Interrogating "Likeness"

Fake Friends, *Similia Similibus,* and Heavenly Crowns

by Caroline Walker Bynum

No historian can avoid comparison. Whether we study art, religion, politics, or social structures, we stand in our own time and place on the globe as we look toward and struggle to understand an "other" outside ourselves and our present. We are all always comparativists.[1] We cannot think at all unless we compare (at least implicitly) something or some things from the past with something now.

The persistent need to compare raises immediately the problem of how to choose appropriate comparanda. The ideas, images, and institutions of "now" that we use to think with must bear some useful "likeness" to what we are studying in the past. But this, in turn, raises the question of what constitutes "likeness." It is my contention that scholars in many areas of the humanities have failed to understand how complicated "likeness" as a concept is and how difficult it is to choose appropriate "likes" in doing comparative study.[2] It is also my contention that there are little-explored resources in the western tradition for both interrogating and understanding "likeness."

1. Avoiding "Look Alikes"

Building on the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Erwin Panofsky, art historians and anthropologists have recently found it necessary to address in detail the problem of "look alikes." After all, as the artist Donald Judd has commented: "A lot of things

1 For recent treatments by historians of the problem of comparison, see *John Huxtable Elliott,* History in the Making, New Haven – London 2012; *George Marsh Fredrickson,* The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements, Berkeley 2000; *Lynn Hunt,* Globalization and Time, in: Chris Lorenz/Berber Bevernage (Ed.), Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future, Göttingen 2013, 199–215, and *Benjamin Z. Kedar* (Ed.), Explorations in Comparative History, Jerusalem 2009.

2 The multi-authored volume, *Martin Gaier/Jeanette Kohl/Alberto Saviello* (Ed.), Similitudo: Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, Munich 2012, agrees that "similitude" has been theorized little. Focused on art historical image theory, it is more philosophical and theoretical than my treatment, although similarly based in case studies. There are also relevant ideas about "similitude" in *Ludwig Wittgenstein,* Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough,* in: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951, Indianapolis, Indiana 1993, 118–155, especially 133, 139 and 143. I am grateful to Paul North for recommending this, for reading a draft of my article, and for sharing with me portions of his book *Bizarre Privileged Items in the Universe: The Logic of Likeness,* which is forthcoming from Zone Books.

look alike, but they are not necessarily very much alike."[3] Most considerations, especially art historical considerations, of this issue have labeled it the problem of "fake friends" or "pseudomorphism" (sometimes "pseudomorphosis") and have proceeded in the vein suggested by Judd's comment – that is, they start from apparent visual or morphological similarity and uncover difference.

Beginning with a comparison of ancient Punic or Carthaginian tombs to the type of medieval European funerary sculpture that emerged in the thirteenth century, Panofsky in 1964 puzzled over these cases as examples of "the emergence of form A, morphologically analogous to, or even identical with, form B, yet entirely unrelated to it from a genetic point of view." How could one explain the appearance, in two places widely separate in time and geography, of a truly odd construction involving an apparently standing figure placed recumbent on a tomb when there was no possible copying, diffusion of ideas, or even temporal influence?[4] Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss in almost the same year compared the split representation of animals in Northwest Coast Native American art (Haida and Tsimshian) with the technique, found in ancient China (and also in Siberia, New Zealand, and southern Brazil), of bisecting and laying out parts of the animal flat with the halves joined at the nose – a pattern that appeared in both plastic (three-dimensional) and graphic (two-dimensional) forms.[5] Insisting, like Panofsky, both that such "parallel recurrences" can arise where there is no historical contact and that their frequency and cohesion cannot possibly be the result of chance, Lévi-Strauss argued that if history provides no answer, we must turn to structural analysis of forms. More recently (2015), Yve-Alain Bois has taken up the question of "look alikes," considering, among other cases, the similarity of a work by François Morellet *4 Double Grids* of 1958 and Sol LeWitt's *Circles, grids and arcs from four corners and four sides* of 1972 – a similarity so striking that an ad in a Milan-based art magazine *Flash* in February 1973 suggested that LeWitt was a plagiarist.[6]

All three of these analyses proceed as the quotation from Donald Judd might suggest – that is, they note remarkable similarity, while claiming no influence or historical continuity, and proceed to find radical, even paradoxical, difference. Panofsky argues that the Punic and the European cases of tomb sculpture have developed within their respective traditions in diametrically opposite ways: the Carthaginian case places a three-dimensional recumbent figure on a peaked roof whereas the medieval Christian case results from raising a two-dimensional figure on a pavement or medallion to become a three-dimensional statue on a tomb. Lévi-Strauss, in a far lengthier and more complex analysis, sees the splitting he explores as related to a special link of graphic

3 *Amy Knight Powell,* Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum, New York 2012, 11, citing Judd from *Gregory Battcock* (Ed.), Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, Berkeley 1995, 163. Or, as Yve-Alain Bois puts it (*Yve-Alain Bois,* On the Uses and Abuses of Look-alikes, in: October 154 (2015) H. 4, 148): "If two objects look the same, it does not mean that they have much in common – much less that they have the same meaning."

4 *Erwin Panofsky,* Four Lectures on Tomb Sculpture: Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini, [1964] foreword by Martin Warnke, New York 1992, 26–27 and 47–55.

5 See *Claude Lévi-Strauss,* Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America, chapter 13, in: Id., Structural Anthropology, translated from the French by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, New York 1963, 245–265.

6 See *Bois,* Uses, 127–149.

and plastic components that is characteristic of a dualism of actor and role – that is, of mask cultures. Such splitting of representation is not, however, he argues, characteristic of all mask cultures but rather of those in which masks establish genealogies and degrees of privilege. Behind the similarity of representation lies a similarity of social structure but social structure that must be further analyzed to find difference as well.[7] Yve-Alain Bois, who declares himself to "loathe pseudomorphism" because it fails "to provide any explanation for the phenomenon," admits that we cannot ignore resemblance but argues that Morellet and LeWitt "convey entirely opposite messages." LeWitt's grids have to do with order, control, and "even boredom," whereas Morellet's evoke a loss of control "emerging from an accumulation of order and astonishment."[8]

However sophisticated and even counter-intuitive each of these analyses is, all begin with the fact of radical and startling similarity. And surely, as a recent conference on "Fake Friends" held in Philadelphia and Princeton in autumn 2018 suggests, similarity or likeness provides an obvious starting point for comparative analysis.[9] After all, as philosopher and literary critic Paul North has stated: "everything is like everything in some respect."[10] Or, as one might say in paraphrase: every thing is like every other thing, at least in being some sort of thing, and probably in some other aspects as well.[11] But if an effort to explain apparent likeness leads quickly and almost inevitably to a discovery of structural difference, such a dynamic may suggest that the superficial similarity one started with was not very interesting after all. As Yve-Alain Bois puts it, "a purely morphological formalism […] cannot lead anywhere."[12] Or, from a more ontological point of view: if everything is like everything in some respect, every thing is different from every other thing in some other respect, even if the difference is only numerical – that is, a second example of something otherwise identical. (In which case, we might still need to ask: why are there two?) Moreover, even if one starts with what seem to be social structural or functional rather than visual similarities, one may quickly find oneself exploring differences. And if difference emerges so quickly, was there really "likeness" to start with? What indeed does it mean for something to be "like" something else?

This is exactly the problem that I addressed in my 2014 article *Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology, or Why Compare?*[13] I argued there that scholars in a wide variety of

7 Lévi-Strauss's analysis ends up concluding that a complex structural sameness underlies, at a deep level, the pseudomorphism of split-representation. So it does not proceed from sameness to difference in the way the other analyses I consider do. But the analysis does involve differentiating among mask cultures and proceeds through a number of layers of culture before concluding for a kind of sameness of structure.

8 *Bois,* Uses, 129–131 and 146.

9 "Fake Friends: A Symposium on Art History and Comparison," held at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, and Princeton, New Jersey, November 29–30, 2018.

10 *North,* Bizarre, ch. 1. I read this chapter in manuscript. For a similar statement that is, however, a description of something very different – that is, the "magical" or "sympathetic" universe – see *Marcel Mauss,* A General Theory of Magic, translated by Robert Brain, [1902] London 1972, 91.

11 In commenting on my article, North states: "Since everything is like everything in some respect, we have to determine the conditions under which this or that likeness emerges. We think of likeness as immediate, like a perception, but in fact it is relative, sometimes mediated by comparisons, sometimes mediated by prototypes – what it means for this or that to be like." This seems exactly right.

12 *Bois,* Uses, 130.

