



The Sacred Object

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Things are not only what they are; they constantly pass beyond themselves, and give more than they have.

—Jacques Maritain

At the center of the Christian world, at least according to most medieval *mappa mundi*, is the cross. In these images, *X* marks the spot, the axis that orients the world. By the later Middle Ages in Europe, the cross was the sacred object par excellence: it circulated as relics and representations, was performed in blessings, extolled in poems and sermons, evoked in prayers of healing and protection, and venerated in ceremonies such as creeping to the cross on Good Friday.¹ An instrument of torture turned sign of redemption, medieval explanations of its special status reflect upon how its very ordinary materiality was imbued with and transformed by sacred power, an issue at the center of this special issue. A passage from “The Exaltation of the Cross” in William Caxton’s fifteenth-century printing of the *Golden Legend* opens by describing the process that transformed a “tre of fylthe” into a sacred object:

De tree of the crosse was a tre of fylthe / for þe crosses were made
of vile trees: and of trees without fruyt: for all that was planted
on the mount of caluarie bare no frute. It was a fowl place / for it
was the place of þe torment of theuis: It was derk for it was in a
derke place and wythout bewté / It was the tree of deth / for men
weren put there to deth. It was also the tree of stenche / for it was
planted amonge the caroynes / and after the passion the crosse
was moche enhanced / for the vylté was transported in to pre-

cyosité: Of the whiche the blessyd saynt andrew saith / O precious
holy crosse god saue the: His bareynes was torned in to fruyte.²

This account presents the “precious holy cross” as an object that, as Jacques Maritain says, “give[s] more” than it has.³ The cross is no longer mere wood, no longer a device of torture, no longer a filthy tree. Because of Christ’s suffering, this passage suggests, the tree transcends its arboreal properties: the transformation is more profound still than a movement from tree to sacred object. The passage suggests, instead, that the tree is redeemed, rescued from an existence incommensurate with its being as a tree—it is in a “fowl place” and is a “tree of stenche,” filth, and death. After the Crucifixion, its vileness is “transported” into preciousness, and it transcends the substance of which it is made.

According to this presentation of the cross, in other words, it is *more* than a tree. It becomes what Jean-Luc Marion might call “saturated,” a phenomenon characterized by excess, manifesting the fundamental givenness of being, and opening “access to the invisible.”⁴ What Mircea Eliade labels “hierophany” similarly corresponds to this passage in Caxton on the exaltation of the cross: “The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the *sacred*.”⁵ It is not difficult to see how the description of the cross in Caxton’s text resonates with this idea of hierophany, as something that “manifest[s] itself, show[s] itself, as something wholly different from the profane.”⁶

Over two centuries later, well after the Protestant Reformation had taken root in Europe, many no longer saw the cross as “saturated.” For those Protestants who did not entirely reject its representation in public worship and private devotion, the cross became a sign of sacred action, a means of introspection, and a mode of *imitatio Christi*. John Donne, poet and convert to the Church of England, wonders, “Since Christ embraced the cross itself, dare I / His image, th’image of His cross, deny?”⁷ Donne writes in the context of a landscape bereft of crosses; iconoclasts have already demolished the towering stone and metal structures that once stood on the highways, in marketplaces, and in churchyards.⁸ Even so, the poem demonstrates that “we cannot in fact avert our eye from the cross, since it is to be seen wherever we look”; for Donne, the cross proliferates as a sign, spiritual, linguistic, and performed: “Material crosses then, good physic be, / But yet spiritual have chief dignity.”⁹ As Donne’s poem suggests, by the seventeenth century in England, it was the cross as symbol rather than object that held the most

power.¹⁰ The virtue once attributed to the material object of the cross has now been taken up by the “cross’s children.”¹¹ Thus, while Donne gestures to medieval veneration of the sacred object, his poem meditates primarily upon the generative, spiritual, and metaphorical nature of the cross.

