Part I

INTRODUCTION

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! (Song of Songs 1.2)

Figure 1 Reading the Body

Leonard (Guy Pearce) and Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss) in *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, USA 2000). Photo: British Film Institute.

Chapter 1

DESIRING BODIES

The scene opens with a close-up of Leonard's face, Guy Pearce's face: stubbled, sharply boned, handsome, with bleached hair and two scratches on his left cheek. He is lying on his back, in bed, looking up at the ceiling; bathed in a soft, pale yellow morning light.[1] We hear his thoughts as he pulls them together, out of sleep. 'Awake.' An observation and a question, as if he had to name the experience of awakening in order to imagine and remember it as his own experience. And indeed, forgetting and imagining is Leonard's constant condition in Christopher Nolan's film noir, *Memento* (USA 2000). Following the rape and murder of his wife, Leonard has lost the ability to make new memories, and apart from his life before that traumatic event – that his anterograde amnesia allows him to remember partly (selectively) – his world begins anew every 15 minutes. By means of notes on the reverse of Polaroid photographs, and messages tattooed on his body, on arms, legs and chest – one laterally reversed so that he can read it in the mirror – Leonard reconstitutes his world, repeatedly. He tells anyone who will listen of his search for the murderer of his wife, his need to avenge the world he has lost.[2]

'Oh, where am I?' Leonard wonders as he looks around the room: a cage with two birds, a gold-framed picture by the door, a drawing of a young girl. 'Somebody's bedroom.' Perhaps it is his room? Then he realizes that he is not alone in the bed. He has raised himself on his right arm and seen a sleeping woman – Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss) – lying close beside him. 'Oh, must be her room.' Leonard has taught himself not to show surprise at what might be the everyday, as it keeps befalling him anew. 'Oh, who is she?' With his moving she begins to awaken, and her left hand falls against his shoulder. With a start Natalie opens her eyes, and she too is a little surprised to find him there, for she only met him yesterday. 'It's only me,' he reassures. He has remembered who he is, the

man who cannot remember, and who must now, again, piece together where he is and why he is there, and with whom he has been sleeping. His own body will prove to be the clue he needs, a living memento of his dismembered life.

The Other Between

Many will have been there, like Leonard, like Natalie. Upon waking you find yourself in bed with a stranger. Who is he? How did he get there? Or, finding the bed unfamiliar, how did you get here? And then you remember. But in the moment before you recall how his body came to be lying beside your own, perhaps still sleeping, you are disconcerted by his presence, by the warmth of his flesh. Even as you seek to name him, your own identity is disturbed, dislocated, for a moment undone, rendered indeterminate. The space between your bodies becomes a distance within yourself, opening between 'consciousness' and 'identity'. Then he rolls over, moves closer, and still sleeping extends his arm in a half-intended embrace, and the touch of skins covers the distance within, and you remember who you are: yourself and the stranger.

Between the intimacy of sheets, between one body pressed against another, each following the other's posture and curves – the convex nestling in the concave, as one spoon lies against another – there is still a space, a distance, a hair's breadth. The stranger with whom you awaken may have been long known to you, a long-time companion, a dear friend, a spouse. Yet even in moments of intimacy, when your beloved gives himself to you and you to him, he is still beyond your grasp, a stranger to the caress of your flesh. This is what the phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas – here a phenomenologist of sexual desire – calls the 'pathos of voluptuosity'.[3] No matter how close the embrace, the 'coinciding of the lover and the beloved, is charged by their duality: it is simultaneously fusion and distinction'.[4] In 'the other's proximity, distance is integrally maintained',[5] even as proximity calls forth the desire for union with the other.

Eros is not so much the destruction of self or other, as their transformation, by making one present to the other, so that the other is not encompassed by the self, or the self submerged in the other, for that would be the destruction of their relationship. Rather the self – the 'I' – goes beyond itself, becoming the self of the other, for 'the amorous subjectivity is transubstantiation itself'.[6] The presence of one to the other – of one *in* the other – is made possible through the distance of proximity,

through the 'absence' that opens in the nearness of the other's body. 'What one presents as the failure of communication in love precisely constitutes the positivity of the relationship; this absence of the other is precisely its presence *as* other.'[7]

To encounter the other in this way, as absent even when most close, *because* most close, is to encounter the other as 'feminine' – so Levinas avers. In the erotic embrace there is no overcoming of the other as other, no denial of the fundamental duality and alterity announced in the other's body, pressed against your own. 'The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery.'[8] This withdrawal – which is the mystery of the 'feminine' – is not that of the 'mysterious, unknown or misunderstood woman', but is that 'mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light'.[9] It is the appearing of that mysterious alterity that hides in being, in the body that encompasses your own, that holds you, not with the strength of enfolding arms, but with a tender otherness, an essential alienness to yourself. 'The transcendence of the feminine', Levinas tells us, 'consists in withdrawing elsewhere, which is a movement opposed to the movement of consciousness. But this does not make it unconscious or subconscious, and I see no other possibility than to call it mystery.'[10]

The 'feminine' is the mystery of the other, and as such is not your projection. It is not something you can possess or own, even as you hold his body most dearly. The erotic embrace, the sexual relationship, is 'neither a struggle, nor a fusion, nor a knowledge . . . It is a relationship with alterity, with mystery – that is to say, with the future, with what (in a world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there – not with a being that is not there, but with the very dimension of alterity.'[11] The erotic is the lure and embrace of the truly alien, the flesh that is other.

Needless to say, Levinas's feminization of alterity, his understanding of the 'feminine' as 'the *of itself other*, as the origin of the very concept of alterity',[12] has given rise to much criticism, most famously, and caustically, by Simone de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949).

> I suppose that Levinas does not forget that woman, too, is aware of her own consciousness, or ego. But it is striking that he deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is mystery for man. Thus his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege.[13]

Levinas's response to this criticism is reluctant and less than pellucid. 'All these allusions to the ontological differences between the masculine and the feminine would appear less archaic if, instead of dividing humanity into two species (or into two genders), they would signify that the participation in the masculine and in the feminine were the attribute of every human being.'[14] It would appear that Levinas, in admitting his 'archaic' use of terms, would not want to deny that woman is also a subject, and that in the man she too can discover the feminine other. Thus for Levinas, 'masculine' and 'feminine' are not biological but ontological distinctions, modalities of being that might be ascribed to either sex.[15] No doubt Levinas is betrayed by a certain cultural context, but his 'feminine' is figural, culturally motivated but biologically arbitrary.[16] 'Masculine' and 'feminine' are attributes of every human being, and Levinas wonders if this might not be the meaning of Genesis 1.27: 'male and female created he them.'[17]

If, biologically speaking, Levinas's use of 'masculine' and 'feminine' is gender neutral, why does he not employ non-gendered terms, thus avoiding the cultural figurations of man and woman as 'virile' and 'modest', 'active' and 'passive'? It is in part because he wants to avoid any abstraction of eros, which, after all, is an intimacy of gendered bodies. Furthermore, he wants to avoid any suggestion that the erotic relation is simply symmetrical, a relationship of two subjects, for both of whom the other is an object, as in de Beauvoir's correction of Levinas. From the outside the relationship may appear symmetrical; but viewed from inside the relationship is a doubled, reciprocal asymmetry, for it is in the erotic relationship that we discover otherness itself: the Other in the other. Thus Levinas takes (hetero)sexual difference – which he holds to be fundamental – as a figure for the yet more fundamental difference of the same from the other, of *ipseity* from *alterity*. It is then not so much the 'feminine' that is the 'of itself other', as the difference of the 'feminine' from the 'masculine', that again should not be understood as a biological difference, as between the sexes, but as a carnal distance, between bodies.

