Medieval Pietàs, 1340-1480:

From Compassion to Remission

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Much of the early scholarship in medieval art places disproportionate attention on the art of the elite. Within this framework, meanings extracted from precious reliquaries and great cathedrals are made to represent overall attitudes in medieval piety. While general trends in devotion can be inferred from this type of analysis, it is important to remember that high ecclesiastical art of the Middle Ages was inextricably bound to the polemics of statecraft and theology, subjects often very removed from the devotional awareness and concerns of most lay people. A better and more complete understanding of medieval spirituality can be achieved by looking at devotional art from all strata of society. There have been many insights into this area through investigation of books that were popular with the later medieval laity, such as psalters and books of hours. In addition to the examination of lay reader and book-owning habits, however, there should be a comparably close look at devotional images that were popular among the laity. In fact, one reason that research into popular devotional objects is not as prevalent as might be expected, is that many of these images are so pervasive within society that they often straddle the fine line between art and material culture. Many devotional sculptures are still *in situ;* indeed, a visit to a local parish church in Europe reveals that many medieval artifacts are still in religious use today.

This line of thinking brings one to the broad question: what is a "devotional image"? In his examination of images and their usage in medieval England, Richard Marks defined the devotional image as one that derived its meaning from cultural use, and whose presence prompted actions on the part of the devotee.[1] Likewise, Hans Belting affirmed that "image devotion" was religious dialogue supported by the aid of an image.[2] Using this definition, a reading of the devotional image of the pietà would be marked by an exploration of the actions it

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[1] Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*. (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 13.
[2] Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*. (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1990), 3.

prompted on the part of devotees, as well as an analysis of the inner religious dialogue that was prompted when lay people were confronted by its presence. This paper will attempt to delve into both types of reception of the pietà, the inward and the outward, as well as examining what these responses suggest about the religious culture of the laity in the late Middle Ages. I have chosen to analyze four pietàs: two earlier examples from the fourteenth century made for a monastic audience and typical in style and form of their period and place of production, as well as two later examples from the fifteenth century made for lay audiences. While the earlier pietàs form a coherent stylistic group, the later examples exhibit a wide range of materials and compositions. Hence, I have chosen to study two of the most common, "standard," frequently recurring types of the fifteenth century. My methodology in investigating these sculptures will be to analyze them in relation to contemporary texts relevant to the region and period, as well as contemporary accounts of people's interactions with devotional images.

The earliest pietàs can be traced to the German monasteries of the early fourteenth century, where they were one example of a new type of religious imagery that scholars call *Andachtsbilder*, or "devotional images." Andachtsbilder are powerful, emotionally charged images, usually comprising one or two figures, that are excerpts from the larger narrative context of the Passion of Christ and that functioned as aids to contemplation and prayer. Known in Germany as *Vesperbilder* after vespers, the canonical hour in which they were used, and the hour considered appropriate for contemplation of the Deposition and Lamentation, pietàs were a quotation from the larger narrative sequence of those events featuring the dead Christ in the arms of his mother. The Italian name "pietà" translates to "pity", and these images were known in English as "Our Lady of Pity". Belting explains the theological significance of the word "pity": "'pietà" is a key word of the songs of lamentations from the literature of the Passion and means not only the pity of the viewer for the dead Christ and his mother who weeps for him, but also

the hoped for pity of Christ and his mother for the viewer concerned about his own salvation."[3]

From its very inception therefore, the Vesperbild was a self-referential image intended to commemorate the pity of the Virgin for Christ as well as for the viewer. The nature of Vesperbilder as free-standing sculpture also allowed them to be portable and adaptable to different devotional needs. Joanna Ziegler adds that in their status as "free agents", pietàs could be placed outdoors as well as indoors.[4] Most frequently, however, they were placed on ancillary altars or in brackets along the nave aisles, along with other devotional sculptures of saints.

Very little is known about the artists who made pietàs, and with a few exceptions, most of the sculptures are anonymous, uncredited works. There is also a wide range in quality and craftsmanship within the genre, partly because its widespread popularity in the fifteenth century created a significant demand for the type and resulted in its mass production.

This brief account returns us to the question of the role of the pietà in private devotional use. How were they used, and what does their use signify about the devotional life of medieval religious and the laity? How may we account for the popularity of the genre with the laity despite the specificity of its roots in German mysticism? Was there a difference in how monks and the regular clergy saw and prayed to the pietà and how the laity prayed to these sculptures? Were there formal, stylistic, and iconographic features that differentiated pietàs made for medieval religious from those intended for the laity?

Existing scholarship on Pietà runs in two veins: the first is focused on elucidating the origins of this sculptural type, and the second is concerned with identifying various "types" of pietàs that developed in different European regions. Art historical consensus traces the origin of

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[3] Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages*, 84.
[4] Joanna E. Ziegler, *Sculpture of Compassion: The Pietà and the Beguines in the Southern Low Countries, C.1300-c.1600. (*Bruxelles: Institut Historique Belge De Rome, 1992), 131.

pietàs to the German Rhineland in the early fourteenth century. However, it was Wilhelm Pinder

who first linked the rise of this new type of devotional sculpture with German mystical thought.[5]

Subsequent art historians have corroborated this thesis and built upon it by linking other,

related devotional sculptures to this new spirituality and the affective piety it fostered. German

art historian Eugen Lüthgen connected the emergence of the forked cross to early vesperbilds,

citing the influence of mysticism and a new personal emotionalism in devotion on the

development of this sculpture type: "This transmission proves better than others, the origin of

the archetype in the time of mystical thought and the personal emotional excitement of Francis

of Assisi and the great mystics Eckehard, Suso, Tauler respectively, also for the creation of the

vesperbild's mood, based in the artist's inner excitement conveyed by a new form."[6] American

scholar Patrick de Winter elaborated on this connection in his analysis of a middle-Rhenish

forked cross from the fourteenth century: "Rhenish mysticism, a movement largely associated

with the Dominican *studium generale* of Cologne, principally with Master Eckhart […] was no

doubt influential in the firm establishment of an art form that addressed itself to the

emotions."[7] The names of Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), Heinrich Suso (1260-1328), and

Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) are frequently mentioned in relation to late medieval German

mystical thought, and the Cologne region in particular was a rich source of early pietàs.

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[5] Wilhelm Pinder, *Die Pietà* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1922).

[6] "So beweist diese Übertragung besser als andere Nachweise die Entstehung des Urbildes in der Zeit mystischer Gedankentiefen und persönlicher Gefühlserregtheit Franz von Assisi und die großen Mystiker Eckehard, Suso, Tauler schufen auch für die Schöpfung dieses Vesperbildes die Stimmung und Grundlagedie, die dem Künstler die innere Erregung zur neuen Formgewinnung vermitteln konnte;" G. Eugen Lüthgen, "Die Wirkung der Mystik in der Kölner und der Niederrheinischen Bildnerei gegen Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts." *Monatshefte Für Kunstwissenschaft* 8, no. 7 (1915): 237. http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2165/stable/24495364.

[7] Patrick M. de Winter, "A Middle-Rhenish "Crucifixus Dolorosus" of the Late Fourteenth Century." The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art 69, no. 7 (1982): 224-35, at 225. http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2165/stable/25159781.

In addition to the literature concerned with the theological origins of the pietà, there is also extensive scholarship on the different "types" and "styles" of pietàs. Walter Passarge's book *Das deutsche Vesperbild im Mittelalter* gives a comprehensive overview of the various German pietà "types" throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century.[8] Passarge categorized pietàs according to their formal qualities; for example, he differentiates between the "horizontal-type" or the "sitting-type". Likewise, William Forsyth analyzed the regional types of French pietàs in his book, *The Pietà in French Late Gothic Sculpture: Regional Variations*.[9] This extensive cataloguing is further developed by writers such as Paul Frankl, Eugen Lüthgen, and Werner Noack, who attempted to uncover the chronology of the early pietàs as well as to determine the presence and influence of various workshops. It was not until Joanna Ziegler's book, *Sculpture of Compassion: The Pietà and the Beguines in the Southern Low Countries,*[10] that a broader range of questions was brought to bear on the study of the pietà. Ziegler takes a socio-anthropological approach to this sculpture-type, revealing how Beguine women would have interpreted pietàs through a rubric of touch and imitation, practices and techniques that would have been especially developed among Beguines due to the manual nature and emphases of their lives within their communities.

Despite the extensive literature categorizing pietà origins, types, and chronology, there is very little scholarship exploring the impact of mysticism on the formal qualities of pietàs and how this impact would have been received by audiences of the time. And, although Passarge and Forsyth differentiate the formal compositions of pietà types, they do not address the question of why different types might have developed in the first place. Scholars have made few attempts to theorize lay audience response to devotional sculpture, with the exception of

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[8] Walter Passarge, *Das Deutsche Vesperbild Im Mittelalter* (Köln: F.J. Marcan, 1924).
[9] William H. Forsyth, *The Pietà in French Late Gothic Sculpture: Regional Variations* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995).
[10] Ziegler, *Sculpture of Compassion*.

important examples produced under the auspices of royal patronage. While Ziegler's work

comes closest to assessing audience response, her interpretive framework, which depends on

the notion that the Beguines understood devotional sculpture through the daily habits of their

communities, is restrictive. It could be argued that most contemporary lay audiences would not

have possessed the highly developed tactile and visual faculties characteristic of the Beguines.

Yet the wide proliferation of the pietà throughout the late Middle Ages shows that these

sculptures enjoyed a broad, even mass- appeal among both clerical and lay audiences.

Furthermore, many pietàs in the fifteenth century were intended for lay viewers who may have

possessed neither extensive theological training nor refined sensory perception. Hence, Ziegler's

interpretation does not, therefore, address the problem of response within the larger populace.