13 See *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology, Or, Why Compare?, in: History of Religions 53 (2014) H. 4, 341–68. This article is to be reprinted, with some elaboration and

fields, impelled by the new emphasis on global studies, have assumed both that comparative treatment across space as well as time is necessary and that such study should proceed quickly to discovering and outlining difference. Whereas an earlier generation of economic historians and sociologists such as Shmuel Eisenstadt and Douglas North sought universal developmental patterns, recent work makes the discovery of difference, even incommensurability, the dominant move. This appears to be so whether we consider the concern among students of religion to avoid universalizing categories such as "secularization" or "belief," treatments of twentieth-century history that stress "the particular and the unique," or the art historical and anthropological fascination with pseudomorphism that I have just discussed.[14] As Indologist David Shulman puts it: "[…] what is at stake is singularity. One pares away likeness and is, with a little luck, left with the unique."[15]

I do not reject "paring away" as a method, or disagree with valuing "the unique." But there is a problem. For behind these rather different theoretical discussions seems to lurk the assumption that the comparanda with which one starts are in some way given or obvious.[16] Thus, the important move is delineating difference. Similarity is either an obvious parallelism or a sort of trick or illusion; the goal is to move beyond it. One starts with two red squares, two female "idols," or two mystics. The challenge is to say why the squares or the idols are not the same, or how the mystics' experiences are in some way different (because of a factor such as theology or gender). Find the "look alikes," whether they are pseudomorphic or not; exploring the similarities will jar one into the difference one is looking for. The question "how do you know where to start?" is seldom raised. If you're interested in women and religion, compare goddess figures or female mystics; if you're interested in idolatry or iconoclasm, compare statues. Depending on your question, the choice of comparanda would appear to follow quite easily. But choosing comparanda may be more complicated than it initially appears. It may be circular, on the one hand, or unproductive on the other. If we choose statues to compare we will find differences in them *qua* statues; if we choose mystics, we will find them different *qua* mystics. In such moves, we may have assumed an answer not because of the variety of the material before us but by the way we have posed the question. We have assumed that it is statues that raise crucial questions about religious representation or that mysticism is a central factor in female devotional experience. But is this the best way to explore female versus male devotional response or what it means to represent the holy?

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the addition of images, in: Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe, New York 2020, to appear.

14 For example, in a fine volume on religion and materiality published in 2010, much of which deals with non-Western topics, David Morgan opens his introduction with an anxious consideration of why the Christian concept of "belief" might be inappropriate. *David Morgan* (Ed.), Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief, London – New York 2010, 1–6. American historian *Fredrickson,* Comparative, 13, refers to postmodernism's stress on the particular as a way of querying whether historical comparisons are possible.

15 *David Shulman,* Spring, Heat, Rains: A South Indian Diary, Chicago 2009, 196.

16 The following five or six paragraphs occasionally reproduce sentences from my article *Avoiding the Tyranny of Morphology,* used by permission of The University of Chicago Press. See above n. 13. I owe the phrase "the tyranny of morphology" to Christopher Heuer and thank him for it. I thank him also for the opportunity to discuss these issues with his class at Princeton in spring 2013.

I do not mean by this to argue that we can escape from building some assumptions about answers into our questions. That is how research proceeds. But I want to argue that the issue of comparison is more difficult than we usually admit. Even before we come to delineating differences, we need to think far more carefully than we often have about the likenesses we start with. Morphology or similitude – that is, "looking like" – may not be the best basis for a comparative study that must, in the final analysis, consider both similarity and difference to be problematic if it is to illuminate either side of a comparison. The tyranny of morphology – whether pseudo or not – has operated too long in comparative study.

In my 2014 article, I argued against starting comparative analysis from morphological or visual likeness for two reasons. First, it may be far more difficult than we initially think to be sure what it is that we see when we confront objects, rituals, or texts from the past. Are we right when we think something from the past "looks like" something in the present? Before we ask why apparent "look alikes" look alike and whether it matters that they do, we need to ask a more basic question. How do we know that something, even falsely or misleadingly, "looks like" something else? However sophisticated we find Panofsky's structural explanation of how Punic and medieval tomb sculptures came to "look alike," we might not see as much similarity as he does between the starting points: the two cases of recumbent, three-dimensional figures on tombs.[17] How do we know that even conventional shapes "look alike"?

We can of course use categories from cognitive psychology: "red" is a certain wave length; an oval or mandorla is a shape that makes a certain portion of the brain light up on a scan; an outline of a circle with dots for eyes is recognized as a human face by a test group of babies.[18] But the latter example immediately makes it apparent that such categories are ambiguous. For any meaningful kind of humanistic inquiry, such a drawn circle is irrelevant – neither "like" nor "unlike" a human face. Even if the juxtaposition of things such as circles and faces that are only distantly or spuriously alike can stimulate new interpretive moves, there still must be some reason why we start with the comparison we start with. The category of even false look alikes is more complicated and more culturally conditioned than we tend to assume.

In my 2014 essay, I illustrated this complexity by discussing a western medieval devotional image that has drawn much attention in recent years: the side wound of Christ. Venerated in the high Middle Ages as part of devotion to the five wounds inflicted on Christ in the crucifixion, the side wound was increasingly in the fifteenth century revered alone – in both iconography and devotional text – as a special entry into Christ's body that provided refuge, love, and salvation.[19] In some manuscript illuminations, woodcuts,

17 See *Panofsky,* Tomb Sculptures, 52 and 54. After all, the roofs of the sarcophagi are different, and this might be a telling point.

18 See, for example, *Robert L. Fantz,* Pattern Vision in Newborn Infants, in: Science 140 (1963), 296–97. I do not want here to plunge into current discussion about the general validity of the cognitive turn in humanistic scholarship. For doubts, see *Ruth Leys,* The Turn to Affect: A Critique, in: Critical Inquiry 37 (2011) H. 3, 434–72, and *James Laidlaw,* A Well-Disposed Social Anthropologist's Problems with the 'Cognitive Science of Religion', in: Harvey Whitehouse/James Laidlaw (Ed.), Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science, Durham, NC 2007, 211–46.

19 Some of this discussion is a condensed version of the treatment in *Bynum,* Avoiding, 354–56. For more on the side wound of Christ, see *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe, New York 2011, 93–101 and 195–208.

and prayers, the side wound appears in isolation as a large oval shape. Sometimes it is treated as an exact measure (called a length) that gives the actual size of the wound or that, multiplied (usually by forty), gives the length of Christ's body. Sometimes it is placed horizontally and appears to be a mouth, speaking accusation. But sometimes the oval is placed vertically and has reminded modern viewers of a vagina with labia, giving rise to elaborate feminist and/or queer interpretations of the image as erotic and/or gendered.[20] My question is: what do we make of this supposed look alike, which is not in any simple way glossed *on* the images as erotic or sexual or female. Before we embrace and analyze the similarity, we have to ask: *are* these things – wound and vagina – similar?

Abb. 1: *Arma Christi* and the Side Wound of Christ. Folio 331r, Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg. From before 1349. The Metropolitan Museum, The Cloisters Collection 69.86. Copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1969[69.86]. Open access.

20 See *Flora Lewis,* The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response, in: Lesley Smith/Jane H. M. Taylor (Ed.), Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Experience, London 1996, 204–229, especially 212–217; *Karma Lochrie,* Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies, in: Karma Lochrie/Peggy McCracken/James A. Schultz (Ed.), Constructing Medieval Sexuality, Minneapolis 1997, 180–200; *Martha Easton,* The Wound of Christ, the Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages, in: Susan L'Engle and Gerald B. Guest (Ed.), Tributes to Jonathan J. G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture, London 2006, 395–414; and *Amy Hollywood,* 'That Glorious Slit': Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound, in: Theresa Krier/Elizabeth D. Harvey (Ed.), Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture, London 2004, 105–25. For more on this, see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 195–208.

When I have shown this image in the classroom or in a public workshop, the immediate response has been "that's a vagina," and the immediate association has been erotic. And yet, as Silke Tammen has pointed out, the vertically placed side wound is a mandorla and, when positioned on Christ's body, it can be seen as an opening in Christ's tunic, thus evoking medieval theories of sight as penetration. It also echoes the association in both Eastern and Western Christianity of the mandorla with revelation and holiness. It can even suggest the present-day use of the mandorla as a meditational device in theosophy, where it is loosely based on Hindu and Buddhist practice.[21] Thus someone in a Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox tradition today might well respond: "that's that funny shaped frame for Jesus I've seen in churches!" Or someone in a theosophist tradition, or even an American new age one, might react just as immediately: "that's an image for meditation!" What then does the wound really look like? Is it a vagina or is this only a case of pseudomorphism? Beyond modern, de-contextualized, psychoanalytic responses, is there any contextualized reason for seeing the image as erotic or sexual?[22]

There are a number of medieval texts that do associate Jesus' body with the female body in an erotic sense. By the high Middle Ages, responses to the wounds and blood of Christ seem to be elaborately and explicitly erotic both polymorphously – that is distributed over the entire body – and genitally focused. Modern western readers almost inevitably see sexual overtones in the homey and sensual images of the popular fourteenth-century Middle English treatise *A Talkyng of the Loue of God.*

> *I [the devotee] embrace and I kiss [him], as if I was mad. I roll and suck I do not know how long. And when I am sated, I want yet more. Then I feel that blood [of Christ] in my imagination as it were bodily warm on my lips and the flesh on his feet … so soft and so sweet to kiss.*[23]

A much commented on passage in the probably somewhat earlier *Prickynge of Love* complicates the physiological image of the side wound in a way that is not so much feminizing as gender-bending. The images of wounds as doorways in the *Prickynge* are almost all of entry, sometimes implicitly sexual. Christ opens doors and windows so that the soul (which becomes the lance that pierced Christ's side) may enter and

21 See *Silke Tammen,* Blick und Wunde – Blick und Form: Zur Deutungsproblematik der Seitenwunde Christi in der spätmittelalterlichen Buchmalerei, in: Kristin Marek/Raphaèle Preisinger/Marius Rimmele/Katrin Kärcher (Ed.), Bild und Körper im Mittelalter, Munich 2006, 85–114. And see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 361 n. 54. On the mandorla, see https://www.theosophical.org/42-publications/quest-magazine/1348-mandorlas-halos-and-rings-of-fire (21.06.2019).

