3  The Xtian Factor, or How to Manufacture a Medieval Saint

Marie of Oignies, the Celebrity Saint

 Legendary Classic Hollywood film producer Samuel Goldwyn declared: ‘God makes the stars. It's up to the producers to find them.’ Frankly, that's old news – at least to Jacques of Vitry. Jacques was a dedicated, even overly conscientious, student of theology in Paris when he first heard about Marie of Oignies. Lured by word of her localized religious fame, Jacques journeyed to the holy woman's home in Oignies in c. 1208. Meeting Marie was, in Ernest W. McDonnell's words, the 'big event' of Jacques' life. The cleric had found his religious star. Now, he could capitalize on Marie's regional acclaim and produce an A-list holy icon. In 1215, two years after Marie's death, Jacques authored a *vita*. The biography made a celebrity of its protagonist, and Marie's piety became well-known across Europe.

This chapter is a case-study of the spiritual celebrification of Marie of Oignies by her hagiographer, Jacques of Vitry. Throughout, I use the term 'star' and 'celebrity' interchangeably. I maintain that celebrity studies offer scholars of hagiography a powerful heuristic framework with which to interrogate the construction of sanctity, and vice versa. In this, I am not alone: various critics suggest a parallel between modern celebrity and medieval sainthood. Medievalist Clarissa W. Atkinson, for example, declares that '[h]oly persons – saints and ecstatics and miracle workers – were the celebrities of the Middle Ages'. In turn, cultural sociologist Richard Howells proclaims that we 'make saints of our celebrities today'. Historians often decry the inability to ever really access the 'real personhood' of a saintly protagonist. Representations of female holiness are, on the whole,
constructed by male hagiographers who mediate ‘direct’ contact with their sources. This is a particularly acute problem when no other records, such as legal or historical documents, testify to the woman as a specific individual apart from a *vita*. Theorizing sanctity in terms of celebrity – the conscious fabrication of a ‘special’ identity through mediatization – permits us to move beyond such limitations.

In 1979, Richard Dyer provided a methodology for systematic study of celebrity production, identifying the constituents of the ‘star image’: ‘*promotion, publicity, films and criticism* and *commentaries*’.9 The celebrity (‘star image’) is an inauthentic representation, fabricated from an amalgam of ‘media texts’ and grafted on to the real personhood of the star-as-subject.10 Although audiences readily grasp that a famous actor is *not* the character they play in a film, they do not – or do not want to – necessarily discern that the actor is *not* synonymous with their attached celebrity persona either. In fact, the ‘true’ identity of a celebrity is fragmented, pieced together by various attributes which together form a whole. When analysing celebrity, Dyer observes that ‘we are dealing with the stars in terms of their signification, not with them as real people. The fact that they are also real people is an important aspect of how they signify, but we never know them directly as real people, only as they are to be found in media texts.’11 The same is true for analyses of hagiography.

Medieval holy women exist to us solely in, and as, hagiographical ‘star images’. Indeed, the majority of our knowledge of Marie of Oignies comes from Jacques’ *vita*. It is ‘impossible to know the real Marie’ as ‘she is buried under layers of Jacques’s imposed meaning.’12 Jacques could not make Marie out of thin air, but once he discovered her spiritual talent he could craft her image to fit his needs. Marie’s celebrity lies in her extreme holiness, but her symbolic capital can be leveraged for both social and spiritual gain.13 The processes of celebritification entail a production of identity for specific aims. There is an inherent power disparity between producer and product, Jacques

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9 Emphases in original; *Stars*, p. 68.
10 Ibid., p. 10; *Heavenly Bodies*, pp. 10-11.
11 *Stars*, p. 2.
13 I examine at length the various different portrayals, both medieval and modern, of the holy woman in: ‘Marie of Oignies’. Manipulation of Marie’s celebrity-image continues to this day, as the Walloon region of Belgium leverages her renown to draw in tourists. In ‘Textual Authority’, I discuss the usage of St. Birgitta of Sweden’s (d. 1373) spirituality by the English, French, and Scottish during the Hundred Years War. My focus in the two pieces is on the given saint’s socio-political ‘capital’, rather than celebrity. Nevertheless, the analyses in both are highly pertinent to my arguments here.
and Marie. However, Jacques consistently positions himself as Marie's foremost follower, her number one fan. This occludes superficially the cleric's power as the producer of the holy woman's primary 'star image', her *vita*.

By casting himself as a fan, Jacques implies that he is subordinate to Marie's star power. However, fans are not simply passive consumers of the celebrity-objects with which they are presented. Fans are 'the theologians of a secular age'. They re-interpret and re-contextualize seemingly authoritative 'star images' to tease out new significations, based on specific circumstances and biases at play. In this context, Marie's pre-existing local fame which drew Jacques to Oignies originally functions as a 'star image' which Jacques, as a fan, can modulate to serve his own interests. Indeed, the cleric leverages Marie's fame in order to become a celebrity in his own right: a star preacher. This kind of stardom is not precisely identical to Marie's charismatic celebrity. Nevertheless, as a star preacher Jacques joins Marie in the VIP-suite reserved to the most illustrious movers and shakers in contemporary religious circles. Jacques is but one of Marie's fans, however. Other fans utilize Marie's star-texts for their own purposes, thereby remaking the holy woman's persona anew. In a later section, I explore one such alternate fabrication: English mystic Margery Kempe's (d. after 1438) fannish, and ultimately unsuccessful, usage of Marie to construct (and legitimize) her own status as a religious celebrity.

In positing Jacques and Margery as 'fans', I offer a counter-argument to numerous scholars' insistence that fandom emerged only in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. This classification also develops Dyer's theory of celebritification, in which fans are dismissed as little more than passive consumers of celebrity-texts. Such passivity might have characterized the fans of Classic Hollywood (1917-1960) celebrity, the period in which Dyer grounds his analyses. However, largescale technological shifts in the years since have allowed fans to engage ever more directly with celebrities and fan-texts. The internet, for example, has facilitated the formation of fan communities, in which all aspects of a given 'star image' are dissected, discussed, and re-imagined in works of fanfiction. Web 2.0 has led to the

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14 honestcoyote, n.p.
15 See, for example: Berlanstein; Braudy, pp. 380-89; McDayter, pp. 1-2, 23-28 (in particular p. 23); Morgan, pp. 101-10; Tillyard.
16 Dyer, *Stars*, p. 10. Other scholars similarly reject (implicitly or explicitly) Dyer's assertion(s). See, for example: Giles, pp. 128-46; J. Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington; Huffer; Jenkins, 'Star Trek'; *Textual Poaching*; *Fans*; Sandvoss.
17 For a historical survey of fan studies, see: Jenkins, 'Panorama'. 
‘fanification of everything’. Many of the creative practices first found in fandom subculture(s) have become mainstream. The rise of reality-TV and social media has also lead to the democratization of celebrity. These channels allow an individual to act as their own celebrity-producer, actively marketing their personality as the rationale for fame. I examine this form of ‘ordinary’ celebrity in later sections focusing on Margery Kempe.

Celebrity – like sanctity – requires an audience, a collective that fabricates the celebrity-subject by dint of admiration. The reverse is also true. The fan existence is transitive: an object of attention is necessary for the construction of the subject position of ‘fan’. Fan and celebrity are engaged in an act of mutual co-creation. As Jacques is ‘much too human to be a saint’, Marie is far too female to be a cleric, or indeed a hagiographer. Each contributes significantly to shaping the other’s destiny. Marie is certainly instrumental in the development of Jacques’ career. Under the holy woman’s advisement, Jacques returned to Paris where he was ordained in 1210 by Bishop Pierre of Nemours (1208-1219). Returning to Brabant almost immediately, he officially associated himself with the priory of Oignies, adopting pastoral responsibilities. His personal and professional trajectory was now tied resolutely to the fate of the blossoming religious movement of lay Liégeois taking up the vita mixta. At Marie’s urging, Jacques undertook an extensive preaching campaign from 1210 to 1213. A year after Marie’s death in 1213, Jacques was elected to the episcopate of Acre and by 1216 was active in the Holy Land and the Fifth Crusade. As early as 1215, Jacques composed Marie’s vita, sharing her story with all of Christendom. After returning to Europe in 1226, he was promoted to the office of cardinal by Gregory IX (1227-1241) in 1229, and spent the rest of his life tending to matters of the curia. On the vigil of St. Philip and St. James in 1240, Jacques died in Rome. At his own request, he was buried in the church of Oignies, a foundation he had consecrated in 1227 and the resting place of Marie’s relics.

According to Jacques’ account, Marie, born to a noble family in Nivelles in 1177, showed early signs of holiness. She disdained worldly goods and

18 Hassenger, n.p. On this, see in particular: Jenkins, ‘Afterword’, Convergence; Burgess and Green.
19 On this, see in particular: Biressi and Nunn, pp. 145-55; Cashmore, pp. 36-55, 188-207; Dovey; Edwards; Round and Thomas; Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen, pp. 107-12. On the impact of an ‘ordinary’ celebrity’s gender on audience reaction, see: Williamson, pp. 118-20.
20 On this, see in particular: Sandvoss, pp. 95-122.
22 For an in-depth biography of Jacques, see: Funk; von der Osten-Sacken, pp. 23-62.
yearned to adopt the religious life.\footnote{23}{VMO, 1.1.11-12, 639-40.} In dismay, her parents married her off at the age of fourteen to John, a man from Nivelles. Shortly after the nuptials, however, Marie managed to persuade her husband to take up a chaste union.\footnote{24}{Ibid., 1.1.13-14, 640.} After divine inspiration, John also agreed to the disposal of all the pair’s worldly goods. The couple moved to Willambroux to tend the patients of a leprosarium and to serve the poor in extreme humility. Due to Marie’s divine knowledge and exemplary holiness, she was constantly sought out to offer counsel and spiritual insight.\footnote{25}{Ibid., 1.1.14, 640; 2.8, 77, 656.} Such was the demand that at times she had to hide in fields and forests to get some peace.\footnote{26}{Ibid., 2.5, 47, 648.} Ultimately, such temporary escape was not sufficient. She was forced to move to a more isolated location, Oignies.\footnote{27}{Ibid., 2.9, 93, 661.} Jacques’ initial meeting with Marie occurs after this transfer: he is but one of a multitude of her fans.

After the publication of her \textit{vita}, Marie was known beyond Brabant-Liège and the hagiographical genre. She was no longer a purely local star. The biography was widely disseminated throughout the medieval period, and became one of the most extensively circulated biographies of a thirteenth-century holy laywoman.\footnote{28}{More, ‘Martha’, p. 271.} Susan Folkerts catalogues thirty-nine extant manuscripts which contain the \textit{vita}, fragments, or adaptations.\footnote{29}{P. 226-7, 230, 235-41.} Twelve to fourteen of these originate in the period between 1215 and 1300, with the majority (seventeen or eighteen) produced between 1400 and 1525. The full \textit{vita} was also translated into Dutch, English, French, Italian, Norse, and Swedish. Manuscript possession of the Latin \textit{vita} bears witness to the large geographical range of Marie’s text. Examples show ownership in institutions in England, Northern France, Germany, and the Northern and Southern Low Countries. Evidently, Marie’s biography had enduring appeal, and knowledge of the holy woman spread via the text, increasing the sphere of her recognition for sanctity exponentially.

It is not necessary to have been a consumer of the star’s primary output – film works, for example – to acknowledge their stardom. Supplementary texts also contribute to the wider appreciation of an individual as a celebrity. Such texts include: promotional documents for a given film; interviews; social media posts; gossip reports; and even a fan’s own communication with friends about the celebrity. Reading a celebrity gossip magazine, for example,
a reader may not know precisely who a star is, or have seen any of their films. Nevertheless, the reader recognizes that the star is famous because they are included in this forum. Another marker of Marie’s celebrity is thus her inclusion in various non-hagiographical texts, signalling her status as a star (or star-text), appropriate to be drawn on by and for different audiences.

For example, Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264) included large extracts of Marie’s hagiography in his Speculum historiale, the third part of his behemoth encyclopedia (Speculum maius). Over 240 manuscripts of this text remain, and it was translated into Flemish by Jacob of Maerlant (d. c. 1300) in 1280 and French in 1333 by Jean of Vignay (d. c. 1350). Dominican Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1272) also referenced Marie in his spiritually didactic allegory based on the communal life of bees (Bonum universale de apibus, c. 1257-1263). This was another popular text, with eighty-six Latin manuscripts of the whole text extant. The text’s wide audience is further revealed by its rapid appearance in print in c. 1473, the first of six Latin editions. The work’s geographical reach is evidenced by translations into Dutch, French, and German. Marie has only a bit part in both Vincent and Thomas’ collections, figuring as one of many individuals drawn upon for exemplary tales. Despite sharing the bill with other stars, as it were, her inclusion in such texts is noteworthy. It shows her acceptance as a holy woman of sufficient general esteem to be used as an authoritative source. Marie is a bona fide religious celebrity.