Of course, Donne is not the first to depict or use the cross as a sign; his poem is not expressive of a uniquely Reformation-era understanding of the cross. In the ninth-century set of *carmina figurata* in *Liber de Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, Hrabanus Maurus likewise sees the cross everywhere, while implying that the object is to be understood as *signum* rather than *imago*. Other early writings call attention to how the human body is formed like a cross. A Middle English lyric recounting Helen’s discovery of the true cross notes that “of cros þe formast man was wrozt, / of cros þe first of alle wifis.”¹² And lollard tracts from the later Middle Ages use this image of the human body as cross to critique the veneration of material representations: in response to questions about venerating the cross, Norwich lollard Margery Baxter extended her arms (“*extendebat brachia sua*”) and proclaimed, “This is the very cross of Christ” [*Hec est vera crux Christi*].¹³ The range of earlier uses and understandings reminds us, as Donne’s poem also suggests, that cultural reformations are not characterized by an absolute rupture from the past.¹⁴

This special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* explores just such continuities between medieval and early modern ideas about the sacred object. Until recently, the European Protestant Reformations were usually understood to mark a sharp break in the culture of the sacred object.¹⁵ Critical approaches to the status of religious objects across the period have often reflected this narrative of rupture: before the Reformations, a flourishing relic culture and exuberantly painted church walls, and after the Reformations, only “bare ruined choirs”; before the Reformations, belief that the divine inhered in the material world, and after the Reformations, concern about idolatry; before the Reformations, the importance of visual and tactile experience to devotion, and after the Reformations, the centrality of verbal and oral experience; before the Reformations, the sacred object, and after the Reformations, the holy book. Yet, as even the most cursory examination of an object like the cross reveals, the story is rather more complex—and more profound—than narratives of rupture allow. For continuities emerge not only when we consider how sacred objects functioned as symbols and actions, such as the cross in Donne’s poem, but also when we consider the rich cultural and material exchange between England and the Continent, and material devotional practices among post-Reformation

Catholics.¹⁶ This volume thus focuses most intensively on Northern Europe, where the status and use of sacred objects were hotly disputed over the course of the European Reformations. Yet the essays of this special issue diverge from narratives of cultural rupture, iconoclasm, or violence against the sacred object. Instead, they attend to the complexities and continuities of cultural translation, whether between medieval and early modern, Catholic and Protestant, secular and sacred, or natural and constructed.

In some ways inaugurated by Eamon Duffy's reading of the destruction of medieval material culture in Reformation England in his 1994 *Stripping of the Altars*, a vast literature has appeared on the sacred object in medieval and premodern culture. Some, like Caroline Walker Bynum and Sarah Beckwith, have productively examined how bodies signify, or like Keith Thomas and Alexandra Walsham, have focused on the shifting meanings of medieval religious practices.¹⁷ Other scholars of the premodern have taken up this concern by focusing on issues of orthodoxy and heresy, idolatry, visual culture, affective piety, ritual and liturgy, and the incarnational aesthetic.¹⁸ Such accounts often stress how "[d]evotional objects," as Sarah Stanbury puts it, "were social objects, bound to the community through ties of politics and patronage" even as their value and efficacy were sometimes disputed.¹⁹

While indebted to these studies, the essays gathered in this special issue are also interested in the intersection of the phenomenological, theological, and historical, considering how human perception and use constituted, and were constituted by, sacred objects. In its earliest sense, the word *object* refers simply to "something placed before or presented to the eyes or other senses."²⁰ For early thinkers, that is, the object consists of that which is perceived; always implicit is the active, human perceiver. Fittingly, then, the essays in this special issue not only historicize how human participants experienced and responded to the power of sacred objects but also consider what made these objects numinous in the first place. In other words, this volume attends to how sacred objects are understood as instruments of divine power. Any investigation of such objects must therefore account for religious practices and beliefs and, by extension, for human use and experience.

The recent turn to object-oriented studies has directed attention away from history, religion, and human interaction with objects, turning instead to the objects themselves, to what Jane Bennett has called "the vitality of matter" — to how objects, in and of themselves, call out to us and to each other.²¹ Applying this paradigm to the study of the Middle Ages, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has recently argued that things "must possess a power indif-

ferent to language: something that comes from themselves, not via human allowance. Silent things must be able to speak, exert agency”; they are not marked by “mere utility.”²² Cohen’s insistence that things “must” speak and that we “must” listen to them derives from a political stance that is largely incommensurate with how late medieval thinkers understood the material world. According to medieval theology at least, *if* objects speak—be they crosses or stones, sacred or mundane—they are in fact channeling “the voice of God.”²³ Insofar as object-oriented ontologies listen for the voice and action of objects before and beyond human thought, they are unable (or unwilling) to account for the potential instrumentality and derivative power of objects within the sacred economy.