22 I find the interpretations of Lochrie and Hollywood (see n. 20 above) moving and possible and would argue that they depend on the fluidity of symbols I pointed out in the 1980s in *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages, Berkeley 1982, 110–169. But I think one must separate more than they do the multiple valences and interpretations suggested by the medieval texts themselves (which implications extend, as *Tammen,* Blick und Wunde, 85–114 convincingly argues, to exploration of the nature of sight as penetration) from modern psychoanalytic readings.

23 A Talkyng of the Loue of God: Edited from MS. Vernon (Bodleian 3938) and Collated with MS. Simeon (Brit. Mus. Add. 22283), ed. and trans. M. Salvina Westra, The Hague 1950, 61.

remain within in the "tabernacle" of the body; to be poured forth is to be cast out of paradise, a poor substitute for remaining ecstatically within the body of God.[24]

This is textual imagery. But there is visual evidence as well. Surviving examples of apparently quite popular objects that appear to mock both Holy Wound piety and relic devotion suggest that the sexual and fetishizing overtones were apparent to contemporaries.[25] A little lead badge, cast about 1400 and now in the *Cluny Museum* in Paris, shows three penises carrying a vagina in procession, just as reliquaries of holy arms, feet, and ribs were carried in saints' day processions. When placed in the context where it certainly belongs – that of other insignia mocking the delights and temptations of pilgrimage and the sexual transgressions of the clergy – the little badge seems to parody contemporary piety. Visual parallels between it and vertical, mandorla-shaped images of the side wound are striking. For example, the isolated and apparently swollen wound in one of the Bohun Books of Hours, lifted upward in resurrection by angels as if it were the body of Christ, bears a striking resemblance to the little vagina borne by penises in the badge now at Cluny.[26] The bawdy and misogynist implications of such insignia (even suggesting rape fantasy) are clear.

Perhaps we have here then not a case of pseudomorphism but rather of multiple mirroring morphologies – images of slit, mandorla, wound, and vagina echoing and complicating each other. And yet in the full medieval context, the parallel of vertical side wound and vagina has a rather different valence than the erotic one suggested by these parodic badges. Medieval texts that associate Jesus' body with the female body do so far more often as an analogy to that body as lactating, conceiving, and giving birth.[27] Salvation is understood in poetry and Biblical exegesis as nestling within the bowels or side of the Savior, and in many devotional writers, it is glossed as being born from him. The most explicit textual identifications of the side wound with vagina or womb are with it as container and source of life, and direct visual identification is most obvious in objects such as birthing girdles that use the wound as an amulet against difficult childbirth. According to the apotropaic assumption known by folklorists as *similia similibus* (to which I shall return below), wound opens womb. Such girdles – thin strips of vellum bearing an image of the wound shedding drops of blood – were bound around the stomach of a woman in labor to ease her pain and were believed to have the power of inducing a similar slit, the vagina, to open.[28] If the paralleling of wound and vagina is more than pseudomorphism, if shape really echoes shape, we are perhaps nonetheless misled by our hyper-sexualized culture to see the side wound as primarily erotic whereas a medieval devotee, concerned with the pain of childbirth and the danger of maternal mortality, might have responded first with the desperate hope that the wound was a gateway of life – both the life of an infant being birthed

24 The Prickynge of Love, ch. 1, ed. Harold Kane, Salzburg 1983, vol. 1, 9–14.

25 On these badges, see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 200–208 and the notes there. See ibid., figure 47, 204, for a reproduction of the badge of penises bearing a vagina.

26 For the image, see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, figure 31, 97.

27 See *Bynum,* Jesus as Mother, 110–169.

28 On birthing girdles, see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 197–200, and *Mary Morse,* Seeing and Hearing: Margery Kempe and the mise-en-page, in: Studia Mystica 20 (1999), 15–42. In *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, figure 46, 202–203, I have reproduced a copy of the images in Wellcome MS 632, computer-generated by Stephen Morse and created by permission.

and of its mother, and the life of a sinner saved by the pouring forth of Christ's blood. Even if the wound looks like a vagina, what does a vagina look like, image, suggest, evoke, for a medieval viewer? Is that what the vaginal image evokes for us now?[29]

I intend such analysis to stir doubts about whether we can be sure what the things we see are "like" – even before we take the step of comparing cultures. But it is also important to question whether likeness or morphology is the correct similarity to use in making explicit comparisons across time and place. The way we choose comparanda may have an answer about social or historical significance assumed or built in, so that the very morphology we choose to focus on may obscure the possibility of understanding the deep structures we should be seeing and analyzing. I raised this second question in my 2014 article by discussing goddess processions of the sort I had been exposed to both in my youth and recently in my travels in India. It was the festival of Durga Puja ("puja" means "ritual of devotion"), which I attended in Varanasi in October, 2009, that brought home to me this question.

Perhaps inevitably, a sense of familiarity came first as I watched the procession of statues of the goddess Durga, carried through the streets on litters or flatbed trucks, with music from boomboxes blaring. We have all, I think, laughed at tourists who say, upon seeing some foreign wonder, "oh, that's like X or Y back at home in Des Moines or Portland, etc." Yet such reactions are natural. The struggle to understand or even to *see* something in another culture tends to elicit a search for analogy or recognition or sameness. Watching statues of Durga parade through the streets on their way to the Ganga reminded me of the processions of female saints, especially the Virgin Mary, that I had seen in Boston's North End in my graduate student days.[30] Indeed, in my teaching at the University of Washington in Seattle, I had regularly used photographs of such festivals to make medieval European rituals seem less foreign to my West Coast American and mostly unchurched students. Although the many-armed warrior and demon-slayer Durga, carried on the backs of men with fierce, determined faces, seemed more intimidating than the softer Marys I knew from Italian or Spanish neighborhoods in New York or Boston, with their sweeter faces, pastel robes, and small children of both sexes in attendance, the dynamic of procession seemed the same.[31]

This dynamic has been described in an abundant literature on pilgrimage and ritual process, such as the older work of Edith and Victor Turner or more recent studies by, among others, Robert Orsi, Joseph Sciorra, Rachel McDermott, Linda Hess, and Jacob

29 In *Bynum,* Avoiding, I go on to consider the case of the Shiva Linga in Hinduism – a discussion I elaborate upon and illustrate in the rewritten version of the article to appear in 2020.

30 For recent examples of such processions, see http://northendwaterfront.com/2012/07/madonna-delle-grazie-2012-procession-through-bostons-north-end-photos/and http://northendwaterfront.com/2012/08/madonna-della-cava-2012-feast-sunday-procession-photos/both (21.06.2019). See also *Robert A. Orsi,* The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950, New Haven [3]2010 and *Joseph Sciorra,* 'We Go Where the Italians Live': Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood, in: Robert A. Orsi (Ed.) Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape, Bloomington – Indianapolis 1999, 310–40. Some of this discussion is borrowed from *Bynum,* Avoiding.

31 See *Rachel Fell McDermott,* Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals, New York 2011, 197–99, points out that Puja festivals have traditionally been male-dominated, although the celebrations appeal to both sexes.

Kinnard.[32] In the ritual of exodus and return, elaborately prepared for and accompanied by music, food-sharing, and gift exchange, community is created, local conflicts are resolved, and peace is renewed between heaven and earth, gods and humans. Moreover, Mary and Durga each represent a paradox of universal and particular. Each is local, possessing specific characteristics – the Durga of Varanasi or the Madonna of 115th Street – yet each is fully the goddess Durga or Mary, in whom the complete power of the holy being resides.[33]

And yet, as I discovered when I actually accompanied Durga in her procession through the streets, the exodus and return are not the same. Not only are there hundreds of small differences between Durga Puja and the summer festivals of the Virgin Mary I knew, there is a large and glaring one. The Marys leave their churches and return to them. The Madonna of 115th Street comes back to her niche. Even the saints Mary Jacobus and Mary Salome (sisters of the Virgin Mary), whose miraculous arrival by water in the Camargue in France is celebrated hundreds of years later, merely visit the ocean before returning home. Carried on horseback to the edge of the ocean, the saints are then swiftly brought back to their place above the altar.[34] But Durga, made from the clay of the river Ganga, returns to the sacred waters.[35] The hundreds of Durgas I saw traveling to the river in Varanasi were, at the end of the festival, thrown in. When I journeyed the next day on the river, I saw plasticized body parts, bits of gauzy clothing, bright faces and fingernails floating and disintegrating in the water. One cannot imagine throwing the Madonna of Mt. Carmel into the Hudson river or the two Marys of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue into the Mediterranean Sea. However much the Marys of Catholic worship may represent the paradox of fertility and purity, they do not come from or return to mud.

Although a number of Hindu festivals take statues from temples in ritual performance and return them thereto in what seems parallel to Western Christian processions, in certain crucial Hindu festivals, such as the Durga Puja I attended, the goddess figure returns to the organic world from which she arose. As David Shulman puts it, describing another goddess festival that takes place in Andhra Pradesh over many months:

> *Twice a year, the goddess Paidi Talli, "Golden Mother," has her festival […]. Like other goddesses, Paidi Talli undergoes a natural, annual cycle. In May she*

32 See *Victor Witter Turner,* The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Chicago 1969; *Victor W. Turner/Edith L. B. Turner,* Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives, New York 1978; *Orsi,* Madonna; *Sciorra,* Where the Italians Live; *McDermott,* Revelry; *Linda Hess,* An Open-Air Ramayana: Ramlila, the Audience Experience, in: John Stratton Hawley/Vasudha Narayanan (Ed.), The Life of Hinduism, Berkeley 2006, 115–139; and *Jacob N. Kinnard,* Places in Motion: The Fluid Identities of Temples, Images, and Pilgrims, New York 2014.