An Anti-Cathar Poster Girl

Marie was ostensibly a spiritual celebrity in Liège before Jacques made her acquaintance. What prompted Jacques to spread Marie’s fame further, and why was his mission so successful? In the vita’s prologue, Jacques explains that Bishop Fulk of Toulouse (d. 1231) requested that he undertake the composition of Marie’s biography in order to provide material for anti-heretical preachers in Fulk’s own region. In the year of Marie’s death, 1213, Jacques embarked upon preaching the Albigensian crusade. His staunch backing of Fulk’s anti-Cathar agenda, displayed through the example of
Marie in the *vita*, surely fast-tracked his ecclesiastical career. The efficacy of the *vita* as ‘an anti-heretical manifesto’ (*un manifeste antihérétique*) is directly linked to Marie’s pedagogical utility as a celebrity. That is, she teaches other Christians how to behave, and why, by her own way of life. Jacques’ description of Marie’s acclaim in the community, however, must be regarded with suspicion, or at least caution. In the *vita*, Jacques’ retroactive celebrification of Marie is a foundational element of his legitimizing agenda. He needs Marie to be widely regarded for great piety – famous – in order for her to stand as a worthy anti-Cathar model for others to take up. Her celebrification is a direct response to the ‘craving’ of the institutional Church for a persuasive representational image of orthodoxy for the laity, and particularly lay women, to venerate and follow.

Although Jacques details Fulk’s request for the production of the *vita* in the prologue, he dedicates the text to the bishop for different reasons: ‘I am speaking to you and have dared to dedicate this little work to you because you, as my teacher, berated me because of my negligence. You know, I repeat, that when you came to our country, it seemed to you that you were in the promised land.’ Jacques conflates Fulk with the entire church, with the bishop identified as ‘of the entire Church of Christ’ (*imo totius ecclesiae Christi*). Thus, the *vita* is dedicated to the Church more generally, which has harboured suspicion for the *mulieres religiosae*. The *vita* affirms Fulk’s surprised yet positive reaction to the Liégeois, recording the affirmation for all to see, and thereby promotes the women as approved by the Church. Moreover, Fulk’s need for an anti-Cathar poster girl inherently required a positive interpretation of the women’s practices. Beguines were criticised for behaviour similar to that of the Cathars. Thus, Fulk’s orthodox agenda facilitated and meshed with a defence of Marie and her spiritual colleagues. Behaviours which would exculpate the women would also serve as models for orthodoxy for others.

Celebrity, according to P. David Marshall, functions as ‘a very elaborate morality tale that [maps] a private world onto a public world’.

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35 Rojek, *Fame Attack*, p. 34.
36 *VMOEng*, prol. 2.41. ‘(ad te enim mihi sermo est, quo praecipiente & de negligentia me redarguente, praesens opusculum ausus sum attentare) […] inquam, quod cum venieres ad partes nostras, jam tibi visum est esse quasi in terra promissionis’. *VMO*, prol. 2.636.
37 Lauwers, pp. 102-03; Simons, *Cities*, pp. 16-24; 120-21; 132-35. On the link between beguines and Cathars as heretic groups, see in particular: Ellis, pp. 171-72; Goodich, ‘Contours’, pp. 30-32.
38 P. 37.
The celebritized Marie functions as a blueprint for the self-production of her fans. Fulk required an orthodox female ‘counter-model’ because Catharism could particularly attract women, as it offered them positions of power at its highest echelons, the perfects.39 Perfects were the most spiritually pure, full participants in the Church and eligible for election to the office of bishop. The Cathar sacrament of the consolamentum was administered in the ceremony to become a perfect, and was the manner by which the devotee wrested back control from the Devil. This sacrament was allowed to both men and women. Initially, the heresy offered women a significant gain in power, as they became teachers and preachers. However, the Cathar hierarchy was eventually dominated by men. Fewer women than men became perfects and no woman ever attained the rank of bishop. Women were also more likely to be seduced by the heterodoxy due to a lack of sufficient space in and support for orthodox female religious institutions, to which the new form of devotion practised in Liège offered a solution.40

The vita’s anti-Cathar programme consists, in the main, of the promotion of: strict submission to clerical powers; the reality of purgatory; the importance of confession; the authenticity of the Eucharistic sacrament; and believers’ triumph over demons.41 In this way, the text furnishes vivid orthodox counter-examples to central tenets of Cathar belief. The Cathar heresy was one of dualism, the belief that God originated all goodness, whilst evil was produced by an evil god. God fabricated the spiritual realm, whilst Satan was the creator of all earthly matter. Thus, the Church – as an institution of the world – was a diabolical institution. In comparison, Marie reveres the Church and its clerical representatives. She kisses and clutches the feet of priests, or sorrowfully cries, if they attempt to leave after giving sermons in church.42 For the Cathars, the Devil – not God or the Church – was the chief organizing force in the world. The Devil and his minions were overwhelmingly powerful entities, nefariously shaping human life at every turn. Indeed, rather than purgatory being a transitory state after death as in the orthodox view, for Cathars purgatory equated to existence in the diabolical world. In countless visions, Marie, and thus

40 Kurtz, p. 187; McDonnell, Beguines, pp. 81-110.
41 On the rhetorical programme of the vita, see: Farmer, pp. 208-09; Kurtz; Vauchez, ‘Prosélytisme’.
42 VMOS, 2.7.68.654. For similar examples, see: Ibid., 1.2.19.641, 2.7.68-69.654-55; VMOSupp, 1.2.667.
the *vita*’s reader, perceives that purgatory is an all-too-real state to which sinners are relegated after death. The holy woman is also a vigorous demon slayer, and her many victorious episodes offer proof of the Devil’s innate weakness.

At other points in the *vita*, Marie’s role as an anti-heretical figure-head is less subtle. She explicitly supports the Crusade against the Cathars, proclaimed by Innocent III (1198-1216; d. 1216) in 1209. She views dying as a crusader as the height of holiness, and yearns to be martyred herself. Marie’s repeated visions depicting the immediate entrance of slaughtered crusaders to heaven, bypassing purgatory, shows the authenticity of the indulgence issued to crusaders. Jacques funnels messages of the Crusade’s righteousness through divine revelation and prophecy. In his prologue, he identifies these specific attributes as targets of detractors who oppose the *vita mixta* pursued by the holy Liégeois:

> ‘They [the detractors] extinguish the spirit the more it is in them, and they despise prophecies because they scorn spiritual people, thinking them insane or idiots, and they consider prophecies and the revelations of the saints to be fantasies or illusions of sleep.’

By depicting pro-crusade prophecies and revelations, Jacques emphasizes that such channels of knowledge are legitimate, and fit within pious orthodox practice. A detractor cannot reject Marie’s anti-heretical message without positioning himself as a heretic, or at the very least sympathetic to the Cathars’ cause. As such, Jacques’ celebrification of Marie is less outright manipulative. By constructing the holy woman as a model, he offers her up as a non-threatening orthodox Christian, glossing potentially troublesome behaviours in a decidedly positive light. Hagiographic fame offers Marie protection from ecclesiastical censure, at the same time as it robs her of personal agency. As with all those subject to the celebrity manufacturing process, Marie’s ‘enfranchisement and empowerment’ is co-terminous with her ‘exploitation [and] objectification’.

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43 *VMO*, 1.3.27.643; 2.6.51.650; 2.6.52.650; 2.6.53.650-51; 2.12.104.664; *VMO Supp*, 2.12.670-71.
44 *VMO*, 1.3.29-30.643-44; 1.3.31-32.644; 2.6.50.650; 2.6.52.650; 2.6.58-60.652; 2.6.61.652-53; 2.7.70.655; 2.9.85.658-59; 2.12.108.665.
45 *ibid.*, 2.11.82.658.
46 *ibid.*, 2.11.82-83.658. See also Marie’s explanation of purgatory to a former crusader, unworthy of martyrdom: *VMO Supp*, 1.4-5.668.
47 *VMOEng*, prol.10.50. ‘Ipsi vero spiritum quantum in se est extinguunt, & prophetias spernunt: quia spiritualuses quosque, quasi insanos vel idiotas despiciunt; & prophetias sive Sanctorum revelationes, tamquam phantasmata vel somniorum illusiones reputant.’ *VMO*, prol.10.638.
Marie the Mystical Chanteuse

The *vita* furthered the holy Liégeois’ cause to a certain degree. In a letter to Lutgard of Aywières in October 1216, Jacques relays that he received from Honorius III documents officially sanctioning communal living arrangements for beguines not just in the diocese of Liège, but across the whole Roman Empire. This good news is immediately undercut, however. Jacques continues that he is denied any special authority to defend the women, who are the subject of oppressive strictures virtually everywhere, with some even imprisoned. For this reason, Jacques does not plan to return and face the holy women’s castigation: ‘Indeed, if I were not able to protect them in the affairs which had been promised, they would not receive the message preached and, what is more, even spit in my face.’

In order to save face and protect himself, the hagiographer allows himself that which he denies Marie: invisibility.

Marie exists in a textual panopticon. There is no way she can remove herself from the spectacle that Jacques stage-manages: she is explicitly billed as the star of the show. But the holy woman can, and does, pixelate the image, rendering her representation (spiritual value) at least partially unintelligible. For a period of three days and nights before her death, Marie belts out a mystical song. Jacques confines her in text. In response, she communicates in a medium that cannot be lexically captured: music. Marie's song contains exceptional theological and religious knowledge, delivered with compelling persuasion. Yet, none of her listeners can actually decipher its contents, nor remember it all. The *vita* records none of Marie’s lyrics, nor the language in which the holy woman sings. Though communicative, Marie’s anthem is beyond language – and thus out of Jacques’ reach.

Mystical singing affords Marie a moment of resistance to clerical control. If clerics wish to interpret her song, they require her to translate it for them: she accedes to a form of knowledge inaccessible to men. Her performance

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49 The first line of the letter has been lost, but the content suggests the same addressee as Jacques’ second letter, identified as being sent to Lutgard: Huygens (ed.), letter I, p.74, ll. 76-81; Sandor, p. 295. This is the same letter I reference above: Introduction, p. 29.
50 Huygens (ed.), p. 74, ll. 81-90.
51 Translation from Wright, p. 156. ‘aliter enim verbum predicacionis non reciperent, sed magis in faciem meam conspuruerent, si eos, secundum quod promissum est eis in predicacionibus, protegere non valerem’. Huygens (ed.), p. 74, ll. 87-90.
52 *VMO*, 2.11.98-99,662-63.
53 *VMO*, 2.11.99,663.
equates to preaching, an activity normally disallowed to women. What's more, mystical preaching is enviably easier than traditional preaching:

She did not think [nec] about composing sentences, nor [nec] did she spend time arranging what she had composed rhythmically, but the Lord gave it to her just as if it had been written out before her at exactly the same time as it was spoken. She rejoiced with a continuous cry and did not have to [nec] deliberate over it, nor [nec] did she have to interrupt her song in order to arrange its parts.

More than signalling Marie's talents, this pile of negations – in the form of asyndeton of 'nec' – highlights the difficulties normally faced by a preacher, difficulties Jacques himself must surely have faced. Additionally, Marie's marathon session of preaching is a feat that a preacher, lacking in divine vitality, could never dream of completing.

As Marie steals the show with her singing, Jacques tries to rush the stage. He attempts to interrupt Marie's moments of personal devotion with his own singing. With a group of colleagues, Jacques sings liturgical chants loudly in church next to Marie, 'almost directly in her ears' (‘quasi ad aures ejus’). His vocalizations cannot break through Marie's spiritual aura, nor can they relate the kind of intense spiritual experience which characterizes her singing. The *vita* frames this moment as an example of the woman's staunch piety: she is 'untroubled' (‘numquam aliquo tumultu gravari poterat’) by any sounds which relate to the Lord. The exemplarity of Marie's reaction veils Jacques' frustration at the impotence of his music to disrupt her spirituality. He even hires stonemasons to erect an altar right beside her, in the hopes that their clattering hammers will do the job. The holy chanteuse, however, just won't quit: Jacques' inglorious hopes are dashed.

Earlier in the *vita*, Jacques laments the inferiority of the human senses, to which he himself is constrained, in comparison to Marie's heightened

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54 Muessig, ‘Prophecy’, pp. 146-58; Wiethaus. For other examples of female mystical singing in the corpus, see: *VCM*, 3.35-37.656; *VLA*, 1.2.18.241; *VILov*, 1.2.11.161; 2.3.13.174; 3.5.25.188.

55 *VMOEng*, 2.11.98.119. ‘nec deliberabat an sententias inveniret, nec morabatur ut inventas rithmice disponeret; sed velut ante se scriberentur, dabat ei Dominus in illâ horâ quid loqueretur. Continuo clamore jubilans, nec in cogitando laborabat, nec in disponendo cantum interrumpebat.’ *VMO*, 2.11.98.662.


57 From another perspective, Jacques' ‘frustration’ could be viewed as satisfaction. The inability to disrupt Marie's song emphasizes her extraordinary holiness, from which he profits.
spiritual senses. Marie’s direct connection to the Lord – rendered audible by her song – is superior to a more rational link to Him. Jacques needs Marie. She alone has the gift of a direct connection with the divine, a link which he cannot forge for himself without her mediation: ‘he preaches, and she makes contact with God’. Whilst Jacques has ‘earthly control’ over Marie’s ‘spiritual self’, the reverse is also true. To produce a vita of a holy individual to further his own concerns, Jacques needs a religious figure that he can reshape. Marie, however, does not need Jacques to access God: access to the Lord is her ultimate talent, her ‘X factor’.