What is at issue here is the discovery and preservation of *difference*, of a radical otherness that cannot be collapsed into the same; denied in favour of an undifferentiated totality, a single flesh. Thus Levinas refuses Aristophanes' myth of humanity's ancient tripartite nature, which is said to have consisted of the male, female and androgyne, with each gender a whole couple, with four arms, four legs, a single head with two faces, that runs by turning somersaults.[18] It was only with their cleaving that erotic desire was born in these comical beings, as each half yearned for his or her other part, for that which they now lacked. The fulfilment of desire then

consists in the (re)union of two complementary bodies – the male with the male, the female with the female, and the androgyne with his or her other half, once more forming an originary whole. Levinas rejects this myth of sexual union as the fusion of complements, for that which complements yourself, that which fills up your lack of self and returns you to yourself, is not other than yourself. There is no going outside of yourself, no meeting with another, but only more of yourself: an engorged solipsism. Thus the idea of complementary bodies – so pervasive in Christian marital theology – betrays a ('masculine') desire to possess the other, as that which will satisfy your want of self.[19] Those who seek for their complement – always heterosexual (androgynous) in the prevailing Christian rendition, but also homosexual (male and female) in the original Platonic joke – seek for that which they can grasp and hold, but which they can never really receive as different from themselves, as the appearing of the Other in flesh. They can never caress the alien.

One should not suppose that each embrace, each and every coupling, opens onto alterity, onto the mystery that withdraws even as one seeks to encircle, hold and possess the other. Often, if not always, the meeting of bodies is but an intercourse of pleasure, a satisfaction of want, a temporary satiety that quickly passes so that we can want again. This is the repeated longing and satisfaction of those seeking to fuse with their other half. In such relationships the other remains within the projection of the self, so that even though mutually agreed, contracted – either through the laws of church and state, or through hurried arrangements ('Your place or mine?') – it is always the hired use of the other's flesh, the negotiated pleasure of their body. But even if much sex is like this, Levinas points to the possibility of something more, to a transcendence or intensity of yearning that is other than want, a passing from need to a different, deeper desiring. When we caress the skin of the other, we do not always know what it is that we seek to touch. 'It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [à venir].'[20]

Desiring Distance

> To expend oneself, to bestir oneself for an impenetrable object is pure religion. To make the other into an insoluble riddle on which my life depends is to consecrate the other as a god; I shall never manage to solve

> the question the other asks me, the lover is not Oedipus. Then all that is left for me to do is to reverse my ignorance into truth. It is not true that the more you love, the better you understand; all that the action of love obtains from me is merely this wisdom: that the other is not to be known; his opacity is not the screen around a secret, but, instead, a kind of evidence in which the game of reality and appearance is done away with. I am then seized with that exaltation of loving *someone unknown*, someone who will remain so forever: a mystic impulse: I know what I do not know.[21]

In the above quotation, Roland Barthes (1915–80) – a phenomenologist of sorts, here a phenomenologist of amorous yearning – finds, like Levinas, that to embrace the beloved is to embrace the unknown. Perhaps, as Barthes suggests, this is a perversity of the lover, who makes the beloved opaque, turning him into an unsolvable riddle, a consecrated divinity. Yet if the 'action of love' is not something that I initiate but by which I am initiated – a 'constant *initiation* into a mystery rather than *initiative*'[22] – then Barthes' account is similar to that which Levinas names as an encounter with the 'feminine', a meeting with the mystery of the other, who withdraws, but does not leave. Barthes, however, wastes no time in telling us that this withdrawal is also the advent of the god, so that what Levinas names the 'feminine' can also be named the 'religious' or 'mystical'. Levinas may be more circumspect, more philosophically tentative, than Barthes, but he is also less solipsistic, since on his account the transcendent movement of desire is not so much the action of the lover as the effect of a preceding passion. Levinas ventures that transcendent desire is not an apophatic idolatry, but the disclosure of the Other in the other's flesh, so that the lover's desiring is already the disclosing, the giving of the Other's infinite difference. That which withdraws in the erotic embrace is also that which approaches, and approaches by withdrawing. It is the approach of the Other, that, in a further venture, is also the approach of God – there being no other route by which God can come to us.[23] God does not abandon the face of the beloved, but is so fully present, that there is nothing to be seen except the beloved's face.

On this reading, Levinas and Barthes open for us the analogous or parodic[24] relationship between desire of the flesh and desire of that which is beyond all flesh, but on which all flesh depends. Levinas's concern to delineate a union without the dissolution or fusion of its terms repeats the 'mystical' concern of both Jewish and Christian traditions to think the relationship of creature to Creator without the destruction of one by the other. Indeed Levinas makes the two relationships homologous, so that eros names

both sexual and mystical union, in which the 'absence of the other is precisely its presence as other'.[25] Moreover, the homologous terms do not appear successively, as if one led to the other, but intensively, inside one another. These intensive, interpenetrating relationships appear as the fundamental unknowability in that most intimate of knowledge, the caress and embrace of the other's body. This is one way in which sex is always alien sex; the cut and difference between bodies that brings them together and keeps them apart, even when – particularly when – they are most amorously conjoined. There is always an alien dimension in the most passionate of conjunctions, a dimension that discloses a yet deeper strangeness. It is this alien depth or intensity that has always already initiated the desire to know the otherness of and beyond the body. This is the theological venture upon alien sex that Levinas and Barthes here open for us. But it was, of course, opened much earlier in the Christian tradition, from its beginning.

Renunciation and Return

Ancient pagans, such as Galen, the second-century physician, were amazed by the early Christians' renunciation of sexual congress. 'Their contempt for death is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint from intercourse. For they include not only men but also women who refrain from intercourse all through their lives.'[26] This text may be a later Christian interpolation, but second-century Christians, such as Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215), certainly boasted of their renunciation of sex, and indeed of sexual desire itself.[27] Yet, paradoxically, even as Christians put aside their sexual wants in pursuit of spiritual gratification, their bodies remained as the measure and, later, the figure of their mystical devotion. The ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries who went into the desert to find their God, also found the deep sexuality of their bodies, that could always return to ground their spiritual ascents. Sexual craving became an inverse measure of their relationship to Christ, an 'ideogram', as Peter Brown puts it, of their 'unopened heart'.[28]

> [Sexuality] became the privileged window through which the monk could peer into the most private reaches of the soul. In the tradition of Evagrius,[29] sexual imaginings were scrutinized minutely in and of themselves. They were held to reveal concretely (if shamefully) the presence in the soul of yet more deadly, because more faceless drives: the cold cramp of anger, pride, and avarice. Hence the abatement of sexual imaginings, even the modification

> of night emissions, was closely observed as an index for the monk of the extent to which he had won through to a state of single-hearted translucence to the love of God and of his neighbours.[30]

Later medieval ascetics, who also sought to climb heaven's ladder, found in their bodily desires, not the measure of their failure, but a means for their ascent, the body becoming the locus for their union with Christ. These are most famously the women mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechtild of Magdeburg (c. 1207–82) and Julian of Norwich (1342–1416). They did not need to renounce their own bodies in order to find Christ, since their flesh, like his, was already womanly, Christ having taken his humanity from his mother.[31] Male ascetics often imagined themselves in womanly terms, as they also imagined Jesus, from whose breasts they fed, and from whose maternity they were to receive and learn charity. 'Christ our Lord . . . stretches out his hands to embrace us, bows down his head to kiss us, and opens his side to give us suck; and though it is blood he offers us to suck we believe that it is health-giving and *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb* (Psalms 18.11).'[32] These men demonstrated their renunciation of the world by symbolically condescending to take on the socially inferior role of the woman, of the mother and nurse; but women were already that role, and so could only identify more intensely with what they already were. And they were the maternal humanity of Christ.

