The Horror of Orthodoxy: Christina *Mirabilis*, Thirteenth-Century 'Zombie' Saint

Abstract

In 1232, Thomas of Cantimpré wrote his *Life* of Christina *Mirabilis* (a. 1150-1224), an account of the miraculous life and three deaths of an unenclosed holy woman from the Low Countries. The text opens with an explicit vindication of Christina's return(s) as divinely mandated. Yet, the narrative shows that her community struggle to deal with the revenant in their midst. Through her example, they must confront the terrifying mechanics of purgatory, resurrection, and the co-incidence of body and soul. A similar unease is found in modern scholarship, in which Christina is typically referred to dismissively in terms more commonly applied to cinematic monsters. I work with such dismissive language — specifically the term 'zombie' — to move beyond this heuristic roadblock. By interrogating Christina's *vita* in terms of filmic zombie-ism, fresh insights are revealed as to the ways in which the holy woman is at once exemplarily orthodox and thoroughly terrifying.

Introduction

> Fatemur quidem, & verum est, narrationem nostrum omnem hominis intellectum excedere, utpote quae secundùm cursum naturæ fieri nequaquam possent, cum tamen sint possibilia Creatori' *VCM*, prol.3.650.)
>
> [I admit — and it is true — that my account surpasses all human understanding, inasmuch as these things could by no means have occurred according to the course of nature, yet they are possible to the Creator', (*VCMEng*, prol.3.128).]

With these words, Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1272) tips his hand: some weird stuff is going to go down. If anything, Thomas undersells the strange-ness of the hagiography that he introduces with these proleptic remarks. A few sentences later, the Dominican friar and erstwhile Augustinian canon makes good on his promise of weird happenings, and begins his

biography of Christina *Mirabilis* (d. 1224). [1] Written in 1232, Thomas' *vita* is an extraordinary account of the singular life, complete with miraculous three deaths, of a cow-herding orphan turned holy woman from Sint-Truiden. The text opens with the death of its protagonist, as Christina succumbs to a deleterious illness brought upon by great spiritual contemplation (*VCM*, 1.5.651.) Her lifeless body, laid out for a day, suddenly springs to life — and Christina is returned to the realm of the living. She will now experience the torments of purgatory on earth by divine will (1.6-8.651-52). Her post-mortem body will be able to withstand such suffering miraculously, and she will remain seemingly unharmed by the multitudinous punishments to come. The revenant Christina exhibits supremely bizarre behaviour, including jumping into ovens, hanging herself for days, sitting on the bottom of the river for six or more days at a time, and flying (1.9.652; 1.11.652; 2.19.654; 2.20. 654). Although never formally canonized, it is little wonder that Christina is hailed as the patron saint of the mentally ill and mental health workers.

Christina is a beguine, an un-enclosed holy woman, whose life is marked by her shifting status in relation to monastic institutions. The *vita* records three distinct periods of Christina's spiritual practice. After her first death in 1182, Christina remains part of the laity, albeit becoming a lay woman renowned for her bizarre and/or miraculous acts (*VCM*, 1.1-3.37.651-56). For some nine years (c. 1210-c.1218), she resides with Jutta of Borgloon, a recluse in the castle of Loon (4.38-46.657-58). During her time with Jutta, Christina does not become reclusive, however. She enmeshes herself in the politics of the region and cultivates a deep spiritual bond with Louis II, count of Loon. Christina regularly offers Louis advantageous prophetic insights, and even takes on his purgatorial punishments after his death in 1218. In the final year of her life, Christina transfers to St. Catherine's, a Benedictine monastery near Sint-Truiden (4.46-5.54.658-59), though she does not take the veil. It is only in death that Christina becomes assimilated fully into a monastic institution. Her body is

buried in St. Catherine's grounds, and translated to Nonnemielen (north of Sint-Truiden) in 1231 as part of a move of the entire monastic complex.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the uncanny and perplexing events contained in Christina's *vita*, extant versions of the text in Middle Dutch and Middle English, as well as the original Latin, testify to the popularity of the tale for a relatively wide medieval audience.[2] A library catalogue dating to the seventeenth century reveals that the abbey of Sint-Truiden housed Christina's biography, alongside the *vitae* of other thirteenth-century holy women from the region such as Marie of Oignies and Lutgard of Aywières (Brussels, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes, MS 98, fol. 345v; Mulder-Bakker, 2011, 39). This is noteworthy as it potentially sheds light on the reception of Christina's *vita*. The biography of hermit Gerlach of Houthem (d. 1165), composed by an anonymous Premonstratensian canon in Liège c. 1227, testifies that the laity were sometimes invited to the abbey of Sint-Truiden to hear recitals of saints' lives and discuss issues of faith (Kneepens, 1995, 1.10.164; Mulder-Bakker, 2011, 39). It is plausible, then, that Christina's text was recited at such events as an entertaining yet authentic representation of piety to a diverse audience of men and women, formally religious and lay alike.

Further evidence of the usage of Christina's text as a focus of collective faith practice is provided if we turn to the Middle Dutch version of Christina's biography. The vernacular work was composed c. 1280-1290 at the behest of the nuns of St. Catherine's for the purpose of public readings (Mulder-Bakker, 2011, 40; Simons, 2001, 175 n. 45). The nuns obviously considered Christina's text suitable material for inspiring greater faith amongst their own ranks. A parallel to such monastic enthusiasm for Christina's life as a textual artefact is found in the diegesis itself. Christina regularly visits with the nuns of St. Catherine's, falling into ecstasy and belting out mystical songs as a result of her disquisitions about Christ (*VCM*, 3.35-36.656). In one instance, the entire community of St. Catherine's runs to her side and

join in her rendition of the *Te Deum laudamus*. The nuns, we are told, 'greatly rejoiced in Christina's solace' (*VCMEng*, 36.146) ('lætabatur enim multum Christinæ solatio', *VCM*, 3.36.656). The holy woman inspires the nuns to praise Christ more intensely, so much so that they 'forcibly detained' ('detineretur') her in the convent on occasion. Ultimately, it is impossible to delineate precisely the composition of the readership of Christina's *vita*. What is clear, however, is that this biography of a lay holy woman (beguine) was accepted — at least by some — as an effective means for inspiring faith, even for members of the clergy and monastics.[3]

Though the medieval audience of Christina's text may recognise it as an important source of religious inspiration, the people with which she lived do not share such a positive view of the holy woman, at least initially. Instead, the townspeople of Sint-Truiden — including her friends and family — believe Christina to be a demoniac. They capture her three times, imprisoning her first using iron chains, then by binding her to a pillar in a locked cellar, and finally securing her with a heavy wooden yoke, presumably with the aim of 'curing' her (*VCM*, 1.9.652; 2.18.653; 2.19.654.) She provokes 'horror and trembling' (*VCMEng* 46.150) ('horrore & tremore', *VCM*, 4.46.658) in those who encounter her first-hand.