It is rather fitting that Marie’s ‘X factor’ is most clearly on display during her mystical choral performance. The property of escaping precise characterization is central to the ‘X factor’. You can’t describe it, but you know when someone has it. This is literally true for Marie’s unintelligible mystical song. In addition, the wildly popular TV talent competition The X Factor has staged the celebrity manufacture process for audiences across the globe for over a decade. The TV talent competition has reinvigorated the signification of the phrase ‘X factor’ as the fundamental ingredient in celebrity creation. For X Factor contestants, as for Marie of Oignies, singing talent is central to their celebrification. It’s how they make it onto the TV stage, and the one bargaining chip they have in the celebrity industrial complex.

Jacques of Vitry, Star Preacher

Writing the vita, Jacques engages in an act of self-production as much as he constructs a specific image of Marie as authentically holy. As Jennifer N. Brown asserts: ‘[i]n many ways the life of Marie [of] Oignies is not about Marie at all. [Jacques of Vitry] is omnipresent throughout the text, inserting himself both overtly and surreptitiously into nearly every aspect of Marie’s life.’ Jacques consistently positions himself as benefiting from the reflected glow of Marie’s spirituality, not just as Marie’s most devoted fan but also as an intimate member of the holy woman’s VIP entourage. The privileged access that this affords Jacques ultimately propels him into stardom in his own

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58 VMO, 2.7.66.654.
59 Coakley, p. 80.
61 For an analysis of the commercial strategy of TV talent shows, see: Jenkins, Convergence, pp. 59-93.
right. He garners a host of his own fans who follow him and (re)construct his identity, claiming him as a celebrity preacher.

Marie is miraculously present at the ordination of ‘one of her dearest friends’ (‘amicus sibi carissimus’), implicitly Jacques himself.\textsuperscript{63} She fills letters to him with prophetic messages which he cannot yet understand, including reference to the spiritual blossoming of a tree destined for her. The text immediately shifts to remark that Marie was present at the priest’s first celebration of mass. Moreover, just before these comments, Jacques emphasizes that Marie is endowed with potent spiritual sight as to the worth and devotion of priests. Jacques thus highlights his own excellence as a cleric. Earlier in the \textit{vita} Marie is shown praying to God for a preacher, as she herself cannot evangelize.\textsuperscript{64} This directly links the ‘anonymous’ Jacques’ ordination to Marie’s request: he is literally a gift from God. This clearly elevates Jacques’ status above other clerics whose career has not been divinely appointed. The hagiographer leverages the holiness, and reputation for prophetic insight, that he so carefully establishes for Marie in order to authorize his own reputation.

Elsewhere in the \textit{vita}, we learn that Marie’s preacher ‘conferred virtue by bodily labour, ministered the word, directed her steps, and arranged his sermons for his audience in an agreeable and beneficial order through the merits of the handmaid of the Lord’.\textsuperscript{65} This sentence foregrounds the reciprocal dynamic at play between hagiographer-fan and saint-star. As the \textit{vita}’s all-powerful author, and in ‘real’ life as a trusted clerical advisor, Jacques metaphorically and perhaps literally ‘direct[s]’ Marie’s movements. He ‘arrange[s]’ the basic biographical material she provides into an ‘agreeable and beneficial order’ to generate a representation of acceptable holiness. Marie’s religiosity, however, is responsible for Jacques’ skill in preaching, as she channels God’s grace to her acolyte. God speaks to Marie, Marie speaks to Jacques, and he then transmits powerful religious truths to the audiences of his sermons. Jacques’ position in this divine telephone game – at only one remove from God Himself – gives his sermons an enviable theological weight, and is central to his own celebrity identity. Indeed, Dominicans Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) and Etienne of Bourbon (d. c. 1261) proclaim

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\item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{VMO}, 2.9.86.659.
\item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, 2.7.69.65-55.
\item \textsuperscript{65} \textit{VMOEng}, 2.7.69.99. ‘sanctae mulieris precibus compraeparabat, virtutem corporis in labore conferebat, verbum ministrabat, gressus dirigebat, gratiam & fructum in auditoribus meritis ancillae suae praeparabat’. \textit{VMO}, 2.7.69.655. For Marie’s positive influence on Jacques’ preaching, see also: \textit{VMO}, 2.8.79.657.
\end{itemize}
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Jacques the best preacher France has ever seen.⁶⁶ Promulgating God's words was central to the Dominicans’ mission and their identity – after all, they were known as the Order of Preachers (Ordo Praedicatorum). As such, the acclaim heaped on Jacques by Humbert and Etienne, notable figures in the Order, demonstrates his transformation from humble hagiographer into an ecclesiastical celebrity. Jacques is the preacher’s preacher.

Testimony as to the power of Jacques’ preaching is provided in the supplement to Marie’s vita, written in c. 1231 by Thomas of Cantimpré. The short work ostensibly provides additional details as to Marie’s piety, and the special bond between the holy woman and her original hagiographer. In actuality, the Supplementum reveals far more about Thomas’ intense admiration for his mentor, Jacques.⁶⁷ Thomas comes across as the older cleric’s own superfan, by turns establishing and bearing witness to Jacques’ celebrity. In the final chapter, the author addresses Jacques directly:

> With what charity I love you, with what sincere love I embrace you, he knows who knows all things [ipse novit, qui omnia novit]. When I was not yet fifteen years old and you were not a bishop, I heard you preaching in Lotharingia. I loved you with such veneration that I was happy just at the sound of your name. From then on a special love for you stayed with me.⁶⁸

As Jacques sought out Marie during his youth, an adolescent Thomas was drawn to Jacques. The preacher’s fame, accrued thanks to Marie’s guidance and the utility of her as an example, travels across the land dissociated from Jacques himself. Thomas would be overjoyed just to hear Jacques’ name, the signifier not of Jacques as a ‘real’ individual but of a celebrity evangelist. Moreover, Thomas’ extreme admiration for Jacques lies not in the fact that he knows all, but he knows the people who know all (‘ipse novit, qui omnia novit’). Jacques’ ability to tap into this spiritual body of knowledge through Marie marks him out as a celebrity in Thomas’ eyes. Whilst Jacques taps into Marie’s spiritual powers, using her particular talents to enhance his

⁶⁶ Respectively: Boyer (ed.), ex. 4, prol., 4.37-42; Quetif and Echard (eds.), p. 186. See also similar comments from the sixteenth century: Trithemius, 432.106-07.
⁶⁷ J. N. Brown, ‘Erotics’, p. 75, n.3; Roukis-Stern, pp. 42-43.
⁶⁸ VMOSuppEng, 4.27.164. ‘Qua enim caritate vos diligam, quam sincero vos amore complectar, ipse novit, qui omnia novit. Nondum enim annorum quindecim aetatem attigerem, cum vos necdum Praesulem in Lotharingiae partibus praedicantem audiens, tanta veneratione dilexi, ut me solius nominis vestri laetificaret auditus: ex tunc mecum vestri amor individuus perseverat.’ VMOSupp, 4.27.676.
reputation, Thomas wishes to emulate his idol almost identically as author and churchman. The latter choice is much more orthodox than the intimate relationships Jacques cultivates with the holy Liégeois. Thomas does not want to be religiously omniscient, but wants to know such a figure and tap in to their spiritual knowledge base. He wants to be friends with a member of a celebrity’s entourage, rather than be in the entourage himself.

Thomas follows in Jacques’ footsteps, including authoring the vitae of other spiritual stars from the diocese: Margaret of Ypres, Christina Mirabilis, and Lutgard of Aywières.69 Indeed, in the prologue to Christina’s vita, Thomas cites Jacques’ description of the holy woman from the prologue to Marie’s vita.70 He draws on Jacques as a source, at least in part because Thomas never met Christina himself.71 This chain of connection to Marie-as-celebrity is potentially infinite: an individual who venerates Thomas gains some form of starstruck interaction with Jacques, and thereby Marie. Jacques (fan) constructs a specific image of Marie (celebrity), which leads to his own celebritification, and the acquisition of a fan of his own (Thomas). Theoretically, Thomas too could become a celebrity by tapping in to the potent system of representation in which Jacques and Marie exist. Thomas-as-celebrity could then be the object of fan attention, processed and reprocessed according to the specific desires and biases of his acolytes. The process of celebritification could continue ad infinitum.

Hairdressers to the Stars

Thomas of Cantimpré’s celebritification remains theoretical, however. He is simply not as savvy in this business we call (religious) ‘show’ as his idol, Jacques. Thomas’ professional performance is sub-par, to put it kindly. Whilst Jacques died a cardinal, Thomas ascended the ecclesiastical ladder only to the role of subprior in his Louvain institution. A fan (Jacques) in intimate contact with the star-object (Marie) can become a star in their own right, albeit a star of a lesser calibre. But a subsidiary fan (Thomas) of a first-string fan (Jacques) cannot. This dynamic is perhaps best illuminated by analysis of a modern example of the changing fortunes of a member of a modern celebrity’s entourage.

69 VMY, VCM, VLA respectively.
70 VCM, prol.1.650; VMO, prol.8.638.
In 1999, hairstylist Ken Pavés started his working relationship with American singer, actor, and reality-TV star Jessica Simpson.72 The publicity generated by tending Simpson's tresses, and the pair's widely reported close bond, has catapulted Pavés into the hairdressing big leagues. He is frequently hailed as the 'man behind the best hair in Hollywood', with a roster of A-list clients with whom he is photographed on various red carpets.73 Pavés is no longer 'just' a stylist: he is a brand in his own right. From his debut on-screen appearance in *Jessica Simpson: A Public Affair*, a short documentary about Simpson's fifth album in 2006, Pavés has become a regular on the American talk-show and reality-TV circuit. Featured as a 'celebrity stylist', he demonstrates his skills by making-over members of the general public. Such appearances trade directly on the hairstylist's VIP connections, foregrounding his membership of Simpson's entourage and his key role in the creation of Simpson as a bona fide celebrity.

In Pavés' own words: 'It was under my direction that we took Jessica Simpson from her trademark blonde to the perfect auburn red that was inspired by Norma Jean Baker before she went blonde and became Marilyn Monroe.'74 The hairdresser here characterizes the end-result of his careful coiffing of Simpson's image as resulting in Norma Jean, and not Marilyn. This is the reverse trajectory that one might expect when processing a female celebrity, given Monroe's mega-stardom. The point, however, is the transformation which takes place: from raw material to celebrity icon. Pavés' reference to the two personas – the 'before' of Norma Jean, and the 'after' of Marilyn – serves to draw attention to the conscious effort of celebrity manufacture, and his own role in guaranteeing a successful outcome. What's more, the seeming authenticity of the 'real woman' represented by Norma Jean Baker arguably fits the late twentieth- and twenty-first century palate for more approachable and accessible stars, fuelled by reality-TV and social media. The point being, today's 'Marilyn' is actually 'Norma Jean', at least in some quarters. Certainly, working with Simpson progressed Pavés' career. In much the same way, Jacques of Vitry's professional and authorial success is grounded on his relationship with Marie of Oignies. But, as with the hagiographer-holy woman relationship, the power between stylist and celebrity-client flows both ways. Pavés' careful sculpting of Simpson's image was central to her success, at least in his account. Under his tutelage, then, even an average Jane can become a star. Women of the world, take note.

72 Pavés, pp. 22-23.
73 Daily Mail Reporter; Pavés, p. 135.
74 Pavés, p. 135.
The stylist’s capacity to (re-)fashion the ‘star image’ from the grist of biology and biography is plainly hagiographic.

Pavés has parlayed his access to authentic celebrities into the opportunity to ascend the ranks of (reality-TV) stardom himself. In 2010, for example, he appeared ‘as himself’ in the documentary-reality series *The Price of Beauty*, sharing equal billing with Simpson as one of the actor’s ‘best bud[s]’.

The 2013 publication of his book *You Are Beautiful*, coupled with the launch of his own range of beauty products at Walmart shortly thereafter, cemented Pavés’ status as a celebrity commodity. Let’s be clear: Pavés is no A-lister. Celebrified primarily as an attendant to one of the ‘real’ stars, he can only be a C-lister, at best. He is not – and cannot – encroach on Simpson’s territory as a pop singer or actor. Instead, he is a ‘star’ in the rather more banal realm of reality- and lifestyle-TV. Simpson is not an A-lister either, a status usually conferred on Oscar-winning actors and uber-successful entertainers. Nevertheless, in the public imagination, she is a ‘legitimate’ celebrity because her exposure is a by-product of her singing and acting activities. Like Pavés, Jacques of Vitry is not a holy A-lister (saint) himself; the best he can do is get up close and personal with a real star, Marie of Oignies, and leverage the reflected glow. But Pavés and Jacques are on the list, and that’s what counts.

As a talented hairdresser, Pavés transformed Jessica Simpson from a relative unknown into a proxy for one of the greatest celebrity icons of the media age, Marilyn Monroe. He is thus allowed a share of the limelight. But fame only radiates so far. Who cares who Pavés’ own hairdresser is? Nobody. This anonymous soul is not worthy of our attention, as his connection to the ‘real’ stars is so tenuous: Pavés’ hairdresser touches the hair of the man who touches the actually ‘important’ hair. Marie of Oignies was certainly blessed with ‘important’ hair. Her locks are repeatedly figured as powerful healing relics, capable of infusing even the sickest wretches with vitality.

