

Tears and Text:

Constructing Difference in the *Vitae* of Marie d'Oignies and Douceline of Digne

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The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw new forms of lay religious devotion and spiritual expression develop in Europe, including the emergence of many female mystics.¹ Mystics were people striving for a contemplative or experiential relationship with God, and their spiritual practices to that end often included extended fasting, sleep deprivation or self-inflicted wounds, while some experienced ecstatic trances, levitation, and bouts of prolonged, involuntary weeping. The fact that almost all the mystics written about in this period were women is reason enough to look at medieval Latin Christian mysticism through the lens of gender. However, in her influential 1986 essay, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' Joan Scott suggested we move away from studying 'gender' as 'women's history.' Instead, she proposed defining gender as both 'a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes' and 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power.'² This essay looks at how a perception of difference based on gender shaped the ways in which a powerfully somatic spirituality was represented and used in the *Vitae* or hagiographic 'Lives' of two of these women, in response to existing power relationships. Rather than claiming this somatic spirituality as essentially feminine, I argue that it was harnessed to construct these potentially challenging religious women as 'different' in a way that did not threaten established power structures, and could be accommodated within them.

¹ 'The proportion of female saints rose from less than 10% in the eleventh century to about 28% in the fifteenth' but the biggest rise was from around 12% to over 22% between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 20–1.

² Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, no. 5 (1986): 1067.

There are extant *Vitae* for at least twenty medieval women mystics. I examine the *Vitae* of two of these women: Marie d'Oignies (Flanders, c.1177–1213) and Douceline of Digne (Provence, c.1215–1274). Both women were beguines, that is, laywomen who 'undertook to lead holy lives of chastity, service and labor without withdrawing from the world, making permanent vows or founding complex institutions.'³ Some chose to live together in small households, but they were not bound by a monastic rule and, unlike monks and nuns, had not permanently renounced their property or submitted their lives to institutional control. Church leaders were often uneasy about this lay movement and beguines were periodically targeted as possible heretics. Marie's influential *Vita* was written in Latin c.1215 by Jacques de Vitry, a cleric who admired her and was briefly her confessor. Jacques was an active and admired preacher, particularly against the Cathar heresy, but he also successfully advocated for papal acceptance of the beguines in the Liège diocese, insisting on their orthodoxy. Douceline of Digne was a dedicated follower of St Francis, and the sister of Hugh of Digne, a leading Spiritual Franciscan. Rather than entering the enclosed order of the Poor Clares, she decided to work with the poor and sick by founding and leading the first beguine communities in Provence at Hyères (Roubaud) and Marseilles. The authorship of her *Vita*, written in Occitan before 1297, is attributed to Philippine de Porcellet, a member of a wealthy, influential Arlesian family. Philippine joined the Roubaud community after being widowed and became prioress at Roubaud in Douceline's lifetime.⁴ I have chosen these two thirteenth-century *Vitae* because they offer a chance to compare a male and female hagiographer and their respective approaches to gender.

Many contemporaries understood the women mystics' experiences as an expression of their essential femininity, in line with the medieval view of women as emotional, irrational, weak and fleshly.⁵ Modern social historians rejected this essentialising view of women, but have nevertheless considered medieval society as hierarchically organised, with social roles and access to resources and opportunities prescribed by gender as well as estate, generally to women's political or economic disadvantage. More recently, though, feminist historians have argued that this polarised view of gender has been used to help construct a negative view of the Middle Ages as a counterpoint to the Renaissance, or to modernity.⁶ They have cautioned against a gender-based historiography that reads back modern sexual politics into our understanding of medieval women's experience, for example, the idea that for medieval women 'spirituality was a delusion of independence driven by gender politics and patriarchal economies that denied women jobs and property,' or that medieval religious women simply internalised misogyny as masochism.⁷ Others have argued, on the contrary, that by engaging in extreme physical practices, women may have subverted disciplines designed to repress and control the female body to re-assert control and achieve spiritual authority.⁸

3 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and The Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 59.

4 Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay (trans.), *The Life of St Douceline, Beguine of Provence*, (Woodbridge & Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 16–17.

5 See, for example Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe 1200–1500*, (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2002), 3; Dyan Elliott, 'Gender and the Christian Traditions,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–35.