Thus, while there are certainly stories of premodern images and objects that weep and speak, for medieval thinkers, acknowledging the power of objects does not *require* that objects speak. Rather, it requires an understanding of how matter functions instrumentally. As Aquinas explains in the *Compendium Theologiae*, there is nothing “mere” about utility or instrumentality:

An instrument acts in virtue of the principal agent. This is why, in the action of an instrument, we are able to discern not only the power of the instrument, but also that of the principal agent.²⁴

Maritain similarly notes that things can “give more than they have, because from every side they are pervaded by the creative influx of the first cause.”²⁵ Sacred objects in particular render this divine agency transparent. Given its function as an instrument, the sacred object is itself agential—we do not need to read agency back into it—but this agency does not originate in the object itself.

Yet, as Carolyn Walker Bynum and others have noted, the “faithful were often themselves confused about how religious objects related to the divine.”²⁶ We should not assume that theological understandings of the power of sacred objects were self-evident. Thus, when fifteenth-century apologist Reginald Pecock calls attention to the divine agency of sacred objects, he clarifies how the instrumentality of the cross surpasses that of a “creature” or thing. Citing a hymn from Passion week, Pecock explains that, while heretics would say that any who “preien deuoutli” to the cross “taken a creature to be her [their] God,” in fact this “creature”—that is, the wood—“is preied forto do *what he may not do*, but what oonli God may do.”²⁷ The term *creature* signals that the wood is a created thing empowered

by divine agency and through which God can work. Yet as Pecock's rejoinder makes clear, not all premodern laypeople or theologians understood or embraced the idea that sacred objects were possessed of this complex agency. Both lollards and reformers complained about belief in the power or agency of "senseless sticks and stones," denying the divine instrumentality of sacralized matter and insisting instead on the raw materiality of images and other sacred things.²⁸ In a way, these lollard critiques anticipate the turn to object-oriented ontology, which regards the material world in a fundamentally secular way—matter is just matter.²⁹ While object-oriented ontologies may be useful for thinking about the post-Reformation natural world, then, they nonetheless do not easily explain the holy and sacred. Even in post-Reformation Europe, this idea of "mere" matter cannot account for the dynamic agency of holy things.

The essays of this volume show how the sacred object is distinct from ordinary matter insofar as it is set apart and imbued with divine virtue. And yet, as our contributors demonstrate, the distinctive nature of the sacred should not limit holiness to religious and liturgical accoutrements. The premodern sacred object denotes more than relics, rosaries, and crosses. What is more, as Anne Harris suggests in her examination of how Celtic sacred objects and places were incorporated into Christian sacred ecologies, it is not always easy to separate the sacred from the mundane. Likewise, in her essay on medieval universal histories, Suzanne Akbari notes that "the sharp divide between sacred and nonsacred (or sacred and secular) often made by modern readers is, ultimately, an arbitrary one. Sacrality is as much a product of the way in which the object is seen as a quality inherent in the object itself." So, too, Patricia Phillippy demonstrates that a set of ostensibly secular objects in Reformation England "acquire an aura of the sacred," even as these "sacred objects," associated with Henry Montagu's memorial, may well have "secular shadows." Given this imbrication of the sacred and mundane, our essayists explore how the sacred object in medieval and early modern culture is characterized at least in part by the human recognition or experience of how some things are more than the sum of their parts and "give more than they have."