Marie's strands, 'reposing with dormant power' (‘virtute sopita [...] conquievit’) even when shorn from her head, operate as a metonym for the holy woman's potent religiosity. In much the same way, Jessica Simpson's glamorous coiffure functions symbolically for her celebrity.

In his twinned roles as Marie’s spiritual adviser and hagiographer, Jacques of Vitry gets his hands on the holy woman’s hair, i.e. her spiritual identity.

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75 Ibid., p. 9, p. 36; quote from p. 30.
76 *VMO*, 2.6.55, 651, 2.8.79, 657; *VMOSupp*, 1.6-7.668-69. See also hair as a marker of the miraculous in: *VLA*, 2.23-249. On hair and hirsutism in female hagiography, see: Easton, pp. 337-40. On hair as a sacred artefact in contemporary culture and the global marketplace, see: Chidester.
77 *VMOSuppEng*, 1.7, 146; *VMOSupp*, 1.7, 669.
He detangles the knots of heterodoxy from her religious praxes in order to craft a polished ‘do, palatable to even the most discerning clerical stylists. By contrast, Thomas of Cantimpré’s sole connection to Marie of Oignies is through Jacques. In the Supplementum, he metaphorically coifs Jacques – carefully managing his idol’s image – rather than meaningfully contributing to Marie’s ‘star image’. The question is: who cares about the hagiographer’s hagiographer? Indeed, Thomas exits stage left the annals of hagiographical miscellany, at least in terms of his supplement to Marie’s vita. The Bollandist editor of the work, Daniel Papebroeck (d. 1714), misidentified the author, listing an unknown Nicholas of Cantimpré instead of Thomas.78 Despite his attempts to leverage Jacques’ stardom, Thomas remains for all intents and purposes a ‘nobody’ here.

A layer of nuance is needed: Thomas is not a ‘nobody’ everywhere. Whilst he is not a star hagiographer, Thomas’s talents in other arenas are nevertheless recognized, at least in contemporary scholarship. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, for instance, presents Thomas first and foremost as a renowned encyclopedist, with his stint in hagiography an authorial side-line to be glossed over.79 A single sentence notes the five hagiographical works which Thomas authored. By contrast, two paragraphs are devoted to an exposition of his encyclopedic texts, De natura rerum (On the Nature of Things) and Bonum universale de apibus (Book of Bees).80 The difference in space accorded to the two genres is implicitly presented as a logical choice to the reader. After all, ‘Thomas’s fame […] rests especially’ on his encyclopedias.81 It turns out the hagiographer’s hagiographer has hidden depths, a special talent not (fully) expressed in his current career cranking out spiritual biographies. But in the world of the medieval encyclopedia, he may just be king. In this world, it is entirely plausible that Thomas operates as a celebrity in his own right. That is: as an object of veneration by less talented or less successful writers, who utilize him as a model for the production of their own star image and textual outputs. Thomas cannot equal, or even usurp, Jacques of Vitry’s celebrity status in the arena of hagiography.82 However,
there's everything to play for if the competition is re-staged to account for a different talent, and undertaken in a different arena (textual genre).

**Celebrity Role-Models**

The genre of celebrity reality-TV, such as *The Price of Beauty*, cannibalizes its headliners’ pre-existing identity as a celebrity object. Pavés simply does not have the cachet to carry the show on his own. In *Price*, Simpson and Pavés, along with another of Simpson's long-time friend-attendants (Kacee Cobb) travel the globe to discover the punishing beauty standards of various cultures. *Price* is appealing to viewers not because of its social-justice-lite message, but because Simpson (a real star!) is the one who purportedly ‘uncovers’ the problems of female body-policing. The actor's pre-existing star identity makes the whole project viable. Furthermore, Simpson's involvement underscores that this is a problem worthy of attention. Medieval *exempla*, as Jacques Berlioz and Colette Ribaucourt point out, constitute ‘an image, or a series of images’ (‘une image, ou une suite d’images’), reproducing metaphorically the Church’s desired behaviour for the laity.83 In *Price*, Simpson adopts the role of an *exemplum*: she discovers that beauty is a social construct, thereby educating her audience. In place of the Church’s metaphorical ‘series of images’, TV producers present the audience with a literal image sequence (TV show) in order to shape attitudes. As a piece of docu-tainment, *Price* is explicitly instructive. However, the infusion of documentary into the celebrity mix merely overlays a key tenet of stardom more generally: innate ideological potency. As stars ‘relate to ideas about what people are (or are supposed to be) like’, they are always exemplary figures to some extent.84

Simpson's horrified reaction to pernicious beauty standards is exemplary in *The Price of Fame* because she is a beautiful woman herself. She manages her looks assiduously – but even she won't do that. Moreover, as a female star she operates in an environment that subjects female bodies to even more punitive strictures regarding appearance than those to which non-famous women are compelled to conform. In *Price*’s first episode, Simpson sets

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83 My translation; p. 96.
84 Dyer, *Stars*, p. 22. See also: Cashmore, p. 70.
herself apart from normal women: ‘It’s one thing to have insecurities, but when you have the whole world watching, and people are criticising you on top of it, it just can get to the point of being too much.’ Such statements emphasize the exceptional status of celebrity, a distinct socio-cultural role which is unavailable to most people. This exceptionality is also a hallmark of hagiographic protagonists.

Whilst holy women are sources of accessible inspiration to mould believers’ behaviours, not everyone can achieve their levels of holiness. Practices upon which the celebrity identity is founded – Simpson’s rigorous beauty regime or Marie of Oignies’ intense asceticism– cannot, and should not, be practised by all and sundry. After graphically detailing Marie’s self-mortifications, Jacques of Vitry emphasizes that readers should not emulate the holy woman: ‘I do not say these things to commend the excess but so that I might show her fervour. […] Therefore, admire rather than imitate what we have read about the things certain saints have done through the familiar counsel of the Holy Spirit.’ Not everyone can be a religious star. But every audience-member can reflect on the underlying message of such acts, and improve their own lives accordingly. Even holy women can take things too far. Jacques remarks that Marie ‘abased herself to an extreme degree and afflicted herself – as it sometimes seemed to us – beyond measure.’ The mechanisms by which a star might manufacture holiness, even those based on physical performance, are strictly controlled by hagiographical producers.

Though Price’s success is founded on Simpson’s celebrity, the show supports her celebrity persona. Simpson is in Price because of her fame as a singer-actor; Price further evidences Simpson’s fame. This feedback loop between primary (Simpson’s film and singing career) and derivative (reality-TV appearances) star-texts in the creation of the celebrity identity is also evidenced in Marie of Oignies’ textual corpus. Details from Marie’s hagiography (primary text) circulated widely via inclusion in collections of exempla and resources for preachers (derivative works). For example,

85 ‘Thailand’ (first aired 15 March 2010).
86 For Marie’s fasting and associated ascetic food practices, see: VMO, 1.2.23-25.642, 2.5.44.648, 2.7.65.654, 2.7.65.654, 2.12.105.664; 2.12.107.665.
88 VMOEng, 2.7.65.97. ‘ […] valde seipsam nimmer abjiciens, & supra modum affligens, nobis aliquando videbatur.’ VMO, 2.7.65.654. See also: Marie’s shame at immoderately cutting her own flesh (VMO, 1.2.22.641-42). For other reprimands for self-mortification, see: VBN, 1.4.26.30-32; VJC, 1.1.4.445.
episodes from her *vita* are reproduced by a variety of Dominican authors, including Etienne of Bourbon, Humbert of Romans, and Jean Gobi Junior (d. 1350). All of these works were targeted at a wide audience, indicated by references in prologues. Marie's appearance in these texts significantly increased her sphere of renown, and shored up her pre-existing identity. Simultaneously, the power of the *exemplum* lies in Marie's widely acknowledged status as a pious holy woman.

Ken Pavés was instrumental in fabricating Jessica Simpson's celebrity identity. That earns him a spot onscreen in *The Price of Beauty*. Likewise, Jacques of Vitry routinely crops up as Marie of Oignies' co-star in *exempla* anthologies. For example, Marie is the subject of ten *exempla* in Arnold of Liège's popular encyclopedic collection, the *Alphabetum narrationum* (composed 1308-1310). Jacques' name (‘Iacobus de Vitriaco’) features in the opening to all of these vignettes. This serves to flag Arnold’s source material. But, it also means that in a very literal sense we encounter Marie through Jacques. The hagiographer's primary position undercuts Marie's leading lady role.

**Margery Kempe's Fanfictions**

Jacques intended for Marie's *vita* to be a model for religious lay women, but how did this function in actuality? The *Book of Margery Kempe*, composed in the 1430s, offers some answers. In the *Book*, Marie – and specifically her pious tears – is invoked as a blueprint, or legitimizing antecedent, to Margery's near perpetual weeping, which irritates and incenses those around her. In this way, Margery attempts to co-opt Marie's established celebrity in order to offer proof of her own extraordinary holiness, and thus sanction her own celebrification.

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89 Etienne of Bourbon: *TPP*, ex. 174, 1.5.175.1037-47; ex. 175, 1.5.175.1047-55, 175; *TPT*, ex. 1028, 3.4.118-19.792-807; ex. 1072, 3.5.190-91.313-17; ex. 1083, 3.5.195-434-37; ex. 1094, 3.5.201.574-76; ex. 1137, 3.6.228.456-63; ex. 1218, 3.7.290-91.774-803; ex. 1283, 3.7.347.2270-09; ex. 1313, 3.7.374-77.2943-3033. Humbert of Romans: Boyer (ed.), ex. 124, 5.91.162-66; ex. 144, 5.100.377-81. Jean Gobi: *de Beaulieu* (ed.), ex. 88, p. 202; ex. 945, pp. 617-18 (implicit). Jacques also used his *vita* as a source for *exempla* material in later works: Hinnebusch (ed.), *Historia occidentalis*, 38.207; drawing from *VMO*, 2.12.105.664.

90 Berlioz and Beaulieu, pp. 283-84. See, for example, *TPP*, prol., 3-4.1-40; specifically ll. 6, 21 on p.3.

The *Book of Margery Kempe* is typically categorized as ‘the first autobiography in English’. However, the *Book* is above all a literary work, not a straight-forward retelling of historical ‘fact’, however personal it may seem. In this respect, the *Book* is a typical work of hagiography. Furthermore, the text’s status as ‘autobiography’ is ambiguous at best. For example, the *Book* is almost exclusively in the third-person: Margery is most often referred to as the creature (‘creatur’). Additionally, two scribe-amanuenses are identified in the text, who work on the contents in two distinct tranches. Though these men are not explicitly named in the *Book*, a variety of circumstantial evidence leads to the prevailing scholarly assumption that Margery’s son initially took on the role, which was later fulfilled by her confessor Robert Spryngolde. The division of authorial labour entailed in the *Book’s* production is simply not clear. Critics have engaged with this instability in different ways. Ruth Evans, for instance, troubles the belief in any single identifiable author. Katherine J. Lewis considers the text a ‘cooperative production’ between clerical scribes and a woman whose narrative may not be wholly accurate. By contrast, A.C. Spearing argues that Margery’s second scribe was clearly the chief authorial force, and as such the *Book* could more accurately be called ‘The Book of Robert Spryngolde, about Margery Kempe’. Barry Windeatt raises the possibility that the figure of a male (co-)writer is deployed as a protective trope in order to cloak a female authorial voice and thus avoid censure. Similarly, the character of ‘Margery’ could potentially be a complete fiction constructed by ‘Kempe’, a female writer who need not necessarily be a holy woman. Lynn Staley systematically enacts a functional delineation between ‘Margery, the subject, and Kempe, her author’. I favour Staley’s schematic, and follow her usage in all discussions below.

We know little of Margery’s life apart from the *Book’s* contents, which recounts both the steps the woman undertook to become an individual of

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93 On this, see in particular: Voaden, pp. 112-15.
94 For the sole usage of the first person, see: *MKB*, 2.10.660-800.230-34.
95 Ibid., proem. 113-129. For Margery’s collaboration with the scribe, see: ibid., proem. 98-99.20, 1.89.5207-46.205-06.
96 For reference to Spryngolde as Margery’s confessor, see: ibid., 1.26.1392.69; 1.57.3285-86.137. On the identification of the two scribes, see in particular: Sobecki; Spearing, pp. 92-93; Windeatt, ‘Introduction’, in *Annotated Edition*, pp. 5-8.
98 P. 195, n. 3.
99 ‘Margery Kempe’, p. 93.
101 *Fictions*, p. 3. On this, see also: p. 1-38.
superior spirituality and her role as a mouthpiece for God (and other divine figures) with whom she conversed in visions. Margery was born c. 1373 in Bishop's Lynn (now Kings' Lynn) in Norfolk to an eminent burgess father. She married the burgess John Kempe in c. 1393, and went on to have fourteen children. Margery outlived John, who died c. 1431, by at least seven years. In mystical visions, she witnessed the births of the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and Christ, amongst other notable biblical moments. She travelled widely across England and beyond, including undertaking divinely ordained pilgrimages to Rome, Santiago, and Jerusalem. Contemporary responses to Margery were mixed, to put it mildly. On her journeys, for example, she was arrested as a heretic in Leicester and in Hessle, and was ordered from the diocese of Cawood by the Archbishop of York. As Antony Goodman diplomatically summarizes: 'some regard[ed] her as a genuine mystic, others as a public nuisance, a charlatan, or diabolically possessed.'