This uneasy response to Christina on a narrative level finds its counterpart in the majority of modern scholarship devoted to the holy woman.[4] Critics struggle to classify the holy woman decisively, seemingly unable to assimilate her into the canon of equally oddball medieval hagiographic protagonists. Instead, Christina is held off at a distance by a near ubiquitous rhetoric of othering, a heuristic manoeuvre which parallels the way in which her contemporary community forcibly isolates her from their midst. For example, the saint is described as a 'ghost or zombie', 'something other than typically "human"', belonging to 'the living and the dead at the same time', an outlandish figure from 'pious folklore' or 'just plain

weird' (respectively: Newman, 1999, 50; Giglio, 1998, 116; Passenier, 2001, 153; King, 1987, 147; Newman, 2008, 30). These descriptions tend toward a figuring of the saint as a horror monster — the terrifying and terrorizing otherworldly creature to be avoided — rather than an example of holiness to be venerated. Such phraseology tends to foreclose any deeper interrogation of Christina and her life: she is weird, full stop, end of discussion. But attention to the particularities of the *vita*, and its reception, shows that there is much more fertile ground to be covered if we move beyond this artificial discursive finish-line. In this article, I work with the dismissive language of modern criticism — specifically the term 'zombie' — to open up fresh analyses of Christina and her text: OK, yes, she's a zombie, what does that actually mean?[5]

Though her numerous resuscitations and lurid behaviour are perceived to be hair-raisingly macabre, Christina is not an isolated case of holy zombification. Miraculous resuscitation is rare, but it is certainly not absent from biblical history — case in point: Christ's Resurrection — and, indeed, crops up now and then in medieval hagiography. There are at least six other examples of miraculously resuscitated saints from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries alone.[6] Medieval images of the Day of Judgement frequently depict the dead rising from graves to face their fate: resurrection as a form of zombification much like the narrative presented in Christina's *vita* was an accepted iconographical motif.[7] What's more, Christina's mystical resuscitation is explicitly shown to be at the hands of God (*VCM*, prol.1.650; 1.7.652). Why, then, does she provoke such discomfort in modern scholars, and in her medieval community? What can Christina's *vita* tell us about attitudes towards resurrection more generally in the period? How does Thomas of Cantimpré construct his narrative to allow for Christina to be viewed, ultimately, as a truly holy individual? Considering Christina, and her text, in terms of filmic zombie-ism offers us powerful inroads into these complicated questions.

Mulvey (2006, 42-53) asserts that 'archaic beliefs and superstitions are able to return within the popular culture of illusions [i.e. cinema] that are not only disorientating but also exploit this particular repressed fear of the dead' (42-43). In the modern critical categorisation of Christina as a zombie, we find a kernel of those 'repressed' and 'archaic beliefs and superstitions' of the possibility of life after death, and implicitly of Christian theology itself. Rather than creating distance from Christina's strange-ness, then, calling her a 'zombie' lets us get up close and personal with the anxieties generated by the holy woman's reanimations, albeit reframed into the filmic — that popular route to the supernatural in our otherwise secular modern society. According to Cowan (2012, 63), most, if not all, of a zombie-horror film's shocks are generated by 'our fear that everything we know — or think we know — about the sacred order could be turned upside down in a matter of moments'. I contend that this '*metataxis of horror*' is evident in Christina's *vita*, as the business of faith is shown to be a difficult process of coming to terms with the unpleasant reality of what is necessary in order to accede to grace: namely, purgatory and resurrection. As such Christina's zombie-ism serves as a vivid and terrifying example of what Christians will go through themselves one day. She functions as a proxy for Christians' future selves. What's more, the reaction of modern critics to the Christina-zombie also exhibit the logic of Cowan's '*metataxis of horror*'. In place of medieval Catholicism, the 'sacred order' which arguably organises modern society is rationality, and the notion of the triumph of the intellect over all else. Christina's *vita* is 'horrific' as it forces us to confront the inherent instabilities of this ideological architecture.

Zombie Typology: Exemplary Outsiders

To understand more fully the implications of classifying Christina *Mirabilis* as a zombie, a brief introduction is needed to (cinematic) zombie typology. Zombies, alongside vampires and otherworldly spirits, form what Grant (2004, 178) describes as the 'basic iconography' of horror films. Soulless lumpen flesh, capable of motor function but seemingly without rational interiority, zombies are both human and non-human. As horror's paradoxically living and walking dead, zombies terrorize the truly living community. In 1932, the zombie made its silver-screen debut in Victor Halperin's *White Zombie*. The movie instantiates the model of zombification brought on by voodoo-ism and/or supernatural possession. Haitian magnate Murder Legendre transforms workers into zombies so that they will work for no pay. Madeline, a beautiful woman subject to the unreciprocated desires of plantation owner Beaumont, is also zombified by Murder so that Beaumont may, finally, have her sexually. Zombies in this mode are mechanistic empty vessels, victimised tools of the curse-master or voodoo priest.

Since the late 1960s another zombie type has dominated the cinematic imagination: the 'Romero paradigm' (Dendle, 2001, 7), named after George A. Romero, creator-director of the *Living Dead* zombie-horror franchise.[8] Such zombies are created in a variety of ways, including viral infection, scientific accident, and zombie bite. They hunt the living — often portrayed as the 'survivor' community — operating in savage packs with a ravenous and incomprehensible need for human flesh. In comparison to voodoo zombies, Romero-style zombies do not have any outside forces governing their zombified behaviour. Rather, they are motivated primarily by drive, specifically a terrifying biological and animalistic urge to consume human flesh. As we shall see, Christina oscillates between these two primary figurations of zombie-ism, at least superficially. On the one hand, she exhibits shockingly

violent behaviour — much like the Romero-zombie. On the other hand, she is isolated, a lone individual operating according to the logic of her 'supernatural possessor' — God.

Zombie films typically reflect upon contemporary socio-cultural concerns, using the figure of the zombie as a vehicle with which to critique problematic dominant ideologies — most often of racism, sexism, capitalism, and rampant individualism. Though 'presented in unfamiliar and frequently grotesque images', the zombie figure's primary role is to offer 'a most welcome corrective' to contemporary society's ills, defined according to the film director's worldview (Paffenroth, 2006, 22). For example, the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978) expose the degenerate inanity of contemporary American consumerism, to which society has closed its eyes (Dendle, 2001, 11; Paffenroth, 2006, 45-69; Shaviro, 1993, 92-94). Drawn to the shopping mall after death the zombies shuffle about and perform the ritualised gestures of consumption. There is the distinct possibility that this shopping trip could last forever — or at least until the zombies are dispatched by the intrepid band of human survivors. The 'shop-till-you-drop' zombies elucidate the material compulsivity that orients the behaviour of the still-living in a capitalist society: empty consumption ad infinitum. Thus, the zombies show the metaphoric zombification of the still-living in the film. The zombies' compulsivity can be viewed sympathetically — they are victims to their zombie nature, after all. By contrast, the still-living humans have no such excuse. They are equipped with the mental faculties to recognise the problematic nature of their consumption, and yet they continue going to the mall. The human 'heroes' would surely be shopping as mindlessly as their zombie foes, were they not battling for their survival.

Unlike the swarming Romero-style zombies that hunt the living, Christina wishes to separate herself entirely from the living. She wants to roam alone, the only one of her kind (*VCM*, 1.9.652) Instead, the holy woman is repeatedly hunted down by her friends, family, and various townspeople in order to be captured and thereby forcibly re-integrated into the

society of Sint-Truiden. The inability or unwillingness of such folk to accept Christina's spiritual excellence demonstrate their debased morality. Moreover, such misrecognition of Christina's holiness leads to greater immersion in sin. In one episode, for example, the holy woman's sisters and friends bribe a 'most wicked man' (*VCMEng,* 17.137) ('nequissimum [...] virum', *VCM*, 2.17.653) to trap Christina and bind her with heavy iron chains.