The pietà emerged in a monastic setting. However, the popularity of this sculpture type

with the late medieval laity is centered less on its Christological meanings than on its

receptiveness to lay cultic worship. This paper will argue the presence of two distinct traditions

of the pietà, the first originally intended for a clerical and monastic elite, the second intended

for lay audiences, with both types offering different significations to its intended audience. Seen

from this perspective, these sculptures exemplify what Eamon Duffy has identified as the

multifaceted, complex, bilateral nature of medieval devotion -- contradictory but encompassing

different elements of medieval piety, from the superstitious to the theological.[11]Furthermore,

this lay appropriation of clerical devotional imagery parallels a similar appropriation of clerical

devotional practices and forms of prayer in relation to other artistic mediums, namely

illuminated religious and devotional manuscripts, and -- in relation to increased concern with

death -- Purgatory and Hell. There is a timelessness to the form of the pietà that has enabled it

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[11] Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 104.

to weather the centuries; however, it is the malleability and receptiveness of the genre to the needs of different audiences that enabled it to spread from the cloistered settings of the fourteenth century to the parish churches of the fifteenth century.

Rhenish mystics who taught in the Cologne region, such as Meister Eckhart, practiced and encouraged a spiritual identification and union with God through an affective contemplation of Christ's Passion.[12] In one of his German sermons, Eckhart wrote:

In this we must understand that we must be an only son whom the Father has eternally begotten. When the Father begot all created things, then he begot me, and I flowed out with all created things, and yet I remained within, in the Father […] So I have remained with the Father. In the Father are the images of all created things. This piece of wood has a rational image in God. It is not merely rational, but it is pure reason.[13]

 Eckhart encouraged a christomimetic form of spirituality by insisting that "we must be an only son whom the Father has eternally begotten." In the next sentence, however, he goes even further and conflates his own identity with that of Christ, referring to God as "the Father" and changing his pronouns from "we" to "me" and "I", so that he assumes the narrative voice of Christ. This fusion of self and Christ forms the basis for mysticism in literature and art. This mystic device of conflating identities was so prevalent that Henry Suso would fasten a cross with nails to his bare back to simulate the suffering of Christ: "The wounds caused by these sharp needles he bore in praise of the deep sorrow of the pure Mother of God that so utterly pierced through her heart and soul at the time of his wretched death."[14] Here, Suso not only reenacts Christ's Passion but also the response of the Virgin, including her sorrows and compassion, effectively recreating the Lamentation scene with himself as Christ.

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[12] Henk W. Van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 165.

[13] Meister Eckhart and Edmund Colledge, and Bernard McGinn. *The essential sermons, commentaries, treatises and defense*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 193.

[14] Henricus Suso and Frank Tobin, *The Exemplar, with two German sermons* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 89.

Apparently unique to Eckhart however, are references in his religious writings to the plastic arts. His use of the term "piece of wood" may be an oblique reference to carved images, since he frequently draws on the allegory of God as a master craftsman working in wood or stone: "If a master craftsman makes figures out of wood or stone, he does not introduce the figure into the wood, but he cuts away the fragments that had hidden and concealed the figure; he gives nothing to the wood, rather he takes away from it, cutting away its surface and removing its rough covering, and then what had lain hidden beneath shines out."[15] Here, Eckhart compares the human soul to a figure hidden beneath the physical matter of wood, with God acting as a master craftsman to reveal the soul. Likewise, Eckhart's allegory of craftsmen and figures alludes to the process of mystical union facilitated by devotional sculpture, with the "paring away" of the rough surface serving as a metaphor for both sculptures and humans. Implicit here is the idea that God is both latent within the carved image and within the soul. It is important to keep in mind this notion in examining the first pietàs.

Two Fourteenth-Century Pietàs in their Monastic Contexts

The original patrons of devotional sculpture in the fourteenth century were primarily monastics who used images for both liturgical and private prayer. Gerard de Frachet, one of the first historians of the Dominican order, explains how the Dominican monks surrounded themselves with images of the Virgin and the crucified Christ in their cells "so that they could look at them [Virgin and Christ] when reading, [at] prayer, or sleeping, and be looked at by them [Virgin and Christ] in turn, with eyes of compassion."[16] The presence of devotional images was keenly felt in monastic life. The spread of mysticism in Germany profoundly affected the form these images were to take, however. What catalyzed mysticism in Germany was the supervision

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[15] Eckhart, Colledge, and McGinn, *The essential sermons*, 243.
[16] Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 108.

of the convents under the spiritual direction of the Dominican friars.[17] For example, both

Eckhart and Suso were deeply concerned with the spiritual education of the nuns under their

care. Eckhart had been prior of Predigerkloster in Erfurt before becoming the Provincial of

Saxony, where he was responsible for forty-seven convents from 1302-1311.[18]

In considering the Erfurt or Ursulinenkloster pietà (fig.1, 2), the first of the two monastic

examples that are the focus of this study, it is important to place the work within the context of

the mystical teachings of Eckhart, who dominated the religious and intellectual life of the city in

the early fourteenth century. Made of polychromed wood, and at 4' 9" (150 cm) tall, a life-size

work, the Erfurt pietà was commissioned by the Magdalene order for its convent around 1340

and has remained at the same community since its creation.[19] The original Magdalene order was

founded by Rudolph of Worms as a convent for reformed prostitutes, and the order was

authorized in 1227 by Pope Gregory IX, who recommended that the order adopt the Augustinian

rule and Institutions of Prouille.[20] The institutions of Prouille meant that the Magdalene

convents were under Dominican authority, since St. Dominic founded the first female Dominican

convent at Prouille. Hence, the intended audience for the Erfurt pietà was female monastics

under the spiritual guidance of Dominicans.

The Ursulinenkloster pietà features an upright, seated Jesus held by his grieving mother

in her lap. Mary's face is aged and distorted to capture the intensity of her grief, and she is

clothed in the loose veil and robes befitting a widow. Mary's line of sight is directed downwards

towards Jesus' conspicuous, gaping side-wound, which occupies a central position in the

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[17] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar*, 16.

[18] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Meister Eckhart," published January 4, 2006, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meister-eckhart/

[19] The Ursuline order replaced the Magdalene order at the Erfurt Convent in 1667
The website of Ursulinenkloster Erfurt; http://www.ursulinenkloster-erfurt.de/

[20]Rebecca Lea McCarthy, *Origins of the Magdalene laundries an analytical history (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), 78.*

sculptural group. While transfixed on the wound, she also seems to recoil from the sight, as evidenced by the awkward incline of her head. The Ursulinenkloster Christ's head is bent unnaturally backwards so that it is almost perpendicular to his body, in a pose of death and rigor mortis. The Ursulinenkloster pietà represents Christ's sufferings naturalistically, in the pain-wracked face marking his last hours, the life of suffering exhibited by the protruding ribs and concave belly, and the veined arms still taut from hours on the cross. In this pietà, the emphasis is less on Mary's emotional suffering as a mother; rather, Mary's face is a reflection of Christ's physical torments. The preeminence of Christ's Passion and his suffering is also seen in Jesus' pose. Christ extends his left hand and his right-hand hangs to show the viewer the stigmata. In fact, the stigmata are arranged so that they form an equilateral triangle with orthogonal lines radiating to the side wound at its apex. The centrality of Christ's wounds, combined with the larger size of the statue, would have elicited especially strong emotion from praying viewers, who would have a direct line of sight to the wounds.

The Pietà's large size, intensity of expression, and emphasis on the side wound and stigmata, all serve to encourage and allow viewers to share in the suffering of Christ. As noted above, the idea of sharing in Christ's suffering was key for mystics, who believed it would allow them to achieve unity with God. Henry Suso pressed followers to accept suffering as a sign of God's grace: "The noblest and best suffering, however, is suffering in conformity with Christ. I mean that suffering that the heavenly Father gave his only-begotten Son and still gives to his dear friends."[21] For the Magdalene nuns, the large size of the pieta, and the naturalistic expressions of the Virgin and Christ, would have been physically immersive and encompassing, allowing the sculpture to mimic a real-life mystical vision. Viewed from a kneeling position, the nuns would first be confronted by Mary's sorrowful visage, which established an appropriately

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[21] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar*, 160.

mournful tone for prayers at vespers. In addition, Mary's face would be a model for penitence, a

virtue that was lauded by the Magdalene order.[22] Mary's bowed head and expression of grief

would have modeled the correct devotional attitude for female viewers, but it also served a

larger role in directing the viewers' gaze towards the side-wound. It is no coincidence that,

regardless of the angle from which the sculpture is viewed, Mary's gaze is always focused on

Christ's side-wound, a reminder for viewers to focus their own attention on the wound

regardless of the vantage point from which they prayed.

The pietà's subject is conducive to contemplating the Deposition and Lamentation, as

the viewer is intended to internalize the events of the Passion and empathize with Christ's

condition. Suso writes of a Dominican monk who had difficulty in meditating on the Passion, and

who was roused to create a series of *veniae* (brief prayers of petition) after gazing at a crucifix:

Gentle Lord, your divine head was bowed by pain and anguish. 2 your tender throat was roughly
abused [….] 1. Dear Lord, your right hand was pierced with a nail. 2 your left hand was pounded
through. 3. Your right arm was distended. 4. Your left arm wrenched out. 5. Your right foot was
dug into. 6. Your left foot was dug into 7. You hung there powerless. 8. Your divine body was
utterly exhausted 9. All your tender limbs were held motionless to the confining anguish of the
cross 10. On many parts of your body warm blood was running down.[23]

These *veniae* were short descriptions of Christ's sufferings often accompanied by an "Our

Father" or "Hail Mary" and recited before devotional imagery. Suso suggested that worshippers

memorize the pardons, so they can be drawn upon for prayers as required: "The brief prayers of

petition he added briefly afterward on his own so that each person himself might find

something to ask for according to his disposition at the time."[24] The physical descriptions in

these *veniae* recall fourteenth-century pietàs, which depict similarly visceral representations of

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[22] Michelle A. Erhardt and Amy M. Morris, *Mary Magdalene, iconographic studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 86.
[23] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar*, 296.
[24] Ibid., 294.