The Book's usage of Marie provides 'concrete evidence' of the Liégeoise's religious celebrity. The holy woman was acknowledged as an apposite example for lay religious women across Europe in the later medieval period. Several English-based manuscripts testify to the dissemination of Marie's hagiography in England in the medieval period from as early as the thirteenth century. Marie's hagiography was translated into Middle English, a version left to us in only one manuscript, produced c. 1450. In addition, Roger Ellis suggests that Marie's tale could have reached an English audience via excerpts from Vincent of Beauvais' Speculum historiale and the exempla contained in Arnold of Liège's Alphabetum narrationum. Kempe's account of reading Marie of Oignies' tale, then, could be truthful. Moreover, Kempe's reference to Marie of Oignies is not entirely spurious. Several key elements of Margery's life mirror Marie's. For example, both were married and persuaded their spouses to shift to a chaste union. Scholars such as Carolyne Larrington and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa have demonstrated that

102 P. 222.
105 Seint Mary of Oegines, Oxford, BodL, MS Douce 114, fols. 26v-76r. For the critical edition, see: VMOME.
106 Ellis, 'Scribe', p. 169-70.
107 On this, see: Windeatt, 'Introduction', in MKBEng, pp. 19-20.
Margery’s spirituality was almost certainly shaped by Marie’s example, including the format of the Presentation scene beheld in a vision, and her belief in the medicinal power of the Eucharist.108 Nevertheless, the Book foregrounds one parallel between Marie and Margery above all else: their predisposition to compulsive crying. Whilst Margery’s tears are deeply irritating to those around her, Marie’s outbursts are widely accepted as legitimate, albeit intense, episodes of devotional expression. Indeed, in the Alphabetum narrationum, the entire entry for ‘tears’ (‘lacrima’) is devoted to Marie of Oignies and her morally upright lachrymosity.109 In the fifteenth century, Arnold’s work was translated into English as An Alphabet of Tales, and achieved even wider dissemination.110 Association with Marie’s pious crying legitimizes Margery’s tears, showing a worthy precedent for the phenomenon. The affirmative response of those around the tearful Marie is evoked to offer a model of acceptance – and respect – for Margery’s weeping.

Kempe introduces the parallel between Margery and Marie as follows:

And yet our Lord drew [the scribe] back in a short time – blessed may he be – so that he loved [Margery] more, and trusted more in her weeping and her crying than he ever did before. For afterwards he read of a woman called Mary of Oignies, […] and of the plenteous tears that she wept, which made her feel so feeble and so weak that she might not endure to behold the cross, nor hear our Lord’s Passion rehearsed, so she was resolved into tears of pity and compassion.111

Marie’s example, summed up faithfully here, is clearly filtered by her vita. We read of how the scribe read Marie’s vita to come to greater understanding of the pious nature of Margery’s crying. A formerly good friar is assailing Margery from the pulpit, and turning much of the community against her. The scribe too is swayed, until God intervenes and inspires him to read Marie’s vita. Now, he loves Margery more than ever and interprets her

108 Larrington; Yoshikawa, ‘Mysticism’.
109 Ex. 435-36, pp. 246-47.
110 For the exempla featuring Marie, see: Banks (ed.), II, ex. 427, p. 293; ex. 429, p. 294.
111 MKBEng, 1.62.191-92. ‘And yet owr Lord drow [the scribe] agen in short time, blissed mote he ben, that he lovyd [Margery] mor and trustyd mor to hir wepyng and hir crying than evyr he dede beforn, for aftyrward he red of a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines, […] and of the plentyuows teerys that sche wept, which made hir so febyl and so weke that sche might not endur to beheldyn the crosse, ne heryn owr Lordys Passyon rehersyd, so sche was resolvyd into terys of pyté and compassyon.’ MKB, 1.62.3610-15.149.
tears as signs of unimpeachable piety. Depicting the shift from negative to positive interpretation of Margery’s sobbing occurring in someone so close to the woman herself, surely highly invested in her tale, allows for an audience’s initial unfavourable reaction to the woman. Such a reaction, with the right education, can be changed.

Kempe, then, implicitly proffers the model of the cleric-scribe’s conversion for the various individuals who are swayed by clerical invective against Margery, and for those who just can’t stand her tears – basically everyone. Even clerics can change their mind about the holy woman, if they re-contextualize her tears in light of the proper sources. For example, sometime after Kempe’s references to Marie of Oignies, a Dominican doctor Maistyr Custawns (presumably Thomas Constance) recapitulates the narrative of Marie’s devotion condensed by Kempe when talking to Margery herself. The doctor’s exposure to Marie’s vita has sculpted his comprehension of Margery’s pesky crying jags, of which he now approves. The scribe’s earlier positive re-interpretation of Margery’s tears is given more weight, as it is a replicable conversion. He is not ‘reading too much’ into Marie of Oignies’ biography; it really does support Margery’s own piety.

After his exposure to Marie’s vita, Master Constance also seeks to spread a positive, or at least less hostile, reaction to Margery. The doctor asks another preacher to bear with Margery’s crying fits in church, which he is shown to allow himself. Constance’s anonymous colleague is persuaded to view Margery’s tears more positively. He now tolerates her tearful outbursts during his sermon in church, and even promises the holy woman a warm welcome if she ever visits Norwich. The anonymous doctor’s experience offers an example of mediated contact with Marie of Oignies’ vita which broadly mirrors the situation faced by the reader of Margery’s Book. He serves a useful extra-diegetic model for a potentially doubting audience. Nevertheless, the reader is encouraged to seek out the vita for themselves in a marginal annotation from the early sixteenth century on the only extant manuscript of the work. The Book notes that the scribe ‘read of’ (‘red of’) Marie of Oignies, but does not provide a source. However, the commentator appends a bibliographical clarification: ‘Maria de oegines [!] liber’. The reader is invited to seek out Marie’s vita, and thereby undergo the shift in attitude modelled by the scribe and Constance.

112 MKB, 1.68.3925-50.160-61.
113 London, BL, MS Add. 61823.
114 MKBEng, 1.62.191, MKB, 1.62.3610.149.
The scope for manipulating reactions to Margery based on Marie’s example is fairly bleak, however. Near the end of the chapter in which the scribe reads Marie’s *vita* and comes to believe in the piety of Margery’s weeping, the text relays that many others embrace Margery as a spiritual woman. Yet, this affirmative conversion is not brought about by reference to the exemplary Marie. Instead, time to get used to Margery and her weirdness softens the initial harsh responses to her and her particular brand of religiosity, at least in some quarters (‘be processe of tyme’). Provision of a positive model for Margery’s tears is simply not enough to convince a large swathe of Margery’s community that she is pious. Countless detractors, including the antagonistic friar, continue to slander her.

Henry Jenkins writes extensively about fans as ‘active producers and manipulators of meanings’ from the texts and objects that they venerate. In Jenkins’ words, fans are ‘textual poachers’, engaged readers ‘who appropriate popular texts and reread them’ – and re-write them – to serve their own interests. In various online communities, writer-fans populate their own stories with the imagined exploits of characters from their favourite narrative universes, re-working storylines to suit their needs. In ‘slash fiction’, for example, writers forge new sexual liaisons between characters, most often between two men not identified as gay in the source work. The form of interventionist practice which characterizes fanfiction is mirrored in Kempe’s treatment of Marie of Oignies. After offering the generally faithful – if very brief – overview of Marie’s spirituality discussed above, Kempe subtly re-writes an episode from Marie’s life to make it provide a closer parallel to one of Margery’s own tear-stained experiences.

In a nutshell, according to Kempe: Marie is ordered out of church by a priest troubled by her continual weeping, which she is unable to curtail. God visits the priest, infusing him with grace upon reading the Holy Gospel so that he weeps so copiously he drenches his robes and the altar. The priest cannot stop the tears of his own volition, and gains understanding of Marie’s sobs as an uncontrollable mode of spiritual expression. However, Kempe’s

116 *MKB*, 1.62.3646.150.
118 See, for example, the case study of Harry Potter fanfiction in: A. K. Allen.
119 On slash fiction, see in particular: Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins; Jenkins, *Textual Poaching*, pp. 185-222.
120 Perk discusses Kempe’s book as fanfiction, though does not refer to Marie of Oignies.
121 *MKB*, 1.62.3621-25.149.
version of the scene omits a telling detail. In both the Middle English and Latin versions of Marie’s *vita*, Marie petitions Christ directly to grant the derisive priest tears (‘gate graunt of oure Lord with terys’; ‘impetravitque à Domino cum lacrymis’). This request has been suppressed in Kempe’s retelling. The *Book’s* adaptation also states that Marie leaves the church due to the priest’s demand (‘at the request of a preyste’), caterwauling about her inability to hold back her tears. In the source materials, the priest only asks Marie to cease crying and pray quietly (‘bade that she shulde praye softely and latte be hir weyping’; ‘ut oraret cum silentio, & lacrymas cohiberet’). It is Marie’s inability to hold back her tears and intense humility that drives her from the church of her own accord.

The discrepancy between the texts results from the exigent circumstances in Margery’s life that prompted Kempe’s reference to Marie of Oignies to begin with. The friar who rails against Margery, described in the *Book’s* preceding chapter, is particularly bothered by her presence in church. Margery keens and writhes during his sermons, thereby disturbing the congregation. The friar’s distaste for her shenanigans results in her banning from the church whenever he preaches. Rewriting Marie’s text to fit the circumstances of Margery’s life functions as a form of wish-fulfilling fanfiction. In the imagined version of events, Margery is not banned from the friar’s church, but instead he is gloriously converted. By affirming that this happened in the life of Marie, Margery’s parallel, Kempe suggests that this may yet happen for Margery too. With a little textual Photoshopping, the ‘star image’ can depict anything the fan desires.

**Keeping Up With Kempe**

Kim Kardashian West’s ‘ugly crying face’ is a viral online sensation. In 2008, Kourtney Kardashian, Kim’s sister, drew attention to Kim’s unfortunate mien when upset. In a ‘confessional’ from *Keeping Up With the Kardashians (KUWtK)*, the family’s massively popular reality-TV show, Kourtney declared: ‘I start laughing at Kim when she’s crying because I just

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122 *VMOME*, 1.5.152-53.93; *VMO*, 1.1.17.640.
123 *MKB*, 1.62.3618-21.149.
124 *VMOME*, 1.5.148-49.93; *VMO*, 1.1.17.640.
125 Although still known as ‘Kim Kardashian’ by many, the star rebranded herself across all media outlets in 2014 as ‘Kardashian West’ following her marriage to rapper Kanye West. As such, I refer to her as ‘Kardashian West’ throughout. On celebrity and ‘ugly crying’, see: Cote.
can't help it, she has this ugly crying face that she makes’.126 This footage, coupled with Kim’s regular emotional outbursts, has become a well-known and much-circulated meme online. Margery is the Ur-example of ‘ugly crying’, and her Book is the fifteenth-century equivalent of must-see car-crash reality TV. Almost everyone finds Margery’s crying obnoxious.127 Even the woman’s closest relations cannot stand her incessant wails. During one of Margery’s whine-athons in Canterbury, her husband pretends not to know her, and runs off.128 He abandons Margery to the clutches of an angry mob that has formed around the urgent social issue of putting a stop to Margery’s interminable wailing – or as the Book tells it, her suspected Lollardy.

In Sharon L. Jansen’s summation, Margery is ‘garrulous, attention-seeking, and funny, both repellent and endearing.”129 The same can be said of Kardashian West. And for both women, ‘ugly crying’ operates as a metonym for the variety of ways in which they are ‘always making a spectacle’ of themselves.130 Indeed, in direct response to Margery’s crying jag in Canterbury, an elderly monk informs her bluntly: “I wish that you were enclosed in a house of stone, so that no-one should speak with you.”131 Margery’s tears are a means of affectively ‘taking up space’, a sinful colonization of the public realm by a woman. Similar condemnation is evident in many of the comments appended to a YouTube video, Kim Kardashian’s Best Ugly Crying Moments, which has netted over a million views as of April 2017:

she is such a disgrace for women.. shame on her.. so pathetic

Shes a massive DRAMA QUEEN AND SHE NEEDS TO GET OVER IT STUPID WOMAN

I can’t believe I live in a world where this woman exists... God damnit[,]132

126 ‘Kardashian Family Vacation’ (S02E08, first aired 4 May 2008). On the links between reality-TV tears and medieval crying as confessional expressions of contrition, see: Weisl.
127 See, for example: MKB, 1.13.620-23.40.
128 Ibid., 1.13.623-73.41-42.
129 N.p.
130 Ibid.
131 MKBEng, 1.13.63. “I wold thow wer closyd in an hows of ston that ther schuld no man speke wyth the.” MKB, 1.13.629-30.41.
132 Comments by YouTube users ‘stiLLa himself’, ‘MUSIC IS MA LIFE!’, and ‘Frank Conrad’ respectively. As of 8 April 2017 (11pm), the video had been viewed 1,078,567 times.
Other commenters seize upon Kardashian West’s illegitimacy as a ‘worthy’ celebrity. She is categorised as an ‘attention whore’, a fame-hungry ‘train wreck’ that should simply not be famous. Margery Kempe is trolled similarly in online comments from modern readers outside the academy. Kardashian West and Margery’s stardom is in question because it emanates from a process of auto-celebrification. They are ‘reality-TV famous’ rather than the products of the traditional celebrity manufacturing process.