33 On the way in which such figures are particularized as local but yet each fully a holy presence, see *Orsi,* Madonna, xvi, and *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 208–215, where I have called this "the concomitant habit of mind."

34 Art historian Cynthia Hahn has described the festival at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue in the south of France, which she attended in October 2003. *Cynthia Hahn,* Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204, University Park, Pennsylvania 2012, 145–47.

35 *McDermott,* Revelry, 4, says that priests invite the goddess to leave before the images are immersed. But her description on p. 5 of women bidding farewell to the goddess and offering her sweets before she goes to the river suggests that it is not clear whether she really departs before her immersion.

> *emerges – as a spark in the hands of one of her devotees – from the turbid water of the Big Lake. She is then carried, latent, in mud drawn from the lake, to her main temple […]. There she will incubate and ferment, infusing a series of clay and metal pots with her essence, for some three months. Afterward these pots, a full form of the goddess, will make the rounds … preparing the city for her arrival in yet another form. In early October, she comes in a dream to her chief priest and informs him that she is "growing" as a tree in such-and-such a grove […]. This tree will be worshiped, recognized as Paidi Talli, and gently uprooted […].*[36]

Or as Linda Hess explains, describing the annual dramatic performance of the ancient Ramayana story:

> *The belief that God is everywhere – […] that God is in you and me or a stone […] is … broadly inculcated and deeply imbibed […]. 'Symbolic' is too flat a word for this type of consciousness […].*[37]

Western Christian imagery is, of course, often organic; the doctrine of creation underlines God's making of and love for the world.[38] But the divine is not *in* the physical in Western piety in the same way in which it is in the world to the authors of Hindu devotional poetry.[39] Exploring transcendence as well as immanence, the Vishnaivite saint and poet Nammāḻvār writes:

> *Great one, who became all things,*
> *starting with the primal elements:*
> *wind, fire, water, sky and earth.*
> *Great one, wondrous one,*
> *you are in all things*
> *as butter lies hidden in fresh milk […].*[40]

Such metamorphosis of the divine into the natural does not play a role in Western Christian images. The Marys of Catholic worship do not manifest themselves as, or transform into, trees as Paidi Talli does.

Thus, the parallel between the Hindu goddess and the Catholic saint, although their processions can each be elaborated with anthropological theory, turns out to be relatively superficial. However much we may be confronted in both cases with an intense presence of something we can call power, general theories of process, or "liminality," or "concomitance" do not take us very far when wood, mud, paint, and the female form

36 *Shulman,* Spring, 78; also 93 and 97.
37 *Hess,* Open-Air, 131.
38 It is well known that the medieval saint Francis of Assisi preached to birds and wolves, thus recognizing them as God's creatures. There is, however, no suggestion that he thought God was in the animals.
39 As John Stratton Hawley has pointed out to me, in Hinduism, the earth itself – *vasu* – is a goddess.
40 *Richard H. Davis,* Lives of Indian Images, Princeton 1997, 39. Nammāḻvār's dates are uncertain.

occur in such different specific contexts and carry with them such different penumbra. Hindu goddess is not very much like Christian female saint. Once one begins to allow the singularity to emerge, as Shulman puts it, one finds vastly divergent assumptions about the world.

As I thought about these similarities and differences after my return from India, I asked myself whether comparing female statues or religious processions was the right comparison. The similarities came to seem a kind of "tyranny of morphology," a sort of automatic and unthinking tendency to focus on "look alikes." Instead, I argued in 2014 that a better and more fruitful comparison might be drawn between Durga Puja and the rite of the Christian Eucharist than between Christian and Hindu goddess processions. In this argument, I meant both to make our understanding of the Eucharist more processual and to suggest, as do the discussions of pseudomorphism I consider above, that one should not rest comparative analysis on visible characteristics or morphological look-alikes. We should compare not anthropomorphic images of the holy but holy "presences" – that is, objects or places in which the holy is understood to be encounter-able, palpable, "there." Thus we should ask not "what looks like a god or goddess?" but rather "where is the power, phenomenologically, structurally, religiously?" In other words, we do not start with objects that look like each other (human figures, or trees, or mangos, for example). We ask: "in what sort of object does the basic ritual and religious power reside?" If we do so, we discover that basic conflict about (and therefore the need to theorize about) how the divine is instantiated in the world is, in Christianity and Hinduism, lodged in very different sorts of objects. Hence "image" in Hinduism may be most parallel in Christianity not to images but rather to relics and the Eucharist.[41] Rather than reproducing the details of that analysis here, however, I turn to my second basic, and perhaps even more unexpected, argument – that is, that the medieval Christian tradition I have spent my life studying can put pressure on, and expand, our contemporary ideas of likeness.

2. Recuperating a More Complicated Understanding of "Likeness"

I suggest both that there are objects and practices in the long European tradition that can give conceptions of "likeness" a richness they do not now have, and that the question of whether and how things look like other things was profoundly explored in the medieval west in ways that may be theoretically useful today. Both claims are, I would argue, more relevant to current questions of interpretation than the issue of "fake" friends, however foreign or quaint some of the medieval practices they adduce may seem. I do not claim that the medieval explorations and uses of "likeness" I discuss here are all the same. I claim only that each may provoke modern theorists to new considerations of how complex the concept of similitude really is.

41 See *Bynum,* Avoiding, 360–67. For more on this, see *Caroline Walker Bynum,* The Sacrality of Things: An Inquiry into Divine Materiality in the Christian Middle Ages, in: Irish Theological Quarterly 78 (2013) H. 1, 3–18.

I begin by pointing out that visual or morphological likeness had a kind of agency in medieval culture that it retains today in folk practices in many traditions. I referred above to the assumption that like *af*fects (influences, stimulates, or represses) and *ef*fects (causes or produces the opposite of) like. This principle, known to anthropologists and folklorists as *similia similibus* (like by like), lay behind the birthing girdle used by medieval midwives to relieve the sufferings of childbirth.[42] Images of the wound in Christ's side dripping blood were thought to cause the birth canal to open when applied to the belly of the laboring woman. Red (the depiction of blood) induced red (the blood of birthing) to flow; the slit in Christ's side opened the slit of the vagina; the issuing forth of life as salvation in Christ's crucifixion not only mirrored but even *effected* the issuing forth of life in the process of giving birth.

The principle of *similia similibus* operated more generally in medieval blood practices. For example, wearing red threads or red amulets was believed to protect against blood diseases and blood flow.[43] Hence, in a number of medieval paintings, the Christ child sitting on his mother's lap wears an amulet of red coral.[44] This depiction signals in complex ways both a medieval practice and a religious doctrine. Ordinary babies did in fact wear such amulets to protect them from disease and injury. When worn by the baby Jesus, the red amulet thus reflected contemporary infant dress. But it also imaged proleptically the coming bloodshed of the crucifixion that would save the world from sin and death. In this case, the redness of coral not only had medicinal and therapeutic effects; it had revelatory effects as well. It signaled the specialness of the Christ child, displayed his future, and moved the viewer to remember and reverence what was to come.

As anthropologists know well, ideas of likeness as agency have functioned in a wide range of both learned and folk cultures for centuries. They were basic to the late medieval theory and practice of alchemy. And they filtered into witch belief as well. The *Malleus maleficarum* mentions a witch who dips her broom in a pond to bring rain. Moreover, such assumptions still operate today in homeopathic medicine where the phrase *similia similibus curantur* sums up the practice of administering as a cure, in tiny doses, a substance that can in other cases cause the symptoms it is purported to control.[45]

42 On the principle of *similia similibus,* see *Stephen Wilson,* The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe, London 2000, xxiv, and *Mauss,* General Theory, 91–92. Wilson relies on Frazer's *Golden Bough* as well as Mauss. For a critique of Frazer, see *Wittgenstein,* Remarks. See also n. 28 above on birthing girdles.

43 On folk remedies concerned with bleeding, see *Danielle Buschinger,* Sang versé, sang guérisseur, sang aliment et sang du Christ dans la literature médiévale allemande, in: Marcel Faure (Ed.), Le Sang au moyen âge: Actes du quatrième colloque international de Montpellier, Université de Paul Valéry (27–29 novembre 1997), Montpellier 1999, 257–66; *Peggy McCracken,* The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero, Philadelphia 2003, 1–2 and 47–50; *Walter Michel,* Blut und Blutglaube im Mittelalter, in: Gerhard Krauss/Gerhard Müller et al. (Ed.), Theologische Realenzyklopädie, Berlin 1980, vol. 6, 737–738; and *Bettina Bildhauer,* Medieval Blood, Cardiff 2006, especially 66–70, 83, 96–103, 140–47.

44 See, for example, *Christ child with Coral Amulet and Finch,* by Giovanni dal Ponte (ca. 1410), now in the Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin.

