependent origination from the *person* who really embodies and holds them together, notwithstanding the agreement upon how impermanent and dependent as we are. Then, this is how the work of Pudgalavādins shines as “middle way” in practice, laying the ground for unique Buddhist anthropology and ethic with a liberative, transformative, “moral agency,”<sup>164</sup> giving a just place for individual human person, who is “*ultimately* real, but not in the way of a substance.”<sup>165</sup> By providing this point, *pudgala* discourse can be still firmly situated within and arise out of the no-self framework, or more accurately, no-Self, negation of *Ātman*, yet acknowledging a real person, fed by the unconventional norms and insights of the Buddhist world.

My elementary intuition on this history of no-self, with *pudgala* debate in particular, the Buddhist teaching regarding the true nature of self and no-self surrounds the complex relationship between conventional and ultimate status of what exists and what doesn’t. And as the ever-critical Buddhist sensibility has heightened awareness on any reification, negation often becomes the central method. However, from the very moment one claims *this is it*, even the arch-deconstructionist mode of Buddhism, often epitomized by Abhidharmic position, can become a dogma itself by stating that what isn’t and what doesn’t is incontrovertibly true— which defeats its own methodology: “The point of doctrine is, rather, to say that nothing at all ‘exists’ in the way that we are *habitually* committed to thinking that our selves exist. Precisely

---

<sup>163</sup> Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position,” 720.

<sup>164</sup> Carpenter, “Persons Keeping Their Karma Together,” 30.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 (my italics).

insofar as he is thus most basically arguing against a particular *criterion* of existence.”<sup>166</sup> Hence, the Pudgalavādins, and zhentongpas many centuries later, show that there has been deeper reflection and engagement on the Buddhist doctrines and methodologies, in the attempt to address the perennial problems of ethical, transcendental and even unapologetically, theological.

Amongst innumerable usages, the fire-fuel relation in the *pudgala* context is indeed a metaphor of unity, but one that still carefully distinguishes, yet neither discriminates nor separates, the fire from fuel— therefore, the status of person from the psycho-physical aggregates. However, such distinction is only a preliminary step for the Pudgalavādins to spotlight the mutual dependence, continuous existence of aggregates ‘genuinely belonging together’ as the person/*pudgala*, in the end, as the “possessor of continuity.”<sup>167</sup> Relatedly, in Tibetan context, the analogy of fire and wood has taken its own development, each representing “non-conceptual realization of the ultimate” (fire) and “concepts” (wood). Nāgārjuna’s insight and tonality for mutual interdependence above can be applied similarly in this case, as the analogy focuses on the indispensable relation between the conceptual and nonconceptual medi(t)ation though the latter should not be understood as direct result from the former. Almost like an alchemy, however, even as the fire of primordial mind is free, annihilating all the concepts for the direct awareness of ultimate, the ignition of such fire depends upon the performance of well-suited wood in the first place: “the nonconceptual wisdom realizing ultimate reality can be ignited only by concepts conducive to it.”<sup>168</sup> Here, the target of analogy has

---

<sup>166</sup> Arnold, “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position,” 724 (my italics).

<sup>167</sup> Carpenter, “Persons Keeping Their Karma Together,” 17-8.

<sup>168</sup> Yaroslav Komarovski, *Tibetan Buddhism and Mystical Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67-8. Komarovski then continues to distinguish these conducive, “correctly formed ideas of emptiness, impermanence” from “the idea of soul, creator God, permanence of phenomena.” Though the latter view sounds strikingly theological, hence unsurprisingly seen as erroneous from mainline Mādhyamaka Buddhist standpoint, Dölpopa, the proponent *zhentong* (other-emptiness), affirms the permanence of “a pure, gnostic ground” that remains positively to distinguish this ultimate (and unchanged) gnosis from ordinary, distorted consciousness.

slightly shifted and expanded from Pudgalavādins' and Nāgārjuna's more ontological ones to the experience of unconditioned wisdom and distinction within mental states— that of phenomenology. But the *necessary* status of fire-fuel/wood relation remains intact. In light of previously examined Eckhart's fire/wood relation examples, one cannot detect the same level of disparaging tone toward fuel/wood/created beings as Eckhart showed. Is it because, unlike Buddhist analogy of fire-fuel relation, Eckhart's targets were the One/Divine/God and everything else that was *not* the being of God itself? The torturous chasm within Eckhart's anthropology does not seem to manifest either in Porete or the Buddhist thinkers.

Coming back to Porete, her use of fire answers this question by radically opposing Eckhart's view. For Porete (and Eckhart, too), the most original core of mystical thinking resides in revealing the divine potential within human nature, as the Souls are brought down to nothing by the fire of Love/God. As Porete understands that these simple Souls are already annihilated and so one with the divine, her most nondual example of fire does not regard human nature as secondary.<sup>169</sup> So, the aspect of union is kindled as *one* flame, forsaking the need for fuel/matter/wood as proper designation of Soul:

Now listen, Reason, says Love, to understand better what you are asking about. A man who is on fire feels no cold, a man who is drowning knows no thirst. Now this Soul, says Love, is so burned in Love's fiery furnace that she has become very fire, so that she feels no fire, for in herself she is fire, through the power of Love which has changed her into the fire of Love. This fire burns of and through itself, everywhere, incessantly, without consuming any matter or being able to wish to consume it, except only from itself; for whoever feels some perception of God through matter which he sees or hears outside himself, or through some labor which he there performs of himself is not all fire; rather, there is some matter, together, with the fire. (MSS 25, 44-5)

---

Duckworth "Grounds of Buddha-Nature in Tibet," *Critical Review for Buddhist Studies* 21 (2017): 109-36. Discussion of Dōlpopa is crucial in this chapter especially for inverse comparison with Eckhart.

<sup>169</sup> My concluding section will revise this, as in some part of *MSS* does reveal Porete's intention to distance away from humanity, toward the nondual union with divinity. As this section only examines the usage of fire and its primarily unitive expression, what may be understood significant diversion between Eckhart and Porete will also meet in the end.

For Porete, the effect of fire is extinguishment of all non-essentials and dualities. Such a radical nondual theology could not be a welcomed view in her Christian context, first risking the most misunderstood mortification in divine will, then for the sake of an ultimate, indistinct union of Soul with Love (who is also already God). Sells captures the component of mystical rapture in Porete's vocabulary and highlights "the fire of love-madness that burns up all distinctions."<sup>170</sup> Needless to mention, this fire is a sacred, purifying, enlightening one, far from the Fire Sermon's passion fruits (greed, hatred, aversion and delusion) mentioned earlier. Again, with less emphasis upon distinguishing the being of fire from iron (fuel) as in Eckhart, Porete's soul undergoes transformation and experiences an *indistinct* union with fire of love. Even when the fuel metaphor appears analogous to the human soul, the implication is again much closer to its identification with fire: "For, says Love, just as the iron is clothed in the fire, and has lost its own appearance, because the fire, which has changed it into itself" (*MSS 52, 71*).<sup>171</sup> As Robinson has helpfully observed, the usage of fire as mystical metaphor is reconfirmed toward intense, nondual relationality between the soul and Love.<sup>172</sup> According to Sells, the fire of love surpasses

---

<sup>170</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 120.

<sup>171</sup> Love's monologue in the beginning of *MSS 52* expresses a few doxological formats reminiscent of Buddhist hymns and praises as well: "**Love.** O most highly born, says Love to this precious pearl, you have indeed entered into that one free dwelling place where no-one enters if he is not of your kind and of no base birth. This Soul, says Love, has entered into the abundance and affluence of divine Love, not at all, says Love, through attaining to divine knowledge, for it can never be that any understanding, however illumined, can attain to any of the affluence of divine Love; but the love of such a Soul is so joined to the affluence of the more of this utterly divine Love (not by attaining the Understanding of Love, but by attaining to its Love which is utterly divine) that she is adorned with the ornaments of this complete peace, in which she lives, and remains, and is, and was, and will be without any being.. so this Soul is clothed in this more, is fed by and is changed into this more, because of its love of this more, without paying heed to the less, but dwells and is changed into this more of a peace that is ultimate and everlasting, where no-one can find her. This Soul loves in the sweet land of complete peace, and so there is nothing which can help or hurt those who love there, no created being, no given thing, not anything which God promises."

<sup>172</sup> *Nobility and Annihilation*, 87: "The iron in fire image serves to illustrate the impassivity of the soul in union. The transformation of annihilation places the soul in proper being, in which her 'work' is done without her: all that she needs is within her. The soul that burns with this metaphorical fire 'sees clearly in all things that she consumes things according to the way one ought to consume thing'; that is, without regard to obtaining matter or willing to possess it. Fire doesn't add matter to itself; rather, it transforms matter into itself so that the fire and the matter become one thing."

the quality of natural metaphor, now effectively a symbol of union, of supernatural and divine origin.<sup>173</sup>

The annihilation of the soul, the annihilation of opposites and distinctions, the annihilation of the will, the annihilation of the reason are all intertwined in Porete's book, and are brought together in this image of a fire that is completely self-consuming, a fire that has no exterior matter or fuel to burn. Elsewhere, the love is said to be the union of love and a blazing fire that burns without air.<sup>174</sup>

Despite the polysemous nature of fire, Porete's choice is unforgettably extreme, perfectionist, to that end, a simple one. Likewise, for Porete, it is natural to portray the union as the sea once absorbs watercourses, "they are all sea"—just as much as the fire unites Love and Soul into: "not two, but one" (*MSS* 83, 107).<sup>175</sup>

#### *Conclusion: Nonduality of Soul-Brought-to-Nothing and No-Self*

Porete's doctrine of annihilation leads the Soul into union with God/Love through nothingness, which is a result of her version of annihilative, purificatory process. But she does remain almost silent about anything regarding potential dissolution of such union after death, or the Soul unified with Love reigning over ages as the immortals (i.e. resurrection). Though Porete herself was not influenced by Indic world of karma or rebirth as Buddhists inherited directly, the afterlife of heaven and hell had been part of foundational teaching of Christian belief for centuries. But as she mostly does in *MSS*, Porete defies her theological context, by refusing to uphold any teaching or practice that gets in the way of her meditation of nothingness.

Eckhart once preached: "So long as you perform your works for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, or for God's sake, or for the sake of your eternal blessedness, and you work them

---

<sup>173</sup> Fire as the presence of God in Scriptures: Exod. 3:1-4:17, Heb. 12:18-29.

<sup>174</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 138.

<sup>175</sup> Earlier in *MSS* 28, 47: Love confesses, "Now they have one common will, like fire and flame, the will of the lover and that of the beloved, for love has changed this Soul into itself."

from without, you are going completely astray” (CWS 183). Like Eckhart, Porete’s description of mystical stages of union stays fully this-worldly in this sense, although its thorough spirituality is not compromised. Porete’s Soul neither minds the Hell nor concerns about Heaven/Paradise. In *MSS*, Hell scarcely appears only to be explicitly neglected, as Porete glosses over its existence to express how much this subject is decentered from her Soul’s true attention.<sup>176</sup> Paradise, too, often faces similar nonchalance, when it is part of Porete’s discourse of nothing.<sup>177</sup> Porete mentions Seventh State (“..everlasting glory”)<sup>178</sup> as it is the highest, ineffable abode of Love herself, but this shall be kept as mystery. Whether this omission was intentional or not, its situatedness belongs precisely to the grand scheme of Porete’s liberation program, the contemplative Souls’ faithful freedom from psychology of bondage and fear. The use of both Heaven and Hell serves and depends on how they relate to Soul’s reckoning of God’s uncreated will, as she undergoes ontological transformation and the ultimate indistinct union with Love, which is now the single most important aim in *MSS*:

Witness Jesus Christ himself, who says that the least will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. One must indeed believe this, for no-one believes this who is not so. He who is what he believes, he believes truly; but he who believes what he is not does not live out what he believes. (MSS 100, 124)

---

<sup>176</sup> “Margaret’s statements concerning the annihilated soul’s disregard for the practice of the virtues and for the notion of heaven and hell (Chapter 97), however they may be explained, were an open challenge to what authorities wished to be taught.” Kent Emery Jr., “Foreword,” xvii-iii.

<sup>177</sup> *MSS* 7, 17; *MSS* 49, 68-9 (“For this Soul, says Love, is set free and is content. It has no need of Hell, or paradise, or any created thing... Not even, says Love, if they were rapt into Heaven every day through such wishing, into the vision of the Trinity, as was St. Paul the Apostle!”); in *MSS* 72-3, Love explains mentions a truly glorious, will-less life can only arise after death of body and spirit (94). Heaven, too, appears to aid the Soul’s appeal to highest authority such as Christ Himself (*MSS* 131, 167), but not with heaven or entering heaven itself as central theological motif. From *MSS* 120-9, Porete delegates few chapters to be more fitting to the traditionally styled praises, doxologies, Christologies and ecclesiologies. But soon she comes back to the anthropology of the Soul that recaps the foremost significance of nothingness (*MSS* 130-6) and the entire book ends shortly. In *MSS* 128, in the sixth consideration, Heaven is functionally mentioned with the humanity of Christ and regarding “who will ascend to Heaven” (162), therefore illumining Christ’s own message (“who does the will of God my Father”), aligning her own teachings so that *MSS* as a whole does not contradict the Scripture. In truth, when properly contemplated and practiced, Porete’s new doctrines illumine the pure radicality of original teachings of Christ, “..and then follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven. That is the counsel of the highest perfection of the virtues” (*MSS* 3, 13).

<sup>178</sup> *MSS* 118, 146.

This, however, does not leave out the future of the Soul, or the celestial geography the Scripture promises. Porete's deconstruction targets not so much the heaven's spatial, eschatological reality itself, but mainly the "wishing for reward in Heaven or on earth" (*MSS* 43, 63) and the base, self-interested understanding of salvation tied to it (*MSS* 63, 84-5; *MSS* 69, 90). For instance, the theological norms and hierarchies she treasures and praises in the latter part of *MSS*, have elements of unmistakable distinction and class ("For all the hierarchies of Heaven do not have one and the same name."), of a noble esotericism, albeit a theological one.<sup>179</sup> These hierarchies are of great symbolic significance to connect Porete's theology with the esteemed figures and cherished belief systems, as *MSS* relies on the appearance and divine authority of Lady takes hold of. Porete's notion of nobility would not and cannot allow a reinforcement of the extant socioeconomic (and political) privilege, hierarchy, or any gap that stands *against* the feminized Soul's process of annihilation and nothingness. When the mutual interdependence between Love and the Soul is the underlying principle for the mystical union, by the fire of nothingness, it is sensible to conceptualize a feminine nobility, reimagining and resetting lots of grounds that were previously not permitted, especially for outstanding, independently-minded, transgressive female Souls who are oriented this way. According to Robinson, however, Porete's nobility carries this newly empowered, elevated sense of privilege, that is impossible to understand apart from the long-standing medieval notion of it.<sup>180</sup> Given how Porete's

---

<sup>179</sup> *MSS* 72, 93. This is especially important in her discussion of angels and hierarchies in *MSS* 77, 98-100.

<sup>180</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 6-8. Here, Robinson evokes Dante's notion of nobility as "the perfection of the nature proper to each thing.. including plants and animals and inanimate objects." Against the historical preference of blood over virtues, Dante refutes nobility based on wealth and lineage, insisting it to be a earned quality through virtue and good character. Porete may agree with Dante, but her reconceptualization of it might be even more theological, transforming the prestige with spiritual meanings. Regarding the natural perfection Dante speaks of, this immediately rings similar to Daoist ideal of *ziran* (self-so), which pertains to the pure, simple, naked and elemental level of spiritual freedom. But a closer analysis will be necessary for comparison, as the usefulness of nobility, as explored and exploited in Porete and her medieval predecessors, might still retain the sense of distinction, that is not shared with Daoist characterization.



theological anthropology subverts the commodification of good works and even virtue in traditional sense, Porete's nobility thus calls for an examination of what is truly united nondually in her union, with caution: There are stages, and varying degrees of realizing the radical potential toward co-equal divinity, which reminds us of the coexistent, inseparable, yet neither same nor different relation between the conventional and ultimate in Buddhist tradition. Robinson further remarks:

Annihilation can be attained only by those capable of recognizing their true identity as eternally one with God. This is accomplished by virtue of an inborn nobility, which provides the soul with strength and secret knowledge. Annihilation comes only to those souls who divest themselves of *all* createdness, including the will, and thus realize their true nature as images of the Trinity. The will of the Trinity, in the person of the Holy Spirit, enables the procession of creation from the Godhead as well as the return of creatures to preexistence. Humanity is granted free will, free to turn to good or evil. Yet it is most free, truly free, when it has no will and is thus returned to God.<sup>181</sup>

Here, Porete's annihilation clearly distinguishes itself from annihilationism, since what is meant to be left of the process is the true essence of Divine Trinity, and the Soul's return to it. And so it is implied that the nobility and lineage denotes the "divine origin of certain noble souls" that cannot be annulled in the annihilation.<sup>182</sup> However, although Porete puts a great emphasis upon disregarding any association with external "merit" or "an earned status," it is undeniable that the path Porete suggests is not reachable just by any soul. The mystical journey of annihilation in *MSS* requires a total devotion from fellow contemplators who can understand and practice the stages toward union, signaling a *spiritual* elitism and esotericism.<sup>183</sup>

Her detest toward ['asses' or 'donkeys'] Reason or Holy Church the Little is so explicit that it is comprehensible, but nondualist interpretation often fails to grasp the extent of Porete's spiritual skew. When Porete's Paradise is equated with seeing God, this activity of nondual

---

<sup>181</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 101-2.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 100: "More central to her definition of esotericism is the idea of transmission of a spiritual path from one spiritual guide to others. She has no problem asserting her own authority, for she writes about what she knows, and she knows about annihilation."

union and its paradisiacal glory is contrasted to “the body.. too gross in such a creature” (*MSS* 97, 121). In this sense, Porete’s fire of annihilation may have not distinguished the *divinity* between Soul and Love in the union, but her contempt for the bodily, and “all created things” may have been no less rigorous than Eckhart’s examples. In her wake of Paradise, at times Porete shows her love of Divinity at the cost of denigrating embodied humanity:

Margaret seems, however, to have little concern for preserving the soul’s human identity, and, instead, she regards humanity not as anything to be redeemed, but as a barrier which should be transcended. In Chapter 14 she had acknowledged that “humanity is glorified in Paradise, joined to the person of the Son;” but, like Ruusbroec, she considers the love of Christ’s earthly humanity to be a potential obstacle to the love of his divinity, and so she suggests that it was for the removal of this obstacle that the humanity of Christ was replaced in the world by the Pentecostal comforts of the Holy Spirit. Whether the humanity of Christ as it is now in heaven and as it was in his life on earth are identical is not a question on which she speculates; and, consequently, she does not consider whether the Hypostatic Union, the joining of the divine and the human in the single person of Christ, according to nature, can serve as the model of what, through deification, man might be according to grace.<sup>184</sup>

Again, acknowledging the issue of embodiment was mainly to be overcome, the enigmatic uniqueness of Porete and Eckhart can still be appreciated in full, turning the theological orientation from hypostasis into what *we* ought to be, with our soul, ourselves. This turn of discourse transforms the status of soul from a mere believer, follower, child into a partner and a lover of Love, the very divine being God is and God calls us to be one with. With the immediacy of indistinct union, Porete and Eckhart revolutionize the theological anthropology by maximizing the independence of each soul. Even though the presence of soul carries a heavy baggage of implications, due to the extensive work of apophasis the French Beguine and the Meister has put into, its comparison with Buddhist no-self discourse has been made possible.

Another moment of conjunction in Porete and Eckhart may be explored by their portrayal of temporality during mystical union, which mirrors the perennial Buddhist debate of sudden/gradual Enlightenment. Starting with the unique and mysterious expression of Eckhart’s

---

<sup>184</sup> “Introductory Interpretative Essay,” lxxiv-v in *MSS*.

temporality, “eternal now” (*Ser. 2; Ser. 52; Ser. 83*), emphasizes the Meister’s dearest wish and prayer to fulfill the One, in his fusion of creaturely temporality with God’s time. *Now* represents the event of creation, expectation of apocalypse, and the very moment of Eckhart’s own preaching. *Eternity* secures God’s presence in each and every work of the soul to be “free and renewed in every present moment.”<sup>185</sup> Even in the understanding of time, one may sense the theological earnestness Eckhart brings, which rather recommends the law of gradualness, than sudden, overwhelming demand for spiritual superiority or perfection. After all, the eternity of “eternal now” is an unchanging, single emanation from divine. As Eckhart is urging the hearer to devote oneself to the spiritual work of birth “that always has occurred and always is occurring,” Sells comments that “eternal now” invites rather a humble, ordinary vision toward “a work that must be realized anew in each moment”<sup>186</sup> than a glorified, extraordinary mystical experience.

Similarly, Buddhist realization of ultimate truth, and revelation of enlightenment may always involve the question of *when/whence* the meditator arrives at *nirvāṇa*. Both Eckhart and Porete have ways of weaving the mutual, coexisting temporality among past, present, future for proximate arrival of such. In the case of Porete, when the poignantly unmediated, “sudden” character of her union comes to the fore, it seems well expected of the Soul to be “overwhelmed” by the complete union with Love (*MSS 39, 59*). The Rapture Chapter 58 in *MSS* describes this state of union, a brief moment of transition from fifth to sixth rapturous state of being, as “an opening swift as a lightning flash and a rapid closing.” And yet, Love speaks on the ephemeral destiny of this lightning as this glorious shock effect for Soul can “not last long in any creature, but only for the time of its passage” (78-9). The fact that Porete distinguishes one stage from

---

<sup>185</sup> CWS, 178-9.

<sup>186</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 202.

another demonstrates that the ravishing, powerful, radical suddenness of union may not accompany the Soul's entire journey. As Buddhism first teaches the conventional wisdom for a novice who is not quite prepared to understand the ultimate, the French Beguine's temporality also cautions a novitiate soul for the impending suspension of elation. On Porete's utilization of time and the gradation of Soul, Sells remarks:

..the sixth station is the intersection between time and eternity. From the temporal perspective, which is all that can be evoked (the eternal perspective of the seventh station being passed over in silence), eternity is perceived as a flash, both timeless and in time, both permanent and evanescent."<sup>187</sup>

Outside my analysis, there may remain critical differences between Buddhism, Porete and Eckhart that we should heed extra care, especially when comparing categories. But the Buddhist framework of sudden/gradual debate on top of conventional/ultimate distinction is incredibly relevant as the term immediately gets at the tension within the understanding of union and temporality, conceived by mystics here. Whether the vibrant tension comes from the fractures and/or fusion between created/pre-created, distinct/indistinct (nondual), even leading to human/divine, all are dazzled and baffled by the simple truth: one does not and cannot exist apart from the other. Construction of conventional or ultimate temporalities can easily become pointless, especially when it is excised from what it means for our current state of being and experience. With this vision, revising the gradualist Eckhart's "eternal now" is also supplemented by his alternative, Porete-esque notion of sudden "spark" in *Ser.* 48:

...by so much will you be made one and blessed in the spark in the soul, which has never touched either time or place. This spark rejects all created things, and wants nothing but its naked God, as he is in himself.

After all, Eckhart's spark does overlap with Porete's lightning as both seek to express the divine luminosity, the uncreated source of inspiration for the soul. In several ways, we may say

---

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 126-7.

that Porete and Eckhart ultimately become nondual, encompassing the gradualist visions and more illuminative, eureka moments in their journey toward mystical union. Besides, as the previous historical studies reveal the influence, it is almost impossible to separate their meditation from each other. Despite the different set of priorities and style in expression from Porete, Eckhart's German treatises on detachment align the core of his thinking with Porete. This can be witnessed in many of his later counsels. However, *On Detachment* is exceptional in that Eckhart synthesizes the titular topic by focusing on how it brings the soul close to nothingness, hence ultimately to the co-equality with God. Unlike his previous analysis with the distinctive tone of divine-human separation in fire analogy, though, the union in *On Detachment* between God and the soul brought upon by pure detachment is now likened to a completely indistinct, absorptive union, "as the sun draws up the red dawn into itself so that it becomes nothing."<sup>188</sup> After all, Eckhart's most inventive schematization (detaching/birthing/breaking-through) points to the two significant notions Porete has already radicalized in *MSS*: living without a why, and *unitas indistinctionis*.<sup>189</sup> Compared to his Latin works or sermons, this is a riveting turn, considering the general appearance of *willful* life, which veered from Porete's radical path. In spite of his attempt at valorization of feminine(-as-divine) incorporating soul as virgin, mother, and wife, most sermons were founded upon somewhat contradictory

---

<sup>188</sup> *CWS*, 292. See also 284-5 where Eckhart's nondualism subdues the quarrel between nature or grace in God's mysterious work of union. The water metaphor is strikingly rare in Eckhart as the indistinct level of union is analogous to *MSS* 82: "There was a man who could dearly have liked to make a stream flow through his garden, and he said: 'If the water could be mine, I should not care what sort of channel brought it to me, iron or timber, bone or rusty metal, if only I could have the water.'"

<sup>189</sup> As my chapter considerably owes to Sells' brilliant analysis, the specific affinities between Porete and Eckhart have been already laid out in *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 181-3. Sells' excellent summary of five similarities between *Ser.* 52 and *MSS* is especially noteworthy: "(1) the reversion to the state of precreation; (2) living 'without a why'; (3) the relinquishment of all medium or mediation; (4) the nakedness of the soul that has given up all will and reason; (5) the giving up of all works" (183). In addition to the excellent study of Sells, all five points are largely shared by Hadewijch and Mechthild. My limited reading suggests that they also have strong, remarkable nuances for the comparative study of Buddhism, Daoism along with great contemplative, nondual mystical traditions.

rationalization. But reviewed with German treatises, Eckhart's sermons overall well solidify its message— emptying all act of knowing or knowledge so that it can come again into focus to bring one's soul into nothing for the true unity between soul and the divine.

Accordingly, the language of love and receptivity appear palpably more often, as the form of philosophical treatise turns itself into a phenomenological meditation on pure detachment. Rather than providing us with an ontological summary of *what* the divine traits are, now Eckhart shows us *how* the soul may unite with God, in greatest receptivity. Porete, in the voice of Love, says “It is from wishing for the divine will, for the more that anyone wishes for this, the less he has his fill of such a will” (*MSS* 12, 29).<sup>190</sup> When the Soul completely empties herself of any power or desire to wish for anything, only then could the will of God work. Now, although the state of Soul is in unison with God, even “her will is not her own nor in herself” (*MSS* 27, 46), the presence and fill of divine *intention* complicates the issue. Has Porete conventionally taught wishing for nothing only to reintroduce the language of will? Does the negation of will itself paradoxically require an intentional meditation? The question of intentionality and “nonintentionality” in Porete's and Eckhart's apophysis has been also raised by Sells, mostly as a critique of what counts as a religious experience by modern standard: one that is intentional, with clear object of experience.<sup>191</sup> In short, since the nonintentional and unmediated qualities of mystical union by both do not fit into the given categories, Sells vouches

---

<sup>190</sup> See also *Ibid.*, n.5 and *MSS* 10, 21-2 n. 3 on the Soul's paradox of (not) willing the divine will. The translators tentatively conclude Eckhart's *Ser.* 52 on poverty of the will draws upon similar conclusion as Porete's total lack of will, or unwilling. This is especially true when Eckhart, vividly reminiscent of Porete, calls out those who have good intention to fulfill God's wishes “donkeys.” *Ser.* 52 continues: “So long as a man has this as his will, that he wants to fulfill God's dearest will, he has not the poverty about which we want to talk. Such a person has a will with which he wants to fulfill God's will, and that is not true poverty. For if a person wants really to have poverty, he ought to be as free of his own created will as he was when he did not exist.. so long as you have a will to fulfill God's will, and a longing for God and for eternity, then you are not poor; for a poor man is one who has a will and longing for nothing” (*CWS*, 200).

<sup>191</sup> *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 214.

for the authenticity of Porete and Eckhart by moving away from those constructions of experience. To supplement my intuition, however, this cannot mean an annulment of will or intentionality as a whole in either Porete or Eckhart, as the detachment in Eckhart clearly “compels God to love” the soul, as the soul is “receptive to nothing except God.”<sup>192</sup> In other words, emptying and annihilation of self gives birth to detachment, detachment to nothingness—which is the purest state to be “full of God.”<sup>193</sup> Most importantly, as we discussed on Porete’s return of soul’s will to God, Eckhart likewise stresses the “willing cooperation” from one’s heart in order for God to work the highest divine will.<sup>194</sup> Though the juxtaposition of willingness and receptivity may sound paradoxical, perhaps the workings of Buddhist meditation on the conventional and ultimate state of nondual unity could help make this discourse even more sense. Further study on this topic in the context of nondual union will be soon conducted in my next chapters, as the issue of will and/or intentionality is huge and complex, thus cannot be addressed here.

The most comparatively valuable point can be found in the discourse of awareness or consciousness. As for the annihilated Soul of Porete, this dimension directly pertains to the pure, divine substance related to seeing God and knowing nothing (divinely). The transformation of Porete’s Soul mirrors the ultimate, enlightened gnosis in Eckhart and *zhentong* (other-emptiness), founded by Dölpopa Shérab Gyeltsen, as “the annihilated soul does not lose consciousness of distinction but rather *attains* consciousness of indistinction.”<sup>195</sup>

Annihilation is thus a process originating at that moment when a gift of consciousness is granted. The imprint of nothingness occurs in time, yet it also occurs in a pre-created state without beginning; she always possessed its form. The deification involved in annihilation shares annihilation’s temporality when

---

<sup>192</sup> CWS, 286.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 288

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 291-2.

<sup>195</sup> Marin, “Annihilation and Deification,” 108 (my italics).

both are seen as dynamic processes. Yet deification simultaneously escapes temporality when the soul discovers that it is an atemporal process, one that has never begun and shall never end.<sup>196</sup>

By undoing all the created, thus external aspects, one's Soul can return to the uncreated, ultimate state of union with God. Both Porete and Eckhart would agree that annihilation and deification unsays the greatest chasm between divine and human—which was already heretically contentious—. However, is the union happening at the cost of creating another dualistic category to leave behind those who couldn't quite reach such moment? Has the apotheosis of emptiness then downplayed the conventional, and ordinary consciousness? Hasn't Porete proclaimed enough the nonduality of nothingness and everything? These questions will be further studied in following chapters, as Porete, Eckhart and Buddhist meditators provide seemingly infinite vistas to investigate. My very basic schematization of the fire metaphor in Eckhart and Porete is only one of those avenues. But each avenue in itself mirrors the infinite, and can be discovered in new detail by way of comparison with another nondual mystical vision. With Buddhist context as a counterpart, Porete's focus on the immediacy, intensity of nondual unity, may be balanced with a question on the conventional status of the Soul. As that very current reflection of oneself is the precondition for receiving "a rapturous outpouring in the movement of Divine Light" which constantly confirms that uncreated essence, yet reminds the Soul that "she is not, and that it is not from her that all things are" (*MSS* 118, 143). It is Porete who claimed that seeing God itself is Paradise, however, also relegated living the eternity in absolute divine goodness to the last, ineffable stages of her meditation in *MSS*.

With all such enigma begging to be explored, this chapter has emphasized particular historic moments in Christian and Buddhist world in the thirteenth century, a noticeably

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.



explosive era. Unbeknownst to themselves, the French Beguine Marguerite Porete and the Dominican Meister have formulated teaching, so radical to the extent that the tenets of this new teaching went off from, and clashed with established theological understanding of their times. However, the emptying of will and the practice of detachment in their apophatic mysticism has opened up possibilities of theological interpretation, an unexpectedly yet surprisingly comparative project, that could communicate and share with Buddhist contemplation through which the displacement, negation *and* nondual unity of subject/object of experience rather becomes the norm. Though the religious differences should not be conflated with one another carelessly, the rich and time-honored Buddhist views, first on the early discourse of person, then with the later development in Tibetan Buddhist discourse bridging the transcendental toward its Western counterpart, with its interpretation of perfect Buddha-nature and *Zhentong* (*gzhan stong*), “being empty of everything other than luminous awareness or buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*)” whose endorsement of such absolute character is indeed –for lack of better expression– theological.<sup>197</sup> Truly, this position concurs with what Porete and Eckhart represents, for their radical and unique voice in distinction and indistinction in the context of mystical union remains theological. It was the purpose of this chapter to show their voices can meet, across two cultural and religious spheres, nondually. Although I have indeed merely touched the resplendent surface of mystical visions toward unity, it should be clear that there are traditions in which divinity, perfection and the ultimate coexist with nothingness, emptiness and the conventional no-self, as both worlds are interdependent in its embrace of immanence, in search of transcendence. Even at the height of their contemplation, mystics and sages had to find the middle ground to reflect on the conventional limit of human

---

<sup>197</sup> Mathes and Sheehy, “Introduction,” 1-2.

existence. Whether the hard striving of this existence, in the appearance of a Soul, person, self, and no-self, is claimed or remains unspoken, the nondual mystics mirror a unitive way, that is neither irreconcilable distinctions (artificially reified between mental and physical collection/person, self/other, self/world, conventional/ultimate, and good/evil, nothing/everything, human/divine) nor changeless identities, in an exclusion of movement, which is the very possibility of transformation. Earlier, Michael Sheehy, the scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, invoked the image of mirror to describe luminous emptiness, lacking identity, yet representing *nonduality*. Even though Porete herself does not elucidate why she titled her work as *Mirror of Simple Souls*, it won't be a false assumption to contemplate our own nature, as the clear mirror of simple Divinity who is Love. As the soul-as-mirror reflects the light of Love, it also illumines other beings. Many pages were allocated to show that there are different planes of such a mirror, through the reflections of Buddhist philosophers, Beguine mystic, and a Beguine-inspired theologian. For now, it should suffice for this conventional phase to have its say and annihilate.

### CHAPTER 3 BECOMING DIVINE: NONDUAL UNION IN BEGUINE-BUDDHIST THEOLOGICAL MEDITATION

**How Truth praises such Souls.**

Truth praises those who are such, and says:

O emerald and precious gem,  
True diamond, queen and empress,  
All of your perfect nobleness you give,  
Asking no rich return from Love..

..O deepest well and fount securely sealed  
In which the sun so subtly is concealed,  
Truth says that godly knowledge makes your rays to show,  
And this through wisdom that is true we know,  
Resplendent, always making us to shine.

*(Mirror of Simple Souls Ch 120, 147)*

*Mystical Union Compared: Porete and Buddhist Tantric Women*

Having introduced Porete's mystical union with Buddhist flavor, now this chapter connects *MSS* with the tradition that mirrors it the best: the tradition of Buddhist tantra. Even scholars of tantric traditions agree on the difficulty of defining 'tantra' due to its complexity. In the midst of such diversity, historical overviews overlap in designating it as esoteric (initiation, authority of guru, secrecy) tradition, converging on one of the most significant characteristics of tantra: The practitioner's *divinization* or deity-visualization, a mystical union by which the Tantric Buddhist adepts and meditators "realize the innate perfection of the world.. and all beings as divine."<sup>1</sup> Defined in a nutshell, this deeply touches the features of Beguine mysticism,

---

<sup>1</sup> Miranda Eberle Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 84. As I will emphasize multiple times here, this chapter is mainly concerned about comparing feminine principles in Beguine and Buddhist tantric tradition. Anyone who has interest in tantric tradition may be aware the various developments of tantra in Hindu and Buddhist traditions replete with ritual and meditative practices (*sādhana*) aided by recitations of sacred chants (mantra), utilization of bodily energies, and geographic diagrams (mandala) that symbolize the structure of universe. However, I am relying upon where scholars do come together to acknowledge: the liberation of practitioners and their union with divinity. See also Shaman Hatley, "Tantra, Overview." in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions*, edited by Pankaj Jain, Rita Sherma, and Madhu Khanna (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2020), 1–11; David B. Gray, "Tantra and the Tantric Traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2016).

especially the worldview and self-perception of Marguerite Porete's Soul-as-Love. Starting with the addressed tone of esoteric initiation<sup>2</sup>, this chapter aims to bring comparative perspective on nondual union and deification. The theme of unity is central to tantra: "the uniting of opposites (male-female, microcosm-macrocosm, sacred-profane, Siva-śakti)."<sup>3</sup> Although, in Porete's case, the greatest opposites to be united is human and divine, it is my contention that the theory and practice of envisioning deities, especially the divine representations of powerful female Buddhas and the Goddesses in tantra *visualizes* what Porete has idealized in *MSS*.

For the purpose of comparison, this chapter will focus on what the visualization of deities, or, deity yoga (*devayoga*) in tantric tradition symbolizes, as it accords with the center of Porete's union with divine Love.<sup>4</sup> In the "envisionment of deity," of course it stands out that the meditator envisions and experiences union with and *as* the deity. However, what is even more noteworthy is that such a process reveals "enlightened qualities *within*, be it the maternal protectiveness of Tārā, the shining wisdom of Mañjuśrī, or the unfailing compassion of

---

<sup>2</sup> "Because, says Love, she has taken leave of you and of the works of the Virtues.. she took lessons in your school, longing to perform the works of Virtue. But now she has been *initiated* and has advanced in divine instruction so far that she starts her reading where you leave off.. this lesson down in a miraculous way.. with no words ever spoken, is conducted that divine teaching which human wit cannot put into words." (*MSS* 66, 87; my italics)

<sup>3</sup> David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 123. Although this chapter focuses on the Buddhist Goddesses and their symbolic resonance with Marguerite Porete's vision of union, the Hindu "philosophical/mythological model" of gods and goddesses will be cited as originator as its history begets, shapes, influences Buddhist narratives despite the variations and even oppositions Buddhist self-understanding develops in order to distinguish itself. In the Hindu tantra, Śakti represents primordial female energy, "the inherent power of creation" and in various tantric traditions the goddess herself, whom the male god Śiva deeply relies upon. See "Introduction" in Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> There is a system of classification in Tantric Buddhist system, and the deity yoga is part of *anuttara-yoga* (Unexcelled Yoga Tantra or Highest Yoga Tantra). Although this chapter does not fully conduct a systematic comparison between Porete's seven states of being (union) and the Buddhist tantra, the way of transformation deserves close inspection. *Anuttara-yoga* is then constituted of two stages, and the latter completion stage or "perfection stage" (*sampanna-krama*) achieves the "blissful awareness" with "final states of realization come like a fresh wind sweeping through an empty sky.. a divine simplicity, an ability to be spontaneously and fully present to each moment of awareness in a state of pristine clarity." See Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 86-7. The exalted and illuminated states of Soul in *MSS* 118 indeed exhibit comparative elements such as the divine simplicity, peace, repose of Soul in perfect Love.

Avalokiteśvara.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, liberation is about realizing what and who is “already present.. waiting to be awakened.”<sup>6</sup> Building upon the groundbreaking research conducted by Miranda Shaw, the scholar of Tantric Buddhist women, this chapter connects the feminized Soul in *MSS* whose uncreated goodness enjoins Divine Love, to the innate greatness of a tantric Buddhist woman whose self-visualization as deity brings about enlightenment, liberation and transcendence. One of the most distinctive driving forces in Beguine mysticism, especially in Porete, is that both the human and divine agency speak with feminine voice. As Shaw argues, though not excluding male deities or gurus, the presence and practice of Tantric Buddhist women similarly has earned and enjoyed due respect and authority as teacher, companion, and a fully enlightened spiritual master (*yoginī*).

In this comparison of divine becoming, the issue of embodiment may pose an impediment if readers of the tradition are not careful. Although the spirit of nondualism is vastly spread, we should be aware that the physiological element (body, energy) is familiar, well-suited, better integrated into the divinization in Buddhist tantra in religious and cultural terms. In the theological world Porete comes from, although the creation happens in the very image of God, the presupposed dualism between mind and body, soul and body has been rigidly applied to mark the infinite *distance* between the divine and human. Part of christological controversy concerns the very distinction between divine and embodied humanity of Jesus Christ. The apostle discusses the “celestial.. and imperishable body” (1 Cor. 40-2) of the believers, but even the topic is relegated to posthumous vision of resurrection. By putting forward the pre-creative goodness of Soul, Porete’s melting, fiery nondual union between Love/God and Soul was therefore already too radical in this cultural milieu, leaving the issue of embodiment almost

---

<sup>5</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 26 (my italics).

<sup>6</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

completely shunned for the sake of dwelling in inherent divinity. Historians' speculation regarding *why* will be explored in the following. Meanwhile, it is important to note however unique Porete's theological anthropology may be, her work still exhibits a more traditional inheritance—the seed of sin, evil and their association with createdness itself. Even though the whole work was problematized due to the Soul's divine goodness like the Deity, *MSS* has no shortage of Porete's Soul and her inner torment for the human Nature and its wickedness.<sup>7</sup> Without having recourse to the often Orientalist understanding of Eastern spirituality, however, embodiment in Buddhist tantric world is cherished and integrated in theory and practice as the basis:

Embodiment, which is understood to be not a “soul” in a “body” but rather a multilayered mind-body continuum of corporeality, affectivity, cognitivity, and spirituality whose layers are subtly interwoven and mutually interactive. This nonessentialist self is seen not as a bounded or static entity but as the site of a host of energies, inner winds and flames, dissolutions, meltings, and flowings that can bring about dramatic transformations in embodied experience and provide a bridge between humanity and divinity. It is in light of this model of a dynamic, permeable self without fixed boundaries that the Tantric Buddhist paradigm must be interpreted.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, this chapter can mainly address the commonality between Porete's mystical union and tantric union, in terms of philosophical goals and grounds. These two meditations share magnificent comparative traits. But it is true the Buddhist Tantra utilizes bodily practices rightly because it “affirms the passions, desire, and sense experience as intrinsically pure”<sup>9</sup> in a way Porete could never concede. This, regrettably, preserves the incredibly rich history of mantra, magic, and rituals tied to tantric Goddesses for next research. But this dissertation's theological comparison will be meaningful as it focalizes what this tradition *means* for the practitioner's sense of self, over and above the skewed, popular obsession with certain

---

<sup>7</sup> Although the main antagonist of *MSS* is Reason, Porete's critique of Wily Nature appears esp. in *MSS* 17, 22, 127, 139.

<sup>8</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, 24.

performative aspect of Tantric embodiment. The yoga of union in Tantric Buddhism is mainly a method for “women and men to deconstruct their conventional selves *together*.. that *women and men can attain liberation together*.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly unfortunate and misdirected, the readers of Porete become preoccupied with language of negation, forgetting that living the divine Love in complete freedom is at the heart of *MSS*. As a prelude to this chapter’s long exposition on this matter, Porete’s approach toward nondual union is deeply metaphysical and gnoseological— yet replete with the metaphorically sensual, rapturous images she relies upon, marking her mystical expressions as distinguished. The critical difference from Porete and the Tantric Buddhist imagination is that the latter, still carrying the message of emptiness and enlightenment, coalesces and literalizes the metaphors into Tantric union in action.<sup>11</sup>

At its heart, however, each meditation forges a unique path to directly and immediately connect, experience, and realize the real, perfect and ultimate. The Buddhist tantra is penetrated by “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), as examined in the previous chapter, not only to include nonsubstantiality but also what undergirds the true nature of all phenomena, especially inseparable from bliss of enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*). Reading Porete’s “nothingness” in relation to such emptiness was my humble suggestion as her notion leads one Soul to the heart of divine nature, and the blissful, spiritual union with Love/God as well. My approach in this chapter thus begins with an appreciation of the dynamism the mystical union bursts with. The symbolic

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-4.