6 Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Women, Gender and Medieval Historians,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 3.

7 Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 4.

8 Laurie A. Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision,' in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 29.

The intersection of gender and medieval Latin Christianity, and in particular the experience of the women mystics, has been a focus for feminist historians since the 1990s.⁹ Caroline Bynum has led the way in arguing for a more contextualised view of gender and medieval Christianity, one that accords women greater agency, by looking at how gender worked within religion as a cultural system in the ‘gendering’ of concepts and symbols and venerated figures. Bynum argues for a return to texts written by the mystics themselves, not just because of what these tell us about their authors’ position, experiences and aspirations as women in a particular historical context but because ‘careful reading of spiritual texts can reveal to us shifts in sensibility and values.’¹⁰ On the other hand, historians such as Amy Hollywood, Catherine Mooney and Barbara Newman have pointed to the potentially problematic nature of male authorship and/or male/female collaboration in producing these women’s *Vitae*.¹¹ They have also noted that women mystics’ own writings focus more on spiritual insights and the affective content of their practice than its physical forms.¹² In working with these texts readers need to be aware that male hagiographers may have shaped them to doctrinal or pastoral ends, while the distinctive physicality of the mystics’ recorded experiences may be an over-emphasis arising from the men’s own wish to present women as essentially physical and emotional rather than rational.

Other feminist historians have explored the implications for women mystics of an increasingly gendered dichotomy between a spiritual authority based on sensory and visionary experience and one derived from Scripture.¹³ Grace Jantzen in particular has described the growth, from the early fourteenth century, of ecclesiastical suspicion of visionaries and a backlash against the idea that spiritual authority could be grounded in anything other than Scripture. At best this impulse worked to re-marginalize women’s spirituality, and at worst it saw women mystics categorized as heretics.¹⁴ This article draws on that paradigm and explores the specific textual strategies used by two *Vitae* writers to represent and position their subjects within a gendered construction of spiritual authority.

Many social, economic and intellectual developments converged to foster the emergence of new forms of religious practice in the High Middle Ages (c.1001–1300).¹⁵ Among them was Bernard of Clairvaux’s radical idea that the soul could come to know God not just through a person’s engagement with the Word, but also through the ‘book of life,’ that is, through lived experience, and particularly emotional experience.¹⁶ For spiritually aspirant women, this idea sanctioned the

9 See, for example Elliott, ‘Gender and the Christian Traditions’; Alison Weber, ‘Gender,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 315–27.

10 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 8.

11 Catherine M. Mooney, ‘Voice, Gender and the Portrayal of Sanctity,’ in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2–4; Barbara Newman, ‘Introduction’ to Thomas of Cantimpré, *The Collected Saints’ Lives*, ed. Barbara Newman, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 22–4; Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 38–9.

12 Mooney, ‘Voice, Gender and the Portrayal of Sanctity,’ 6–15.

13 Mary Frohlich, ‘Authority’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 305–14; Laurie A. Finke, ‘Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision’; Grace Jantzen “‘Cry Out and Write’: Mysticism and the Struggle for Authority,’ in *Women, the Book and the Godly. Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda’s Conference, 1993*, Vol. 1, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane M. Taylor, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 67–76.

14 Grace Jantzen, “‘Cry Out and Write,’” 72–6.

15 Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe*, 154–90.

16 Bernard’s Sermons on the Song of Songs, begun in 1136, interpreted the Song of Songs as an allegory of the soul’s union with God.

pursuit of a path straight to God, via prayer and ascetic practice, without the need for education or the mediation of priests.¹⁷ It also enabled them to assert spiritual authority—for example, by providing leadership or guidance on questions of morality, understanding and practice. However, this boost to lay religious enthusiasm also fostered experimentation with ideas and practice, challenges to orthodoxy and priestly functions, and a growing Church anxiety about identifying and stamping out heresy.¹⁸