> The human mother will suckle her child with her own milk, but our beloved Mother, Jesus, feeds us with himself, and, with the most tender courtesy, does it by means of the Blessed Sacrament, the precious food of all true life . . . The human mother may put her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother Jesus simply leads us into his blessed breast through his open side, and there gives us a glimpse of the Godhead and heavenly joy – the inner certainty of eternal bliss . . . A kind, loving mother who understands and knows the needs of her child will look after it tenderly just because it is the nature of a mother to do so. As the child grows older she changes her methods – but not her love.[33]

Moreover, for medieval women – as women – there was no pretence, no metaphor in their becoming brides of Christ. The nuns at Rupertsberg, where Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was abbess, wore bridal gowns when receiving communion.[34] When they took Christ into their mouths, they were eating not only true flesh, but also the flesh of their bridegroom, their eternal lover. Thus eucharistic devotions could became ecstatic, passionate consummations of desire.

> Thus [Christ] gave himself to me in the shape of the sacrament, in its outward form, as the custom is; and then he gave me to drink from the chalice . . . After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. And then, for a short while, I had the strength to bear this; but soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to naught and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference.[35]

In such oral copulation – when 'eating God', as Mechtild of Magdeburg put it[36] – the sexuality of these celibate women was not so much sublimated, as 'simply set free'.[37] The distinction between sexuality and sacramentality became indeterminate, and the body's desire participated in the desire of God. It was not only women, such as the thirteenth-century Hadewijch, who desired Christ's body, but men also. One day, in the twelfth century, Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075–1129/30) found the wooden figure of the crucified Christ – that he was wont to embrace – coming alive and returning his caress, and then, later, kissing him deeply with an open mouth, tongue to tongue.[38] The fourteenth-century hermit-theologian, Richard Rolle (d. 1349), warned against the snares of female flesh, the deadly delights of carnal desire, even within marriage.[39] But his longing for Christ is that of the lover for his beloved, and while alluding to the Song of Songs, and thus to the feminine soul,[40] Richard's 'lover' is undoubtedly male, a man who has escaped the love of women for a better, truer love.[41]

> I ask you, Lord Jesus
> To develop in me, your lover,
> An immeasurable urge towards you,
> An affection that is unbounded,
> A longing that is unrestrained,
> A fervour that throws discretion to the winds!
> The more worthwhile our love for you,
> All the more pressing does it become.
> Reason cannot hold it in check, fear does not make it tremble,
> Wise judgement does not temper it.[42]
>
> Jesus, when I am in you, and on fire with joy,
> And when the heat of love is surging in,
> I want to embrace you, the most loving, with my whole being.[43]

For a modern sensibility, Rolle's passionate treatise on the fire of divine love is intensely homoerotic, and the more so the more it denigrates the carnal and the sensual. For as with all this literature of divine love-making, Rolle must evoke the very thing he disparages in order to express a spiritual felicity that exceeds the embraces of interpenetrating bodies. The flesh he would shun provides the metaphoric body with which he embraces his heavenly lover. In drag, as the soul-bride of the Song of Songs, Rolle writes:

> [W]hen I feel the embrace and caress of my Sweetheart I swoon with unspeakable delight, for it is he – he whom true lovers put before all else, for love of him alone, and because of his unbounded goodness! And when he comes, may he come into me, suffusing me with his perfect love . . . Love is making me bold to summon my Beloved that he might comfort me, come unto me, and *kiss me with the kiss of his mouth*.[44] For the more I am raised above earthly thoughts the more fully do I enjoy the pleasure I long for; the more carnal longings are banished, so much the more truly do the eternal ones flare up. Let him kiss me and refresh me with his sweet love; let him hold me tight and kiss me on the mouth, else I die; let him pour his grace into me, that I grow in love.[45]

The sensual body is given up so that it can return, but now more bodily, more intensely, for 'the delights of loving Christ are sweeter than all the tasty pleasures of the world and the flesh'.[46] In Rolle, as in other medieval mystics, theology becomes an *ars erotica*. It is concerned with evoking the ecstatic union of the soul with Christ, that, even as it surpasses the pleasures of the flesh, always returns to the body; to the meeting, biting, engulfing of lips and tongues, to that fateful opening verse from the Song of Songs that resounds throughout medieval theological erotica: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!'[47]

In the Flesh

Ever since men and women began to tell the story of Jesus Christ, their relationship to God has been a relationship of the flesh, since God only comes to them in the body of the other.[48] The gospel has always been a story of carnal desire and erotic encounter, and only the gnostic who fears and hates the material world would deny this. It is supposed by many that Christians are called to renounce desire in favour of pious *apatheia*, but such a view misses the paradoxes of Christian thought. Paul – and certainly

Augustine after him – may have found desire the gateway for death, but in Christ death becomes the gateway to eternal life.[49] Paul may have urged the lustful to marry as a way of curbing their libido,[50] but at the same time they were to become the brides of Christ, impatient for the consummation of their wedding night.[51] Thus when the cultural critic, Jonathan Dollimore, tells us that for 'the early Christian ascetics', mutability had become the 'savage' agent of death, 'located firmly *inside* desire', he is only partly, patchily right; not really right at all.[52] His short account of saints Paul, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Augustine, attends only to the first part of the story, to the advent of death for want of an apple.[53] Dollimore entirely neglects the second part of the story, which for the saints is the more primordial: the advent of Christ out of desire of our desiring, of wanting only that we want his life, which is that of infinite eros. Dollimore rightly notes the connection of death with desire in Christian thought. But he misses their transfiguration in Christ: the turning of death into life, of mutability (entropy) and (sexual) want into the infinite becoming and boundless desire of the trinitarian charity, which as such is the source of their creaturely parodies (instability and sexual craving). Indeed, for Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330–c. 395), it is the ability to change toward the good, 'from glory to glory',[54] that is the mark of human perfection. 'For that perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth in good, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation.'[55]

Desire is deathly for Gregory of Nyssa, but it is also the way of life, that which enraptures the soul and moves it toward the good, infinitely. This is not a matter of two different kinds of desire, as between two different kinds of love, eros and agape. The latter distinction, as famously advanced by Anders Nygren, is overwrought, overly concerned to delimit pagan passions from Christian charity, human from divine love.[56] In someone like Gregory of Nyssa, we find a much more fluid conception of the desiring body, and not least because the body is produced by desire. The body is drawn by the desirable, a movement occasioned by the attractive and beautiful, and so a motive participation in that which attracts, as a shining light catches the eye and makes us look. After Freud, it is too easy to assume that desire is only, or most fundamentally, hunger; and that this is how it was understood from the first, as when Socrates argues that Eros is the love of what is lacking, the child – as Diotima explains – of Poros and Penia, want and resourcefulness.[57] But Diotima's Eros does not want just anything, but that which is good, and it is the good by which Eros is enlivened, Eros being the love of the good.[58] Thus we are not so far from Plato's pagan eros when we come to the ascetic-theologians of the fourth century; but

this is not because they were being pagan. They were being Christian. Gregory reads Plato through Exodus, not Exodus through Plato.