<sup>11</sup> This is the reason why I am aiming for a comparison at the level of theological and philosophical principle. In *MSS* 131; “and so my will is martyred and my love is martyred” (168). Love initiates this martyrdom of “created nature” within the Soul, leading her to nothing, hence likeness and equality its divinity. In my limited observation, in Tantric setting, the “union of divine couple” is reenacted by sexual union (Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 108-9). The intensity of meditation on the union, even ecstasy, is no less powerful in Porete, but it remains purely spiritual. This conundrum stays unresolved as the history of divide, or very difficult coexistence, between the sacred and sexual runs deep in many faith traditions, even in mystical contemplations. Yet in terms of the direction and language of such union, there still exists commonalities between Porete and Buddhist tantric visualization, almost in an inexplicable coincidence.

significance of Porete's Love is communicable with Buddhist tantric revelation of Divine Feminine, allowing Porete's Soul join the transformation of self, subjectivity, or 'soul' in relation to the deity's transcendence.<sup>12</sup>

With Buddhist "nondual insight"<sup>13</sup> and the realization of emptiness and liberation in mind, Porete's deification becomes much simpler to comprehend with the status of nothingness as the very nothingness becomes a figure and the presence of deity and the self's relation to Goddess. Focus of my analysis is not technically a historical comparison between Divine Feminine, as the existence of Buddhist goddesses' pantheon alone is worth many encyclopedic research. Rather, the role and status of Buddhist tantric Goddesses and Beguine mystics' feminine, Love and her soon-to-be-deified lover Soul will be studied on conceptual level, at once philosophically and theologically, regarding *what* they represented and meant for the psyche, subjectivity and soul of those mystics and practitioners who devoted themselves to the nondual union with such deities, realizing enlightenment and liberation.<sup>14</sup> Of course, it is my sincerest desire to distinguish my conceptual approach, from pure philosophical distillation of what the Goddess in Buddhist world symbolizes, standing in temporarily and conventionally. On one hand, this is a required step to accomplish a comparison with Beguine tradition, especially with Porete whose notion of nothingness, annihilation and the union between human and divine

---

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 10-1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>14</sup> "One might say that the identity of the Great Goddess.. has more to do with *what* she is rather than *who* she is." Tracy Pintchman, "The Goddess as Fount of the Universe: Shared Visions and Negotiated Allegiances in Purāṇic Accounts of Cosmogogenesis" in *Seeking Mahādevī: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 90-1. Following Pintchman, I conclude that it is not possible to approach the Goddess tradition as singularly, succinctly or systematically as one would, for the nature or identity of God in Christian theology. Precisely because "Goddess's personal identity.. Who she is can and does *change* from text to text, depending on sectarian biases (my italics)." The purpose of my chapter, therefore, does not trace particular identification of goddess(es) in different textual, temporal, geographical location. Rather, Pintchman also comes to take up the "principles" the Goddess embodies and this way we can focus on the "cosmogonic potency that transcends particular form and personal identity.. her identity as a creative force manifest in cosmogony and the foundation and source of all that is persists across sectarian contexts."



correlates the case of Buddhism, and the Tantric movement in particular. Shaw writes on the basic premise of Tantra:

Tantra is a religious paradigm, found within both Hinduism and Buddhism, that emerged to historical view within both traditions at about same time, namely, the seventh and eighth centuries CE. The central premise of Tantra is that the world is intrinsically radiant, blissful, and pure. The goal of Tantric practice is to remove the veil of illusion that obscures the pristine perfection of the world and thus to experience the innate ecstasy of being at the heart of reality. Toward this end, one of the main Tantric methods is to visualize oneself as a deity in order to discover one's divine qualities and powers.<sup>15</sup>

This brief paragraph, in parallel, sums up what Porete's Soul may go through in *MSS* as well. In pure freedom of Love, the Perfect Love, embraces Soul in ecstatic, rapturous quality of union ("always without herself") (*MSS* 59) as the Soul restores the oneness with Love as the "resplendence of the sun and its radiant beam" resides "in the soul" (*MSS* 78, 101). On the other hand, as Shaw insightfully observes, "the ontological status of the deities" in Buddhist world always had to face the conundrum whether a practitioner has to regard the deities as illusory, at most conventional, to accord with the doctrine of emptiness.

..The doctrine of emptiness remained operative as the underlying principle of pantheon. The Tantric practice of deity yoga (*deva-yoga*), which culminates in identification and merging with the envisioned deity, further dispels any view of the deities as concrete entities essentially "separate" or "different" from humans. The emptiness of the deities, like the concept of emptiness itself, is a nuanced metaphysical view that easily lends itself to misinterpretation. This subtle teaching regarding the impermanence and interdependence of all phenomena is commonly mistaken for nihilism, a denial of any existence whatsoever. Thus, some western thinkers conclude that the deities are "unreal" or "nonexistent" in an absolute sense, interpreting their emptiness as nonreality. According to this view, the deities do not exist in any sense, except as human inventions or useful tools for spiritual development.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, Shaw continues to point out that hasty, wholesale rejection of Buddhist deities' place is "crude absolutism" in and of itself. As I have briefly surveyed in the previous chapter, the Tibetan Tantric tradition does uphold the space of transcendental and theological, and this

---

<sup>15</sup> Shaw, "Is Vajrayogini a Feminist? A Tantric Buddhist Case Study," in Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl eds., *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 166.

<sup>16</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 10.

applies to preserving the reality of deities as well.<sup>17</sup> It is of paramount importance to note that acknowledging the role and work of deities essentially promotes the “interaction between deity and devotee” toward “the human-divine relationship in *nondual* terms.”<sup>18</sup> This is at the heart of current chapter and others, as the comparative motif beaming at the Soul-Love relation in *MSS*. Without the dynamic relation between human/Soul/practitioner and the divine/Love/Goddess, a need for movement or transformation toward nondual union, also loses its cause and meaning. Further, both in the case of Porete and Buddhist Goddesses, it is the union that motivates and manifests the realization of all virtues, qualities. For example, the Goddess encourages the practitioner by claiming that she is the form of Buddha-body (emanation), the goddess of wisdom (wisdom *dākini*) and the goddess who personifies Perfection of Wisdom (Skt.

*Prajñāpāramitā*; Tib. shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa), famously known as Mother Yum

Chenmo in Tibetan:

Tārā smiled, then after a quick glance at the *dākinis* of her entourage, she said: “Yogini, do not feel discouraged! In the course of previous lives you have studied and mastered the meaning of the scriptures of Sūtra and Tantra. So today it is sufficient for me to reveal this meaning to you through mere symbols. **You are a mind emanation of the Great Mother Yum Chenmo: we are inseparable. You are the wisdom *dākini*, the sovereign of the Vajradhātu and the source of the liberation of all phenomena.** Don't lose heart. Keep your determination.”

But Machig replied: **“How could I possibly be an emanation of the Great Mother, inseparable from you? And in what way am I the source of the liberation of all phenomena? And where is the residence of the Great Mother?”**

Tārā answered, “Yogini, although in your innermost heart there is clear knowledge about the past, listen carefully and I'll explain it to you. The one known as the primordial Mother Yum Chenmo is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, emptiness, the essence of reality [*dharmatā*] free from the two veils. She is the pure expanse of emptiness, the knowledge of the non-self. She is the matrix which gives birth to all the Buddhas of the three times. “However, so as to enable all sentient beings to accumulate merit, **the Great**

---

<sup>17</sup> *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 10: “Bokar Rinpoche.. explains that the deities are not illusions produced by the human mind. However, human envisionments of deities are mental fabrications that do not correspond precisely to the forms of those deities. In that sense, Bokar Rinpoche concedes, a deity can be said to be a creation of the human psyche. This illusory status, however, holds true only of the human concept and image of a deity, not of the deity himself or herself. The deities are realities that transcend this world and ‘spontaneously assume...various forms...to benefit beings.’” Shaw here quotes Bokar Rinpoche, *Tara The Feminine Divine* (ClearPoint Press 1999): 12, 15, 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 10-1 (italics added).

**Mother appears as an object of veneration** through my aspirations and prayers for the sake of all beings.<sup>19</sup>

In a more daring fashion, Porete's Soul is elevated to the loftiest level, carrying on with the endorsement she receives from Love. Now, she is ruling over, as the Lady of the Virtues, and furthermore her project of becoming divine is utterly complete:

**Love.** This Soul, says Love, is Lady of the Virtues, Daughter of the Deity, Sister of Wisdom and the Bride of Love.

**The Soul.** ..but I am, says this Soul, and I am and I shall be always without fail, for Love has no beginning or end or bounds, and I am nothing but Love. How then could I have any such limits?

**..Love.** ..says Love to this Soul who is herself Love and nothing else but Love, once Love in its divine goodness had cast Reason and the works of the Virtues under its feet and brought them to death, with no return. (MSS 87, 112)

Porete's fiery union between Soul and Love finds a spectacular similarity here, in the visualization of deities, as the most central paradigm of fire and burning in Porete is a spiritual one toward union, a thorough "mental and emotional purification"<sup>20</sup> tantric practitioners also have to undergo:

**The deities at the secret place burn;**

The chiefs of the four *cakras* also burn completely.

**The fire,** having touched the A at the navel,

**Burns** [the A] and touches the HAM [at the crown],  
Whereby a stream of elixir drips, filling the four *cakras*,

**[Whose] deities burn, increasing their great bliss.**

All the Buddhas of the three times,

Living beings, love, hatred, and so forth...

Become inseparable from the breath and are condensed and absorbed.

**The fire burns away impurities.**

**In a state of emptiness and deep compassion,**

The natural mind doesn't do anything.

[In] the authentic state of nonconceptual clarity,

Maintain stainless intrinsic awareness.

---

<sup>19</sup> Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 83. Primary translation in Jérôme Edou, *Machig Labdrön and the Foundations of Chöd* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 150-2 (boldface is mine). Tārā is the Buddhist Goddess, Savioress, the universal Buddha mother, who is most widely worshipped in Indo-Tibetan culture. Machig Labdrön (1055-1149) is a Tibetan tantric Buddhist master who established Chöd lineage. She is considered as a reincarnation of Yeshe Tsogyal, the preeminent mother of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 124. See also MSS 25, 45: "But he who burns with this fire without seeking such matter, without having it or wanting to have it, sees all things so clearly that he values them as they must be valued. For such a Soul has no matter in her which prevents her from seeing clearly, so that she is alone in it through the power of true humility."

Hold the breath and **purify** oneself of all biases [of dualistic thought].<sup>21</sup>

Porete's image of fire, in my limited perspective, exhibits a far more Buddhist sensibility than a Christian one: "This Soul, says Love, is flayed by mortification, and burned by the ardor of the fire of charity, and her ashes are strewn by the nothingness of her will upon the high seas.. She who is such no longer seeks God through penance or through any sacrament of Holy Church, not through reflections or words or works.. not through divine knowledge or divine love or divine praise" (MSS 85, 109).<sup>22</sup> Porete has no rite tied to body or sophisticated symbolism in tantric visualization, but the importance of burning impurities to reach the state of primordial nothingness, "effecting the subtlest stages of purification.. the metaphysical insights that scale the final peaks of meditative attainment"<sup>23</sup> is deeply and quintessentially shared in *secret*.

**Love.** They are astounded at the one who is at the peak of his mountain.. by a not-thinking which is shut up and **sealed in the secret enclosure of the greatest purity** of so excellent a Soul; and no-one can open this enclosure or unseal it, nor shut it up when it is opened, unless the noble Far-Near from afar and from nearby closes it and opens it, for he alone has the keys to it. (MSS 98, 122; boldface is mine)

These examples of dialogues and meditations describe a manner of union through which the status of female adept/mystic/practitioner is uplifted to the nobility of the Divine Feminine. The dialogues exist because there is relationality: between Love and Soul in Porete and the Divine Feminine/Buddhist Goddesses and a female practitioner Porete will be the mystic-philosopher exemplar whose strong noetic/philosophical experience is infused with depth of

---

<sup>21</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 124. Primary passage is from sDe-dge 2140, fol. 208b.5-7 (The emphasis in boldface is mine).

<sup>22</sup> Porete's insistent meditation of nothing, shared by Eckhart, therefore, renders her thinking communicable with Zen.

<sup>23</sup> Shaw, 125. The transformation of Soul on different stages of elevation is also a strong motif found in Porete. The ascension toward Divine nobility and lineage in Porete, from my perspective, delivers an account of Soul that reechoes Tantric Buddhist woman's self-understanding. Both representing esoteric strand in Christian and Buddhist traditions, Buddhist noble eightfold paths (Sanskrit: *mārga*) becomes much more sophisticated in the stages of Tantric meditation that combine the element of spontaneous realization of enlightenment and a continuing practice. See also Robinson (*Nobility and Annihilation*, 91) and Porete (esp. MSS 88) for a fascinating gradation toward nondual union between human and divine.

existence to be transformed. Moreover, embodiment of goddesses provides the women who worship them with a radical “affirmation of femaleness” as they embrace the “innate divinity” within them.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, my chapter agrees and advocates Shaw’s perspective on deity-yoga and the status of Goddesses. Can one describe the essence of God without Love? Can another practice the emptiness and realize the liberation by oneself? Is the deification of Mother, Lady, Daughter, or Love also merely another category to be emptied? How can one cultivate and materialize all the praiseworthy virtues without a model? This is a question worth its own chapter, but both the Beguine Porete and Buddhist tantric women will embrace the personified Divine Feminine in their own soul (Porete) and mind/body (tantra). In the previous chapter, I have reconstructed a potential for convergence between Porete’s Soul and Buddhist (no-)self. There, the Buddhist pretext of “personalism” (*pudgalavāda*) with Tibetan philosophical stream of *zhentong* (empty-of-other) meditation exhibits a possibility of *transcendental* interpretation. Even this move still requires much effort, but the conversation cannot be complete without the theological (or *theological*) aspect of Porete’s mysticism of becoming divine. Both Porete’s Lady Love and the visualized deities in tantric tradition, with its emphasis on unity, transcend a question whether nonduality is achieved through personification or an abstract thing, as deification embraces both.

Despite the prevalence, or historical eminence of nondualism in Buddhist tradition, most well-known texts are philosophical, hence lack the kind of direct endorsement of being a *woman*, specifically. We can surmise that the form of one’s body, the gender and sexuality in Buddhist tradition, is bound to dissolve for the sake of emptiness, and enlightenment. But the following analysis by feminist scholars will show why women’s historical, social, and political reality of

---

<sup>24</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 39-44.

everyday repression and oppression may have understood such project as over-burdening rather than un-burdening, the liberation. In tantric meditation, Buddhist tantra presents a distinctive and “spiritually transformative” understanding of “femaleness and maleness,”<sup>25</sup> mirroring the fluid gender traversal in Beguine mysticism at best, which I will explain further as this chapter streams along.<sup>26</sup>

### *Gender in focus*

The component of nondual union with the fierce, wise and compassionate female deities is immensely important for my project as whole, but especially for Marguerite Porete. The centrality of love and relationality in *MSS* complicates the roadmap of soul. Lady Love, the most distinguished and mighty nobility in this drama of nondual union, is the personified Divine Feminine who engages in the dialogue with Porete’s Soul. It is in the form of dialogue between Love and Soul that Porete’s nothing-everything bipolarity / annihilation-deification dialectic unfolds. This chapter will probe the thought of Porete, as an analogue closest to Buddhist tantric contemplation involving goddesses, at once philosophical and personal. Therefore, here, the gendered and spiritual aspect of such union will be studied, aided by Tantric Buddhist

---

<sup>25</sup> Shaw, 11.

<sup>26</sup> See also Pranshu Samdarshi, “The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions,” *The Delhi University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2014): 97: “A deeper understanding of tantric iconography reveals that much of the symbolism of tantra has been derived from a profound practical basis which is often esoteric in nature. Tantric manuals suggest that the figures are not icons of beings, be it god or human, but that they are icons of ideas in a stylized mode.. the concept of a goddess appears in the framework of non-theism, which means that there is no external supreme being, and hence all religious symbols of a divinity, rituals and doctrines have just conventional utility rather than being the ultimate truth.” In my previous chapter, I have suggested this is the rather popular, classic deconstructive view on Buddhism which juxtaposes possibility of theism, or any theological dimension at complete odds with itself— understandably so, concerning the core Buddhist doctrine of emptiness that staves off any entities claiming to be independently real, permanent, absolute or eternal. However, as Shaw’s comprehensive analysis shows, such line of thinking, at its own risk of nihilism, does not fully reflect the total picture of Buddhist tradition, which indeed originated from a broader “Indic divine landscape.. the spectrum of Buddhist goddesses is similar in scope and type to that found in pan-Indic and Hindu religiosity.” Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 12.

practitioner's meditation and ritualized union with the Buddhist deities, especially the sacred feminine figures, such as *yoginīs*, *dākinīs*, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who personify the perfection.<sup>27</sup> Especially when Porete's Love is often portrayed as romantic partner radically equalized in union, Tibetan Buddhist women's writing that deals with the dimension of *faith* and love manifest dependence on what might be essentially *theological* categories.<sup>28</sup>

Porete's antagonism against any association with embodied, visionary experiences has been duly noted, and will keep coming up. The reason has been studied from multiple perspectives, but scholarship on Porete largely would agree that embodiment was regarded as obstruction to be "overcome."<sup>29</sup> Porete's deification, however, is not explicable without the presence of Divine Feminine and the feminization of Soul, and all the classified, celestial Virtues as mothers, daughters and sisters. Though the process is highly philosophical and without her own ritual or magical power, looking closely and deeply the comparable models of Hindu and Buddhist tantric Goddesses, Porete's Soul-Love union can be much better comprehended with the glass of "erotic mysticism" prevalent in the context of broader South Asian nondual, mystical philosophies.<sup>30</sup> This topic shall, too, reappear in the next chapter, as the understanding of eroticism can widely vary from the symbolic to the actual.

---

<sup>27</sup> The current chapter owes a great deal from preceding works by comparative theologians, philosophers and historians who are not surprisingly feminists. For instance, Giorko's brief essay "Salvation" provides Porete's proximities (nothingness, freedom, stages of union) to basics of Buddhism: *nirvāṇa* (liberation), *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *mārga* (path) toward such liberation. However, these standards mostly come from the early Buddhist discourses. On the topic of nondual union, my previous and current chapters will benefit from the flourishing of Tibetan Tantric Buddhist tradition such as Anne Klein's study of nondualism in Yeshé Tsogyel ritual, and Sarah Jacoby's demonstrations of "relational selfhood" (or relational autonomy). The feminine divine in Buddhist and Beguine mysticism will continue to be explored, in conversation with Indo-Tibetan goddess traditions. The presence of *Minne* (Love) in Beatrice of Nazareth and Hadewijch will also be interpreted in this vein.

<sup>28</sup> As a student of Christian theology, without the support of colleagues who are students and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, these invaluable resources would have not been available for my dissertation. I especially thank my colleague Olga Leitch who introduced me the life of Machig Labdrön, among many influential Buddhist philosophers, masters and teachers.

<sup>29</sup> Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Kerry Martin Skora, "Abhinavagupta's Erotic Mysticism: The Reconciliation of Spirit and Flesh." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 1 (2007): 63–88.

The Goddess, the feminized Soul, and their exclusive union apparently perplexed her contemporary readers. Her emphasis on the notion of nobility went against the traditional tone of “radically debased nature of fallen humanity” thereby elevating the free agency of Soul, reducing the authority of absolution, yet reclaiming the noble Ladyship.<sup>31</sup> As *MSS*’s spiritual orientation often speaks of the highest, most noble and perfect contemplation, undoing any aspect of creation, nature, body and even willing. In this sense, Porete’s deification resists any simple categorization, but open more avenues of understanding mystical theology as it speaks to powerful divine-human relation in feminine terms, yet in the mode of philosophical theology and poetic contemplation, simultaneously touching on the gnostic emphasis on divine knowledge and illumination.<sup>32</sup> The notion of illumination is understood as the gift of Love’s graciousness. However, the illumination itself as expressed in Porete’s Divine Light, and the Illumined Soul was a much debated, divided topic as the distinction between divinity and natural beatitude was not to be conflated. Therefore, the use of illumination in Porete is yet again relatable to the Luminous Mind of Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>33</sup> In Porete’s mystical theology, illumination is not a topic to be passed over as it is essential for the highest states of union:

**The Fifth State.** ...And this **movement of divine light which is spread by light within the Soul shows to the spirit’s will** that he who is deals justly, so that she who is not, the Soul, may wish her will to

---

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, “Introduction,” in *Nobility and Annihilation*, xi. See also *Ibid.*, 103: “For Porete, certain noble, elect souls can recognize their inborn status and become annihilated; base souls cannot and never will. Hildegard and Hadewijch never claimed that any soul could attain such heights.”

<sup>32</sup> Porete’s meditations on illumination, or, “divinely illumined cognition” was strongly objected by academic theologians of her times, so as her mystical core on “union with the will of God.” More historical context should be found in Kent Emery, Jr., “Foreword,” xviii-xix. Although my intention, along with many contemporary scholars of mysticism, starts with deep philosophical and theological appreciation of Porete’s meditation, the tension between her independent method and “men of theology and scholars” (*MSS*, 9) is quite obvious.

<sup>33</sup> See Duckworth, *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature*, 109: “This shift from a development model of yogic perception to a discovery model of innate yogic perception mirrors a shift in the way that “knowledge” is characterized: from a (conventional) determinate judgment to an (ultimate) ineffable knowledge. This distinction is clearly reflected in the Tibetan terms for two types of cognition: consciousness (*rnam shes, vijñāna*) and gnosis (*ye shes, jñāna*). As opposed to consciousness, it is only gnosis that is really nonconceptual (as even sense-perceptions are conceptual in some sense in the former, as we saw above), so this gnosis is held to (p.110) be the only reliable source of knowledge in Mahāmudrā traditions like the one represented by the twelfth-century Drikung Kagyü forefather, Jikten Sumgön (1142–1217). We have seen how the Jonang tradition similarly delineates between consciousness (*rnam shes*), the relative truth, and gnosis (*ye shes*), the ultimate truth.”



move from the place where it is, and where it must not be, so that it can be returned to where it is not, whence it came, and where it must be.

Now the Soul's Will sees, **by the light of the spreading of divine light**—which light is given to this Will to return it to God, to where it cannot return without this light—that it cannot progress by itself if it does not separate itself from her own willing... and **by the light she sees** that one's Will must will only the divine will and not any other, and that it was for this that this Will was given her.. **This gift brings about this perfection in her, and changes her into Love's nature**, which delights her with consummate peace...

...and so this Soul is an abyss of such evil.. **This Soul sees herself to be so, and does not see it. And who makes her see herself?** It is the depth of humility, which seats her on the throne, where she rules without pride. No pride can enter by force there, **because she sees herself, and yet she does not see herself; and this not seeing makes her to see herself perfectly.**

...Now she sees by herself, and she knows the divine goodness, and this knowing of divine goodness makes her look again at herself;

**The Sixth State.** The sixth state is when the **Soul does not see herself at all**, whatever the abyss of humility she has within herself, nor does she see God, whatever the exalted goodness he has. But God of his divine majesty **sees himself in her**, and by him **this Soul is so illumined that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself; and so she sees nothing except herself, for whoever sees that which is sees nothing except God himself, who sees himself in this very Soul by his divine majesty...** **But this Soul, thus pure and illumined, sees neither God nor herself, but God sees himself of himself in her, for her, without her**, who—that is, God—shows to her that there is nothing except him... And therefore goodness, of his goodness, **sees itself by divine light in the sixth state, in which the Soul is illumined.** And so there is no-one except him who is, and who sees himself of his divine majesty in this state of being, through the transformation of love of that goodness which has been poured forth and has been restored to him. And so of himself he sees himself in such a creature, without appropriating anything from the creature; all is his own, but his very own.. when Love takes hold, Love who of itself by its exalted greatness has paid this debt.<sup>34</sup>

In this sense, the illumination permits the Soul to see and *not* see, in order to see only Love/Divine Feminine. By this direct communication and perfection through divine light, Porete reveals her own critique of clerical and university theologians, —mostly appearing as Reason in *MSS*— and this may have stemmed from and continued the polarization between their teachings. Although any religious tradition can incorporate more doctrinal, institutional bent with the mystical, the coexistence is not always without vehement attack on each other. In the case of Porete, the work was first viciously scrutinized as book of errors, claimed as heresy, then destroying the possibility of coexistence in the vilest form of persecution. Yet I am not arguing a new place for Porete within the history of christianity, not at all. Rather, this chapter contributes

---

<sup>34</sup> *MSS* 118, 143-6 (boldface added).

by connecting the meaning of her work, influence and the context with the women-centered, meditative tantric Buddhist strand– with immediate resonance, with a shared understanding that a female mystic has the equality and independence in pursuing spiritual path. This is why the chapter reaches out to the embedded theologies and philosophies of the goddess traditions (Kinsley), and analysis of woman in practice and goddesses in Tantric tradition (Shaw) that appreciates gender in focus.

Proving this point will be the focus of my chapter, as the most relevant feminist scholarship will be reviewed. But before doing so, a brief reading of Eckhart, with the aforementioned issue of ethics from the previous chapter should be mentioned. Having gender in focus, it is of great significance that Porete disparages the dimension of (female) body, or any embodied emotion. However, the Soul is nonetheless speaking as female, to the Divine Feminine/Love, and as her very self in the union. Therefore, the issue of gender should be considered from the mystic who perceived it as an obstacle, and also from the women who ritualized the life of Divine Feminine within their own body, incorporating contemplation for union in their femaleness. This leads us to the last reason why comparison would be more useful in reading Porete. After all, *MSS 108* is titled: “How Meditation of Pure Love has only one intention.” Single intention in meditative absorption (Garfield 2015; Finnigan 2018) draws an illumined perception in the deep Buddhist contemplation: “the mode of engagement that emerges from an awakened experience of the world, and a mode of engagement that reflects that awakened awareness.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, in my previous chapter, I have suggested that the Soul and Charity’s role taking leave of Virtue in Porete should be understood in terms of an ethic based on the character rather than injunction of code, as the comportment of self to the world and the

---

<sup>35</sup> Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 316.

whole inner transformation; This Buddhist ethics of *seeing* the true nature of reality—  
 “transformation of vision, and consequent transformation of mode of being.”<sup>36</sup> Back to the  
 importance of perception in Porete, it is suggested that the way of nothingness is greater in terms  
 of its abyssal quality as it heads toward illumination (*MSS* 91, 116: “from Love into  
 Nothingness, and from Nothingness into the Illumining of God”). Any serious reader of Eckhart  
 might find such an ethic familiar as his own famed ethic of virtue, justice and mercy flow out of  
 God’s being. Eckhart, not dissimilar from Porete, also detests forms of performances that are  
 external to the state of indistinct union. Nevertheless, as suggested in the prior chapter, he may  
 not allow an expression as ‘belittled’ Reason under the divine knowledge and understanding  
 Porete distinguishes from; as pointed out before, for Eckhart, the intellect receives the Divine  
 Light, the Word/Logos. Supreme goodness and mercy is present, yet Eckhart always returns to  
 having ‘more will, more love’ (*Counsel* 10., 256) almost in complete contrast to Porete’s search  
 for divine willing only:

**Love.** So the Soul wishes for nothing, says Love, since she is free; for **he is not free who wishes for anything by his own inner will**, whatever the thing be that he wishes for. For in wishing God to do his will for God’s own honor, he is thereby a slave to his own self; and he who wishes this wishes it only so that God’s will be accomplished in him and in others. It was for such men, says Love, that God refused his kingdom.

**..The Soul.** ..for since **their will remains in them, they are the slaves of their will. It is into such slavery, says this Soul, that Soul enters who has complete faith in these two Virtues, that is Reason and Dread, and in that fearful tyrant-mistress Will**; but he alone is free, says this Soul set Free, who is governed by Faith and Love, for they bring him out of all bondage, so that he has no fear of what is fearful, nor longing for any of the things that delight. (*MSS* 48, 67-8; boldface mine)

Readers may be reminded of the well-known *Ser.* 52, Eckhart’s preaching on the most intimate poverty I have examined in the previous chapter (nn 189-190) that he nonetheless draws similar conclusion toward detachment and nothingness, and overall carries the core of Porete’s union. On this topic, scholar of mysticism Charlotte Radler has eloquently defended Eckhart, by

---

<sup>36</sup> Garfield, 309.

reevaluating the component of Love permeating in its interconnectedness with being and intellect.<sup>37</sup> Radler's presentation provides us with delightfully ample examples of Eckhart on his rapturous, nuptial imageries and languages to shine on God as Love.<sup>38</sup> Radler's interpretation and her own translations of Eckhart's commentaries and sermons radiate his theological ingenuity, on those Beguine-reminiscent radical metaphors for God and Love, despite their temporality just as any discursive designation. It is true that God and God's love occupies central significance in Eckhart's writings. At the end of her defense, Radler implies that gendered, essentialized categories of mysticism into "affective" or "speculative" division. That trend was a judgment somewhat unfair to Eckhart, according to Radler, as she argues his mysticism has been understood almost exclusively from the latter, without embracing the unique content and style of Eckhart has fused the two as one notion, and skillfully so.<sup>39</sup>

It is generally true, Eckhart then exclaims, "Leave God to work in you, let him do it,"<sup>40</sup> with his nature and grace wholly unknown to us, yet still in work. This, too, already finds expression in Porete: "What is done Love's own self does, for of myself I can do nothing, unless my beloved himself do it in me" (*MSS* 36, 56). The famed prayer of Eckhart to rid one's soul of God is also present in Porete:

**The Soul.** Ah, my Lord, says this Soul, you have suffered so much from us, and you have so worked in us, by yourself, of yourself..

Now work in us of yourself, for us, without us, as it will please you, Lord. For from now on I shall not care about myself. **I unburden myself of you, and of myself, and of my neighbors;** and I shall teach you how, **I abandon you, and me, and my neighbors, all into the knowledge of your divine wisdom.. for your divine will alone.** (*MSS* 92, 117; boldface is mine)

---

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte C. Radler, "'In Love I Am More God': The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism." *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 171–98.

<sup>38</sup> Please consult with another CWS edition of *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*. translated and edited by Bernard McGinn, Frank J. Tobin, and Elvira Borgstädt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> Please look at Latin Sermon VI "God Is Love" vv. 52-5; and the powerful *Ser.* 69.

<sup>40</sup> *Couns.* 23, 284 (in CWS, from the German Works [DW]).

On divine willing, Eckhart writes:

Now you say: "Alas, God does such great things in lots of people, and they become so transmuted in the divine life, and God does all this in them and they do nothing."

Thank God for what he does in them, and if he gives this to you, take it, for God's sake; and if he does not give it, then you ought willingly to lack it, and intend nothing but him, and do not be upset, whether God does your works for you or whether you perform them yourself; because if you intend God alone, he must perform them, whether he like it or not

Counsel 23. Of interior and exterior works (CWS 284)

So what is the remaining difference? Although the message of nondual union is clearly there, the kind of life-or-death commitment to divine willing in Porete is quite absent in Eckhart. The level of nakedness and nothingness in Eckhart must have been adjusted so that it can be properly heard for pastoral and pedagogical purpose. In short, a writing was supposed to suit the audience. Unlike Porete's union develops with a direct dialogical relation between Soul and Love, Eckhart preaches, consoles and teaches. Therefore, the style of expression diverges along with consideration of feminine in the act of union. In Porete, we get an image such as...:

**Love.** ...She sees **ever more clearly** the fairness and **radiance of the sun and its radiance's splendor**, which gives her as food the sap of the tall cedar (MSS 22, 41; boldface mine).

In Eckhart's scheme, although highly elevated, the most exalted feminine figures are Virgin (Mary) and Mother (Eve), promoting virtues through them. This is also a move in opposite direction, leaving no direct route for a female believer to connect with these figures as intimately as Porete did. In MSS, Porete, too, recognizes that the nothingness experienced by created, willful, human Soul is seething with potentials of evil and sin. Yet, as the Soul loves the divine, absolute good of Love/God transforms her, and unites her into the pure, simple, pre-created state. This dramatic journey of return of Soul to Love is observed on the ground of metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology of evil and good. But the primary mode of resolution is then mediated by *no* prayers, *not* constantly seeking, and most significantly, meditations that unify Soul and Love, as one. In MSS, typified by the figure of Mary, often contrasted to Martha

who exemplified the actives, the divine knowledge is addressed and conferred to “true contemplatives” who has no will of their own, except to receive the divine (*MSS* 11, 22).<sup>41</sup>

In Porete’s world, a feminine Soul was able to be graced with knowledge of divine love, and self-knowledge of nothingness with certainty of union. In Eckhart’s sermons and treatises, one may seek to do so, but a proclamation in female voice as in *MSS* is not anticipated at all. It is true that Eckhart’s way of meditation may connect with more mainstream, various philosophical developments in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism even better. However, having surveyed the writings of both mystics, it is hard to shake an intuition that the problem of gender and sexuality cannot be minimized in how they have envisioned union with Divine. In Eckhart, everything Porete prohibited makes comeback: reason, will, virtues and works (*CWS* 275-85). Even knowing nothing is construed from Intellect, and this Aristotelian synthesis with scriptural theology is fundamental in his reading. Not to introduce a dichotomy that the return of the four media (reason, will, virtues and works) itself is necessarily masculine, there has to be room to think whether, in the time of Porete, a female mystic could have exerted her agency, flourishing with those means under the medieval system. Even if it had been possible, the kind of fluid union Porete presents always transcends the scope of media, therefore, the realm of creation. Fundamentally, their existence is all tied to serving, and at best, retaining the glimpse of divine— yet never fully reflecting or becoming, as this clearly meant a trespassing the distinction between divine and human, even though the true end of Christian spirituality does allude that possibility.<sup>42</sup> Porete reimagined the entire system with a female gender, not against

---

<sup>41</sup> See also *Ibid.*, n. 1.

<sup>42</sup> “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.” Gospel of John 14:10-2 (Revised Standard Version)

the Father-Son structure of union, but pushed further beyond, her new interpretation and system to the true end she believed in. Here, note what Hollywood says: “Only such a radical negation of creatureliness will make possible the complete transformation of the soul into God which she desires.”<sup>43</sup> I wonder the negation of creatureliness, along with reason, will, virtues and works, was a preferred choice of meditation, or a necessity for Porete. In order to be truly free from male-dominated, male-oriented society, Porete had to strip herself of inveterate, demeaning gaze of the given structures, and self-create a Soul, who is free from embodied, creatureliness. Often accused of nihilistic desecration, she had to redesign a process of female becoming reaching for the un-created, pre-created state in order to transcend the many limits of this created world. Porete’s new temporality actually always had existed since, and even before the beginning of time: “*In the beginning* this Soul lived by the life of grace” (MSS 59; my italics). This disjuncture may tentatively explain the tragic absence of body in her mystical union, and yet, even the invisibility paradoxically amplifies the centrality of gender and sexuality in reading Porete’s nondual union.

This is precisely when the study of tantra and Tibetan Buddhism becomes not only a useful sounding board for Porete, but also a very realization of what Eckhart largely speculates. The contemplation on God’s being in Eckhart has achieved abyssal level of depth and rigor, hence remains unmatched in the *imitatio dei* of Christian West. Nevertheless, as I have explained in the previous chapter, Eckhart’s method and meaning is absorbed into his mode of philosophical theology: largely subsumed under speculation. The message of union is still floating, but the intensity and radicality of perfected Soul in Porete may be better aligned with deity yoga in Tantric Buddhism. Porete also equates the Soul-brought-to-Nothing as the

---

<sup>43</sup> *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 118.

Illumined Soul. And yet, comparison with Buddhist meditation is much more instructive because a feminized, illumined life boasts of knowing nothing, and seeking no more for God rather boldly: “..she has no business with God. She does not lack him, so why should she seek him?” (*MSS* 100, 124). In this regard, we may only be able to find a language of passion and complete union, in the form of spiritual ecstasy:

**Love.** ..So there is in this Soul the beam of divine knowledge drawing her out of herself without herself, into an astounding divine peace, supported upon a crest of the outflowing love of that Jealous Lover on high, who gives to her supreme freedom in all places.

**The Soul.** ..And this union of complete peace joins and secures me through the supreme excellence of the creation prepared by the divine being, that being from whom I have my being who is being.

**Love.** When this Soul, says Love, is so drawn by him without herself, by God, for herself, that is the divine operation; nor was ever once any work of charity performed by human body which approached or could approach to this work.. It is true, says Love, for the work of the creature, that is to say the work performed by man, cannot be compared with the divine work, performed by God in the creature, out of his goodness for the creature. (*MSS* 71, 92)

For medieval women mystics, description of divine/human union often evokes romantic, rapturous language, charged with palpably sensual connotations. Porete’s Rapture Chapter in its entirety captures the flow of sensual ecstasy and portrays the moment of nondual, indistinct union as such (see also *MSS* 72, 93; *MSS* 110, 133-4). Unsurprisingly, the implied passivity of Soul as (feminine) lover with no willpower, not without good reason, seemingly risks her own vulnerability in this rapturous union. Responding to such modernist feminist concern, Sells fully acknowledges the understandable association between the rapture/ravishment language with “a code for the enactment of rape and for the disenfranchisement of the woman.” Women and sexual oppression has been a thorny historical reality, and Sells marches on to distinguish Porete’s literary convention from misleading interpretation: “The mystical union occurs at the moment that will is abandoned, but that abandonment of will does not entail *a lack of consent*.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Sells, “The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: ‘Unsayings’ and Essentialism” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 125 (italics added).



Apophatic mysticism entails a moment of letting go of distinctions. With Porete's apophysis of desire, figured in terms of rapture, there is a similar moment of risk. Rapture entails complete abandon: abandon of will, of works, of reason, of self-vulnerability. It can occur only in a context of absolute trust. At the moment of abandon, the soul gives up all defenses, control, security. The soul annihilated in love of the divine no longer exists in the formal sense as a subject that wills and acts—the only will and act are the will and act of the deity.<sup>45</sup>

As Porete often deploys the strategy of nothingness/emptiness in order to gain everything/oneness with Love, the great hazard in Porete's rapture reveals even greater dimension of jouissance in her apophysis: the purest joy and freedom of being in love, and in magnificent union with divine. Certainly, Porete is not the first theologian or mystic who utilizes apophysis to attempt a description for an essentially ineffable mystical union. But the use of ravishment in Porete makes her writings unique for she ventures use of erotically charged term for "sexual union"<sup>46</sup> in much contrast to Eckhart's focus on virginal images. Unlike Eckhart, Porete values and portrays rapture as part of her annihilation process, although her own writing remains deeply philosophical. The only ecstasy and rapture in Porete is envisioned toward the *unitas indistinctionis* in an impeccably contemplative and philosophical manner. Summing up, Porete's evocative language of rapture or ecstasy is closer to a Tantric female Buddha Vajrayoginī's "primordial ecstasy, which is not ordinary pleasure but the innate bliss that pulses at the core of every being and is the birthright of all living creatures."<sup>47</sup>

In truth, Porete ingeniously opens the path for human Soul to realize the divine in love and within herself, and this realization need not be barren of experience *per se*, especially when it comes to mystical and ineffable union, a moment only the sense of rapture or the vocabulary of ecstasy may capture. In addition, as Hollywood's study shows Porete's notions of nothingness, annihilation and deification, and their influence and inspiration on Eckhart, it is not hard to see

---

<sup>45</sup> Sells, "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister," 125. Although large portion of this work overlaps with the author's *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, I will continue to review both essays due to their respective significance.

<sup>46</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 193.

<sup>47</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 357.

how Porete has expanded possibilities for women's mysticism this way— dodging all suspicion, charges, or even wrongful scorn against how women can mystically approach and unite with the Divine in their own way. It is indeed an audacious enterprise, and it cannot be emphasized enough that the element of rapture/ravishment is culmination of the soul's annihilation and abandonment of will, as the self-emptying transformation the Soul chooses for herself, freely. There is no room for female subjugation or violation when the protagonist and the lover are feminine and co-equal in their status. In this manner, it should be agreeable that the genuine feminist sensibility and sensitivity for unbounded female subjectivity is possibly the most shared ground with Porete's thinking.

If we are mindful of the fundamental Tantric aspect of embodiment, it will become clear that Porete's goal, and logic of meditation and transformation may eventually converge on spiritual terms, with a tantrika's "perception of herself as a divine, enlightened being with the sense of proud empowerment and universal efficacy that characterizes such a being."<sup>48</sup>

### *Most Emblematic Expression of Nondual Union in Porete*

**Love.** It is fitting, says Love, that this Soul be like the Deity, for she has been changed into God, says Love, through which she has preserved his true form..

**The Soul.** Ah, Love, says this Soul, the meaning of what has now been said has made me nothing, and the nothingness of this alone has placed in an abyss, below what is immeasurably less than nothing. And the knowledge of my nothingness, says this Soul, has given me everything, and the nothingness of this everything, says this Soul, has deprived me of orison and prayer, and I do not pray at all.

**Holy Church the Less.** And what then do you do, sweetest lady and mistress over us? Says Holy Church the Less.

**The Soul.** I rest wholly in peace, says the Soul, alone and nothing and altogether in the graciousness of the single goodness of God, without stirring myself, not with one single wish, whatever the riches that he has in him. This is the end of my work, says this Soul, always to wish for nothing. For so long as I wish for nothing, says this Soul, I am alone in him, without myself, and wholly set free, and when I wish for something, she says, I am with myself, and so I have lost my freedom. But when I wish for nothing, and have lost everything beyond my will, then I have need of nothing; being free is my support; and I want nothing from no-one.

---

<sup>48</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 117. See also *Ibid.*, 118-30 on nondual gnosis and self-creation rite (*sādhana*). Note that communion (*yuganaddha*) replaces the terminology of union, putting more emphasis on relationality.

**Love.** O most precious being, says Love, who have lost all your former customs, and having lost them, now have the custom of doing nothing, now are you truly most precious; for in truth this custom and this loss have been accomplished in the nothingness of your beloved, and you dwell in this nothingness, says Love, in all things in his will; it is his chamber, and it pleased him to remain there.

(*MSS* 51 “How this Soul is like the Deity,” 70-1)

*MSS* 51 is one of the most explicit chapters of union, explaining large sum of reasons why Porete’s version of deification was hated. Basically, it went against the recommended teaching almost on all fronts. From the mainstream church’s viewpoint, the authority being reduced into ‘the Less’ is an insult. Yet, the most problematic aspect of this union between Love and Soul, comes from the fact that the Soul’s meditation occurs in a hyper-individualist mode, over and above, and without any mediation or support from the church (‘being free is my support; and I want nothing from no-one’).<sup>49</sup> This radical move, of course, gives the feminized Soul an unmatched freedom and power, as the Soul’s reliance upon nothing intermediary connects her to the core of Divine Love. Besides, this is not the first or only time the Divine Feminine/Love praises the Soul. In fact, *MSS* has its most chapters beginning with Love addressing the spiritual qualities, singing the Soul’s nobility.<sup>50</sup> Given that the project of *MSS* ultimately resides in revealing the shared, co-equal, primordially united divinity between Love and Soul, this is only natural: “I am God, says Love, for Love is God, and God is Love, and this Soul is God through its condition of Love, and I am God through my divine nature, and this Soul is God by Love’s just law” (*MSS* 21, 41).

---

<sup>49</sup> A. Denise Starkey, “Apophysis, Detachment, and Luce Irigaray’s Search for the Divine Woman” (Paper delivered at Marquette University Colloquium, Loyola University Chicago, February 5, 2005), 7: “It is not difficult to see how Porete’s book represented a threat to the church in its diminished understanding of the Church’s role in salvation. A recurring principle in many apophatic discourses is the absence of any mediation between the soul and God.”

<sup>50</sup> See also *MSS* 10, 21: “**Love.** She can be called, says Love, by twelve names, which are: The Very Wonderful: // The Unknown: // The Most Innocent of the Daughters of Jerusalem.: // She upon whom all Holy Church is founded: // The Enlightened by Knowledge: // The Adorned by Love: // The Quickened by Praise: // The Brought to Nothing in All Things through Humility: // The One at Peace in the Divine Being through the Divine Will: // She who wishes for nothing except the Divine Will:” This kind of exaltation of female devotee, marked by humility, through the authority of divine figure can be found in Buddhist tantric goddesses’ hymns and praises.

Theologically speaking, this nothingness Porete sings of, leads the Soul into nondual union with Divine Love, dismantling and unclothing all the trace of createdness. One of the most distinguished, curiously inquired notions is “uncreated goodness.” The Soul first proclaims: “but he must do this without me, just as he created me without me of his divine goodness.”<sup>51</sup> There is pure joy of partaking in divine goodness with peace and contentment in contrast to the “one who dwells in a life of will.” The Soul then begins to praise the originally sinless free will, set forth from the uncreated goodness, and even affirms that we also have this will, “issuing from his goodness.” In this sense, though at first glance contradictory to how she’s been releasing the will entirely from her, this is precisely the move Porete makes to lead us to the pre-creative state where human and divine will is enjoined (though essentially and simply one)—from the object of resignation and annihilation. Further, from the mouth of the deviant will, a complex, interconnected nature of both divine and human wills is to be revealed:

**Errant Will.** Now I cannot be, says Errant Will, what I am to be until I am back there again where once I was, and as I was before I issued from him, as naked as is he who is; as naked as I was when I was who was not. And I must have this, if I want to have again what is mine; and otherwise I shall not have it.<sup>52</sup>

According to Sells, in Porete’s overflow of God’s goodness, this movement becomes “personal” matter as the divine “hands over its will” to the Soul as “a relinquishment that, in contrast to Plotinian emanation, puts the divine lover in some sense at the mercy of the human soul.”<sup>53</sup> In pre-created nakedness and nothingness, the Love (deity) and the Soul (human) share the horizon, in unison. And yet as the moment of creation has occurred, the divine outpouring of will quickly degenerate by “pestilence and perdition” of human willfulness. But as the Divine Love already gave away its free will to the Soul, the reunion with Love, in nothingness and

---

<sup>51</sup> MSS 111, 134.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 185.

everything, will not proceed until deity can “have back” (*ravoir, rehabere*) its will from the soul! The exchange of will is out of love, from the beginning of creation (“in which the deity gives the soul her free will”) and will be completed when “the soul gives up her will in union with the divine lover and reverts to the pre-creative state.”<sup>54</sup> This dynamic of divine dependence on human suggests a radical, subversive alternative to the more traditional, orthodox doctrine of divine impassibility. Of course, it is not Porete’s goal to completely revise the theology, but the exchange elevates the Soul’s status as God’s co-equal partner who now becomes responsible for her next move.<sup>55</sup> The vivid image of divine need for human participation will later blossom in Eckhart’s groundbreaking notion of self-birth of God in the soul as well. In contrast to Eckhart’s virginal and maternal imagery, however, Porete’s full-blown feminine Soul and her co-equal status with divine as the *beloved* could reveal an incredibly dimension, close to Buddhist nondual relation, especially in Tantric setting. From this chapter and onward, however philosophically and theologically defined, the romantic and sensual sentiment of Porete’s Love and Soul’s nondual union should be acknowledged as her most distinctive trait in *MSS*.<sup>56</sup> Naturally, the indefatigable power of Love will be consistent center of my analysis.