Christ. The emphasis of the *veniae* on bodily sensation allows the speaker to assume the narrative voice of Christ and to vicariously experience Christ's suffering as a memory. This affective suffering, viewed in conjunction with the large, three-dimensional wound of the Erfurt Pietà, worked together to conflate the self with Christ in a *imitatio Christi.* The intrusion of the wound into the viewer's visual space -- it is located on the highest point of the protruding ribs -- along with its stylized, hollow rendering, has the effect of transforming it into a focal point for meditation. Like Buddhist mandalas, Christ's side-wound holds the viewer's gaze like a center point, allowing for the creation of a sacred space where body and memory blend syncretically. Viewing the Erfurt pietà in combination with reciting *veniae*, the viewer would be able to dwell on all the visual markers of the passion while retelling to herself the story of how it happened. Thus, regardless of the starting-point of the viewer's prayers, contemplating the other aspects of the pietà brought the viewer closer and closer to reliving Christ's suffering, culminating in the contemplation of the side-wound, where viewers would experience true compassion and unity with Christ.

This conflation of image and bodily experience is seen in the lives of female mystics. For example, Elizabeth of Spalbeek "regularly reenacted events of each hours of the Passion, taking the part of every character in the story, including Christ himself, the Virgin, and even Christ's tormentors."[25] Elizabeth feels so strongly that she conflates the events of the Passion with her own bodily experience. Also notable is the fact that she reenacts the Passion during all the hours of the liturgy, similar to the Divine Office; while Elizabeth is an extreme example, her physical reenactments are analogous to the hourly prayers of the nuns at Erfurt, who used the pietà as a visual stimulus to their own mental reenactment. The Italian mystic, Angela of Foligno, would

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[25] Kathryn A Smith, "The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 72. doi:10.2307/3051287.

fall sick with fever whenever she saw an image of the Passion,[26] and once when she saw a

stained-glass window depicting St. Francis held closely by Christ, she felt the holy spirit saying to

her, "Thus I will hold you closely to me and much more closely than can be observed with the

eyes of the body."[27] Angela not only imagines that she will supplant the figure of St. Francis, but

she also wishes for an extra-body unity with Christ, which is the heart of mystical teaching. For

those unable to reach imageless devotion, visual aids such as the Erfurt pietà were meant to

unite the body and soul with God. The impact of sight and image upon the soul is summarized

by Eckhart in a suggestive comparison between his eyes and a piece of wood:

The comparison concerns my eyes and a piece of wood. If my eye is open, it is an eye; if it is
closed, it is the same eye. It is not the wood that comes and goes, but it is my vision of it […] If it
happens that my eye is in itself one and simple (Mt. 6:22), and it is opened and casts its glance
upon the piece wood, the eye and the wood remain what they are, and yet in the act of vision
they become one, so that we can truly say that my eye is the wood and the wood is my eye. But
if the wood were immaterial, purely spiritual as is the sight of my eye, then one could truly say
that in the act of vision the wood and my eye subsisted in one being. If this is true of physical
objects, it is far truer of spiritual objects.[28]

Eckhart's use of "wood" references wooden sculptures, and his point that "my eye is the wood

and the wood is my eye" describes the spiritual experience of seeing a devotional image, one in

which the identity of body and image blend together to "subsist in one being". This cancellation

and merging of identities accomplished visually what the viewers hoped to achieve spiritually.

The pietà at the Dominican Church of St. Andreas in Cologne (fig. 3, 4) stands at 4'5"

(140 cm) tall and is also made from polychromed wood. Dating from 1350-1400, the sculpture

group comprises a youthful, bereaved Mary holding Christ upright in her lap. Mary's queenly

status is underscored by her hair and dress. Her hair is golden and worn loose down her back,

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[26] Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 146-146.
[27] Ibid. 147.
[28] Eckhart, Colledge, and McGinn, *The essential sermons,* 197.

and she is richly garbed in a red, jewel-trimmed mantle over a blue, jewel-trimmed gown with gold patterning. Mary's left hand rests on Christ's knees while her right encircles and supports his lower back, propping him up. While the sculpture is vertical in nature, the figures possess a sight tilt towards the left, as Christ's head slants backwards and Mary's head inclines forward, towards him. Both figures' positions, postures, and respective sizes recall the Romanesque *sedes sapientiae* figures, in which Christ's smaller, doll-like body is cradled as if he were a child sitting on his mother's lap. Indeed, there is a Romanesque formality to the frontal treatment of Mary's body, and her rigid grip on her son's body appears as if she is presenting him to the viewer.

In contrast to this decorum, Christ's left hand is raised, and he seems to clutch Mary's mantle, despite his state of death and the lack of support for his arm. This, in combination with Christ's tilt of the head, which conveys the effect of looking upwards towards Mary's face, mimics the intimacy and tenderness seen in Virgin and Child statues of the Gothic period. Like the Sainte-Chapelle Ivory Madonna and Child (before 1279) and the Virgin and Child of Jeanne d'Evreux (1324-1339), the St. Andreas pietà plays upon Gothic tropes of maternal affection and familiarity. Christ's outstretched left arm seems to almost playfully snatch at his mother's mantle like traditional Madonna and child statues. This relationship between mother and child is accentuated by Christ's small body: despite being a full-grown man, Christ's legs dangle off of Mary's lap as a child's legs do when he is sitting in a chair that is too high, and Mary seems to hold her son firmly in her lap without much strain or difficulty. In fact, it appears that Christ himself is swaddled in the folds of Mary's rich coat as an infant would be swaddled in his mother's skirts. Additionally, Mary's youthfulness evokes comparison with Gothic Madonna and Child images. Mary is depicted here as an idealized young virgin-queen. She is sumptuously clad

like a noblewoman, not in the veil or habit of a widow. Her complexion is rosy and girlish, and her graceful neck and white bosom are archetypal of medieval representations of princesses.

In many respects this would be a scene of happy domesticity and motherhood, if not for Mary's highly charged expression of grief and the grotesque display of Christ's wounds. Mary's otherwise youthful visage is contorted by sorrow, and the artist added trails of tears from her eyes, echoing the trails of blood trickling from her son's wounds. Christ's stigmata are prominently displayed on both hands and feet, with the artist seeming to make a point of adding blood to all lesions. Blood is painted on naturalistically, following the flow of gravity; it either trickles downwards or pools around the wounds. However, it is the cavernous carving of Jesus's side wound that draws the viewer's eyes. Located centrally within the composition, the side wound is deeply carved within Christ's ribcage and issues copious streams of blood. Likewise, the stigmata are disproportionately large with respect to the body parts on which they appear, seeming as if they were gouged out of Christ's flesh rather than punctures caused by the withdrawal of a nail.

The effect of the St. Andreas pietà is a synthesis of two Gothic sculptural archetypes; the pietà and the Madonna and Child, melded in a single sculptural group to connote the two polar experiences of Mary's motherhood -- her joy of raising Christ as a child and her sorrow at his death. This conflation of two different forms is further underscored by the ambiguity in the Virgin's expression. Viewed frontally, her face assumes the countenance of traditional grief; viewed from the right side, her face seems to wear a doting smile.

Like the Erfurt pietà, the St. Andreas pietà was another early monastic pietà. The original location of the sculpture was the Dominican monastery of the Holy Cross at

Stolkgasse.[29] The Stolkgasse monastery was founded in 1222 and was the oldest Dominican

monastery in Cologne,[30] as well as the site of a prestigious *studium* where Rhenish mystics such

as Eckhart, Tauler and Suso taught.[31] However, by the time the St. Andreas pietà was made

(1350-1400), the Stolkgasse monastery was in the midst of upheavals caused by disputes with

the city council over taxes and control of land. Refusing to capitulate to secular control even

after the Carmelites, Franciscans, and Augustinians conceded, the Dominicans were finally

expelled from Cologne in 1347, and all their holdings were seized. Upon their return in 1351, the

order was unable to regain any properties sold by the city and was barred from directly owning

land. It was within this context of financial hardship that the brothers commissioned the St.

Andreas pietà, writing in their history: "In this time, the Dominicans, in spite of their financial

difficulties, commissioned the sculpture of the sorrowful Mother of Christ, which is now in St.

Andreas."[32] What resulted was a pietà that addressed the political and economic woes of the

order as much as its spiritual welfare, using the framework of contemporary mystical theology.

Like the Erfurt pietà, the features of the St. Andreas pietà appear to be responses to

practices associated with affective piety and identification with Christ. This explains the

positioning of Christ, who is held parallel to Mary's body so that only his right side – the side

that displays the prominent side wound and stigmata -- is presented to the viewer. As in the

case of the Erfurt pietà, the centrality of the side-wound cannot be ignored, because it features

[29] Marcel Oswald, "Die Pietà im Marienchor," Dominikanerkirche St. Andreas, Cologne, accessed April 24, 2017, http://gemeinden.erzbistum-koeln.de/st_andreas_koeln/kirche/pieta/index.html.
[30] "Geschichte der Dominikaner in Köln bis 1899,"Dominikanerkirche St. Andreas, Cologne, accessed April 24, 2017, http://www.dominikanerkloster-koeln.de/24/Kloster/Die-Dominikaner-in-Koeln.htm
[31] Marcel Oswald, "Geschichte der Dominikaner in Köln,"Dominikanerkirche St. Andreas, Cologne, accessed April 24, 2017, http://gemeinden.erzbistum-koeln.de/st_andreas_koeln/dominikaner/DomGeschichte/
[32]"In dieser Zeit geben die Dominikaner, trotz ihrer finanziellen Schwierigkeiten, das Gnadenbild der Schmerzhaften Muttergottes, die sich heute in St. Andreas befindet, in Auftrag"
Oswald, "Geschichte der Dominikaner," http://gemeinden.erzbistum-koeln.de/st_andreas_koeln/dominikaner/DomGeschichte/
http://gemeinden.erzbistum-koeln.de/st_andreas_koeln/dominikaner/DomGeschichte/

the same gaping depth and is prominently located at the apex of Christ's ribcage. Also like the

Erfurt pietà, Christ's hands are unnaturally arranged so that the stigmata are prominent, and

help to form the side corners of an equilateral triangle with the side-wound at its peak. What is

different about the St. Andreas pietà from the Erfurt example is Christ's diminutive size, which,

as noted above, recalls the Romanesque *sedes sapientiae* figures. However, unlike the *sedes*

sapientiae figures, which feature a young child with the gravity of an adult man, the St. Andreas

pietà is the inverse: it features an adult man who displays the helplessness of a young child. This

merging of youth and adult is efficacious in the context of affective worship, during which the

monks could imagine the infancy of Christ up to his death. Henk van Os explains: "The supreme

goal was to lose one's own identity so that one could go to the side of the baby Jesus, imitate

Christ, and feel at one with him during his Passion, with the stigmata as the high point of a life of

prayer."[33] Walter Passarge agrees with this convention in explaining the small "child-like" pietàs,

adding that the sight of her dead son on her knees is reminiscent of her experience of Christ's

infancy in Bethlehem, when he sat upon his mother's knees.[34]

Christ's size carries an additional meaning in the St. Andreas pietà. While the small size

of Christ helps the viewer to visualize his infancy, it also acts to elevate the importance of his

mother. Mary's torso was intentionally elongated, so that viewed from below, where the monks

would have viewed it as they knelt in prayer, the angle would collapse her body together so that

she towers over Christ. The prominence of the Virgin in this pietà highlights the significance of

her role in the Lamentation; it is Mary's compassion or "pity" that give the sculpture its name.