Reality-stars are famous because they have been on reality TV, not for any special talent. Initially, reality-TV producers operate as ‘star-makers’, choosing which lucky hopeful is cast in their shows and making tactical editorial decisions to present desired storylines. Their source material, however, is the brute force of persona, an individual who has consciously chosen to put themselves up as a ‘star image’ for audience consumption. Reality-stars typically engage in conscious attempts at auto-celebritization beyond the show which first brought them to public attention. They package and manage themselves as star-objects by appearances in other texts over which they have more control. Presence on social media, in celebrity magazines, and in the tabloid press are mainstays in the reality-star’s toolkit. The reality-TV star harnesses the praxes of celebrification established in the traditional system, but under their own steam. ‘Fake it till you make it’ goes the saying, and that is surely the mantra of the reality-TV celeb. By performing the gestures of ‘legitimate’ fame often enough, to enough onlookers, and with enough skill, the wannabe becomes famous too. In a similar manner, Margery requires models of other acclaimed holy women to legitimize her own forms of piety, both within the diegesis (Margery and her community) and extra-textually (as the author seeks acclaim for the text’s protagonist).

The Book details Margery’s determined attempts to garner spiritual fame by modelling herself on other holy women. She is a fame-hungry fan, a wannabe desperate to transform herself into a celebrity saint in her own right. Though Margery grinds out her days on the D-list, she looks fannishly to a roster of A-list female saintly stars, including Marie of Oignies, in whose image she fabricates herself, or tries to. Kempe relies on a patchwork of citation, borrowing from various spiritual texts to construct a viable – read: ecclesiastically and socially acceptable – holy life for Margery. Like Margery, Kardashian West needed a guide in the celebritification process.

133 Quotes from comments by ‘Frank Beltra’ and ‘John Roberts’.
134 Bale, p. 16.
135 On this, see in particular: Atkinson, ‘Sanctity’, pp. 226-33; Lewis; Staley, Fictions, pp. 171-200; Yoshikawa, Meditations, pp. 94-104.
She credits socialite-cum-minor-celebrity Paris Hilton as a mentor: “I do think I learned a lot from Paris. I think that she has always been so gracious to the paparazzi, to her fans, and has taught me, you know, that there’s no real need or reason to never not be.” For a number of years, Hilton employed Kardashian West, a then non-famous childhood friend, as a personal assistant and stylist in her own C-list celebrity life. Kardashian West’s earliest onscreen appearances are in episodes of The Simple Life, the reality-TV show that launched Hilton as a star. Whilst the pair were friends, footage shows Hilton exploiting the power differential between them, effectively putting Kardashian West in her place. This entry-level position in The Simple Life was productive, however. It functioned as an internship in the twinned businesses of reality-TV and auto-celebrification.

Kardashian West’s own reality-TV show, KUWtK, launched in 2007. It instantly elevated her celebrity, and transformed the whole family into a celebrity brand. As of 2017, KUWtK is still going strong in its thirteenth season, with various spin-off Kardashian-focused shows and cross-marketed merchandise. Audiences worldwide can’t seem to get enough of Kardashian West and her family. Hilton is irrelevant; Kardashian West is omni-present in the media landscape. In the Book, Christ implies that Margery will achieve a similar usurpation of her role-model, St. Birgitta. He speaks to the English woman “just as [he] spoke” (“rygth as [he] spak”) to her mentor, suggesting an equivalence between the pair. However, he blesses Margery alone with certain visions, assuring her that the Swedish saint “never saw [him] in this way” (“say [him] nevyr in this wyse”). Nevertheless, Birgitta has nothing to fear from Margery: she does not attain anything like the Swedish saint’s fame in her time.

Chris Rojek attests that “[c]elebrities offer powerful affirmations of belonging, recognition, and meaning in the midst of the lives of their audiences, lives that may otherwise be poignantly experienced as under-performing anti-climactic or sub-clinically depressing.” Margery’s pre-mystic life

136 Pomarico, n.p. See also: Kardashian, Kardashian, and Kardashian, Confidential, p. 100.
137 Kardashian West insists that she was not, in fact, Hilton’s stylist, but the socialite was a client of her eBay-selling and closet-organizing business: Kardashian West and Swisher, ‘Interview’.
139 See, for example: Kourtney & Kim Take Miami; Kourtney & Kim Take New York.
140 MKBEng, 1.20.83; MKB, 1.20.1089.58.
141 MKBEng, 1.20.83; MKB, 1.20.1085-86.58.
142 Celebrity, p. 52.
was certainly no bed of roses. Indeed, the Book opens with an account of Margery’s first pregnancy, a devastating experience which leads to an eight-month mental breakdown.\textsuperscript{143} During this period, Margery is beset by demons and diabolical temptations. When all consider her a lost cause, a visitation from Christ – the most potent religious celebrity of all – finally jump-starts her recovery. God has not forsaken her; if Margery devotes herself to Him fully, then all will be well. But how can Margery accomplish this mission, practically speaking? The numerous acclaimed holy women found in the Book function as role-models. These saintly celebs – or the models of faith they embody – offer the much maligned Margery a roadmap to full integration in her society, and ultimately to the recognition of her own sanctity. Margery is an attention-seeking acolyte, a superfan, whose greatest desire is not to be like a saint, but become one herself.

Margery’s breakdown is provoked by her inability to confess a significant long-concealed sin.\textsuperscript{144} Thinking she is on the brink of death post-partum, the woman calls for a confessor. The cleric, though, rushes to rebuke Margery, cutting her off mid-flow and thus silencing her. Her transgression remains unshriven, and she fears for her eternal damnation. Diana Jefferies and Debbie Horsfall contend that Margery’s sin is not based in any specific act.\textsuperscript{145} Rather, after her traumatic pregnancy she comes to renewed awareness of the original sin that afflicts all humanity, and her status as a ‘daughter of Eve’. In Genesis 3.16, God instructs Eve on the gendered burden of sin she bears: ‘In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband’s power, and he shall have dominion over thee.’\textsuperscript{146} Margery’s labour pains are visceral reminders of her transition from virgin to wife, and all that entails: the loss of both her bodily autonomy and subjective agency.\textsuperscript{147} Recognition of these losses propels the holy woman into insanity. In order to move beyond this annihilating relegation to bodiliness and reclaim her sanity, Margery must produce an alternate self-image. She turns to saintly mentors who seem to have redeemed, at least partially, the sinful female body via their religious praxes.

Kim Kardashian West’s auto-celebritization is also rooted in a reclamation of subjectivity in the aftermath of trauma. In February 2007, she faced

\textsuperscript{143} MKB, 1.1.130-87, 21-23.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 1.1.142-50, 22. This episode is often interpreted as post-partum psychosis or mental illness within a modern framework. See in particular: Craun; Freeman, Bogarad, and Sholomska; Jefferies and Horsfall, pp. 350-52; Torn.
\textsuperscript{145} P. 353.
\textsuperscript{146} Douay-Rheims Bible.
\textsuperscript{147} McAvoy, pp. 36-37.
public humiliation after the leak of a sex-tape, made with the singer Ray J a few years earlier, when the pair were a couple. At this point, Kardashian West was mostly unknown, of interest primarily for her party-going with Paris Hilton and brief romance with boyband star Nick Lachey in 2006. The sex-tape, then, was the primary ‘star image’ with which the public interpreted Kardashian West. It materialized her celebrity, or rather notoriety, as a sexual object: a body without a voice, and without a story. Hilton faced the same issue, with her own sex-tape leaking less than a month before the debut of The Simple Life. The tape was certainly a media sensation. However, Hilton used her reality-TV series to offer a counter-narrative, crafting herself as the archetype of the rich dumb blonde. Once more, Kardashian West followed, and refined, Hilton’s example. Five months after the release of her sex-tape, KUWtK hit the air. In the show, Kardashian West comes across as likeable and family-oriented, in diametric opposition to the spoiled and entitled brattiness embodied by Hilton. Crucially, KUWtK allowed Kardashian West to exercise control over the narrative circulating in the sex-tape. The woman having sex in the video is not just a body. She is a woman with a real life, with a real family, and with real emotions. Kempe’s portrayal of Margery hits the same notes: she is not just body, but soul too.

In 2015, Kardashian West published the best-selling Selfish, a 448-page monograph composed of selfies taken in the period from 2006 to 2014. The title of the work is telling. The word ‘selfie’ typically auto-corrects to ‘selfish’ when typed on a smartphone or similar device. And ‘selfish’ is a rather more polite version of the kind of epithets routinely hurled at Kardashian West due to the way she consistently puts herself in the spotlight, oftentimes through the medium of selfies. By naming her book Selfish, then, Kardashian West acknowledges, at least implicitly, this context to her fame. So doing, she neutralizes the barb’s sting. She works with the ‘auto-corrected’ attitude that equates her stardom with vapidity and vanity, in order to offer a counter-narrative in the book itself. Selfish encourages you to consider Kardashian West with empathy, as a woman with a real life, made up of a series of ‘self-ies’, i.e. different facets of one’s persona that shift according to a given context and for which we shape our appearance. This underscores the fragmented, performative aspect of all social activity, as we shape-shift like chameleons into our various roles: mother, wife, business woman, celebrity.

A series of nude and semi-nude photographs feature in Selfish. These risqué images first came to public attention in August 2014, when they were leaked online in the so-called ‘iCloud hack’, along with similar images of
other female celebrities. Kardashian West comments that she had not considered including the nude selfies in *Selfish* until she saw them posted online after the hack. She dismisses any potential stigma attached to the photographs, laconically remarking that she is not ‘mad at [the hackers]. lol’. By including the nude selfies in *Selfish*, Kardashian West re-inserts them into the fabric of her life. So doing, she re-asserts her subjective agency: the person in the non-consensually shared photographs is not just an object for sexual titillation, but a real person with a real life. What’s more, Kardashian West has effectively de-sensationalized her non-consensual nudity, by freely posting nude or semi-nude pictures on her social media channels. In a 2016 interview, she reports that she is ‘baffled’ by the public’s continued shocked (and admiring) response to nude photographs. After all: ‘They’ve seen me naked 500 times!’ The stolen images are less titillating, and thus stimulate less spectatorial interest as they are not secret or hidden artefacts. It turns out that the thieves didn’t really steal anything so personal after all; Kardashian West would have shared, if only they had asked.

As with Margery’s *Book*, *Selfish* makes visible the celebrity manufacturing process. Megan Garber notes that in reading the book, ‘you see the work that goes into making Kim Kardashian, the person, into Kim Kardashian, the icon.’ Countless selfies capture Kardashian West mid-beautification: in the make-up artist’s chair, or with her hair in rollers. She reveals the dissonance between celebrity ‘reality’ and her normal existence. Kardashian West might walk the Oscars red-carpet as a paragon of glamour, but when she returns home, the gown comes off and comfy sweats rule. Readers witness their icon testing photographic filters, and the myriad photographs she takes in order to produce that one ‘perfect’ selfie, or secure that iconic magazine shoot. The painstaking effort of maintaining a feminine persona, celebrity or otherwise, is revealed. All that labour pays off, though. In 2014, Kardashian West was the second most Googled person worldwide. In 2015, she was the most Googled person in twenty-six countries. With the hotly contested 2016 election cycle in the USA, she ceded the top spot in global searches to Donald Trump. A consolation prize: she earnt the crown for the year’s most

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149 Ibid., p. 282.
151 N.p.
152 Ibid., pp. 253. See also the ‘before’ and ‘after’ selfies: ibid., pp. 228-31.
153 Ibid., pp. 216-17, 354-55, 246-47 respectively.
154 Google Trends.
155 McCluskey.
Googled selfie in the USA. The transformation is complete: Kardashian West is a wannabe no more. Why does she succeed, whilst Margery fails?

Christ intimates to Margery four times that she will be the object of a posthumous cult in the Book. These promises are ultimately empty. There is no evidence of a cult in Margery’s memory. Regardless of Marie’s example, Margery’s tears could not be assimilated into a successful saintly identity, in the Catholic context at least. The Church of England commemorates Margery in its Calendar of saints on the 9 November, in a relatively recent addition to their liturgy. Margery’s inclusion here, though, is almost a back-handed compliment. A ‘commemoration’ is the lowest form of veneration available for inclusion in the Calendar: a kind of ‘participation trophy’ for the holy woman who – bless her heart – tried so hard, but didn’t actually produce the goods. In 2009, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA also provisionally approved the liturgical commemoration of Richard Rolle (d. 1349), Walter Hilton (d. 1396), and Margery Kempe on 28 September. Even here, Margery finishes last. She is quite literally the hanger-on after the two illustrious male mystics in all official written material about the commemorative day circulated by the Church.