Now, these questions require careful reading of Porete mysticism, with further revision of what we can learn from the feminist viewpoint of self-assertion and achieve. Shaw’s

---

<sup>54</sup> Sells, 184.

<sup>55</sup> Sells, 204: “And by making the divine lover dependent upon the annihilated soul (he cannot have back what he has given except at her pleasure)..” Apparently Eckhart agreed with this vein of theological anthropology and suggests “the vulnerability of the divine” in the process of birth and self-birth: “If the soul doesn’t receive the divine emanation.. if it cannot give birth to the divine act, not only the happiness but the being of divinity is threatened” (Ibid., 177).

<sup>56</sup> Though somewhat sporadically, and only briefly will be mentioned for the purpose of current chapter, the study of Goddess traditions in India and Kashmir Śaivism in particular will be extremely useful because of the theological/divine/transcendental worldview that encompasses sensual metaphors. The ritualized sexual experience is actually identified with the highest spiritual attainment, very much similar to Porete’s description of nondual union with Love as melting or rapture. See Fūrlinger, *The Touch of Śakti*, 164.

characterization may be of great benefit here as the deity yoga combines apophatic *and* kataphatic ways of union:

In Tantric Buddhism, enlightenment is characterized as the realization of emptiness and supreme bliss. Both qualities figure prominently in Nairātmyās divine persona. One meaning of her name is "Lady of Emptiness." „One path to the realization of emptiness is to visualize and identify with a Buddha such as Nairātmyā through the Tantric practice of deity yoga, wherein the meditator envisions himself or herself to have the appearance, qualities, and enlightened awareness of the divinity.. Mahayana philosophical techniques for deconstructing the contents of ordinary experience. These analytic methods employ logic to deconstruct the subjective responses that distort reality and give rise to attachment and suffering.

..These sophisticated strategies for deconstructing the contents of ordinary experience, a classical *via negativa*, are then crowned and complemented by the *via positiva* of deity yoga. Envisioning Nairātmyā engages the imagination in the process of replacing conventional self-awareness with a divine archetype, or visual symbol, of emptiness that ushers the practitioner into the subjective realm of enlightened awareness, characterized above all by transcendent bliss, or spiritual ecstasy. The elimination of negative emotions that cause suffering to oneself and others gives rise to a rich emotional repertoire of joy, empathy, humor, and devotion to the liberation of others.<sup>57</sup>

Having carefully reviewed Porete, by this point, it should be clear that every single step of annihilation brought upon by the Soul leads her to the most powerful mode of self-assertion: becoming one with Love/God. Mystical apophasis is, of course, a humble beginning, and yet it elevates the Soul to the domain of divinity. Nothing/ness is at once the method and the destination: the preparatory purification – though accompanied with periods of philosophical, emotional, spiritual abyss and destitution – and synonym with the most primordial, uncreated divine nature, uniting itself with the Soul who always has shared that essence. In sum, this awareness of divine nothingness indeed gives the Soul everything, and more. Porete’s radical, noble vision is *via negativa* par excellence, in a sense that she both plays with nothingness/everything dialectic and transcends it. When Reason asks, “why does this book say that this Soul has everything and yet has nothing?” Love replies:

**Love.** That is true, says Love, for through divine grace this Soul has God, and he who has God has everything, and it says too that she has nothing, because everything which this Soul has within her from God through the gift of divine grace seems nothing to her, and it is nothing, too, in comparison with what

---

<sup>57</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 388.

she loves, which is in God and which he will not give to anyone except only to himself. And it is in this sense that this Soul has everything and yet has nothing, she knows everything and yet she knows nothing.<sup>58</sup>

Porete's Soul mirrors the being of God, albeit remaining ineffable and wholly unknown. But her striving for union never stops, as *MSS* shows, the blissful union is claimed and temporally achieved by the speech of Love herself. As co-equal partner of Love, the Soul unites with everything, by touching the nothingness/emptiness, and finally tastes the fluid, nondual aspect of such an indistinct meeting with Love: "Dissolution is to be completed, a mutual melting where nothing remains of the human nature, not even its name, Annihilation leads to total deification."<sup>59</sup> And if such a deified Soul is the resultant state of Porete's transformation, then perhaps the ultimate feminist agenda of female empowerment may intersect with this God(dess), after all. Having established the supreme position of feminine, Porete does not take much interest in femininity being *determined* as virgin, wife or mother, as to see the Soul as coequal and coeternal lover of divine. Of course, such a lover may embody any form of feminine models, but it is apparently Eckhart who prefers and depends upon the aforementioned designations. Porete prefers the souls to be "mistresses" over Virtues (*MSS* 8, 19). *MSS* 21 confirms that before the union with Love, "Reason and the other Virtues were the mistresses of this Soul" (41). Here, it is of utmost importance to understand that mistress here translates as Ladyship, and also *Lordship*, in starkest contrast to the modern, pejorative use of the term.<sup>60</sup> With mistress signifying the highest spiritual autonomy and authority of Soul assumes in union with Love, she is still contextualized within the resplendent adoration of rapturous union, "the exaltation of love.. wonderfully full of a love of great fidelity" (*MSS* 118, 142-3). The kind of

---

<sup>58</sup> *MSS* 13, 31.

<sup>59</sup> Juan Marin, "Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls." *The Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 1 (2010): 100.

<sup>60</sup> *MSS* 11, 26n18.

femininity Porete's Soul assumes, both in divine and human forms, with unadulterated autonomy and joy, nothing short of revolutionary invention.

*Bridging Porete and Women of Tantra: Luce Irigaray as In-Between Emanation*

..a continuing transformation that seemingly aims to elude, nomadlike (Béguine-like), the fixed points and structures of patriarchal thought. Irigaray's other woman consequently serves not as the telos or goal of a feminist philosophy, but as its instrument in the elaboration of a radically new nondualistic mode of physical, metaphysical, and ethical speculation—a future toward which the feminist speculum only points the way.<sup>61</sup>

In the previous chapter, I alluded that Porete is not an antinomian mystic whose rather unconventional disclaimer on neighbor-love takes shape as a bare critique of practice, *work* of virtues that did not flow from a pure meditation and union with Love, despite making sure of leaving them. Yet this never meant an abolition of Virtues, as she distinguishes the true mother of the Virtues from “Humility who is Humility through the work of the Virtues, for she is blood sister to Reason” (MSS 88, 113) and Eckhart too reiterates this. I have discussed Porete's implied ethics grounded on the very being of God/Love, and in surprisingly impeccable sense, Porete's view becomes alive through the words of French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray (1930 - present):

..of a love that would not just redeem but glorify us in full self-awareness: thought directed at the self and for the self that is free to love but not obliged.. Love of other without love of self, without love of God, implies the submission of the female one, the other, and of the whole of the social body.. No one has truly taught us love of God. Only love of neighbor. But how can one love one's neighbor without loving God? ..Love of neighbor is an ethical consequence of becoming divine.. Love of God has nothing moral in and of itself. It merely shows the way. It is the incentive for a more perfect becoming. It marks the horizon between the more past and the more future, the more passive and the more active-permanent and always in tension. God forces us to do nothing except become. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is: to become divine men and women, to become perfectly..<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Philippa Berry, “The Burning Glass: Paradoxes of Feminist Revelation in *Speculum*” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 243.

<sup>62</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 68.



Again, this passage has striking resemblance to Porete's notion of female subjectivity and independence over observance. This section will review Irigaray's writings and the works by feminist readers of Beguine mysticism and tantric Buddhism, equally inspired by Irigaray. Although her reflection is (post-)modern, as the following will show, renowned feminist researchers who wrestle with the late medieval representation of Divine Feminine engage with Irigaray fruitfully. In order to elucidate the connection of Irigaray with women in Buddhist tantra and Porete, first we should note what heavily characterizes Irigaray's study: her emphasis on sexual difference, hence upon the body and its *breath* in her latest work (though the work focuses on Hindu tantra and not Buddhist).<sup>63</sup> Can it be said then the Tantric tradition, in principle and in practice, fulfill the aspect of union, ardently sought out by both Irigaray and Porete? There is a stream of luminous value from the past, glistening for the future, as a beam of woman-centered becoming:

Man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity. The revival of religious feeling can in fact be interpreted as the rampart man raises in defense of his very maleness.

To posit a gender, a God is necessary: *guaranteeing the infinite*.. The goal that is most valuable is to go on becoming, infinitely.

In order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexual essence) as horizon. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject. When we become parts or multiples without a future of our own this means simply that we are leaving it up to the other, or the Other of the other, to put us together.<sup>64</sup>

This well-known observation of Irigaray makes us ponder just how forward Porete's thought must have been – to claim indistinct union with the divine, providing the necessity for Divine Feminine. Due to the particularity of Porete whose meditation requires the process of

---

<sup>63</sup> “Becoming spiritual amounts to transforming our elemental vital breath little by little into a more subtle breath in the service of the heart, of thought, of speech and not only in the service of physiological survival.. The spirit is thus the most important divine dimension. For us, as for the yogis, breathing is what can makes us spiritual. But we have forgotten this. And often we confuse cultivation with the learning of words, of knowledges, of competencies, of abilities. We live without breath, without remembering that to be cultivated amounts to being able to breathe, not only in order to survive but in order to become breath, spirit.” Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Irigaray, “Divine Women,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 61.

nothingness and annihilation, Irigaray's sexuateness might not have had a place in Porete's Soul at that time. However, the gender of Soul occupied the imagining of Soul from beginning to the end. Porete's oppression is impossible to conceive without the power of her imagined gender, the protagonist and heroine Soul and her divine lover Love, supreme virtues and saintly figures all as *women*. When Irigaray sighs, "We have no female trinity,"<sup>65</sup> any serious reader of Porete might revisit how uniquely advanced her thinking was. Speaking of Porete, in many ways, Irigaray's essay "La Mystérique," with its rich metaphorical (fire and mirror) and philosophical imagination (soul's union with divine), succeeds Porete in yet another radiant stream. It is true Irigaray evokes Teresa of Avila in her brief footnote, but the imagery of lightning flash (200), burning, melting (201), soul's nakedness and the self-seeing, self-knowing and loving most definitely mirror the style of French Beguine herself, who advanced these forms of meditation centuries ago.<sup>66</sup> Feminist theologian Denise Starkey's precise reading of Irigaray and literature review for central theses of current Christian mysticism scholarship is incredibly useful. However, despite her spectacular engagement of Irigaray to Porete, for some reason, she does not transcend or go beyond what Irigaray claims: "Detachment and apophatic mysticism could almost be described as universal phenomena. They are pervasive in most of the spiritual

---

<sup>65</sup> "Divine Women," 63.

<sup>66</sup> From the previous chapter, I have observed how Porete's key notions may converse with Daoist mysticism on philosophical level. Another great example as apophatic philosophy can be found in Daoist canon *Liezi* and the notion of 'Unselfconsciousness': "...the less aware they are of what they do, where they are and who they are, or the less conscious and self-conscious they are, the more mysterious their respective set of skills appears. The work's description of perception and cognition as obstacles on the path to higher levels of existence is not entirely unique.. however, the *Liezi* interweaves its notion of becoming a superior being by gradually deconstructing these processes with its cosmogonic conceptions. More precisely, the path towards skills unachievable by ordinary humans requires a person to *become one with the primordial cosmos*, and thus shut down their own (self-)consciousness, rather than seeing oneself as human individual or even a member of a society." See Richard J. Sage, "'Annihilation of the Heart': The Ideal of Non-Perception in the *Liezi*," *PROBLEMOS* (July 2016): 75-6 (my italics). As the title of the article suggests, "the complete obliteration of perception" in Daoist text *Liezi*, after such a loss of (self-)consciousness, is a comparable idea to Porete's state of indistinct union. For the future of comparative mysticism, if relatable, this rather Porete-esque theory from Daoist canon is indeed a theory of (de-)creation and (non-)origin that describes annihilation, and toward a union and a kind of deification. See Puett, *To Become a God* (2002).

traditions of East and West.. Irigaray’s own call for women to find a feminine divine/divine woman.”<sup>67</sup> So, there, despite the hint of comparison, we can see her argument closes within the purview of Christian mysticism so as to fulfill Irigaray’s demand without having to traverse between east and west. This is why the culturally more encompassing comparativist, such as philosopher Morny Joy, will be invaluable as the chapters move forward, carrying on some of the most original legacies (and critique) of Irigaray’s far-reaching viewpoints.

On the other hand, one also may wonder how this essay could have been different if Irigaray came into serious contact with Goddess tradition in Asia beforehand. Unsurprisingly, her most proximate cross-cultural musing *Between East and West* (2002) primarily deals with *Prāṇāyāma*, the breathing process and how she rediscovers body as the site of divine. There, in eastern/Indian teachings, Irigaray finds a few answers to questions she posed in previous essays (“In traditions of the goddess, the inverse takes place. It is the man who is initiated into love *by* the woman.”<sup>68</sup>). Despite the criticism by queer feminists who are dissatisfied with the lasting heterosexual scheme of man/woman union,<sup>69</sup> in fact, Irigaray’s search for female god has always been grounded by the sexuated difference: “God or the gods may be destroyed, but sexual difference, Irigaray claims, can never be. As such, sexual difference (and/or ‘woman’ becomes

---

<sup>67</sup> Starkey, “Apophysis, Detachment, and Luce Irigaray’s Search for the Divine Woman,” 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 64 (italics added).

<sup>69</sup> Morny Joy, *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender and Religion* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 160: “Irigaray’s limitation of such participation to heterosexuals is indicative of a repressive tendency in her programme.” On this point, multiple decades of generation have transformed the spectrum of gender, so a revision should follow. However, regardless of how one identifies gender-wise, even the trans-gendering means one body transitioning into *other* sexuated body. A non-conforming, gender-queer person still live with the particular embodiedness. In *I Love to You* (1996), Irigaray shares an acknowledgement of incompleteness in both genders, interpreting the sheer irreducibility of each gender as a negation of totalization (105-7). Contemporary discourse of gender rather lacks this level of internal critique and self-negation. The diversification of gender is not always necessarily a solution in and of itself, and the danger of totalization still lurks in any uneven dynamics of power. For example, homoerotic between males still can generate misogyny against females, and this could go in other direction as well. Therefore, rigid heterosexuality should be timely revised, but I think we can still appreciate the aspect of loving union, rather than the totalizing desire to be single, singularly perfect, in total respect of one another’s individuality in Irigaray’s conception.

the site of an undeconstructed and fetishized ideality on which Irigaray's utopian visions rest."<sup>70</sup> Without the individuated difference, talk of union carries much less for Irigaray. When she speaks of "perfection of her subjectivity," Irigaray explores the corporeal and divine ideal, "a female god"<sup>71</sup> and the practice of breathing opened her vision to the horizon on which her Goddesses can coexist along with Gods— not in the way of destroying the other gender. In fact, Irigaray's model of union should be distinguished even from Porete's melting/fusion because each lover's subjectivity, polarities and differences remain one's own:

..What I wish to see become from these ancient texts, alas too neglected in our Western(ized) teaching, is that love come to pass between two freedoms.

Often, love is presented there as a union, regressive in a way but ecstatically spiritual, of man with the universal womb that woman would incarnate, chosen as *shakti*. This interpretation is far from being negligible and it is certainly more worthwhile than simple bestial love, rapacious or debased. But the union of two lovers, man and woman, free with respect to genealogy, can realize something other in the incarnation of human love. Each lover, woman or man, can contribute to the rebirth of the other as both human and divine incarnation. In this case, the carnal union becomes a privileged place of individuation and not only of fusion, of regression, or of the abolition of polarities and differences. In love, women and men give back to one another their identity and the potential for life and creation that the difference of identity between them makes possible.

This double identity allows them to remain two in love, and in adult relations of reciprocity.<sup>72</sup>

For purpose of comparison, again, if we tentatively set the sexuated body aside, we get a similar framework of nondual, mystical union as *MSS*. Insistence on such embodiment may pose a limit to be read alongside Porete, but in Irigaray's case, the godly aspect of female always entails the reality of gender and sexuality, a reality Porete intended to transcend completely. For now, it would suffice to mention Porete and Irigaray search for the divine union almost in an inverse manner. Porete's project of annihilation, in this case, match Irigaray: "No man or woman would achieve absolute knowledge within or according to his or her gender. Each would be constituted in time through a constant articulation between the genders, a dialectic between

---

<sup>70</sup> Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 213.

<sup>71</sup> Irigaray, "Divine Women," in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 63-4.

two figures or incarnations of the living that are represented in sexual difference, and there alone.”<sup>73</sup> Of course, the level of perfect equality between gender remains as a goal, as Irigaray allows zero naïveté in her analysis, also contemplating on the following issue<sup>74</sup>:

Yet it is not a matter of simply returning to the goddesses of the earth, even if this were in our power. We need to keep hold of them and establish (or reestablish) a social system that reflects their values, their fertility. It is idle to revive old myths if we are unable to celebrate them and use them to constitute a social system, a temporal system. Is this in our power?

„According to Feuerbach, no affirmation of gender or humanity is possible without a God, probably a trinity. Women, traditionally cast as mother of the gods, have no God or gods of their own to fulfill their gender, whether as individuals or as a community.

In order to build a tangible system, there has to be the symbolic representation that ideologically grounds and sustains it. Although this chapter cannot provide a complete picture of such vision, I think it is important to note that there has been dynamic movement in both Christian and Buddhist history of women’s spirituality. As Rita M. Gross shares, it is true that the representation of goddesses has much to offer: vision of love and power, spirituality and whole self supported by the “psychological comfort” with “the presence of positive female imagery at the heart of a valued symbol system.”<sup>75</sup> The predominant material analysis cannot address this dimension in-depth and is too oblivious to be concerned at all, neglecting the power of mythology, symbolism, and images and what they inspire in human desire, emotion, imagination, in general:

---

<sup>73</sup> Irigaray, “The Female Gender,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 110. Therefore, it is not hard to surmise why Irigaray connects with Hindu tradition rather than Buddhist. In Hindu Goddess traditions, the aspects of embodiment, materiality, pleasure are more pronounced *as* transcendence: “what it means to assert that a goddess is the supreme divine reality and still, always, a *woman*” (my italics). See Tracy Pintchman and Rita DasGupta Sherma eds., *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism: Reinterpretations and Re-Envisionings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 55.

<sup>74</sup> Irigaray, “Women, the Sacred, Money,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 81.

<sup>75</sup> Rita M. Gross, “Is the Goddess a Feminist?” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, 107. Irigaray also writes: “It paralyzes us in our becoming. As divinity or goddess of and for man, we are deprived of our own ends and means. It is essential we be God *for ourselves* so that we can be divine for the other, not idols, fetishes, symbols that have already been outlined or determined.. If the divine is absent in woman, and among women, there can be no possibility of changing, converting her primary affects.. to affirm and fulfill ourselves as individuals and members of a community, can be ours only if a God in the feminine gender can define it and keep it for us.” See “Divine Women,” 71-2.

Some Indian feminists realize this, and are promoting Shakti and Goddess images to generate a feminist consciousness among a broad base of women, especially more traditional women for whom powerful religious images carry more weight than do political rhetoric and dialectical materialist analyses. I do not mean to imply that these Indian feminists are cynically exploiting religious images and ideas for their own ends. Rather, I think that many Indian feminists are expanding their own visions of feminism to include a spiritual dimension and are finding powerful resources within their own traditions.<sup>76</sup>

The figures and traditions in my current chapter, although definitely uplifting the feminine as supreme deity, also do not seem to promote a purely essentialist, most exclusive forms of gynocentrism. Rather, it is more about assuming and eventually transcending both genders to fully liberate oneself. Fully acknowledging the feminized divine strongly supports and represents the often oppressed female gender, it is important to note that both Buddhist and Beguine projects of freedom invite practitioners to transcend *all* distinctions, ultimately including gender.<sup>77</sup> Judith Simmer-Brown, the scholar of women and Buddhism in Tibetan tradition, would point us to the Buddhist deity *Ḍākinī* (Buddhist deity), who is “often spoken of as feminine, she is known as simultaneously gender-inclusive (both male and female) and beyond gender altogether (neither male nor female).”<sup>78</sup> Such representation is of conventional purpose for devotees, but she actually symbolizes the “primordially vast space that accommodates everything but cannot be grasped as thing or a person.”<sup>79</sup> In essence, the Buddhist emptiness itself, the ultimate ground of all phenomena.

This is why I think **Love-Soul** connection is so close to *ḍākinīs/yoginīs* (female spiritual masters in Tantra, who often occupied human-divine dual identity) and the Goddesses conversing with female Buddhist practitioners, in addition to Porete’s paradigm already analogous to Buddhist sentiment. But Porete is not bound by this either, allowing masculine

---

<sup>76</sup> Erndl, “Is *Shakti* Empowering for Women?” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist*, 97.

<sup>77</sup> Starkey, “Apophysis, Detachment, and Luce Irigaray’s Search for the Divine Woman,” 2-3. Of course, this cannot be accomplished without recognizing the reality of patriarchy and sexism. See Campbell 139.

<sup>78</sup> Simmer-Brown, *Dakini’s Warm Breath*, 83.

<sup>79</sup> Simmer-Brown, 83.

expressions of divine and human (*MSS* 14, 31-2).<sup>80</sup> Interestingly enough, Porete's mystical theology has already advanced a move in this vein, perhaps even more radically. As commented succinctly in previous chapter, for Porete, even sexual difference becomes a category that needs to be brought to nothing, in the Soul's journey to unite with Love/Divine Feminine. Therefore, Porete's unorthodox scheme neither privileges the humanity of Christ, nor a typically feminine mode of religiosity. One may complain that Porete is too philosophically inclined to do away any aspect of embodiment. However, as the *MSS* is in entirety theological dialogue between Love, Soul, and Reason (occasionally other virtues), we should recognize even the culturally sanctioned androcentrism is thoroughly deconstructed as all three figures are depicted as feminine. The Soul's perfect freedom with, in, and as Love has no obstruction: no will, no works, no virtues, and quite possibly no *fixed* gender. Starkey insightfully points out:

If Irigaray is right, and God is nothing more than an articulation of a sexed incarnation, then I believe ultimately we will fail in redressing the grievous harm of patriarchy.. Marguerite Porete offers cause for more hope than Irigaray recognizes. She "speaks" the possibility of a feminine imaginary, one in which God is imaged as male and female, and more than both, but never reduced to a gendered projection. Porete, it would not be hard to imagine, concurs with Irigaray's critique of seeing woman as more than the ground for masculine transcendence. **She reads the reflection in the mirror and sees not woman as a reflection of the masculine: she sees the divine reflected.**<sup>81</sup>

*Reckoning the feminist contribution: Critical to Constructive*

With her penetrating insights, Irigaray seems to be equally loved by two feminist camps of scholarship: Buddhist and Christian. Later, severe criticism follows on equal level, from both sides, as well. As intriguing, creative and controversial she may be, Irigaray's feminist philosophy nonetheless begins with commonly cautioned, sobering feminist insight: "Woman,

---

<sup>80</sup> "Love: She knows, says Love, through the power of faith that God is all-powerful and all wisdom and perfect goodness, and that God the Father performed the work of the Incarnation.. So that the Father has in him one single nature, which is a divine nature, and that the person of the Son has in him three natures, that is, the same divine nature as the Father has, and the nature of his own soul, and the nature of his body, and he is one person in the Trinity." Regarding the christological controversy around this passage, see 32n.2.

<sup>81</sup> Starkey, "Apophysis, Detachment, and Luce Irigaray's Search for the Divine Woman," 15 (boldface added).

for her part, remains in unrealized potentiality —unrealized, at least, for/by herself.. not only is she secondary to man but she may just as well not be as be. Ontological status makes her incomplete and uncompletable. She can *never* achieve the *wholeness* of her form.”<sup>82</sup> Sharing the pessimistic tone of Beauvoir, Irigaray also contemplates on the perplexing existence of woman as “the simultaneous co-existence of opposites. She is *both one and the other*. ..equally *neither one nor the other*.”<sup>83</sup> Though tragically and historically linked to passive servitude to male self-actualization, I think Irigaray takes up this enigma and complexity of woman (‘the non-subjective sub-jectum’), desiring to transmute it into a mystical, yet not self-evasive, but authentically self-defining possibility for the luminous female subjectivity— which has been the center of this chapter.

The most recent comparative effort had been made by scholar of philosophy and religion Morny Joy, tracing the feminine images in spiritual tradition. More scholars of gender and religion are coming together in Buddhist and Christian studies. Joy’s research traces the work of Rita Gross, Miranda Shaw and Anne Klein— foundational figures in the study of women and Buddhism. This type of conversation and transformation from Western feminist philosophy/theology into comparative theology/philosophy of religion provides my work the closest and most relevant framework to work with. I will soon come back to how Joy appropriates and critically evaluates Irigaray’s cross-cultural turn.

Before I can explain how via Irigaray, Porete and Buddhist tantric may have constructive spaces of becoming, a very critical and honest perspective must be engaged first. Across the culture, this will emphasize the relevance and higher-order of Porete’s undoing, especially of createdness, the sexuateredness, according to Irigaray. Most feminist researchers I have reviewed

---

<sup>82</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*



in the prior sections have dealt with the women and Buddhist tantra from a view of veneration and valuation. The theoretical and historical appraisal conducted by the researchers are genuine, full of respect and awe, moving past the colonizing gaze of the West. However, veneration of Other religious tradition can be filled with idealization, as much as inveterate self-worship of one's own background. Apparently, the mystification of Buddhist tantric tradition is quite possible in a way that repeats the inveterate female repression and oppression we have discussed in this chapter. June Campbell has pointed this out vocally, that the idealization of symbolic feminine may still allow the dominant socio-religious power to “*objectify*” the female, repressing her vision's true actualization within system.<sup>84</sup> Campbell's critique is poignant as the representation of female soul, a mystic and the symbolic Divine Feminine is at the heart of this chapter. Although I may not agree with Campbell's reading of ‘mirroring’ almost as an equivalent as mimesis or the mere deficient reflection of male, or the Buddhist emptiness as “refusal of representation,” Campbell's analysis is still a powerful, resounding one that accords with Irigaray's question above.<sup>85</sup> This question itself needs own book-length response. Campbell's observation comes out of her own practice and experience of contemporary Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, and she wasn't alone among who perceived the place of woman: even when aligned with Buddhist emptiness, precisely because the female principle is identified with a kind of “other-worldliness” or embodiment of *nothing*, the true value of feminine in this setting can be only appreciated in terms of transcendence, deprived of reality.<sup>86</sup> Being designated for the sake

---

<sup>84</sup> June Campbell, *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity, and Tibetan Buddhism*, rev. ed. (London: Continuum, 2002), 177. For readers not familiar with the author's profile or biography related to this work, see “The Emperor's Tantric Robes: An Interview with June Campbell,” *Tricycle* (Winter 1996) <https://tricycle.org/magazine/the-emperors-tantric-ropes/>. Campbell's writing is known for weaving her own experience as a female practitioner of Tibetan Buddhist context with astute observation of feminist literature. In this chapter, Campbell's critical perspective will be reviewed alongside more positive philosophical and historical promotion of Divine Feminine and symbolic image of feminine, for the sake of Tantric Buddhists' and Beguine mystics' subjectivity.

<sup>85</sup> Campbell, 171.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-3.

of transcendence is vastly different from “the ability to define herself in terms of her own transcendence”<sup>87</sup> and such vacuum in women’s representations easily anticipates their exclusion and exploitation from male-oriented power structure that largely associates itself with this-worldliness. Hence the female holds a limited space as expedient means or sacrificial offering for male practitioner’s realization as Irigaray puts it: “mother-matter affords man the means to realize his form.. Theoretically there would be no such thing as woman.. Now, if everything is taken up with the realization of the *physis*, woman has, and will have, no place and thus no existence.”<sup>88</sup> Of course, neither Irigaray nor Campbell stop their reflection here. But their sobering questions are the sharpest critique of patriarchy and an empty, absent representation of feminine. As these pioneers have already penetrated the truth of transcendentalization of the female, my comparative search for Divine Feminine has to face the chilling vacancy, still hoping to reveal more of its true potency. If no woman can call upon the goddess and be aided/represented, any belief, ritual, and the narratives of the female principle may become a soothing, yet conceited fantasy. As critical as she could be, Campbell also tackles on the *yab-yum* (Tib.: “father-mother”) symbolism<sup>89</sup> and relation to benefit mostly men’s quest, wondering how the practice assists the female, without debasement, yet “in forms which relate to her perspective” and “in the image of the female herself.”<sup>90</sup> The most effective and immediate example that might counterbalance this would be the scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Sarah Jacoby’s multifaceted study of Sera Khandro (1892 - 1940), which will appear next chapter.

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>88</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 166.

<sup>89</sup> This term denotes the mystical union of wisdom and compassion, and the wisdom is understood as feminine. The iconography is very common and popular and the union is often represented as a passionate, sensual embrace. As I have argued in this chapter, the French Beguine Porete, though not leaving any room for embodied or visual material, does use more erotically charged language for her mystical union between Soul and Love.

<sup>90</sup> Campbell, *Traveller in Space*, 145.

Now, Porete and Irigaray both can be so important because their models of union, respectively, defy the *dualistic* transformation Campbell critiques— in which feminine aspect “became not only of secondary importance, but also categorized relationally and sometimes in *symbolic opposition* to the male.”<sup>91</sup> This dualism situates the feminine, even in the form of Goddess, only in relation to the male, who often symbolizes the higher, more essential philosophical principle— thereby restricting the symbolic weight of Divine Feminine. First, in the system of Porete, the Soul singularly possesses the ability, power, and nobility of Love/Divine Feminine, without any need to exist in relation to any other--- except Love. The Soul is self-fulfilling transcendent. Secondly, Joy offers her own: “she [Irigaray] insists on a natural heterosexuality.. Irigaray begins from a dualist position. This is because she identifies everything that she connects with patriarchy with rationality and the symbolic. Women are consigned to the mythic and imaginative, without recourse to their rational capabilities.”<sup>92</sup> Hence, as Joy’s nuanced reading of Irigaray unfolds, Irigaray’s writing reveals one of the most problematic assumptions, lurking and enhanced in the “mythopoetic fantasy of a feminine divine”<sup>93</sup> in the heterosexual gaze of East and West. From my perspective, if a woman wants to construct a project of self-transcendence, and decides to connect with spiritual dimension in order to achieve it, such a decision should not be equated with discarding a modern, critical, or rational reflection. I don’t think Porete resorts to mystical union because she lacked rational

---

<sup>91</sup> Campbell, 55.

<sup>92</sup> Joy, *Divine Love*, 34. Regarding this criticism, it should be noted that Irigaray herself has been deeply aware of this issue: “Where it already have been noted—to the amazement of all—that the poorest in science and the most ignorant were the most eloquent, the richest in revelations. Historically, that is, women. Or at least the ‘female.’” Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 192.

<sup>93</sup> Joy, *Divine Love*, 34. I believe this type of worry is justified as women’s spirituality, especially the mystical sort, has frequently equated with further renunciation of female subjectivity. In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray also observed this pattern: “The path of renunciation described by certain mystics is women's daily lot” (120). However, she comes back to the significance of Divine Feminine, and the becoming of feminine on her own terms. Porete’s work is the epitome of this movement, as her mystical theology begins with the critique of her contemporaries’ excessive abnegation.

capability, which is far from truth when we engage with *MSS*. In terms of Tantric women, the models, visions and images of Goddesses may not currently deliver the merit within framework of equality –legal, economic, or political– but still provide even more fundamental, “positive female imagery.. strong-willed, creative, and powerful females who are auspicious and beneficent.”<sup>94</sup> And the goddesses embody art, compassion, emptiness, insight, intellect, wisdom guiding and liberating the Souls. Hollywood would again critically add, “According to Irigaray, mysticism disrupts the borders between body and soul, immanence and transcendence, sensible and intelligible, and in doing so is *always* marked by sexual difference.. The mystical is both *dependent* on the existence of a female deity and the site on which she can be apprehended.”<sup>95</sup> Both Hollywood and Joy would resist a female divine merely recapitulating heterosexual couple, and the femaleness defined by the same structure, on this very earth. But then Hollywood’s remark can be read as Porete’s question toward Buddhist goddesses, why do women have to rely upon the very sexuateness that limits them? Why can we transcend all such matter? One response can be found in Hollywood:

For Irigaray, men and women exist tangibly in the world and are available to human sensory perception. God, as an absolutely transcendent entity, is not.. Irigaray recasts the divine as that which is experienced when men and women recognize each other in their difference. The divine is not a supernatural being with whom we relate independently, but rather the outcome of true relations between the sexes.<sup>96</sup>

This response could be an interpretation or endorsement, but leads to a point that I’ve been making, still in favor of Irigaray’s emphasis upon sexuateness/sexual difference.

Acknowledging the sexuateness, from my perspective, should of course depart from

---

<sup>94</sup> Rita M. Gross, “Is the Goddess a Feminist?”, 106-7.

<sup>95</sup> Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 187-8 (italics added).

<sup>96</sup> Hollywood, 212. Hollywood here borrows from Penelope Deutscher, “‘The Only Diabolical Thing About Women...’: Luce Irigaray on Divinity,” *Hypatia* 9 (1994): 88-111; and Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 81-6.

heterosexual supremacy opening up more discussion on gender and sexuality in the representations of human and divine. Still, in our times, many injustices and violations are committed on the basis of sex despite the progress in cultural awareness of gender. In Porete, union presupposes what is apart, but primordially one and shared. However, would Divine Love without any title of Lady have connected one's Soul, a feminized soul, better? Why do people pray to apparently gendered gods, goddesses, and saints, and the Christian and Buddhist iconography still attract and inspire believers in this manner? If reason is the light of transcendence in human soul, why is the capacity called *image* of God? I imagine, in the future, to construct an iconography based on the world of Marguerite Porete, and I suspect the distinction between the many Goddesses and Gods will have features based on gender and sexuality.

### *Concluding reflection*

The theistic and personal metaphors characteristic of Christianity suggests a deep duality between God and the world and yet the deification of love generates practices that displace egocentrism as the organizing shape of a person's mind.. love implies an erosion of the boundary that separates the ego from others as well as God from the world.<sup>97</sup>

In many ways, my comparative framework has been inspired by the theologian Wendy Farley's intuition. Though mainly philosophical and secondarily textual, my introduction and synthesis have grappled with sources and their interpretations, I deemed to have the power to transcend the unfortunate danger of female subjugation. Miranda Shaw and Judith Simmer-Brown excavate original vision of feminine principle and practice of Buddhist tantra in which women can derive empowerment from the status of goddess, and eventually become one. In

---

<sup>97</sup> Wendy Farley, "Duality and Non-Duality in Christian Practice: Reflections on the Benefits of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue for Constructive Theology." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31 (2011): 139.

turn, Porete's Annihilated Soul also chooses a noble path to be one with Love / Divine Feminine. In Porete's mystical scheme there is no teacher other than Love, as the Divine Feminine's knowledge and wisdom transcend that of all the book-learned teachers. The wisdom of nondual union is however carried on by the esoteric community spiritually. Love's transmission of simple, true, liberating knowledge of nondual union to Soul is praised by Holy Church and Holy Trinity, which suggests this 'lineage' will be survived by those who are exalted and have acquired citizenship in the Land of Freedom (*MSS 122*).

I upheld Buddhist Goddesses with Marguerite Porete, because Porete's divinity-focused, divinely inspired approach of union can shine light upon the supreme virtues and symbols surrounding the tradition of Goddesses, against the much-critiqued western gaze of orientalist exoticism that resulted in the hypersexualization toward tantric practices. Bringing Marguerite Porete along with gems of Western feminist critique had a particular goal discovering the meaning of such union together. In order to do so, any serious attempt should go further, and not stop at the inherently limited work of criticism toward Goddess tradition. Conversely, the lived reality of those who practice this tradition should be fully heard so as to examine the true potential of union. Conflict, misunderstanding, and tensions are easily anticipated, especially when the two cultural modes collide. At its core, a work such as Campbell's *Traveller in Space* is an outcry against the contemporary sexual politics within a Buddhist sect, rather than the symbolic feminine herself. Although the working of the embodied reality of sexism and the misrepresentation of Divine Feminine is very hard to separate, a genuine effort to reconstruct and create the intended meanings and powers of feminine is necessary for the well-being and

becoming of the female.<sup>98</sup> Even in hysteria, shunned and repressed symptom, Irigaray would see a potential in women who were manifesting it, because it reveals a feminine power and agency to disrupt the status quo: “..patriarchal impulse to subordinate women is rooted in the acknowledgement that *women are powerful*.”<sup>99</sup> I think this is exactly what Porete’s theology of mystical union did, endowing the feminine Soul an access to divine knowledge without any mediation, as a desired lover of Love/Divine Feminine. If the notion of female accomplishment of becoming divine herself was not considered groundbreaking or revolutionary, Porete would not have been subsequently executed for this cause.

Having gleaned much wisdom from the historians of Buddhist tantric goddesses and feminist scholarship, it was my intention to show that the profoundly enigmatic Porete and her work *MSS* can be rather smoothly read along the dynamic between Buddhist goddesses and practitioner.<sup>100</sup> As reviewed above, the radicality of nondual orientation of tantra and Porete was compared through the work of Irigaray who has gestured toward an eastern excursion.<sup>101</sup> No single body of work is perfect, in comparison, even more so. Despite the plethora of criticism pointed against Irigaray’s more mystical turn, her “Eastern” intuition toward body as locus and its significant role for the resurrection of female subject —mindful of how essentialized or glorified she should be— was not far from what the scholars of tantra have indicated. Therefore, *Between East and West* is highly valued work, having initiated a cross-cultural excursion none of the critiques have forged out.<sup>102</sup> In a profound way, my current chapter was guided by Irigaray’s

---

<sup>98</sup> My view is therefore is closely aligned with “the positive task of reconstructing the world of the texts and recovering women’s place in it.” Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 14. For contemporary scholarship on “the identification of the feminine with materiality and power” see *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism*, 221.

<sup>99</sup> Erndl, “Is *Shakti* Empowering for Women?” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist*, 95 (my italics).

<sup>100</sup> Samdarshi, “The Concept of Goddesses in Buddhist Tantra Traditions,” 94.

<sup>101</sup> Most notably in Irigaray’s *Between East and West*. Joy’s *Divine Love* provides meticulous reading of this text and other seminal works of Irigaray.

<sup>102</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 7: “We Westerners believe that the essential part of culture resides in words, in texts, or perhaps in works of art, and that physical exercise should help us to dedicate ourselves to this essential. For

search for divine since the “Divine Women” to which Goddess studies and *MSS* have responded fully, but I believe, mainly as a view from the top. In the following chapter, the inner world of Beguine and Buddhist mystics will be explored, but this time, more from the turbulent earthly realm of human heart: passion, ecstasy, desire, emotion as experienced from the highest peak of Perfect Love to the lowest valley of melancholia.

---

the masters of the East, the body itself can become spirit through the cultivation of breathing. Without doubt, at the origin of our tradition.. the soul still seems related to the breath, to air. But the link between the two was then forgotten, particularly in philosophy. The soul, or what takes its place, has become the effect of conceptualizations and of representations and not the result of a practice of breathing. The misunderstandings are so profound, proportional to historical forgetting and repressions, that bridges between the traditions are difficult to restore.” In critique of the West, has Irigaray set up another dichotomy and mystifying the East as at root mystical, body-oriented? This issue will be later tackled from multiple contemporary feminist perspectives.



## CHAPTER 4

### HOLY MADNESS AND DIVINE JOY: LOVE AND MELANCHOLY IN COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM

Love is, in fact an intensification of life, a completeness, a fullness, a wholeness of life.... Life curves upward to a peak of intensity, a high point of value and meaning, at which all its latent creative possibility go into action and the person transcends himself or herself in encounter, response, and communion with another. It is for this that we came into the world—this communion and self-transcendence. We do not become fully human until we give ourselves to each other in love.<sup>1</sup>

Thus for Hegel the correlative between Infinite Grief and the death of God is established as a moment of the Idea that manifests itself within the psyche, history, culture, religion, and speculative philosophy. If we recognize melancholy in Hegel's Infinite Grief and *Unhappy Consciousness*, then melancholy can vanish only with the death of the Spirit. To understand its metaphysical ground, we must acknowledge that melancholic human suffering and God's pathos and death inhabit the same moment in the dialectic of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The transformation and transcendence of self and soul can never be trivialized, as they lie at the core of our inner landscape: (re)defining ourselves. In the first paragraph above, Merton, cited by bell hooks, emphasizes that love is spiritual; but this claim on love apparently has deeper history in its background, rooted in the devotional and mystical traditions of variety of religions. Many philosophers, theologians and contemplatives have articulated what the 'ecstatic' and spiritual dimension of love could be— yet without mentioning the transgressive, ground-shattering aspect of mystical ecstasy pushing the limits of dogma. Ground-shattering, not so much because the mystic intends to, yet can't help but facing the Other who represents the Real; whilst "standing outside the self" as the Greek origin of term of ecstasy (Greek: ἔκστασις; ek-stasis) explains.<sup>3</sup> We have many rational accounts available on such moment of union. But the object of study here is very far from the concerns of previous accounts. To crudely put, the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Love and Need: Is Love A Package or A Message?" in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, eds. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Alina N. Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God: a Study of the Hermeneutics of Depression* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 113 (my italics).

<sup>3</sup> Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81.

mainstream idea of mysticism is reserved for a conscious, metaphysical exercise to observe and meditate oneself calmly. This, of course, is a valued contemplation. Nevertheless, as we have reviewed and will be investigating, Beguine mystics Porete and Hadewijch have reclaimed mystical state of union as rapturous losing oneself, embraced by Love, being “entirely *out* of the spirit.. in fruition of him.”<sup>4</sup> Union with Love takes one by the storm, demanding full engagement and devotion of “Body and soul, heart and thought” (*PC* 16: 358). Therefore, in addition to the avid, critical eyes and mind, readers may have to adjust their approach toward Beguine mystics (and misunderstood women mystics in general). I believe, it is the heart of an empathic listener, that is most required.<sup>5</sup> As I bring comparativism to hear them better, understanding the differences in gender, sexuality, eroticism, and spiritual traditions is needed. As this chapter explores the boundaries of mystics’ emotion, including melancholia and madness, a particular attention to this unique search for sublime and sacred is welcomed. The fact that both Beguine mystics and their (Asian) counterparts has historically been marginalized and suffered because their ideals eventually broke out of the orthodoxies and traditions. The synthesis of secular literary genre and its powerful eroticism to clothe new, original rendition of Divine as Love is exciting to modern eyes, but unfortunately heretic to their contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, mystics were not meant to fit in, as they articulated the mode of liberation in terms of bliss,

---

<sup>4</sup> V14: *New Power to Live Christ*, *CWS*, 305 (italics added). In many other *Visions*, Hadewijch specifically records the details of her visions and even the duration of her ecstasy.

<sup>5</sup> Dori Laub, “Reestablishing the Internal ‘Thou’ in Testimony of Trauma.” *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 18, no. 2 (2013): 184–198. Although this chapter is not based on the more contemporary study of trauma encompassing the issue of genocide, or sexual crime, in one way or another, both mystical traditions represented in this chapter either begins or ends as a description of suffering, a contemplation to overcome such suffering especially related to the particular context of these mystics’ lives--- one in particular invites acute melancholia reminiscent of the analyses in trauma studies. “Empathic listener” to medieval women mystics is therefore attentive to the low moments in mystical search, understanding that writing mystical treatises or autobiographies all purports to be an act of creating their own empathic listener, audience out of immense pressure and solitude, ultimately seeking the sense of authenticity, agency, and independence.