The actions of Christina's intimates are not motivated by any care for the holy woman's well-being, but their own immoral vanity: they are thoroughly embarrassed ('erubescentes non modice') by Christina's weird behaviours and want her hidden from sight. In another imprisonment scene, Christina's family and friends are explicitly characterised as her persecutors ('ipsius persecutione'), rather than terrified potential victims (2.19.654). Their cruelty is vividly depicted in Christina's final episode of captivity, in which a heavy wooden yoke crushes the holy prisoner's shoulders, causing suppurating wounds that rob her of her ability to eat her scant rations of bread and water. Nevertheless, '[n]o one there had compassion on her wretchedness' (*VCMEng*, 19.138) ('[n]ullo ergo ejus miseriis compatiente', *VCM*, 2.19.654). Christina survives solely due to the Lord's intervention, who makes her breasts run with a salvific oil that satiates her hunger and treats her wounds. This miracle is a turning point, and Christina's companions now perceive her holiness. Nevertheless, these wicked individuals are a far cry from the sympathetic community of human survivors who are trying to hold out against the zombie hordes. Christina's family and friends take on the attributes of the violent and persecuting living-dead zombie, whilst the saint functions as the sympathetic victim, the sole human survivor.

Any character, including the still-living, may adopt the 'zombie function' of incisive social critique. Indeed, Kay (2008, ix, 323-32) notes that there exist 'zombieless zombie movies' which deploy characters governed by the 'zombie function', i.e. outsiders that lay bare the troubles at the heart of a given society symbolically acting as if they were 'real'

zombies. From this perspective, it matters little if Christina looks like a zombie or even conforms to basic zombie lore — her status as a frightening outsider through whom proper Christian behaviour is relayed to her community, and to the *vita*'s audience, shows her uptake of the 'zombie function'. In this, Christina finds a parallel in so-called 'zombie walkers'.

In a 'zombie walk', participants dress as zombies, converge in a zombie pack, and menace an area at a shuffle. 'Zombie walkers' are decisively human, bringing 'zombies' into the zombieless twenty-first century world, in much the same way that Christina conjures the zombie figure into a literally zombieless medieval context. Mann (2012) argues convincingly that a central goal for zombie walkers' is to expose the 'rapacious consumerism' that corrodes 'our sense of self', forcing citizens into ever more narrow 'modes of [capitalist] identity'. Moreover, she asserts that the Church offers the ultimate solution to the problems of our 'zombified age', offering 'the promise of new life and hope'. In this framing, which discloses the spiritual bias of the author — otherwise employed as an Anglican priest — the 'zombie walkers' are undertaking an urgent spiritual mission, more or less consciously. The dramatic demonstration of the 'zombie walkers' instructs the general public as to the emptiness of lives devoid of religious succour, implicitly urging them to return to the bosom of the Church. What's more, they have fun doing it. The zombie — whether immediately identifiable as such or not — is a figure at once educative, exemplary, and entertaining. These three characteristics similarly govern the protagonist of a hagiographic text (Campbell, 2008, 12; see also Cazelles, 1991, 4, 7). A vivid and entertaining portrayal of a saint's life and works could be regarded as a necessary element of an effectively instructive text. From this perspective, we can talk about zombie narratives as 'saint-less hagiographies' as much as Christina's *vita* operates as a 'zombieless zombie film'.

The saint is a pedagogical tool for the hagiographer, as the zombie is for the film director or 'zombie walker'. The saint's biographical narrative is carefully constructed in

order to offer inspiration to Christians in terms of moral virtue, to offer proof of God's magnificent potency, and to shore up their acceptance of doctrine. Indeed, Thomas of Cantimpré stresses Christina's function as an *exemplum* testifying to the reality of purgatory in his concluding remarks to the text:

> Et quid aliud in omni vita sua Christina clamavit, nisi poenitentiam agere, & paratos esse homines omni hora? Hoc verbis multis, hoc fletibus, hoc ejulatibus, hoc clamoribus infinitis, hoc exemplo vitae plus docuit, plus clamavit, quam de aliquo praecedentium vel subsequentium scripto vel relatione percepimus, in laudem & gloriam Christi (*VCM*, 5.56.659).

> [What else did Christina cry out during her entire life except to do penance and be ready at every hour? This she taught with many words, with tears, with lamentations and boundless cries, and with the example of her life. This, indeed, she taught more insistently and shouted louder than anyone we have heard of before or since, whether through writings or by report, to the praise and glory of Christ […] (*VCMEng*, 56.155).]

Unlike the modern filmic zombie who 'straddle[s] the line between living and dead in a perverted version of the Christian idea of bodily resurrection' (Paffenroth, 2006, 12), zombie-hood in Christina's *vita* is a vehicle for educating the audience about religious truths. That is not to say that filmic zombie is fundamentally at odds with the Christina-zombie. Rather, the former — products of an overwhelmingly secular culture — target dominant ideological frameworks which orient modern life. Similarly, Christina's *vita* and zombification reveals the rather unappealing inner workings of Catholicism, the organisational structure which governs medieval life. Though Christina's return to life seems to 'violate the natural order', it actually reveals the divine order which orients all earthly things. Far from being an aberration from Catholic norms, Christina is an *example* of orthodox doctrines of resurrection and

purgatory — albeit taken to extremes — and the difficulty of coming to terms with the demands of doctrine.

It is worth reiterating that the image of Christina's as an illustrious role-model is controlled entirely by her hagiographer. Thomas curates events from the holy woman's life to provide his readership with a picture of orthodoxy. Although Christina is shown to subject herself voluntarily to myriad violent purgatorial sufferings, her agency is ultimately a textual fiction. Nevertheless, the *vita* is presented as historically accurate, with Christina's purgatorial agonies inflicted consciously by her own hand. Throughout my analyses, I defer to this diegetic representation of the holy woman, in order to dissect the effect of her actions on onlookers within the narrative and readers of the biography.

Resurrection, Resuscitation, and Anxiety

Christina certainly fulfils one of the criteria for zombie classification — she is one of the dead, a 'female Lazarus' who has risen to walk amongst the living (Newman, 1999, 52). An individual rising from the dead seems monstrous to a modern audience, as such an event runs counter to the prevalent secular understanding of the finality of death. In contrast, tales of mystical resuscitation were designed to inspire a 'wondering response' from a medieval audience, steeped in Christian theology that legitimised the miraculous return of the dead to life as acts of divine providence (Joynes, 2001, xii). Resurrection is at the very heart of Christian doctrine: the greatest example of the authenticity of revivification is Christ's rise from the dead (see Jn 5:28-29, 6:39-40, 11:25; Lk 14:14). Despite the clear biblical precedent for Christina's return from the dead, however, the holy woman's friends, family, and wider community do not respond to her with wonder — but contempt and fear. This response further establishes Christina as a zombie, primarily an object of terror for the still-living within the diegesis and for film-spectators alike.

Initially, the inhabitants of Sint-Truiden believe Christina to be possessed by demons, as discussed above. Her actions categorically cannot be interpreted as the actions of a sane and/or holy individual (*VCM*, 1.9.652; 2.17-19.653-54). This reaction reflects circulating beliefs — and significant anxiety — about purported cases of resurrection, which were viewed with considerable circumspection. Such cases could be demonic in origin: it was widely accepted that demons could re-animate corpses at will. For example, holy woman Ida of Louvain (d. c. 1261) is visited by a terrifying demonic apparition of a corpse on a bier one night (De vener. Ida, 1968, 1.2.8-9.160). The Devil jumps into the dead body, reanimating it with his force, and launches himself upon Ida. Another possible explanation for 'resurrection' was illness or insanity. Thomas of Cantimpré — the staunchest supporter of the reality of Christina's resuscitation in the *vita* — elsewhere concurs with such medical explanations. In his *Liber de natura rerum* (1973, 1.60.66) he asserts that many women suffer with the problem of appearing to drop dead.