It is in this context that Jacques de Vitry produced his *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies, one of the first examples of the genre and arguably a template for other hagiographers of women mystics.¹⁹ One of Marie's attributes as a potential saint was her weeping, generally in response to images of, or sermons about, the Passion.²⁰ The first thing Jacques tells us about Marie, after describing her childhood and chaste marriage, is that her tears 'flowed copiously down onto the church floor and showed where she had walked...water flowed continually from her eyes by day and night.'²¹ He offers an important episode where a priest scolded Marie for her uncontrolled weeping during Mass. She went outside, but then the priest fell prey to a storm of tears that hindered his conduct of the Mass: 'the harder he tried to stop weeping, the more not only he himself but also the book and the altar cloths were soaked by his tears.'²² He only managed to complete the Mass 'after much sobbing and getting many words wrong'—'this man of bad judgment ... learned from shameful experience what humility and compassion had failed to teach him in the first place.'²³ So tears and feelings trump words and books, life and the body are for learning not avoiding, and men can learn from women. But only up to a point. Jacques carefully framed the *Vita* with scriptural tags (of his choosing, not hers) that authorise Marie's conduct. He blurs the question of her own literacy, and presents her not as a reader but as a passive medium for the Word: 'as if by nature [i.e. not by hearing, reading or thinking about them] she had St Peter's words about women imprinted on her mind.'²⁴ She even becomes a text herself: 'reading the unction of the Holy Ghost in her face as though in a book, they knew that she emanated divine power.'²⁵ So, in this way, text retains its primacy.

In Jacques' account of Marie there is also a convergence between appropriate femininity and natural virtue: she is a 'frail being,' 'modest,' 'meek' and 'diffident.' He presents her piety as

17 Women were not allowed to be priests, no longer allowed to be priests' wives, and if they were not wealthy or noble, were increasingly denied access to monastic life. For discussion of this issue see Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe*, 158–60.

18 John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 69–70

19 This was especially true for Thomas de Cantimpré, for whom Jacques was both friend and mentor, and who wrote lives of Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, Lutgard of Aywières as well as a Supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies, and for Philip of Clairvaux who wrote the Life of Elisabeth of Spalbeek. For the popularity and wide dissemination of Jacques' Life of Marie in Latin and in translation in the Middle Ages, see Jennifer N. Brown (ed.), *Three Women of Liège. A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elisabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 247–48.

20 Note that weeping was not in itself gendered behaviour in the way it might be assumed today. Many male saints also experienced bouts of crying during mass or in solitary contemplation. It was an emotional response to the suffering humanity of Christ, which was especially emphasised in the thirteenth century.

21 Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of St Mary of Oignies in Medieval Writing on Female Spirituality*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Spearing, (New York & London: Penguin Books, 2002), 90.

22 *Ibid.*, 91.

23 *Ibid.*

24 He writes of her reciting from a psalter and being able to quote scripture but not knowing Latin. Jacques de Vitry, 87. This is paralleled by his likening her to a vessel, 90.

25 *Ibid.*, 103.

‘natural,’ present ‘almost from her mother’s womb.’²⁶ But he also presents her as physically strong and fiercely determined, capable of superhuman feats of endurance and willpower in her prayer and asceticism, a sort of spiritual athlete. Further, while he insists that her extended fasts and gruelling devotional practices had no impact on her health or her ability to work, elsewhere he describes her as severely emaciated, weakened, ill and no longer able to work by the time she died prematurely at thirty-six.²⁷ These unresolved contradictions point to Jacques’ desire to construct Marie as ‘other,’ not just through her femininity, but also by making her mysterious and inexplicable.

I contend that Jacques took Bernard’s opposition between ‘textual authority’ and ‘authoritative experience’—a binary with a long pedigree that was gender-free—and aligned it with gender, making it normative of female sainthood.²⁸ This included positioning this kind of female saint in a particular relation to the priesthood and to orthodoxy. At this time only male clerics were allowed to teach and preach, and only priests could administer the sacraments and effect the miracle of transubstantiation during the Mass. Jacques presents Marie as accepting and valuing this male monopoly, in spite of her fierce independence of spirit and even though she sought direct communion with God. She asked for and submitted to the advice and guidance of priests and her confessor (Jacques himself), while he praised her reluctance to give spiritual advice herself to those who sought it, categorising this humility as evidence of her fear of God.²⁹ Marie’s *Vita* can thus be placed in the wider context of the battle against heresy, in which Jacques was a key actor as a preacher. It was written for and dedicated to Foulques, Bishop of Toulouse, at precisely the moment when the latter was supporting Dominic and his mendicant preachers in Languedoc as part of the papacy’s crusade against Cathar heretics. Catharism rejected priestly mediation, transubstantiation and the sacraments generally. Importantly, it also allowed women scope for spiritual leadership. In his *Vita* of Marie d’Oignies, Jacques offered an alternative model for how women could innovate and broaden religious experience without challenging ecclesiastical authority.