45 See *Mauss,* General Theory, 90–94. To give a contemporary example: it is believed, in present-day rural Appalachia, that putting an ax under the bed will "cut" the pain of labor. On homeo-

Similarity or likeness functioned in other complex ways in Christian medieval culture. Relevant to my specific concern here is the role it played in relic cult – a role that has been, until recently, very little noticed. Relics (body parts of holy people or objects, such as cloth or earth or even bath water, that had touched them) were believed in the Middle Ages to carry the power of the holy person.[46] Although often theorized by Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory as indexes (objects significant because of actual connection with the source of power) rather than icons (objects significant because they represent something else by likeness), some relics gained their power by similitude.[47] By the high Middle Ages, a number of European churches boasted as relics not only objects brought in fact from the Holy Land and assumed to carry the power of the holy place where Christ's body had been present (for example, stones from Golgotha, fragments of the crucifixion cross, bits of wood from the manger in Bethlehem where the baby Jesus had lain), but also what the scholar Nadine Mai calls "similarity relics." Objects that looked like objects in the Holy Land – such as

Abb. 2: Antique column revered as Column of Flagellation in Bologna because of resemblance to the column in Jerusalem. Credit Nadine Mai.

pathic medicine, see https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/What-is-similia-similibus-curantur/articleshow/4240036.cms (21.06.2019).

46 The bibliography on relics is immense. See *Thomas Head,* Relics, in: Joseph R. Strayer (Ed.), Dictionary of the Middle Ages, New York 1988, vol. 10, 296–99; *Martina Bagnoli/Holger A. Klein/C. Griffith Mann/James Robinson* (Ed.), Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe, New Haven 2011; *Julia M. H. Smith,* Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700–1200), in: Proceedings of the British Academy 181 (2012), 143–68; *Hahn,* Strange Beauty; and *Renana Bartal/Neta Bodner/Bianca Kühnel* (Ed.), Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500, London 2017.

47 On Peirce, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiotic_theory_of_Charles_Sanders_Peirce. There are other differences between relic and icon that I do not treat here. The power of relics is usually spread by division into fragments and that of icon by reproduction or copying. What I call attention to here, however, is that likeness or copying did in some cases act to spread the power of relics. Hence the categories of icon and index are not mutually exclusive.

this Column of the Flagellation in Bologna – came to be understood as conveying something of the power of the look alike.[48]

While the documents describing such objects do not assume that similitude creates identity, they do attribute to likeness itself a kind of power. Hence prayers were appropriate at such a venue, and touching the column might bring special grace. In the same fashion, the footprints of Christ, revered on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, are assumed – as are footprints of the Buddha or Shiva in other religious cultures – to carry the power of the departed God-figure in their very signaling of likeness to the feet of the departed. Such likeness conveys both holy presence (Christ has stood there) and empowering absence (Christ has gone up to reign in heaven).[49] Medieval Christian worshippers believed that copies of such footprints (even copies that were not visually similar but were simply lengths made to the measure of the Jerusalem footprints) could convey Christ's grace to those who acquired and possessed them.[50] In such relics, like

Abb. 3: Stone supposedly marked with one of Christ's footprints,
Church of the Ascension, on the Mt. of Olives, Jerusalem.
From Wikipedia. Open access.

48 See *Nadine Mai,* Place and Surface: Golgotha in Late Medieval Bruges, in: Renana Bartal/Neta Bodner/Bianca Kühnel (Ed.), Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500, London 2017, 190–206; fig. 11.6, 199. See also *Anthony Cutler,* The Relics of Scholarship: On the Production, Reproduction, and Interpretation of Hallowed Remains in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, Early Islam, and the Medieval West, in: Cynthia Hahn/Holger A. Klein (Ed.), Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond, Washington D. C. 2015, 309–45, especially 320.

49 For more on holy footprints, see n. 51 below and *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Footprints: The Xenophilia of a European Medievalist, in: Common Knowledge 24 (2018) H. 2, 291–311. This essay will appear in a different and expanded form in *Bynum,* Dissimilar Similitudes.

50 On measures transporting the presence of a holy person, see *Adolf Jacoby,* Heilige Längenmasse: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Amulette, in: Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde 29 (1929) H. 1, 1–17, and Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde 29, (1929) H. 4, 181–216; *Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck,* Bilder und Zeichen religiösen Volksglaubens, Munich 1963, 40–41, 68, 115, 137–38, and plates 81–85, 215, and 240; *David Areford,* The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ, in: Alasdair A. MacDonald/Bernhard Ridderbos/Rita M. Schlusemann (Ed.), The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture, Groningen 1998, 220–21 and 238;

carries the power of like, even when the copy is only the rather abstract similarity of shape or even the non-visual similarity of mathematical measure.[51]

Art historians and anthropologists such as Alfred Gell, David Freedberg, Hans Belting, and Bruno Latour have recently written much, in various ways, about the "power of objects" or "of images."[52] No longer theorized as simply representing what they ostensibly depict, objects are now understood to possess agency – to induce reverence, identification, horror, or ecstasy. Relics – thought by believers to cure illness or bestow grace – are considered by even non-believing scholars to act by a kind of materiality or tactility that induces empowerment in religious adherents. As used in liturgy or in processions of the sort I discuss above, not only relics but also icons or statues of holy figures are understood to have agency almost as if they are living beings.[53] (Hence, paradoxically, even representations become not so much icons as indexes, in Peirce's terms, and indexes, also paradoxically, are understood as made significant by likeness.)

My point here is not to defend medieval cultural assumptions, nor to recommend birthing girdles, red strings, or homeopathic cures. My point is simply to use exploration

and *Louis Gougaud,* La Prière dite de Charlemagne et les pieces apocryphes apparentées, in: Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 20 (1924), 211–38.

51 For examples of outlines or lengths of footprints transporting presence, see *Janet Bord,* Footprints in Stone: The Significance of Foot- and Hand-prints and Other Imprints of Giants, Heroes, Holy People, Devils, Monsters and Supernatural Beings, Loughborough 2004, 41–43, and *Kriss-Rettenbeck,* Bilder, 40–41 and 69, and plates 82 and 215. For examples of the Buddha's footprints, see *Kathryn H. Selig Brown* (Ed.), Eternal Presence: Handprints and Footprints in Buddhist Art, Catalog No. 44, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York 2004. On the footprints of the Archangel Michael, see *John Charles Arnold,* Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem: Angelic Caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano, in: Speculum 75 (2000) H. 3, 567–88.

52 See *Alfred Gell,* Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, Oxford 1998, published posthumously and enormously influential recently for its stress on culture as social interaction. Gell criticized Panofsky's focus on meaning and saw all art as "a system of action intended to change the world" (ibid., 6). On Gell, see *Christopher Pinney/Nicholas Thomas* (Ed.), Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment, Oxford – New York 2001; *Robert Layton,* Art and Agency: A Reassessment, in: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 9 (2003) H. 3, 447–64; and *Robin Osborne/Jeremy Tanner* (Ed.), Art's Agency and Art History, Oxford 2007. On attention to images as performative, see *Alain Dierkins/Gil Bartholeyns/Thomas Golsenne* (Ed.), La performance des images, Brussels 2010. The most influential statement of the theory of art's agency has been *David Freedberg,* The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response, Chicago 1989. On the agency of objects, see also *Bruno Latour,* The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things, in: Paul M. Graves-Brown (Ed.), Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture, London 2000, 10–21; and *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 280–84. Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art,* trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago 1993, has profoundly influenced this discussion because of its analysis of medieval images as powerful and active in cult. On recent "thing theory," which has some affinity with these ideas, see *Paul M. Graves-Brown* (Ed.), Matter, Materiality, and Modern Culture, London 2000; *Bill Brown,* Thing Theory, in: Critical Inquiry 28 (2001) H. 1, 1–22; *Elisabeth Arweck/William Keenan* (Ed.), Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual, Oxford 2006; and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented_ontology and https://www.researchgate.net/post/What_is_the_material_turn_in_the_social_sciences (11.06.2019). Recent work includes: *Paula Findlen* (Ed.), Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800, London 2013, and *Henning Laugerud/Salvador Ryan/Laura Katrine Skinnebach* (Ed.), The Materiality of Devotion in Late Medieval Northern Europe: Images, Objects, Practices, Dublin 2016.

53 For ways in which medieval assumptions about materiality underlay the power of what we would today call inanimate objects, see *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, ch. 4. For a sensitive example of attributing some agency to objects, see *Glenn Peers,* Object Relations: Theorizing the Late Antique Viewer, in: Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity, Oxford 2012, 970–993.

of medieval assumptions and practices to make modern perspectives richer and more complex. A careful consideration of how similitude actually operated in medieval folk practice and religion can contribute to conceptualization of likeness itself. I suggest that there are, in medieval practices, assumptions about the agency of objects that can help us expand contemporary understandings drawn from anthropology and art history. As I just explained, much recent art historical analysis has found in Hans Belting's "images before the era of art" or Alfred Gell's objects "intended to change the world" a deeper understanding of the power of things to act on viewers and users. We should, however, add nuance to this sense of the agency of objects by moving beyond the very thin notion of "likeness" found in the equation of "likeness" with "looking like." In images brought home from Jerusalem by pilgrims, for example, the likeness to Christ's footprint on the Mount of Olives was the likeness, not of appearance, but of abstract measurement.