Gregory's Moses is an exemplar of the erotic man, who, replete with God's gifts, still yearns for that by which he is already filled, requesting as if he had never received, 'beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God's true being'. Moses is the 'ardent lover of beauty' who yearns 'to be filled with the very stamp of the archetype'.[59] This erotic impulse can never be satiated, since God is infinitely other, and so always withdrawing and always arriving, filling the soul with the desire to follow after.[60] Just as Moses, placed in the cleft of the rock, was permitted to see God pass by, from behind, so God's arrival and appearing is at the same time a withdrawal, since God is always going on ahead, infinitely.[61] One can never get in front of God, and so never see his face. To see God is to follow God.[62] To ascend the mountain and see God is to see God's unseeability, an ever further distance.[63] It is to want to see God all the more. 'This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him.'[64]

Desire of God is not simply opposed to the want of more earthly pleasures, since sensual desire is also of the good, and so a primer in desire for that which is alone truly good, for that which gives life. In his dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Gregory's sister, Macrina – who plays Diotima to his Socrates[65] – tells us that the impulses of the soul can 'become instruments of virtue or wickedness', just as steel can be made into swords or ploughshares. Thus desire, when virtuously directed, can 'mediate to us the divine and immortal pleasure'.[66] Desire only becomes deathly when it mistakes a sign for that which is signified, an earthly for a heavenly good, turning us away from being itself, from the divine becoming that is excessive of all signs, the source of their coming to be and passing away.[67]

But more importantly, the desire for God is God;[68] it is God's attractiveness (beauty) in the world.[69] To desire God is already to participate in God, to be produced by God's desiring, and so to 'see' God, as Gregory teaches. Those who desire God do so because they are first desired by God, caught up into the dynamic of God's desiring, God's eternal, primordial movement. The priority of God's desire is figured in the arrow shot by the divine archer, wounding the soul with faith and love. Then the soul becomes the arrow, held firm in the arms of the archer,[70] shot forth and yet still embraced. 'All at once I am launched through space, and at the same time I rest in the hands of the Lord.'[71]

The becoming of the creature – that many contrast with the supposed stasis of the divine being – is, for Gregory, a reflection, an analogous

movement, of the Creator's always prior becoming. The creature, who comes into being out of nothing, parodies the becoming of God out of God, the infinite source of becoming-being. The fountain in the garden of the Song of Songs provides Gregory with a profoundly paradoxical image for the eternal becoming of God, as of an ever-moving stillness.[72] Constantly flowing, never changing but always new, this water fills the soul with its life, so that the soul's love is the love of the ever-flowing waters, and these she receives when she kisses Christ, a divine gift of bodily fluids.

> This is truly the summit of paradox. For while all other wells contain their water in tranquil quiet, only the Bride possesses it flowing within herself, so that it has both a well's depth and a river's perpetual movement . . . In her minute way, she imitates the Fountain in becoming a fountain, Life in becoming life, Water in becoming water . . . And this Water flows from God (for the Fountain itself says: 'I emanate from God and I am coming'), and the soul welcomes it as it enters her basin, and the soul thus becomes a reservoir of living Water . . . The fountain is none other than the mouth of the Bridegroom, from which the words of eternal life gush forth . . . Since, then, he who wishes to drink ought to bring his mouth to the fountain, and since the Lord is himself this fountain . . . the soul that wishes to put her lips to this mouth from which Life springs forth says the following words: 'May he kiss me with a kiss from his mouth.'[73]

'I am going away, and I am coming to you'[74] (Trinitarian *Excursus*)

The Levinasian account of the erotic relationship, of the 'feminine' other or depth that, in the body of the other, withdraws as one draws near – drawing near by withdrawing – strangely parallels the triune structure of God's approach in Christ. For that also has the dynamic of drawing one into a mystery that withdraws even as it attracts, that attracts by withdrawing. But in the gospel, this depth or distance is not named the 'feminine', but the 'Father'. This is the name that Jesus gives to the mystery from which he comes and to which he goes, the absolute alterity that shines in his face, that draws people to him. The Father is the vertiginous depth of Christ's body, the dark density of his flesh, the distance that opens and draws on in his touch. When Philip asks to see the Father, Jesus is almost bewildered. 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?'[75] For to be with Jesus is to see the Father. Has Philip not heard the paternal resonance in Jesus' voice? 'The words that I say to you I do not speak on

my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.'[76] To see Jesus is to see the Father; and Jesus is all there is to see. It is the very movement of the Father's withdrawal that draws the disciple on. The Father is always arriving because always departing, as also Christ, who departs in order to return. 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.'[77]

This profoundly mystical, carnal theology was undone when it was supposed possible to see the Father other than by seeing Christ. The retreating, divine darkness of the flesh was lost once it became possible to image the Father other than by imaging Christ, to picture the Father as leaning over, watching, holding, or simply standing or sitting alongside the Son, to imagine the Father as one of three men.[78] This was to forget – perhaps never to have learned – the ascent of Moses toward the dark light of God's desire.[79] For, as Gregory of Nyssa taught, the more one sees in the light of God, the more one sees what is not seen, the uncontemplated in the contemplated.[80] 'This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.'[81] And this is to 'apprehend reality', as Gregory teaches, and catch there, in the light, the mystery that slips away from the light, the 'luminous darkness' that appears in the face of Christ, and then in the fellowship of the body.

That the Father appears only in the appearing of the Son was forgotten more in the West than in the East, but in the East also. The seventh ecumenical council (Nicea II, 787) reaffirmed the teaching of Pope Gregory II (669–731) that the Father cannot be represented apart from the Son, because no one knows what the Father is. '[I]f we had seen and known Him as we have seen and known His Son, we would have tried to describe Him and to represent Him in art.'[82] The only image fitting for the unseen Father is either no image at all, or the image of the Son in whom the unseen is seen. Picturing the Father alone is not merely an aesthetic failing, but a spiritual error, a fall into idolatry. The practice is widespread in the West and also in the East since the seventeenth century, and this despite the condemnation of such images by the Great Council of Moscow in 1666–67.[83] The Council was responding to existing images, to proliferating traditions of iconic representation that it could lament, but not halt. 'At a time when the Orthodox tradition was betrayed, as much in the image itself and in its conception as in thought, the decision of the Great Council of Moscow categorically to prohibit any representation of the Deity is an authentically Orthodox echo of the patristic theology of the icon.'[84]

Depicting the Father destroys the dynamic unity of the three-fold mystery. The doctrine of the Trinity ceases to be a primer in looking, a grammar for the seeing of Christ's body, and instead is reduced to a descriptive, tri-theistic speculation; a mythological fancy.[85] The triune movement can be seen – pictured – only intensively, as the darkness that appears in the light, as the depth of the surface that leads forward as it withdraws. By the light of the Spirit – the pentecostal flame – we can see the Father in the face of the Son, and the Son in the bodies of others.

Dispossessive Desire

Jesus said to the crowds who insisted on following him: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple'.[86] It would seem that those who would love and follow Jesus must hate everyone else, including those to whom they are most attached by blood and affection. Jesus is a jealous lover, who demands to be the sole object of their craving. He will not play the paramour, the 'bit on the side', the casual fling. Many have taken Jesus at his word and refused the amorous attention of others, denying themselves homely affection and sexual gratification, and fleeing their spouses and offspring for the quietude of the desert (the monastic abode). Thus, in the fourteenth century, Margery Kempe fled her husband's bed for the arms of Christ, who appeared to her, sitting on her bedside, as 'the most seemly, most beauteous, and most amiable' of men.[87] Before the Bishop of Lincoln, Margery and her husband, John, took a vow of chastity,[88] which was also, in effect, her marriage vow to Christ, with a ring on which – by Christ's command – she had engraved, 'Jesus est amor meus' (Jesus is my love).[89] Later she was to have a vision of Christ lying beside her, his face turned toward her, the 'handsomest man that ever might be seen or imagined'.[90] Christ had earlier explained to her that it 'is appropriate for the wife to be on homely terms with her husband. Be he ever so great a lord and she ever so poor a woman when he weds her, yet they must lie together and rest together in joy and peace. Just so must it be between you and me.'