Also important is the level of attention given to the carving of the Virgin in comparison to Christ.

The figure of Jesus is rudimentary in execution, lacking specificity or details except for his side-

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[33] Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 130.
[34] Passarge, *Das Deutsche Vesperbild Im Mittelalter*, 50-51.

wound and stigmata, and his face is turned towards his mother. For the monks praying below, this means his features would have been partially or completely obstructed. In contrast, Mary's face would be fully visible because she looks down at her son with tears of compassion. Mary's leading role in the St. Andreas pieta is not unusual; the late Middle Ages was the age of Marian devotion with Suso declaring, "Look, this is why you [Mary] are the first thing my soul gazes upon when I arise. You are the last thing I see when I go to bed."[35] However, the visual significance of Mary in the St. Andreas pietà shows that the brothers at Stolkgasse made a conscious choice to highlight her compassion.

The decision to emphasize Mary's pity is best understood within its historical context. The sculpture was made during a time of adversity, when the impoverished Dominican order had just returned to Cologne after a four-year exile. The formerly wealthy order had been stripped of their lands and possessions, so one may suggest that they commissioned a devotional sculpture that echoed their hardships. Using mystical piety, the monks might have imagined themselves as Christ through their suffering and condemnation at the hands of the city council of Cologne. The choice of the pietà as the subject for the commission was fitting, since it was common to beseech the Virgin's compassion through contemplating her suffering during the Passion. Hence, through a contemplation of the Virgin's own compassion for her son, the brothers were activating the Virgin's compassion or "pity" for themselves. Thus, the act of gazing and praying before the pietà, becomes a transmutation of "compassion" through the process of giving and receiving. Suso demonstrates this circular entreaty as he prays to the Virgin after the Entombment, "O pure Mother, as my whole soul stands by you in kind pity, receives you with sincere desire, and, in contemplation with heart full of desire, in gratitude and praise […] I beg that on its final journey my soul might be guided by you, pure gentle Mother and

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[35] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar,* 258.

Goal of all my comfort, to its fatherland and that it may be established in eternal blessedness. Amen."[36] Suso hopes that the reward for his "pity" will be the Virgin's intercession on behalf of his soul, and the Dominicans hoped for the same on their behalf.

Additional layers of meaning are given to the sculpture by Mary's queenly garb, already noted. Unlike the Erfurt pietà, which portrays Mary as a chastened, aged widow, the St. Andreas pietà depicts Mary as a preternaturally young queen. While this choice may seem odd in a Lamentation scene, it also suggests Mary's role as regal intercessor. Theresa Earnfight highlights the point that queens were expected to intercede on behalf of their subjects: "perhaps the most appreciated form of queenly work was her intercession on behalf of her subjects [...] queens relied on spiritual models of intercessions, such as the practical wisdom and worldly authority of the abject Virgin Mary and the sage Ester."[37] In representing Mary as an earthly queen, the Dominican brothers appear to have expressed a desire for queenly intervention on their behalf. Not only does Mary possess all the attributes of a medieval queen, but her jeweled mantle also covers Christ's nakedness in a manner evocative of material support for the monastery. The richness of Mary's costume alludes to the material wealth the order had been stripped of by the city council. Mary's gesture, therefore, may be interpreted as one of sympathy and support, and as signaling a hoped-for change in financial circumstance for the order.

As supplicants knelt to pray in front of the sculpture, its size would have meant that they were close enough to look up into Mary's face when praying, while it also expressed the Virgin's authority. The simplification of Christ's body as well as the blocking out of his face when seen from below would have allowed viewers to affectively identify themselves with Christ being held in the embrace of the Virgin. In addition, Christ's small size would allow the monks to envisage

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[36] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar,* 267.
[37] Theresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

themselves as helpless and child-like, and needing the protection of a mother. This message of

mercy is accentuated by Mary's tearful face, which looks down kindly at petitioners in a nod of

compassion. Mary's tears show her pity towards her beleaguered children, with weeping in the

Middle Ages signifying an openness to God's love or a softened heart.[38] Moreover, the St.

Andreas Mary is notable for her trademark half-smile, which, depending on the angle from

which it is viewed, could connote either mournful commiseration or the promise of future favor.

Like the nuns at Erfurt, the monks at Stolkgasse would have also recited *veniae* while

gazing at their pietà. Similar to his *veniae* for contemplating scenes of the Passion, Suso also

gave prescriptions for reflection on Mary's suffering:

> … sweet Queen let me remind you today- when you stood beneath the cross and your child had departed and was hanging dead in front of you-how often you looked up helplessly. 2. How his arms were taken by you, his Mother. 3. With what devotion he was pressed to your bloodstained face. 4. How his open wounds and lifeless countenance were all kissed. 5. How often your heart was wounded. 6. How many times you deeply groaned 7. How many bitter and desolate tears you shed 8. Your words of grief were so very mournful 9. your attractive appearance was so very sad […] O pure Lady, remember all this today so that you might constantly protect me throughout life and lead me faithfully. Always turn your eyes toward me in mercy. Receive me like a mother whenever I seek you. Keep me from all my enemies in your faithful and tender embrace…[39]

The similarity of the descriptions in these *veniae* to the form of the pietà suggests that the

prayers might have been directly inspired by a pietà image. Most important is the progression of

the prayer from narrative descriptions of Mary (*veniae* 1 through 8) to an entreaty for her

intercession that would parallel the response of those praying in front of the pietà. The pardon

conflates place, time, and identity by beginning with detailed descriptions of Mary's sorrow that

would allow the viewer to affectively imagine him/herself as witness to the Lamentation, before

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[38]Virginia Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, C. 1400-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 184; and see also Elina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York and Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012).
[39] Suso and Tobin, *The Exemplar,* 300-301.

redirecting him or her back to the present by urging Mary to "remember all this today," and finally by shifting the focus of the *veniae* to the supplicant's own request for protection. "Always turn your eyes toward me in mercy. Receive me like a mother whenever I seek you. Keep me from all my enemies in your faithful and tender embrace" is a verbal articulation of the pieta's visual language and shows that people interacted with the formal qualities of vesperbilds in a self-referential manner.

The St. Andreas pietà applies the mystical experience of identifying with Christ by means of a form and design that offered security to the Dominicans. The affective experience of imagining oneself as Christ comes full circle when the Virgin pities the suffering of the monks at Stolkgasse and intercedes on their behalf. The use of Christ and Mary as avatars for private devotional suffering was not unusual. An account of Suso's own mother states that "She had the custom of attaching all her sufferings to the bitter sufferings of Christ and thereby overcoming her own sufferings […]."[40] Suso's mother is so affected by a wooden carving of the Deposition that she assumes Mary's pain as her own and dies from heartbreak.[41] In the same way, the Dominican audience for the St. Andreas pietà hoped to overcome their own misfortunes by conflating their sufferings with those of Christ, and hence benefit from the compassion of the Virgin.

The Pietà in the Fifteenth-Century Lay Ambient

While the form and iconography of fourteenth century pietàs were dominated by a theologically driven mystical artistic program, pietàs in the fifteenth century exhibit a broader appeal, as the grisly markers of the Passion were reconfigured and even "tamed" for a larger, lay audience. Moreover, the stepped, vertical pietàs of the Rhineland were displaced by a

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[40] Ibid., 167.
[41] Ibid..

horizontally-oriented Christ lying across the Virgin's lap, as seen in the Victoria and Albert pietà

(fig. 9). Passarge notes the move towards the horizontal type in the early fifteenth century:

"Here is a motif, which the horizontal type of the earlier fifteenth century has repeated in ever

new variations."[42] However, it was not until the second half of the fifteenth century that Christ

was depicted in a horizontally-oriented, three-quarters view, like the Gruitrode pietà (fig. 5):

"The upper body of the Lord is turned three quarters forward. In all of this, the type of Mary

with the forward-looking Christ as pointed out in the second half of the fifteenth century, the

viewer encounters as an eloquent Image of Pity."[43] In order to better understand this shift in

form, it is necessary to examine developments in lay spirituality and the role of devotional

sculptures within it.

At the heart of spiritual life for medieval lay audiences was the parish church. The local

church was not only the center of religious life for the village it served, but it also included

community and personal ties. Parish churches were filled with images of the Passion narrative,

the Virgin, and various saints. Eamon Duffy records the appearance of thirty-five separate

devotional images in the local Faversham church in Kent, for example, four of which were

different depictions of the Virgin, including an *Our Lady of Pity* in the south aisle.[44] Most of these

local churches were not pilgrimage churches with famous relics or images. Rather, these local

images were an expression of the devotional needs of the community they served. At a time

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[42] "Hier ist ein Motiv vorgebildet, das der Horizontaltyp des früheren 15. Jahrhunderts in immer neuen Variationen widerholt hat."
Passarge, *Das Deutsche Vesperbild Im Mittelalter*, 40.