Taken together, the essays of this volume address sacramental matter in relationship to time, place, text, and body. Medieval objects, such as manuscripts with religious materials, find new lives and meanings in a Reformation context, functioning both as relics of a lost past and as sites of new types of devotion. While Gail Gibson's essay examines how a medieval drama manuscript comes to function as a relic of medieval spirituality in

Reformation England, Robyn Malo's essay examines the post-Reformation circulation of medieval saints' relics, such as Thomas Becket's hairshirt, and the surprising proliferation of new relics: the bodies of Catholic martyrs. These bodies, as Malo shows, connect early modern Catholic devotion to the medieval past and sacralize the present. Phillipy examines, on the other hand, how a post-Reformation secular object memorializes and incorporates vestiges of medieval devotion to holy things. Akbari makes the most insistent connections between the sacred object and temporality, showing how sacred objects can function as "temporal hinges," or temporal nodal points in secular historiographies. Other essays take up the relationship of the sacramental to the institutional, charting the entanglements of sacred matter with secular and ecclesiastical ways of structuring time and experience.

Sacred objects also call attention to and reorient humans within spaces, both sacred and secular, and natural and constructed. Whether they are found painted on the space of the manuscript page, as part of the architectural fabric of a parish church, or as a part of the natural environment, such objects sacralize the places in which they are found. The relationship between "raw materials" and their form as sacred objects is the subject of Anne Harris's essay, which examines how the mundane and natural always inheres in the sacred, even as the holy object transforms and reinterprets the matter from which it is constructed. Whereas Harris draws attention to the lingering, mundane materiality of all sacred objects, Aden Kumler highlights the ways in which the sacred object effects transformations from the ordinary into the sacred in what she calls an *imitatio rerum*. For Kumler, the liturgical objects painted in the St. Giles Hospital Processional function as "the protagonists of divine worship," transfiguring and even creating a sacred space in which "Christian subjectivity [can be] reborn, refashioned, reenvisioned, and reproduced in the company—and perhaps even in the image—of sacred objects."

Indeed, as a number of the essays make clear, texts both represent and come to function as sacred objects in late medieval and early modern cultures. While Kumler's essay represents the depiction of sacred objects in a liturgical manuscript, other essays examine how texts themselves come to function as sacred objects in their own rights. Gail Gibson discusses how words can function as sacred objects, as devotional relics, reliquaries, and aids to meditation, translating sacred experience from one culture to another. As Gibson puts it in her essay on the Reformation afterlives of a medieval drama manuscript:

[T]he texts of late medieval performances of saints' lives and scripture, performances that claimed omnitemporality at the same time they were being extinguished by Reformist edict, necessarily charged the embodiment of the passing show of the lost religious past with the numinous power of holy relic. These texts even rendered the medieval drama manuscript as a kind of bookish shrine.

Just as, in the context of the Reformation, the medieval drama manuscript becomes “a kind of bookish shrine,” so too do the bodies of recusant martyrs inspire fresh devotion to relics in the period. As Malo shows, recusant accounts of execution call attention to the complex mysteries and origins of sacrality, in that the suffering bodies of the martyrs predicate their status as holy objects. The personal relationships between recusant and martyr, between medieval Catholic and sacrificial victim, expand the idea of the sacred from one that is definitive to one that is flexible; there exists an intimate relationship between these sacred bodies and those who encounter and use them, one that complicates boundaries between the sacred and the ordinary. For Malo, this intimacy foregrounds the ways in which instrumentality exhibits derivative agency: the relics of these Jesuit priests work miracles not in themselves but because they give more than they have.

As we hope to suggest, both in this introduction and in the essays that follow, premodern sacred matter exhibits precisely these qualities of givenness, of saturated phenomena, of hierophany, and as such we cannot dismiss their instrumentality as evidence of their “mere” manipulation by human subjects. Instead, in a premodern context, this instrumentality provides evidence of the divine mover and of matter that consists of more than its component parts. Taken together, the essays in this volume show how, in the sacred economy, all bodies, all matter, have the potential to become martyrs, to become sacred things—to become instruments of God. If we are to consider the agency of premodern objects, then, it seems to us that the sacred object is the obvious place to start.