> Therefore I must be intimate with you, and lie in your bed with you. Daughter, you greatly desire to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your darling, and as your sweet son, for I want to be loved as a son should be loved by the mother, and

> I want you to love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband. Therefore you can boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want.[91]

Though, on her own account, Margery Kempe was considered crazed by many of her contemporaries, there is a touching domesticity about her devotion to Christ, even though he leads her to spurn more immediate, though mundane, affections. She is but one of many who have renounced the flesh in order to become one of Christ's 'exclusive' lovers, following his command to abandon all others for love of him, and this despite his obvious promiscuity (polygamy). For many today the demands of this singular devotion to Christ will seem too strange, too wayward, to offer a productive ascesis of desire, a truly charitable ascesis; but there is another way of taking Jesus at his word.

The implied injunction to abandon family and even life for the sake of Christ is followed in Luke by a more extended, but equally extravagant claim upon our credulity. Just as someone who would build a tower must first count the cost, or the king who would wage war must first estimate his chances of success, so the would-be disciples of Jesus must be equally prudent and give away all of their possessions.[92] Dispossession is necessary for discipleship; without it, those who would follow will go astray. To love Jesus alone, as he wants, one must be free of all possessive relationships, free of the illusion that other people belong to you, are yours, extensions of yourself. One cannot love Jesus possessively, since we are to be his, not he ours. Learning to love Jesus is learning to let him go. If we did not, we could not abide it that he loves others as much as he loves us, and loves them indiscriminately. The pain is not that Christ loves someone else, but anyone else, everyone else, even the person you most despise.

It would then be that to love Jesus exclusively is to be free to love others as well, but dispossessively. The gospels narrate the story of the disciples' training in such dispossessive love. They tell a love story about men and women who fall for Jesus, head over heels, blindly, as their families and friends must have thought, abandoning, as they did, everyone and everything in order to follow him. Each disciple chooses to follow Jesus freely, yet none can give a reason for doing so. As they fish, just off the edge of the sea, a stranger approaches and invites them to leave their nets, their livelihoods, and go with him. And they do.

The love story of Jesus and his disciples traces the turning of their possessive desire into a dispossessive love, so that at the last they no longer need to touch and hold on to him. They can let him go, and in that

leaving find him returning. In this way they regain paradise. It would be wrong to think that the first disciples who spurned marriage, making themselves as if eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven,[93] or the later disciples who went into the desert, were simply fleeing the body and its wants. Rather they were pursuing a paradisal desire, that was not craving but charity, not the satisfaction of hunger but the pleasure of participating in the movement of the beautiful. In the garden, Adam and Eve coupled not out of want of being – of needing to be needed – but out of that abundant joy that comes from the beauty of the good, from the pleasure of being made for the making of love.[94] In a fallen world this is not something that is naturally given. It has to be learned, practised, and practised not just through renunciation but also in dispossessive forms of sexual relationship. This is a venture for the living flesh, the desiring body of Christ, the carnal community that, held in the embrace of the Lord, is shot forth as the arrow from the bow, wounded with the flight of desire.

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Guy Pearce's body, Leonard's body, is repeatedly undressed in Nolan's *Memento*, as Leonard seeks for the clues to his past life that he thinks are written on his skin. But his body is unable to tell him the truth, since the significance of each terse message changes with each rereading of his flesh. Indeed, Leonard's body becomes increasingly lethal for those whom he encounters, a carnal mnemonic of their impending demise. Like them, he does not know how to read his own flesh, or reads it too late. The viewer of *Memento* has similar trouble in learning how to read Leonard's skin, and it is only at the end of the film that the beginning of the story becomes clear; only after one has left the cinema that the story preceding the film's narration becomes visible, in memory.

The meaning of *Memento* is sought in its back-story, in what has happened prior to the start of the film, the 'incident' that has traumatized Leonard's life. But in order to grasp this past, we, like Leonard with his notes and polaroids, have to recollect the film's diverse scenes, seeking their connections, in order to produce an orderly summary that will, perhaps, disclose the truth. There is a curious and pleasing parallel between this labour and the medieval monastic tradition of memory-work (*memoria*), which sought to contemplate divine truth through recollecting the words and images of scripture. The monk's first task was to divide the text into memorable sections, which the meditating monk could later recollect. As Hugh of

St Victor advised, we should 'from every study or lesson gather up things brief and secure, which we hide away in the little chest of our memory, from which later they may be drawn when any subject has need.'[95] For from these scriptural seeds, stored in our memory chests, will grow a 'great tree of knowledge', that will 'break into flame in our heart', as Peter Chrysologus put it in the fifth century.[96] The words of scripture begin to glow with meaning when recollected in memory.[97]

For the medieval tradition, memory is meditation, since the latter requires that we bring to mind those texts and images we have collected in our minds, and there allow them to burn with the intensity of their inexhaustible meaning.[98] Moreover, in recalling scripture we are remembering the future, since scripture shows us what is to come as well as what is past. Memory is never simply melancholic but always also anticipatory, a motive for action. Leonard moves forward by looking back, his scriptural seeds being the collection of notes, photographs and tattoos that he keeps on and about his person, which on each rereading and reordering impel him to new actions. His is an exterior memory, stored on his flesh and extended body.

The medieval tradition also developed an exterior memory, a mnemonic extension of the mind. In some instances this was the decorated cell, on the walls of which were painted images that were to be used for meditation, as in the monastery of San Marco in Florence, painted by Fra Angelico (Giovanni da Fiesole) in the 1440s. The retreat of the monk to his cell recalls the Roman tradition of withdrawing into a small room or closet (*exedra* or *cubiculum*), an 'invention chamber',[99] as Mary Carruthers calls it. There one could remember, meditate and compose one's thoughts, speeches and writings. In Cicero's dialogues 'On Oratory', Lucius Crassus retires to his closet, where he reclines on a couch (*lectulus*) while meditating on his debates with Marcus Antonius.[100] Such a room was likely to have been painted, not so much with subjects for reflection, as with pastoral scenes in which Crassus could wander meditatively, a matrix for the mind.[101] 'Such murals can be used to map out one's topics during invention, somewhat as a mandala-picture does in traditions of Buddhist contemplation. They provide "where" to catch hold of the process of thinking something through.'[102]

Like Crassus, the monk finds his cell the proper place for memory-work, and like the monk, Leonard retires to his motel room in order to remember and meditate upon his notes and other mementos. On his wall he pins up his map, around which he places his collection of polaroids. They form something like a medieval *pictura*, an arrangement of images in a church

that, like the thinker's painted cubicle, provides a framework for meditation. The Venerable Bede tells us that the pictures Benedict Biscop brought back from Italy to Wearmouth, were so arranged in the church that all who entered, 'should either look on the gracious face of Christ and his saints, although in an image; or might recollect in their minds more feelingly the grace of the Lord's incarnation; or having the perils of the Last Judgement as it were before their eyes, might remember to examine their consciences more exactly'.[103] The images together formed a picture of the soul's place in Christ's story, of what has been and is to come, and which, when remembered, prompts the soul to action. So similarly Leonard, through the arrangement of his pictures and notes, seeks to find a meaningful world in which he can have an identity, a motive for moving forward.

Amorous Memory

In one scene of *Memento*, Leonard creates for himself another living memento in addition to his own body, hiring a hooker to play the part of his dead wife. As on the night when Leonard's wife was murdered, the hooker must get out of bed and go to the bathroom. Closing the door, she wakens Leonard, who reaches out to the now empty side of the bed, wondering where he is, but also, perhaps, recalling the body that once used to lie beside his own.