[43] "Der Oberkörper des Herrn ist zu drei Vierteln nach vorn gewandt. In all dem kundet sich bereits jener Typ der Maria mit dem nach vorn gedrhten Christus an, deruns besonders in der zweiten Halfte des 15. Jahrhunderts als unmittelbar zum Beschauer sprechendes "Erbärmdebild" entgegentreten wird;" Ibid., 41.

[44] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 155.

when the choir screen demarcated the respective spaces of the clergy and the laity,[45] the

multiplication of images displayed on them, and on supports in the nave and side aisles, allowed

parishioners the proximity to God that they desired. These supports and loci for sculpture took

the form of subsidiary altars and side chapels as well as new, elevated corbels, brackets and

niches.[46] Often these subsidiary altars were funded and owned by the laity, who provided for its

outfitting, maintenance, and lights, and for separate masses for the souls of its benefactors.[47]

Kathleen Kamerick points out that "the multiplication of chantries within a parish church made

these peripheral areas and their artifacts more central to the religious practice of the

community."[48] Unlike the official liturgical sacrament that took place behind the choir screen,

lay people felt these separate images were their own and formed close personal bonds with the

images that spoke to them. Among the variety of images available for worship, the pietà

achieved particular popularity in the parish churches of England and the Low Countries. Richard

Marks notes that "[…] between one in four and one in six of the parish churches in Bedfordshire

and Kent are known to have had an image of *Our Lady of Pity*. Devotion to the Virgin was very

strong in England, so the true figure is likely to have been considerably higher. Waterton's

assessment that there was no church in England without a pietà may not have been too wide off

the mark."[49]

Two seemingly paradoxical forces shape a reading of fifteenth-century pietàs intended

for lay audiences. One is the need for the creation of a grave and sobering mental space

appropriate for obtaining salvation; the other is a superstitious need to address the physical

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[45] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art,* 73; and see Jacqueine E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[46] Marks*, Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England,* 61.
[47] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 114.
[48] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 93.
[49] Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, 124.

concerns of the world. The standard fifteenth-century pietà type allowed a range of interpretations, but most examples encompassed both of these themes concurrently. This can still be seen today in the Gruitrode pietà in the parish church of St. Gertrude in Northern Belgium (fig. 6), where the sculpture is still displayed on a high corbel. Though little is known of the Gruitrode pietà, the formal composition is typical of late fifteenth-century pietàs, as the horizontal, three-quarters placement of Christ in Mary's lap becomes more and more relaxed, so that he appears almost in danger of falling into the audience's space. Made from polychromed wood, the pietà stands at 2'5" (75 cm) in height and dates from the 1480s. The sculpture on its corbel appears to have been made for this location, since some elements of it appear to have been intended to be seen by viewers looking upwards. The St. Gertrude pietà exhibits themes that are a continuation of earlier fifteenth-century pietàs. Mary is veiled in the hood and wimple of a widow with Christ lying prostrate in her lap. Christ's body drapes and spills over the span of his mother's knees.   His legs hang in midair and his right arm drops vertically down towards the edge of her robe, where her feet would be. Although Jesus's body virtually engulfs Mary's lap and torso, it would seem that Mary is still larger proportionally, and her form serves to anchor and stabilize her son's body.

Also typical of other fifteenth-century pietàs, the St. Gertrude pietà deemphasizes the side-wound of Christ as well as the stigmata. The only wound that can be seen from the intended viewing angle is the one located in the palm of his right hand, which extends into the viewer's space. Likewise, the side-wound appears to be merely painted onto the surface of Christ's flesh rather than possessing any depth. Christ's body itself is also robust and vigorous, a marked departure from the emaciated cadavers of the fourteenth-century pietà. There is an absence of emotion in the faces of Mary and Jesus (fig. 7, 8). Perhaps their expressions can be interpreted as a calm acceptance; though the idealized and standardized features conform to

stock models rather than denoting any specificity or individuality of experience. Altogether, the impression of the St. Gertrude pietà is that of a sculpture that has been mass-produced in a workshop and that catered to the devotional needs of the laity, but that was inspired by other versions of the same subject.

By the 1480s, when the Gruitrode pietà was made, the pietà form had already proliferated across Europe, and Marian piety was popularly expressed as devotion to the sorrows of the Virgin. Eamon Duffy identifies this orientation as an expression of Passion devotion: "But the most distinct manifestation of Marian piety in late medieval England was not devotion to the Joys, but rather to the Sorrows of Mary. This was, of course, a European rather than a merely English phenomenon, and was yet another aspect of the devotion to the Passion […]".[50] This pan-European devotional preference was paralleled by rising literacy ratesand an increased production of devotional books for the laity, [51] developments that offered laypeople an experience of reading texts and viewing objects in which the two activities were codependent. Also, by the fifteenth century, there was an established tradition of lay confession and a highly evolved system of penitence, as well as concepts of Purgatory and spiritual debt that were manifested in, and shaped, how laypeople related to Mary and Christ. These developments accelerated in 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council ordered the annual confession of parishioners to their parish priests.[52] By the fifteenth century, confession had been expanded to a weekly basis, along with feast days, and pilgrimages. Margery Kempe was not alone in demanding constant confession to any member of the clergy she met, and her accounts of her pilgrimage around Europe showed that most pilgrims requested confession at the holy sites they visited. Confession was the discharge of spiritual debt, an acknowledgement of past

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[50] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 259.
[51] Ibid., 212.
[52] Ibid., 54.

sins and a desire to return to grace through penitence, which expressed itself through "the idea of a debt discharged by pious activity" or penance.[53] This late medieval interpretation of penance was ubiquitous, yet highly personal and a far cry from the public act of penance during the Romanesque period. Moreover, it was devotion to the cult of the Sorrowful Mother or Sorrows of the Virgin that was universally associated with penitence.[54]

Viewing the formal qualities of the Gruitrode pietà in conjunction with the devotional texts of the period aids in elucidating lay response to the pietà. Firstly, as already noted, viewers would have related to the Gruitrode pietà from below, due to its elevated placement. This transforms the act of viewing into one in which the viewer assumes a subordinate position, as viewers had to look up in order to gain access to the pietà. What they would have encountered was the visage of Mary, who looks past the body of Christ to make eye contact with parishioners. It is noteworthy that Mary's face is the only exposed part of her body -- even her hands are partially concealed -- and her grave, stern expression would have been the most immediate and noticeable encounter for praying laymen. Contrast this experience with the Erfurt pietà or the St. Andreas pietà, whose large size and proximity to the viewer allows them to bridge the gap between the image and audience.

What prayers would laypeople have recited or read in Mary's presence? One of the most common was the Stabat Mater, which was frequently accompanied in medieval devotional books by an image of the pietà.[55] The Stabat Mater expresses the Sorrows of the Virgin in seeing her son die, but also exhorts the devotee to share in her sorrow: "Come then Mother, the fount of love, make me feel the force of your grief, make me mourn with you. Make me weep lovingly

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[53] Ibid., 356.

[54] Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Cassell, 2000), 203.

[55] Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: G. Braziller in Association with the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 2001), 104.

with you, make me feel the pains of the crucified, as long as I shall live. I long to stand with you

by the Cross, and to be your companion in your lamentation."[56] It is important to note that the

Stabat Mater places the emphasis on Mary's grief, as opposed to Christ's death, as the driving

force behind the viewer's contrition; hence, Mary's ever-constant reprimand to the parishioners

would have encouraged contrition. Even parishioners passing by would have been reminded to

pause before the image to share in her grief.

This compassionate, penitential theme can also be seen in the prayer "Obsecro te," one

of the two prayers ubiquitous in books of hours that was almost always illustrated with a picture

of a pietà. It is notable that half of the prayer is a request for protection, while the second half is

a plea for guidance in living a holier, more penitential life:

… lift up my mind, direct my course, preserve my senses, control my ways, approve my actions, fulfill my wishes and desires, instill holy thoughts, forgive the evils I have done in the past, correct those of the present, and temper those of the future, grant me an honest and honorable life, and grant me victory over all the adversities of this world, and true peace for my spirit and body, good hope, charity, and faith, chastity, humility, and patience, rule and protect my five bodily senses, make me fulfill the seven works of mercy, make me firmly believe in and hold to the twelve articles of faith and the Ten Commandments of the law, and from the seven deadly sins keep me free and defend me until my end. And at the end of my life show me your face, and reveal to me the day and hour of my death. Please hear and receive this humble prayer and grant me eternal life. Listen and hear me, Mary, sweetest virgin, Mother of God and mercy. Amen.[57]

This request to Mary for temperance in action and thought is critical to the reading of the prayer

and its relationship to pietàs. Medieval lay people saw themselves as weak-willed in the face of

temptation; their exhortation to Mary to intervene and guide their actions with pure thoughts

would have been a way for them to avoid sin and remain in good grace. This is specifically

requested in the prayer: "and from the seven deadly sins keep me free and defend me until my

end," as well as "instill holy thoughts" and other iterations of the theme such as "lift up my

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[56] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 259.
[57] Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 164.

mind." Additionally, the prayer was often accompanied by pardons and indulgences, all of which

worked to alleviate the spiritual debt for access to heaven. This attention to spiritual debt is

seen in the progression of the prayer, which moves from abstract entreaties to specific appeals,

such as the following: "…make me fulfill the seven works of mercy, make me firmly believe in

and hold to the twelve articles of faith and the Ten Commandments of the law, and from the

seven deadly sins keep me free." These specific appeals to adhere to Christian tenets show an

overarching concern with being spiritually qualified and "in good standing" in order to gain

access to heaven. All good Christians were expected to practice the seven works of mercy if they

wanted to reach heaven, as Duffy explains: "It was believed that everyone would be judged at

the last judgment not by works of faith or homage, but by whether or not they had concretely

helped the poor and suffering."[58] Therefore, in addition to instilling penitence and sobriety in its

viewers, the Gruitrode pietà would also have reminded them to observe Christian tenets of the

faith and morality such as charity and humility.