<sup>6</sup> See Ch3, 5n11 and Kent Emery Jr., “Foreword,” in *MSS*, vii-lxxxvi. For scholarly speculation on Hadewijch’s potential arrest, see “Introduction,” in *CWS*, 22.

ecstasy, joy, love, along with grief and sorrow— This is where empathy is truly urgent, to trust these mystics’ emotional dynamic accompanies itself with their impeccably genuine intentions, noblest desires, and a sacred journey toward freedom and enlightenment: total absorption with godliness and newness, not a pathological, self-engrossed endeavor.

Beguine mystics’ radicalism, borrowing psychoanalytic language, aimed to unite the symbolic realm with the primordial, unknowable “Real” — the Divine/Love. Themes of Love and union set Beguine mysticism apart from the Kantian assumption that: “the Real cannot be known in itself; all knowledge is mediated.. We only know an ‘appearance’ (*phenomenon*), never the ‘real in itself’ (*noumenon*).”<sup>7</sup> This critical spirit of Kant is powerful and influential; and yet, the claim reduces possibility of mystical union into mainly an event of knowing, which, already had been the target of contemplation in Hadewijch and Porete centuries ago, by their critique of Reason. For Porete, the Soul’s true self-knowledge of her own nothingness ultimately unites her to the real goodness of God (*MSS* 61, 83). In Hadewijch, knowledge is essentially of and from God, always accompanied with love (‘knowledge of the sublime Love that he himself’<sup>8</sup>), pointing to the attainment of full and sublime nature, the real heart and being of Divinity.<sup>9</sup> For both Beguines, knowledge in the mystical context requires a sense of loving relation and spiritual delight. Therefore, the knowledge incorporates but differentiates itself from intellectual capacity, or mere Reason. It is a term that indicates human Soul’s complete, nondual intimacy with Divine, hence the erotic expression such as kiss, embrace, taste of sweetness finds fruition in Hadewijch’s mysticism.

---

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey J Kripal, *Kālī’s Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Letter 27: Ultimate Motives for Humility, *CWS*, 107.

<sup>9</sup> See also Letter 7, *CWS*, 64. See also L 19, *CWS*, 88: “True knowledge of the methods of Love;”

Naturally, I concur with the renowned Indian psychologist Sudhir Kakar (1938-), in his appraisal of mystic as the “one who seeks to go beyond the illusion of The Imaginary.. And The Symbolic register” mending the grief and agony of “separation from the Divine.”<sup>10</sup> Even from my limited stance, even the most materialistic, atheistic orientation of modern world didn’t succeed rooting out the question of divine, and human soul’s original unity. Replacing the language of divine or soul, the predominantly shared, chief tenet of psychoanalysis treats the *lack*, repression, the patient’s anxious separation from the primal unity from infantile, familial and parental structure.<sup>11</sup> In our times, it is mostly believed that the lack of long-lost unity remains unfulfilled, in the mood of intelligent pessimism. Therefore, being absolutely confident in restoring, achieving or even embodying such union –as Porete and Hadewijch would dare to claim– is regarded either being totally inconceivable, or simply an excessive illusion. However, the narrative of excess can be transformed when it is revealed that Porete, and more visibly affective Hadewijch, may provide alternative framework of desire and emotions that does not solely depend on satisfaction (or, lack thereof) of sexual, or familial instincts. At the center of Beguine paradigm, there is the divinely sanctioned female subject who desires to live and become God’s equal partner/lover. Through an excellent hybridity between the spirits of romantic poetry and theological legacy available to them, any careful reader could see how the Beguine mystical contemplation has created a new mode self-transcendence, complex and thoroughly modern, that mirrors our own search for long-forgotten unity, totality, the

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Analyst and the Mystic*, 26-7.

<sup>11</sup> One of the most notorious examples would be the reduction of the “inner world of religious *belief*” into “distorted sexuality” in an “attempt to regress to a condition of intrauterine existence”: in other words, infant’s yearning toward mother’s embrace, simple sexual frustrations or neurotic obsession (Kakar 56). These are rigorous critique of religious orientations that gave birth to modern, scientific approach to the depth of human self. However, the Beguines and Buddhists —despite Hadewijch’s own turmoil and complexity—in my study may qualify as proto-psychologists themselves as they precisely aim at liberating oneself from such psychological bondages, even the natural cycle of life. Besides, Hadewijch’s submergence into abyss concerns the soul’s growth and fruition into Love/Divine who is mostly described as the co-equal, ultimate lover rather than moving toward parental figures.

overflowing love of divine: “Pain and adventure for the sake of Love!” (Poems in Stanzas [PS] 1: CWS 127). But Hadewijch will emphasize that the hard, risky, bittersweet adventure will actually bring the Soul to arrive at and taste the “nature of Love” (PS5: CWS 141); which is very different from saying that journey is what matters. In this sense, no matter how s/he is perceived by many under the illusory realm, “The mystic becomes the only healthy person, the only one truly attuned to reality.”<sup>12</sup>

The preceding chapters have looked into Marguerite Porete and her dimension of mystical union, philosophically and theologically. The fourth chapter expanded its excursion by laying the comparativist bridges between Porete’s notion of union with Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tantric women and their belief and practice upon Goddesses. The current chapter focuses on the driving force of the Beguine and Buddhist non-dualist mysticism— Love. This Love relates to lovingkindness, but in both women mystics’ cases, what Love can mean is more complicated, intense, and perhaps radical, precisely because Love promotes an excess of unity, in a mystical attempt to unite the polar opposites: human and Divine. Current chapter retains this nondual approach in Hadewijch and Porete, comparing prevalent modes of madness and joy of Love with their Asian counterparts. Hadewijch’s emotional extremity will be read together with First, the French Beguine Marguerite Porete-tantric Buddhist expressions are cross-cultural counterparts, and correlates, spiritual twins, mirroring one another. Although the comparison cannot and should not be oversimplified, Porete’s erotic-mystical in *MSS* does share cognizable traits— among the ‘Significant features of tantric Buddhism’: Esotericism; Importance of the teacher; Ritual use of maṇḍalas, Foul offerings and antinomian acts – the transgressive dimension of tantric Buddhism, Revaluation of the body, Revaluation of the status and role of women,

---

<sup>12</sup> Kripal, *Kālī’s Child*, 41.

Analogical thinking, Revaluation of negative mental states.<sup>13</sup> The most notable difference is *how* transgression occurs in Porete in contrast to Tantric Buddhists, and this necessarily involves complete absence of body in *MSS*. Previously in Porete, many traditionally central values are to be seen subverted, especially when meditation of ‘*nothing* (that is, everything)’ takes over Reason and Virtues, preparing the Soul to be endowed with divine goodness itself. Porete’s transgression is no less scandalous because her subversion of values attempt to transcend what is normative and acceptable for the feminized Soul. Even the pedagogically instilled, institutionally recommended feelings are, to Reason’s vehement objection, ignored or annihilated (‘no heed of shame or honor.. love or of hate, of Hell or of Paradise.’)<sup>14</sup> In *MSS* 13, Love carries this subversive statement even further:

**Love.** ..these Souls who are guided by perfect Love value shame as highly as honor, and honor as dearly as shame.. being loved as highly as being hated, being hated as dearly being loved, being in Hell as being in Paradise, and being in Paradise as dearly as being in Hell..

**Love.** Already, says Love, I have said that such Souls value every affliction of their heart-both for body and for soul-as highly as if it were prosperity, and prosperity as highly as adversity (30-1).

Transformative value-subversion may have its true origin in the Scriptures: especially in prophetic, and apostolic voices who were either imprisoned, or executed. First *MSS* troubles the patriarchy and the ecclesial infrastructure, but more fundamentally, Porete’s own interpretation of theological anthropology is so original and excessive, from nothing to becoming Divine Love herself, it demanded restructuring of the teaching itself. This is why I find Tantric revaluation and subversion as method of awakening and liberating force to be culturally more apt and compatible hermeneutic framework for Porete. Understanding this framework is equally

---

<sup>13</sup> Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 197-202.

<sup>14</sup> *MSS* 7, 17; see also *MSS* 65. 86.

important for Hadewijch, whose choice of hell, rather than heaven, captures the versatile, insatiable nature of Love in the following analysis.

Because of the radical annihilation in Porete, her work is uniquely and famously known to defy all categories previously attached to medieval women's mysticism, elevating the level of contemplation to "an absolute union of the annihilated soul with the divine."<sup>15</sup> The manner of Soul-Love union is often eclipsed by the repeated emphasis on bringing all else to nothing, especially the human feelings. In this chapter, however, I want to bring attention to the state of ultimate union in Porete: the pure and everlasting joy of Love, which cannot be properly characterized without its erotic and ecstatic dimension; where "feelings of love" and human will are pronounced dead, the Soul will be instead filled with "*divine pleasure*" (MSS 73, 94; italics added). This means the Soul is brought to nothing, and Love takes over in her place. The Soul stands beside and outside herself. The rapturous union with divine dissolves and drives the Soul ecstatically:

**Love.** This Soul, says Love, is completely dissolved, melted, drawn and joined and united in the exalted Trinity.. And a rapturous brilliance and light join her and drive her from ever closer at hand.<sup>16</sup>

It is my humble proposal that the readers of Beguine mysticism, with focus on the 'erotic' and 'ecstatic' dimension of loving union, in addition to the already widely available lens of 'affective' mysticism. In order to explain this effectively, I am also engaging with Hadewijch and Asian contemplatives, and their aesthetic sources on mystical ecstasy that contain strong, comparable elements of erotic mysticism.<sup>17</sup> For tentative purpose of constructing this chapter, I

---

<sup>15</sup> Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> MSS 68, 89.

<sup>17</sup> It should be mentioned that "erotic mysticism" as a hermeneutical and literary tool has been first coined and shaped by the prominent scholar of South Asia Edward C. Dimock, and his work, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

will define ‘erotic mysticism’ as a search for (comm)union with the divine/the sacred/the numinous mainly by means of desires, longings and erotic love. This way, the inquiry on Beguine mysticism can has a ground, and the Asian ecstasies in this study connect together, more smoothly. Since the publication of the phenomenal *Passionate Enlightenment* (1994), nearly three decades have passed. Unfortunately, except for the most learned society of academics specialized in Tantric Buddhism, I believe the meaning of Buddhist tantric practice remains largely unknown to the American public audience in general. Similarly, outside devoted scholarship of the history of christianity, theology, gender and sexuality studies, Beguine mystics are not widely studied either. I think this is an incredibly unjust neglect, especially given the highest accomplishments they build on theological, philosophical, literary and psychological levels. I think one primary reason may be found in their own trait of erotic, ecstatic esotericism in the tradition; therefore, it will be advantageous if we investigate this, with a growing vanguard of pioneers who have written on this exquisite era and the movement.

For the reasons stated above, aside from Hadewijch, Porete’s mystical union has been notoriously difficult to explore, solely by the term ‘affective mysticism.’ With erotic and ecstatic foci, it is more important to acknowledge the radical spirituality through which the two Beguine mystics have reconstructed a new way of Love, becoming the Divine, positioning themselves as the lover of Love/Divine Feminine, filling in the co-equal status— a position that was never quite readily available to women (or humanity in general), either in theory or practice. Next chapter will probe into Porete’s divine, equanimous joy, of which readers may gain a clearer understanding with Kashmir Śaiva view on aesthetic emotion that captures the ‘divine’ affect and ‘spiritual’ sensuality. In order to address the perplexing dimension of Porete’s frequently misunderstood non-affective world, I will briefly trace the general concepts on the joy and bliss



in the context of mystical union. This chapter will focus on Hadewijch, whose powerfully unbound emotion regarding Love, will be paired with Bengali Vaiṣṇava concept of *mahābhāva*, the highest state of mystical ecstasy that encompasses totality of human emotion, including love-madness toward divine.

In this regard, comparative interrogation is then not a scholarly or orientalist luxury of finding Other, but a crucial, indispensable intervention to spotlight the previously misconstrued, marginalized or even distorted aspects of these mystics' unique spirituality to revive the whole meaning of it. For Tantrikas, in order to uplift Tantric Buddhist women's genuine and serious authority as teachers, masters who have obtained the yogic ability; and their ability to embody the deep philosophy of nondual unity in which the primordial and innate purity of worldly phenomena is emphasized and rediscovered. Hence, the body emerges as the locus of tantra, of equal importance. This dimension often becomes misunderstood. My chapters therefore carry out the feminist scholarship's efforts— a little less obsession with what and how female bodies are utilized, but more perception of *why* women do it in the first place. In Shaw's own words: “..the tradition itself is primarily concerned with the subjective and contemplative components that animate them and are considered essential to their efficacious performance. As a blending of content and form, Tantric union resists description in purely physical terms.”<sup>18</sup> So far, many publications regarding Tantric Buddhist women are lopsidedly and unsurprisingly fixated on ritualized sex, its historical development and bodily symbolism. Acknowledging my own limited background in these categories, I am nevertheless convinced that reading Beguine mystics along with Tantric Yoginīs is an immensely conducive move to highlight the ‘subjective and contemplative components.’ Without understanding these inner components, even the most

---

<sup>18</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 141.

recent fascination with embodiment, materiality, and sensuality in academic study of religion makes it harder to fend off “the miasmatic status” of explicit sensuality of female bodies.<sup>19</sup>

Once we revisit Porete’s becoming divine, what is revealed is undeniably an expression of *excess*. However, this can be truly meaningful when reflected with deep religious and metaphysical lenses in anticipation of the notion of mystical ‘oneness.’ In other words, uniting with Divine/Love is a possibility, and it is recommended that one’s soul lives “wholly” (L12: CWS 73), losing oneself “wholly” (L5: CWS 55), possessing and conquering Love “wholly” (L7: CWS 64). Dedication to such a union, perhaps, directly moves against the major premise regarding (female) subjectivity, inherently lacking the wholeness, and its ‘fantasy’ of plenitude. One of the most influential psychoanalysts in twentieth-century, Jacques Lacan (1901 - 1981) has extensively explored on the nature of the Real, and the *Jouissance*. In spite of my limited reading of “the possibility of *jouissance* (enjoyment), which is complete and immediate satisfaction,” it seems rather apparent that the *jouissance* almost always is inscribed as ‘impossible’ in Lacanian terms.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, either the Beguine mystics sit on the far side of the Reason, or creates a totally alternative vision. In any case, considering this critical observation, Porete’s spotlessly confident claim — the excessive, transgressive quality of

---

<sup>19</sup> Liz Wilson, review of *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* by Miranda Shaw, *History of Religions* 36, No. 1 (August 1996), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Georgia Rapsomatioti, “Spirituality and the psychotic subject in the thought of Lacan,” in *Insanity and Divinity*, 200. On the term *Jouissance*: as it is of extreme value for reading Porete and mystical subjectivity in general “This term, which has a sexual connotation, means pleasure or enjoyment and comes close to Freud’s notion of libido.. Lacan uses the term *jouissance* to indicate an excessive quantity of excitation or the desire to transgress the prohibition against incest. Thus Lacan describes it as the paradoxical pleasure derived from the symptom. Entry into the symbolic order, through symbolic castration, amounts to a renunciation of (an already impossible) *jouissance*.” “Glossary of Lacanian Terms,” *Insanity and Divinity*, 244. Having reviewed the following article, however, ‘ineffable’ would be more apt than ‘impossible’ as the psychoanalytic insight highlights the “shifting, evolving and always changing” character of the real: Richard E. Webb and Michael A. Sells, “Lacan and Bion: Psychoanalysis and the Mystical Language of ‘Unsayings,’” *Theory & Psychology* 5, no. 2 (May 1, 1995): 197-9. It should be emphasized that this chapter only borrows from key insights from psychoanalysis that may illuminate Beguine mysticism. As the field of psychoanalysis deals with desire and emotion, the issue of enjoyment or transgression will come up leaving yet another task of reading erotic mysticism apart from one that is entrenched with sexuality in popular discussion.

*jouissance* can be really, perfectly realized — may risk oneself spilling into the realm of insanity. In the case of Hadewijch, this worry does apply, but more importantly, so does the promise of “perfect enjoyment” (V11: CWS 290). After such “enjoyment,” Hadewijch’s Soul will not accept “something less than God himself.”<sup>21</sup>

Hence the current and following chapters seek to understand the Beguine mystics’ joy and melancholy in their adventure toward Love’s sublimity and fruition. Despite their apparent differences, the language of spiritual senses, emotions and their affects come to the fore of Beguine imagination. Porete’s joy reflects her radical elevation toward nondual union, so does Hadewijch’s love-madness, riding the union and separation with Love/Minne at its peak (and the nadir). In other words, both Porete and Hadewijch have profound projects of liberation and transformation as a goal, which won’t be appreciated or captured solely by a highly medicalized, or even pharmaceutical approach. That itself is a materialistic underappreciation that leaves out the mystic’s profound experience (hence, it is to no surprise that, the modern subject experience de-personalization, disallowed and unable to incorporate one’s own narrative of deepest desires.) This causes a serious problem especially the outward expressions of mystics and ecstasies cannot be fathomed without their internal world, marked by noble devotion, of extraordinary quality. This is why the chapter builds upon the psychoanalytic insights from emblematic figure such as Lacan who is not only a pillar of his own school, but also contributed heavily on women’s sexuality, *jouissance* and the relatively lesser-known seminars on mystics. The theories themselves are not without controversies, but the chapter takes on the insights, since the incisive intent has been invested toward an area otherwise would have left been barren. Most of the mystics discussed are men, but surprisingly Hadewijch is introduced along with St. Teresa, as

---

<sup>21</sup> Letter 6: To Live Christ, CWS, 59-60.

one of the exceptional cases that may count as the true mystic, who “sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond.”<sup>22</sup> Moving beyond phallic structure, Lacan appreciates that there is indeed ecstatic, rapturous *jouissance* modelled in St. Teresa. But more importantly and interestingly, he adds that “the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it.”<sup>23</sup> Led by the transcendent of whom the mystic knows nothing: this moment exactly reintroduces us to Porete’s Soul, whose “knowing nothing.. freed her” (*MSS* 47, 66). Lacan emphatically asks: “Doesn’t this jouissance one experiences and yet knows nothing about put us on the path of ex-sistence?.. as based on feminine jouissance?”<sup>24</sup> Strong reminiscence from last chapter may capture the reader’s attentiveness. Without a doubt, Porete’s Divine/Love comes to mind: “the Soul set Free knows everything and yet knows nothing.. in her will she knows nothing.. she wills nothing but God’s will, so securely has Love imprisoned her” (*MSS* 16, 34). But as this chapter reintroduces Hadewijch, it should be mentioned the mystical jouissance makes appearance in Hadewijch as well: “I speak of excessive sweetness, it is in truth a thing I know nothing of” (*L1: CWS* 48). She would add that this non-knowledge is rather a blessing, since “any knowledge would be a loss.”<sup>25</sup> Hence it is confirmed that the Beguines’ mystical union has nothing to do with egomaniacal pride or phantasm, but a genuine relation that transcended the standpoint of knowing. As Hadewijch’s internal storms will testify, the manifestation of her depression, or polarized, love-madness loses its meaning without the unfathomable weight of being. Both Beguines are highly philosophical, yet capturing their essence of mysticism demands the erotic longing and ecstatic passing away. And

---

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, “God and Woman’s jouissance,” in *The Seminar of Jaques Lacan. Book 20, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, Encore 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Lacan, “God and Woman’s jouissance,” 76.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> *PC* 10: Not Feeling but Love, *CWS*, 336.

even though Love will continue to be read through desire, the longing ultimately requires faith, that feminine *jouissance* Lacan mentions above, is indeed real and accessible. Because the ecstatic *union* with Love frees us from the bounds of ourselves, leading us toward what is infinitely more: “The soul lives for God with all power.. So its whole life becomes divinized;” (PC 14: CWS 349).

One last note on why Hadewijch and comparativist reading is integral. In the previous chapters, I have suggested that Porete’s core doctrines and their ramifications, however, are definitely closer to Buddhist meditation as the extinguishment of non-essentials, hence suffering, is rather central. The philosophical character of each meditation has rendered itself workable and more acceptable to secularized notion of well-being. Yet, the ecstatic quality of Porete, comparable to Tantric Buddhism which holds the place for bliss, thus remains less discussed—due to the rebellious nondual nature. Porete is much more pessimistic than Buddhist tantrikas in terms of the tantric body, the status of the world in general, only allowing the perfect union for the chosen noble Soul, marking her preference toward divinity over humanity. Therefore, body cannot be a site of comparison especially when I bring Porete’s theological anthropology who omits and annihilates it completely. However, if we shift our attention to the bigger picture of nondual union, the similarity becomes stronger and clearer, for the sake of liberation and enlightenment through love; as both Beguine and Buddhist mystics are cultivating their resources into “blissful, enlightened states of awareness.”<sup>26</sup> Porete, along with Hadewijch, is the most suitable to deliver something more, an ecstatic vision of total transformation becoming

---

<sup>26</sup> Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 140. In the beginning of the paragraph, Shaw notes that as much as the “desire, sexuality, and pleasure” can be affirmed, it is incorporated into the goal of Buddhist enlightenment, with “the body as an ‘abode of bliss’”. Marguerite Porete has entirely removed the significance of female embodiedness dismissing any potential gender divide, inequality or discrimination. But because of that Porete is often perceived as enigmatic, devoid of any ‘affective’ dimension in her writings. Porete’s indistinct union, however, uses very passionate, blissful, joyful, romantically and even erotically charged language resonant with Tantric union within the scope of my analysis.

*everything*, becoming *all* with, and eventually as Divine Love. Their characterization and experience of Love dodges the usual suspicion on women's mysticism, thereby fulfilling Lacan's own praise of certain mystics' *jouissance*. Porete and Hadewijch in this sense, in thirteenth century, had already invented (or, re-discovered) a female-led, mystico-erotic dimension that cannot be reduced to women's biology, as their contemplation leads one to taste the whole of Divine Love.<sup>27</sup> Or, according to Ramakrishna's tantric vision: "She herself has become everything.. Everything *is* the goddess."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, almost extremely spiritualized bliss in/with/of/as Divine Love in Porete could be reviewed alongside the tantric reminder; that the briefly examined visualization of deities cannot work without affirming here-and-now of the practitioners, and the human embodiment as somewhat inescapable, necessary —albeit conventionally— vessel and locus of the lofty meditation. Hadewijch semi-embraces both qualities, reaching for the core common traits in Beguine mystical union and aforementioned Buddhist contemplation, replete with bliss and melancholia. Therefore, the emotional tempest of Humanity, who ecstatically tasted the union with Divinity, is painfully experienced as melancholic lovesickness of the Soul for Love.

*"My heart lives in despair"*<sup>29</sup>: *Hadewijch's Melancholy as Darker Half of Love*

---

<sup>27</sup> Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, 325; see also Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 161. Both in fact refer to Lacan's "God and Woman's *jouissance*," 77. Now, one should be cautious about discerning the female-led transcendence of body, limited to a total abnegation or rejection. Apparently, tantrism presents more positive view toward the status of body and phenomenal world. However, if readers take into consideration that the erotic and blissful mode of union in Hadewijch and Porete proceed with an encompassing totality ("Love is all!" [L25]), the embodied Humanity itself is not under scrutiny. Even Porete's nothingness functions as the core of humanity: "know perfectly your own nothingness, you will do nothing, and this nothing will give you everything" (*MSS* 34).

<sup>28</sup> Kripal, 313. Hadewijch and Porete, in this regard, had formulated an order of unity that defies Lacan-ian desubjectivation of "woman as 'not all'" in male-dominated discourse and social reality. Also, their Soul in mystical union with Love attests that "desire for unification and totality" is not merely fantasy, or failing to recognize the inherent split or lack. See Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 155-8.

<sup>29</sup> Poems in Stanzas 17: Under the Blow, *CWS*, 173.

“May God make you live in despair” (*PC1: CWS 311*), Hadewijch writes. There cannot be a greater contrast to Porete’s mood for Love, as Porete’s joy of union befits the image of “radiance of the sun and its radiance’s splendor” (*MSS 22, 41*). Hadewijch’s elongated sorrow is always entwined and separated from Love, more as of “moon and of the sun” bathed in fire and darkness.<sup>30</sup> In order to later address Porete’s divine joy in her notoriously affection-less world, we now turn to equally renowned, yet affection-filled mystical world of Hadewijch’s sorrow. This contrast is only functional, and by no means is restrictive as Hadewijch’s theological and literary richness vividly captures how Porete’s sweet, perfect union with Love may *feel* like. However, Porete’s expression of sweetness mostly describe the impeccable transformation of Soul into Love, as “she feels no joy, for she herself is joy” (*MSS 28, 46*). Precisely such completeness of nondual union between the supposed humanity and divinity was what has gotten Porete into trouble. Hadewijch was no stranger to trouble of ostracization and oppression. However, the noble Soul of Hadewijch sings of her own pain toward Love, in contrast to Porete’s tranquil state designating the place of suffering either into the everlasting legacy of historical past, that is, Christ’s Passions (*MSS 63, 84-5*) or to the imagined future the Soul vows to protect herself from bondage. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Porete’s way of nothing cautions against self-inflicted, ascetic mode of suffering, a futile behavioral gesture if the soul truly understands and unites with Love. Therefore, The Soul brought to Nothing is portrayed almost always noble, content and have no disquiet.

Equally driven by the noble Soul, Hadewijch is the one who exemplifies the mood for Love through discontent and disquiet. In Hadewijch, nondual mystical union resorts on dramatic language due to the symbolic weight of love and suffering in Christian spirituality, at its

---

<sup>30</sup> Vision 7: Oneness in the Eucharist, *CWS*, 285.

emotional peak. This is what outwardly tells Hadewijch apart from Porete unmistakably. Hadewijch's abyssal, painful, dark side of Love (grief, sadness, wound, sorrow and though scantily, also *depression*) becomes acutely visible and tangible with her bountiful usage of spiritual senses and medium of despair. On this matter, I find the former Vicar of Camberwell and author Rodney Bomford's insight extremely relevant and beneficial. Bomford writes:

..some of those who are today called mystics have manifested extreme behavior, apparently irrational thinking and very often a sharp dislocation from the values and norms of the societies in which they lived.. some of the mystics of past ages might well be classified as insane by the criteria of our present age. However.. what is rightly valued in the mystics of the past is not their experiences, however abnormal, nor such matters as voices and visions and unusual states of mind, but their pursuit of an *inner transformation*. This transformation, which they too primarily regarded as important, is the subject matter of mystical theology and its aim is to conform the individual to what is seen as God's will for the flourishing of the whole creation. That, surely, is a very sane purpose.<sup>31</sup>

For scholars of mysticism, of course, there may be a desire to opt for a model of inner transformation occurring in the proper, serene mind, without all the confusing, un-sane emotional disturbances. Amongst Beguine mystics, Porete's approach might not be too different from this philosophical interest in mysticism, especially on the subject of mind and consciousness— except that the element of rapture and *divine* becoming is still integral to her mysticism. As long as these two processes both anchor the uniqueness of Beguine mysticism, it is impossible not to discuss the place of emotion —the erotic and ecstatic— in the mystical union as the presence of divine as Love/beloved confirms the relationality between soul and divine, not simply a rationality within one's own mind; especially, if we are mindful of Porete's own rejection and critique of Reason. From my understanding, the ecstatic mysticism of Hadewijch

---

<sup>31</sup> Rodney Bomford, "Mystical Theology, Mysticism and Madness," in John Gale, Michael J. P. Robson, and Georgia Rapsomatioti, eds., *Insanity and Divinity: Studies in Psychosis and Spirituality* (Hove: Routledge, 2014), 188 (italics mine). This concluding paragraph, however, does not convey the chapter's general tone against what is fundamentally a Beguine understanding of mystical union: "the modelling of the human relation to God on the erotic attraction between humans was emphasized.. This may be seen as one factor in the latter misunderstanding of mysticism as ecstatic moments of absorption into the divine" (182). The primacy of soul's conformity of the will is stressed multiple times-- over the temporary, ecstatic, absorptive mystical experience as the latter results in the controversial territory of nondual union.



and Porete, according to previous definitions, cannot be set apart from the erotic, and vice versa. Primarily, the way of love and desire for these Beguines always has direction and relation that is mutual and not one-sided, from/to Divine. Secondly, though not all ecstasy is meant to be erotic, standing outside oneself, *ék-stasis*, in mystical context, discovers the saint/mystic/ecstatic to surpass beyond, beside one's ordinary self, in order to connect with Divine. In an attempt to make space for Divine, mystics and ecstasies go far enough to empty, annihilate and bring themselves into nothing. But what is annihilated is the trace of ego, not their pure, innate capacity to fully and finally become one with Divine/Love. Therefore, ecstatic mysticism introduced in this chapter necessarily involves erotic dimension. Conversely, a full-fledged mystical, erotic union between the Soul and Love is impossible if the former is not in the truly ecstatic state, free from egoism and all the related forms of bondage. At this point the name and thought of Rūpa Gosvāmin (approx. 1489-1564), the great poet and scholar of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, whose interpretation of sacred aesthetic — significantly differed from Abhinavagupta's *rasa* theory— must be mentioned for cross-cultural contextualization, by centralizing the erotic and ecstatic dimension of love. Similar to the scriptural, classical four types of love, Rūpa's "aesthetic emotion of love (*śṛṅgāra rasa*)" includes five primary modes: peaceful, respectful, companionable, parental and erotic ones.<sup>32</sup> The intensity of love, however, does vary as it increases from former to the latter, further staging the ecstatic emotion as the highest stage (*Bhāva*) of spiritual love and devotion. I will come back to this notion for comparison with Hadewijch, and her notable ecstatic moods in erotic union with Love.

---

<sup>32</sup> Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 63-5. Note that *śṛṅgāra* means love, already replete with erotic and passionate sentiment, among its many definitions. Its meaning varies according to Hindu traditions and texts, but mainly it denotes the category of aesthetic emotion. "Śṛṅgāra: 18 definitions," accessed April 8, 2022, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/shringara>.

Still, emphasizing the erotic and ecstatic in mystical union does not mean the Soul can do away with all other God-given faculties. For Hadewijch, despite Love's overwhelmingly surpassing any trace of reason in most of her poems, the method of theological grounding stands firmly. In one of her beautiful epistles, Hadewijch defines the relationship between reason and love this way:

The power of sight has two eyes, love and reason. Reason cannot see God except in what he is not; love rests not except in what he is.. Reason advances toward what God is, by means of what God is not. Love sets aside what God is not and rejoices that it fails in what God is. Reason has more satisfaction than love, but love has more sweetness of bliss than reason.. When reason abandons itself to love's wish, and love consents to be forced and held within the bounds of reason, they can accomplish a very great work.<sup>33</sup>

So Reason plays a consistently large part in Hadewijch, but for the nondual fruition and deepest oneness with Love, "strict counsel of the intellect" (V8: CWS 284) can hinder envisioning such possibility and hold the Soul back. When it comes to mystical emotion toward Love, the scholar of mysticism Amy Hollywood has astutely commented on the Beguine mystics' "melancholic lovesickness for God" —in contrast to medieval interpretations associating the melancholia with "all sinful states"— such that this type of melancholia simply "cannot be sinful, for the object of love cannot be overvalued, nor the lover ever sufficiently debased before its divine beloved."<sup>34</sup> Hadewijch's strong ethics and theology also distinguishes itself from any kind of 'sinful' accusation, but the emotional depth of her love-induced melancholy may remain as a serious concern, apart from the more normalized, healthy process of mourning. Nevertheless, after examining Freud's seminal work "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) and Melanie Klein's "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1939), Hollywood tentatively concludes that melancholic constitution of one's subjectivity is found not

---

<sup>33</sup> Letter 18: The Greatness Of the Soul, CWS, 86. For the fallibility of reason (in fear, hope, charity, desire of devotion, and especially "bent for sweetness" foreshadowing Porete), see also Letter 4: Role of Reason, 53-5.

<sup>34</sup> Amy M. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 71-2.

exceptional, but rather essential: “Mourning, for Klein, is always melancholic, for it always involves processes of identification and incorporation grounded in a refusal fully to relinquish our lost objects.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the overwhelming enormity of loss, grief and even “disabling depression” is understood, observed and acknowledged. Hollywood writes:

..to disavow the subject’s melancholic constitution is to disavow the complex constellation of others who make us who and what we are. It is to disavow our losses and our griefs as well as that which supports and enables our subjectivity, our agency, and paradoxically, our responsibility. It is to deny our responsibility to the others within, and thereby to disavow that which makes possible our relations with others outside of ourselves, the very grounds of sociality from which our ethical and political projects emerge.<sup>36</sup>

If the melancholia in relation to losing and grieving our human (and non-human) companions, the melancholic lovesickness for Divine/Love opens up a horizon for incorporating such experience into a continually evolving, transforming self—practically with no limit. This is why analysis of Hadewijch’s expression most definitely goes further than a sort of measurable love-sickness. In her own words, Hadewijch’s desire toward union with Divine/Love drives her soul toward *madness* of Love. On this point, a very few scholars have commented, with handful of mystics who can be viewed along with Hadewijch. Of equal importance is that the condition can be manifested by intense presence of the feminine, from human agency to Divinity; and this

---

<sup>35</sup> Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> Hollywood, 86. For the intricate analysis Hollywood offers on Beatrice of Nazareth, Margaret Ebner, Freud and Klein, please review chapter “Acute Melancholia,” 67-90. I have cited passages that are directly relevant to Hadewijch’s melancholia. The most recent and ideal example, especially in American context of religious studies and gender, can be found in the theologian Monica A. Coleman’s autobiography: *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman’s Journey with Depression and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016). Weaving the intergenerational trauma, racialized melancholia, and the experience of sexual violence and healing from it, Coleman’s spiritual journey includes actual love relations, network of friendship and communal support that accompanies her grief and growth as a scholar, minister and activist. Despite a very little reference, Hadewijch, too, recalls individuals she cares for (L25: CWS 105-6), a reminder to readers that even a great mystic has a social biography. Lastly, Coleman’s theological understanding on God’s compassion and presence (203) brilliantly coexists with “Hell if I know.. How do I even recognize God’s voice?” (129). This echoes Hadewijch’s bitter complaints (PS 35: CWS 227) and noble “unfaith” continually desiring yet mistrusting Love/Divine (L8: CWS 65). This first-account may not have ecstatic vision as Hadewijch’s, it has a profound reflection on how God connects to the author, through her life experiences, including romantic encounters and relationships. *Bipolar Faith* involves the self ‘wholly’: “my brain, my mind, my soul, and my body were so thoroughly exhausted and broken down” (291), similar to how Hadewijch’s Love often breaks the Soul’s strength with storms of despair.

factor sharply narrows down the objects of study if confined within single tradition. Other hindrance to entry has been already mentioned: The issue of propriety, politics of gender, modern psychology and science discomfited by the notion of religion, or ecstasy. Therefore, I will present on this issue, through comparison: borrowing many more insights from traditions that allow the erotic and ecstatic modes of union in which such condition finds an important meaning, rather than exclusion.

June McDaniel, the scholar of Hindu religious and devotional traditions, has brought attention to this matter. First, it is imperative not to exclude the possibility of mystic's madness to come, genuinely and *directly*, "from the vision of God." That the intensely emotional mystic, or ecstatic, could be truly "in a state of divine love.. expressing a transcendent religious truth, beyond the ability of ordinary words and actions to express."<sup>37</sup> Though this may be an unpopular opinion, as a belief in such has been tainted by the puzzling (in)communicability and its morphing into the history of fanatic violence, and self-worship. But if we are to discuss the divinely inspired, love-madness, the ineffable mystical ecstasy ought to deliver a vision, or perception that does not exist, or cannot be formed or understood tangibly in language, just yet. The truthfulness of this holy madness needs to be examined under the context of temporal, theological and social tension. But this requires community of insight and tolerance, with a theological framework to allow that "the divine presence is known to drive the person mad with love and passion."<sup>38</sup> Although McDaniel provides a scheme for Bengal ecstasies, it flows naturally with Hadewijch's vision as her soul desires to be totally absorbed in God's sublime nature in one (CWS 57, 130, 143, 171, 215, 303), with fervent devotion of love. Whichever

---

<sup>37</sup> June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 250.

<sup>38</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 2.

marginalization came, the radical, independent Beguine point of view did not back down its totality: Therefore, the love-madness not only required the Soul to annihilate herself, but also rewarded the Soul by exalting the feminized devotee's being as the Beloved, the egalitarian partner of Divine. Assuming the direct status of divinity, the mystic/ecstatic "critiques the traditional religion by showing its limits and the absurdity of social norms."<sup>39</sup>

For the purpose of comparison, I find the concept and practice of *Mahābhāva* most useful. Mainly translated as 'divine ecstasy' or 'religious madness,' *Mahā-bhāva*, the Great-Emotion/Great-Ecstasy, denotes the highest pitch of spiritual love that accompanies and relates to the state known as 'divine madness' (*divyonmāda*). I choose this concept, or devotional emotion, to review Hadewijch because Porete's general mood of post-annihilated joy markedly differentiates itself from Hadewijch's violent emotions. Tentatively, I am making a very rudimentary distinction between Hadewijch and Porete, as made by Rūpa Gosvāmin's *bhāva* and Abhinavagupta's *rasa*. The term *bhāva* has wide range of meanings, but the chapter focuses on (1) the uncut, raw, personal emotional states and moods; and (2) the highest stage of spiritual love and perfection.<sup>40</sup> Following chapter will focus on Porete's joy and the indescribable yet central notion of aesthetic emotion *rasa*, with its generalized, im-personal, aesthetic affect. Now that we have come to the Divine madness, it is hard not to evoke the ever-lingering Hadewijch's love-madness from previous section. As confusing it may seem, her *Visions* and *Poems* are so radically emotional, and vibrant to the extent their unstable moods at times contradict the moderation she herself made examples of, from her letters and theological statements. However, when closely examined, they do have continuity. In terms of fluid spiritual language of *excess*,

---

<sup>39</sup> McDaniel, 251.

<sup>40</sup> *Bhāva* here means an ecstatic state, at the top of six stages which Rūpa Gosvāmin, the Vaiṣṇava theologian and aesthetician, provides for the experience of divine love (*prema*).

Hadewijch's Soul also overflows in her praise of God's essence in this manner: "A blessed soul saw with God according to God; and it saw God enclosed and yet overflowing. And it saw God overflowing in totality, and total in overflowingness" (L28: CWS 110). Although this is written in prose, the beginning of Letter 28 is replete with effusive joy and sweetness of soul's union with God, very much like Porete's uncompromising nondualism. However, all of this is truly directed toward the divinity, therefore, overwhelming for human soul to contain within herself. This type of theological contemplation cannot be fully comprehended by knowledge as most of Hadewijch's way of union enters the state of mystical ecstasy, with immense emotional flux. I formerly observed that Hadewijch's grief came out of separation, bliss out of union, respectively. But, as the keen eyes of scholars of mysticism have already pointed out, unilateral juxtaposition of Hadewijch's ecstatic state and following mood alone fails to capture the complexity of her love-madness: one should note that the famed phrase — "Hell should be the highest name of Love" — frequently appears in pairs with "bliss and the madness of Love" (*PC 16: CWS 357*). Madness of Love is not rendered as rather unfortunate consequence, but accepted by the mystic who lives it out, as the inevitable, central, and perhaps in the case of Hadewijch, the noblest and most natural route toward total union with Love. For her, the madness is not a purely transcendental state, either. Whether it's simply a metaphor for apex of love or not, her preceding poem exhibits psychosomatic pain induced by madness of Love—pain so severe the Soul withers and hopes that Love resurrects her 'already dead' senses; and yet, she finds the cause and cure of this adversity as Love, welcoming the "violence" of such experience altogether (*PC 15: CWS 350-1*). For a valiant soul of Hadewijch, pain of love can be voluntary and almost

self-inflicted.<sup>41</sup> This parallels when McDaniel explains Bengali Vaiṣṇava view on ecstasy and divine, love-madness:

The Ājvārs make use of the two meanings of *mā*- both Kṛṣṇa and mental disturbance. Love is a disease, and the disease is a deity, the only way to cure the disease (possession by Kṛṣṇa) is to worship him. As a friend states, “The disease [from which] she is suffering is a very exalted deity”; it is a “good disease.”<sup>42</sup>

I think the most visible and striking difference between this view on ecstasy and Hadewijch (or Porete) is that no matter how united and ecstatic the Beguines may become, the place of love-madness resides strictly in the Soul. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, however, the supreme emotion (*mahābhāva*) is embodied by the Goddess Rādhā herself. Therefore, even the highest ecstatic state, “divine madness” is not simply happening within ecstasies, but emulated by and through them, ascribing the passionate state to the Goddess of Love Rādhā’s own *mahābhāva*.<sup>43</sup> Since it is my main point to comparative read Hadewijch in relation to *divyonmāda* (divine madness) and *mahābhāva*, the highest stage of love, let us take a look:

They who go to God by **the way of hell** are fed without consuming, for they can neither believe nor hope that they would ever be able to content Love in her substantial being. They live in the land of debt, and reason penetrates all their veins and invites them to lift themselves up to this **divine self-offering** and to the height of all men who are beloved. They cannot believe what they feel: Thus God stirs them interiorly in a **madness without hope**.. what was given them in trust is soon devoured by their deep, **anxious** longing. What causes the soul’s **wrath** to increase continually is that she knows with her interior spirit what of God is lacking to her.. This is the wrath of the soul. There is besides a more intense **anger** in certain souls<sup>44</sup>

Caitanya felt contradictory mental states, due to his different types of ecstasy, and there was a great fight [within him] between the ecstasies. **Anxiety**, restlessness, distress, **anger** and intolerance were all soldiers, and the cause of this was the **madness of divine love** [*prema-unmāda*]

..His state of **divine madness** affected his mind and body, causing fatigue, and he spoke possessed by *bhāva*.

..The symptoms of madness caused the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. In possession by *bhāva* [*bhāvāveśa*], the states of affection and sulking were awakened, [as well as] disrespect, pride, and sarcasm.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> “..For your sake I shall never more spare mind or will, / Power, or marrow, or heart’s blood!’ / For it stands in the code of Love: / The deeper wounded, the easier cured” (PS 27: CWS, 205).

<sup>42</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> McDaniel, 29. Because of this, the renowned mystic Ramakrishna (1836-1886) is reassured that “he was not mad.. the same things had happened to Rādhā, the lover of Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya, the sixteenth-century saint of Bengal: ‘Who calls you mad, father? You are not mad. You are in the great ecstasy’ (LP [*Śrīśrīrāmakṛṣṇa-Līlāprasāṅga*] 2.10.10)” in Kripal, *Kālī’s Child*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> Hadewijch, Letter 22: Four Paradoxes of God’s Nature, CWS, 99.

<sup>45</sup> All translations found in McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 36. Original text from Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, ed. Sukumar Sen (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1977), II.55, 56, II.2.57. The passage on the right column describes the spiritual experience of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486-1534), one of the most distinguished ecstatic

As we can see, the highest loving sentiment toward deity at the pinnacle of mystical ecstasy entails extreme sets of emotion, exhibited by the Dutch Beguine Hadewijch and Bengali mystic-saint Caitanya. In each tradition, neither embodying a total range of emotion, nor calling the mystic’s own emotion as godlike earns unanimous endorsement or recommendation, by their contemporaneous orthodox stance. But this chapter precisely concentrates on the outlier mystics’ unique ability to channel this unbounded reality of Divinity, as desires out of/for Divine Love find self-expression freely. It turns out they have had massive impact on the following centuries, inspiring communities of mystics, establishing their own legacy. If the mystics are aiming at totality of divinity, full range of human emotions should be devoted and more. This is why the concepts of *bhāva* and *Mahābhāva* as divine ecstasy are useful to understand mystics’ overflowing affect, decoding Hadewijch’s rather ‘dark’ emotions, in particular. Difference should be noted: Although the symptoms of love-madness in both contexts are intense and very similar, there is no sign of direct ‘possession’ or talk-back to Divine as Hadewijch’s Soul is apparently struggling to grow fully and match the totality of Love, directing and containing all emotions, within her own Soul. As stated earlier, the Bengal ecstatic’s divine madness astonishingly relives Rādhā’s own state of love toward her divine beloved, Lord Kṛṣṇa: “and she becomes divinely mad (*divyonmāda*), with hallucinations of Kṛṣṇa and anger toward him.”<sup>46</sup> From the context of divine couple, anger can be directed toward divine, from another deity who carries equal weight in this divine play of love. In this regard, one should note that this level of

---

in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition in Bengal. Caitanya is famously known to embody the union of divine lovers: Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. See also Voss Roberts, 60. Relatedly, the feminist theorist Bell Hooks also commented on this range of emotion: “Ultimately, cynicism is the great mask of the disappointed and betrayed heart.” in *All About Love: New Visions*, William Morrow Paperback Edition. (2018; repr., New York: William Morrow, 2000), xviii. This chapter’s citations refer to the 2018 William Morrow Paperback edition.