In Philippine de Porcellet’s *Vita* of Douceline of Digne, there is no sign of the struggle Jacques de Vitry evidently had with reconciling femininity and strength. Philippine tells us that Douceline saw the Virgin Mary as the first beguine, and took the Virgin as her model.³⁰ She provided the women who follow her with moral leadership and guidance as a ‘mother’:

the holy mother [Douceline] ... had to be an example to them in all virtues. Not only was she the leader and director of those in Roubaud who were under her allegiance and of whom she was the mother, but she was also the leader and mistress of those who, by her example, became beguines on the street near Roubaud, in Marseilles and also in Hyères.³¹

26 *Ibid.*, 87.

27 For example, Jacques describes Marie genuflecting 1100 times over 40 days, once 600 times in a row, or lashing herself with a sharp stick 300 times at each genuflection, Jacques de Vitry, 96, 106.

28 Radler traces its evolution from the ancient Greek duality of *theoria* (philosophical pursuit of truth) and *praxis* (active involvement in life of the city) via St Augustine’s final privileging of contemplation over action, to the Dominican Meister Eckhart’s attempt in the fourteenth century to resolve the dialectic of contemplation and action in his approach to mystical practice. But note that for St Augustine, the two New Testament figures of Mary and Martha stood for contemplation and action, and behind them stood the Old Testament duo of Rachel and Leah—so there was no gendered opposition in this notion in the Christian tradition at first. Charlotte Radler, ‘*Actio et Contemplatio*/Action and Contemplation,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 212–17.

29 Jacques de Vitry, 104.

30 *The Life of St Douceline*, [2: 9–11], 30–1.

31 *Ibid.*, [6:1], 40.

Douceline is presented as modest but not meek. Philippine describes her as a harsh but just disciplinarian, who ‘acted with great authority ... there was no one who did not tremble upon seeing her authority, and it seemed that her authority represented the judgement of God.’³² There is no echo here of Jacques de Vitry’s suggestion that a laywoman aspiring to spiritual leadership is lacking in humility and should fear God. Philippine does not stand in a gendered relation to Douceline, so she has no need to downplay or contest Douceline’s authority, as Jacques might have done. The opposite might even be true: as Douceline’s subordinate and spiritual follower, Philippine may have had an interest in magnifying her authority, particularly in the face of any threat from those who might want to close down the community.

Like Jacques de Vitry, however, Philippine emphasises at the very start of the *Vita* the ‘natural’ and pre-literate, even pre-verbal, character to Douceline’s religious vocation, even though the text implies she learnt to read:

before she knew her letters ... she would go out, through God’s urging ... kneel with bare knees on the small stones she found on the ground, join her hands in prayer to God, and turn her face to heaven, not knowing how to say anything ... before she knew how to talk properly, she made the sign of prayer and of contemplation.³³

She later described Douceline as ‘a simple, uneducated woman.’³⁴ When a ‘lector from a Paris convent’ visits and questions her on the nature of the soul, Douceline declines to answer: ‘Brother, it is not for me, a simple woman, poor in every respect, to answer this question.’ Nevertheless, ‘the force of the wonderful feeling that she had from the [friar’s] words’ propels her against her will into a rapture, from which she emerges later with a compelling answer, framed in Latin.³⁵ When the ‘great lector’ hears it, he says: ‘all the masters and all the teachers in Paris could not have given a better answer to this question.’³⁶ Here again an opposition is made between the learning and text-based authority of the male lector and a woman’s involuntary direct access to definitive spiritual understanding through her body.³⁷ However, Philippine framed the incident to signal the primary and overarching power of the Word over the body—Douceline’s rapture is unavoidably provoked by contemplation of the friar’s words, and her response is in Latin, the language of the Scriptures.