The anxiety expressed by the Sint-Truiden community is not quelled by the explicit status of Christina's return from the dead as a miracle wrought by God Himself (*VCM*, prol.1.650; 1.7.652). Christina recounts her lengthy conversation with Christ after her first death, in which he offers her the choice to remain with him in heaven, or to return to her body on earth and undergo the trials of purgatory there. It is painstakingly spelled out that Christina returns to the mortal world to undergo purgatory, thus showing all her actions are both orthodox and extremely compassionate, as her suffering will release souls stuck in purgatory. The inclusion of this conversation signals the author's anticipation of significant push-back against Christina as a holy individual. Further, the rejection of the vision as definitive evidence of Christina's holiness reflects the significant difficulty of discerning true divine visions from false which haunts medieval female mysticism. For example, the widely popular late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Pseudo-Albertine text *De secretis mulierum* (1655,

11.114) describes Galen's cure of a certain woman who appeared to be dead, complete with loss of pulse and total stasis. One of the text's medieval commentators ('B') connects such episodes of 'resuscitation' with spiritual charlatanism (Lemay, 1992, 11.134; Elliott, 2004, 207-08). Stories of ecstasy, purportedly provoking the temporary loss of life, are laughable, as is the victim's belief that she has experienced genuine divine visions. Whilst Christina's vision should settle the matter of her spirituality, not all purportedly divine visions are actually from the Lord. Alongside visions originating in psychological and medical imbalances, the Devil is known to ensnare victims with seemingly pious spiritual apparitions. In the *vita* of the beguine Marie of Oignies' (d. c. 1213), for example, one of the holy woman's close friends receives many dream visions in which the Devil appears cloaked with the appearance of righteousness as an angel of light (Jacques of Vitry, 1707 [1969], 1.3.30.643).

Evidently, resurrection was a source of significant unease for medieval Christians. All Christians, sinners included, will eventually regain an immortal body via resurrection after death. However, there was — and is — debate as to when exactly the soul reclaims the body. However, Le Goff (1984, 123-24) notes that the liturgy emphasised the concept of a first resurrection espoused in Rv 20:6 during the early Middle Ages. The first resurrection involves only the resurrection of the righteous. After a millennium, all, including sinners, will be resurrected for the Lord's final judgement. After divine judgement, the pious will be released to heaven, whilst the sinful will be remanded to hell. However, only saints will inhabit a glorified body, as described in 1 Cor 15:35-44.

The doctrinal situation is further complicated by the coincidence of cases of resurrection and resuscitation. In the case of resurrection, an individual is returned from death to life to a glorified body, and cannot die again. With resuscitation, an individual is restored to life from death but is susceptible to dying again. Hence, in his *Summa theologica*

(composed c. 1265-1274), Thomas Aquinas (1859, 954) describes resuscitation as 'imperfect resurrection' ('resurrectione imperfecta'). Nevertheless, those experiencing resuscitation foreshadow Christ's eventual perfect resurrection, and the resurrection of all mankind ('ad praemonstrandum quasi in quodam signo resurrectionem ipsius'). As mystical resuscitations of saints showed the historical veracity of Christ's resurrection, Christ's resurrection, in a feedback loop, offers proof as to the authenticity of the saint's own revivification. In 1 Cor 15:12-17, Paul underscores that a belief in general resurrection follows from the fundamental cornerstone of Christian theology: Christ's own resurrection.[9] The filmic zombie represents 'an unashamed mockery of humankind's most universally cherished ideal: life after death' (Dendle, 2001, 10). The medieval hagiographic zombie signifies the reverse. The saint, living after death, affirms that, in fact, the 'corruptible is incorrupt' — and a belief in the corruptibility and degeneration of the body into nothingness is a mockery of Christian theology (Bynum, 1995, 309).

The fact that Christina dies three times would seem to lead to a classification of her experiences as repeated resuscitations, as she is obviously susceptible to death. However, the Lord explicitly describes her resuscitated body as having a central quality of a resurrected body, i.e. incorruptibility. After her first death, Christ declares that the holy woman will '"return to the body and undergo there the punishment of an immortal soul in a mortal body without damage to it"' (*VCMEng*, 7.131) ('ad corpus reverti, ibi que [agere pœnas] immortalis animæ per mortale corpus sine detriment sui', *VCM*, 1.7.652). Thus, Christina's body is both resuscitated *and* partially resurrected. Christina's imperviousness to physical damage marks her out as one of God's elect, and allows the saint to function potently as an example of a perfectly resurrected body for her community. It is also central to generating the pervasive sense of unease in the text, as the author struggles to work through the form and capacities of Christina's — or any — resurrected body. Thomas of Cantimpré's concern with

establishing what precisely the resurrected body is and does reflects a widespread preoccupation in the thirteenth century, as theologians debated the nature of resurrection at length (Bynum, 1995, 229-343). It was clearly a compelling topic which provoked a considerable amount of worry in ecclesiastical quarters. Moreover, Thomas was certainly not the only author to grapple with the issue. A number of purgatory poems from the era testify to a wide engagement with working through the mechanics of purgatory as a means to salvation, and the contours of the resurrected body.[10]

The Council of Lateran IV in 1215 insisted that all 'will rise again with their own bodies, which they now bear' (Denzinger, 2012, 266, DS 801). Lateran IV's pronouncement was restated in the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 (283, DS 854). In Paris in 1277, not only were propositions that denied resurrection condemned (Denifle et al., 1889-1897, prop. 17, 544), but also those which troubled the identity of the resurrected body. Theologians rejected 'that God cannot give perpetuity to a mutable and corruptible thing' and 'that man, through the process of nutrition, can become another numerically and individually' (prop. 25, 545; prop. 148; 552 respectively; trans. from Bynum, 1995, 230-31). The vast majority of theologians of the later medieval period agreed that 'God will reassemble and reanimate at the end of time the same material particles […] of which the body was composed on earth' (Bynum, 1995, 276). Though theologians maintained that the resurrected body remains whole, in the sense that it continues to possess all 'aspects and elements of its earthly structure', the exact method of the body's reconstitution and its make-up remained topics of intense and complex discussion (238).

Bynum argues (1998, 595) that such medieval theological frameworks for resurrection find a direct parallel in the way in the modern era privileges the 'embodied self' in terms of identity. In much the same way that medieval resurrection demands the complete (re)union of body and soul, the modern human subject is understood as a 'psychosomatic

unity, a person, fully individual both in its physicality and its consciousness' (594). Bynum notes, for example, that the horror of Alzheimer's disease is rooted in the incapacity for those around the sufferer to disentangle bodily from psychological person-hood: 'we often feel body is person even when personality is distorted and intelligence gone' (596). The Alzheimer's patient looks like herself physically, but the disease has fundamentally altered her internal make-up. She is both there, and not there; the same, but different. Christina and the filmic zombie both operate in a broadly similar manner. By considering Christina as a zombie, modern readers project the ever-relevant anxieties provoked by the holy woman as to psycho-corporeal integrity into the realm of supernatural filmic representation.