<sup>46</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 43.



contemplation is obviously not for beginners, as the idea of Goddess’s own ecstatic, blissful love feels all too human and could be misleading for those who haven’t renounced their ego maturely. But the way of love-madness incorporates “all emotional states, even negative ones, in relation to the deity.”<sup>47</sup>

This notion holds equal significance for Hadewijch. And the observation above can be overturned if we follow through the premise of Beguine mystical union: The Soul is “heroine and lady” who can be “equal” to Love (V4: CWS 274). The whole point is the path-crossing between human Soul and Divine Love through Love. Hadewijch’s high-minded, Love-ruled “delirium” for Love (PS 28: CWS 207) is therefore reserved from the Soul to Lady Love, comparable to Rādhā’s delirium of passionate love (*mādana*) is directed toward Kṛṣṇa, the God of compassion and love. Neither of them denies that the way of hell, the darker, painful side of divine madness is somehow sweeter; as their tormented passion leads them to unite with their beloved. Besides, if we should take into consideration that the Soul’s *becoming* Love, previously compared to visualization of oneself as deity, and the Soul’s position as perfect ‘bride’ of God, who does access the totality of Love— allowed to “know” God “perfectly.”<sup>48</sup> In this sense, the status and agency of Soul as the beloved and lover of divine is enhanced. Hadewijch’s Soul and her noble unfaith, according to Hillgardner, “compels” Divine/Love/God to long for the Soul and be drawn closer to the Soul.<sup>49</sup> This is the remarkable power of Soul to demand and move Love, by expressing her sorrowful discontent. Similarly, the moodiness of ecstatic is known to be a strategy of one’s “forcing the deity to manifest and show love” during

---

<sup>47</sup> McDaniel, 45.

<sup>48</sup> V14: New Power to Live Christ, CWS, 305. Note that Hadewijch’s soul writes: “..I might taste Man and God in one knowledge, what no man could do unless he were as God, and wholly such as he was who is our Love.” Before and after this ecstatic moment, she also witnesses *herself* multiple times in the position/throne of Love.

<sup>49</sup> Holly Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go: Christian and Hindu Practices of Passionate Non-Attachment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 75.

the phase of separation.<sup>50</sup> For a lack of better term, the lens of *bhāva*, either translated as basic feeling or the most intense ecstasy, opens a door for divine and human “*sulking*.”<sup>51</sup> This line of thinking, belief and experience is only possible through the framework of desire and longing between lovers’ quarrel: and such love is most powerfully characterized by romantic, passionate, and erotic sentiments. Beguine mystics and ecstasies in this chapter had confessed what they were going through in a painfully honest manner: soul, heart, mind and finally, body. Their ecstatic symptoms include cognitive, affective, neurotic and physiological manifestations. If true devotion is directed toward God who is Love in all aspects and all dimensions of one’s soul, can the way of *bhāva* and love-madness also be read in this sense as well?

The fact that these phenomena had happened to women and men of excellent rational faculty demands today’s spiritual readers to genuinely perceive that there really is divine, love-madness beyond the pitying gaze of mere hysteric reaction to repression, genetic or biological misfortune, a disordered reaction to overwhelming psychological pain. All such research is essential for caring for the distressed, but the deeper existential meaning out of the noble suffering could emerge when there is relation to the ultimate, from the distress itself, a rare connection to the transcendent.<sup>52</sup> After all, divine, love-madness is not entirely Hadewijch’s invention, but finds its spiritual origin and value in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: the four types of madness –

---

<sup>50</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 244.

<sup>51</sup> Voss Roberts, 65.

<sup>52</sup> With the notion of “divine madness” (*divyonmāda*), the scholar of esoteric religion and mysticism, Jeffrey J. Kripal explains how what was previously regarded as mad, pathological, and even “shameful” can “transform themselves, almost alchemically, until their dark natures began to glitter with the gold of the mystical.” *Kālī’s Child*, 321-2. Although the main object of the saint Ramakrishna’s homoerotic vision, I think Kripal’s insight is mutually beneficial to read Hadewijch’s love-madness. As the alchemical transition of one’s pain, —especially when shunned outside societal norms— returns as a force of “radical transformation of one’s being,” the mystics’ symptoms become “‘exceptional cases’ in which the symptom became a symbol and turned a crisis into an experience of the sacred” (323). Here, Kripal cites Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 21-4.

“prophetic, ritual, poetic and erotic.. having a divine origin.”<sup>53</sup> The beauty of this brief section on divine madness in *Phaedrus* is that whole discourse is shifted to “the truth about the nature of soul, both divine and human.”<sup>54</sup> For the mystics and ecstasies, that meaning can only be found in Divine/Love who brings the liberation and fruition of human soul. Since love is set as the primary force of union, the place of transcendence may be said to encompass both sacred and secular spaces, and the entirety of emotional sphere: joy through despair. Being perhaps one of the most discouraging and despairing words from God, of course the passage is preceded by the glory of fruition, then followed by promise of timely fulfilment:

..as you desire to possess me wholly in my Divinity and Humanity, you shall desire to be poor, miserable, and despised by all men; and all griefs will taste sweeter to you than all earthly pleasures; ..your noble nature, which makes you desire me in my totality, it will become so alien to you to live among persons, and you will be so despised and so unhappy, that you will not know where to lodge for a single night, and all persons will fall away from you and forsake you, and no one will be willing to wander about with you in your distress and your weakness.. (Vision 1: The Garden of Perfect Virtues, CWS 268)

In sum, following the totality of Love’s will cause social isolation, wandering, and misery. But this fate is shared with ecstasies in Asia, who suffers similarly to Hadewijch’s burden of “overflowing with charity for others” (CWS 268). The ecstasies’ heart is overcome with the overflowing love, ecstatic joy of the deities whose divine madness represents the highest level of spiritual love (*prema*).<sup>55</sup> The fate of ecstatic is yet again connected to the Beguine mystic Hadewijch, as they both wander frenzied, with immeasurable Divine Love. But does such divine and holy madness have any ethical and moral consequence? According to Hillgardner, mystic’s madness does manifest great qualities, such as courage for justice:

These unnamed “great qualities” suggest again that the madness does not disintegrate all that she is and all that she knows. Instead, she recognizes in the insanity some connective profundity, a kind of “holy

---

<sup>53</sup> “From Beyond Speech to Non-Inscription,” in *Insanity and Divinity*, 12-3. Translation of *Phaedrus* found in Plato, *The Symposium: And, the Phaedrus; Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 102-3.

See also McDaniel 7, 295.

<sup>54</sup> *The Symposium: And, the Phaedrus; Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, 103 [245c-245d].

<sup>55</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 47, 85.

madness” that makes her more lucid in her condemnation of injustice, public opinion, and power.. Viraha bhakti’s trope of “holy madness” thus helps Mirabai find her voice against oppressive and shaming powers. She can even glory in the way that others, who may think her insane, view her.. Rather than feel shame in her reckless drunkenness, she revels in it, finding bold power in her bliss.<sup>56</sup>

Building upon the serious contribution from philosophers, historians and scholars of Beguine mysticism, we may father their shared, profound feminist orientations that speak to the Divine Justice. Both Hadewijch and Porete prioritize the inner perfection of their Soul, but the spirit of justice, charity, virtue is always there. Although many chapters in *MSS* have been poured to describe what it is to unite with Love/Divine Feminine, the core of such union remains ineffable along with the mystery of divine essence. Likewise, the visualized Buddhist Goddesses (Ch4) guides and empowers the believer; yet, this does not mean not a female devotee or mystic’s ordeal is lifted, at once, completely. Even the most radical claim of Porete, her Soul’s own becoming of Love, seems to fall back into mortal, temporal realm after a brief, rapturous moment of perfect deification likened to flash of lightning. On Hadewijch’s term, each return to herself after tasting full divinity in fruition is an “woeful” experience (V6: *CWS* 280). Soul must carry on the difficult realization of separation, disunity, and lack of Love. The focus of this chapter borrows resources from the psychology of mysticism, specifically, the flow of love and melancholy drenched in the words of female mystics. Due to the uniqueness and centrality of Porete, the narrative won’t be solely determined by the historical or embodied experience of mystics. Porete exemplifies a mystical excess best represented as union, purified by nothingness, simplified as peace and perfection. Nonetheless, as we now arrive at the reality of women with the symbolic representation of Divine Feminine back from the last chapter, the ecstatic goal of the nondual union cannot be complete or meaningful without addressing the inward and outward reality marked by distinctions and polarities. Beguine mystics hold onto Love tightly and

---

<sup>56</sup> Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 44.

powerfully: Hadewijch and Porete are both known to claim the union with Love/God/Divine Feminine so radically, they each faced worldly opposition: imprisonment and execution.

The presence of Divine as Love poses a unique complication and challenge to this philosophical discussion, especially when it is primarily structured around reason, bereft of emotion. Although Love is the Divine Feminine who is everything, I think in Porete's work, it is fair to say that we have mostly and thoroughly learned who and what Love is *not*, by way of Soul's utter nothingness. This is why the current chapter will delve into Hadewijch's musings and experiences of the nature of Love as she precedes and complements Porete, especially regarding what it does to the psyche of these Love mystics. With caution, my contention in this chapter is that the study of women's mysticism shall not exclude such radical expressions from consideration. Despite laudable theological achievement, Beguine mysticism has many counter-normative elements; but this is precisely why it has potential to reach deep and speak to diverse spiritual needs and agonies calling to be addressed and communicated. One prominent element is gender, and how the Beguines, especially so with Hadewijch, challenge the "heteronormativity of the relationship between the soul and the divine"<sup>57</sup> which has already been eloquently suggested by Hollywood's poignant critique. In the previous two chapters, I have emphasized the feminized aspect of Divine Love (and the Soul), but not merely essentializing female gender, yet pointing to the *queerness* that undoes the "dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual"<sup>58</sup> relations as metaphors of mystical union. Queer criticism, in the field of gender and sexuality, is a powerful tool to observe the "ecstasy, excess, and transgression" so endemic to Beguine erotic mysticism.<sup>59</sup> Mystical ecstasy here, then, a genuine longing toward infinite.

---

<sup>57</sup> Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 156.

<sup>58</sup> Hollywood, 152. See also Ch3 nn14-6 in this dissertation.

<sup>59</sup> Hollywood, 153.

My focus has begun with this insight, then turns it on more toward the problem of desire and love itself; toward the rather unspoken, insufficiently explored limits and capacities of human emotion and how the mystical union is experienced: how a mystic such as Hadewijch *felt* her union with Love. These feelings were in reality source and manifestation of sufferings Hadewijch's soul went through for the sake of Love. Despair, grief, madness of love-longing and even Hell stricken her inner world as the darker half of Hadewijch's erotic and passionate desire for union: "Suffering does not preclude erotic desire, but is central to it."<sup>60</sup> From medieval theological viewpoint, claim for indistinct union with divine is already marked as a grave heresy. In a secularized therapy session, we may be able to share our grievances in love, but how one can even fathom being in a relationship with *divinity* could be simply an unanswerable question, if not shrugged off as grandiosity. But Hadewijch speaks to both contexts (sacred and secular) and both grounds (depression and self-realization), rightly because the human soul, "in the deepest essence" cannot be explained without its dignified capacity as "a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself."<sup>61</sup> In other words, there is no way to deliver the truth of human soul without divine. Hadewijch of course moves even further by suggesting that God's own self-sufficiency and liberty "finds fruition" *in* this soul. Union between the soul and God is essentially and truly on equal footing as the divine "inmost depths" can be touched only by "soul's abyss." In this union, it is God who must "belong to the soul in his totality."<sup>62</sup> Abyss is a central metaphor for Hadewijch and Porete in their contemplation of infinite, mysterious quality and nature of Divine Love. In Hadewijch, abyss is the ruling image for the being of Love (*PC* 10:62; *PS* 7:4; *V11*;

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 156. See also Michael Warner, "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood," in *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Donald Morton (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 43.

<sup>61</sup> Letter 18: The Greatness Of the Soul, *CWS*, 86.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

V12:42-152). Now the mystic's own soul shares the abyss, confirming her status as the tireless "lover" of Love/Divine (*PC 1: The Nature of Love, CWS 318*).

Hadewijch, in her emphasis upon Soul's dignity and nobility, is known to have come "closest to the theological world of Marguerite Porete."<sup>63</sup> Despite the shared preeminence of Love as Divine and nondual mystical theology that unites the soul as one with Love, however, Hadewijch's writings are definitely more expressive (and explicit) about the soul's inner feelings and act as the lover— with evident, powerful appearance of visionary and sensory images and metaphors, such as "Beloved's kiss" and "embrace."<sup>64</sup> In Porete, 'touch' is the most sensual, spiritual language Porete utilizes. Nevertheless, it is always, exclusively, ultimately initiated by the Perfect Love/Divine, and the Soul remains to "be touched" by this grace (*MSS 53, 72; MSS 118, 140*). We may infer why: when it comes to Porete, her staunch guard against embodiment stays strong, as she perceived this as an obstacle to her contemplation. Other than that, Porete would only occasionally allow usage of certain images in the context of nondual union as dissolving into unity (sea, fire, lightning), or the Soul's great state of freedom (phoenix) nonetheless to the full impact. Porete's union is ecstatic and excessive in its own mode of radical divinization of Soul; but its highly meditative, philosophical quality may characterize her mysticism as 'seeing' the stages of union, solely through as nondual mystical perception.

---

<sup>63</sup> "Like Porete, too, Hadewijch describes the fully matured noble person as untouched by commands or counsels of those 'aliens' who do not understand the secret message and thus aim to destroy God. For both, the world is divided into noble and non-noble, or nobles and 'alien rustics.'" Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 20. As Robinson elucidates, it is Porete who marks her esotericism noticeably "by exclusion" distinguishing "those who can attain annihilation" from those who are in bondage of Reason or Virtues. Even Porete has an elaborate list of genealogies, but they are designated for divine beings and noble souls only. See *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>64</sup> L27, *CWS*, 107-8. Kiss, as the metaphor of divine-human unity in Hadewijch, makes frequent appearance in Letters, Visions and Poems. Among them, most intense meaning of kiss emerges as noble, sweet, yet violently all-consuming, "indivisible kiss— / That same kiss which fully unites / The Three Persons in one sole Being" (*PC 16: CWS, 355*). For the original kiss reference in Song of Songs, see *Ibid.*, 382n81.

In Hadewijch, seeing means and literally becomes *Visions*, including her encounter and hearing from Angels, saintly figures, God as Love. However, as decoding these symbolisms in Hadewijch's mystical theology deserves another volume-length work, current chapter will therefore concentrate on the dimension of excess, during the presence and absence of Love. Hadewijch's emotion may be excessive but still very human. In contrast to Porete, the fluctuating mood of Hadewijch is indeed the main place out of which eros and the often problematized presentation of melancholy can both be expressed as equal process of nondual union. Porete's process annihilates all such elements. For instance, we shall look into Porete on wretchedness as the Soul's essential recognition, a pre-requisite for the Soul's realization of "her fundamental identity with God in the ultimate ground of reality."<sup>65</sup> In Porete, the wretchedness/wickedness is more of a soul's character or human nature, as the Soul's frailty, folly, evil are all ontologically contrasted to divine power, wisdom and goodness (*MSS* 130). All feelings or affective descriptions are to be annihilated, except for the peace which pertains to *divine* life. Robinson points out: "Annihilation thus entails the utter transformation and eradication of createdness alongside the seemingly paradoxical freedom of the natural body in the material world."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, any feeling or affect, even those regarded as 'spiritual,' will be a hindrance to divine goodness and divine will to take place in the Soul Brought to Nothing. In *MSS* 88, The Soul speaks: "...Who serves is not free, who feels is not dead, who has longing wants, who wants is begging, who begs, deprived is he of divine sufficiency" (113-4). Even though this line of thinking may not precisely match the Buddhist inter-relations of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), but Porete's project of freedom and her method of nothing similarly guards against any arising of willing or willful affects for the sake of liberation

---

<sup>65</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson, 88.



and peace (*MSS* 73), shared with Buddhist sentiment. Nowhere in Porete can we find an actual emotional experience, and not as a sign of nobility, of wretchedness: an emotional desolation the mystic's soul plunges into with grief, Hadewijch is best known for.

Truly it is in Hadewijch the intensity of wretchedness manifests as literal woundedness, madness, depression and eventually the intensity of Hell— all induced by Love. Even the enlightening work of reason, as she recommends it, can't help her soul from confessing: “All this *depresses* noble soul” (L4: *CWS* 54; italics added). This is in radical contrast to Porete's sad, forlorn, wretchedness that rather fits into the pristine theological scheme of noble, perfect and peaceful soul, considering the overall tone of *MSS*.<sup>67</sup> However, it should be emphasized that Hadewijch's theological motifs, especially the centrality of Love and union, indeed align with what Porete narrates in *MSS*. Both Beguine mystics, as the chapter have indicated so far, manifest different kinds of erotic mysticism characterized by rapture and excess, of becoming one with God, paradoxically, only through annihilation in Porete, and Hadewijch's complete “dispossession of self.”<sup>68</sup> This paradox was already shown in the study of Porete in her rapturous union and her centrality of nothing. But Hadewijch expands this point, not by ruling out, but by exploring the realm of emotion, to all degrees and scopes of suffering as well. The emotional-spiritual strife and dispossession of self remains to be an utterly human experience, bringing forth the transformation of self, in new fruition with divine who represents the infinite.

---

<sup>67</sup> Though exceptionally rare, in the very beginning of the Prologue, Porete does present a Soul likened to a damsel and, “her sorrowful heart.. sorely wounded.. by the affection of the love with which she was overcome” (*MSS* 1, 11), also mentioning that this analogy of a king's daughter falling in love with her far-off love, as “a brief story of worldly love.. applies also to divine love” (Ibid., 10). Also, even more strikingly, Porete's Bewildered Soul complains: “..Now he has taken whatever I possessed, and he has given me no thing, he has kept it all. Ah, Love, for the love of God, is this how a lover shares?” (*MSS* 30, 49) These two passages contradict basically the tone of Porete's all following chapters, but leaves a point of convergence and transition to Hadewijch in whom the divine-human union painfully blossoms into romantic language of love. Following chapter will explain more of this.

<sup>68</sup> Borrowing Judith Butler's terminology, Hillgardner weaves the core of Hadewijch's non-attachment through which the mystic's longing for divine itself “dispossess the devotee into states of unknowingness, loosening her attachments to the divine, the self, and the other.” See *Longing and Letting Go*, 114.

Though naturally felt sad and powerless, the undoing eventually sets the mystic’s soul “freed from *selfness*.”<sup>69</sup> I sense a very Buddhist move here, but want to remain careful as Hadewijch’s framework is always relational and explicitly theological. At one moment, the soul observes “Love’s being remains unalterable” (*PS* 14, *CWS* 165), but we learned human heart is readily thrown into ecstatic-erotic alternation of bliss and the madness of Love. Especially considering this enigmatic passage in particular, whether the dispossession from the preexistent selfness has any bounds:

May God make known to you, dear child, who he is.. may he submerge you in him!  
 ..the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth to mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul, while one sweet *divine* Nature flows through them both one thing through each other, but at the same time remain two different selves—yes, and remain so forever.<sup>70</sup>

Again, the chapter does not aim to solve the mystery of divine Trinity or human nature. Nevertheless, such description of mystical union is shockingly intimate, and it is not too difficult to imagine the level of soul’s suffering after the perfect lover’s collision. According to Hillgardner’s analysis of this dispossession, this moment of undoing is part of “widening” of self, an unavoidable process of inner transformation in the scheme of Love. The widening began with the broadest merging with divine, but it is the grief of separation that truly expands the Soul

---

<sup>69</sup> Paul Mommaers and Elisabeth M. Dutton, *Hadewijch: Writer, Beguine, Love Mystic* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 69.

<sup>70</sup> Letter 9: He in Me and I in Him, *CWS*, 66. The realness of ‘body’ in Hadewijch cannot be overlooked, but her mysticism is not entirely body-based, therefore, body-to-body union can be source of confusion. What does this possibly mean? However, this complex fusion in Hadewijch may be able to find a very rare, but certain common ground with *achintya-bhed-abhed*, the notion of “simultaneous difference/dualism/separation and non-difference/monism/union” based on the blissful, refined, pure yet erotic love between divine couple Kṛṣṇa and Radha. It is understood, in Bengal Vaiṣṇava context, since Krishna cannot taste his own sweetness (*madhurya*) while the goddess Radha can, their difference/non-difference even intensifies their love (*prem*) and desire toward their union, increasing the pleasure of devotees who “drown themselves in the refined erotic ocean which blissfully merges Krishna and his world.” See Sukanya Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion: Siting and Experiencing Divinity in Bengal-Vaiṣṇavism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 3. In other words, devotees and ecstasies embody an important part, as an agent with “spiritual body” (*siddha deha*) who both observes and participates in the love play of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa: “The spiritual body is nonphysical, made of consciousness and bliss (*cidānanda*).” McDaniel, 52. So far, this difference/non-difference principle in *siddha deha* captures what Hadewijch portrays in L9 the best, otherwise enigmatic or even inscrutable. Such dimension deserves further study.

in Hadewijch: “Rather than staying bounded in the confines of the self-possessed “I,” a widened Hadewijch finds herself connected in divine fruition with other longing selves.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the experience of dispossession has taken on social and ethical aspects, channeling Hadewijch’s non-fruition into yet another fruition. Love can never be solitary but relational. But even the heart-wrenching separation has a purpose in Hadewijch as the dispossessed Soul is ceaselessly seeking a vast, infinite vision to encompass and transcend one’s previous knowledge and experience of Love. The soul’s union with divine requires the two-fold preparation: Philosophically this may entail unprecedented wisdom and heightened intuition; Spiritually, the dispossession shows us the true meaning of Hadewijch’s ecstatic-erotic mysticism. Whether the Soul wants or not, one is powerless when Love lets go and disintegrates: “One does not dispossess oneself; one is dispossessed by a power *outside* oneself.”<sup>72</sup>

Of course, in Hadewijch’s version of erotic mysticism, Love is allowed in all its possible affective and experiential forms, results in markedly great difference in imagination and contemplation, from the French Beguine’s. One prominent example of this is that Hadewijch’s mysticism shines in the recording of her *Visions*. First and foremost, therefore, the radical co-equality of Hadewijch’s feminized Soul expresses the remarkable individuality of female mystic. Relatedly and secondly, it can be said that this freely loving, individual Soul’s introspection models a proto-modern and proto-feminist psychology.<sup>73</sup> Hadewijch has composed a mystical theology that not only probes into the divine being, but one that is replete with anthropological concerns: language of desire, senses, strife, all forms and depths of human anguish. On these

---

<sup>71</sup> Hillgardner, 118.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid (italics added).

<sup>73</sup> “Any strangeness we feel at first in meeting a woman of the thirteenth century will quickly wear off as we discover her real modernity. She has no distinctively medieval notions, no distinctively medieval crudity or childish naiveté. She is entirely free from superstition; diabolism and melodramatic apparitions of the defunct.. Instead we find a wholly modern subtlety of feeling and psychological acumen.” Hadewijch, “Introduction,” in *The Complete Works* (hereafter CWS), trans. Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 36.

matters, Hadewijch goes toe to toe with her contemporaneous romantic secularist sentiments. Even the symbolically charged visions —though there is no denial that Hadewijch’s *Visions* indeed inherit the profound scriptural, historical and theological tradition — utilize the tradition, but the visions are to transform the tradition to uplift the noble Soul of *herself*, highly individuated yet not individualistic, even surpassing the esteemed figures such as Saint Augustine.<sup>74</sup> This move should not startle any serious reader of Hadewijch, as we have already observed and discussed in Porete; the Beguine mystics’ main struggle remains to be all about the total oneness with God, “without difference.”<sup>75</sup> The unmistakable difference of Hadewijch from Porete here is that the devouring, all-consuming aspect of this human-divine equality and union as “the *madness* of love.”<sup>76</sup> Theologically most creative and wholesome, Hadewijch’s daring and honest expression truly goes beyond the predetermined bounds of women’s belief and desire that were meant to be kept modest and silent, explosively revealing the dark side of rapture and excess in nondual, unitive mysticism:

My heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire and, ..., such madness and fest beset my mind.. and that my Beloved did not fulfill my desire, so that dying I must go mad, and going mad I must die.. I desired that his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with my humanity.. For that is the most perfect satisfaction: to grow up in order to be God with God. For this demands suffering, pain, and misery, and living in great new grief of soul: but to let everything come and go without grief, and in this way to experience nothing else but sweet love, embraces, and kisses. In this sense I desired that God give himself to me, so that I might content him.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Hadewijch, *Vision 11: The Abyss of Omnipotence*, in *CWS*, 290-1. Note that Hadewijch’s soul and Saint Augustine are equally absorbed by the Unity of Trinity. Though such an experience made her “so perfectly happy,” Hadewijch’s daring nondualism does not stop there, but claim: “For I am a free human creature.. I can will as highly as I wish, and seize and receive from God all that he is.. because I could not believe that any human creature loved him so passionately as I— ..I used to love the blessedness of the saints, but I never ceased to desire the repose in which God within them had fruition of himself;” Given Hadewijch rarely boasts about the depth of her spirituality, this really is a striking statement that signals proto-feminist, proto-modernist vision: to see oneself as a free, confident, ambitious being who can debate and eventually break out of the traditional boundaries and authorities. For the modern work inspired by Hadewijch’s dreams and visions in parallel with modern dream psychology and psychoanalysis, see Robin van Löben Sels, *A Dream in the World: Poetics of Soul in Two Women, Modern and Medieval* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> V7, *CWS*, 281.

<sup>76</sup> V14, *CWS*, 302 (emphasis added).

<sup>77</sup> V7, *CWS*, 280-1.

Before, I have briefly alluded that Hadewijch's writings exhibit a psychological analysis of her own self/Soul. Her intellectual capacity to conduct this is very important, as critique of women's mysticism or affective mysticism is quick to shut down any further discussion, in order to keep the union with divine or transcendence free from and untainted by emotional turmoil. But the level of her education and theological sophistication proves that divine, love-madness does not manifest itself as a mystical phenomenon only for those who lacks reasoning, articulation or sanity *per se*. From modern psychoanalytic perspective, her excessive desires, feelings of union with God and separation from God may immediately be subject to a suspicion, and categorization of psychosis: Especially her *going mad I must die* so swiftly melts into seemingly opposite mode of sweetness. Albeit worrisome, even the most intense emotion in Hadewijch is nonetheless guided by the immaculate "virtues"<sup>78</sup> and strong ethic based on "honor of Love."<sup>79</sup> As Paul Mommaers recounts: "...this instability of her experience is not the result of any moral shortcoming."<sup>80</sup> If we choose to restrict or reduce the possibility of mystical union *solely* in the realm of pristine reason, Hadewijch's unfathomable abyss of Love cannot fully unfold. Because the soul's instability stems from an overwhelmingly emotional rollercoaster to process being "wholly melted away in him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself" (V7: CWS 282). The readers soon anticipate how she desperately falls back into separation from that total, ecstatic union. Thus it is primarily a response to Love's own, extremely unpredictable range: "In all her comings and in all her goings" from "Bitter and dark and desolate" to

---

<sup>78</sup> Letter 1: In God's Radiance, CWS, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Letter 2: Serve Nobly, CWS, 49.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Mommaers, "Preface," CWS, xviii. To clarify, instability here means Hadewijch's emotional world fluctuating, according to the capriciousness of Love's very coming and going, unity and separation. Although in her pastoral mode, Hadewijch cautions against "instability" (CWS 57) and state of melancholy (59), as a whole, Hadewijch's writings point to the woundedness of soul by Love's unfathomable, thus mercurial nature. See *Poems in Stanzas (PS) 5: Love's Mode of Action* (CWS 139-41), in which Love's way of acting alternates between sweetness/joy/consolation/afire/cautious/gracious/alooof/revealed/bright/liberating consolation oscillating with cruelty/sorrow/blows/cold/reckless/close by/hidden/fierce/dark/coercive fear.

“heavenly joy.”<sup>81</sup> What is notable is that, this mystical ecstasy cannot result from irrational deviation, or lack of reasoning, as it affects soul such as Hadewijch’s, whose “reason penetrates all their veins”; those “who go to God by the way of hell”— Regardless, “God stirs them interiorly in a madness without hope.”<sup>82</sup> So, although Hadewijch’s madness of love is well-known notion as her overarching theme, how the piercing, exacting role of Reason contributes to these bouts of insanity is rarely discussed. In *PS* 25 “Reason, Pleasure, and Desire,” it is revealed that Reason is the most relentless critique and enemy of Pleasure and Desire:

So Reason shows her the highest degree in Love  
And overcharges her with the heaviest burdens.  
Pleasure, alas, even if she had had to kill Reason..

...And the soul with love so tastes its Beloved to the full  
That it lives for the Beloved on the Beloved’s word,  
And Reason then proposes an impediment,  
Showing the soul’s lack of growth,  
Because of which Reason judges the loved soul and the  
Beloved ever unequal;<sup>83</sup>

Very much unlike Porete, however, for Hadewijch, Reason’s place as “Love’s surgeoness” is intact and the pedagogical function Reason keeps eventually evolve into the most significant part— she brings about the *wounding* of the soul, by constantly blowing, charging, pressing how the soul fails to measure up to the Beloved. Therefore, this point complicates the picture of Hadewijch’s mysticism often painted solely with excessive *feeling*. Rather, it is notable that how Hadewijch’s love-madness may, in reality, be combined with *reason*-madness. For a soul who wants to grow into the fullness and sublimity of Love/Divine, the sweet experience of mystical union will always be real and wholly felt, yet the faculty of Reason also will dissect and review this moment, totally. Since Hadewijch’s soul and Love commit

---

<sup>81</sup> Poems in Stanzas (*PS*): 34, *CWS*, 224-6.

<sup>82</sup> Letter 22: Four Paradoxes of God’s Nature, *CWS*, 99.

<sup>83</sup> *CWS*, 198.

themselves into dual, polarized modes of living, being and union, we can only surmise the violent intensity of internal conflict, tension and self-scrutiny during her distressed moment of separation and non-fruit. Nevertheless, the greatness of Hadewijch lies in that she confesses her soul's vulnerability ('human being as I am— / I who merely invited Love') and remorse concerning Reason ('Enlightened reason.. To scrutinize with her the whole garden of Love'), yet still manages to declare: "How reason illuminates the entire abyss of Love" (*PS 19, CWS, 177*).

I am not simplistically arguing that Reason directly causes madness in Hadewijch; What I suggest here is that its unending demand ('Then comes reason, in force, / And with new works of obligation'<sup>84</sup>) is paired with the sweet, albeit temporary, experience of Love. And though the connection between the soul's reason/mind and pleasure/desire runs inseparably deep, their co-existence is rarely experienced as balance, but lament, wounding and eventually, madness. Moreover, Hadewijch's soul does not seem to allay any of the excess or turmoil, yet "will suffer gladly" as the very nature of sublime Love is to rob both "mind and heart" (*PS 18, CWS, 175*). Interestingly, in Vision 9, Reason appears as a terrifying Queen whose very presence instills fear at first:

The queen approached me dreadfully fast and set her foot on my throat, and cried with a more terrible voice, and said: "Do you know who I am?"  
 And I said: "Yes, indeed! Long enough have you caused me woe and pain! You are my soul's faculty of Reason,"

(*CWS 285*)

Although the following describes how the soul acknowledges Queen Reason's facilitation of the workings of Love and mystical union as the quintessential part of it, Reason confirms the knowledge of Love is also "*painful mystical knowledge*" (emphasis added). It is as if Hadewijch predicts the cognitive-affective interplay in her description, by recording the words of Reason in

---

<sup>84</sup> Poems in Stanzas 19: Defense of Love, *CWS, 179*.

the vision: “And every eye of knowledge, either of love or of pain, had the crown of Love.”<sup>85</sup>

For strictly scientific purposes, many realms require careful distinction between the cognitive and affective dimensions. However, Hadewijch’s take on it is built for, and from the perspective of Love. Only through this totality of Love, Reason can be incorporated in the mystic’s life: “..and I truly acknowledged it. Then Reason became subject to me, and I left her.”<sup>86</sup> This vision begins and concludes as part of her ecstatic experience, leaving the soul finally embraced by Love at the last scene. Her theological creativity grounds itself on thorough and fluent grasp of sublimity of divine traits; and yet, even the most rational, self-sufficient moment always returns with the depth of hellish despair, caused by none other than God as Love. Hadewijch’s brutal honesty fills in what Porete has annihilated and left completely blank: the emotional world of mystic’s soul. The interiority of the mystic’s soul and her love for God is transparent for Porete and Hadewijch, but the latter’s world is pronounced more volatile and vulnerable. Nevertheless, such traits cannot be interpreted as unwholesome or inauthentic. In Hadewijch’s union with Love, true renewal fundamentally entails “new violent longing” and “new sufferings” culminating “In the madness of Love.”<sup>87</sup> Without acknowledging the soul’s internal tempest, the *bipolarity* of Love cannot be understood. According to Jeffrey J. Kripal, American scholar of History of Religions, this bipolar reality structures the mystic’s universe and consciousness “that is at once static and dynamic, transcendent and immanent, conscious and erotic.”<sup>88</sup> This definition may represent the position of any scholar of mysticism, or philosophy, but the

---

<sup>85</sup> Vision 9: Queen Reason, *CWS*, 286. Also, Hadewijch’s simultaneous engagement of her reason and longing can be best compared to *viraha bhakti*—“a mystical eroticism from Mirabai’s Vaiṣṇava Hindu tradition that emphasizes communal, emotionally complex experiences of intense longing.. the ancient Indian art of longing as an epistemology,” Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 10. *Bhakti*, or devotion, “can be intellectual, intentional, and hospitable to both ritual and contemplation. Not simply an unbridled emotion that negates or ignores the intellect, bhakti is best defined as ‘participation’ and ‘committed engagement,’” (Hillgardner, 12).

<sup>86</sup> V9, *CWS*, 286.

<sup>87</sup> Poems in Stanzas 7, *CWS*, 145-6.

<sup>88</sup> *Kālī’s Child*, 15.



following state of Hadewijch's mystical consciousness as erotic union of bipolar energies, and the Divine lovers has profound resonance with transgressive South Asian models—between *Śakti* and *Śiva*, between goddess and the god. When Hadewijch's highest joy is signaled, so too is the “the time of greatest sadness / For the heart noble Love has wounded.”<sup>89</sup> Love and melancholy, then, is not a separate status that take turns respectively, but a very much lived reality that comes together. According to Hillgardner, the bliss of “fruition”/enjoyment/satisfaction and “falling short”/lack of fruition/non-fruition may sometimes keep separate paths, but Hadewijch's soul and *Minne*/Love often recollects when the two moods are experienced “*at the same time.*”<sup>90</sup> On this entwined relation, Hillgardner notes:

In the continual and dual experience of these states, Hadewijch suggests the integral intertwining of separation and union. They do not exist solely as opposite and unconnected states; instead the interconnected states of blissful enjoyment and forlorn abandonment combine toward the expression of a full-bodied communion with *Minne.*<sup>91</sup>

If the fruition and apparent lack of it mutually implicate with one another, the love and melancholy of mystic should be understood as equal representation of *Minne*/Love experienced in the soul. The separation presupposes a greater “love in separation” (Skt. *vipralambha*) transforming the nature of relationship between the parties involved, from hierarchical to

---

<sup>89</sup> Poems in Stanzas 14: School of Love, CWS, 162. On the use of bipolarity as a term— Only a few sources on Hadewijch discuss her experience of despair, in medical terms. There are scholars such as Jerome Kroll, in *the Mystic Mind* (2005), who approach certain mode of despair in medieval mystics through the lens of modern psychology and psychiatry. If helpful, my chapter will also engage in this direction as the crux of this dissertation is constructing an alignment between the mystical contemplation and today's existential suffering, mood disorder in particular. The highs and lows in Hadewijch's writings exhibit intense and extreme changes bear a very close comparison to the mood swings. The aim of such usage is exactly the opposite of merely identifying or pathologizing mystical experience; Rather, by not shying away from various fields' investigation, the philosophical and psychological depth and complexity Hadewijch has accomplished in her magnificent self-introspection which deserves a new reading, appraisal, or renewal, borrowing her own words.

<sup>90</sup> Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 68.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* Though this chapter does not linguistically examine the meaning of *Love/Minne* in Hadewijch, I follow the definition where the scholars (Newman; Guest; Rudy; Boon) mostly agree upon; that is, loving relation and union between God and the soul (63-4) which uplifts the soul's status as Beloved, as equal to God, and the Person/Christ. Its totality is absolute, but never merely abstract.

mutually nourishing one.<sup>92</sup> Not to overgeneralize this position, Hadewijch's emotional response is a rare one, not normative. However, for those who deal with great mental and emotional disturbances during their search for transformation and transcendence, this highly unusual, Hadewijch's "barely concealed mood disorder" can be seen as unanticipated companion, as full expression of human emotion bridges the gap of separation between soul and divine Love.<sup>93</sup> Hadewijch artfully and repeatedly explains why her soul undergoes the lowest point no matter how excruciating it could be— all the pain is for the sake of Love, toughening the warrior-like spirit of Soul to perpetually engage with Love. This move empowers anyone who wrestles with their whole being, devoting all their desires and emotions to rise above current ordeals, without the language of sinfulness, demonization or stigmatization of melancholia, as the experience of dispossession and despair is regarded a natural process of development, as much as the blissful fruition. Nevertheless, this does not allay the grief of such development, because Hadewijch's path of desire brings the soul to both extremes, to the extent living through Christ's own example is recommended. Living with, for, *as* divine, for Hadewijch, means letting Love rule the soul to be consistently under "restless force of desire."<sup>94</sup> The very core of desire is an explosive and mercurial one, so the human emotion of love "grows to a real madness and can be perilous to life."<sup>95</sup> As I have suggested, Hadewijch is a model exemplar and a companion for wounded souls/selves who suffers while seeking personal transformation or transcendence, without hiding or reducing this cost of Love. In other words, though not all dedicated souls may experience

---

<sup>92</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 282-3. Although the mystical union in Hadewijch is portraying the divine-human relationship, as the erotic sentiment cuts across sacred and secular, it is not impossible to imagine this on the ground of devotees themselves. For the tantric couple (Sera Khandro and Drimé Özer) whose ritual union symbolizes the union of divine beings, this means equal partnership for "spiritual realization" rather than "master-disciple relationship" even though the eminence of guru and reverence toward within the tradition remains strong.

<sup>93</sup> Hillgardner, 66.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>95</sup> Mommaers, "Preface," *CWS*, xiii.

this, but for Hadewijch's soul, melancholy or instability seems activated in opposition to mediocrity or half-heartedness with Love. Soul's continuing longing toward Love is only justified when it is cruelly unfulfilled: "And this is a frightening life Love wants, that we must do without the satisfaction of Love in order to satisfy Love."<sup>96</sup> For a soul who is determined to pursue such an unattainable goal, inner wounding is inevitable. In Hadewijch's case, one may contest the melancholy is perpetually self-inflicted as Hadewijch appoints herself as a "human being, who must suffer to the death with Christ in Love" (L29, *CWS* 115). There is no way to mitigate or escape the soul's grief until Love's fruition, and becoming one with Love.<sup>97</sup>

In modern terms of psychology, explicit language of divine may be absent, or not allowed, but the problem of human desire and emotion involving oneself and the Other is always present as the main subject of the field. In this setting, status of divine is replaced by other human relations of ultimacy: primal causes and developmental factors, mechanism of unconscious, parent-child relations, and so on. Even within these relations, the issue of emotional excess manifests as repression, obsession, neurotic and psychotic episodes often based on individual crises. Still, experienced psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists attempt to console a tormented patient/analysand/client, while exploring to understand the deeper inner world of self on the long-term basis. Yet any discussion of mystical, divine, or unitive experience will be easily dismissed if the professionals are held back by "biases and cultural assumptions" leaving out the wealth of "virtue and health" the Beguine mystics embodied, for

---

<sup>96</sup> Letter 13: Love Unappeasable, *CWS*, 75.

<sup>97</sup> On this point, see Hillgardner 83-4: "Hadewijch's longing, even with its burdensome physical and mental consequences, may be best viewed as an acceptance and even a celebration of bodily life rather than a glorification of suffering.. Hadewijch might be said to cultivate longing, as the *virahinīs* do, by learning to lean into, if not fully accept, the inevitable griefs of separation." This insight becomes especially true, observed apart from the passionate, ecstatic joy of union with Love. Readers, however, should be mindful of the excessive and violent side of Hadewijch's depression, and love-madness— a sentiment, radically far from modest resignation.

the development of human character and maturity of loving relations.<sup>98</sup> In this regard, this chapter perceives Hadewijch's sick-with-love mysticism as the thirteenth-century mode of psychological examination of her own depression (and mania) in search of perfect, realized self, through even more perfect state of union: Love. As much as it sounds controversial, the Dutch Beguine mystic's unique and significant approach does not contradict her sophisticated philosophical acumen, but strengthens the theological creativity beyond her time, heavily weighted by heart and its infinite rich emotions. In a society where terms such as heart, soul, infinite are treated as rare currency, mystical ecstasy or love-madness could be relegated to the realm of dysphoria. As Kakar has earlier observed: "The distinction between the two, though, is not very hard and fast, their boundaries constantly shifting. Both can be produced by severe depression or manic excitement," but "What is important in distinguishing them is their *meaning* and *content* and not their origin."<sup>99</sup> In the words of Hadewijch, living with the spiritual bliss, joy, and the soul's "purest motivation for new progress."<sup>100</sup>

Given that the study of mysticism, for a long time, has gendered itself into philosophical/contemplative/masculine versus affective/visionary/feminine, Hadewijch powerfully embraces and fuses both dimensions. But to be able to do so, Hadewijch is bestowed with a unique, capacious vision that can hold extremes and polarities. This gift of vision can be a blessing and a curse at the same time. And the side of curse, of course, has been minimally discussed outside the network of scholars of mysticism cited in this very chapter. Hadewijch's madness of Love represents a climactic state of true and total unity of soul with God, thus radiates new possibilities and routes the modern, scholarly discourse of mysticism and theology

---

<sup>98</sup> Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 199.

<sup>99</sup> *Analyst and the Mystic*, 19 (italics added).

<sup>100</sup> Mother Columba Hart, "Introduction," CWS, 17.

may connect to. However, with her erotic and ecstatic mystical contemplation of Love and the internal landscape of darkness, Hadewijch approaches the divine with her soul, not only rational but also emotional. This line of reading deeply humanizes the contemplatives and mystics who write about their languishing, plagued journey toward their ultimate union with the divine—precisely because it mirrors the phase of our own life, full of perils and agonies, awaiting the glistening, albeit brief moments of exaltation even after eight centuries. Since her capacity to engage both dimensions has proven Hadewijch’s deep theological understanding, firmly securing her depression as a process and a *result* of immersion and transformation. Kakar explains such a process so fittingly:

Mysticism.. is a radical enhancement of the capacity for creative experiencing, of the ability to experience “with all one’s heart, all one’s soul, and all one’s might.” ..the mystic undergo a creative immersion in the deepest layers of his or her psyche, with its potential risk of phases of chaos and lack of integration.. the potential mystic may be better placed than the analysand to connect with—and perhaps correct—the depressive core at the base of human life which lies beyond language. *Psychically, he or she is also more endangered.*<sup>101</sup>

Seldom is there a better embodiment of ecstasy, in its highs and lows, as the Dutch Beguine grasps, internalizes and grovels. In “Love’s Seven Names,” Hadewijch depicts the essence of Love:

<p>As Hell turns everything to ruin,          In Love nothing else is acquired          But disquiet and torture without pity;          Forever to be in unrest,          . . . . .</p>	<p>To be wholly devoured and engulfed          In her unfathomable essence,          ..In the deep, insurmountable darkness of Love          (Poems in Couplets 16, CWS, 354)</p>
---	---

Despair, disquiet and the unfathomable quality of Love lives with a soul who’d willingly devote “heart and mind” only to discover “Love has put in chains our heart and powers / And all our mind and will;”<sup>102</sup> But as countless variations in Hadewijch testify, this dedication of whole being soon prepares the soul to undergo the kind of radical, creative mystical immersion Kakar

---

<sup>101</sup> “Preface,” *The Analyst and the Mystic*, x (italics added).