Instead of any significant medieval renown, evidence of a sizeable fan-base for Margery is instead found in modern academic scholarship, particularly in feminist critique from the 1980s onwards. In 1998, Margery earnt an entry into the connotatively titled Who’s Who in Christianity anthology, a veritable star-chart of religious celebs. The last line of Margery’s entry concisely captures the shift in the holy woman’s fortunes: ‘In recent years she has become something of a feminist heroine.’ Margery’s Book is so compelling because our wailing heroine fails at – or more charitably ‘struggles with’ – her objective of securing sanctity. In a personal blogpost, Clarissa W. Atkinson reflects on Margery’s impact in her professional life as a medievalist. Atkinson was on the vanguard of academic feminism, undertaking postgraduate study at a time when women were practically absent from the medievalist canon. With Margery, she finally found ‘a recognizable (and annoying) human being’. Academic interest in Margery is founded on Margery’s relatability: she is a woman scrambling to find

156 Johnson and McCluskey; Lang.
158 Church Pension Fund, p. 611.
159 On this, see in particular: Tolhurst.
161 ‘40 Years’, n.p.
her place in a male-dominated world, balancing the competing demands of family, community, and personal passions.

Margery is not (academically) famous because she is (or was) recognised as a saint, a perfected image of (holy) womanhood. Rather, she is a celebrity, at least in medievalist circles, for the messiness of her persistent bids for (holy) fame. Margery has become famous for wanting to be famous. Jeffrey Sconce affirms that Paris Hilton’s ‘reality TV-level’ fame depends on her consistent (and perhaps even knowing) failure at doing something truly celebrity-worthy: ‘her entire persona depends on her signature inability to do or contribute anything productive, making her fame the most pure and tasteful of all.’

Similarly, Margery’s incapacity to perform holiness ‘productively’ underpins her enduring presence in the academic media-scape. The mystic’s failure, however, exposes the reality of the hagiographic star-system, the constructed-ness of accepted saintly identities. Katherine J. Lewis suggests that the *Book* was ‘intended to plug a perceived gap in female English sanctity by providing a saint who was Katherine, Bridget, Mary Magdalene and others all rolled into one – thus providing something for everyone.’ Margery (or Kempe’s) suturing together of numerous female saintly identities is a conscious hagiographical move to create a female English ‘multi-saint’. In other words, she is a try-hard, and trying too hard too obviously is the antithesis of celebrity cool. Margery’s behaviours may not be ‘tasteful’, to quote Sconce, but they demonstrate in perhaps the ‘purest’ form the ways in which saints are artificial objects, cob-blended together from various narratives and for various ideological motives.

As a ‘wannabe’, then, Margery shows us how the ‘real’ stars are made.

The genius of Kardashian West, and to a much more limited extent Simpson, is that she reveals the inequity and artificiality of the celebritification process, and leverages this revelation to support her celebrity trajectory. Kardashian West and Simpson are the hyperreal of womanhood. They exist as mediatized images which reveal the logical end-point of the patriarchally enforced pressure that society places on all women to look and act in certain ways. Simpson’s confessional reality-TV show, *Price of Beauty*, lifts the lid on beauty standards worldwide, but equally throws off refracted light to reveal the extreme measures Simpson must routinely take to be on TV, to be a woman in Hollywood and the chart-topping music biz. Kardashian West turns to social media and selfies to chronicle her own navigation of the socio-cultural demands placed on female appearance and comportment.

162 P. 336.
163 P. 215.
164 Sconce, p. 336.
That she may enjoy dressing up or being photographed is not important here, no matter how the tabloids might frame it. What matters is that she consciously shows you the ‘before’ and ‘after’, how celebrity is manufactured. More crucially, this revelation emphasizes the constructed-ness of the image of socially ‘legitimate’ cis-heterosexual Western womanhood itself. Even before she snapped her first selfie, or appeared on any TV, Kardashian West was always already imprisoned in this panoptical woman-ification system, as are all women who must conform – or pay the price – to what society, at a given moment, designates as the appearance and behaviour of ‘real’ and ‘legitimate’ (read: acceptable) womanhood. She has managed to extract value from this system, to play it at its own game: she mediatizes herself, and so doing holds up a mirror – or smartphone – to the cameras of patriarchy which adorn the walls of the panopticon in which all women find ourselves.

Wendy Harding affirms that the Book stages ‘an unequal struggle for control of channels of communication’. The illiterate Margery is dependent on oral expression to render her life into narrative. In order to preserve her life story, Margery must give her spoken words, and thus her narrative agency, to an individual who can process her oral account into text: the cleric Kempe. The mystic ‘cannot write her own script’. Writing permits the elision of Margery’s body (subjectivity), as text conveys meaning ‘without the necessity of bodily contact’. Moreover, in the epistemological hierarchy of the late Middle Ages, textuality is the most authoritative communicative format. Margery’s vocalizations are simply less significant than Kempe’s interpretation of them, and can never be fully represented in text in any case. The holy woman depends entirely on her textual producer to purvey her ‘star image’. In comparison, Kim Kardashian West is in almost complete control of her own celebrity narrative. Reality-TV producers might have first brought her into the public eye, but they no longer run the show. Paris Hilton’s ever-waning fame may, to return to Sconce’s critique, rest upon her ‘signature inability to do or contribute anything productive’. Kardashian West, by contrast, is a digital entrepreneur, whose celebrity springs directly from her industrious and innovative media interventions.

165 P. 170.
166 Ibid., p. 174.
167 Bynum, Fragmentation, p. 41.
168 Harding, p. 172.
169 P. 336.
Kardashian West has harnessed the power of social media to disrupt the traditional model of ‘top-down’ celebrity production, in which the star-object is controlled by her producer-creator.\(^{170}\) She assiduously manages her multiple social media profiles. As of April 2017, the star has over 177 million followers across her Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts.\(^{171}\) These social media channels equate to multimedia networks which are completely under Kardashian West’s control. In posts shared directly with her followers, Kardashian West carefully sculpts the particular image of celebrity she wishes to portray. She frequently anticipates content in her reality-TV show, releasing news on her social media channels to control the story, and uses her multiple platforms to refute celebrity gossip. In her analyses of Margery’s orality, Harding explains that oral communication ‘is not linear but interactive and global’, a means of mediation that nevertheless depends on ‘the body in its entirety.’\(^{172}\) These characteristics similarly govern social media. Indeed, social media is useful to Kardashian West for precisely these reasons. It allows her to interact with fans across the globe in an informal manner. Moreover, the star’s social media accounts allow her to foreground her subjectivity as an unavoidable part of the Kim-Kardashian-West package. She resists the reduction of her existence to body alone as a female celebrity and sex symbol. Instead, she shows followers her ‘body in its entirety’, complete with her personality, mind, and affect. This representation also serves to heighten the sense for fans that she is authentic above all, and thus supports her broader celebrity identity as a ‘real’ star.

Kardashian West subverts the textual and media hierarchy of traditional celebrity. The ‘original’ work of her fame, *KUWtK*, may be authentic, but only shows a partial view of her life. In order to get the really good stuff, the fans have to go direct to the source: Kim herself. ‘Derivative’ celebrity-texts, including her social media posts, thus usurp the authority of the ‘original’ works. For example, the autobiographical exposé *Kardashian Konfidential*, co-authored with her sisters Kourtney and Khloé, allows Kim to share ‘the real scoop’ about her life.\(^{173}\) Whilst fans might ‘know a lot about’ the clan from watching *KUWtK*, they ‘don’t know *everything*... yet!’ Kardashian West thus acknowledges, and feeds, fans’ hunger to consume ever more pieces of her life – but

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\(^{170}\) Ingram; Kardashian West and Swisher, ‘Interview’, ‘Naked Selfies’; Kirst.

\(^{171}\) As of 9 April 2017, Kardashian West had 50.8 million followers on Twitter; 97.4 million followers on Instagram; and 28.9 followers on Facebook.

\(^{172}\) P. 172.

\(^{173}\) Front dust jacket copy. For an explicit example of the book offering ‘more’, see: ibid., pp. 67-68. See also the sisters’ novel, *Dollhouse*, which is a transparent restaging of the Kardashian-fame narrative.
only on her own (textual) terms and for her own gain. She is a consummate businesswoman, extraordinarily savvy in the art of auto-celebrification.\textsuperscript{174}

Kardashian West’s auto-celebrification strategies – in particular her policy of radical self-disclosure on social media – are not without danger, however. In October 2016, she was a victim of a robbery in her Paris hotel. Armed thieves broke into her hotel room, tied her up, and made off with approximately ten million dollars’ worth of jewellery. Kardashian West believes, as do many commentators, that the thieves tracked her activities in Paris through her extensive posts to social media, as she documented her time at Paris Fashion Week.\textsuperscript{175} A sexy selfie posted on Instagram a few days before the robbery showcased a newly acquired four-million-dollar diamond ring, stolen by the thieves.\textsuperscript{176} She Snapchatted early in the evening of the day of the robbery that she was alone in her hotel suite, as her bodyguard had gone out with her sister. There is a price to using social media as a tool of self-celebrification: a loss of privacy, and concomitant loss of personal security.

After the robbery, Kardashian West took a three-month hiatus from all social media, returning to her multiple platforms only in January 2017. Beyond offering police her testimony, she kept silent on her experiences, saving her account instead for a special episode of \textit{KUWtK}.\textsuperscript{177} The ‘big reveal’ of Kardashian West’s first-person account of the robbery displayed all the hallmarks of her digital entrepreneurship. The robbery may have forced her social-media accounts to go dark for three months, but in this episode she returned fully to our screens with a bang. The \textit{KUWtK} episode functionally ‘scooped’ other broadcast media in terms of featuring Kardashian West’s first-person account of her traumatizing ordeal. Moreover, in a series of tweets shortly before the episode first aired, Kardashian West teased the show’s authentically raw emotional content. The episode was ‘going to be very tough’ for her.\textsuperscript{178} Nevertheless, it was ‘important’ to release the content, ‘to share this story through [her] eyes & not in an interview where my own words could be twisted.’\textsuperscript{179} This emphasizes the fact that other narratives circulating around the Parisian incident are not (fully) authentic. The show, then, sets the record

\textsuperscript{175} On the robbery, see in particular: Aurthur; Corinthios et al; Quinn; Seal. Kardashian West speculates on being followed on social media in an episode of \textit{KUWtK}: ‘Paris’ (S13E02, first aired 19 March 2017).
\textsuperscript{176} Kardashian West, ‘💎💎💎’, Instagram post. She also tweeted the same image: ‘💎💎💎’ tweet.
\textsuperscript{177} ‘Paris’ (S13E02, first aired 19 March 2017).
\textsuperscript{179} Kardashian West, ‘I thought it was important’; cited in Aurthur, n.p.
straight. What's more, the tweet implies that fans should not necessarily trust any Kardashian-West content not produced by the woman herself.

Graphic re-assertion of the traumatic dimension of the robbery is particularly important given the instantaneous backlash to the theft that the star faced. As soon as news broke online, cruel memes and conspiracy theories began to surface.180 ‘The robbery was just a ‘publicity stunt’ by a talentless woman who would do anything for a ratings boost. She ‘brought it on herself’ after flaunting her wealth on social media and TV for so long. As Alex Abad-Santos remarks: ‘[d]espite Kardashian living her life almost entirely in the open, many people still don't see her as a person. To her biggest critics, there’s no separation between the woman and her brand. And that allows us to forget our own humanity while calling hers into question.’185 Indeed, during the robbery itself, Kardashian West pled for her life by urging the thieves to see her as a ‘real’ person, not a celebrity brand: “Don’t kill me, I have babies, don’t kill me, please, I have babies! I’m a mom! Take whatever you want!”182 In the fight-back against the accusations of the robbery being a hoax, Kardashian West’s supporters similarly emphasized the star’s humanity, in terms of her motherhood and family relationships.183 The implicit message, however well-intentioned these remarks were: Kardashian West deserves to live because she fulfils the necessary conditions levied by the patriarchy, because she is a mother and a wife and a social (read also appropriately socialized) being. No mention is made, for instance, of the presumably scores of people dependent on Kardashian West for their livelihood: paparazzi, designers, make-up artists, her entourage. Kardashian West’s impressive generative capacity as a breadwinner – and likely source of many other families’ daily bread – is elided. It screams of too much agency, after all. Instead, she is cast as worthy of humanity as, and seemingly only as, a wife and a mother. These elements rubber-stamp her – and by extension all woman – with the designation of ‘human’. If one falls short of these oppressive ideals? Death is no longer a tragedy but the very definition of just desserts. The battle for Kardashian West’s humanity, then, demonstrates the excruciating situation women face under patriarchy more generally: not accepted as fully human until and unless we are defined in relation to our men, our child-bearing capacity, and our family of origin.

180 For examples and analyses, see in particular: Abad-Santos; Charlton; Davison; Givhan.
181 N.p.
182 As reported by the hotel concierge, identified only as ‘Abdulrahman’, in Seal, n.p.
183 Davison, n.p.
The backlash to the Paris robbery demonstrates the way in which Kardashian West’s detractors perceive her as too commodified to be a ‘real’ woman, whatever that actually means. Above all, Kim Kardashian West’s brand is dependent on her individual agency, her forward-thinking smarts and her ceaseless hustle. As a brand, then, she is a vision of the unpalatably self-actualized womanhood that the patriarchy seeks to contain. Despite supporters’ claims to her humanity, she is not viewed as a human subject, but instead a celebrity-brand, and thus unworthy of empathy and basic respect. This might suggest, then, that Kardashian West’s celebrity-brand is broadly confirmed, and thus offers her significant protection. This is not the case. The vast majority of people accept her status as a brand, a pre-packaged commodity that sells an abundance of stuff to the public. Her celebrity, essentially her recognition in the public eye, functionally underpins her viability as a brand. Yet it is this celebrity which is hotly contested. The denial of Kardashian West’s ‘specialness’ – any genuine talent from which her celebrity is, or should be, derived – is a central plank of criticisms levelled against her.