The four endowments of the glorified (resurrected) body — impassibility, agility, levity, and clarity — allow Christina to endure the torments of purgatory on earth somewhat nonchalantly. Or rather, they should. Though inhabiting a glorified body, Christina can and does feel pain. She lets out gut-wrenching howls of pain during her bouts of extreme self-mortification (*VCM*, 1.11.652). Her passibility indicates that the line between resurrection and resuscitation can be very blurry indeed. Moreover, her painful bodily experiences connect her uncomfortably closely to the still-living Christian. The consequence of sitting in ovens is overwhelming pain, 'just like [for] any of us mortals' ('velut aliquis nostrûm') (*VCMEng*, 11.133). The precise nature of the authorial equivocation here is unsettlingly unclear: is Christina's experience similar to that of a still-living individual? Or will a now-living individual ultimately experience what Christina feels, perhaps during a lengthy stint in purgatory? Or both? Whatever the case, Christina's suffering makes plain the inevitable suffering to come for all sinners. Escaping death does not mean escaping the body, or pain.

A Graphically Glorified Body

Compelled by the drive to hunt and attack, zombies pay little attention to the state of their bodies. Cinema-goers are accustomed to seeing the zombie body fragment and break down before our very eyes — chunks of skin hang from the zombie, limbs and even the zombie's head are severed, whilst the zombie remains, terrifyingly 'living'. However, in Christina's biography, her self-directed violence not only leaves her intact but is an attempt at procuring an eternal wholeness in the form of the incorruptible body of the risen in heaven (*VCM*, 1.7.652). The saint's purgatorial trials, and (mostly) glorified body, bear witness to the interconnectedness of body and spirit. Even after resurrection the body is recognisable as a body — Christina retains her bodily identity and all attributes of her pre-resurrection body. Yet, Christina's body is also significantly different from her former pre-resurrection body. Similarly, the zombie body is the same-but-different as the living body it once was: zombies are recognisable to friends and family as individuals, yet also irrevocably other in their new form. How to come to terms with the body, eternally integral and identical during life and death? How to understand a body that is the same but different?

Christina's post-resuscitation behaviour seems to be startlingly violent. She appears to systematically attack her body with fire, water, and cold. For example, she creeps into fiery ovens and roaring fires and jumps into boiling cauldrons (*VCM*, 1.11.652); she lets water tumble her over the turning wheel at the water mill, and spends six days or more underwater in cold weather at the bottom of the river Meuse (1.12.652). In addition, she performs torture and mock executions on herself (2.14.653; 1.13.652-53) — scratching herself with thorns and brambles until she is drenched with blood; stretching herself out on the rack, painfully pulling her arms and legs apart; and suspending herself for days on the gallows. Significantly, however, none of these attacks are on members of the living community, and thus do not conform to a typical model of zombie-on-human violence. The only violence she does is to

her *own* body. It is unclear where the line is drawn between mortification of the flesh and a bona fide suicide attempt, but Christina is never identified as suicidal, nor feels shame for her actions.

Crucially, all of Christina’s sufferings conform to models of purgatorial punishment evident in other medieval texts (King, 1987, 147; Newman, 2008, 35). Torment by fire — achieved by Christina by sitting in ovens and roaring fires — was a key element of medieval purgatorial imagery. Medieval texts routinely showed people coming back from purgatory to visit the living marked by these flames, potent illustrations of doctrinal theory. Fire is symbolically conjoined with torments by water and the cold in the purgatorial imagination. For example, the dead in purgatory were seen to pass first through fire and then through water or the cold in their journey to expiate their sins (*VCMEng*, 134 n.16; 135 n.18). Thus, Christina’s repeated exposure to flames, water, and frozen conditions are explicit signs of her enduring purgatory in the here and now of the mortal world. The saint’s acts can be understood within the relevant framework of medieval religious devotion — however strange they might seem to modern eyes.[11] Christina’s self-mortification is entirely orthodox: it represents the penitent’s purgatorial punishments in strict accordance to doctrine (Elliott, 2004, 76). Christina’s zombification allows for the reality of purgatory to be made visible to those who witness her exploits, demonstrating the consequences of sin, and also the lengths to which one must go to expiate sin when in purgatory.

Christina’s zombified body makes plain the authenticity of divine punishment, and ‘reifies the mechanisms of judgement’ (Elliott, 2004, 76). From inquisitorial records of the mid-thirteenth century, it is clear that heretics of various different flavours were united in one particular sense (76-77). Many heretics, including the Cathars, challenged the orthodox position on divine judgement after death, with some entirely repudiating the notion of any judgement whatsoever. Christina’s *vita* is thus a potent weapon in an anti-heretical toolkit, a

tale outlandish enough to stick in the mind and keep an audience's attention but also entirely conformist to resurrection doctrines (Kurtz, 1988). Her strange actions are not subversive, but conservative — no matter how 'weird' they seem. In fact, the traumatic valency of Christina's practices lies in their status as completely orthodox. Suffering is useful, and the body must be mortified and simultaneously conserved. Yet who can truly embrace their own bodily breakdown with joy?

The Problem of Orthodoxy

Despite facing persecution initially, Christina comes to be accepted, even venerated, as a holy woman. Massive crowds come to Sint-Truiden from far and wide in order 'to see the wonders God had wrought' in her (*VCMEng*, 20.139) ('pro videndis mirabilibus Dei in Christina', 2.20.654). This development is not interpreted wholly positively by the town's spiritual community:

> […] religiosi viri ac mulieres, qui in praedicto opido errant, horrentes ne suprema mirabilium admiration humanum sensum excederet, converterentque bestiales hominum mentes in malignam operationem facta divina, maxime in iis, quod fugideno hominum praesentias, ardu quaeque velutavis ascenderet, & in aquis piscis diutius moraretur, […]]
>
> [When such crowds assembled, the religious men and women of Sint-Truiden were terrified that these supremely amazing marvels might exceed human reason, and that the beastly minds of men might convert these divine deeds into demonic activity — especially because Christina, fleeing the presence of humans, would ascend into lofty places like a bird and linger long in the waters like a fish.]

The horror felt here by those who fail to recognise Christina's holiness finds its parallel here. Though this passage purportedly depicts the staunch support of the religious community for

Christina, the evocation of her bizarre behaviours suggests that the misrecognition of the holy woman as demonic is almost logical, at least to the fallible human intellect. Indeed, the religious cohort pray to God that Christina's practices might be moderated to solve this seemingly inevitable problem. The collective prayers are answered. Christina immerses herself in a church font, and thereafter her temperament is significantly subdued (*VCM*, 2.21.654). Yet the clearest depiction of the community's horror when confronted with Christina occurs long after the saint's auto-baptism. At this point, her strangest behaviours are in the distant past, she lives in the main on her own in the desert, bothering nobody, and her holy acclaim is relatively secure (*VCM*, 4.46.658; Newman, 1999, 50). Even a moderate Christina continues to inspire fear in to those around her.

It is Christina's almost excessively orthodox body, whose nature remains constant after her first death, that troubles the people around her. Describing the holy woman's appearance during her wanderings, the *vita* explicitly states that the superabundance of spirit in her still living flesh is problematic, and indeed, horrific to her community: 'in omnibus fere partibus animale corpus sic spiritus obtinuerat' (*VCM*, 4.46.658). The text elides details of the precise make-up of the community that reacts to Christina with horror. This episode takes place in Loon near the end of Christina's life, in the period before she enters St. Catherine's monastery. However, it is not clear if these, and similar, events occur also in Sint-Truiden. The biographer notes that holy woman 'more frequently' ('sæpius morabatur') dwelt in the monastery after this point, which opens up the possibility for Christina's continued strange apparitional appearances around the area. This sense of the continued negative reaction to Christina is strengthened as the author foregrounds the universality of responses to her, as 'no one dared greet her, no one dared ask her anything' (*VCMEng*, 46.150) ('nemo eam salutare, nemo aliquid interrogare audebat', *VCM*, 4.46.658).