<sup>102</sup> *PC 10: Not Feeling but Love*, CWS, 336.

describes above. Our commonsensical association of creativity with levity or playfulness is completely overturned in the mystic's emotional journey. Despair purifies one's soul; and "Deficiency examines the depths of Love;"<sup>103</sup> To taste Love's sublimity, the soul wrestles with grief, chaos and disintegration. There seems to be no detour in peeling the layer of one's psyche, which may be an extremely difficult process. But Hadewijch's resilience shines when she faces with darker sides of union, anticipating, embracing that: "Love is always the reward of love." And "It is very sweet to wander lost in love / Along the desolate ways Love makes us travel" (*PS* 34: *Becoming Love with Love*, *CWS*, 225). Perfect enjoyment of Love is desired, but readers witness how this is an eternally deferred hope, slipping at a radical distance. The pain is, I think, is even more severe when the union with Love seems so close and already has been tasted. However, this seems embedded in the character of desire itself— As Desire, Pleasure and Reason constitute the human experience of Love altogether— as well as Love's essence; rightly because of the distance between the humanity and divinity, the Divine Love acts as "the wholly Other" whose "transcendence continues to exceed man."<sup>104</sup> In other words, shaping the soul's experience of union is only possible due to the ever-renewing, continual generation of Love. It is the truly sublime, divine quality in "never-contented Beloved" who generates "never-completed work" in "every noble soul like a storm" with sole purpose of contenting Love.<sup>105</sup>

According to Hadewijch's visions, true enjoyment of fruition primarily occurs during ecstatic visions, of which she even records the exact temporal duration: "And I lay in this fruition half an hour;" (*CWS* 288, V10) In this sense, the remaining records of Hadewijch often complains of having to return to humanity itself— a state of exile, a vivid metaphor for painful

---

<sup>103</sup> *PC* 1: *The Nature of Love*, *CWS*, 318.

<sup>104</sup> Mommaers, "Preface," *CWS*, xv.

<sup>105</sup> Letter 16: *Loving God with His Own Love*, 80.

non-fruition. Letters are probably written during spiritual exile; if exile never misses to cause grief in the soul, melancholy may also be directed to the condition of *humanity* itself— as experienced by Hadewijch’s embodied, non-fruitive, non-ecstatic reality. There is no means to sugarcoat this gloomy picture, but the focus needs to be not on any earthly humanity, yet on the *Humanity of God*, the *Humanity of Christ* Hadewijch prays to be one with.

With the Humanity of God you must live here on earth, in the labors and sorrows of exile, while within our soul you love and rejoice with the omnipotent and eternal Divinity in sweet abandonment.

For the truth of both is one single fruition. And just as Christ’s humanity surrendered itself on earth to the will of the Majesty, you must here with Love surrender yourself to both in unity.<sup>106</sup>

To sum up, following the very example of Christ, in Hadewijch’s world, the painful longing in the humanity is united to the sweet Divinity/Love. At the end of Letter 6, Hadewijch shows what’s behind the demoralizing exile— the glimpse of oneness of Love, yet again during the state of ecstatic vision: “..she ravishes man out of himself and so touches him with herself that he is one spirit and one being with her and in her” (CWS 63). One may notice how much the oneness between the soul (masculine here) and Love is stressed here. On the other hand, this fruitive union, by touch, will be more integral to Porete’s mystical rapture as well. In the mystical ecstasy, the soul is allowed and elevated to be in ‘touch’ with her own potentiality without any limit. It is during this state Hadewijch’s soul closely mirrors Porete’s soul— or, potentially Hadewijch’s core as reminiscence to Porete,— forsaking the primacy of virtue or work, in front of Love:

But the just nature of the Unity, in which Love belongs to Love and is perfect fruition of herself, does not seek after virtues, virtuous tendencies, or particular works, however pure or of however pure authority they are;

For in that fruition of Love there never was and never can be any other work than that one fruition in which the one almighty Deity is Love.

What was forbidden me (as I told you it was forbidden) was to have on earth any undueness of love; that is, to stand in awe of nothing outside of Love, and to live in love so exclusively that everything outside of Love should be utterly hated and shunned; (Letter 17: Living in the Rhythm of the Trinity, CWS 83)

---

<sup>106</sup> L6, CWS, 59.

As Unity prevails, the fruition not only unites the soul to Love, “he becomes God” (84). Indeed, Letter 17 describes the nature of Divine Persons, yet it is also a pastoral recommendation for the readers to not just learn and live, according to the very flow of Trinity. The preceding letters also reflect the wish for complete union with Love, by touching (L3) and living (L6) Christ; in themselves, the aim of mystic has already moved beyond worshipping and modeling after the divine, but toward becoming united to the depths of transcendence. Whenever there is a perfectly unitive fruition for the soul, it is, however, given by the ecstatic vision, unsurprisingly. Hadewijch’s soul is kissed, embraced, united to God the Father “with the Son” thereby inserting her own place as equal, in the Unity of this new Trinity.<sup>107</sup>

In Hadewijch’s scheme, by the reasoning of mutual abyss between soul and God, this is the godly Humanity that contents and fulfills humanity in Love. Nevertheless, when the paradox of Love again casts the soul off, it is *felt* to the mystic as a cruel abandonment, as the matter is not quietly accepted or internalized. At the moment of non-fruition, the tone and moods are radically different from the soul as a valiant warrior who fights Love’s new assaults as a counterstrike:<sup>108</sup> “..we are exiled far from it.. Oh, he is God, whom none of us can know by any sort of effort unless veritable Love comes to our aid!” (L12, CWS 71). Another way to look at the fruition is the politics of theological anthropology of her time.

It is above all, is it not, her experience of God as unfathomable that determines her conception of what man is. And the most important point here is, beyond any doubt, that this unique creature, in spite of all his

---

<sup>107</sup> There is remarkable similarity between this vision introduced in Letter 17, and Porete’s rapturous state of nondual, mystical union, especially The Fifth State, during which “the Soul considers that God is he who is, of whom all things are” (MSS 118, 143). Hadewijch’s soul is equally taken to God with Christ, then “in this Unity into which I was taken.. I was enlightened, I understood this Essence..” (L17, CWS 84). This unity, from my perspective, goes beyond aligning mystic’s will toward divine will-- As “a single fruition and a single delight” is constantly emphasized in this union with Love/*Minne*. Hadewijch keeps portraying the union “the most intimate.. through eating, tasting and seeing interiorly” (PC 16, CWS 353), which reminds us of the heart-warming union between Christ and his disciples during pre- and post-resurrection encounters.

<sup>108</sup> One example: “Love alone is the thing that can satisfy us, and nothing else; we must continually dare to fight her in new assault with all our strength, all our knowledge, all our wealth, all our love” (L7, CWS 64).



definiteness and limitations, is no determined being. He who can become one with a never-to-be-comprehended Beloved is, in his essence, an openness and an unlimited dynamic.<sup>109</sup>

Although the prominent scholarship has emphasized the embodied humanity of Hadewijch's soul, I would suggest a slightly different kind of reading. As I have suggested earlier, Hadewijch's mystical union and her nondualism does retain an unresolved tension, including moments when her pendulum of divine-human nature of the soul swings to the direction as transgressive as the French Beguine Porete's union with divinity. Hadewijch's bliss and desolation, both of her significant moods are related to Hadewijch's status of union and separation, divinity and humanity— and it is mostly the former of each pair that converges with Porete's exultation of divinity in/with her own Soul. The level of discouragement, opposition, rejection, and persecution surrounding such a claim for union must deepen the melancholy, given the fidelity of her own soul who cannot deny the realness of her experience of Love. Any discussion of mystic's humanity or divinity is always at high risk of inquisition because it necessarily involves the nature of Christ himself.<sup>110</sup> But this position has been already challenged by Hadewijch, who is willing to live, suffer, die *like* Christ, for real. Even in such a secularized environment as ours, Beguine nondualism can be a shock to religious community to whom certain dogmas remain untouchable.

In sum, when read together, Hadewijch's melancholy and Porete's joy could be better understood in relation to the other: "Each person who gives her everything he has shall possess

---

<sup>109</sup> Mommaers, "Preface," xv.

<sup>110</sup> "At length she was threatened with an accusation of teaching quietism, a charge that carried with it the possibility of being turned out of the community to wander the countryside, or even of imprisonment if she were denounced to the Inquisition." Mother Columba Hart, "Introduction," *CWS*, 4. This chapter does not fully explore biographical detail of Hadewijch. However, historical evidence supports that wandering, imprisonment and banishment may have been facts of life for Hadewijch, not only a metaphor for non-fruiting, the life without ecstatic oneness with Love. Such details of oppression may be unexposed, but the level of her suffering is barely concealed and always return to give meaning in relation to Love: "...He who must journey into distant exile / Is wearied by the deeply worn roads.. Through everything Love ever inflicts on him— / In him Love ever has her fullest contentment" (*PS* 41, *CWS*, 246-7).

her wholly—one shall possess her in joy, another in sorrow.”<sup>111</sup> As both experiences attest to fullness of Love, either implicitly or explicitly, they may also express much more similar grievances than previously admitted— especially when mystical oneness with God had the most transgressive potential of *becoming* divine for oneself. In other words, melancholy and joy throughout the Soul’s relation to Love in both mystics, is fundamentally born out of the tension, unity, then another separation between divinity and humanity. However dazzling and real the joy of loving Divine Love in unity could be, the ephemeral quality of the mystical experience quickly saddens the soul who remembers the high of “absolutely transcendent” but now returns to the “utterly immanent.”<sup>112</sup> Without this risk of all-or-nothing, Hadewijch’s wounded soul, or madness of Love basically loses its existential weight, not to mention that Porete’s rapture is also based upon similar excess. I have earlier suggested Hadewijch fills in the empty space Porete left: The reality of humanity, human suffering and all of its feeling, the phase of melancholic non-fruit. Chronologically, however, it would be more accurate to say Porete could have inherited the Dutch Beguine’s legacy, and started from where it’s left, by absorbing, distilling and resurrecting who and what the melancholic Hadewijch truly wanted to claim. The rather painfully concealed and forbidden yearning of Hadewijch undergoes repression and explosion; then, this yearning finds a singular dominance in outspoken Porete as the soul unites with and becomes Love by bringing all else nothing: including her own Soul. Among the host of great mystics, Hadewijch and Porete are unique in constituting the nothing, not solely through metaphysical lens, but through and for Love. Indeed, Love, annihilation and nothingness is a theme then that is built and flows out of Hadewijch’s own writing first, blossoming into Porete,

---

<sup>111</sup> Letter 7: Assault on Love, *CWS*, 64.

<sup>112</sup> Webb and Sells, “Lacan, Bion and ‘Unsayings,’” 198. See also McDaniel, 279: “The ecstatic is joyfully permeable and vulnerable, with the deity both immanent and transcendent, both within and beyond the ecstatic.”

most ardently: “To be reduced to nothingness in Love / Is the most desirable thing I know” (*PS* 38: Nothingness in Love, 239). Moreover, it can also be said that the rapturous union emerged in Hadewijch, which Porete held nothing back from. Notice her resemblance to Porete’s stages:

The fifth nameless hour is that in which Love allures the soul and heart and makes the soul ascent out of itself and out of the nature of Love, and into the nature of Love. And then the soul loses its amazement at the power of Love and the darkness of her judgments, and forgets the pain of Love. And then it experiences Love in no other way but in Love herself.

The sixth nameless hour is that in which Love disdains reason and all that is in, above, or below reason. ..for reason can neither take anything away from Love nor give anything to Love.

..The seventh nameless hour is that nothing can dwell in Love, and nothing can touch her except desire. The most secret name of Love is this touch, and that is a mode of operation that takes its rise from Love herself. For Love is continually desiring, touching, and feeding on herself; yet Love is utterly perfect in herself.. No mercy can dwell in Love, no graciousness, humility, reason, fear; no parsimony, no measure, nothing. But Love dwells in all these.<sup>113</sup>

Hadewijch’s woundedness, —again simultaneously describing the nature of Love/Divine— is expressed with the language of senses. According to Elizabeth A. Dreyer, this simultaneity of Hadewijch becomes visible through the language of “spiritual senses” through which the “mystics’ longing for God” accompanies the basic sensory modalities (taste, smell, touch, hearing, and sight).<sup>114</sup> But the more significant message in this erotic-ecstatic touch, from my limited observation, is first should be considered from the problem of gendered, female desire and yearning: “By making the desiring female body the site of mystical union, Hadewijch highlights the crucial role of female desire in the mutual erotic love for which she yearns.”<sup>115</sup> But the Beguines achieve this not by excluding the other gender, but by incorporating and

---

<sup>113</sup> Letter 20: Twelve nameless Hours, *CWS*, 91-2.

<sup>114</sup> See Elizabeth Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 110. My chapter addresses Hadewijch’s desire and despair toward Love, but does not focus on the issue of how the physical senses are utilized, either in metaphorical or literal sense, in mystical experience. On this particular subject, see Gordon Rudy, *The Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>115</sup> Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*, 60. See also Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation*, 67: “Hadewijch of Brabant.. fully exploits the intimate bodily relations implied by language of taste and touch to articulate her idea that union with God is an immediate, reciprocal, and dynamic union of essences.. She assumes that to sense by taste and touch is to make immediate and continuing contact with another bodies and thereby acquire knowledge that alters our judgments and desires. She also assumes that to taste or to touch is by definition to *be* touched: it is reciprocal.”

transcending the traditional categories of female and male, eventually. Because the project of loving, uniting with, and becoming divine is the telos. Historically, in both Christian and Hindu devotional mysticism, renowned male mystics exhibited “strong feminine identifications” cultivating their own “femininity to the point that the female-self part becomes dominant” in their internal world.<sup>116</sup> Even then, it was still a male, homoerotic vision and Kakar, in the nineties, has admitted that the “primary femininity” or “the pure female element” remains largely unknown, especially in the field of mysticism.<sup>117</sup> Had Hadewijch and Porete been known and studied earlier, in comparison with rich tradition of Hindu and Buddhist Goddesses, the observation on female-centered mysticism could have been entirely reshaped.

The second point here is revealed to be the radical mutuality between soul and Love/*Minne*/God(dess), whose union is so deep and one, the level of intimacy can be conveyed only in rapturous and erotic language. The connection between divinity and humanity can be rapturous when the divine is mainly understood and expressed by the mode of desire— Even though Hadewijch transforms the erotic desire borrowed from courtly love into what is utterly sacred, faith approached from Love and desire may have been the most foreign element, especially for those who attempted to define and contain Beguine mysticism within the category of traditional theology. Nevertheless, the presence of abyss, depression, madness, culminating in the Unfaith, altogether is a concept and experience that rather has plagued humanity since the beginning of time, but especially now. The way of desire and love, through Beguine mystics’

---

<sup>116</sup> Kakar, 30-1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 34. See also Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine*, 98-101 on the gendered nature of mysticism from historical perspective. This passages gives us a vivid context in which women’s mysticism, not to mention erotic expression, has largely been interpreted in the dualistic, derogatory reduction of feminine, thereby giving us a clue why Porete begins and ends completely rejecting any association with female embodiment as such--- establishing her mystical union to the higher and bolder position. By saying this, I am pointing out that homosexual reading of mystics has been conducted in a way the theological orientation and the mystic’s devotion, hence both the divine and human soul, are dominantly on ‘male-to-male’ relation. On this issue, see Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism & Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 18-21.

imagination, has become the least foreign and most intimate route of passion. By attempting to feel the Divine Love, Hadewijch's emotion has redefined how to be fully human: Not only should we devote ourselves to God who is Love, but with human soul, we should become lovers, Beloved and the agent of Love. Therefore, for Hadewijch, it is this unfathomable interrelatedness, "This flowing forth and this reflux / Of one into the other" is the main mode of loving union, surpassing "the mind and understanding" (CWS 356).

When combined with issue of gender, Hadewijch's Love has truly heralded the becoming of *female* soul, the following centuries have been struggling to grapple with. But the gender carries such an enormous weight that Hadewijch's divine, Love, subconsciously or consciously establishes herself "as a goddess or cosmic principle, representation of the Beloved as a mirror of the self"<sup>118</sup> which pulls itself, closer than ever, to the tantric Buddhist Goddess tradition mentioned in the previous chapter. This radical move basically established, however long it lasted, her own erotic-mystical vision within a framework that such an expression was unprecedented, disallowed and unimaginable— resulting in great marginalization, as a consequence. But the spirit Hadewijch invokes has a resounding ramification, especially for the current ventures in gender and spirituality, providing a possibility of total union with God in the name of Love. Embracing the reality of melancholic lovesickness and non-fruition, now we shall turn to Marguerite Porete, whose indestructible joy of union with Divine Love perfects the Soul. Comparison with Asian sphere of erotic sentiment and divine ecstasy will further enhance the reading of Porete.

---

<sup>118</sup> Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 164.

## CHAPTER 5

### JOY THAT IS BLISS AND BEATITUDE: WHEN PORETE MEETS NONDUALIST TANTRIC UNION

**The Soul.** The rapturous exaltation which overwhelms me and joins me to the heart's heart of Divine Love, into which I am melted, says the Soul; and so it is right that I should be mindful for him, for I am dissolved into him.

(MSS 80, 104-5)

Repose (*viśrānti*) therein can be attained by the union (*yoga*) with the rising of the heart (*hṛdayaccāra*). The perfect (*samyak*) repose therein is nothing other than the place of *anuttara*.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Why Porete's Joy Needs Nondualist Buddhism and Kashmir Śaivism*

The passage on the top is indeed from Porete, but remains hardly ever quoted; I speculate that it seems to contradict the generally non-affective tone of Porete: “says the Free Soul who keeps everything *without* care of heart; and if the heart feels this, then she is not so” (MSS 89, 115; italics added). Current chapter relatedly focuses on this conundrum of Porete's Love and joy within the contemplation that seemingly rejects and burns any place of feeling. I have presented few points of philosophical comparison between Porete and Buddhist tradition. But the understanding and attitude toward ‘feeling’ in Porete is even more interesting, with Buddhist counterparts close to her. There's another conundrum that classical Buddhist stance primarily deals with how to reduce the desire-induced suffering (but so does Porete). Despite the possible enjoyment with Porete in terms of inner peace, the rapturous and blissful joy of Porete remains unanalyzable if we solely rely upon the mode of somber ascetic. This is why nondual tantric

---

<sup>1</sup> Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka (TĀ)* 5.52cd-53ab. Like most Sanskrit terms quoted in this chapter, the word for heart *hṛdaya* has many referents including “mainstay or resting place” (Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 79). But Heart primarily expresses the “characterization of the goddess (Śakti).. the centre of reality.. as the ‘heart of the highest Lord’ (*hṛdayam paramēṣituh*).” Ernst Furlinger, *The Touch of Śakti: A Study in Non-Dualistic Trika Śaivism of Kashmir* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2009), 221-2. Therefore heart is a significant spiritual concept and reality that is grounded as the essence of divine being, which will culminate in the meditator's attempt toward union with the supreme state. The following section largely rests on the possibility for further philosophical and theological conversation on this very subject of one's own realization as Self, accompanied by the sense of joy and bliss both in Beguine (Porete) and Asian contexts.

union is essential in this comparison. Otherwise, any discussion of joy or bliss can easily be dismissed as pursuit of egotistic, ephemeral desire. Because, an indifferent Buddhist may ask: “Who can afford joy in a world full of suffering?” But this question does not address the more fundamental basis of Buddhism, which is an ardent critique of “clinging, grasping, possessing” rather than an absolute denial of pure and authentic, human experience of joy itself: “Buddhism teaches for adults that ..trying to hold on, particularly to states of bliss, is the cause of suffering.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, if one delves into eradicating the clinging part, it is easy to dismiss or neglect the real possibility of bliss. From reading Porete, however, it is established that the Soul’s true joy comes from her luminous and blissful union with Love/Divine. Distinguished scholar of comparative mysticism Michael A. Sells (1949 - ) has pointed out insightfully regarding this uniqueness of Porete:

This freedom is ecstatic; the soul lives and is without itself, outside itself, or beyond itself. The ecstatic freedom occurs simultaneously with two events: (1) a highly erotic version of the mystical union of the lover and beloved (in which the two parties are now only one party), and (2) the courtly exchange whereby the deity entrusts the soul with its goodness and the soul hands back her will to the deity.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Porete’s mystical union, in essence, is truly nothing but the ecstatic, divine joy— minus any aspect of ‘explicit’ embodiment, or physical passion. Nevertheless, Porete’s mysticism can be best interpreted as this tantric Buddhist movement pivoted around the notion of *sahaja*, the spontaneous enlightenment, or “divine ecstasy.” Despite aforementioned differences, as a mystical experience, Porete’s joy of Love has much more in common with *sahaja*: “1. It is ineffable, 2. it is blissful, 3. It is timeless.. 5. it is an abolition of the duality of subject and

---

<sup>2</sup> “Faust, Mephistopheles and attachment: discussion of Mark Epstein’s chapter— ‘On the seashore of endless worlds: Buddha and Winnicott’,” in *Freud and the Buddha: The Couch and the Cushion*, ed. Axel Hoffer (London: Routledge, 2015), 112.

<sup>3</sup> Sells, “The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: ‘Unsayings’ and Essentialism” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 127.

object.. 8. it is sacred, and 9. it is the luminosity of one's own mind.”<sup>4</sup> Along with nondualist tantric union, Porete's can certainly add the transitory nature of highest state of union, and the devotional, relational aspect such as calling upon divinity, and eventually identifying with the divinity.<sup>5</sup> Positing a mysticism of knowledge and illumination, though the innate and divine bliss is incomparable to worldly bliss, neither of them deny the worldly realm, culminating in their usage of erotic and sense-based expressions; the ultimate state is implied, and realizable within the transformation of perception of one's own spiritual potential. Always embracing and transcending dualities and polarities; and this nondual movement is metaphorized as loving union between divinities, divine principles, between (human) Soul and (divine) Love, then again between two human beings who fully embody and practice such noble ideals.

Canonical Buddhist texts and commentaries mainly start (and end) with analysis of *dukkha*, so the dimension of higher level joy/happiness *sukha* is rarely emphasized with equal weight. However, with a counterpart such as Porete who shares the noblest pursuit of joy and bliss, the existence of *sukha* in Buddhist idiom and the tantric placement of *mahāsukha* cannot be further ignored.<sup>6</sup> According to Ronald M. Davidson, the eminent scholar of religion and esoteric

---

<sup>4</sup> For the full nine descriptives, see Davidson, “Reframing ‘Sahaja,’” 52. Davidson here cites Per Kvaerne, “On the concept of sahaja in Indian Buddhist Tantric literature.” *Temenos* 11 (1975): 124-8. Please see also Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 182-4, 188-9.

<sup>5</sup> David L. Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 35: “Such discussion serves to indicate the very transitory nature of the experience and the very delicate distinction that must always have existed between the two orders of enjoyment. It was indeed a razor’s edge.” Lightning flash of Porete’s fifth and sixth state befits this description with the difficulty of slicing through each elevation of Soul’s state. Following the sense imagery of touch (*MSS* 58, 77-8), Porete converges with tantric Buddhism and Kashmir Śaivism in her ample use of illumination and light (*prakāśa*). See *Śivastotrāvalī* (*ŚSĀ*) 4:8: “O master, Your shining form which is soaked with the supreme nectar of joy and ecstasy does appear to me sometimes. It appears to me momentarily just like the lightning of clouds, finished in a flash.” See also Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 120-1 on how the light denotes the very nature of divine Self, and all phenomena.

<sup>6</sup> The closest, comparable source of joy in Early Buddhism may be found in “Divine Abidings” or “Four Immeasurables/Four sublime attitudes (*Brahmavihāra*)” that is lovingkindness (*maitrī/mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣā/upekkhā*). Readers of Porete may find that “lovingkindness and graciousness” (*MSS* 79, 103) in Porete is present, yet not as much highlighted as the “peace” (*paix*) of her Soul, sharing the equanimity that comes with her divine-like status. Although both the Beguine and tantrikas would not contradict all four divine abodes, the sensual, blissful, loving sentiment of their union goes beyond the realm of Virtues— as these states are mainly oriented others. American scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Sarah Jacoby similarly



Buddhist traditions, this *mahāsukha* is also translated as “great ecstasy” introducing another significant esoteric term for tantric joy and bliss (*ānanda*).<sup>7</sup> Before addressing the importance of *mahā-sukha*, we should understand and acknowledge *sukha* first: mental and emotional pleasure that is “good, beneficial, soft, healthy (*kusala*).”<sup>8</sup> Successful outcome of reducing *dukkha* naturally leads us to *sukha*, not a harmful, but recommendable one. Porete’s own, thorough annihilation of Soul who is constantly brought to Nothing may fundamentally agree with Buddhist orientation toward cessation of *dukkha*, cognizing and purifying what is impermanent, hence freeing one from psychological distress. Apotheosis of such state, on Buddhist terms, is the ennobling, “enlightenment” or “awakening” (*nirvāṇa*), that is also “the highest or ultimate *sukha* (*paramam sukham*).”<sup>9</sup> Because the Buddhist analysis concentrates on diagnosing and curing the source of unhappiness and pain, the experience of happiness and pleasure is mostly disregarded as the cause for series of the eventually disappointing, changing phenomena. So this aversion to a term such as ‘bliss’ is only natural, with nondual tantrism as exception. But this chapter looks at precisely where such realization of *emptiness* is not necessarily without or separate from bliss. Porete’s rapturous joy or pleasure is also contemplated as bliss of *nothing*, as it is only accomplished when the Souls “have no longing, no feeling, and at no time any affection of the spirit; for such customs would enslave them” (*MSS* 24, 44).<sup>10</sup> Porete’s critique of

---

comments that *brahmavihāra* and its joy and love “have a decidedly parental tone, in keeping with the injunction to love all beings as one’s mother.” See Sarah Jacoby, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 256. More on *brahmavihāra*, see *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, 439, 566, 616.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald M. Davidson, “Reframing ‘Sahaja’: Genre, Representation, Ritual and Lineage.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2002): 57. In the same article, *ānanda* is primarily translated as joy or bliss, but at times also as ‘ecstasy.’

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Olendzki, “Buddhist psychology: a work in process,” in *Freud and the Buddha*, 73.

<sup>9</sup> Olendzki, “Buddhist psychology,” 74.

<sup>10</sup> The Kashmir Śaiva may overlap with tantric Buddhists here as the concept of empty/void becomes integral to realizing the oneness with everything, the divine nature: “‘Nothingness’ is to be distinguished from ‘not-existing’ in the sense of nihilism; rather, it is the Centre, ‘the light between being and not-being.’” Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 48.

“spiritual affection” at first glance baffles readers. Doesn’t it sound like a major component of any genuine spirituality, especially to a mystical contemplation of Love? However, in *MSS 55*, Porete explains in the character of Love that the adherence to spiritual affection either manifests as mortification of the body or as the psychological satisfaction with one’s own sense of longing and wishing itself (74-5). But there is truly a moment of following: “They do nothing if it does not please them, and if they do it, they deprive themselves of their peace, freedom and nobility. For the Soul is not perfected until she does what pleases her and feels no remorse for doing her pleasure” (*MSS 91*, 116). Therefore, Porete opens up the space for joy and pleasure, incorporating the range of most supreme meditational goals. In the words of her Asian counterpart: from “the great bliss of the void (*mahāsukha*) ..toward the joy of ecstatic love (*mahābhāva*).”<sup>11</sup>

Porete’s illumination genuinely brings such joy, along with peace and freedom, similar to the way Buddhist path of being aware and ceasing *dukkha* results in “gladness, joy, happiness.”<sup>12</sup> Based on this understanding, we can situate the presence of love —with or without sexuality— both in Porete and tantric Buddhist practitioners: The Beguine’s Love is between divine lovers, Lady Love and the Soul. Though maintaining a rather traditionally heterosexual scheme, *yab yum* (father-mother) union of couple models after “male and female deities in sexual union, symbolizing the nondual union of method and insight.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, both contexts allow a new kind of love that transcends the ordinary limits as the mystics/practitioners embody the

---

<sup>11</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 168. *Mahābhāva*, according to Rūpa Gosvāmin, denotes “the highest form of passionate love for the deity, Kṛṣṇa.. the form that was fundamental for the experience of sacred erotic rapture in the Caitanya tradition.” See Delmonico, “Sacred Rapture,” 213. Here we may learn that erotic-ecstatic rapture does not always fall under the anti-normative, extremist margin, but has been regarded as the apogee of sacred, at least in one significant sect (Caitanya). However, McDaniel notes that *mahāsukha* is indeed a tantric emphasis and a “shift from Mahāyāna emphasis on *nirvāṇa*” which confirms that the joy in Porete requires the tantric sensibility of union for apt comparison, in addition to the philosophical, ascetic mode.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 280.

communion of Means and Wisdom— “In the ultimate sphere of great bliss, method and insight are indivisible.”<sup>14</sup> Love between the Tibetan visionary Sera Khandro and her guru, Drimé Özer is a great example as they each perceived other as *yab* and *yum*, awakening the very “body of buddhahood as Hayagrīva and Vajravārāhī in indestructible union.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, living out the indivisible, inseparable, indestructible union of deities, even corporeal death cannot put a halt to such love.

The aforementioned Hadewijch’s love-madness, as shown in the previous chapter, is apparently closer to state of *mahābhāva* with its vast range of emotion; yet it is not completely separated from Porete’s joy and bliss from union, perfectly encapsulating and comparatively mirroring the two great divergence and reunion between *bhāva* and *rasa* theory, in and of itself, as well. Here, although the Perfect Love and other romantic metaphors are shared with the Dutch Beguine, one cannot categorically mistake one for the other as Porete’s unique way of liberation and annihilation is inexplicable as mixture of any trait of what is ‘typically’ Beguine. She is totally unique.<sup>16</sup> Every divine and noble ideal is personified as Love, lover, or beloved, yet the method and goal of Porete’s mystical union does align itself with Buddhist sentiment. Porete’s re-definition of Love as Divine, and the Soul’s “wishing for nothing” minus any “works of virtue, in the longing of a good will” directly contradicts a theological sentiment discrediting a large sum of performances based on goodwill (*MSS* 133, 170).

Porete’s joy is only comprehensible in terms of pure freedom of Soul, enjoined with/as Divine Love. Any language of Love, desire or rejoicing transcends ordinary senses in Porete’s

---

<sup>14</sup> Jacoby, 311. For how the primordial wisdom of the four joys is enacted through the tantric physiology, see 199-200.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 309. The divine couple are prominent in the tantric Buddhist pantheon. Among the existing iconography, these two deities tend to appear as one, embracing, in the form of Hayagrīva-Vajravārāhī Chintamani (Tib. *ta pag yi shin nor bu*. Eng. the Wish-fulfilling Jewel, Horse-necked One and Vajra Sow). See “Hayagriva (Buddhist Deity),” Himalayan Art Resources, Rubin Museum of Art, accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/915>.

<sup>16</sup> Kent Emery Jr., “Foreword,” in *MSS*, xiii.

Annihilated Soul, yet this distinguished state brings her notion of joy so comparable to the Buddhist and Hindu tantric notion of “Great Bliss” (*Mahāsukha*), “as the abode of indescribable joy as well as liberation.”<sup>17</sup> In the theological canon of the West, Beatitude might be the closest candidate for comparison. Also, in the previous discussion of Buddhist Goddess, Nairātmyā<sup>18</sup>—the tantric female Buddha and deity whose name means “Lady of Emptiness” or “She Who Has Realized Selflessness”<sup>19</sup>— Miranda Shaw has taken up the significance of bliss, along with the centrality of emptiness, in Tantric Buddhist’s enlightenment. And there we repeatedly encounter the “spontaneously arising joy” (*sahajānanda*) “beyond the realm of sense experience” and constitutes the essence.<sup>20</sup> Like other divine feminine representations in this chapter, Nairātmyā is first praised as the “Lady Prajñā (Lady Insight/Lady Wisdom).. who brings the Joy Innate.. She is the Innate itself, the divine *yoginī* of great bliss.”<sup>21</sup> However, more importantly, Goddess Nairātmyā is partnered with Lord Hevajra, a prominent Buddhist deity and the emanation of buddha Akṣobhya, to generate bliss of union *together*. Hevajra speaks: “There at its centre am I, O Faire One, together with you. The Joy Innate I am in essence, and

---

<sup>17</sup> Bishnu Ch. Dash, “The Art of Amour-Cortois: Eros, Jois and Mahasukha in Tantra and the Troubadours.” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 30, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2007): 70. Alex Wayman translates *Mahāsukha* as “Great Beatitude” in *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), 261, 267. These translations, when compared, are preferable to comprehend the spiritual meaning of joy in Porete. Relatedly, it appears as “Supreme Great Bliss” (ABh: *paramamahā suha*) in *Hevajra Tantra*, one of the widely regarded key texts in tantric Buddhism. See more in Jackson Barkley Stephenson. “Bliss beyond All Limit: On the Apabhraṃśa Dohā in Tantric Buddhist Texts.” *Religions* 12, no. 927 (October 1, 2021): 927.

<sup>18</sup> “About Nairatmya,” accessed August 20, 2021, <https://mandalas.life/tag/nairatmya/>. “Nairātmyā or Dāgmemā is a yoginī, the consort of Hevajra in the Hevajra-tantra. The name means “she who has no self (ātman)”. Nair-ātmyā is the feminine form of nairātmya which comes from nirātman ; nairātmya means “of nirātman”, and in the feminine form, nairātmyā, “she who has no self”. Nair-ātmyā, the no-self female, that is, she who has no self. She is an embodiment of the Buddhist philosophical concept of anātman.”

<sup>19</sup> Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 377-8.

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, 389. *Sahaja* (Tib. ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པ་, Wyl. *lhan cig skyes pa*) itself is translated as “simultaneously born” (Davidson 45) but its most significant appearance and discussion is combined with the tantric connotation of with joy, bliss, and/or ecstasy, *ānanda*— hence *sahajānanda*, the fourth joy of *Hevajra Tantra*. Although my chapter is limited to provide its concrete historical usage or practice, its frequent association with *mahāsukha* (great bliss) provides a meaningful space as the highest meditation of nondual gnosis, with the language of ecstasy and/or bliss, close to Porete’s erotic union and illumination.

<sup>21</sup> Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra*, 104-5, g. (41)-(46)

impassioned with great passion.. But my inner nature is tranquil, and holding Nairātmyā in loving embrace, I am possessed of tranquil bliss.”<sup>22</sup>

The four joys of nondual, bliss-emptiness: This innate joy, the kind of bliss is identified with the *mahāsukha*, coming closest to Porete’s otherwise perplexing description of joy. In the iconography, the divine couple’s embrace is often literalized. Therefore, it should hardly come to our surprise that the bliss or joy (*ānanda*), in tantric buddhist world, is “related fundamentally with sexual experience.”<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the fourth joy, or Joy Innate (*sahajānanda*) is commonly associated with transcending, and being free from all three preceding worldly, sensual connotations. Because this Joy Innate pertains to “perfect enlightenment” for “The Innate is called self-nature, the single unity of all phenomenal forms.”<sup>24</sup>

From Joy there is some bliss, from Perfect Joy yet more,  
From the Joy of Cessation comes a passionless state.  
The **Joy of the Innate** is the finality.

The first comes by desire for contact, the second by desire for bliss, the third from the passing of passion, and by this means **the fourth** is realized.

Perfect Joy may be called *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* the Joy of Cessation, with plain Joy as a middle state.  
But **the Innate** is free of all three;

for **there is found neither passion nor absence of passion**, nor yet a middle state.<sup>25</sup>

David Llewellyn Snellgrove (1920 – 2016), the premier British Tibetologist, in his influential study of *Hevajra Tantra*, had pointed out that the Joy Innate can mean “slaying of the notion of a self.”<sup>26</sup> Porete’s own aspirations are strikingly similar to this as Soul brought to Nothing tasks herself in destroying the self-will and solely burning with fire of Perfect Love; a

---

<sup>22</sup> Ch v. “The Manifestation of Hevajra,” **a.** (7)-(11) in Snellgrove, 110.

<sup>23</sup> Snellgrove, 134.

<sup>24</sup> Ch x. “Consecration,” **b.** (15-17) and **e.** (41) in *Ibid.*, 82-3.

<sup>25</sup> Ch viii. “The Troupe of Yoginīs,” **e.** (32-5), *Ibid.*, 76. Boldface added for the Joy Innate. Note that the Nondualism here does not discriminate between the “mystic realization (*nirvāṇa*)” from “the world of everyday experience (*saṃsāra*)” (22). Note how Porete’s description of Soul-Love mystical union also lacks a posthumous state of glorification. Instead, Porete also organizes her Soul’s joy and beatitude in terms of *seeing* and knowing properly; realization and perception clearly, and “the state of being of Perfect Love.. of that Love who is the mistress of Knowledge, not of that Love who is Knowledge’s daughter” (*MSS* 56, 75-6).

<sup>26</sup> Snellgrove, 38.

task so thoroughly permeated in her work, it is not to sense a comparative resonance of Buddhist project of utter extinguishment of (wrong view of) self, along with all the defilements. Many ritual studies have already dealt with the literalized practice of sexual union. As I have mentioned earlier, what is more important in both tantric Buddhism and Porete, is the goal of liberation and nondual union, through realizing emptiness/nothing *cum* bliss.<sup>27</sup> The remarkably feminine description for divine and human lovers, Porete's erotic-esoteric language, and a thorough, fiery apophasis of nothingness, from my perspective, finds common spirit in the Tantric Buddhist meditation on emptiness and bliss aided by the league of Goddesses guiding the practitioners with ennobling wisdom, benevolence.

Nearly three centuries ago, nondual mystics-theologians-philosophers in Asia had sung about “the enjoyment of the joy of tasting the nectar” of the Divine: they belong to a school of Kashmir Śaivism, known to originate and thrive during 9-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>28</sup> This chapter will, however, only engage with very brief passages and concepts that directly speak to Porete, departing from a historical or doctrinal entry as such encyclopedic work has been conducted by numerous eminent scholars.<sup>29</sup> This chapter starts with a firm decision, considering who can

---

<sup>27</sup> Lama Yeshe, *Introduction to Tantra* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 37, quoted in Jacoby, 205: “The Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition understands this intense joy or bliss.. involving sexual union to be entirely unlike the lustful desire aroused in ordinary sexuality.. Tantric practitioners aim to transform ordinary desire into bliss infused with the insight of realizing emptiness, which in turn consumes the desire that gave rise to it.” Because the nondual Śaiva stance similarly undoes any dualities, it is only natural that “‘high’ and ‘low,’ ‘worldly’ and ‘spiritual’ is removed and the unity of reality is recognized.” Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 109. However, “supreme state” pertains to “the internal joy of God-consciousness” (ŚŚĀ 5:15), leading to “destruction of the differentiated knowledge of the universe” (ŚŚĀ 17:14). So if the sensuous joy does not bring this level of ecstatic realization, it is not the supreme bliss of union.

<sup>28</sup> Utpaladeva, *Śivastotrāvalī of Utpaladeva: A Mystical Hymn of Kashmir*, eds., Swami Lakshman Joo, Ashok Kaul, and Manju Sundaram (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2008), 229 (Śivastotrāvalī [ŚŚĀ] 17.9).

<sup>29</sup> To name a few: David Peter Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument: A Contemporary Interpretation of Monistic Kashmiri Śaiva Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Swami Lakshman Joo, *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme* (Albany: Universal Shaiva Trust, 1988); Paul E. Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart of Siva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); Isabelle Ratié, “Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta on the Freedom of Consciousness,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 437–68.

properly converse and converge with the French Beguine: the non-dualistic tantric Buddhism and Śaiva theology from Kashmir. In the previous chapters, I have sparsely mentioned that the religious context of South Asia holds a significant place for Śakti, “the divine power, revered as the Goddess.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to having the presence of Divine Feminine, the tantric and Śaiva world is oriented toward “supreme joy.. the touch of the Supreme Joy itself, of the pure joy, the essence of the ‘Highest’ (*anuttara*).”<sup>31</sup> Divine “touch” is the source of one’s spiritual realization, the touch “kindles.. the light of the Self.. after having dissolved all thought-constructs and discursive thinking.”<sup>32</sup> This chapter does not conduct a complete, systematic comparison between Porete and Śaiva theory of stages, in the context of nondual mystical union. But it surely is the goal of this limited work to point out the similarity between the Beguine mystic’s path and the nondual core of Buddhist tantrism and Śaiva theories as there is comparable, long history of theological realm in South Asian studies. In the following section ‘States of Rapture,’ I will briefly examine the latter States of Soul which resonate with Kashmir Śaivite:

..the dimension of the interiorized sexual act and the dimension of the awakening and unfolding of the Self — the states of the “fourth” (*turīya*) and then “beyond the fourth” (*turīyatita*), “beyond every state” — pervade each other in an indissoluble way.. during the spiritual ascent, the apparently solid reality of the body, the “I,” and the phenomenal world melts, becomes more and more light and transparent, more and more fluid, until only its core remains — the vibrating, shining resonance of the Power — and finally merges, fuses, flows into the One, “Supreme Śiva” (Parama-Śiva).<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Fūrlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 248.

<sup>31</sup> Kṣemarāja, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* (*PHṛ*), sūtra 3 commentary quoted in Fūrlinger 112. Kṣemarāja (c. 975-1025) is a prominent philosopher and a disciples of Abhinavagupta, the most representative thinker in Śaiva school. In different translation, it is Highest “bliss,” instead of joy, and they appear as interchangeable. See Kṣemarāja, *The Doctrine of Recognition: a translation of Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, trans. Jaideva Singh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 52. Appearance of ‘touch’ as beginning of Porete’s mystical union is notable as it serves as the central spiritual sense. “The touch of joy of the Self (*ānandasparśātmātām*)” stands out as main expression of supreme joy of union with divine in Kṣemarāja’s *Svacchandatantra* (*SvT*).

<sup>32</sup> Fūrlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 121.

<sup>33</sup> See Fūrlinger, 67-8. Note its correspondence to Porete’s scheme of mystical union. 68n69: “...cannot be attained through any amount of self-effort, for it is the very nature of things (*svābhāvika*) (*Kuṇḍalinī*, 31). Someone who reaches ‘beyond the fourth,’ the divine pervasion (*śivavyāpti*)... is no other than Divine life, bliss, and true Love‘ (*K*, 64)” Note its similarity to Porete’s scheme of mystical union.

The preeminence of joy and bliss in the wake of one's becoming one with Divine is shared by Porete and nondualist tantric union. As descriptors of such joy, sense of touch, light and beauty thrive fruitfully in the imagination of both camps. Though eventually mystical union with Divine requires transcendence, in this chapter, joy that is bliss and beatitude emerges out of common conception that the senses and worldly phenomena can neither be separated nor denied from the spiritual, because the source is ultimately shared.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, by this point, I hope the comparison would not be halted because the tantric Buddhist's bliss, or bliss-emptiness, actually does involve sexual union that begets pleasure and revelations; as erotic, sensual union is equally important for Porete.<sup>35</sup> The same applies to Śaiva mystical theology.

Secondly, current chapter is lengthwise utterly limited to provide a detailed, side-by-side comparison of Porete with South and Central Asian tantric Nondualism. Still, it can draw a bigger and clearer picture of how this union looks like, but it should be established that “pure divine love” transcends the matter of “any human love or the wish for any divine feelings” (*MSS* 64, 84-5). In comparison with Porete's joy, tantric Buddhist nonduality certainly provides important comparable categories: between subject and object, conventional and ultimate, ‘sample’ and ‘actual.’ However, the designations are primarily metaphysical, and even purely mental, pursuing a matter of unperturbed, single, pure intention. This methodology seamlessly coincides with Porete's meditation, too. But the more fundamental union between human and divine should almost always be additionally emphasized with the visualization of deities.

---

<sup>34</sup> Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 142-3: “Here we meet the ‘metaphysical’ basis of Tāntric ways in which the sense and the sensual experience — especially in its most intense form, sexuality — are not devaluated, opposed or combated, but are seen rather as a means to realize the Self, since they are nothing other than the veiled forms of the Self, the highest reality.”

<sup>35</sup> Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary: A Translation and Study of Jigme Lingpa's Dancing Moon in the Water and Dakki's Grand Secret-Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 256. As will be repeated, the nondualistic, tantric point of view connects the highest reality of bliss as both metaphysical and sexual. See Furlinger, 161-4.