The monk's cell was also a site for remembered affections, since it was likened to the bridal chamber in the Song of Songs, a place for divine intimacies.[104] Bernard of Clairvaux likened the several senses of scripture – plain, moral and divine – to three spaces: the garden, the storehouse, in which the fruits of the garden are kept, and the bedroom in which the monk contemplates the garden's divine mystery, the soul's bridegroom.[105] But unlike Leonard's paid bed-companion – who is both a ghostly memento of his dead wife, and, when he finds her snorting coke in the bathroom, utterly mundane – the monk's lover is altogether more passionate. When the bride waits upon the bridegroom, the monk upon the Word in the words of scripture, it is best to be lying down, reclining on one's bed, as is Crassus in his cubiculum or Boethius in his cell, at the start of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, or, indeed, Augustine – lying on the ground – when he hears the words 'tolle, lege', take, read.[106] For then the bridegroom can 'wondrously and yet pleasurably' wear out the bride, as Bernard of Clairvaux remarks.[107]

The monk not only made love to the text, he also devoured it, since the most basic hunger for food could also provide a bodily trope for union with Christ. Texts were consumed in the refectory, along with the food, and later, when the monk was alone in his cell, those texts could – through *memoria* – give rise to visions, as food to dreams. From 'eating the book' came sight, and from sight new understanding and writing, a proliferation of texts.[108]

The monk on his bed was to read and recollect the words of scripture with desire, casting his lustful gaze upon the body of the text, finding consummation in the words written upon its skin.[109] Poor reading, inattentive and disordered, is a form of wantonness or fornication (*fornicatio*), a straying of thoughts (*peruagatio cogitationum*), a lack of faithful focus.[110] 'Our minds think of some passage of a psalm', John Cassian wrote. 'But it is taken away from us without our noticing it, and, stupidly, unknowingly, the spirit slips on to some other text of Scripture.'

> [T]he spirit rolls along from psalm to psalm, leaps from the gospel to St Paul, from Paul to the prophets, from there it is carried off to holy stories. Ever on the move, forever wandering, it is tossed along through all the body of Scripture, unable to settle on anything, unable to reject anything or hold on to anything, powerless to arrive at any full and judicious study.[111]

This is forever Leonard's plight, the difficulty of keeping focused, as he repeatedly reorders his memories, his notes and photographs. As long as he concentrates on a particular topic or task he can remember what he has just done, what he is doing and what he is going to do. But a sudden distraction – the slam of a car door – or a moment of tiredness, and his concentration is broken, the immediate past gone, and once more, like Sisyphus, he must begin his memorial labours.

Leonard strangely repeats the medieval practice of *memoria*, the memory-work by which texts and images are made to disclose their meanings. As with the monk who sought his identity in union with the body of Christ, so Leonard seeks in his own body for the identity he once had with his wife, whose absence from his bed is made present through repeated scenes of his awakening in motel beds or in the beds of others. And strangely, Leonard's memory-work figures that of *Alien Sex*, which is to read the flesh for signs of that other body in which our desires find their source and fulfilment. Like Leonard we have our own body texts – which include Leonard's body – and around which we have ordered a series of images. Our reading may be more wanton than John Cassian would have approved,

but it is no less focused on the body's grace than is the monk's desire for the *visio Dei*. Texts and images form a *pictura* that, as at Wearmouth, will lead us to 'look on the gracious face of Christ and his saints, although in an image', and to recollect 'more feelingly the grace of the Lord's incarnation', the embodiment of the divine Eros.

Notes

1 Everything in the film is caressingly lit and crisply photographed by Wally Pfister. On the film and its making see James Mottram, *The Making of Memento* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).

2 The film itself is a kind of mirror image, telling its tale in reverse order, so that the last scene of the story is the first in the film's narrative. Thus the viewer experiences something of Leonard's bewilderment, having to reinterpret each scene as the film retraces the course of events. The film can be understood only when remembered, when its scenes are reordered and differently connected.

3 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, [1979] 1987), p. 86. For brief introductions to Levinas's thought see Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 47–70; Gerard Loughlin, 'Other Discourses', *New Blackfriars*, 75 (1994): 18–31. Levinas writes from within the tradition of phenomenology as most immediately determined by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and inaugurated by René Descartes (see John Milbank, 'The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused', *Modern Theology*, 17 (2001): 335–91). Though Levinas's reflections start out from the singular consciousness, they do not – *pace* Milbank – succumb to the dualism of self and body inaugurated in Cartesian thought. For Levinas, consciousness is always bodily, always the sensibility of corporeality. No less than Milbank, Levinas holds intersubjectivity to be at the same time interobjectivity. Milbank too closely follows Phillip Blond's wayward reading of Levinas's texts, which fails to attend to the 'erotic' in Levinas. See Phillip Blond, 'Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology', in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, edited by Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 195–228. For a more sensitive reading of Levinas that attends to the key notions of transcendent desire and 'proximity' see Brian Schroeder, 'The (Non)Logic of Desire and War: Hegel and Levinas' in *Philosophy and Desire*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 45–62.

4 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, [1961] 1969) p. 270.

5 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 94.
6 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 271.
7 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 94; emphasis added. For an earlier statement of this view see *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, [1988] 1978/2001), pp. 98–9.
8 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 86.
9 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 87.
10 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 88.
11 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 88.
12 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, [1982] 1985), p. 66.
13 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated and edited by H.M. Parshley (London: Everyman's Library, [1949] 1993), p. xlv.
14 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 68.
15 See Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), ch. 9. It would seem that Luce Irigaray mistakes Levinas's deployment of these terms, as does Tina Chanter. See Luce Irigaray, 'The Fecundity of the Caress', in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, [1984] 1993), pp. 185–217; and Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995), ch. 5. But see also Tina Chanter's more nuanced, searching and 'charitable' critique of Levinas in *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), ch. 1 and conclusion (pp. 37–74, 241–60).
16 The same would hold for Levinas's use of 'maternity' in *Otherwise than Being*, where it names the ethical relationship of responsibility for the other. 'Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor.' But this does not mean that men are outside the ethical relationship. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, [1974] 1998), p. 75.
17 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 68–9.
18 Plato, *The Symposium*, 189c–193c; in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 2, translated by R.E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 130–4. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 254; and *Time and the Other*, p. 86.
19 For a discussion of 'complementarity' see Gareth Moore, *The Body in Context: Sex and Catholicism* (London: SCM Press, 1992), ch. 7. Moore shows how much theology inscribes a set of differing cultural stereotypes upon the bodies of men and women. Thus Henry Peschke tells us that the 'male is more active and outgoing; he possesses greater courage to assail. The female is more receptive and protective; she shows greater fortitude to endure . . . The logic of facts and keen penetration are characteristic of the man; the

woman is more led by emotion, sensitivity and intuition. He is ruled by principles, she by love.' (C.H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics* [Dublin: Goodliffe Neale, 1978], vol. 2, p. 377; quoted in Moore, *Body in Context*, p. 121.) Such a differentiation of the sexes is a solipsistic return to the same, since the womanly traits are the disavowed projection of a masculine paranoia. See further Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1996), pp. 192–3, and chapter 6 (Sex Slaves) below.

20 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 89.

21 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, translated by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, [1977] 1979), p. 135.

22 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 270.

23 Christian theology finds the coming of God in the 'going towards God' that, for Levinas, is the 'going towards the other person'. 'I can only go towards God by being ethically concerned by and for the other person.' Levinas in Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, p. 59.

24 See further below, chapter 5 (God's Sex).

25 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 94.

26 Galen quoted in Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), p. 33.

27 Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 31.

28 Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 230.