Christina generates horror in any and all individuals possessing human intellect, implicating readers both medieval and modern: 'scarcely could human minds or eyes look at the shadow her body cast without horror and a trembling of the spirit' ('humanæ mentes vel oculi vix possent ejus corporis umbram sine horror & tremore spiritus intueri'). In this way, the religious men and women of Sint-Truiden, previously shown to interpret Christina positively, are enfolded into the group of individuals in whom Christina provokes significant disquiet. Thus, the *vita* anticipates a certain push-back against the miraculous events it narrates from within lay *and* religious circles. In another vignette, such hypothetical clerical consternation is concretised in the 'stupefied' (*VCMEng*, 10.133) ('cernunt stupidi', *VCM* 1.10.652) response of two priests to Christina's miraculous ability to walk across the river Meuse unharmed. The clerics should hardly be nonplussed — after all, Christina has a resurrected body and thus can walk on waters as Christ can (Mat. 14:25-27).

Cowan (2008, loc. 321) argues that most horror films derive their frisson from debunking the 'good, moral, and decent fallacy' of religion — that is, the idea that 'religion is always (or should always be) a force for good in society'. Zombie-horror films offer a space in which to consider and negotiate the challenging elements of religious *praxes*, a space which allows for catharsis in the spectator's feelings of horror at the images on the screen, channelled from sentiments which haunt them outside of the cinema theatre. Christina's biography operates similarly for the medieval audience, as an arena to showcase and come to terms with the disturbing resonances of complete orthodoxy. Though orthodoxy may not be easy to accept for a medieval Catholic, the *vita* strenuously works to bring believers into step with its strictures.

By contrast, for a modern reader, the *vita* challenges the 'orthodoxy' of rationality — and in particular the supremacy of intellect over instincts — which governs contemporary society. That's, at least in part, why Christina is so damn weird: she gets under our skin. We

know logically that resurrection is impossible, that these events are utterly absurd. Yet, Christina's tale allows for the deeply ingrained human fear of death and the problematic inter-connection of mind and body to surge to the fore in the reader's mind. Through the zombie Christina, modern critics are forced to reassess the place of the intellect and rationality within the biological, instead of the questions of religious spirit and material body which haunt the medieval Christian audience.

Whether medieval or modern, the body is ultimately ruled by drives, a series of 'motive principle[s]' expressed as 'persistent behaviour directed at a goal', most notably those of biological imperatives such as satisfying hunger or the need for sleep (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Zombies are, in essence, creatures reduced to the satisfaction of one drive: hunger. They replicate — as zombie bite begets zombie — and form groups, though these eventualities are not consciously targeted. Zombies are no longer capable of rationalising their biological compulsions, exercising self-restraint in order to conform to the norms of civilised society. The zombie is the film spectator unmasked, their civility peeled off to show the raw reality behind the veneer. However much we might intellectualise our existence, the body and its messy drives are inescapable. As Jason J. Wallin (2014, 47-48) formulates:

> […] zombie-cinema creates an experimental plateau upon which the body might be re-created, or, rather, reconnected with inhuman unconscious desires subtending the orthodox and overcoded image of the *rational human* […] It is through the filmic image of the zombie that we might recommence the question of how *a life might become*. [Emphases in original.]

The seven deadly sins can be seen as examples of the excessive satisfaction of secular biological imperatives: reproduction (lust), hunger and thirst (gluttony), sleep (sloth), emotional bonding and group formation (wrath), competition (pride, envy), and personal security (greed). From a Catholic perspective, sin is an integral part of living in the world in a

human body after the Fall. From a secular perspective, the potentially excessive action of the drives — leading to 'sin' — is an ineluctable biological fact. Giving in to sin equates to succumbing to a series of physiological drives without control. As such, zombies are above all embodiments of sin, secularised for modern palates by their status as 'unreal' monstrous creatures. Indeed, Paffenroth (2006, 25-27) affirms that the vast majority of the filmic zombie's iconography taken from Dante's fourteenth-century masterpiece the *Inferno*, the first part of his *Divine Comedy*.

Returning once more to Christina's *vita*, the terrifying superfluity of spirit in the saint's corporeal form is partly expressed by her ability to defy gravity. Her biographer explains that it is because Christina's body is 'so subtle and light' ('tantae subtilitatis, & levitatis') that she can walk on dizzying heights, and hang suspended from slender branches of trees (*VCMEng*, 15.136; *VCM*, 2.15.653). As discussed above, Christina is endowed with the four qualities of the resurrected body, including levity — expressed here as 'subtlety' (*VCM*, 1.6.651; McGinn, 1998, 161; Sweetman, 1997, 619). In this context, 'subtlety' signifies a loosening of the ties of the material on the corporeal form. Implicitly, then, Christ too is monstrous.[12] As part of God's Holy Trinity, Christ has the same divine attributes as the Father and the Holy Spirit, yet he is flesh and blood. His humanity abounds with spirit, but we are taught to recognise the reality of his flesh in the Eucharist. In Christ's comingling of humanity and divinity lies a terror with which Christians must come to terms. Christina's body becomes a proxy for Christ's body; her *vita* is a testing ground for working through the complex conflicting significations of Christ's spirito-corporeal status.

Christina flees to the tops of trees or stands erect on fence palings to pray as she cannot bear to touch the ground when praying (*VCM*, 2.16.653). Times of intense spirituality are almost incompatible with her corporeality. Yet, in these moments, Christina also demonstrates her rationality and 'tetheredness' to the rhythms of the mortal world by

chanting approved Psalms. This 'tetheredness' is equally reflected by her obedience to ecclesiastical convention throughout her life, in spite of her strange behaviour. Thomas of Cantimpré takes great pains to attempt to show her adherence to one of the most important organizing hierarchies within her society — the Church. Her zealous veneration of the clergy is highlighted, and she is positioned as a reverent daughter to her numerous clerical fathers (4.40.657). She does not circumvent clerical authority in order to take Communion directly from the Lord as other female saints are routinely described as doing, which would signal her greater assimilation into the spiritual realm. Even when desperately impatient to taste the Eucharistic wafer, she simply takes herself off to another church which houses a priest able to perform the rite immediately (1.10.652).

Passages which highlight Christina's devotion to the clergy must, however, be analysed with an awareness of the hagiographer's project — of ensuring the holy reputation of the individual being discussed. Deference to the priesthood was a necessary prerequisite of acceptable female lay sanctity. Nevertheless, Christina's ecclesiastical obedience is striking, given her rejection of social norms.[13] Indeed, such obedience signals her existence entirely and eternally within the dominant system of her period, the Church. Christina's zombie lifestyle is profoundly disturbing as it affirms the overwhelming power of the Church within medieval life. The route to God is shown to be the willing acceptance of a certain form of zombification: giving oneself up to an omnipotent puppet-master — similar to a voodoo priest — that directs the believer's every move. A terrifying prospect indeed.