The second popular prayer in books of hours, "O Intemerata," which frequently was

accompanied by a Crucifixion with Mary and John as mourners, fulfills a similar function. The

first stanza addressed to Mary forms an analogous request:

O immaculate virgin […] turn the ears of your piety towards my unworthy prayers and be kind to me, a sinner and be a helper of all things[…]I beech you to offer your glorious prayers so that my heart would be made worthy of being captured, entered, and inhabited by the Holy Spirit who would purify me of all sordid vices and embellish me with sacred virtue, who would help me stand, almost perfectly, in God's favor and make me persevere, and, after the course of my life is over, lead me to the joy of his elect…[59]

The notion of "worthiness" refers to the shedding of spiritual debt and being in good grace. The

devotee asks for purification of vices and instillation of virtues *specifically* so that it allows

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[58] Duffy, *Marking the Hours,* 95.
[59] Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 164.

him/her to stand in God's favor and hence, to secure salvation. These prayers are written as a private dialogue between the devotee and Mary. Viewed along with an image like the Gruitrode pietà, the devotee would feel that Mary's face, turned towards him, showed her acknowledgement of his prayer and offered reassurance that she was listening.

It is important to remember that these prayers were memorized, and, because image was so closely correlated with text, viewers seeing an image would almost instantaneously recall the prayer. As Kamerick notes, "the book user then reads the appropriate prayer for that saint […] once the prayer is learned, however, the reader might easily associate it with that saint's images wherever it appeared, on the page or in the parish church. In thus linking images to texts, prayer books could direct people's responses to images beyond the book."[60] Through the conflation of image and prayer, the act of viewing was metonymic for holy living. Medieval audiences knew that avoiding sin and living in conformity with the articles of faith was difficult, so they created religious images as a form of "interjection" into the sequence of their regular lives. This explains why pietàs could be found not only in churches during the Middle Ages, but also by street-side shrines, in gardens, and outside of buildings overlooking streets.[61] The closely related *Image of Pity* was popular in the late Middle Ages for similar reasons. Duffy writes that their purpose was to frighten and disturb, because "If Christ's wounds reproached, the believer might respond […] by repentance and compassion."[62]

In the Gruitrode pietà, viewers standing below the image would not have had direct access to the figure of Christ. Instead, they would have only an oblique, partial view of his face and direct sight of his right hand. As noted earlier, because the Christ of the Gruitrode pietà is healthy and robust, parishioners would have been able to relate to such a corporeal version of

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[60] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 161.
[61] Ziegler, *Sculpture of Compassion*, 128.
[62] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 108.

Christ that was so much like them. Indeed, the fact that his face is not visible from below would

have aided them in imagining themselves as Christ and in substituting themselves for him, and

the fact that he is dead would add to their penitential concerns as a reminder of their own

future deaths. The representation of Christ's body in the Gruitrode pietà shows the "real-life

consequence" of not heeding Mary's remonstrance—that of sudden death.

In late medieval society, ideas about death and dying were shaped by epidemics of

plague, wars, instability and famine. Death was predictable only in its imminence, and the need

to avoid dying in a state of mortal sin was important in obtaining salvation.[63] Roger Wieck

writes about the ideal Christian death, where the soul has been cleansed and is free of spiritual

debt, as follows: "The ideal Christian death took place at home, in bed, having confessed, been

forgiven, and having just received Last Communion and Extreme Unction. Such a death cleansed

the soul and permitted immediate entry into heaven."[64] Without these elements, the soul was

destined for Purgatory, a fate that drove medieval lay people to seek indulgences and pardons.

Medieval *ars moriendi* texts explicating preparation for death, required the dying to the

meditate on the Passion: "And if he is ready, let him return to the passion of Christ, invoking it

continually and meditating these things."[65] This also applied to the living, and the pietà would

have been a reminder for the living to constantly reflect on the Passion in case of sudden death,

a literal "memento mori" to viewers, reminding them that they should pause during their day to

stay in good grace in case of sudden death. Duffy discusses a fifteenth century "devotional

instruction on the need to prepare against sudden death by constantly renewed acts of

contrition and resolutions of amendment and by undertaking to make a sacramental confession

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[63] Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 124.

[64] Roger S. Wieck and Sandra Hindman, and Ariane Bergeron-Foote*. Picturing Piety: The Book of Hours* (London: Paul Holberton Pub. for Les Enluminures, Paris and Chicago, 2007), 413.

[65] "et s'il est ainsi prêt, qu'il s'en remette a la passion du Christ, l'invoquant continument et meditat ces choses " Florence Bayard, *L'art Du Bien Mourir Au XV Siècle* (Paris: Presses De L'université Paris Sorbonne, 1999), 59-60.

at the first opportunity […]"[66] Not only would images have been a non-verbal cue to remember

and contemplate the inevitability of death, but clergy also reminded and urged their

parishioners to recite the *quotidie morior*:[67] "I die daily. I decrease, I renounce self more each

day so that Christ may increase in me and be exalted […]."[68] This preoccupation with death

invests an image like the pietà with multiple meanings. On one level it is a reminder of death's

presence; on another it shows a strand of hope, as laypeople could envisage themselves as

being saved through the figure of Christ, held in the arms of the Virgin. Since Christ's face is

turned away from the viewer, the viewers are encouraged to put themselves in his place and to

imagine themselves in the arms of the Virgin, dying the ideal death. The last line of "Obsecro te"

asks of the Virgin "[…] And at the end of my life show me your face, and reveal to me the day

and hour of my death," a prayer befitting the Gruitrode pietà, as viewers imagined their deaths

while looking into Mary's face.

Lay people saw Mary as an admonition to abide by the faith, yet also as a reassurance

that by doing so, they would be able to obtain salvation. In this way, the Gruitrode pietà is a

stimulus to, yet also the product of, prayer. In analyzing a miniature of the Crucifixion, Wieck

suggests that it should be read on two levels: "… while it depicts what the patron sees in his own

mind's eye while at prayer, it also shows what he hoped to experience, in the eternity of

heaven, as a result of the very prayer he recites."[69] This dual-orientated manner of engaging

with art led to a cyclic, holistic conception of and response to the images in question.

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[66] Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 84.

[67] Bayard, *L'art Du Bien Mourir*, 21.

[68] Matthew Levering, *On prayer and contemplation: classic and contemporary texts* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2005), 141.

[69] Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, 95.

The cities of the Low Countries in particular were important loci of production and export of sculptures of the pietà in the fifteenth century.[70] The alabaster pietà made by the Rimini Master, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is a prime example of a pietà made for devotional use. Standing at 1'3" (40 cm) tall, the sculpture is much smaller than the other examples analyzed in this paper. It is carved of white alabaster stone, and originally parts of it would have been painted. Dated to the 1430s, the Victoria and Albert pietà is a horizontal pietà; however, the body of Christ is self-contained, and he does not threaten to "intrude on" the viewer's space as in the Gruitrode pietà. Jesus lies in a state of peaceful repose and shows no signs of having experienced a tortured death (fig. 10). His mother delicately cradles his sleeping head in her right hand. The Virgin's left hand clasps Christ's left forearm in a manner that draws him close to her. The sculpture displays a simultaneous drawing inwards and pull outwards: while Mary gently pulls Christ towards her with her left hand, her right hand cradling his head is lowered and positioned away from her body, as if she is holding him farther away to get a better look at him. Similarly, this contact is mirrored in the rest of her body, as her elongated torso leans slightly away from Jesus, while her head inclines towards. The Virgin's countenance also echoes the calm of her son's repose, as she gazes serenely upon him (fig. 11). The first fifteenth-century development that departs from the German tradition is the presence of a gradual torsion of Christ's body towards the viewer. As a result, the relationship between Christ and Mary is no longer an insular dialogue: rather, Mary offers her son to the viewer as if bestowing a gift.

The overall effect of tranquility conveyed by the sculpture is further accentuated by the classicizing treatment of Mary's drapery, which cascades downwards in slopes and folds.

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[70] Aleksandra Lipińska, *Moving sculptures: southern Netherlandish alabasters from the 16th to 17th centuries in central and northern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 124.

Against this backdrop, Jesus's body is also more classicized in treatment: although still gaunt, the musculature of his abdomen is noticeable, and unlike the two earlier pietàs, his ribcage does not protrude from beneath his skin. Most noticeable of all, though, is the difference in the handling of Christ's wounds in the Victoria and Albert pietà from the earlier German iterations. As in the case of the Gruitrode pietà, Christ's side-wound is much shallower, appearing as an incised slit against his flesh - it is neither deeply hollowed out nor cave-like. Additionally, there is a reduction in size of the stigmata, so much so that it is difficult for the viewer to note their presence unless he/she looks down upon the statue in an eagle's-eye view. The V&A sculpture showcases the first movement away from the intense physicality of earlier pietàs and toward a milder image-trope.