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Notes

- Several interlocutors helped to shape this introduction; the authors wish to thank in particular David Aers, Andrew Cole, Karma Lochrie, and, of course, Michael Cornett.
- 1 On the status and uses of the cross in early England, see Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the "Dream of the Rood" Tradition* (London: British Library, 2005); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005); and Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
 - 2 "The Exaltation of the Cross," in *Legends of the Holy Rood: Symbols of the Passion and Cross-Poems*, ed. Richard Morris, Early English Text Society o.s., vol. 46 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 161.
 - 3 Maritain makes this point in a number of different places; here he is speaking of the qualities of things as the objects of poetic experience. We cite the entirety of this quotation in the epigraph. See "Poetic Experience," *Review of Politics* 6, no. 4 (1944): 387–402, at 397.
 - 4 Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 113. "Thing Theory" offers a similar, though secular, description of "things" as "what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects. . . . [T]hingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects)." See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22, at 5.
 - 5 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 12; emphasis in original.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 11.
 - 7 Donne, John, "The Crosse," lines 1–2, in *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 26–27.
 - 8 See Margaret Aston, "Cross and Crucifix in the English Reformation," *Historische Zeitschrift: Beinhefte*, New Series, no. 33 (2002): 253–72.
 - 9 Donne, "The Crosse," lines 25–26; with comment by Ernest B. Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 138.
 - 10 This is not to suggest that the symbolic is any less complex than the sacramental. As Sarah Beckwith makes clear, symbols "do not so much express meaning as encourage the creative attribution of multiple meanings to themselves." See *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.
 - 11 Donne, "The Crosse," line 64.
 - 12 "How þe hali cros was fundin be seint elaine," in *Legends of the Holy Rood*, ed. Morris, 118. See also Elizabeth Robertson's discussion of how the cross functions as a symbol for Julian of Norwich in "Julian of Norwich's Unmediated Vision," in *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97–114.

- 13 Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428–31* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 44; our trans. Also see Beckwith's discussion of John Oldcastle's similar *imitatio crucis* during his heresy trial, in which he spread his arms and stated, "[T]his is the very cross" (*Christ's Body*, 72–73).
- 14 See particularly the special issue "English Reformations" in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010).
- 15 For recent studies, see John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics: Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008); William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 16 For an examination of the spiritual and textual networks of Reformation Europe, see Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Embodied Word: Female Spiritualities, Contested Orthodoxies, and English Religious Cultures, 1350–1700* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).
- 17 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body*; Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). Alexandra Walsham has written extensively on the afterlives of material religious culture in post-Reformation Europe; see *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and, most recently, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 18 In addition to those mentioned above, other noteworthy studies include Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, Volume 1: Laws against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Age of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); James Simpson, *Oxford Literary History, 1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Robertson and Jahner, eds., *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective*.
- 19 Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 14.
- 20 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. *object*, n. 1a.
- 21 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke

- University Press, 2010); also Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
- 22 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (Washington, D.C.: Oliphant Books, 2012), 6–7.
- 23 As Andrew Cole notes, the desire to make things “talk” is driven by an unacknowledged logocentrism that assumes (problematically) that for an object to act it must also talk. See “The Call of Things: A Critique of Object-Oriented Ontologies,” *Minnesota Review*, no. 80 (2013): 106–18, at 110.
- 24 “Patet autem quod instrumentum agit in virtute principalis agentis. Unde in actione instrumenti non solum invenitur virtus instrumenti, sed etiam principalis agentis, sicut per actionem securis fit arca, in quantum securis dirigitur ab artifice.” Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Dominican Friars of San Tomasso, vol. 42 (Romae: Ed. di San Tommaso, 1979), chap. 212. Translated in Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, ed. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 164.
- 25 Maritain, “Poetic Experience,” 397.
- 26 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 151.
- 27 Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy*, vol. 1 (London, 1860), 199, 201; our emphasis. See also Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Hambledon Continuum, 1984).
- 28 Importantly, however, lollard critiques do not necessarily consign the body to the status of matter. See Robyn Malo, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 160–82.
- 29 While it may be true that contemporary attitudes and actions consign matter to the category of mere utility—particularly in the case of the destruction of the environment—medieval texts present instrumentality as a kind of agency, not utility. On the ways in which contemporary scholarship has tended to ignore medieval views on matter, relying instead on Enlightenment definitions that are not consonant with those of the premodern world, see Kellie Robertson, “Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto,” *Exemplaria* 22, no. 2 (2010): 99–118.