Coping with a Resurrected Body

The fear elicited by a horror film is provoked, Sobchack (1987, 38) argues, by the 'recognition that we are forever linked to the crudeness of our earthbound bodies'. Zombie

horror films in particular reveal the monstrosity of the still-living human, the human who, however civilised, is still subject to their destructive compulsions. It is this same recognition of the eternal link to the 'crudeness of our earthbound bodies', brought about the witness of Christina's resurrected body, which produces fear in Christina's friends, family, and all those who witness her behaviours. In the hagiographic narrative, however, anxiety shifts to the co-existence of body and soul after death, rather than the terror of coping with the relationship of tissue and secular intellect in the realm of the living in zombie films.

Voicing the positions of body and soul in an emotional dialogue, Christina frames the relationship between the two as a fraught and distressing opposition. As the body torments the soul by enforcing a separation from God's loving embrace, the soul punishes the body by not allowing death to come:

> O miserum & miserabile corpus! quam diu me miseram cruciabis? Quid agis mecum? Quid tibi tam diu miseram animam detinere? Quam diu retardabis me à conspectu Christi? Quando derelinques me, ut anima ad Creatorem suum libera revertatur? Vae tibi miserrime, & vae mihi, quae conjuncta sum tibi! Haec & hujusmodi dicens, tundebat corpus suum. Tunc iterum assumens personam corporis, quasi spiritui dicebat: O anima misera! Sic quare me crucias? Quid te tenet in me, & quid te delectat ex me? Quare non sinis me redire ad terram, unde assumptum sum, & quiescere, quousque tibi in novissimi judicii die restituar? Quare non vadis ad requiem tuam, ut fruaris potioribus in supernis? Haec dicens suspirabat, & anhelabat & flebat (*VCM*, 5.47-48.658).

> ['O miserable and wretched body! How long will you torment me, miserable as I am? What are you doing with me? Why do you keep my wretched soul in you for so long? Why do you delay me from seeing the face of Christ? When will you abandon me so that my soul can return freely to its Creator? Woe to you, most miserable one! And woe to me who am united to you!'
>
> As she said these and similar things, would beat her body. But then, taking the part of her body, she would say, as if to the spirit, 'O miserable soul! Why are you tormenting me in this way? What is keeping you in me and what is it that you love in me? Why do you not allow me to return to the earth from whence I was taken, and rest until I am restored to you on the last day of judgement? Why do you not go to your rest, so that you might enjoy more desirable things in heaven?'

As she said this, she would sigh and gasp and weep (*VCMEng*, 47-48.151).]

The balanced apostrophes, with the repetition of 'miserable', which introduce both body and soul's address, highlight the equal burden of anxiety and anguish carried by each 'speaker' because of the connection with the other. This anguish is further reflected in Christina's beating of her body (as soul) and tearful sighs (as body).

With God's grace, Christina ultimately finds a joyful peace in her comprehension of the extraordinary and complementary connectedness of body and soul. Once more taking on the voice of spirit, she exclaims:

> O dulcissimum corpus! quare verberavi te? Quare convicia intuli tibi? Numquid obedisti mihi in omne opus bonum, quod Deo auctore aggressa sum facere? Tu tormenta, tu labores benignissimè ac patientissime pertulisti, quae spiritus imponebat. […] Nunc patienter sustine, ô meum optimum & dulcissimum corpus. Jam finis instat laboris tui; jam quiescens in pulvere, paululum dormitabis, & tunc demum, canente tuba, deposita omni corruptibilitate, resurges, & sociaberis animae in perpetuo gaudio, quam in praesenti tristitiae sociam habuisiti (*VCM*, 5.48-49.658).

> ['O most beloved body! Why have I beaten you? Why have I reviled you? Did you not obey me in every good deed I undertook to do with God's help? You have most generously and patiently endured the torments and hardships the spirit imposed on you.'
>
> […] 'Now O best and sweetest body, endure patiently. The end of your labour is at hand. Now you will rest in the dust and sleep for a little and then, at last, when the trumpet blows, you will rise again, purified of all corruptibility, and be joined in eternal happiness with the soul you have had as a companion in the present sadness' (*VCMEng*, 48-49.151-152).]

The earlier negative apostrophe from spirit to body here gives way to repeated positive affirmation of the body's sweetness. Christina, and concomitantly both the audience that

witness this scene in the diegesis and the auditors of her *vita*, recognise that the body that had previously provoked such misery will stay with us after death. The body that is feared and mortified on earth is the same body that the Christian will regain, now rendered immortal, after death.

It becomes clear, however, that the holy woman ventriloquises not just body and soul, but also the orthodox position of the Church in this dialogue. Thomas adds the chapters which feature the dialogue at some point after 1239, minimally seven years after he first 'completes' his text. The biographer draws from the testimony of a priest, Thomas, who witnessed the dialogue first-hand, who has since risen in the clerical ranks to become abbot of Sint-Truiden (1239-1248) (*VCM*, 5.47.658; *VCMEng*, 47.151). Given the likely public readings and discussions of Christina's *vita* in the abbey of Sint-Truiden, this insertion is particularly striking. Did Abbot Thomas request that the hagiographer include this material in order to cater better to the audiences he hosted? It is impossible to know. Nevertheless, the insertion is suggestive of a certain dissatisfaction from auditors at the abbey (or elsewhere) — lay and religious alike — at the narrative. Apparently, clarification was needed regarding the relationship of body to soul, and the means to ultimately achieve a peaceful relationship between the two.

The narration of the dialogue interlude initially accentuates the priest's role as an eyewitness, evoking his presence: 'he saw her' ('illa […] introivit'). Almost immediately, however, the hagiographer colonises the priest's gaze, and reports the scene without such mediation — 'she threw herself' ('se projecit'), 'she began to beat' ('coepit pugnis') — including proffering long sections of Christina's purportedly direct speech. This manoeuvre gilds Christina's words with the illusion of authenticity — it seems that she speaks directly, channelling her own divine insights. This is almost immediately undercut, however. Thomas closes this episode by inserting himself into the text: 'Truly God is wonderful in his saints,

and in this one, if I may say so, his wonders pass all admiration' (*VCMEng*, 49.152) ('Vere mirabilis Deus in Sanctis suis & in ista, ut ita dicam, super omnem admirationem mirabilis', *VCM*, 49.659). Christina's 'direct speech' is literally enclosed by the presence of the two Thomases, clerical powers which indubitably shape the content of her orations. What's more, Christina's dialogue occurs during the final year of her life, during which she resides in the Benedictine monastery of St. Catherine's. As the two clerics textually contain Christina, she is spatially enclosed in the convent. Strictly speaking, the holy woman never becomes a nun, and thus her 'enclosure' is only ever partial. Nevertheless, her sojourn in St. Catherine's is the time in which she is most overtly under Church control.