Again like de Vitry, Philippine placed great emphasis on her subject’s somatic spirituality. The chapter on Douceline’s weeping, and evolving raptures and levitations is by far the longest and sits at the very centre of the *Vita*. Contemplation of Christ’s Passion triggers raptures in which Douceline became insensible to noise, touch and pain for hours, even days, on end. In contrast to Jacques’ account of Marie, however, Philippine described Douceline’s efforts to keep her raptures and her weeping, which she had cultivated as a private devotional practice, secret from her fellow beguines.³⁸ But when the raptures became extended and their onset unpredictable, they

32 *Ibid.*, [6: 11–12], 43.

33 *Ibid.*, [1: 3], 26–7.

34 *Ibid.*, [9:3], 48.

35 Philippine makes it clear that Douceline very much wishes not to engage in this sort of contest: attempting to avert the oncoming rapture, ‘she had pricked [her hands] with needles under her cloak so she would not hear what the friar was saying to her.’ *Ibid.*, [9:31], 55.

36 *Ibid.*, [9:30–2], 55.

37 Not just literally a ‘reader’ but someone who at this time in the mendicant orders teaches Scripture-based theology.

38 *Life of St Douceline*, [6:13–14], 43.

attracted large numbers of spectators who, in an attempt to rouse her, ‘would push her and shake her forcefully and even inflict pain on her.’³⁹ On one occasion, Douceline remonstrated with her community members: ‘With bitter tears she said to them all, “Unfaithful sisters why did you allow this? Why did you put me on display like that? How could you do such wickedness and betray me in this way?”’⁴⁰ Here we see the female mystic not as mysterious object of wonderment, like Marie, but as autonomous subject. It seems likely that Douceline, the foundress and leader of a community of women dedicated to serving the poor and sick, wished her life and work to be the message, not her body and its supernatural feats.⁴¹ So why did Philippine give the raptures so much space in the *Vita*?

Douceline’s *Vita* was written sometime before 1297 but well after her death in 1274. It is clear from the *Vita* that Douceline was under pressure to name a successor before her death but also to hand management of the community over to the Franciscans, who were already her spiritual directors, and to merge it into a convent, a pressure which she resisted.⁴² The *Vita* employs several strategies to make an implicit case, based on a particular framing of Douceline’s spirituality, for the continued autonomy of the community. The first is a focus on demonstrating Douceline’s sainthood. One of the functions of *Vitae* was to collect and record evidence as part of a campaign for canonisation. Mystical experiences of weeping and ecstasy were considered ‘gifts of grace’ and by the thirteenth century were accepted as marks of sainthood.⁴³ Douceline’s *Vita* clearly offers these experiences, corroborated by testimony from named contemporaries and supported by stories of her posthumous miracles, as evidence of Douceline’s sanctity. Another strategy is the inclusion of several stories about the resurrected Christ visiting the community in the person of a poor, sick man they had cared for.⁴⁴ These may have been intended to signal to the beguines and the wider world that their community was favoured and secure. These stories are reinforced by a dream reported after Douceline’s death in which Christ reveals to the beguines the privileged status of the community vis-à-vis the Franciscans—the beguines are already ‘beneath the wings of St Francis’ and ‘under the direction of St Francis’ even though they are not wearing his habit, so there is no need for them to formally merge with the Order.⁴⁵

A separate strategy aimed at the broader Church was to embed throughout the *Vita* a number of episodes which showed Douceline achieving spiritual and eventually political authority with Charles of Anjou, Count of Provence, brother of the King of France and later King of Sicily. The *Vita* gives Douceline credit for restoring the Franciscans in Provence to the Count’s favour, thereby placing them in her debt: ‘the count had such devotion that, for love of her, he restored the Friars and the whole order to his good graces; they had all considered themselves dead and had been

39 Ibid., 49.

40 Ibid., 57.

41 ‘While her example led the others to austerity, and while she urged them to live with great discipline in all things, she did not like the rigour of austerity without discretion. Singularity especially displeased her.’ Ibid., 43.