Kardashian West’s stardom is not viewed as fully ‘legitimate’ by many. In June 2015, her appearance on the National Public Radio (NPR) show, ‘Wait Wait… Don’t Tell Me!’ provoked ire in listeners.¹⁸⁴ Hundreds wrote in to complain, with many threatening to cease their NPR sponsorship in response.¹⁸⁵ A complaint from listener Brianna Frazier is indicative of the tenor of the backlash: ‘vapid, talentless, and shallow individuals who have not earned fame or fortune through an ounce of hard work have no place on a show of such caliber’. Earlier in this chapter, I remarked that the symbiotic relationship of Jacques of Vitry and Marie of Oignies rests upon their complementary deficiencies. Jacques is ‘much too human to be a saint’, whilst Marie is ‘too female’ to be a cleric.¹⁸⁶ Kardashian West is trapped in a parallel double-bind: she is ‘too ordinary’ (‘too human’) to be a legitimate celebrity, yet too commodified to be a ‘real’ human. Similarly, the ‘femaleness’ which prohibits Marie’s clerical career operates as a commodity, or commodifying mechanism(s), which governs the holy woman’s life and interactions. It is not a reflection of the genuine state of lived womanhood. Rather, it is a hollowed out and overly determined category, manufactured by the Catholic Church according to its doctrinal logic and by a medieval society which considered women to be inferior to

¹⁸⁴ Pesca et al. This is a typical reaction to Kardashian West’s appearance in ‘serious’ media. See, for example: Gannes.
¹⁸⁵ E. Jensen, n.p.
men in intellectual, emotional, and biological terms. Kardashian West has the relative luxury of being the agent of her own commodification. Marie of Oignies, on the other hand, has little recourse.

In religious terms, Kardashian West is a celebrity not via any official canonization, but instead via grass-roots lay devotion. Marie of Oignies's stardom is also a product of lay devotion. She was never officially canonized, only attaining the lower honour conferred by beatification. Nevertheless, she is recognized as legitimately holy because her mode of celebrification, Jacques' *vita*, conforms to the traditional routes of sanctification. Moreover, Jacques enacted Marie's 'local canonization' in 1226, granting an indulgence to any individual who venerated Marie's remains in a newly fabricated shrine in Oignies.¹⁸⁷ Margery Kempe and Kim Kardashian West's auto-celebritization, however, does not have 'official' backing, and is enacted via non-traditional routes which fundamentally threaten the establishment, be that the Church or broadcast media. As Margery is dismissed as heretical and annoying, Kim is classified as talentless and low-class. Despite her success, Kardashian West's auto-celebrification is only partially successful. A significant portion of the public resist her disruption of the celebrity machine. But, love her or hate her, they know who Kim Kardashian West is. 'Famous' or 'infamous', she remains in the spotlight. In much the same way, Margery Kempe is 'everywhere treated as a miracle, a scandal, a *cause célèbre*'.¹⁸⁸ She endures as an object of fascination and irritation, both in her own contemporary context and in academic scholarship alike.

**Fans in the Academy**

Writing Marie of Oignies' *vita*, Jacques of Vitry forcibly fragments the holy woman, parcelling her life out into textual vignettes which come to signify the holy woman's entire existence. This is not an entirely deleterious process, however. Marie dwells not just in the Lord's embrace, but also in the manuscript(s) which preserve her biography and resonate as textual relics. Celebrification in the medieval context entails 'manuscript-ification'. Positing himself as Marie's superfan, Jacques writes himself into existence, both within the *vita* and beyond the text by significantly developing his ecclesiastical career. And yet, this is not enough for Jacques, it seems. He is only partially materialized in Marie's manuscripts; he wants to be fully absorbed,

¹⁸⁷ Mulder-Bakker, 'Introduction', p. 10; Mannaerts, p. 247.
¹⁸⁸ Watson, 'Making', p. 396.
‘manuscriptified’ in his entirety. This desire is testified by a startling donation which Jacques made to the Oignies priory upon his death in 1240: an illustrated parchment mitre, a manuscript all of his own (see Figs. 10 and 11).\textsuperscript{189}

Though mitres were routinely stiffened with parchment for structural stability, Jacques’ is unique in its composition entirely of the material. There are no other parchment mitres of this kind in all known museum and ecclesiastical collections.\textsuperscript{190} The potential of the mitre’s material support is fully exploited: it is covered in exquisite illustration. The pictorial cycle, in combination with their support, are biographical, recounting Jacques’ episcopal trajectory and elevated spiritual status to the viewer/reader. On the front, the \textit{titulus} (bisecting vertical bands) is marked with three medallions, filled with an image of a bishop, the Virgin Mary, and Christ. The organization of the medallions, filled with an image of a bishop, the Virgin Mary, and Christ. The representation of the bishop is a proxy for its episcopal wearer, Jacques, and suggests his close proximity to God. The diagonal edges of the piece are richly covered with

\textsuperscript{189} On the mitre, see in particular: Courtoy, pp. 216-18; Folda, pp. 142-44. Jacques donated various other objects to the priory. For details, see: Courtoy, pp. 127-28, 198-225; Collet, pp. 14-15, 27-31, 34-36.
\textsuperscript{190} Courtoy, p. 216; Folda, p. 143. Cf Paper mitres in a very different context: Cohen, p. 407. In 1398, two disgraced Augustinian monks – denounced for idolatry, witchcraft, and apostasy – were crowned with paper mitres bearing their names on the procession to their execution.
the simulation of precious stones in a variety of shapes. This ornamentation creates, as Jaroslav Folda notes, ‘a sumptuous jewelled and golden episcopal object that would perhaps match, or at least reflect, the bishop’s liturgical books’. Jacques symbolizes his immense liturgical comprehension by bedecking himself in a codicological veneer.

191 P. 142.
The two bands hanging down from the back (infulae) contain decoration only on one face. Miniatures of ten male and female unidentified saints and worshippers decorate these strips. Whilst Jacques may not be able to be a saint himself, he carries numerous saints on his episcopal person, symbolically connected to and absorbing their piety. On one side of the infulae, the saints are imaged. The other side is left bare, unadorned parchment-skin that makes contact with Jacques’ body each time he wears his mitre. This contact enacts a fusion of Jacques to the saints, through the very object which symbolizes most explicitly his own religious excellence. The bottom figures of each infula carry a palm and book, representing pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These miniatures form an ‘iconographic programme’, promoting the dynamic mission of its wearer as bishop of Acre.\textsuperscript{192} With this mitre, which for all intents and purposes is an elaborately illustrated manuscript, Jacques displays his yearning to become a series of textual images himself, a spiritual star like Marie. Doffing a parchment ‘skin’, he becomes a manuscript himself, a text to be read and revered through the ages. This echoes the phenomena I analysed in the conclusion to Chapter 2, the means by which human and manuscript interact, bleeding into one another as one.

Jacques’ appreciation for text and manuscript as vehicles for genuine presence is not some peculiar phenomenon of days gone by. Rather, this is a prevailing undercurrent in fan culture, predicated more or less explicitly on a sense that the fan-object speaks to something ‘real’, of importance to fans. Moreover, fictional characters from favourite fan-objects routinely take on an aura of ‘realness’ in fan culture, even going on to develop a life of their own, whether in fan fiction or in the fan’s imagination. Academic scholarship operates somewhat similarly. Indeed, Ghislaine McDayter asserts that ‘there are few things more “material” (or more like a saint’s relic) than a literary text in the academy.’\textsuperscript{193} In our literary analyses, critics engage in an act of (re)materialization, piecing together the personality and form of those whose stories we purportedly study. In deeply engaging with the text – the immaterial literary elements of a holy woman’s life – her ‘flesh get[s] in the way’, and we end up deeply engaging with the woman herself.\textsuperscript{194}

All study of the past, as Nicholas Watson remarks, has ‘emotional designs on its object’.\textsuperscript{195} Whatever the complexion of those emotions, they inevitably impact our methodological approaches and research findings. The

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., p. 144.
\textsuperscript{193} P. 172.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 173.
\textsuperscript{195} ‘Desire’, p. 61.
academic’s ‘self-legitimating and claimed identity’ of ‘critical rationality, objectivity, and neutrality’ is ineluctably compromised.196 We might not self-identify as ‘fans’ of the objects of our scholarship, eschewing the label of ‘acafan’ (plural: ‘acafen’).197 Nevertheless, we engage in the creative intellectual practices that are the mainstay of fandom in almost every aspect of our scholarly work. ‘Acafan’ is not a derogatory label. Fans are, above all, ‘acerbic critics’ (‘critiques acerbes’) of the objects that capture their attention.198 With often surgical precision, they dissect texts to expose latent signification, and pry open textual fractures to uncover fresh interpretations. As Henry Jenkins explains, both academics and fans ‘have a passion for thinking deeply and talking often about things they love.’199 The output of such thinking and feeling, whether in the academy or in online fan communities, belongs to the ‘fanon’: ‘the many stories, ideas, images, features, etc. that fans add or revise [to a given source text], usually outside of a commercial context.’200 In this context, this book itself is explicitly fanonical.

Watson avers that Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* – one of the most influential works of feminist hagiographic scholarship to date – evinces a ‘desire’ for ‘discursive union’ with the medieval holy women who are the primary object of its scholarship.201 In this, *Holy Feast* situates itself ‘in a common tradition’ with those women’s ‘desire for union with God’, albeit implicitly. Bynum herself becomes a mystic, and the monograph becomes a work of mystical historiography-cum-theology.202 In other words, *Holy Feast* is fanonical, and its author writes from a place of ‘acafandom’. This does not undermine the quality of Bynum’s work, nor the absolute importance of her scholarship for feminist hagiographical studies. Recognition of our status as ‘acafen’ permits us to interrogate how and why we create such intimate affective bonds with the past. It also

196 Hills, ‘Media Academics’, p. 35.
197 The term ‘aca-fan’ is a shorthand for ‘academic fan’ (otherwise known as the ‘scholar-fan’). On ‘aca-fen’ and ‘aca-fandom’, see: Hills, *Fan Culture*, pp. xvii-xxxviii; ‘Media Academics’; Jenkins, *Fans*, pp. 1, 12; Jenkins and TWC Editor, para. 2.1-2.7.
199 Jenkins and TWC Editor, para. 2.7
201 ‘Desire’, p. 73. He responds directly to Biddick’s critique of Bynum’s monograph, which argued that Bynum becomes problematically conflated with the medieval holy women she studies in *Holy Feast*; Biddick, pp. 135-62 (see in particular pp. 140-41, 160-61). See also Watson’s sequel to ‘Desire’: ‘Phantasmal Past’.
enables us to consider the moment in which we write in terms of its own historicity, namely what is at stake in our academic criticism, including the structures, biases, and concerns which most influence us. Read as a work of acafandom, *Holy Feast*’s central organizational and ideological thrust comes more fully to light: an effort to ’redeem the past, with its institutions, beliefs, and stories, for feminists’.

Academics interact with holy women such as Marie of Oignies and Margery Kempe at perhaps the purest level of fandom. The relationship between scholar and text is totally parasocial. And yet, as we incessantly debate textual minutiae – in professional or personal settings, in writing or in lectures – we become intimate with our literary star-texts. Our fannish obsession constitutes a key plank in our professional identity as researchers. As the bread-and-butter of scholarship, it fuels our professional life. The text engenders the academic, in much the same way as celebrity implicitly demands a fan-base. The productive energy flows both ways. Scholarship is another form of celebrification. We splice together diverse textual elements to fabricate a single version of events, or a coherent interpretation of a holy woman’s life story. Our scholarly attention suggests that a holy woman is worthy of study, that she has the makings of an academic celebrity.

In writing this chapter, I celebrify Marie of Oignies yet another time. This chapter originated as a section of my PhD thesis. In that draft, however, I avoided any discussion of Margery Kempe. Including Margery as part of Marie’s celebrity formation is a calculated move. The Englishwoman is a big draw for academic audiences: she is a ‘bankable’ holy woman. In comparison, Marie of Oignies is a ‘nobody’: her *vita* is actually ‘best known to scholars’ for its inclusion in Margery’s *Book*. Kempe utilized Marie of Oignies to legitimize Margery’s piety. In a reciprocal move, I refer to Margery in order to leverage her acknowledged academic celebrity, and thereby establish Marie in similar terms. My motives in this are not entirely altruistic. In celebrifying Marie, I hope, more or less consciously, to share part of her spotlight. Recognition of Marie’s stardom entails, implicitly, an appreciation for my intellectual skills. Such appreciation draws, tantalizingly, the possibility of a wider readership for my scholarly outputs, greater academic impact, and ultimately increased chance of career advancement. Jacques of Vitry and I make strange bedfellows indeed.

203 Emphasis in original. Watson, ‘Desire’, p. 64.