Unlike the vast majority of surviving examples, the V&A pietà has been attributed to a known -- and now named -- artist, the Netherlandish Rimini Master, who, according to scholar Kim Woods, was likely the alabaster carver Gilles de Backere. [71] Gilles was based in Bruges in the first half of the fifteenth century, when Bruges was the largest trading city in the Low Countries. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the Rimini Master was not a single artisan, but rather that he oversaw a large workshop that produced finely carved, luxury alabasters for export in popular stock categories such as altarpieces, St. John's heads, and pietàs.[72] Unlike earlier luxury devotional sculptures, the Rimini master's work was not commissioned. Rather, it was ready-to-purchase and made for a non-specific, foreign market.[73] This artist also seemed to use imported alabaster for his sculptures, all of which indicates that there was a widely established import-

[71] Kim Woods, "The Master of Rimini and the tradition of alabaster carving in the early 15th century Netherlands," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 62, (2013): 65.
[72] Ibid.., 68.
[73] Lipińska, *Moving sculptures*, 124.

export trade network in that material.[74] The large quantity of works exported also show a high degree of standardization in iconography and style, suggesting a unified European language of devotional images, and, potentially, of their reception. This is evidenced by the fact that the V&A pietà was exported to England, and by the presence of a very similar Rimini pietà in the Tempio Malatestiano in Italy. Examination of past art sales indexes also shows many similar types of pietàs attributed to the Rimini master that have widely divergent provenances.[75]

Despite the difference in material and size, the V&A pietà shows its maker's concern for the same themes as seen in the Gruitrode pietà, chief among them being lay concerns with salvation, fending off temptation, and reducing spiritual debt. Because the V&A pietà was exported and used in England, a comparison of the sculpture's form and details with popular English devotional texts of the period will help to illuminate English devotional practice surrounding, and reception of, the pietà as an image. The English monk John Lydgate (1370-1451), who was active around the same time as the Rimini Master, wrote a poem on the Image of Pity that gives a sense of the reception of the genre in England. As Kathleen Kamerick notes, Lydgate "teaches that looking at an image and keeping it in remembrance can move its viewer to contrition, prevent further sins and be the means to salvation."[76] This approach to devotional images is reflected in *Codex Ashmole 61* (Appendix A), a late fifteenth-century manuscript for a lay reader, written by a scribe who signed as "Rate", comprising a mixture of romance and devotional verse that was intended to be read aloud.[77] The codex is not a luxury item, but instead seems to have been intended for a popular audience, and the editorial choices in its

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[74] Woods, "The Master of Rimini and the tradition of alabaster carving in the early 15th century Netherlands," 61.
[75] Blouin Art Sales Index; http://artsalesindex.artinfo.com/Master-of-Rimini-113212-results.action
[76] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 41.
[77] George Shuffelton ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popuar Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2008).
http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-prayer-to-mary-introduction
e Publications).

compilation suggest the preoccupations of late medieval lay people. Most of the poems are

popularized examples of stories already in circulation but reworked in the scribe's northeast

Leicestershire dialect. The devotional poem, "The Lament of Mary," survives in two alternate

forms and dates no earlier than the second quarter of the fifteenth century. [78] Editor George

Shuffelton notes that it was "strongly influenced by literary, artistic, and devotional trends of

the period," [79] and indeed, Mary's lament is initiated by a viewer gazing at a pietà that begins to

speak. [80] The poem is in the form of a private dialogue. Mary laments her son's death and

reprimands the viewer for spending too much time on their own children instead of mourning

Christ: "and thyn [viewer's son] were dede and had no lyfe, Thou cowth well wepe at ever mele;

For my son thou wepys never a dele."[81] The poem interpolates happy scenes of motherhood

with which would a medieval audience would have related, with explicit descriptions of Christ as

he lies in Mary's arms. Each stanza alternates between the viewer's joys in motherhood and the

sorrows of the Virgin. When read out loud, this structure would lead the listener's mind from

thoughts of his own daily life to contemplation of Christ's death.

The Virgin's exhortation is a verbal outline of what medieval audiences were expected

to feel when they looked at pietàs, and narrates how the audience should arrive at a feeling of

contrition. Not only is the pietà statue itself narrating the viewer's response, but in addition, an

examination of the V&A pietà shows that the sculpture gives visual expression to and supports

this type of performative dialogue. In the V&A pietà, Mary holds Christ out to the viewer to *be

looked at*: his face is turned out towards the viewer instead of towards her. Not only does this

create a better viewing angle for the beholder, but it also dramatizes the relationship between

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[78] See appendix A.
[79] Shuffelton ed., *Codex Ashmole 61.*
http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-prayer-to-mary-introduction
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

the two figures in an unusual, stylized posture. In comparing the V&A pietà to the poem, one notes frequent passages that ask the audience to redirect their visual attention back to Christ: "Behold my sone and behold me," "Woman loke on me agene," "Wepe with me, both man and whyffe." These insertions in the text shift the listener's attention from his/her own thoughts back to the sculpture. Moreover, the opening lines of Mary's lament, "Alas, For now lyes dede my dere son dere," becomes the refrain for the rest of the poem. It is also an actual descriptor of the pietà, in conjunction with which the viewer can imagine the sculpted pietà in front of him/her, speaking those words, as Christ is proffered to him/her by Mary. There is a notable congruity between the voice of Mary in the poem and the portrayal of Mary in the V&A pietà. In both works, Mary is sorrowful, although not highly emotional. Mary's grief lacks the brutality of the fourteenth- century pietàs: rather, she is resigned to and accepting of her fate and laments her son in a general, didactic fashion. Both the poem and the V&A pietà work in the audience's mind as a teaching device to stimulate thinking on the Passion. The poem even promises a reward to those who follow Mary's counsel: "Thou seyst thi child whether it be seke or dede, Wepe thou for myn and not for it, And thou schall have mych to thy mede." This likely allayed the anxiety medieval lay people felt about salvation and death. Ultimately, in both the Codex Ashmole 61 poem and the V&A pietà, the relationship of Mary and Christ is not so much with each other as with the audience, an emphasis that encourages the viewer's meditation on the spiritual rather than the material. Like the Gruitrode pietà, the V&A pietà and devotional texts of the period give evidence of how the pietà genre served as a pause or interruption in the daily lives of lay people.

Similarly, Margery Kempe's response to seeing a pietà conforms to this interpretation of the sculpture type as offering a breakage in the habitual patterns of life. Margery recounts her experience upon seeing a pietà as follows: "… where this creature saw a beautiful image of our

Lady called a pietà. And through looking at that pietà, her mind was wholly occupied with the

Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the compassion of our Lady, St. Mary, by which she

was compelled to cry out very loudly …"[82] The image causes Margery to feel contrition and

induces in her a state of compassion. While Margery's reaction is exaggerated and her crying is

atypical even by medieval standards, her response to medieval imagery offers insight into the

responses that were expected of lay viewers. As a middle-class but still illiterate laywoman,

Margery's spiritual priorities are probably not far off from most medieval laypeople's, so her

concern with issues such as Purgatory, confession, and penance was most likely commonplace.

However, even at the other end of the devotional spectrum, in respect to the educated elites,

men like Thomas More were still concerned with the perils of Hell and final judgment. In the

letters he wrote while in the Tower of London, More asks God to help him constantly meditate

on his death and the fires of Hell, concluding with a plea that he should continually have Christ's

Passion in his mind.[83]

In addition to what seems to be a conventional, pan-European response to pietàs as an

invocation to remember the Passion, testamentary evidence and contemporary references

consistently refer to pietàs as a variation of a "Madonna" statue. The cult of Our Lady of Pity

was an individual cult within Marian worship, as is witnessed in the case of Faversham parish

church in Kent, mentioned earlier, where the image was listed as one of four Marian types

represented among the sculptures in the church.[84] Duffy writes, "Images of Our Lady of Pity

exercised a growing attraction throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Lay

people in increasing numbers left money in their wills to maintain lights before them and sought

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[82] Margery Kempe and B. A. Windeatt, *The book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 2005), 186.
[83] Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 115.
[84] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 155.

burial near them."[85] These bequests mean that lay people considered there to be functional differences between an image of Our Lady of Pity and one of Our Lady of Mercy. What does this mean for viewer response? A closer look at how lay people interacted with different devotional statues will help provide an answer.

As in the case of Faversham church, which had thirty-five devotional images, these various images served a practical role as saintly intercessors in the lives of the laity. For example, St. Sebastian was invoked as protection against plague and St. Christopher was popular with travelers and as protection against sudden death. As Kamerick observes regarding the mural of St. Christopher at St. Matthew's, Ipswich, "St. Christopher, patron of travelers, dominates the large wall painting that looms before the eye as one enters the church, a prominent position accorded him perhaps because of the belief that one who saw his image and invoked his aid would be protected that day from all harm, especially sudden death."[86] The Virgin herself intervened in specific situations through the activation of a prayer such as "Stella coeli Extirpavit," which prevented death by plague.[87] More common in relation to Christ and the Virgin was the use of indulgences and pardons that granted remission of sins. A 1497 book printed a pardon in which certain prayers were said before an Image of Pity without the actual image,[88] presumably because the image was so common that it would be easily accessible to the viewer. Margery Kempe undertakes her many pilgrimages to receive location-specific indulgences, such as when she visited the Portiuncula chapel on Lammas day to receive plenary remission.[89]

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[85] Ibid., 261.
[86] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art,* 76.
[87] Gordon Mursell, *English spirituality: from earliest times to 1700 (*London: SPCK, 2001), 162.
[88] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 172.
[89] Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 115.

The escalation of indulgences, rosaries, and pardons led to the proliferation of images that were widely available and accessible to all strata. Kamerick notes, "one could earn indulgences by looking at holy images as well as by saying prayers,"[90] which explains the presence of numerous depictions of Christ and the Virgin in even small local churches. The fifteenth century also saw the rise of cheap, portable devotional woodcuts that contained indulgences,[91] the most frequent images on which were images of pity and of Our Lady of Pity (fig. 12). This culture of pardon and indulgence-hoarding was often site- and image-specific. Pardons and indulgences were also conflated with other ameliorative effects of devotional images, as Kamerick argues: "These books point to a culture shared by clerics and laity, in which the magical element of charms and the suspicious promises of indulgences join sanctioned cults like that of the five wounds to pattern the beliefs of priest and parishioner alike."[92] This is because indulgences were part of the religious matrix of contrition and absolution, as Duffy explains: "In every case the indulgence could only be obtained by a Christian in a state of grace, that is, one who had truly repented, sincerely confessed, and been duly absolved of all grave sins, and the pardon was awarded in return for the performance of specific pious acts, such as pilgrimage or the recitation of particular indulgenced devotions".[93] The faithful were required to be pure and relieved of spiritual burdens, but they also needed to perform specific *acts* to receive the pardons. Read within this context, pietàs offered a solution to both parts of the problem: they helped to establish a mental space for contrition and repentance, but also functioned as recipients of cultic devotion, perhaps attached to an indulgence or boon (miracle).