42 Ibid., [10:16–20], 71–2; [10: 30–7], 75–6; [13:12–13], 91.

43 The ‘gift of tears,’ for example, was ‘that charism which makes possible and certifies the communication of the Christian’s soul with God.’ Piroška Zombory-Nagy, entries on ‘Charism’ and ‘Gift of Tears,’ in *The Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (James Clarke & Co, 2005), <http://www.oxfordreference.com>; DOI 10.1093/acref/9780227679319.001.0001.

44 In one of these, the details of the story echo those of the disappearance of Jesus’ body from the tomb after the Crucifixion. *Life of St Douceline*, 47.

45 Ibid., [14: 27–32], 99–100.

living in great fear' because of 'the count's anger.'⁴⁶ According to the *Vita*, Douceline's authority with the pious Charles rested at least in part on her somatic spirituality—Charles himself had put Douceline's raptures to the test by having molten lead poured onto her feet to no effect while she was in ecstasy—while her presence and her prayers had ensured that his wife had given birth safely at the end of a difficult pregnancy.⁴⁷ Douceline was made the child's *commère* (godmother) and the *Vita* records Charles as providing the community with substantial alms each year. The *Vita* claims he turned to Douceline for advice about whether he should accept the crown of Sicily from the Pope.⁴⁸ Douceline encouraged him to do so but would later admonish and advise him on how to conduct himself, and used her gift of prophecy (another attribute of sainthood) to warn him of dangers ahead.⁴⁹ The *Vita* also asserts that the disastrous episode of the Sicilian Vespers in 1282, which led to Charles losing Sicily, was due to the fact that 'after the Saint died, he forgot about fearing God.'⁵⁰ These episodes in the *Vita* place Douceline at the nexus of the relationship between the papacy, Charles and the Franciscans, clearly claiming for her a separate and higher standing than the Franciscans, and showing her authority as a political adviser deriving from her somatic spirituality and her gendered role as saintly Angevin midwife.

Both Jacques de Vitry and Philippine de Porcellet wanted and needed their subjects to be seen as saints in response to external political, social and religious circumstances. In Jacques' case, the imperative was to contain within orthodoxy the new forms of religious practice emerging in his diocese and to deploy them against heresy; in Philippine's there was a need to establish her institution's founder as a saint in her own right, in a position of moral authority and non-threatening spiritual legitimacy in relation to both the secular power and the Franciscans, in order to preserve the institution's independence as a female community. At the time of composition, Philippine may also have needed to position the beguine community on the orthodox side of the line in the looming conflict between the Franciscan Conventuals and the Spirituals, of whom Hugh of Digne had been a leader and with whom his sister Douceline was clearly aligned in her espousal of absolute poverty. In this context, reminding the Angevin rulers of the family debt to Douceline in order to secure their support could also have been important, aligned as they were with the papacy.

In constructing their cases for the sainthood of Marie and Douceline, Jacques and Philippine deployed gendered concepts of text and body in response to gendered power relations. They lived within an established social hierarchy of men over women, and in their society women had less access to literacy and education than men. The value of maleness and the value of learning can be seen as mutually reinforcing: that is, men deserved the privilege of learning because they were deemed superior, while the status of learning was enhanced because it was more associated with men. The *Vitae* of these two women emphasise the somatic and experiential quality of the women's spirituality as something innovative and as an alternative to a spirituality based on and guided by text. But it is also a spirituality exercised and contained within conventional and unchallenging feminine personae: Marie as the chaste and meek girl, Douceline as the fierce and protective mother, both as sworn virgins. Both women are shown as achieving a level of agency and authority within a distinctive feminine spirituality which complemented rather than challenged male

46 *Life of St Douceline*, [4:14], 37.

47 *Ibid.*, [9:16], 52; [4:10–14], 36–7.

48 *Ibid.*, [11:4], 77–8.

49 'On a number of occasions the Saint informed him, and let him know in her letters, that God was not pleased with him and was preparing to punish him.' *Ibid.*, [11:7–8], 78.

50 *Ibid.*, [11:9], 79.

ecclesiastical authority, a spirituality which the authors of the *Vitae* framed in such a way as to assume and ultimately uphold the ecclesiastical hierarchy of text over body.