29 Evagrius Ponticus (346–99) departed Constantinople for the Nitrian desert, between Alexandria and Cairo. His writings, particularly his treatise on prayer, influenced later ascetic theologians, such as John Cassian (c. 360–c. 430) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662).

30 Peter Brown, 'Late Antiquity' in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, edited by Paul Veyne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 235–311 (p. 300).

31 Here I am following the argument of Caroline Walker Bynum, as developed in her wonderful collection of essays, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992). For a contrary judgement on a slightly earlier, twelfth-century tradition of 'affective mysticism' see Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 123–33. '[F]or a man to become spiritual he must increasingly become what he is; but for a woman to become spiritual, she must become what she is not' (p. 130). But this plays down the extent to which someone like Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) – whom Jantzen discusses at this point – played the 'bride' in relation to Christ his bridegroom, and 'mother' to his monks – a maternity that was not merely sentimental but practical, required for the well-being of the monastic family. See further Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), ch. 4.

32 *The Monk of Farne: The Meditations of a Fourteenth-Century Monk*, translated by a Benedictine nun of Stanbrook (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 64; quoted in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 159. See further Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, ch. 4. While attending to those medieval men who availed themselves of a womanly persona, it should be noted that in the later medieval period the attribution of feminine qualities was increasingly confined to women. See Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret Is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), ch. 1. Keller describes the solidifying of earlier (Origenist) gender fluidities as a process of 'sexualization', since it tied both genders to their nominal sexes (p. 32). She follows John Bugge in identifying Bernard of Clairvaux's bridal mysticism as the paradoxical 'apotheosis of the woman's marriage to Christ' (John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 92). After Bernard, it became increasingly difficult for men to play the bride. Instead, they were confined to playing the brothers of the bridegroom, his representatives or panders, guiding women to his marriage bed. In modernity it is still just possible for men to play the bride, but in Catholicism women are definitively excluded from the role of the bridegroom, unlike men. It is part of the burden of *Alien Sex* to advocate a 'return' to a more fluid body. For premodern mutability see further Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001). Bynum crosses narrative with Judith Butler's 'performativity' to produce a sense of 'self' as a *changing* storied 'shape'. '[M]y self is my story, known only in my shape, in the marks and visible behaviors I manifest – whether generic or personal. I am my skin and scars, my gender and pigment, my height and bearing, *all forever changing* – not just a performance, as some contemporary theory would have it, but a story.' (Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 181; emphasis added.)

33 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, translated by Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), ch. 60 (p. 170); cited also in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 164.

34 Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 61.

35 Hadewijch, vision 7, in *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, translated by Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 280–1; quoted in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 120.

36 Mechtild quoted in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 130.

37 Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 134.

38 See John H. Van Engwen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 51–2; cited in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 86.

39 '[T]here are men so perverse that they are consumed by uncontrollable lust for their own wives for the sake of their beauty, and the more quickly the body is reduced by their strength, the more they give themselves to satisfy their carnal lusts. But even while they are enjoying their delights they are beginning to fail; while they flourish they perish.' Richard Rolle, *The Fire*

of Love, translated by Clifton Walters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), ch. 24 (p. 117). For Rolle, as for St Paul long before him, marriage is the antidote to lust. On this view of marriage see further below, chapter 6 (Sex Slaves).

40 Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 26 (p. 122).

41 '[A] man who honestly wants to love Christ must not let his imagination toy with the love of women.' Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 29 (p. 136). Rolle does admit that there are pleasures in female companionship – 'as for example in mutual conversation, or seemly contact, or a happy marriage' – but men and women must not 'indulge the voluptuous pleasure of carnal love, and come together in their vile passion', as would seem to have been happening all around him. Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 39 (p. 176), ch. 41 (p. 188).

42 Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 17 (pp. 98–9).

43 Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 35 (p. 154).

44 Song of Songs 1.2.

45 Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 26 (pp. 123–5).

46 Rolle, *Fire of Love*, ch. 26 (p. 126).

47 See Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995) and E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990). The Song of Songs was to exert its influence beyond the medieval period into that of the early modern, informing the mystical writings of two of its most notable exponents, the Spanish Carmelites, St John of the Cross (1542–91) and St Teresa of Ávila (1515–82). Both saints wrote in what Richard Rambuss identifies as a tradition of 'sacred eroticism', stemming from the Song of Songs, and which continued, for example, in the less obviously 'mystical' writings of seventeenth-century English poets like Richard Crashaw (1612/13–49), John Donne (1572–1631) and George Herbert (1593–1633). See Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). Other Renaissance poets who might be placed in this tradition, from across Europe, are Miguel de Guevara (c. 1585–c. 1646), Jean de La Ceppède (1548–1623) and the Polish poet Zbigniew Morsztyn (c. 1620–90). See Peggy Rosenthal, *The Poets' Jesus: Representations at the End of a Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 14–17. For the Song of Songs in the Protestant Reformation see George L. Scheper, 'Reformation Attitudes Toward Allegory and the Song of Songs', *PMLA (Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America)*, 89 (1974): 551–62.

48 Matthew 25.45.

49 Romans 5.12–21.

50 1 Corinthians 7.2. See further below chapter 6 (Sex Slaves).

51 See 2 Corinthians 11.2 and Ephesians 5.27, and behind them – in the tradition of mystical interpretation – the Song of Songs. As noted by John A.T. Robinson, sexual union with Christ is also used by Paul in 1 Corinthians

6.17 and Romans 7.4. See *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 64.

52 Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1998), p. 43.

53 The identification of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2.16–17) as an apple tree derives from the Song of Songs 2.5 and 7.8. But the tree has also been identified as a figtree.

54 2 Corinthians 3.18. King James version.

55 Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection*, PG 46.285A-D, quoted in *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, translated by Herbert Musurillo SJ (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, [1961] 1979), p. 84. See also in the same book Jean Daniélou's introduction, pp. 46–56; and Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), pp. 62–4.

56 Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, translated by Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, [1932–9] 1953). Nygren distinguishes vulgar from heavenly eros, the love of the sensible from the supersensible, and insists that between vulgar eros and Christian agape 'there is no relation at all', whereas between Christian agape and heavenly eros there is a born rivalry, the one 'entering the lists' against the other. 'Agape stands alongside, not above, the heavenly Eros; the difference between them is not one of degree but of kind. There is no way, not even that of sublimation, which leads over from Eros to Agape' (pp. 51–2). Though not mentioning Nygren, Francis Watson – in *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) – similarly divorces agape from eros, placing the latter outside the domain of the former, excluded from the *ekklesia* (p. 208), the *koinonia* of agape (p. 211) which permits only a sanctified eros, when it is kept behind the veil (p. 259), its beauty hidden from view.

57 Plato, *Symposium*, 200e, 203a–e (pp. 143, 146–7). Freud did not write so much about desire (*Begehren*) as about the wish (*Wunsch*) and the libido. But he explicitly identified libido with hunger, and his extended notion of sexuality with the 'Eros of the divine Plato.' See Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905) in *The Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 7: *On Sexuality*, edited by James Strachey and Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 43 and 45.

58 Plato, *Symposium*, 206a (p. 150).

59 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, translated by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), paragraphs 230 and 231 (p. 114). As Enobarbus says of Cleopatra, God 'makes hungry where most she satisfies'. (William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act III, Scene 2, ll. 237–8.) I am grateful to Brian Horne for reminding me of this line. For much of the following exposition I am indebted to Hans Urs von Balthasar,

Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa, translated by Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, [1988] 1995).

60 John 14.28.

61 Exodus 33.21–23.

62 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraphs 251–253 (pp. 119–20); quoted in Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 102. For a homoerotic reading of Gregory's reading of Moses' encounter with God, the pleasure of which I forgo, see Virginia Burrus, *'Begotten, Not Made': Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 127–9.