Therefore, *MSS* can be comprehended in even fuller sense, when tantric Buddhist and nondual Śaiva mystical theology are brought together. Bringing śaiva notions is almost inevitable, as the range of tantra or tantrism itself is born of out broader religious history of India. As noted above, an eerily similar presence to Porete's, the frequent appearance of spiritual sense languages phenomena such as light, touch, ocean (aquatic) and nectar (liquid) is floating on the main texts I'll be citing. All these imageries are common in absorbing any differences into themselves, and for this reason, they are truly apt for the only one wish, and one will of Porete's Soul: being "reunited with Love" (*MSS* 15, 34).

The name and meaning of Love herself, poses a unique complication and challenge to all the aforementioned philosophical and theological discussion, as most of such analyses is structured around reason, bereft of emotion.<sup>36</sup> However, the state of Porete's mystical union becomes somewhat harder to define, due to Porete's repeated emphasis upon the Love's, rather noticeably *non*-affective aspects: "Marguerite's allegiance to Love leads her to annihilate Love."<sup>37</sup> It is the latter form of Love that is commonsensically associated with Longing, affection, feelings— rightfully "at once killed" for the sake of "fullness of divine love" (*MSS* 122, 152). Here, the question of desire, pursuit of Love and Porete's own exposition of paradox of love itself begs us to ponder. In her culmination of apophasis, Porete, reminiscent of Dutch

---

<sup>36</sup> The affective life in Buddhism also deserves and demands separate analysis as the topic is rather difficult to discuss, as any (romantic) passion or even metaphor of sensuous desire is perhaps deemed inappropriate from Buddhist point of view, as its basic tenets teach misguided and excessive desire as source of suffering. I think this has posed tacitly one of the greatest challenges in comparing Beguine mystics and Buddhist philosophers, even though Porete and other Beguines genuinely utilize such metaphors for ideals such as unity with divine, virtuous perfection, life of solitude, knowing, being and having nothing. For an excellent recent exposition of emotion in Buddhist context, please consult with Maria Heim's chapter "Buddhism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17-34. See also Sonam Kachru, "After the Unsilence of the Birds: Remembering Aśvaghōṣa's Sundaṛī." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47, no. 2 (April 2019): 289–312, for a detailed analysis of poetics on Buddhist grief. I thank Professor Anand Venkatkrishnan for recommendation of these resources.

<sup>37</sup> Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, 145.

Beguine Beatrice's sixth manner<sup>38</sup>, likens the state of soul-in-annihilation to swimming and flowing "in the sea of joy... without *feeling* any joy, for she dwells in joy and joy dwells in her" (italics added).<sup>39</sup> The sea originates from Divinity, and Porete identifies herself with this very source of joy. This quite daring metaphor of nondual union expands and guides the chapter as a whole:

And if she is so free in every quarter, she loses her name, for she rises into sublimity. And so she loses her name in him by whom and into whom she is melted and dissolved, into him and in him for her sake. Just as a watercourse does, the waters of which come from the sea, and which has some name or other, Aisne, it may be, or Seine, or another river; when this watercourse or river flows back into the sea, it loses its channel and its name.. It is just so with this Soul.. how this Soul came from the sea, and had a name, and returns into the sea, and so loses her name, and has no name at all, except the name of him into whom she is completely changed; that is, into the love of the spouse of her youth, who has wholly changed his bride into himself. He is and thereby she is.. this is Love that pleases, and thereby she is love,<sup>40</sup>

In *MSS* 28 and 82, the river and sea metaphors mediate a shockingly bold message: "an *identity* between the soul and the love into which it is transformed, that is, the love that is God."<sup>41</sup> Thus, though worrisome at a first glance, *passivity* in Porete's "why-less" and also will-less joy is inscrutable without the indistinguishable union of love.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned multiple

---

<sup>38</sup> John Arblaster, "'Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea': Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries." *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (March 21, 2018): 180.

<sup>39</sup> *MSS* 28 is an important chapter filled with exchange between Love and the Soul regarding the process and joyful outcome of their loving union: "Love. Such a Soul, says Love, swims in the sea of joy, that is in the sea of delights flowing and streaming from the Divinity, and she feels no joy, for she herself is joy.. for through the power of joy she is herself joy, which has changed her into itself.. // The Soul. Ah, sweetest, pure, divine love, says this Soul, how sweet is this changing by which I am changed into the thing that I love better than I love myself?" (46-7).

<sup>40</sup> *MSS* 82, 107. As I have briefly introduced in the previous chapter, Porete notably treats the gender of divinity quite flexibly. Although this chapter (and Porete, to a large extent, as well) mainly concentrates on the Divine Feminine, *MSS* does not completely do away with masculine (God as *him*), as the counterpart of union. The object of Porete's consistent critique, Reason, is also at times portrayed as Lady (feminine), though the focus of *MSS* remains as the radical melting between powerfully feminized Soul and Love. As the feminized Soul's freedom and liberation is so singularly emphasized, it is very easy to miss the presence of male signifier. For a remarkable observation on Beguine mystics' gender fluidity in divine-human union, see Hollywood's "Sexual Desire, Divine Desire; Or, Queering the Beguines" in *Acute Melancholia*, 149-62.

<sup>41</sup> Arblaster, "'Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea,'" 180 (my italics). Similarly important observation has been previously suggested by Hollywood (1995) ('union without distinction') and McGinn (1995) ('union without difference') in their respectively seminal works. Embracing the traditional theological viewpoint, both McGinn (1994b) and Arblaster shortly mention the vestige of distinction and duality in Porete's metaphors as well. Yet the main point made by both experts still imply that Porete's use of metaphor radically annihilates and absorbs any element of differences between the divine and human soul.

<sup>42</sup> David Kangas. "Dangerous Joy: Marguerite Porete's Good-Bye to the Virtues." *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 299-319.

times, Porete's nothingness is far richer and deeper than a mere cutting-away of oneself in an annulment of Soul's agency. Moving onto the response from modern Buddhist psychology and psychotherapy, there are reasons why any mention of mysticism or mystical union has been avoided, as the study of mind and emotion has been radically naturalized. The resonance between Porete and Buddhist thinking can vary according to different traditions and their systems of meditation, despite my single attempt given here. One influential variant of this interpretation, according to Mark Epstein, may suggest that Porete-esque annihilation of emotion is neither viable nor recommendable from a therapeutic point of view: "Selflessness does not require people to annihilate their emotions, only to learn to experience them in a new way."<sup>43</sup> This new way is the cultivation of mindful, "*bare attention*" against the drive toward merger or trance state by which unwholesome emotions are momentarily pushed aside, remaining unresolved.<sup>44</sup> However, Porete's contemplation on nothing is so intense and pure, one cannot conclude her nondual union would be identified with some escapist jump into the "pool of blissful feelings" which is repeatedly targeted and critiqued in *MSS*. Epstein does not deny the possibility of true selflessness in the form of undifferentiated union. However, the centrality of nothing and annihilation in Porete leaves a point of curious wonder. Did Porete's fire of annihilation share "the psychic equivalent of the Buddha's longing for nonexistence"<sup>45</sup>—? Any annihilative drive, if misdirected, could fall for the destructive, suicidal nihilism. In many ways, Porete's work defies any standard of normalcy, but her radicalism embraces annihilation and union on the inseparable horizon. In Porete, it is about the Soul's transformation of and into Love/Divine Feminine. Porete's Divine Love represents all-encompassing, arising and perishing

---

<sup>43</sup> Mark Epstein, *Thoughts without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 96.

<sup>44</sup> Epstein, 96.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

of world and its phenomena; Also, the entirety of temporal existence: “Beloved, what do you want from me? I contain all that ever was, That is, and that will be, I am filled full of every thing” (*MSS* 132, 169). Another benefit of Buddhist insight here is that such description cannot be fulfilled with a *fixed* notion of eternity, which contradicts its own concept. Since the temporal dimension of Buddhist enlightenment itself is hotly debated whether it is cessation or eternal bliss, this chapter cannot deliver just how exactly this feels or looks. However, their common goal toward liberation can be reconfirmed as it direct us toward a more constructive proposal. Porete herself is known to tread the extremes of annihilation and eternity, nothingness and everything, yet never residing in any one aspect: hence, the relational dynamic between Soul and Love. Readers are able to see that Porete’s Soul annihilates all such ego-obsessed elements to the point of nothing. Yet only because this nothing, an identity as ‘no-one’ of Porete’s Soul connects her to the infinity of Divine Love. In short, change and transformation has utmost significance in Porete. Nondual union in Porete is nothing other than Soul’s *change* into Love and the divine goodness (*MSS* 83, 107).<sup>46</sup> The contemplation that Love has changed her, and “having been transformed in the union with Love” (*MSS* 9, 20) is the biggest theme in Porete’s mystical union. Being grounded in the theological realm, for sure, Porete’s union with Love is still described in terms of divine, “enduring substance” but without the solitary, resounding masculinity of Triune Godhead, and more in terms of “fruition in delight” (*MSS* 115, 136)—because the Divine is always portrayed as a lover. In fact, with a very Asian and gnostic flavor, Porete’s Love also utilizes the “substance of the Soul” as “a subtle instrument of which perception is born, which gives knowledge in the Soul” (*MSS* 110, 133).<sup>47</sup> It won’t be an

---

<sup>46</sup> See also *MSS* 82, 106-7; *MSS* 118, 144-145; *MSS* 122, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Current translation of *MSS* by Marler and Grant in fact does not have any mention of ‘immutable.’ The only time ‘unchangeable’ nature of God appears is not in Porete’s writing but in commentary 173n2.

exaggeration that Porete's mystical union defamiliarizes the contemporaneous assumptions of Christian theology itself. This is why Porete's God and Soul truly deflects any accusation that conversation is impossible due to the infamous "soul or Self, understood as an eternal and immutable spiritual essence" considered chief enemy of classical Buddhist viewpoint.<sup>48</sup>

Buddhist premise of no-unchanging self, or any entity in the world is helpful to understand Porete against any recalcitrant, static reading of Porete's theological view. Vice versa, comparison with Porete can illuminate the possibility of joy and bliss within Buddhist tradition.

For instance:

In Buddhist terms, the exuberance of the children on the seashore is a reflection of the orgasmic bliss (usually given the more conventional—and less threatening—translation of "natural" or "spontaneous") of the enlightened mind. When the artificial boundaries of self and other melt under the influence of the wisdom of selflessness, the ego orgasms.<sup>49</sup>

In this regard, Porete's basis of union harmonizes with Buddhist sentiment: "The ability to see the self as flexible and mutable.. Real transformation comes from uprooting the deeply embedded reflex of projecting ownership upon experience ('this is me, this is mine, this is what I am'), and seeing it instead as an impermanent, impersonal, interdependent arising of phenomena."<sup>50</sup> Unlike those who try out seductive, paradisiacal feelings, Porete then seems to have reached the *Real*, oceanic zone of the indistinct union in her use of river, and the sea. Wary of insanity or psychosis, one may question how we may distinguish the absolute union and deification of Porete from the rather defensive zeal, as Epstein cautions, to merge with womb-like, undifferentiated oneness? The incisive father of psychoanalysis Freud had already doubted

---

<sup>48</sup> *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, 616. Please review the Tibetan *zhentong* (other-emptiness) in the previous chapter.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Epstein, "On the seashore of endless worlds: Buddha and Winnicott," in *Freud and the Buddha*, 107. Here Epstein cites Robert A. F. Thurman, *Essential Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Harper), 296.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Olendzki, "A classical future: Interview with Insight Journal editor Chris Talbot," *Insight Journal*, retrieved January 11, 2014, <http://www.bcbsdharma.org/2012-12-28-insight-journal/> quoted in Kostner, "It's not just about the mindfulness," in *Freud and the Buddha*, 46. Original webpage cannot be currently accessed.

the potential of “oceanic feeling” as he foresaw the danger of one’s regression to “infantile, narcissistic state.”<sup>51</sup> Many do fall into this trap. I think Porete’s oceanic —her image of river and sea for nondual union— can swiftly divert such accusation as her mystical union first requires the Soul to annihilate ego-related feelings. Then, Porete proceeds to transform the Soul into a fully mature lover of divine on equal footing, not a clinging, helpless child who wants to merger with her motherly being. In other words, Porete’s mystical oceanic is reserved for independent, noble, and fully grown selves. For such an absolutist as Porete, that might be an impossible doubt as the annihilation and mystical union with Love transforms everything into divine. According to Porete, the zealous, union-seeking diver may be the one “moved by the longing of the will in her spiritual feeling” (*MSS* 93, 118). And her Soul brought to Nothing has burnt that longing and feeling.

Another significant concern emerges that either from the writing of other Beguines, Porete or Buddhist women in my next chapters, the notion of annihilation, emptiness or nothingness of self in the context of nondual union is doubly obligated to elaborate what this means for women, both in theory and practice: due to the significance of female gender. But the greatness of their contemplation certainly reaches out to humanity far and wide, eventually overcoming the given boundaries of gender and sexuality. Immediate suspicion might linger: is this another form of female self-effacement? Haven’t women suffered enough, at least conventionally, to engage in another total negation of themselves? Why the Soul’s radical dispossession rather than the self-possession? If the Soul can rebuke and nullify the authority of Reason with such an audacity, why can she present herself in that mode at all times? All of these questions are raised from a very modern, affirmative view of female subjectivity. I can only add

---

<sup>51</sup> Delia Kostner, “It’s not just about the mindfulness: foundations of Buddhist thought and why it matters for psychoanalysis,” in *Freud and the Buddha*, 28.

that Beguine and tantric Buddhist women were engaging with the philosophical core of tradition they each inherited, at once addressing the reality of suffering in this world and the task of self-transformation and transcendence. Due to the immense restriction human love imposed upon female embodiedness and subjectivity, the politics of gender has been hovering any mystics or theologians who themselves were women. Porete's pursuit of transcendence and liberation through union with Divine Love, with a soaring spirit like a phoenix, dared to define what and Love means, with implications far too theologically (and politically) significant.

Even the most philosophical or volitional approach is rejected, along with feelings-- even spiritual ones. I have stated that the most perplexing part of Porete's nondual union of, with, and by Love, and Love only. But how can we understand Love when this Love basically requires the Soul to forsake everything human? Is this even viable? To tentatively conclude, that seems to be the very point of Porete's union: the complete transcendence by/with/as divinity accomplished by total emptying, becoming naked and 'nothing.' Only then can we deduce the meaning of the Soul "is always without herself.. When she does not belong to herself" (*MSS* 59, 79). The previous chapter introduced the identity of Deity who "would perform his divine works, in us, for us, *without* us. He is, who is; and so he is what he is of himself: loving, loved, love" (italics added). Therefore, when Porete's Soul speaks of Love, it is often from the perspective of Soul already united with Love, deified, now Divine Love herself/Deity himself: hence the notion of divine ecstasy, or sacred rapture. In the following *MSS* 115, when the Love engenders perfect Unity of divine Trinity "in a Soul brought to Nothing" Porete repeats the phrase of union "this divine love in me, for me, and without my guiding" (136-7). Resorting to the sole authority of the divine being itself, granting the level of freedom and power to Soul, otherwise impossible by any other means; it is precisely because every other force (Reason, Virtues, Holy Church the

Little, Will, Dread, Longing and Affection) want the Soul to be bound and serve under them. One may rightly surmise, following in line with Porete's meditations in *MSS*, that especially the 'affections' in the name of 'spirit' are seen to have the most surreptitious and dangerous capacity to *manipulate* one's devotional orientation in bondage. Sadly this may be applied in any institutional or communal formation of religiosity, largely by setting and enforcing 'right' and 'wrong' emotions. Without constant internal critique and cultivation of these emotions, as Porete had warned, the originally unbounded potential of transformed emotions may easily become a source of regulations, forgetting the spiritual revolution that originally inspired and prompted such a movement, having targeted an awakening for liberation, peace and love. Hence, Porete's radicalism does not repeat the well-paved notions on intellect or affect, as she makes it clear that her union prepares her Soul to even annihilate traditional interpretations, practices, and communities altogether to re-create the way for what her contemplation of Love leads her to believe to be true and original.

Through this chapter, a suggestion will be concretized that the way mystics have been studied so far reflects how the broader category of religion is understood and taught. Needless to repeat, the primary engagement has been spearheaded through conceptualization, and the philosophical investigation of mind-consciousness. This mode of contribution provided a foundation to both ordinary and mystical search for truth and transcendence. Beguine mystics, Buddhist and South Asian contemplatives were thinkers, profoundly influenced by such a strand, whose theological and philosophical engagements were highly acclaimed. However, by returning to the simple essence of the divine as Love, their expressions most necessarily invited the realm of desires, emotions and passion with no bounds, beyond normative metaphysical descriptions; philosophical acumen has been heavily invested in inherent limits upon what can



and cannot be said about the divine, often relegating the matter of desire and feeling to the region of art and literature. Religious affects and its emotional, psychological implications, though, can never really contradict the metaphysical commitments to truths and ideals, since they mutually transform and perfect each other's domain. More importantly, this chapter's comparison breaks down the misguided notion that the element of Love and Divine is only present in "a personal mysticism in Christianity" and not in "an apersonal experience in Hindu religions"—a stereotype so vehemently wrong, hence does not require further deconstruction.<sup>52</sup>

*Rasa (Aesthetic Emotion/Rapture) Meets Porete's Love*

In "Emotion in Bengali Religious Thought," McDaniel introduces two important concepts in emotion. *Bhāva*, the basic, concrete and personal emotion, and *rasa*, the aesthetic, transformed, yet rather known as "impersonal" emotion.<sup>53</sup> I think understanding both notions is imperative to conclude this chapter for Beguine emotion, but especially the latter notion holds significance for Porete. Having previously reviewed the relevance of realms of *bhāva* and *rasa*, Porete's noble use of sacred senses, sensuality and even emotion finds deep resonance with the latter, in particular; As Porete's relationship with Love and feeling has been proven to be criminally misconstrued. Divine *Love* in Porete is profuse, and her notorious elimination of feeling may be interpreted analogously to what is known as "impersonal" mode in Indian aesthetics and devotional emotion: "What is in us is not ours: It is Vrindavan's *prem* that deities

---

<sup>52</sup> Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> "Emotion in Bengali religious Thought: Substance and Metaphor," in Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 46-8. It should be noted that *bhāva* is the basic emotion and mood, most scholars cited in my chapter appreciate and value its transformation into the significant devotional sentiments, and aesthetic rapture (*rasa*). According to McDaniel, in Bengali context, *bhāva* incorporates not only ecstasy, rapture, but also being/existence, state, love, and divinity. For the full list, see *Madness of the Saints*, 21-3. Voss Roberts also explains that *Bhāva* as "the uppermost stage of the emotion of *prema*"— highest ecstasy of divine love in *Tastes of the Divine*, 68.

are enjoying in us.”<sup>54</sup> Through comparative reading with *rasa*, we may review Porete’s enigmatic joy ‘without feeling’ as without transient/non-essential/unpurified feeling; as the joy is not ordinary but a primordial, innate, blissful state of Soul that connects the Soul to the very source of Divinity. This point of view, acknowledging the effacement of ego in the rapturous state, aptly coincides with Porete’s Soul-brought-to- Nothing whose annihilation is not the end, but always the means to bring union with Love in erotic-ecstatic manner. In this sense, Porete’s nothing really has nothing to do with a nihilistic sense of unrecognizable non-self, but rather, everything to do with transforming one’s Soul and becoming a true lover of Divine. The aforementioned affective registers, and/or language of spiritual senses of Porete in itself deserves more sensitive work. But already another noteworthy indication to express mystical union emerges, when the Soul also drinks “the sap of the tall cedar” (*MSS* 22, 41; *MSS* 80, 104). This accords with the beginning of many meanings of *rasa*: “sap, juice, liquid essence, and taste.. translated as flavor, relish, mood, and sentiment.”<sup>55</sup> Of course, motivation for comparison should neither begin nor end with coincidental appearance, be it wine or sap. However, it surely is no mere coincidence, that different cultures manifest aquatic images (ocean, river, sea) and of nondual, fluid union in liquids (sap, wine, nectar).<sup>56</sup> Since the annihilation of feeling is so

---

<sup>54</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 146. *Prem/prema* means love and affection often designated for one’s pure spiritual love toward divine. Vrindavan is geographically located in Uttar Pradesh, India but in Bengal Vaiṣṇava ritual and imagination, has cosmic significance as “Radha-Krishna’s passion-abode” (8). Porete’s contemplation has no mention of body-place, but as the Soul becomes united to Love, there is definitely a presence of sacred spatiality—such as “place of peace” (*MSS* 16, 35) and “the divine Trinity has in her-its dwelling place” (*MSS* 22, 42). I think comparison can be facilitated if we follow “how imagination itself is experienced as the place” and the “mind-heart” (*manas*) is where the celestial Vrindavan resides (Sarbadhikary, 72). Similarly, Porete’s Soul dedicates her heart to be one with Love: “All of my heart was set on you” (*MSS* 6, 16); “The Holy Spirit is his name. / With him I have such union in my heart.. He is complete, / And from this so am I. / This is the divine heart of hearts” (*MSS* 122, 151-3).

<sup>55</sup> McDaniel, “Emotion in Bengali religious Thought,” 47. Joy of union is metaphorized as melting, dissolving nonduality as wine, nectar and “the ocean of highest bliss” in śaiva imagery. Furlinger, *Touch of Sakti*, 96-8.

<sup>56</sup> According to the great 10<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir Śaiva master and philosopher, of ‘Recognition (Pratyabhijñā)’ school, Utpaladeva (c. 925-975), the expression of *rasa* denotes “essence of the highest joy” in spiritual ascension. Spiritual sense of “touch” is central for Utpaladeva, as it is for Porete’s touch by Perfect Love, especially in the first and fourth state of being (*MSS* 118, 141-2). More importantly, the liquid *rasa* states a spiritual “becoming liquid.. a

intransigent in Porete, the constant presence of affective registers —touch, taste, drink, sweetness— in her pure bliss of Love may be confusing or jarring. It baffles many as it makes extremely difficult to categorize her version of mysticism. For example, See finally *MSS* 121: “Ah, divine and sweetest Love.. Now I am astounded such men can ever be.. And cannot see how great it is, this life of Nothing-would-I-see” (148-9). Not only is this life of Nothing far superior, but The Holy Trinity, at this important juncture, brings up the metaphor of taste of wine. Wine indeed does have central sacramental role in ecclesial context, but Porete’s use of wine regards a Soul *drunk* in Love: “..sweetest and most intoxicating is the wine drawn from the topmost spigot” (*MSS* 23, 43); then in *MSS* 89, “She who is so is always like one who is drunk” (114). Even though nobility is important for Porete, in the context of Love, this drunk, enraptured image of feminized Soul and her version of love-madness (‘extremely drunk’) appears.<sup>57</sup> Of course, Porete is not suggesting an actual Dionysian feast but a complete nondual union between her Soul and Divine Love, who confirms that “this most noble lady is drunk with... the highest spigot” (43). However, in conversation with South Asian notion of aesthetic rapture, and divine ecstasy of Love, I suggest that we may find a clue to what Porete attempts to portray.

---

fluidity of the stiff and rigid I-identity.. of the borders between self and other — up to the experience of pervasion (*vyāpti*) of the self by all, and of the all by the self.” Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 114. This describes a state close to the nature of radical union in Hadewijch and Porete. Having explained this, it is not surprising to see wine/liquor and intoxication/drunkenness as the supreme mode of devotion, immortality, worship- that is union with Divine. See *ŚSĀ* 5:5; 9:15; 13:13; 17:16.

<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, this expression is not exclusively unique to Porete, and globally can be found in Love-madness in Bengal and also in Sufism. “The role of lover allows intense interaction with the deity. Love madness shows the highest possible devotional state and is the sign of ecstatic transformation.. the *siddhācāryas* were called mad (*pāgal*) and poetically described themselves as intoxicated with the wine of bliss, like a bull elephant maddened from drinking the lotus-honey of the *yoginī*.. The Sufis sought to be intoxicated with love of God, entering states of passion and annihilation of individual identity (*fanā*). They drank the wine of love, becoming so maddened (*mast*) that they could think only of the divine Beloved.” McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 276.

The sophisticated layers of *rasa*, the aesthetic emotion, has been known difficult, first and foremost due to the element, often read with a distanced, observant stance of “impersonality or generalizing.. feeling as *if* he felt the emotion but not being involved enough to feel it directly.”<sup>58</sup> Such impersonality, the *as if*, allows for the aesthete or spectator to retain and feel the powerful, extraordinary and joyful emotion, yet without the risk of experiencing any painful ones. Although *rasa* is a reigning notion in drama, theater and aesthetic theory in general, this impersonal or generalizing aspect (*sādhāranīkaraṇa*) of *rasa* has had immense spiritual implications on the experience and nature of mystical rapture. I find the following explanation of *rasa*, in particular, to be strongly applicable to Porete:

For Abhinavagupta, the aesthetic experience is an event of temporary freedom from the limitations of an otherwise constantly constricted subjectivity that culminated in the experience of itself as a universal subject. The spectator under the influence of drama or poetry becomes temporarily expanded and capable of a universalized or generalized experience.. towards an impersonal, universalized and non-affective experience involving a kind of self-dispossession.<sup>59</sup>

The great 10-11<sup>th</sup> century philosopher-mystic Abhinavagupta blends his Kashmir Śaiva theology that conscious beings free themselves from limitations, in order to experience “the joy inherent in” the true, “the pure ‘I’ of all”— the consciousness of God/Lord/Śiva.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is a highly sophisticated, most refined and transformed emotion. Only the unwholesome and transitory ones are annihilated, as they are “impediments to the *rasa* experience.”<sup>61</sup> Yet there is clear distinction from any range of human emotion considered as ordinary, which leads to later

---

<sup>58</sup> “Emotion in Bengali religious Thought,” 47.

<sup>59</sup> Neal Gorton Delmonico, “Sacred Rapture: A Study of the Religious Aesthetic of Rupa Gosvamin,” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1990), 118. Although this view of *rasa* is highly influential, the theory has numerous critique and variations as there is diversity even within erotic-ecstatic union in Hadewijch and Porete. But Abhinavagupta’s *rasa* does interpenetrate the core of Porete’s notion of Soul becoming Divine Love, since the ‘impersonal’ only denotes transcending “individual identity” therefore revealing “true self.. the underlying universal ‘I,’ which is the Lord” (n81).

<sup>60</sup> Delmonico, “Sacred Rapture,” 103.

<sup>61</sup> Delmonico, 20.

aestheticians' criticism whether the annihilation is really not a *destruction* of such emotional base— a central question and driving force of this chapter.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, if we engage with Porete carefully, the dominant sentiment of her Soul matches the aesthetic experience (*rasa*), especially the sentiment of erotic love (*śṛṅgāra*) that truly characterizes the union between Soul and Love, though in South Asian context it originally denotes the union between divine couple Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>63</sup> Being mindful of Porete's single intention on freedom and transcendence of the feminized Soul, her joy and peace as the predominant mood of union can be better comprehended with notion of *rasa*, then enabling the place for spiritual, divine emotion in her expressions. Furthermore, this establishes the relation between divine lover and the beloved, when Love says: "This love of which we speak is the union of *lovers*, and the kindling of fire which burns without breath" (*MSS* 64, 86: italics added). Presenting a thorough comparison of Asian and Beguine emotion is an impossible task here, but the beginning is promising. Further study of *rasa* can facilitate a renewed understanding of Porete's purification-via-nothing that annihilates all human *and* quasi-divine feelings, ones surreptitiously originating from human longings: these are neither pure nor divine. Note that Porete's project of liberation seeks to be and live the divine affect itself, going beyond any social, ecclesiastical, ethical and psychological bounds that were, from the Soul's point of view, enslaving and tormenting as frequently indicated by her critique of Reason and Holy Church 'The Little/The Less.' And yet, this should not permanently impede the readers from

---

<sup>62</sup> For instance, alternative aesthetics has been proposed by Bhoja (1025-1055), for whom self-love (*preman*) enables and grounds the possibility of aesthetic rapture. Therefore, the significance of 'feeling' returns and how it is felt through human heart. See *Ibid.*, 42n22. Delmonico's in-depth dissertation of *rasa* traces that the 16<sup>th</sup> century Rūpa's aesthetics, valuing the individual identity and feeling, therefore is closer to Bhoja than Abhinavagupta.

<sup>63</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 259-60. Note that Tibetans understand aesthetic experience (*rasa*/Tib. *nyams*) as "intensification" of basic emotion (*bhāva*/Tib 'gyur) as "one of intensity and degree of outward expression." This could be a great divergence from mainstream Indian *rasa* theory. I see this divergence very similar to how Porete diverges from Hadewijch, as the former has no trace of palpable, violent, turbulent emotions as the latter's. But the commonality remains bigger: the presence of rapture and ecstasy out of Love.

*experiencing* love, rapture and union in *MSS*. Where “Thought is no further use to me.. Love draws me up on high to see” (*MSS* 122, 151). Through the concept of *rasa*, we can mutually understand Porete with “taste of divine sensations” or even, divine affect — “incompatible with the sense of an ego or ‘I,’ due to the impersonality of *rasa* and the supra-individuality of affect.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it would be a grave misreading to suggest an annihilation of affect or emotion as a category in Porete, even though her own words on the surface confusingly seems to suggest so. But Porete’s system overall gestures toward the impersonal aspect of *rasa* by deifying the ultimate affect: Love. What is presented above as *im*-personal, however, is far from removing affect or degree of empathy; rather, the meditation invites and introduces a kind of *trans*-subjectivity, with an infinite reach, as the focus of rapture or ecstasy shifts to experiencing and uniting with the Divine/Love, and the universal affect and conscious implied in it.

In the previous chapter, I have looked into Hadewijch’s love-madness in mystical union and the aesthetician Rūpa Gosvāmīn’s highest stage of *Mahābhāva*. But my comment had accentuated the highest grade of devotion, and the place of peaceful devotion (*śānta bhakti rasa*) can be certainly found as a form of love toward Divine. Yet, according to Voss Roberts’ fascinating juxtaposition of Rūpa Gosvāmīn with legendary aesthete and philosopher Abhinavagupta, it is revealed that the former designates peace as “inferior” precisely because it lacks “personal” quality of the devotee in relation to the deity.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, it is the latter, having lived five centuries ago, who prioritizes peace as the “paramount” *rasa* and the supremely distilled principle of *sādhāranīkaraṇa*.<sup>66</sup> At least on this very topic, the contrast between Rūpa and Abhinava is mysteriously close to that of Hadewijch and Porete. Chronologically, Rūpa

---

<sup>64</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 32. See also McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 80-2.

<sup>65</sup> Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Voss Roberts, 63.

Gosvāmīn’s emphasis on cultivating “myness (*mamatā*)” is an obvious response to Abhinavagupta’s postulations of *rasa*, as an ‘aesthetic’ emotion and not ‘ordinary’ feeling, “bracket feelings of ‘I, me, mine’ that impede the savoring of *rasa*.”<sup>67</sup> This very notion of Abhinavagupta perfectly encapsulates how to arrive at Porete’s joy as divine affect, devoid of longing, feeling and even “affection of the spirit.. being too far away from the peace of freedom” (MSS 24, 44). This section’s analysis does not determine whose approach was better as both meditations guide the devotees to worship and unite with Divine/Love. But it should be pointed out that Porete’s focus on the purity and peace of her Soul’s inner being finds historical precedent in *rasa*, according to Abhinavagupta. Peace is the major *rasa*, so to speak, in Porete’s description of annihilated Soul and of divine life itself.

But I do think the most significant *rasa*, to bring Porete’s pure, free and perfect Love (MSS 24-7), is the aforementioned Love (*Śṛṅgāra*) itself, charged with eros and romantic flavor. Why is the Soul at peace at all, in the first place? It is because “Perfect Love has taken possession of her” (MSS 25, 45). Therefore, it is a supreme state for Porete. Similarly: “Without that the emotion/taste (*rasa*), basic to all others, the peaceful one (*santa rasa*) is not stimulated. Emotions become self-directed unless an ego-effacing perfection is achieved through *santa rasa*.”<sup>68</sup> This befits when Porete discusses the “unction of peace, which transcends all the senses” (MSS 111, 134). Both in Śaiva context and Porete’s world, we are constantly led to look up to the realm of Divine Love, such that love (*prem*) is “not self-directed (*kama*) but always focused on the deities”<sup>69</sup>— This is especially true for Porete. Therefore, it is a tone-deaf misconstrual of Porete’s genuine devotion as becoming emotion-*less*, especially when Love is

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. See how the Soul’s reasoning matches this strand of *rasa* theory: “For if anyone were to wish for God’s comforts through feelings of consolation, they would impede Perfect love from taking hold” (MSS 26, 45).

<sup>68</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 95.

<sup>69</sup> Sarbadhikary, 105.

mainly involved. All the philosophers, theologians and mystics who are cited here will vehemently oppose such a misunderstanding. But Abhinava’s view on *rasa* and its universalized, generalized aspect of aesthetic emotion (*sādhāranīkaraṇa*) definitely deserves some explanations. I think it is not *too* distant from Buddhist meditation or Porete’s annihilation as the one’s self, now disinterested/divested of narrow set of egoism, gains an access to the pure, higher, unfettered form of its transcendence “experiencing its own inherent joy.”<sup>70</sup> In stark contrast to creating a machine-without-soul, therefore, this ego-less and owner-less emotion expands and “engenders empathy and humility” as the emotion is unbounded by one individual, connected to an universal assemblage of affect.<sup>71</sup> Hence, generalized or universalized emotion (*sādhāranīkaraṇa*), often dubbed as *im*-personal, massively assists our comprehension of Porete when The Soul claims: “And I am so changed that I have therein lost *my name* for the sake of loving.. I am changed into that which I love more than myself, that is, into Love, for I love nothing but Love” (*MSS* 28, 47; italics added). Before we worry about Porete’s Soul losing its individuality, we should make space in/for ourselves to also transcend any limited, egotistic impulses and personal residues of feelings that hinders us from connecting with the root, ground and universe that enables us to think, feel, be and most importantly, to love. Besides, even when the complete nondual union between Love and Soul is in process, Love frequently speaks on behalf of Soul that she “is not her own” (*MSS* 16, 35) also keep conversing with the Soul—which preserves the relational aspect of this union between the lover and the beloved. Whether the

---

<sup>70</sup> Delmonico, “Sacred Rapture,” 19. See also *Ibid.*, 88-9 for the generalization (*sādhāranīkaraṇa*) that enables the spectator/participant to perceive emotion as part of single continuum of universal consciousness, transcending “individual and temporal limitations.. the self experiences its own innate joy. That joy is the joy that characterizes aesthetic rapture (*rasa*) for Abhinavagupta.” Given that this theory comes from a prominent Saiva philosopher Abhinavagupta, it is deeply touched by the understanding of consciousness (*saṃvit/saṃvedana*) that is inherently blissful; My proposal is that this line of thinking and belief is very close to the Porete and the tantric Buddhist perception of self and world.

<sup>71</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 137.



union between Love and Soul means absorption, that is obliteration of Soul's personal identity and feelings, therefore demands a deeper level of investigation.

Though Porete never forgets to bring the language of sweetness and taste for Love, any aesthetic expression and senses remain strictly spiritual, as the boundary between divine and human melts and dissolves into united Love. For tantric Buddhists and Bengal Vaiṣṇava devotees, spirituality is hardly separate from the “physical body-space.”<sup>72</sup> But the physical, sexual embodiment symbolizes the pleasure of *celestial* Vrindavan, the site of divinity: “..pleasure belongs to all in Vrindavan.”<sup>73</sup> This symbolic and theological dimension is often neglected in observation of the embodied rituals, because of the ego-gratifying, obsessive gaze toward body, rather than understanding and cultivating the body as vessel and a place for sacred to dwell. Scholars have already problematized whether the distant, generalized, elevated *rasa* could in reality create distance and apathy not being able to channel or experience human emotion. Similar issue makes the reader of Porete question just how it is possible to theorize Love after burning all the human feelings away. Again, these questions arise when we forget the dimension of ecstatic and erotic of Love in Porete. They will continually be dealt with as the chapter proceeds. Therefore, careful distinctions had to be made according to the vast arrays of traditions and practices, whether blissful mystical union generates complete nondualism or there are remaining layers of dualities and hierarchies within the nondual structure. Nevertheless, Porete's mystical union will always contain an erotic-ecstatic element of Love, inherently radical, provoking and transgressive. No matter how counterintuitive Porete's Love might sound in the first place, her mystical devotion without typical “myselfness” sets up a vision of depth and transcendence, rarely to be found in this century of selfishness and consequently, quickly fading

---

<sup>72</sup> Sarbadhikary, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 106.

loves unrelated to any contemplation of devotion— not to mention divine power or eternity.

Robinson aptly writes on this noble nature of Porete's annihilationism, love and indistinct union

(*unitas indistinctionis*):

This is a radical claim, even within the realm of esoteric speculation.. This is not a loving union of wills, as depicted so often in the “bridal” mysticism.. positing a union in which the ontological distinctions between God and creature remain. Annihilation is a speculative doctrine more proper to *Wesenmystik*, or the mysticism of being.. a union of indistinction (*unitas indistinctionis* or *unio sine distinctione* or *differentia*), in which the soul and God are united without difference.<sup>74</sup>

### *States of Rapture and Their Nondual Imageries*

The aspect of Porete's joy is initiated by delicate and sensuous phenomenon such as touch, by which the Soul and Love connect. Among the seven states of devout Soul, the serious one begins with the fourth:

**The Fourth State.** ...through the exaltation of contemplation, whereby the Soul becomes so vulnerable, so noble and so delicate that she cannot endure anything to touch her, except only the touch of Love's pure delight, which makes her full of joy and lighthearted, and overweening in her abundance of love, in which she is the mistress of the lustre—that is, of the brightness—of her soul.. Then the Soul holds that there is no higher life.. that she does not believe that God has any greater gift to bestow on any soul here below than this love which Love for love has poured forth within her... Gracious Love makes her wholly drunken, and so drunken that she does not let her pay heed to anything but to herself.. the Soul can esteem no other state of being, for Love's great brightness has so dazzled her sight.. (MSS 118, 142-3)

But the significance of Fourth State lies precisely in that that its overweening, dazzling delight is *not* the noblest union Porete envisions as her telos of meditation. So she warns already that the Soul could be “deceived.. by the sweetness of the pleasure of its love” (143). The greater, nobler, most distinctive nature of Porete's union still has two higher states to ascend toward: “..and this Soul knows, whom Love has exalted by Perfect Love *beyond herself*” (Ibid., italics mine). If we look at the Fourth State, it is apparent that the alluring quality of love rather limits the Soul from wishing for further and otherwise, yet again risking the Soul's attention and perception, obsessing toward and within herself, not *without* and *beyond*. From this state and on,

---

<sup>74</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 79.

retaining the ecstatic quality carries the seed for realization of ‘nothing,’ over any kind of perishable, enslaving sense delight. In *MSS 110*, Porete’s Lady Love stipulates that the perfect indwelling of Love in Soul is characterized by the Soul’s residence “in nothingness, not in love” (133). Love continues to explain that when Soul dwells in love, instead of nothingness, “she is concerned with herself” akin to the Fourth State (‘pay heed to anything but to herself’). This capricious flux of love-induced affect contradicts the union with Love; that is, return to nothingness and the complete peace, with no trace of will, wish, and related strife of human desires always subject to change.<sup>75</sup> Naturally, Fifth State plunges into another philosophical immersion with Buddhist sentiment in *MSS 118*: it is all about the Soul’s being simultaneously nothing and everything, with divine goodness and evil. Without this philosophical core of nondualism, the Soul cannot transcend the ephemeral joy in the Fourth State and move upward. The temporal limitations of ecstasy, however, extend to the last states of Soul as well. The rapturous union in fifth and sixth states is also repeatedly marked by the brevity of this experience. It just doesn’t last long beyond the glimpse of glory, like the appearance of lighting flash; this flash is in continuum with Porete’s main nondual imageries, light and illumination:

**Love.** ..The Soul who is such is neither lost nor forlorn but rather is in rapture which her lover in the fifth state of being.. indeed often she is rapt up into the sixth state, but this does not last with her for long. For it is an opening swift as a lightning flash and a rapid closing in which one cannot remain for long.. The rapture of this opening as it is made, and widens by the peace of its work, makes the Soul, for as long as that peace lasts which is given to her in this opening, when once again it closes up, so free and so noble and unburdened by all things.. for in the fourth state there is willing, and in the fifth state there is none. And

---

<sup>75</sup> In her most abstruse and mysterious moments, Porete’s Love says ‘love’ makes the Soul “proud and light-hearted... For there is Nature in such love.. there is a cause for bestowing and accepting, and so the Soul is demanding and proud.” What is more astounding is that Porete, in an acute philosophical moment of equipoise, adds that “In such a state there are perceptions and meditations, for this is the contemplative way of life, which keeps Thought by it as helper.” *MSS 110* solidifies Porete’s mystical union closest, first, to the Four Noble Truths, by diagnosing false way of love as being subject to feelings that are arising, perishing, hence causing an enslaving attachments and craving. In the latter part, after dodging all the potential sources and outcomes of such suffering, Porete’s Love suggests a way of union that no longer needs the assistance of Thought. In short, further study can explore Porete’s nondual union, similar to the tantric Buddhist non-conceptual, nondual gnosis, transcending all conditions and mental constructions/fabrications: “..Thought no longer has lordship in her. She has lost the use of her senses—not her senses, but the use of them” (*MSS 110*, 133). It is surely a recurring theme in nondual meditation “abandoning all discursive thought, your mind set on the form of the divinity.” Snellgrove, 90.

because in the fifth state.. there is no will, and the Soul remains there after the work performed by the Far-Near of Rapture, whom we term lightning from its manner of opening and rapid closing.. (MSS 58, 78)

The penultimate, Sixth State is where Porete's illumination reveals the self of God, with which the Soul becomes one. So far, readers may have been wondering the *Mirror* in Porete's title means anything, since it is so scarcely used by the author. The central meaning of *Mirror* may be found not in the literal count, but as a clue in The Sixth State "God of his divine majesty sees himself in her, and by him this Soul is so illumined that she cannot see that anyone exists, except only God himself; and so she sees nothing except herself.. God himself, who sees himself in this very Soul by his divine majesty" (MSS 118, 145). In short, God and the Soul only see each other, through illumination; because they are now (or, has been all along) one. At the culmination of Porete's erotic-ecstatic moment in this Sixth State, we don't necessarily see a mirror image. But the most apt modern interpretations of what happened in this Sixth State, and how mirror, in the context of mystical women, may be a truly guiding metaphor for Porete can be found in the intuitions of Irigaray and Hollywood:

..Mirror made of matter so fluid, so ethereal that it had already entered and mingled everywhere?.. What if everything were already so intimately specularized that even in the depths of the abyss of the "soul" a mirror awaited her reflection and her light. Thus I have become your image in this nothingness that I am, and you gaze upon mine in your absence of being.. A living mirror, thus, am I (to) your resemblance as you are mine.<sup>76</sup>

..the enflamed/enflaming mirror represents the soul when she empties and purifies herself in order to become the perfect reflective surface for the divine.. Marguerite Porete.. calls her treatise *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. The soul becomes a mirror of the divine and unites with "the all" that is God by emptying herself of all createdness and hence of all being.. if the self becomes nothing in order to reflect the divine, God is also nothing. The mirror image.. is from the paradoxical interplay of darkness and light to the mystic "touch."<sup>77</sup>

Supporting Hollywood's astute observation in *Sensible Ecstasy*, it can be said that Porete's mirror discourse fully develops what Hadewijch showcased through the nondual, God-

---

<sup>76</sup> Irigaray, *La Mystérique*, 196-7. As of the previous chapter, I have already indicated that this particular work of Irigaray contains many passages that are applicable to central themes of Porete, even though the Beguine's influence is not directly referred to.

<sup>77</sup> Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 195.

abyss-Soul abyss relation. Even when God is on masculine term, the Soul “sees herself as nothing in God and God as nothing in herself” (*MSS* 26, 45). As the previous chapters have more resoundingly confirmed, Porete’s mirror never merely reduces the Soul’s agency into a lower form of mimicry, but into a transparent reflection of divine, and the equal beloved of Divine, who declares: “..this Soul is God through its condition of Love.. this Soul is God by Love’s just law” (*MSS* 21, 41). In a rare moment, The Soul also boldly confesses that “The Son of God the Father is my mirror” (*MSS* 109, 132). Therefore, the mirror of *Mirror of Simple Souls* overcomes all the negative mirroring and self-serving attitudes (“fragmentation.. vanity and narcissism”) by annihilation, integrating the Soul into oneness with Divine, which is the inborn, pure, naked, and noble nature of now annihilated soul. Replacing the helpless posture of mimesis, Porete’s mirror radiates the Soul’s freedom and “willingness to lose herself in a most radical otherness” that is God.<sup>78</sup>

I have earlier stated that the tantric Buddhist ideas and theological world of Śaivism as cross-textual, religious-cultural, spiritual twin to Porete’s *MSS*. The above interpretation of Porete and Irigaray by Hollywood demands how the metaphor of mirror is deployed, in the spirit of union in Śaiva theology as well. In sum, mirror is the globally favorited metaphor meditation. But in this specific case, the mirror of Porete is as luminous as the mirror of prominent tantric Buddhist ideal and the nondual union in Kashmir Śaivism.<sup>79</sup> Of the following, although the

---

<sup>78</sup> Maria Lichtmann, “Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart,” 76.