The cultural assumptions underlying the operations of *similia similibus* and "similarity relics" should induce modern theorists to a richer conception of "likeness" in another way. An awareness that the supposed likeness of things is often assumed to have an opposite as well as a complementary effect (as, for example, redness is understood both to stop and to induce bleeding) might lead students of religious practices and of semiotics to theorize the ontological unlikeness within any likeness. If we consider, for instance, representations of Christ's footprints, we must perforce understand that they carry absence as well as presence. The footprint cannot exist at all unless the foot that made it has gone away. By definition, likeness must shed light on what it excludes as well as what it includes. A medieval image or relic calls up for the viewer or user the "other" beyond it – that which it cannot completely mirror or be like as well as that which it does resemble and convey. Whether a column in Bologna that in some sense participates in the column in Jerusalem that it is not, or an image of blood-shed that speaks of life and salvation as well as of pain and death, similitude is a far more fecund and complicated notion than modern theorists have recognized.[54]

Indeed, medieval theorists and artistic practitioners themselves addressed in audacious ways the topic of "likeness." We find discussed in sophisticated theory and instantiated in things claims to similarity where there *cannot,* in any simple sense, *be* similarity. I turn now to consider both language and objects that purport to bridge heaven and earth. What, in this case, can "similitude" mean?

First, medieval theorizing. Although they have not usually been employed to shed light on general discussions of similitude, the debates over images both in Byzantium (in two phases between 726 and 787 and again in 814 to 842) and in fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Europe were focused to some degree on Exodus 20:4–5: "Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness *[similitudo]* of any thing that is in

54 As I have written elsewhere, this complex sense of paradox – of something as what it is and yet in ritual and presentation what it is not – is general in western relic cult. The shin bone of a saint encased in gold and crystal bodies forth, on the one hand, the decayed fragment as part and, on the other hand, the status of the body to which it belongs as undecayed in heaven. See *Caroline Walker Bynum,* The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336, New York [2]2017, 200–214 and plates 19–21. *Johannes Endres,* Unähnliche Ähnlichkeit. Zu Analogie, Metapher und Verwandtschaft, in: Martin Gaier/Jeanette Kohl/Alberto Saviello (Ed.), Similitudo: Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, Munich 2012, 29–58, agrees with me that "similitude" is under-theorized (in comparison to analogy, metaphor, and family resemblance), although my approach and his are very different.

heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them."[55] God is beyond; he is not *like,* therefore one should not make a likeness to him. At stake in the so-called iconoclastic controversy in the Eastern church were images of holy figures, especially the figure of Christ, not all images or representations.[56] The general question of the likeness between heaven and the created world was not debated. Nonetheless, as far as scholars can tell about the ideas of the iconoclasts (which are mostly found in the writings of their opponents), their objection to religious images lay, first, in the idea that a true icon must be like its prototype (that is, of the same substance) and that this was impossible for wood and paint, and second, that a true image of Christ must represent both his human and his divine nature, something that could not be accomplished except by separating the two natures or by fusing them (the heresies of Nestorianism and Monophysitism, respectively). Hence only the Eucharist was a true "icon" of Christ. The iconodule (image-revering) response asserted, among other arguments, that icons depicted Christ only as he had appeared in the flesh and that God had commanded the Jews to make images in the case of the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18–26).

In some ways, the controversy over images that erupted again in late medieval Europe, was broader than the earlier one, although some of the same Biblical citations were used. (The cherubim of the Ark were often cited.) The opposition to religious images that characterized the dissident movements of the fifteenth century (Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites, etc.) interrogated various conceptions of holy matter, rejecting not only the pictures, statues, and stained glass that proliferated in fourteenth and fifteenth-century churches but also the cult of relics and some realist conceptions of the Eucharist as literally flesh and blood. The sixteenth-century religious movements known as Protestantism were not all hostile to images. Luther opposed the destruction of images, describing them as *adiaphora* ("things of indifference") that had no intrinsic holiness but could be used for the good to educate the populace.[57] Nonetheless even the Catholic church at the Council of Trent reacted against some "unusual" images from the later Middle Ages, such as three-headed statues illustrating the Trinity or images of the Virgin Mary that opened to show the Trinity inside; and relic cult was down-played (in part, as is well known, in response to the abuse of indulgence-selling).[58] Not merely concerned with

55 In the Latin of the Vulgate read in the Middle Ages, the word for "likeness" is *similitudo.* To further complicate understandings of "likeness" by medieval theologians, God is said to make man "*ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram"* in Genesis 1:26 – a citation employed by Aquinas in the passage cited at n. 61 below. For medieval discussion of this concept, see *Robert Javelet,* Image et ressemblance au 12e siècle, de saint Anselme à Alain de Lille, 2 vols., Paris 1967.

56 See *Leslie Brubaker,* Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm, London 2012, and *Leslie Brubaker/John Haldon,* Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850, Cambridge 2011.

57 See *Lee Palmer Wandel,* Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel, Cambridge 1995; *Peter Marshall,* The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2009, 72–76; *Jeremy Dimmick/James Simpson/Nicolette Zeeman* (Ed.), Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image, Oxford 2002; *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Are Things Indifferent? How Objects Change Our Understanding of Religious History, in: German History: The Journal of the German History Society 34 (2016), 88–112; and *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 269–73.

58 Sacrosancti et Oecumenici Concilii Tridentini Paulo III, Julio III et Pio IV, pontificibus maximis, celebrati canones et decreta: pluribus annexis ad idem concilium spectantibus, Mechelen, J. Hanicq 1862, 270–74, and *Bynum,* Christian Materiality, 82.

art, the debates between Catholics and their critics of various persuasions were, in some sense, over late medieval conceptions of matter itself, although even the Calvinists who, in the sixteenth century, opposed all religious images in churches (except the cross) had a profound sense that the glory of God was manifested in creation.[59]

Modern discussions of what it means for something to be "like" something else have paid little attention to the problematizing of similitude involved in the various iconoclastic controversies of the Christian tradition. Nonetheless, it is clear that what was contested in the earlier, eastern controversy was the idea that any representation or image could be "like" the divine; in the later, European controversy, what was contested was whether any earthly object (picture or statue, relic or consecrated bread and wine) could be "like" the holy. And, if they are like, how far is such likeness identity? In other words, can things participate in, or be like, or be, an Other that is beyond and apart from things? And yet, if there is an Ultimate Power, it must in some sense be accessible to and revealed in things. There are resources here for thinking about "likeness" as far more complex than merely "looking like." Yet there is within the long history of Christian theology an even deeper questioning of what it means for something to be like something else. Lodged in consideration of the very nature of language is the question of how anything earthly can refer to – be used to talk about – the Other of the divine. How – even in a religion that holds the doctrine of the incarnation (the coming of God into human flesh) – can earthly language and earthly objects tell us anything about heaven?

Medieval Christian theologians discussed such questions with great sophistication. By the high Middle Ages, the issue was considered not only in discussions of images and of mystical encounter but also, and especially, as part of the exploration of predication: how can the same terms be used for God and creatures? For example, Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* explains (bk I., ch. 32): "It is […] evident that nothing can be predicated univocally of God and other things. An effect that does not receive a form specifically the same as that through which the agent acts cannot receive according to a univocal predication the name arising from that form." In other words, Thomas explains, we cannot say that the heat of the sun and the heat of sunshine can be called hot univocally (that is by a term having only one sense), nor can the forms of things created by God ever be "that which is found in Him in a simple and universal way."[60] So we can speak of God only analogically (that is, in terms used in a related but not the same sense). Yet Thomas also points out (bk I, ch. 29) that creatures are like God.

> *Effects that fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and nature. Yet, some likeness must be found between them, since it belongs to the nature of action that an agent produce its like […]. Hence it is that Sacred Scripture recalls the likeness between God and creatures, as when it is said in Genesis (1:26): 'Let us make man to our image and likeness.' At times the likeness is denied, as in the text of Isaias (40:18): 'To whom then have you likened God […]?'[…].*

59 *John Calvin,* Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Philadelphia 1977, vol. 1, bk 1, ch. 5, 51–69, on how knowledge of God shines forth in the creation. But see also ibid., ch. 11, 99–120, against images.

60 *Thomas Aquinas,* Summa contra Gentiles, trans. with introduction and notes by Anton C. Pegis F. R.S. C., Notre Dame 1955, bk 1, ch. 32, paragraphs 1–2, 143.

> *Dionysius is in agreement with this argument when he says: (Divine Names, bk IX, ch. 7): 'The same things are both like and unlike to God. They are like according as they imitate as much as they can Him Who is not perfectly imitable; they are unlike according as effects are lesser than their causes.'*[61]

Without exploring the complexity of Aquinas's doctrine of analogy, I point here to the fact that the nature of likeness and how one refers to it was at the heart of much medieval philosophical exploration for a thousand years. If one looks, for example, at the late-fifth to early sixth-century figure Thomas cites above as "Dionysius" (and we call the "pseudo-Dionysius" in the absence of knowing his real name or identity), we find that he referred to those objects and terms Thomas calls analogically predicated as "dissimilar similitudes" – that is, figures or revelations "without resemblance."[62] Arguing that such things are better able to refer to God because they refer to what the heavenly is *not* rather than what it is, pseudo-Dionysius nonetheless holds that all figures in some way participate in and affirm the truth of God. Hence, although heavenly things are not made of earthly substances, figures elevate our minds in specific ways toward heaven.