Despite the dialogue's promise of a definite — and joyful — death, the *vita* denies any sense of closure, of a death which really 'sticks'. This lack of finality causes Christina great anguish. The earlier apostrophe to body and soul is echoed in Christina's despairing address to the nun who calls her back to her body after her second death:

> 'O Beatrix! quid me inquietasti? Quare revocasti me? Jam exhibenda ducebar ad conspectum Christi; […] & finas me, obsecro, ad Domini concupita reverti.' (*VCM*, 5.53.659)
>
> ['O Beatrice! Why have you disturbed me? Why have you called me back? Just now I was being led to the face of Christ! […] I beg you, allow me to return to the Lord for for whom I have longed so eagerly.' (*VCMEng*, 53.153-54)]

Christina's grief undercuts the comfort offered by the earlier body-soul dialogue. She has waited for death — and waited, and waited, through multiple lives — and still grapples with the problem of her body separating her from full immersion in God's embrace. Shortly after this, Christina dies a third time, bypasses purgatory and ascends directly to heaven, as she has

already done penance in the mortal realm (5.53.659). However, the final three paragraphs of the *vita*, appended by an unknown hand after the original, also subvert any sense of finality.[14] An old woman dressed in white appears at St. Catherine's monastery in 1249, twenty-five years after the mystic's last known death. This woman advises the monastery to exhume the body of Christina, and thereby access the saint's intercessory powers or otherwise face divine wrath (5.57.660). The white-robed woman is most likely Christina herself, though not identified as such. My willingness to make such a presumption — generally accepted by other critics — is telling. Given the events of Christina's deaths and lives, it seems obvious that she will keep returning from beyond the grave. Theoretically, Christina could appear, alive, at any time — there is no telling how many more deaths and resuscitations she will ultimately undergo. How can a Catholic patiently wait for the comfort of death, when death — the definitive end of mortal existence — may never really come?

Christina haunts the collective Catholic psyche as an enduring representation of troubling doctrinal teachings on purgatory and resurrection. Yet, in her 'final' appearance as the old woman in white, Christina superficially has the upper-hand over the Church. She calls the shots in organising for her remains to be moved to a more holy location. This transferral, though, renders her reputation for holiness — founded on her embodiment of orthodox doctrine — more visible and more accessible to worshippers at St. Catherine's. She remains, perpetually, a tool by which the Church inculcates believers with orthodoxy.

Conclusion

According to Cavell (1979, 149), horror is 'the perception of the precariousness of human identity, to the perception that it may be lost or invaded, that we may be, or may become, something other than we are, or take ourselves for; that our origins as human beings need

accounting for, and are unaccountable'. For the medieval Christian, human origins were accounted for by doctrine. However, Christina's dialogue between body and soul and the horror her glorious body inspires in her community reveals that this account is problematic for Christians. As the minutiae of the doctrine of resurrection were being debated by medieval theologians, reflecting scholastic and ecclesiastical concern with pinning down its technical aspects, non-theologians were left dealing with the practicalities of comprehending how corporeal and spiritual identity functioned for themselves, in respect to their own bodies, within the Christian context.

Christina provokes horror in the community of Sint-Truiden — laity, monastics, and clergy — because she brings difficult questions of Christian identity vividly to light before their very eyes. In her resurrected body, Christina is a different person. No longer does she fit in with her community, friends, and family, and no longer does she wish to. Though she may look the same as she keeps outward bodily identity after death, she does not *act the same*. The filmic zombie, on the other hand, looks different after reanimation but actually acts, in essence, the same as when living. The human drives which were poorly regulated in life are even less well regulated in the zombie state. Christina's bizarre behaviour, provoked by an overwhelming abundance of spirit in her flesh, has enacted an otherness within her very being. This produces a sense of horror as all those who gaze upon her are faced with the reality of the 'precariousness' of the Christian position betwixt heaven and earth.

Christina is an entirely orthodox example, an example that shows that the seemingly cohesive identity of 'Christian' is composed of contingent and destabilising experiences. Returning to her body after death, she is the same but different — visibly recognisable as herself, but obviously and definitively altered as a being, signalled by her miraculous abilities. Her resurrection and purgatorial trials are examples of the resurrection and purgatorial trials that all Christians can look forward to. The anxiety she herself experiences

about the status of her body in relation to her soul, and the anguish of her community in the face of their ‘Christina problem’ is an example of the difficulties experienced by all Christians grappling with the doctrine of resurrection.

Varma (1988, 16) argues that the ‘difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse. [...] Terror thus creates an intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread […]. Horror resorts to a cruder presentation of the macabre […]’. When the medieval reader, lay or religious, ‘stumbles over’ Christina’s agile corpse, horror is engendered by their ‘sickening realization’ of the internal logic of orthodox Christianity. Yet there is terror too: a smell of their own death wafts into the nostrils, as they are forced to see their own future as a Christian. Modern critical categorisation of Christina *Mirabilis* as a zombie allows us to grasp the complex and disquieting signification(s) of her *vita*. It also, perhaps, permits modern readers to utilise the zombie saint as a safe focal point for our own anxieties, as we project our concerns as to bodily identity and death — ever-present even in contemporary secular culture — onto the bewildering body of a thirteenth-century holy woman. The scent of death lingers, reaching us on the wind centuries later.

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Sidenotes

[1] I refer to Thomas of Cantimpré's (1727 [1969]) Latin work as *VCM*, and the English translation (2008a) as *VCMEng* thoughout. References relate to chapter, paragraph, and page number respectively.

[2] For details of English MSS containing the Latin *vita*, see Brown, 2008, 13-14; Kurtz, 1988, 195 n. 3. On the *vita*'s popularity generally, see McGinn, 1998, 162.

[3] For a discussion of the similarly heterogeneous reception of the fifteenth-century Middle English translation of Christina's *vita*, see: Brown, 2008, 18-20.

[4] For a summary of earlier critical reception of the *vita*, see King, 1987, 145-48. Historians and theologians — including the Bollandists — typically refute the authenticity of Christina's tale, though accepting in the main her historical existence.

[5] I also discuss Christina's resuscitations in terms of the modern holographic 'resurrection' of deceased celebrities in Spencer-Hall, 2012.

[6] These are: Marie of Oignies (d.1213), Ida of Louvain (d. c. 1261), Peter Amengol (d. 1304), Agnes of Montepulciano (d. 1317), Margaret of Castello (d. 1320), Catherine of Siena (d. 1380). Another notable, slightly later, example is Julian of Norwich (d. c. 1416).

[7] See, for example, the Last Judgement image in the fourtheenth-century St. Omer Psalter: London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 14, fol. 120.

[8] The franchise comprises: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), *Survival of the Dead* (2009)

[9] See also: Acts 17:18, 17:31-32; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; 5:4-5; Phil 3:21; 1 Thes 4:12-16; 2 Tm 2:11; Heb 6:2.

[10] See, for example, Gervase of Tilbury's (d. 1228) 'Ghost of Beaucaire' tale (2002, 3.103.768-69), and the widely circulated 'Gast of Gy' and 'Vision of Tundale' poems. For the Middle English translations of the latter two, see Foster, 2004.

[11] Christina's self-directed mortifications also conform to models found more generally in female hagiographies: a preoccupation with the utility of illness, suffering, and harsh ascetic practices as worship forms. See in particular: Bynum, 1991.

[12] On the monstrosity of Christ generally, see Mills, 2003.

[13] Sweetman (1992) affirms that Christina becomes a bodily preacher post-mortem. Thus, she is ecclesiastically 'deviant' in some sense, as preaching is prohibited to women. Nevertheless, she remains trapped in the Church's ideological plane: the message of her ongoing corporeal sermon is fully orthodox.

[14] These chapters follow logically from the preceding narrative, though they are stylistically less accomplished (*VCMEng*, 155 n. 64). It is unclear how they were received by contemporary audiences, but the text certainly circulated without these elements long after their introduction in 1249. For example, the additions are missing from two extant manuscripts that were produced in fifteenth-century England: Oxford, St. John's College, MS 182 (Latin text); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114 (Middle English translation) (Thomas of Cantimpré, 2008b, 84 n. 296).

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