<sup>79</sup> The “transparent or elusive” quality of mirror is associated with Buddhist realization of emptiness “to avoid reification” in Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 189. My chapter first focuses on the appearance of mirror and fire because of their prominence in Porete. But it is also the most significant image for the purified, ideal state of Buddhist tantric mind. See *The Life and Teaching of Nāropa*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). For more feminine principles, such as womb, the mother, and mythical, divine beings in tantric Buddhism, see Gyatso, 246-54. More on the mirror, consult Alex Wayman, “The Mirror as a Pan-Buddhist Metaphor-Simile,” *History of Religions* 13, no. 4 (May 1, 1974): 251–69.

object of mirror discourse has shifted and been directed toward the world and universe, I think it's not impossible to apply the principle of nondualism, once compared:

Therefore, the universe, reflecting itself in the mirror of *saṃvitti*, express (*vadati*) the purity (*vimala*) of the cosmic form (*viśvarūpatā*) of the lord (*nātha*) — TĀ (Tantrāloka) 3.44

Kālī is the supreme goddess Saṃvit, who, joyously radiant, sprays out (*ullasayatīti*) the universe (*viśva*) in the form of the subject (*pramātr*), cognition (*pramāṇa*), and object (*prameya*), consisting in non-difference (*abheda*) from Her own self in external things — that is called *kalayati*.. The goddess Kālī establishes (*avasthāpayati*) differentiation.. which have arisen in her own nature (*svarūpa*), non-different in the mirror (*makura*) of her own *saṃvit*.<sup>80</sup>

Sells has given an attentive interpretation of “the seventh stage, the joy of the *afterlife*.”<sup>81</sup>

In a very esoteric manner, the seventh state of grace actually has no detailed description, passing only twice in *MSS* 61 and 118. But when it appears, it signifies a perfect state of glorification and the Divine Feminine as Love “keeps within itself” (*MSS* 118, 146). It remains sealed and none can be written about this state. Sells’ interpretation is the most persuasive one because Porete also writes that “we shall have no knowledge until our souls shall have left our bodies” (146). Can a paranormal out-of-body experience approximate the Seventh State? Not all experience can qualify for comparison, as it will have to include the meditation of Divine/Love and ensuing transformation of one’s being. Though it is undetermined by Porete, the possibility of rapture, as an experience, can be an interesting convergence of neuroscience and mystical contemplations. In addition, we may not reserve the seat of this secret glory strictly to afterlife due to Porete’s commitment to nondualism: the Soul is not concerned with Hell or Heaven, either. As surveyed in Chapter 3, for Porete who well precedes Eckhart’s this-worldliness:

---

<sup>80</sup> I am borrowing these translations from Furlinger, *Touch of Śakti*, 152-3. Latter passage is originally quoted in Rajanaka Lakshman Joo, *Śrīkramanayapradīpikā*, ed. Prabhā Devī (Srinagar: Guptagaṅga, 1959), 3-4. The keyword *saṃvit* means full energy, or potency of knowledge, and in the non-dual context, (God-)consciousness. Note that *saṃvit* also functions to identify this consciousness, as “Goddess” in South Asian traditions. The powerful status of Goddess Kālī is symbolized in the famous iconography where “Kālī erotically astride the supine Śiva, whose seeming unconsciousness under her feet is variously interpreted by the tradition as sleep, death, mystical ecstasy, and sexual bliss.” Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 202.

<sup>81</sup> *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 120 (italics added).

“Paradise is nothing else than to see only God” (*MSS* 96, 121). Of course, this seeing not even an intentional action, as both will and work are to be annihilated as well. It is rather a gift of illumination. Therefore, posthumous distinction has no significance for Porete, but living the divine life, being one with Love itself does. It is a matter of with whom and how (“Love then worked in her, for her, without her”<sup>82</sup>), where (“..Then she found God within herself, without seeking him,”<sup>83</sup>) without a why. Where to? Once again, “to the land of the Forgotten and Naked and Brought to Nothing or the Illumined” (*MSS* 95, 119)— not a geographical location but the metaphysical space for annihilated, transformed being of Soul. Since the Soul is not bounded by the force of sin, or the lost paradise of Adam, it seems that the distinction of life and death also has no power in her discourse, but only being “wholly naked” and “brought to nothing” (*MSS* 94, 119). Chapters 61 and 118 briefly introduced the states of devout Soul to show that perfection of Soul in her mystical ascent exists and is experienced. Prologue of *MSS* begins with the Soul’s statement that the highest state of grace can be attained “in the land of life” “through her enjoyment of God” and “touched by God and stripped bare of sin” (*MSS* 1, 10; *MSS* 118, 141).<sup>84</sup> However, this contemplation is possibly the first and last place where the worldly love is explicitly connected to divine love in a positive association, albeit in the form of an allegory. Robinson, based on this passage, emphasizes several times Annihilation.. is a return of the soul while in her earthly body to her prior existence.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, given the observation of

---

<sup>82</sup> *MSS* 93, 118.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Compare, in the nondual Śaiva context, how ‘touch’ is primarily involved in dissolving and melting the self with Supreme Lord, the highest reality in “the complete absorption or immersion (*samāveśa*).” Furlinger 117-20. This language of absorption and immersion is precisely the state of unity of Soul with Love in Porete: “And she is so wholly dissolved into him that she sees neither herself nor him” (*MSS* 91, 116). See also Vasugupta, *The Stanzas on Vibration: The SpandaKarika with Four Commentaries*, trans. Mark S. G. Dyczkowski (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), xv: “..But through his contact/touch (*sparśa*) with (his) own (inner) strength (*bala*) made in such a way that he identifies with it (thus acquiring its power).”

<sup>85</sup> *Nobility and Annihilation*, 83.

Porete's disgust of any created aspect, human nature, human will, and especially any association with human flesh, it is somewhat difficult to confirm this position. It may make more sense when viewed with nondualist tantric meditation that better affirms body as worldly phenomenon. Although the goal is joy of Love, Porete's path is still a thorough path of self-negation, an ascetic mysticism without mortification.

Taking all reflections above for consideration, *MSS 119* condenses such theological contrasts and tensions, blends them with mystical ineffability and esotericism. As she boldly puts forward:

**The Soul.** Ah, you unknown ladies, says the Soul who caused this book to be written, you who are in being, and are so without separating yourselves from the unknown being, truly you are not known; but that is in the land *where Reason is lord*.. It was Cowardice.. who surrendered this intention to Reason through Love's replies to Reason's questions; and so it has been made by human knowledge and human intelligence; and human reason and human intelligence know nothing of interior love, nor does interior love know anything of divine knowledge. My heart is drawn up so high and plunged down so deep that I cannot reach it; for everything which one can say or write of God, or, what is more than saying, that one can think of him is far more lying than it is speaking the truth.<sup>86</sup>

Porete, on the other hand, though being a superb philosopher and a theologian for herself, does not build her case solely upon the domain of knowledge. As the Soul has been narrating throughout *MSS*, she's contemptuous against the Reason. Rather, the source of attunement is the deeper interiority of love that embraces both highs and lows of experience of union with divine. And it is clear that as a true mystic, Porete appreciates and not infrequently confesses the unknowable, unreachable, abyssal quality of love ("plunged down so deep that I cannot reach it")<sup>87</sup> reminiscent of Hadewijch. Though much of her sophisticated thinking is of course

---

<sup>86</sup> *MSS 119*, 146-7 (italics added). Full title: "How the Soul who has caused this book to be written excuses herself for having made this so long-winded, this book which seems so small and short to the Souls who dwell in nothingness and who have fallen from Love into this state of being."

<sup>87</sup> In many chapters of *MSS* cited here, the Soul expresses the abyss of nothingness and love. See also in *MSS 38* "abyss of utter poverty." Amongst Beguine mystics, Hadewijch is known to have utilized abyss language at best, in her description of union with Love (*Minne*). Comprehensive study of abyss in Beguines, Eckhart and Rhineland mystics can be found in McGinn, "Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism." *Franciscan Studies* 72 (January 2014): 433-52.



mediated by the philosophical theology, Porete's intellectual freedom, deeply intertwined with the total freedom of her Soul, should never be confused with Reason alone. Although the status of Reason in Porete's *MSS* should and may not represent a simple, genuine philosophical search or conceptual rigor writ large, the fire and its burning in Porete will resist and annihilate any norms, opposites, distinctions, strictures standing in the way of her soul's process of nothingness and complete union with Love. Reason, unfortunately, seems to embody all those forms of obstruction, and has become the object of Porete's perennial criticism, disdain, enslavement (*MSS* 39) and destruction (*MSS* 87). However, the reemergence of Reason's voice after *MSS* 87 might signal the difficulty and complexity of executing Porete's own project of transcendence, as the expression of nothingness must transform epistemological, volitional and ontological states, almost always inevitably mediated by the contemplative *thinking*. Altogether, Reason is undoubtedly annihilated along with any work, obligation, preconception of sin or hope. *MSS* 41 continues on the state of Soul:

**Love.** This Soul, says Love, is not with herself... she does nothing from within herself; for whoever does anything of his own initiative, he is not, says Love, without himself, but rather he has Nature with him and Reason. But, he, says Love, *who is dead through Love neither feels* nor knows Reason or Nature. And so such a Soul wishes for none of the joys of Paradise, however much choice be offered her, nor refuses any of the torments of hell, as though everything was to her liking.

(60-1; italics added)

Although Porete's basis, telos and beloved object for mystical union is all represented as Love, such Perfect Love is described as nondual, ontological status as being and seeing as divine; and this state has no room for ordinary human feeling.<sup>88</sup> As for feeling, although further analyses on the women mystics' feelings and desires will be presented in following chapters, it should be noted that the discussion of feelings in *MSS* primarily begins as a critique, annihilation

---

<sup>88</sup> *MSS* 25 and 28 are notable for Porete's description of Soul's deadness to feeling, in the context of her indistinct union with Love. In *MSS* 97, Porete mentions "Paradise is nothing else than to see only God" (120), in continuation of her focus on uncreated state of pure nothingness and complete freedom, yet without mentioning any particular affective change or status.

and death of feelings: shame, fear, anxiety, or dishonor, mainly tied to soul's bondage to Virtues, under the force of Adam's sin.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the Soul's urgent need to transcend such traditionally gendered, negative and critical affective associations increases, so as to attain true freedom and unity with Love. Now, Reason asks, "do such Souls feel any joys, within or without themselves?" (*MSS* 25, 44) Porete maintains her emphasis upon the perfected nature of Soul in Love, yet does not indicate that our goal resides in gaining happiness or paradisiacal joy as a favor, either: "...the Soul brought to Nothing is without herself when she has no feeling or work from nature, nor any from within, nor shame, nor honor, nor any fear of anything which may happen, nor any affection for the divine goodness" (*MSS* 114, 136).<sup>90</sup>

*Concluding Porete's Joy in Love: Courtly Love and Dance of Divine Couples*

In the analysis of Porete and Hadewijch, that the element of love, desire and affect takes an undeniably erotic turn in the history of Christian West— potentially best addressed in comparison with Tantric schools, in which the role and transformation of desire is crucial for enlightenment.<sup>91</sup> Only when desire becomes the means of expression, some of the truly 'excessive' claims make sense. This has to do with expressed form of divine-human union in Hadewijch and Porete, capturing the apparent struggle of pursuit in love itself. One must deal with the depth of human emotion, hence the paradigmatic example of love and madness. Among this, human affairs of love have a history of baffling and terrifying examples. For instance, the

---

<sup>89</sup> Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> See also *MSS* 65 and 86.

<sup>91</sup> On the desire-focused stance of tantric mystic and saint Ramakrishna (1836-1886), see Kripal, *Kālī's Child*, 25: "It was desire not a synthesis of doctrine that formed the center.. Indeed, if one has 'passionate desire,' it matters little whether or not one believes in incarnations.. Doctrine is subordinate to desire.. The center of his teaching was ecstatic love for a personal deity, not formless meditation on an impersonal Absolute." Similarly, by emphasizing the erotic and ecstatic dimension of mystical union, Hadewijch and Porete truly revived the language of love and desire, privileging the mode of passion over rationality, ritual and even sets of common morality.

possibility of capriciousness and unwelcome change is evoked out of passion. Though only once, Porete does mention such possibility of change, bringing ‘third-party’ in relationship, allusion of love affair outside the system of conventional marriage. It is hard to deny this is a kind of polyamorous relation, *ménage à trois*:

..And after that I pondered and considered how it would be if he were to ask me how I should react if I knew that it could be more pleasing to him that I should love another more than him; and then my wits failed.. And afterwards he asked me how I should react if it could be that he could love another more than me.. Furthermore, he asked me what I should do and how I would react, if it could be that he could wish that someone other than himself loved me more than he did.. Then I asked, in great bewilderment of thought, how it could ever be that I could love another more than him, or that he could love another more than me, or that another could love me more than he did. ..if I did not wish to lose both myself and *him*. ..now he wanted to part from his beloved.., and who believed that he was to live yet longer with *her*;<sup>92</sup>

Just what exactly is this meditation doing for Porete’s Soul and her commitment to Love?

This particular chapter truly defies a reading of conventional theology, despite being immediately welcomed by Land of Freedom, Justice, Mercy and Divine Love herself (*MSS* 132). Most of *MSS* has strengthened the unity between Soul and Love exclusively, by leaving other characters with doubt, curiosity, astonishment or enjoining with support and praise. In order to understand the passage above, readers may need the contextualization through the idealized principle of courtly love, sublimated as a distinctive form of mystical theology, by none other than Hadewijch first and then Porete. It is gravely unfortunate that elements of the courtly love are often only spotlighted under extramarital, hence automatically adulterous affairs, in a similar way to how the tantric Buddhism suffers the voyeuristic gaze. However, this does not mean the tradition of courtly love lacks its own philosophical commitment, and its own ideal perfection and purity in love. Alexander J. Denomy explains:

..it is desire which is the means to the end and purpose of Courtly Love: the *ennobling* of the lover. Despite the sensuality that such love implies in Christian eyes, for the troubadours such love was *spiritual* in that it

---

<sup>92</sup> *MSS* 131, 167-8. I have italicized gender pronouns as the Soul identifies herself as feminine and the beloved as masculine. And the ‘other’ lover is also described as feminine.

sought a union of hearts and minds rather than of bodies; it was a virtuous love in so far as it was the source of all natural virtue and worth.<sup>93</sup>

Needless to mention, such a characterization shares significantly with Porete's schematization of Love in *MSS*. Courtly love in Porete utilizes a metaphor of freely loving Lady/mistress who brings all to nothing for the sake of Love. Like Hadewijch, Porete's erotic mysticism leads to the total self-emptying, and the apophysis of desire then can bond with the meditation of tantric Buddhist yoginī who learns self-control and practices letting go of any ego or clinging (Shaw). For both, *dispossession*, rather than possession, is the primary means and ends. As briefly mentioned in previous chapters, Porete's preferred title for Divine Feminine is "Lady" Love, who is the "mistress" with power and inexhaustible dynamic of desire between Soul and Love. On the fourth state, the Soul "is made mistress" as the "mistress of the lustre" full of "Love's pure delight" (*MSS* 142-3). The overwhelming abundance of joy and sweetness at this stage is withdrawn for higher contemplation, but the description intensely and noticeably coincides the model of courtly love: the union heralded by "Female Principle" (*domna*), not "envisaged in terms of love and marriage within the bounds of the doctrine of *Caritas*."<sup>94</sup> In short, Porete's daring vision provides an alternative framework: unsettlingly new, utterly other. But with this context, the structure of Perfect Love in Porete is thus closer to courtly love (*fin amour*) as she mentions her preference to be a spiritual *mistress*, who is the female noble ideal.

---

<sup>93</sup> Alexander J. Denomy, "Courtly Love and Courtliness." *Speculum* 28, no. 1 (1953): 44 (italics added). See also "Introductory Interpretive Essay," in *MSS*, liv.: "*Fin amour* carefully preserves the notion of what is superlative, perfected. Loyalty, authenticity, refinement are all names which become attached to it."

<sup>94</sup> Dash, "The Art of Amour-Cortois," 65. Surely Porete is preceded by Dionysian, Neo-Platonist Christian mystics such as Gregory of Nyssa who presents divine eros, yearning for God, and mystical ascent. However, complete nondual union between soul and Divine, not to mention, the idealization and divinization of feminine over the more traditional masculine God-father/God-son is uniquely characteristic of courtly love tradition, and therefore, aligns more closely with Porete.

Again, following the scheme of courtly love (*fin amour*), the desire and love in Beguine mystical union has already moved past the bounds of marital norms and politics, sharing this level of sentiment. Though this chapter cannot trace the history of gender in marriage, an unbound, enhanced freedom of *female* agency to love/Love is not necessarily a priority in marriage as, foremost, a legal and political institution unsurprisingly governed by Reason and Virtues, Porete was apparently moving against. However, the existence and function of *MSS 131* is still rare and perhaps most radical even within *MSS*. But as previously noted, the presence of divine affect, analogous to that of humanity, or love triangle in divine relations is not just in Porete's imagination. The centrality of divine couple Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Bengal Vaiṣṇava meditation has been already mentioned, along with the Goddess's own exhibition of Great Emotion (*Mahābhāva*) also called 'divine' madness. The scholarship cited in this chapter also confirms that the couple's union, separation and devotion is saturated with erotic energy, but distinguished from gross physicality: "They don't indulge in voyeuristic participation in the lovers' bliss and serve in a truly egoless state of non-desiring rapture. Their services remain non-auto-referential."<sup>95</sup> According to Rūpa, even though Rādhā is worshipped as the true Goddess, Kṛṣṇa has many devotees who are lovers, some of whom are married to Kṛṣṇa, others to their own husbands, yet willing to risk it all. Thus, rather than rejecting these minor relations, however, their love is part of religious emotion, "graded according to intensity."<sup>96</sup> Among them,

---

<sup>95</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 99.

<sup>96</sup> Voss Roberts, 67-8. Note that *Ujjvalanīlamanī (UN)*, one of Rūpa's prominent works, is only for devotees who have studied and mastered scriptures as "People whose religious orientation is knowledge-based (*jñānīs*) are unlikely to understand the ecstatic feelings of this text or to look favorably upon Kṛṣṇa's affairs with married women (*UN 5.3-5*)." This also comes very close to Porete's own position that privileges love over reason all along, who says at the end of *MSS 131*, that she is "brought.. out of the days of my childhood." (168). The second greatest problem may be the feminist discomfort with male-oriented polygamy as the metaphor of love and desire. Would it solve the problem if the table is turned? Although Beguine mysticism has an elaborate mythology as its Asian counterpart, both Hadewijch and Porete have expanded the gender of Soul, then transforming the divinity as Lady Love (*domna* in courtly love), never cancelling the masculine presence of God. When it comes to love, faith and

the jealousy and competition between Rādhā and her notable rival Candrāvalī, who also loves Lord Kṛṣṇa with passion, emerges. Their love toward Kṛṣṇa is consistently compared to each other's, but eventually always the deepest, truest, fullest love and devotion is exemplified by Rādhā, whose longing is equally returned by her eternal lover. Since she is the one who embodies the intensity and purity of devotion, the worship of Rādhā seems to hold the utmost significance in goddess-worship.<sup>97</sup> Divine Love, then, really is nothing like extirpation of such, but all about transformation of *human* desires and emotions in flux, both in the case of Porete and *bhāva*, according to Bengali ecstasies. The renowned love story of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa union, however, has been popularized by the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries, the aesthete-philosopher Rūpa Gosvāmin and the saint-philosopher the Chaitanya (Caitanya) whom we have surveyed in the last chapter. By saying this, I want to point out that Kashmir Śaivism, focal point of this chapter, has indeed millennium-long connection with this dynamism of divine couple: none other than *Śakti* and *Śiva*, the oldest and most significant representations of female and male divinities, primordial feminine and masculine energies. Many forms and incarnations of Hindu divinities, ever cited in this dissertation, originate from them. Unsurprisingly, *Śakti*, as the ultimate Goddess, is worshipped singularly by a community of Shāktas, who have separate tantric lineage, whose rich tradition has captivated American Asianists and feminists.<sup>98</sup> For the purpose of current chapter to mirror Porete's Soul-Love union, however, the following passage exemplifies *Śakti* and *Śiva* union:

**..The burning power of fire is not accepted as separate from fire even after full consideration..**

---

devotion, this already challenged a singular representation of divine-human relation, leaving massive impact on human relationality in general.

<sup>97</sup> McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 50.

<sup>98</sup> Please consult Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Jeffrey S. Lidke, *The Goddess within and beyond the Three Cities: Śākta Tantra and the Paradox of Power in Nepāla-Manḍala* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2017).

Only it is described in a distinct way as a preliminary step for the listener towards its knowledge. When in one who enters the state of *Śakti* (i.e. who is identified with *Śakti*), there ensues **the feeling of non-distinction (between *Śakti* and *Śiva*)**, then he acquires the state of *Śiva*.. she (*śakti*) is declared as the door of entrance (into *Śiva*) (Lit., *Śakti* is like *Śiva*'s face) Just as by means of the **light of a lamp, and the rays of the Sun**, portions of space. etc. are known even so, Oh dear one, **by means of *Śakti* is *Śiva* (who is one's own essential Self) cognized (i.e. re-cognized).**<sup>99</sup>

This union between *Śakti* and *Śiva* is often philosophized. But having reviewed the Buddhist deities in Tantric Buddhism and Porete's meditation, in mystical realm, there is no rigid distinction between philosophy and the contemplation of love: The former will affirm the embodied sex, and the latter will firmly remain in the Soul. Nevertheless, here, even the most philosophical interpretation is based on the divine qualities of Goddess and God and the love between them. Previously, Soul's elevation into her own divinity has been examined in Porete, along with the tantric Buddhist visualization of Goddesses. Although the Soul does not begin as a Goddess as *Śakti*, it can be said her transformation into Love immortalizes her as the lover and beloved of Divine Love: "Now they have one common will, like fire and flame, the will of the lover and that of the beloved, for love has changed this Soul into itself" (*MSS* 28, 47). *MSS* is a magnificent, notable work that can be categorized into philosophical treatise, respectively symbolizing universal female and male consciousness and principles. This is not incorrect. But the resignation of Reason and Thought for the sake of Love definitely demands not to categorized as such. The imageries and phenomena introduced in this chapter —fire, light, drinking nectar and wine, being one with the ocean of Love— all attest to the path of devotion

---

<sup>99</sup> *Vijñānabhairava, or Divine Consciousness: A Treasury of 112 Types of Yoga*, trans. and ed. Jaideva Singh (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 16-7 (boldface added). Alternatively, shortened as *VBh* vv18-9; 20-1. It is interesting that, unlike Meister Eckhart who distinguished heat of fire from its essence, the *Vijñānabhairava* text indicates that the burning power of fire is not separate or different from the fire itself. What's emphasized throughout these passages is the principle of non-difference. The interpretation of entry is debatable, —many read it with connotations of sexuality— and Porete's rapture is more complex as the divine embraces both genders, though Love mostly has feminine voice. I think it is more about the Soul's embracing divinity with her whole being, but varying degrees of eroticism can certainly applied: "Which delight exalts me and changes me, uniting me / In the everlasting joy of being with divine Love. / And divine Love says to me that she has entered into me," (*MSS* 122, 153)

and desire, in the name of Love: “Love cannot be sufficiently rewarded in any way except by Love.. This Soul.. buried her memory and her understanding and her will, deep down in one single being, that is God.. This Soul, says Love, has languished for Love for many a day” (*MSS* 43, 63-4). Then such Love, not simply a metaphysical principle, indeed ‘touches’ the Soul, further eroticizing the nature of such union. It is a mystical union, simmering with a variety of affective elements that are both sensual and spiritual. Porete’s erotic-ecstatic mystical union truly mirror the divine play and its erotic sentiment in South Asian tradition.

Therefore, this chapter has spotlighted on pioneers of new spiritual expressions, who were simultaneously women, and authors who further explored and transgressed the boundaries between male/female, sacred/secular, divine/human in a radical manner, in the mystical context East and West. Such radical traversal must have encountered backlash especially in a world women’s expressions, admission, participation are to be restricted based on the crude reality of embodied sex. And yet, for both groups of mystics, the aspect of social critique doesn’t come to the forefront (except Porete) as does the illumination as primary cause of their contemplation, with the impulse toward Divine who is Love itself. Their greatness and originality lies in that the Divine is (re)discovered as feminine, but different genders cross each other as the human Soul unites with the deity. Once again clarifying that this chapter has not made any sort of essentialized, rigid distinction between gendered experiences of mystical union, yet pointing out that this invention is severely understudied. In this sense, visualizing one’s being to unite with divine as the lover-embracing-the-beloved transcends all the binaries above, in the name of Love at once deeply Scriptural and also sensually romantic like the fire, burning with the excess of the ineffable. In this sense, although there is no information regarding embodied ritual in Porete and Hadewijch, their mystical union has much in common with the character and qualifications of



(Bengal) Ecstatics McDaniel provides in her conclusion<sup>100</sup>— culminating in the ecstatic as “Lover” of Divine whose passionate devotion allows to unite and separate from deity who is Love.

The significance of Beguine mystics, Hadewijch and Porete, is that despite the multiple variations of melancholia in their writings, through union with Love/Divine Feminine, there is a moment of resolution, a triumph, total psychological liberation, and freedom from women’s (yet not only) point of view— despite the harsh cost of freedom as an ideal. True, the Beguine songs of Love, a representation of thirteenth-century spirit, however radical its voice was, cannot address every gendered, racialized melancholia in women’s lives. But the impact of Beguine mindset, neither religiously orthodox nor secular,<sup>101</sup> enabled a very unique mode of contemplation and pursuit of their own truth and freedom. This cuts across, precedes and sets examples of secularism and humanism established only after a few centuries, not without controversy. By portraying the Soul and Love both as mainly as feminine, fluidly inviting masculine, these mystics open up discourse of feminism and queerness. The nobility and power of the Soul did not prevent the inevitable imprisonment or impending death. Precisely as Porete foretells, the actualization of Divine Love in one’s Soul is not ardently sought by everyone but *only* by the noble and sad Souls, who, in this sense, experience marginalization from the external

---

<sup>100</sup> McDaniel, 241-86: The Ecstatic as Guru, Siddha, Hero, Process, Lover and Madman. I think only the former two generates few obvious dissimilarities or arguments against the comparison with Beguines’ status. Neither Hadewijch nor Porete wants to be established as any sort of Master, at least from the text, precisely because Beguine community doesn’t belong to the traditional religious institution, adhering to its liminal position. It is my speculation that the restrictions on female authorship and authority should have created a unique sociological variation of Beguines distinct from the South Asian devotees, teachers and saints, many of whom were female; but this requires sociological investigation. Porete at some point complains that even Beguines, along with other Christian sects and persons, objects her and calls her “astray” (*MSS* 122, 152). This, of course, does not reduce the height of their mystical thought and lasting influence on Christian history of mysticism. On the level of envisioning an ideal, spiritual community as Holy Church, it can be said Porete does emphasize the lineage of noble Souls. See Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation*. So far I had limited access on how Porete or Hadewijch may have been known, respected, and practiced historically or ritually; therefore, this is only a tentative comparison.

<sup>101</sup> Hadewijch, “Introduction,” *CWS*, 19.

forces entrenched with the non-essentials. Therefore, nobility is not easily given, yet fiercely won by resisting the majority of oppression. The imagery of valiant warrior/knight/heroine in Hadewijch thus cannot hide the woundedness of its noble Soul, as much as Porete admits the reality of sad, and wretched Souls bound for pure nothingness.

The joy, melancholia, madness and blissful sweetness of Love in Hadewijch and Porete, in this regard, makes sense and finds companion across the centuries and cultures— in conversation with Buddhist tantrikas who has innate and perfect joys, and the devotees from Hindu tradition for whom the rapture of loving union with gods and goddesses was likewise central; For both Beguines, then for both religious-cultural zones, the pervasion of erotic-ecstatic dimension with the language of senses and sensuality is an exciting expression of Love, both divine and human, one that reveals true nature of Soul and the Self *as* Love. The joy of union and such realization is the biggest commonality amongst women presented in this chapter. The system of elaborate sexual union in Asian mystical tradition, or lack thereof, has been largely misinterpreted or left with no explanation of the deep philosophical and theological meanings embedded in the act of union: concerted and constant effort for spiritual realization transcending “the divide between self and other, lover and beloved.”<sup>102</sup> In turn, Beguines were also struggling to speak and write in a world in which mystical experience and interpretation was split into the philosophical/affective, soul/body narratives, hitherto, into categories already very much gendered. But the texts record all moments of contemplation and union, joy and suffering, heart and soul that keeps the fire alive within the mystics and ecstasies. Exiting this chapter, though with lots left unsaid, one observation can be clearly made that we are not here to discuss Porete’s joy or, tantric Buddhist’s, or the mystics’ and ecstasies’ solely in terms of individual,

---

<sup>102</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 315.

ephemeral happiness. It was briefly mentioned that great tantric joy *Mahāsukha* is both embodied and spiritual, but the crux of interpretation gave its center to the mystical state of bliss and beatitude, realizing the pure and ultimate awareness of reality devoid of dualities. In this line of reading, Porete’s joy should also be considered from the much disputed “natural beatitude.. that The soul knows that it is already impeccable.. in its union with the deity, it *transcends* that ‘the duality that it believes to be intrinsic to all knowledge, between a God possessed subjectively and the soul who contemplates him.’”<sup>103</sup> Likewise, the tantric Buddhist visionaries and meditators, in essence, cuts across the separation between the realm of deities and their own. Through the fascinating insight from the anthropologist Sukanya Sarbadhikary, readers (and I) have welcomed a new hermeneutic lens to explore this mystical, nondual union: *divine* affect. Both the Buddhists and Beguines have forged a unique way to utilize the path of desire and love fully, but simultaneously, transforming and freeing themselves from the enslaving structure of ego, self-will, and attachment— thereby creating a “transcendental space of ultimate bliss.”<sup>104</sup> In a way, these mystics and contemplators were completely negating and purifying their own lives, in order to invite and embody the deities and Love/Divine. This is why the concept of *rasa* and its putatively im-personal and universal aesthetic is so important for understanding Marguerite Porete’s divine joy; Gods and Goddesses were speaking through these self-less and ego-less humans. Therefore, the human agency or even personality is obliterated, but they serve trans-subjective, trans-temporal purpose as “the divine place of sensuous bliss... spiritual bliss.”<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Kent Emery, Jr., “Foreword,” xviii in *MSS* (italics added). The cited original French work is Christian Trottmann, *La Vision Béatifique: Des Disputes Scolastiques à Sa Définition Par Benoît XII* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1995), 326-8.

<sup>104</sup> Sarbadhikary, *The Place of Devotion*, 186.

<sup>105</sup> Sarbadhikary, 217. This incredibly plays out in Porete as well. The soul claims “..he who is to all eternity will never love anything without me.. never did he love anything without me.” So the individuality of Soul is

Whether or not this nondual mystical view won the day, or how long it has lasted, readers can see that the discourse of Porete's joy and tantric Buddhists' bliss/beatitude surpasses a narrow definition of women's mysticism as immediately as visionary or affective mysticism. Nevertheless, Porete's mystical union does deliver an important nondual vision of ontology that does not exclude the expression of love or erotic union, as it is central to her contemplation. Likewise, the Buddhist tantric Goddesses and the female devotees' relationship with them includes the elements of love, guidance, and even ritualized, physical practice of union. But the joy and bliss of such union ultimately resides in "internal nondual awareness" or "the realization of emptiness."<sup>106</sup> As the Sixth State of Porete's mystical ascent describes her Soul's union with divine goodness as "pure and illumined" (*MSS* 118, 145), the tantric Buddhist's nondual realization is "luminous and empty awareness."<sup>107</sup> Such is a magnificent joy, a joy of Divine Love, shared by mystics across the ages.

---

maintained, yet, rather than elevating personal traits per se, Soul focuses on her co-equal presence "to all eternity" and also "in the divine knowledge, and shall be there without end" (*MSS* 35, 55).

<sup>106</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 137.

<sup>107</sup> Jacoby, 145.

## Bibliography

- Arblaster, John. “‘Flowing from the Wild Sea and Back to the Sea’: Water Metaphors and Mystical Union in the Late Medieval Low Countries.” *The Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (March 21, 2018): 169–91.
- Arnold, Dan. *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- . “Self-Awareness (Svasaṃvitti) and Related Doctrines of Buddhists Following Dignāga: Philosophical Characterizations of Some of the Main Issues.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (June 2010): 323–78.
- . “The Sense Madhyamaka Makes as a Buddhist Position: Or, How a ‘Performativist Account of the Language of Self’ Makes Sense of ‘No-Self.’” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2019): 697-726.
- Barnard, G. William, and Jeffrey J Kripal, eds. *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*. New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002.
- Berry, Philippa. “The Burning Glass: Paradoxes of Feminist Revelation in *Speculum*” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, edited by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford, 229-46. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Campbell, June. *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity, and Tibetan Buddhism*. Rev. ed. London: Continuum, 2002.
- Carpenter, Amber. “Persons Keeping Their Karma Together: The Reasons for the Pudgalavada in Early Buddhism” in *The Moon Points Back*, eds. Koji Tanaka, Yasuo Deguchi, Jay Garfield, and Graham Priest, 1-44. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Clark, Kelly James, and Liu Zongkun. “The Polished Mirror: Reflections on Natural Knowledge of the Way in Zhuangzi and Alvin Plantinga.” in *Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization*, edited by Robin R. Wang, 163-83. New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Clooney, Francis X. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Collins, Steven. *Nirvana: Concept, Imagery, Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Cook, Scott Bradley., ed. *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Corrigan, John, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Coutinho, Steve. *An Introduction to Daoist Philosophies*. Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Dash, Bishnu Ch. “The Art of Amour-Cortois: Eros, Jois and Mahasukha in Tantra and the Troubadours.” *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 30, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2007): 61–77.
- Davidson, Ronald M. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- . “Reframing ‘Sahaja’: Genre, Representation, Ritual and Lineage.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2002): 45–83.
- Delmonico, Neal Gorton. “Sacred Rapture: A Study of the Religious Aesthetic of Rupa Gosvamin.” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1990.
- Denomy, Alexander J. “Courtly Love and Courtliness.” *Speculum* 28, no. 1 (1953): 44–6.
- Deutscher, Penelope. “‘The Only Diabolical Thing About Women...’: Luce Irigaray on Divinity.” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 88–111.
- . *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Dreyer, Elizabeth. *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005.
- Duckworth, Douglas. “Onto-Theology and Emptiness: The Nature of Buddha-Nature.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 1070–90.
- . “OTHER-EMPTINESS IN THE JONANG SCHOOL: THE THEO-LOGIC OF BUDDHIST DUALISM.” *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 2 (2015): 485–97.
- ., and Jonathan C. Gold eds., *Readings of Santideva's Guide to Bodhisattva Practice: (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- . *Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy of Mind and Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Meister Eckhart, the Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*. trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

- . *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*. trans. and eds. Bernard McGinn, Frank J. Tobin, and Elvira Borgstädt. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Emmanuel, Steven M., ed. *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Epstein, Mark. “On the seashore of endless worlds: Buddha and Winnicott.” In *Freud and the Buddha*, edited by Axel Hoffer, 89-108. London: Karnac Books, 2015.
- . *Thoughts without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective*. New York: Basic Books, 2013.
- Farley, Wendy. “Duality and Non-Duality in Christian Practice: Reflections on the Benefits of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue for Constructive Theology.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31 (2011): 135–46.
- Feld, Alina N. *Melancholy and the Otherness of God: A Study of the Hermeneutics of Depression*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Finnigan, Bronwyn. “Madhyamaka Ethics.” in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, edited by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields, 162-82. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Forman, Robert, ed. *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*. SUNY Press, 1999.
- . *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Fraser, Chris. “Emotion and Agency in Zhuangzi.” *Asian Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (February 2011): 97–121.
- . “Wandering the Way: A Eudaimonistic Approach to the Zhuāngzǐ.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13, no. 4 (December 2014): 541–65.
- Fürlinger, Ernst. *The Touch of Śakti: A Study in Non-Dualistic Trika Śaivism of Kashmir*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2009.
- Garfield, Jay L. *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Giorko, Georgina. “Salvation. Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls through a Buddhist Lens,” 2018. <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/25044>.

- Gyatso, Janet. *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary: A Translation and Study of Jigme Lingpa's Dancing Moon in the Water and Dakki's Grand Secret-Talk*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Hadewijch. *The Complete Works*. Translated by Columba Hart. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
- Harvey, Peter. "The Conditioned Co-Arising of Mental and Bodily Processes within Life and Between lives" in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, 46-68. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Heim, Maria. "Buddhism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, edited by John Corrigan, 17-34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . *Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Hillgardner, Holly. *Longing and Letting Go: Christian and Hindu Practices of Passionate Non-Attachment*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf., and Kathleen M. Erndl eds. *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Hoffer, Axel, ed. *Freud and the Buddha: The Couch and the Cushion*. London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2015.
- Hollywood, Amy M. *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion. Gender, Theory, and Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- . *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- . *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995.
- Hooks, Bell. *All about Love: New Visions*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow, 2000.
- Huls, Jos. *The Minne-Journey: Beatrice of Nazareth's "Seuen Maniren van Minne." Mystical Process and Mystagogical Process*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2013.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Translated by Stephen Pluháček. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- . *Sexes and Genealogies*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.



- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jacoby, Sarah. *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Jantzen, Grace M. “Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics.” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 186–206.
- . “Mysticism and Experience.” *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 295–315.
- Joy, Morny. *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender and Religion*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2006.
- . “Equality or Divinity: A False Dichotomy?” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, no. 1 (1990): 9–24.
- . “The Gifts of Wisdom: Images of the Feminine in Buddhism and Christianity.” In *Women, Religion, and the Gift: An Abundance of Riches*, edited by Morny Joy, 195–218. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.
- Kangas, David. “Dangerous Joy: Marguerite Porete’s Good-Bye to the Virtues.” *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 299–319.
- Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Review of *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* by Sarah H. Jacoby. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 286–88.
- Kinsley, David R. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- . *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Klein, Anne C. *Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology in Support of Transformative Religious Experience*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1986.
- . *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2008.
- Kostner, Delia. “It’s not just about mindfulness: foundations of Buddhist thought and why it matters for psychoanalysis.” In *Freud and the Buddha*, edited by Axel Hoffer, 28–46. London: Karnac Books, 2015.

- Kragh, Ulrich Timme. "Appropriation and Assertion of the Female Self: Materials for the Study of the Female Tantric Master Lakṣmī of Uḍḍiyāna." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 2 (2011): 85–108.
- Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism & Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Kroll, Jerome, and Bernard S. Bachrach. *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Lanzetta, Beverly J. "Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart." *Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (April 1992): 248-68.
- Lerner, Robert E. "The Image of Mixed Liquids in Late Medieval Mystical Thought." *Church History* 40, no. 4 (1971): 397–411.
- Lichtmann, Maria. "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: The Mirror of Simple Souls Mirrored," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, edited by Bernard McGinn, 65-86. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Liezi. *The Book of Lieh-tzu: A Classic of the Tao*. Translated by A. C. Graham. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Mathes, Klaus-Dieter. "A Brief Analysis of Jonang Choklé Namgyal's *Pointing Out Instruction on the Foundation, Path, and Fruit*." in *Reasons and Lives in Buddhist Traditions: Studies in Honor of Matthew Kapstein*, Dan Arnold, Cécile Ducher, and Pierre-Julien Harter, eds., 241-54. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019.
- Marin, Juan. "Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls." *The Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 1 (2010): 89–109.
- McDaniel, June. "Emotions in Bengali Religious Thought: Substance and Metaphor." In *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*. Edited by Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames, 39-63. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- . *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- . *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

- McGinn, Bernard. "The Abyss of Love: The Language of Mystical Union among Medieval Women." In *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, edited by E. Rozanne Elder, 95-120. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995.
- . *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200-1350*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.
- . "Lost in the Abyss: The Function of Abyss Language in Medieval Mysticism." *Franciscan Studies* 72 (January 2014): 433–52.
- , ed. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- . "Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition." *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 2 (1994): 155–81.
- . "Unio Mystica/Mystical Union." In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, eds. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman, 200-10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Muller-Ortega, Paul E. *Triadic Heart of Siva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Nāgārjuna. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakārikā*. Translated by Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013.
- Nishitani, Keiji. *Religion and Nothingness*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Newman, Barbara. "Annihilation and Authorship: Three Women Mystics of the 1290s." *Speculum* 91, no. 3 (June 13, 2016): 591–630.
- Olendzki, Andrew. "Buddhist psychology: a work in progress." In *Freud and the Buddha*, edited by Axel Hoffer, 65-83. London: Karnac Books, 2015.
- Patton, Kimberley C., and Benjamin C. Ray, eds. *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Porete, Marguerite. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Translated and edited by Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, and J. C. Marler. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.
- Radden, Jennifer. *Melancholic Habits: Burton's Anatomy & the Mind Sciences*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- . *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- . *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . *The Philosophy of Psychiatry: A Companion. International Perspectives on Philosophy and Psychiatry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Radler, Charlotte C. “And So the Prajña Eye Sees a Wide, Impregnable Country: Communal Spirituality in Meister Eckhart, Thomas Merton, Margaret Farley, and Mahayana Buddhism.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 38 (2018): 231-51.
- . “‘In Love I Am More God’: The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart’s Mysticism.” *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 171–98.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/649847>.
- . “Losing the Self: Detachment in Meister Eckhart and Its Significance for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26 (2006): 111–7.
- Robinson, Joanne Maguire. *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Sage, Richard J. “‘Annihilation of the Heart’: The Ideal of Non-Perception in the Liezi.” *Problemos* (July 2016), 75–93.
- Śāntideva. *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Sarbadhikary, Sukanya. *The Place of Devotion: Siting and Experiencing Divinity in Bengal-Vaishnavism*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015.
- Schaeffer, Kurtis R. *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . *The Christian Faith*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.
- Sebastian, C. D. *The Cloud of Nothingness: The Negative Way in Nagarjuna and John of the Cross*. Springer, 2016.
- Sells, Michael Anthony. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

- . “The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: ‘Unsayings’ and Essentialism.” In *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, edited by Bernard McGinn, 114-46. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Shaw, Miranda Eberle. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- . *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Sheehy, Michael. “The Dharma of the Perfect Eon: Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen’s Hermeneutics of Time and the Jonang Doxography of Zhentong Madhyamaka.” in *The Other Emptiness: Rethinking the Zhentong Buddhist Discourse in Tibet*, Michael R. Sheehy and Klaus-Dieter Mathes, eds., 65-94. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019.
- Simmer-Brown, Judith. *Dakini’s Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*. 1st ed. Boston: Shambhala, 2001.
- Starkey, A. Denise. “Apophysis, Detachment, and Luce Irigaray’s Search for the Divine Woman.” Paper delivered at Marquette University Colloquium, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL, February 2005, 1-16.
- Stearns, Cyrus. *The Buddha from Dölpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2010.
- Stevens, Travis Allen. “Violent Lovesickness: Richard of St Victor, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, and Angela of Foligno,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 2017.
- Studstill, Randall. *The Unity of Mystical Traditions: The Transformation of Consciousness in Tibetan and German Mysticism*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. New York: Collier Books, 1962.
- Thurman, Robert A. F. *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.
- Voss Roberts, Michelle. *Dualities: A Theology of Difference*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.
- . *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Wayman, Alex. *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998.
- Wedemeyer, Christian K. *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

- Westerhoff, Jan. *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- . “The Madhyamaka Concept of Svabhāva: Ontological and Cognitive Aspects.” *Asian Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 17–45.
- . *Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- White, David Gordon. *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in Its South Asian Contexts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Willis, Janice D. Review of *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, by Janet Gyatso. *History of Religions* 39, no. 4 (2000): 390–3.
- Yener, Güzin A. Review of *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*, by Sarah H. Jacoby. *Buddhist Studies Review* 33, no. 1–2 (2016): 314–6.
- Zhuangzi. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Brook Ziporyn. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009.
- Ziporyn, Brook. *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016.
- . *Evil and/or/as the Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000.
- . *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought: Prolegomena to the Study of Li*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.