Hence, devotional images stimulated a cyclical series of answers and responses: the sight of a particular image at the local parish church could trigger repentance, after which the

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[90] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art,* 169.
[91] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 214.
[92] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 186.
[93] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 288.

layperson would seek absolution by paying a visit to a specific image in a different church. In this manner, various devotional images, beliefs, and superstitions were woven together to form the fabric of medieval spirituality. It is important to remember that most medieval lay people did not differentiate the granting of a material favor from receiving God's or a saint's favor, which is why lay people often traveled back to a site-specific image to offer thanks if their request had been granted. Margery Kempe made an offering to the Trinity at Norwich before she left for her pilgrimage to Rome; she again stopped at Norwich on her way back to make another offering for the successful completion of her pilgrimage.[94] Similarly, Duffy reports on a series of paintings over the Lady altar in Ranworth, Norfolk, where it was customary for local women to present themselves and their babies to the principal image to give thanks for a safe delivery.[95] Wills also show that lay people bequeathed legacies to the wooden and alabaster images in their parish churches.[96] Not only in death but also in life, parishioners paid for the maintenance and upkeep of these local images, in addition to endowing light bequests and masses to be said before them. In many ways, this type of rapport with images parallels the cultic function of Byzantine icons in the tenth century, which was transmuted in the Romanesque and Gothic periods into relic devotion.

On this point, it is noticeable that the V&A pietà shares many similarities of function and form to famous Byzantine icon representations, such as the Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (fig. 13, 14). The V&A pietà is formal and nonspecific. This non-specificity is probably a result of mass production, in which the "artworks that issued from the countless ateliers were treated as a product line whose primary function was to generate profit, and this produced a high degree of

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[94] Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, 140.
[95] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars,* 181.
[96] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art,* 73.

standardization."[97] Like icons, which were also produced in workshops, all the pietàs by the

Rimini master are generalized and similar in style and size. There is also a lack of forceful energy

in the V&A pietà, which is precisely the opposite aspect of an Andachtsbilder. In fact, the image

does not seem to be so much taken from a narrative sequence, as a posed "family portrait" for

display: Mary places her hand lightly around Christ's left arm while holding him to the viewer for

display, making him more of an attribute of her grief than a person with whom she actively

interacts. This formal relationship between mother and dead son, with the former exhibiting the

latter to the viewer, is paralleled in the Byzantine *hodegetria* icons, where Mary gestures

towards the infant Christ to indicate that Christ is the source of salvation. Similarly, in the V&A

pietà, Mary holds Christ in her arms for the viewer, in order to convey the importance of

contemplating the Passion. In both examples, the Virgin uses her free arm to redirect visual

interest back to Christ, whilst maintaining a formal composure and separation that is not seen in

the fourteenth-century pietàs. Also in contrast to the massive, forcefully affective pietàs of the

fourteenth century, the scale of the alabaster pietà s by the Rimini master is comparable to

hodegetria statuettes, which typically measure about seven to eight inches (c. 20 cm) high,

meaning they were small enough for wide production and export but also versatile in function.

This combination of generic, nonspecific, and formal qualities and smaller size, meant that, like a

Byzantine icon, the V&A pietà was malleable to whatever beliefs local parishioners attributed to

it. It is also worth noting the similarities in the style of Mary's garb in both the V&A pietàs Mary

and the Byzantine works.

While we do not know how medieval lay people responded to the V&A pietà, we can

infer the functions it served by following the devotional trajectory of another Rimini Master

pietà. The *Madonna dell'Acqua* in the Tempio Malatestiano still stands *in situ* (fig. 15, 16). It was

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[97] Lipińska, *Moving sculptures,* 134.

brought back to Italy by a member of the Malatesta family and installed in the family chapel,[98]

where it accrued a site-specific cultic reputation for providing relief from droughts in a series of

miracles over the centuries, the first occurring in 1584. Though pietàs do not have a specific

association with droughts, this shows that local inflections and practices are crucial in forming

the meanings of images. Perhaps the first miracle was a result of a parishioner who felt their

prayers to the Madonna were being answered by the appearance of rain. Though it may seem

odd to pray to a pietà for rain when the image was created for the purposes of contemplating

the Passion, it also shows how the vocabulary of prayer in hope of salvation may be blended

with a vocabulary of temporal earthly concerns. The non-specificity of the *Madonna dell'Acqua*

shows how it lent itself to local worship and customs. This adaptability is similarly evident in the

V&A pietà.

This type of cultic devotion is what elicited Lollard skepticism of devotional images as

leaning towards idolatry in England, with one Lollard writer condemning the rites accompanying

what he deemed image-worship as follows: "cleuen sadly strokande and kyssand þese olde

stones and stokkis, layying doun grete offryngis, and maken avowis riȝt þere to þese dede

ymagis to come þe nexst ȝeer agayn, as ȝif bei were Crist and oure Lauedy and Ion Baptit and

Thomas of Caunterbery and siche oþer."[99] With the English Reformation, proponents of reform

levied criticism against pietàs as emblematic of this form of cultic devotion. Layman and

proponent of the Reformation William Marshall attacked the cult of Our Lady of Pity, saying

"why might not a man smell a little idolatry here, in that there appeareth in this title a certain

respect, a reverence, more to one image to another?"[100] Similarly, fellow Reformation supporter

Henry Goldwell complained that the presence of more than one crucifix in a church lead to

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[98] Vera Mazzotti, "La Madonna dell'Acqua." Monache dell'Adorazione Eucaristica. April 28, 2013. Accessed April 27, 2017. http://www.adoratrici.it/bellezza/storie-mariane-e-simboli/la-madonna-dell-acqua.
[99] Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art*, 24.
[100] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars,* 382.

idolatrous worship. As Duffy reports, Goldwell had a special distaste for pietàs: "…he particularly disliked the very common images of Our Lady of Pity, 'having her son in her arms after he was taken down from the cross; which I do not perceive to be a true story by the Scripture, yet to these images the people have much mind'."[101] Both Marshall and Goldwell are reacting to the pietà 's function as a receptacle for cultic practice. However, this aspect of pietà devotion is just the most visible expression of devotion to the cult of Our Lady of Pity; the far less noticeable expression would be its role as a stimulus to contrition and repentance as the ever-present, silent reminder for parishioners' moral consciences.

This presence of these ritualistic beliefs surrounding the pietà forces a reevaluation of the definition of the pietà as an Andachtsbild. Hans Belting, Sixten Ringbom, and Erwin Panofsky saw Andachtsbilder as a combination of form and function with specific definitions. The form of an Andachtsbild had to be halfway between a narrative image and an icon: in other words, it was usually a quotation from a larger scene. The pietà or vesperbild was held up as an ideal example because it was a quotation of the Lamentation. In terms of its function, Ringbom writes, "It had a specific function as a vehicle of empathic feeling and contemplative absorption."[102] Marks explains that Andachtsbilder were expected to "draw a line between cult images, i.e. images with miraculous powers, and a kind of personal image which 'forsook its traditional aloofness and was ready to address the beholder in a way that produced a private dialogue […] The old cult image, in contrast, steadfastly refused to allow its content to be manipulated by the wishes of the beholder'."[103] However given these criteria, it would necessarily be the case that the intended functions of all *vesperbilds* cannot be the same, since the forms are not the same. This means that while all pietàs are essentially extracted from the

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[101] Ibid., 419.

[102] Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting*. (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco, 1984), 339.

[103] Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England,* 15.

same story, the formal, iconographic differences in their rendering are a conscious choice. The artist chooses who is emphasized and who is deemphasized in response to the needs of the audience. Because the pietà is essentially a variation of the same story, these formal choices work to indicate the function of the image.

The key indicator of function is who and what is being emphasized. For example, the closeness of Christ to Mary is a good indicator of the intensity of her grief, which speaks to whether the image is conveying the idea of a mother mourning her son or a mother *with* her son. If the focus is on Mary's grief over her son's death, then one can say that the image is a proper *Andachtsbild,* since it is a "vehicle of empathic feeling." However, if the focus is on Mary and Christ as isolated beings, portrayed together in a single image, then the image would not fulfill the emotional requirements of an *Andachtbild*. Instead, it would function as another variation of a Marian image, as in late medieval England, when people referenced the cult of Our Lady of Pity. This is because the expression of true grief and loss requires two figures to relate emotionally to one other; most often this is conveyed through their physical intimacy. Using non-medieval examples, compare Michelangelo's Roman pietà (fig. 18) against the pietà etchings and sculpture of Käthe Kollwitz in the twentieth century (fig. 17). The interaction between Kollwitz's figures cues a viewer's recognition that these two figures are emotionally bound together. Although beautiful and elegiac, the same cannot be said for Michelangelo's pietà - because the two figures are so detached from one other that the viewer is only aware of their relationship from iconography. Ultimately, Ringbom, Belting, and Panofsky's desire to attribute a single meaning to specific iconographic representations, can lead to misinterpretation. This is seen in late medieval pietàs that were predisposed towards cultic rituals and manipulation by their viewers of their iconographic content.

The long history of the pietà covered in this paper shows a genre adaptable to the changing audiences and changing devotional needs of the Middle Ages. While originally conceived as an image for the aid of affective piety in mystical devotion, the gradual dissemination of this image to lay audiences show a democratization of religious prayers, texts, and images. Analogous to the rise and spread of books of hours, the laity began to play an active part in their own salvation, unlike the earlier Middle Ages where the regular clergy was responsibility for the salvation of the entire society.

Finally, the pietà is illustrative of how medieval audiences did not segregate the secular from the sacred,[104] in a worldview that was holistic and conceived of Christianity as the underlying connective tissue pulling together different facets of their lives. It was a pluralistic worldview where contradictory beliefs coexisted, a religion spoken in what Duffy describes as "…a voice which sang on more than one note, and often in harmony with others."[105] Within the medieval ethos, pietàs found a meditative, contemplative purpose as well as practical, palliative ones, with neither being mutually exclusive. Rather this duality summarizes the breadth of interpretations images inspired in an audience that was as capable as any contemporary audience in receiving and reconciling disparate -- sometimes seemingly contradictory -- information.

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[104] Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 47.
[105] Ibid., 103-104.