The thirteenth-century nun Gertrude the Great (roughly a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas) went further. Supposedly quoting Hugh of St. Victor (although no scholar has found the reference and I suspect that Gertrude is in fact drawing on the pseudo-Dionysius), Gertrude argued that there are in heaven no gems or wreaths of the sort we find on earth but that in the heavenly Jerusalem "nothing is lacking." "For," she said, "if no such things are there in outward appearance *[per speciem]* they are all there in likeness *[per similitudinem]."* Hence likeness is not "outward appearance" (looking like) but a deeper similarity.[63] Such conceptualizing makes "representation" the enabling of and encounter with presence and affirms likeness as lodged in what things *are* as created by God rather than in morphological or visual similarity (how they might appear to us on superficial encounter). To medieval theorists such as Gertrude, pseudo-Dionysius, and Thomas, a thing of earth is "like" heaven not because it is made of heaven's matter or because it mirrors a heavenly appearance but because it can refer analogically. That is, it can refer to or somehow be a link to a specific aspect of the Other that is the realm of God.

I discuss such theorists only to underline how aware medieval thinkers were of the complexity of similitude. Impelled into such discussion by a conviction that heaven exists and that there must be some knowable and identifiable relationship between earth

61 Ibid., bk 1, ch. 29, paragraphs 1–4, 138–39. And see *James F. Anderson,* Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Texts Selected and Translated, Chicago 1953, 36–43; and *E. Jennifer Ashworth,* Medieval Theories of Analogy, in: Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/analogy-medieval/(21.06.2019). On what it means to think analogically, which is far more complicated than I can explain here, see *Bynum,* Avoiding, 354.

62 *Pseudo-Dionysius (or Denis) the Areopagite,* La Hiérarchie céleste, ed. René Roques, Günter Heil, and Maurice de Gandillac, Paris 1958, ch. 2, sections 3–4 (140C–141D), 78–81.

63 The passage is from *Gertrude,* Legatus divinae pietatis 1.1, ed. the monks of Solesme, Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae, Paris – Poitiers 1875, vol. 1, 10–11. Book 1 of the *Legatus* was written by one of Gertrude's fellow nuns. No scholar who has worked on the passage has found a source in Hugh of St. Victor.

and this heaven, they developed a sophisticated semiotics and thereby probed the nature both of language and of what we call artistic "representation." At least to specialists in medieval intellectual history, this is well known. I contend, however, that medieval Christians did more. Returning to the question of objects and images with which I began, I want to make an argument that other modern scholars have not made – that is, that medieval things themselves deal with the issue of similitude.[64] Many of the devotional objects that Christians in the later Middle Ages crafted and used for worship and private prayer themselves express the paradox of "dissimilar similitude" – that is, of likeness that is unlike and unlikeness that is also like. They show us how to look at and with them. That is, they show us that the things they depict or represent are both like and not like the Other toward which they gesture. Hence encounter with and analysis of such paradoxical likeness should help us think in far more complex ways about issues that art historians and theorists find newly urgent – that is, what it means for objects, and indeed all visual matter, to represent and be like that which it is not.[65]

The period between 1200 and 1600 in Europe was particularly prolific in producing devotional objects, and devotees had intense confidence that the things of earth reflected and affected heaven. For example, in a practice known as *Handwerkliches Beten,* late medieval nuns understood themselves to fashion gifts of gold, gems, and precious cloth for heaven by their repetitive prayers. A sister in the Dominican convent of Töss received a vision of the Virgin Mary in a snow-white garment that, however, lacked both sleeves. The Virgin told her: "If you say 50 more Hail Mary's a day, then you will make for me a complete dress."[66] Yet how can the Virgin Mary – even to those who believe her to be bodily assumed into heaven alongside her resurrected Son – need clothes in heaven? It is my contention that late medieval devotional objects themselves often ask such questions by the very way in which they present themselves. I give here only a single example – the nun's crown – although I have made a similar argument about other objects in other places.[67]

64 The article by *Evelin Wetter,* Von Bräuten und Vikaren Christi. Zur Konstruktion von Ähnlichkeit im sakralen Initiationsakt, in: Martin Gaier/Jeanette Kohl/Alberto Saviello (Ed.), Similitudo: Konzepte der Ähnlichkeit in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, Munich 2012, 129–46, might be said to take the approach I take here, although her conclusions are different.

65 The idea of "representation" has been much discussed recently in art historical circles. See, for example, the conference "Beyond Representation: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Nature of Things," September 27–29, 2012, Bard Graduate Center and Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York, organized by Elsner, Finbarr B. Flood and Ittai Weinryb.

66 *Thomas Lentes,* Die Gewänder der Heiligen – Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zum Verhältnis von Gebet, Bild und Imagination, in: Gottfried Kerscher (Ed.), Hagiographie und Kunst: Der Heiligenkult in Schrift, Bild und Architektur, Berlin 1993), 120–51, here 120. Lentes and Hamburger have both discussed the antependium of a rosary altar in Frankfurt that shows roses issuing from the mouth of a monk, which the Virgin Mary plucks and forms into a circlet that is both a wreath for her hair and the completed recitation of the rosary. See *Lentes,* Gewänder, 124, and *Jeffrey Hamburger,* Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent, Berkeley 1997, 76.

67 See *Caroline Walker Bynum,* Encounter: Holy Beds, in: Gesta 55 (2016) H. 2, 129–131; *id.,* 'Crowned with Many Crowns:' Nuns and Their Statues in Late Medieval Wienhausen, in: The Catholic Historical Review 101 (2015) H. 1, 18–40; and *id.,* Footprints: The *Xenophilia* of a European Medievalist, in: Common Knowledge 24 (2018) H. 2, 291–311. Much longer and quite different versions of *Holy Beds* and of *Footprints,* and a slightly revised version of *Crowns,* will appear in *Bynum,* Dissimilar Similitudes (2020).

Medieval Christians believed that the early martyrs wore in heaven the golden crowns they won by their sacrifice, just as the Virgin Mary wore in heaven the crown with which Jesus adorned her when she joined him as Queen of heaven. The crowns and veils that medieval nuns were given at their investiture were often spoken of as precursors of the crowns they would gain in heaven by the martyrdom of their virginity. Although there is to my knowledge only one surviving nun's crown from the Middle Ages – now in the Abegg Stiftung in Switzerland – we have a good deal of evidence about what such crowns looked like.[68] In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard mentions nuns' crowns with red crosses, and Tengswich of Andernach's letter to Hildegard of Bingen, criticizing her for dressing her nuns in bridal array, with embroidered crowns, is well known to medievalists.[69] In the fifteenth century, the reformer Johannes Busch criticized canonesses for wearing crowns decorated with gold.[70] We have textual evidence from the convent of Lüne of crowns with red silk crosses, and Henrike Lähnemann has pointed to several illuminations in Medingen manuscripts showing nuns with red crosses over their veils, including a miniature where a nun's head has been cut out and replaced with a new drawing when the style of the convent's headgear changed.[71]

Despite their variety of appearance, these crowns played a crucial role in constituting the female novice (who had fairly often been given to the convent as quite a young child) as a nun. Although in conferring monastic status, the veil was the key, it was the crown that made manifest the nun's hidden spiritual status as the bride of Christ. (Wreaths, understood and denominated as *corona* [crowns], had been part of wedding ceremonies in the Mediterranean world since before the rise of Christianity.) Hence, for the nun, clothes made the person in a sense that was not quite true for the monk, in whose case it had earlier been held in canon law that "the vow not the habit makes the monk."[72] Even as an earthly garment, the nun's crown provides an example of that "agency of objects" so prominent in modern art historical and anthropological analyses.

68 See *Evelin Wetter,* Bräuten, 129–46. In conversation (January 28, 2014), Evelin Wetter told me that the sale catalogue suggested French provenance but she considers this unlikely. For a color image of the crown, see *Eva Schlotheuber,* Best Clothes and Everyday Attire of Late Medieval Nuns, in: *Rainer C. Schwinges/Regula Schorta* (Ed.), Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe/Mode und Kleidung im Europa des späten Mittelalters, Basel 2010, 139–54, here 146, figure 7. It is my impression that there may be two decorative traditions regarding the medieval nun's crown, one more penitential, the other more reflective of glory.

69 The reference in Abelard is cited in *Wetter,* Bräuten, 134 n. 24; Tengswich's letter is cited in ibid., 135 n. 27, and *Schlotheuber,* Best Clothes, 153. For Hildegard's defense, see *Barbara Newman,* Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine, Berkeley 1987, 221–222. The real veils and crowns described in Tengswich's letter are identical to those illustrated in Hildegard's own vision, supposedly drawn according to her instructions, in the *Scivias* 2.5; see *Adelgundis Führkötter* (Ed.), with the collaboration of Angela Carlevaris, Hildegardis Scivias, 2 vols., Corpus christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis, 43–43A, Turnhout 1978, 174–175 and plate 14.

70 *Johannes Busch,* Liber de reformatione monasteriorum, in Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum, ed. Karl Grube, Halle 1886, 603.

71 See *Ulrike Hascher-Burger/Henrike Lähnemann,* Liturgie und Reform im Kloster Medingen: Edition und Untersuchung des Propst-Handbuchs Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. liturg. e. 18, Tübingen 2013, 99–103.

72 See *Gil Bartholeyns,* Les objets contre les symboles: une sociologie chrétienne et médiévale du signe, in: Alain Dierkins/Gil Bartholeyns/Thomas Golsenne (Ed.), La performance des images, Brussels 2010, 137–156, here 138–139 and 147.