63 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraphs 232 and 233 (pp. 114–15).

64 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraph 239 (p. 116).

65 Gregory's dialogue is complexly related to Plato's *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*. For discussion of Gregory's 'Macrina', arguing that she is both Diotima and Socrates, the means by which Gregory can be both feminized 'man' and masculinized 'woman', see Burrus, *'Begotten, Not Made'*, pp. 112–22.

66 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, translated by Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), ch. 3 (p. 57). See Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 160 n. 25.

67 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraph 234 (p. 115).

68 'God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them' (1 John 4.16).

69 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' (John 12.32.) Christ's death on the cross is paradigmatic of God's dispossessive love, the divine eros that is not want, but love of the good; the beauty of the trinitarian charity.

70 Song of Songs 2.6.

71 Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 852A–853A; quoted in Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, p. 160. In late medieval German interpretations of the Song of Songs, the soul-bride herself becomes an archer, who, when she ravishes the bridegroom's heart with the glance of her eyes (Song of Songs 4.9), shoots Christ with her arrow, or pierces him with her spear. '[T]he soul forces God to do what she wants. This is called wounding because the soul acquires power over God, she draws her bow and shoots him in the heart. The bow which she draws is her heart. She draws it and shoots in heated desire for God and hits the true mark. In this way she attains the highest point of perfection.' (*Das Buch der geistlichen Armuth*, 64.13–19; quoted in Keller, *My Secret Is Mine*, p. 253.) On this and other remarkable gender reversals, in which a feminine/phallic soul penetrates Christ, see Keller, *My Secret Is Mine*, ch.5, especially pp. 248–60. However, Christ's wounding by the bride's love is not unique to this German tradition, and can be found in the early modern period. See, for example, Fray de los Angeles (1532–1609), *The Loving Struggle between God and the Soul*, translated by Eladia Gómez-Posthill (London: Saint Austin Press, [1600] 2000). 'The more

pliable the bow is, the more it curves, and the farther the arrow will go . . . Similarly, the greater our humility and trust in God, the higher the soul will soar, and the more we shall wound him [God] in love' (p. 76).

72 Song of Songs 4.12–15.

73 Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 780A; quoted in Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, pp. 157–8.

74 John 14.28.

75 John 14.9.

76 John 14.10.

77 John 14.28.

78 The tradition developed various images of the Father, such as in the Old Testament Trinity of the three 'angels' who visited Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18.1), now most famously painted by Andrei Rublev (c. 1411). But this was not a direct imaging of the Trinity, since the divine persons 'appear' as the three androgynous guests seated at Rublev's table. More direct imagining of the Father appears in the Divine Paternity, with the Son on the lap of the Father, and the Spirit in the form of a dove (also known as the Seat of Mercy – *Gnudenstuhl* – when the Father displays the crucified body of the Son); or in the New Testament Trinity that seats Father and Son on thrones, again with the dove of the Spirit. But the Father truly came into his own when he began to be represented as the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7.9. For many in the West this old man, with his hair like 'pure wool', is God the Father; the deity of bourgeois patriarchy (as pictured by William Blake).

79 Exodus 20.21.

80 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraph 162 (p. 95).

81 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, paragraph 163 (p. 95).

82 Pope Gregory II to the iconoclast emperor Leo III; quoted in Leonid Ouspensky, *The Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1992), vol. 1, p. 154. This statement was produced in the midst of the iconclast crisis, with its inception in 726, when the Christ icon above the golden gateway of the imperial palace in Constantinople was destroyed, and its conclusion in 843, with the Council of Constantinople that declared the Triumph of Orthodoxy. These exact dates are, of course, imprecise measures of eighth to ninth-century iconoclasm.

83 Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 1, p. 154; vol. 2, ch. 16 (pp. 371–409).

84 Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2, p. 409.

85 The point is not that depictions of the Father are 'faulty intellectual exercises', as David Brown supposes, but that they are faulty visions, failures of the imagination. See David Brown, 'The Trinity in Art', in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, edited by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ and Gerald O'Collins SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 329–56 (p. 352). It is even more wide of the mark to suppose that the objection to imaging the Father stems 'from residual notions of the Father

as in some sense superior to the other two persons in virtue of being their *arche* or source' (pp. 344–5). On the contrary, it is the image of the divine paternity that promotes the subordination of the Son to the Father. On the doctrine of the Trinity as grammar see Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1996] 1999), pp. 190–7.

86 Luke 14.26.

87 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, translated by B.A. Windeatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), bk I, ch. 1 (p. 42).

88 *Book of Margery Kempe*, bk I, ch. 15 (p. 69). On the practice of chaste marriage see Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

89 *Book of Margery Kempe*, bk I, ch. 31 (p. 114).

90 *Book of Margery Kempe*, bk I, ch. 85 (p. 249).

91 *Book of Margery Kempe*, bk I, ch. 36 (p. 126).

92 Luke 14.28–33.

93 Matthew 19.12.

94 Genesis 1.28–31. Here I am imagining, *pace* Augustine and others, that Adam and Eve enjoyed prelapsarian sex before their expulsion from paradise. On the garden see further below, chapter 9 (*The Garden*).

95 Hugh of St Victor, 'De modo dicendi et meditandi', *Patrologia latina* 176.878; quoted in Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 64. I am indebted to Carruthers' marvellous book for the medieval tradition of memory-work utilized in this section of the chapter. On medieval memory see also Mary Carruthers' early work *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Janet Coleman, *Ancient Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

96 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 98, ll. 28.33 (Corpus christianorum, series latina 24A.603); quoted in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 64.

97 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 96, ll. 6–10 (Corpus christianorum, series latina 24A.592); quoted in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 45.

98 In meditation we remember not the past, but present tokens of the past. See Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), X.8 (12); and on Augustine's memory see Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, ch. 6. 'In so far as any past experience has meaning, its meaning is in the present grasped by the mind's gaze. Whatever the pastness of the past is, it *is* only in the present and the meaning itself has no temporal modes despite the ambiguities of grammar. There is a sense, then, in which Augustine the Roman orator has destroyed the past as meaningfully distinct from the now, and made all Christians paradoxically memoryless' (p. 100). Leonard's present is Augustine's memoryless memory.

99 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 177.

100 Cicero, *De Oratore*, III.v.17 in the Loeb Classical Library; quoted in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 177. On Cicero see further Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, ch. 3.

101 Carruthers points us to the cubiculum from the Pompeian villa of Fannius Synestor at Boscoreale (40–30 BC), which can now be seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. See Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, pl. 15.

102 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 178.

103 Bede, *Vita sanctorum abbatum monasterii in Uyramutha et Gyruum*, 6 (Loeb Classical Library); quoted in her own translation in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 204.

104 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 171.

105 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica*, 23.II.3; quoted in Carruthers, p. 240.

106 'I threw myself down somehow under a certain figtree, and let my tears flow freely.' Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.12 (28), p. 152. '[T]he scene as a whole, from start to finish, is a paradigmatic instance of the inventive orthopraxis of reading described by others among [Augustine's] contemporaries. Its steps include the thinker's initial anguish expressed and maintained by his continual weeping, his cognitive use of mental imaging, his repetition of Psalm *formulae*, his prone posture to resolve the crisis in his thinking.' Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 176.

107 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons super Cantica*, 23.IV.11; quoted in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 176.

108 Revelation 10.9–10; Ezekiel 2.8–3.3. See Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, pp. 102–3, 244–5.

109 Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 111.

110 See John Cassian, *Conference* XIV.11 in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), vol. XI (Sulpitus Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian), p. 441; quoted in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 82.

111 John Cassian, *Conference* X.13 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XI, p. 409; translated in Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, p. 83.