Moreover, the crown itself was multivalent in function and signification. Gertrude the Great worried that she or her sisters might sully or damage their crowns, veils, and habits by unworthy thoughts or actions. In her *Spiritual Exercises,* where she provides a lengthy commentary on the nun's crowning, she speaks of the nun's consecration as a process toward heaven. Christ promises: "I will make you a robe of the noble purple of my precious blood; I will crown you with the choice gold of my bitter death." And the young sister prays in response: "Make me to go on my way to you in my nuptial gown among the prudent virgins."[73] The crown is both the crown of thorns and the bridal wreath. Moreover, the crowning is reciprocal: Christ and the nun are clothed with each other, and this is completed only in heaven.[74] The nun prays: "And after this life, may I deserve to receive the crown of chastity in a long white gown among a lily-like band, following you, lamb without spot, son of the Virgin Mary, wherever you go."[75] In the homier stories of Gertrude's *Herald of Divine Love,* much of which was written about her by her sisters, Gertrude questions why a certain person who has died receives the garment of glory immediately while an equally worthy person, still alive, is not yet clothed with the "marvelously embroidered" robe of Christ.[76] The implication is clear: on earth the garment can still be soiled and wrinkled. The crown the nun receives at her earthly investiture both is – and is not yet – her crowning in heaven. Thus the nun's garments were understood to represent the spiritual as well as bodily virginity that she hoped she would carry with her at the end when she ascended to heaven.

As Eva Schlotheuber has argued, the crowns of the cloisters in the Lüneburg heath not only manifested the nun's commitment to virginity; they also assimilated the new nun to the bride of the Song of Songs, thereby elevating the life of virginity far beyond the "lay" status to which nuns were relegated by canon law. In the second reform report from Ebstorf, a nun spells out this spiritual significance: "On the crown are four red crosses […] which mean the […] wounds of our crucified husband […] as it says in the Song: 'You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride', that is, through love." In the first reform report, a sister of the convent of Ebstorf went further, claiming a status that in some ways mirrors the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception: "To this noble and worthy condition, God foresaw us and pre-elected us before we were received in our mother's body."[77]

Nonetheless, in understanding the complexity of an object like the crown, we need to consider more than texts. We must look more closely at the nun's crown itself. Scholars have tended to see it simply as symbolizing the crown she would wear in heaven. In this view, the crown on earth is proleptically the crown in heaven. Crown is like crown. But the nuns themselves seem to have imbued their objects and depictions with a more subtle sense of unlikeness as well as likeness. The bands of their crowns

73 *Gertrude of Helfta,* Oeuvres spirituelles, 1: Les Exercices 3, ed. Jacques Hourlier and Albert Schmitt, Paris 1967, 98 and 104; also *Gertrude the Great of Helfta,* Spiritual Exercises 3, trans. Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Jack Lewis, Kalamazoo 1989, 43 and 47.

74 *Gertrude,* Legatus*,* 3.18, 151.

75 *Gertrude,* Les Exercices 3, 118; Exercises 3, 54.

76 *Gertrude,* Legatus, 3.65, 241–42.

77 *Eva Schlotheuber,* Klostereintritt und Bildung. Die Lebenswelt der Nonnen im späten Mittelalter. Mit einer Edition des 'Konventstagebuchs' einer Zisterzienserin von Heilig-Kreuz bei Braunschweig (1484–1507), Tübingen 2004, 164 n. 217, and 162, respectively.

were strips across the head that pointed downwards; the crowns they as martyrs would gain in heaven pointed upwards. The very shape of their crown said a kind of "not yet."

If we look, for example, at the ceiling of the chapel in the convent of Wienhausen, we see a depiction of the founding abbess in her crown, which is like a caplet, and contrasts radically with the crowns of the martyrs depicted nearby. Although constituting the nun as virgin and bride, destined to wear the crown of heavenly reward won only by those who sacrificed for Christ, the nun's crown was also *not* the crown she would wear in heaven. Her crown was temporal not eternal, unlike as well as like. Mirroring the crown that Christ's mother is understood to wear in heaven, it can nonetheless, unlike Mary's crown, be damaged or lost.[78]

Abb. 4: Paintings for Nuns' Choir, Wienhausen. 1380 (restored).
Left: the founders of the convent of Wienhausen; the abbess in her nun's crown is third from the left.
Right: The martyrs receive their crowns in heaven. Photographs used by permission from Kloster Wienhausen.

A manuscript page from the convent of Marienstern that depicts the investiture of a Cistercian novice provides an even more telling example.[79]

78 On Wienhausen, see *June L. Mecham,* Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany, ed. Alison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel, Turnhout 2014, and *Bynum,* Crowns. The initial ceiling painting is from soon after 1380. It was restored in 1488 by the nuns, and restored again in 1867–68 within the original outlines.

79 *Marius Winzeler,* Die Bibliothek der Zisterzienserinnenabtei St. Marienstern. Zu Geschichte und Bestand einer frauenklösterlichen Büchersammlung des Mittelalters, in: Falk Eisermann/Eva Schlotheuber/Volker Honemann (Ed.), Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.–26. Febr. 1999, Leiden 2004, 331–356, here 342.

Abb. 5: Investiture of a Cistercian Novice, Marienstern Ms. Oct. 1, fol. 59v.
Used by permission of the Convent of Marienstern.

About such images, historians have usually said simply: here's an example of a nun's crown. But the image is far more thoughtful than that. Not only do we see a quite rare depiction of a novice being shorn while a sister standing beside her holds the crown; we also see, hovering above the novice, the heavenly crown, of a completely different shape and material, which her earthly garment foreshadows. This heavenly crown breaks out of the picture space and ascends toward heaven. Thus, the image makes clear that the heavenly crown is not earthly; it is unlike in its very structure, and it is depicted as in a transitional space, rising toward an Other out of sight of the participants in the ceremony. It even ascends away from us, the viewers of the image, and toward a beyond we cannot see. Nonetheless, although they are not "look alikes," both objects are crowns.[80] The image itself represents the earthly crown as a dissimilar similitude of the hoped for crown in heaven.

Carthaginian and medieval tombs, split representations of animals, manuscript illuminations showing the side wound of Christ, processions of goddesses, birthing girdles and amulets, footprints as relics, the headdresses of medieval nuns – I have treated in some detail here a disparate array of things. Have I managed thereby to say anything about the meaning of "similitude" – a concept necessary for any effort at comparison? Paradoxically, in the examples I have explored, "looking like" has turned out to be superficial or misleading, whereas likeness that has unlikeness built in seems to be more useful when considering not only the objects themselves but also the traditions – textual as well as artistic and devotional – within which the objects function and exist. Antique Punic tombs and medieval European ones, François Morellet's *4 Double Grids* and Sol LeWitt's *Circles, grids and arcs,* the processions of Durga Puja and the Madonna of 115th Street, seem to be "fake friends" – "look alikes" that challenge us to say why they are "not necessarily very much alike." On the other hand, the headdresses of medieval

80 In *Bynum,* Crowns, I discuss a similar disjunction in a panel (about 1330) from the Altenberg Altar (now in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt) which pairs a Premonstratensian nun as donor, wearing her modest crown and venerating St. Elizabeth of Thuringia, with a panel above on which Christ crowns Mary in heaven with a golden diadem whose pinnacles gleam, thrusting upward. This is the image most frequently used by scholars to illustrate the medieval nun's crown; I argue that it is more complex than has previously been noticed.

nuns, as actually worn and as depicted in images – objects of cloth or paint that *cannot* be "like" the realm of heaven – seem nonetheless to carry within what they *are* and *are not* a sense of what the hoped for heaven will be like. Their shape or morphology gestures not toward sameness but toward difference. It is in the downward pointing of their strips that they suggest how, in heavenly glory, the crowns of nuns will point the other way. Yet, both on earth and beyond, the crowns are crowns.

If the various analyses offered here can say anything telling about how we ought to choose comparanda or what it means to compare, they should serve as a warning for anthropologists, art historians, and historians to be more careful about what they assume to be "like" what. They should challenge us to push beyond the concept of "likeness" as "look alikes" to understand that seeing anything as "like" anything else will have built into the comparison a sense of what it excludes or makes "unlike." If likeness has agency, as it does in many cultures, the power of similitude will produce both its opposite and the effect expected according to likeness. And even if we do not believe in heaven or in the possibility of curing blood flow homeopathically by red threads or amulets, understanding such convictions and acts can lead us to a richer and more theoretically sophisticated understanding of "similitude." As pseudo-Dionysius enjoined, "dissimilar similitudes" or figures "without resemblance" may say more by what they signal as "not" than by what they conjure up as "like." But even in dissimilitude, there lurks and is made apparent a connection of effect, or structure, or cause. The relic of a holy person's footprint is powerful in both its resemblance to and its difference from the "other" who made it. What I have tried to do in this essay is to put on the table, from the perspective of a medieval historian who studies things as well as words, the question of what "likeness" means, and to suggest that, if we probe the significance of objects, we are likely to find that likeness is not so much univocal as paradoxical and multivalent.

Abstract

The question of how historians and anthropologists should make comparisons involves the nature of "likeness." Bynum argues that similitude has been under-theorized by anthropologists, semioticians, and historians. Using recent discussions of "pseudomorphism" to query how we can be certain that things really "look alike," Bynum treats several examples from the field of medieval studies. She argues that the most telling "likenesses" between objects can inhere in characteristics other than visual resemblance and that, conversely, apparent "looking like" can mask profound cultural differences. She concludes that both medieval cases and medieval theories can provide resources for a modern theorizing that would vest comparison in characteristics more complex than merely "looking like."

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