

Language Recorded 12/25

by

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For my family, for still loving me even after I tell and retell your lives.

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“And behold! In the forty-third year of my earthly course, as I was gazing with great fear and trembling attention at a heavenly vision, I saw a great splendor in which resounded a voice from Heaven, saying to me,

‘O fragile human, ashes of ashes, and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear. But since you are timid in speaking, and simple in expounding, and untaught in writing, speak and write these things not by a human mouth, and not by the understanding of human invention, and not by the requirements of human composition, but as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God...O human, speak these things that you hear and see.’”

- Hildegard of Bingen, Declaration

Me: R u an organ donor? Any reason not to be?

Mom: Only if you have religious objection

Ok haha

So you are ?

Mom: I think so. Don't really remember

Ok

Mom: I think it's good

-Transcript of text conversation with my mother,
June 16, 2017 10:17 AM

1No Genesis

1. I am trying to write it as a puzzle, which it is, but not in the way I wrote it before. I am less concerned with the completion now—more the pieces.
2. Last summer, while vacationing together in a house on Fire Island, as August flicked heat and breeze through the tall and sandy rented rooms, my family sat around a table and did a puzzle together. Medieval women, sadly, never did a jigsaw puzzle, as they were invented in 1767.
3. I wanted to write about medieval women writers and contemporary atheist Judaism. I was thinking about both things at the same time, and they were therefore related, I decided. I rationalized this as Extreme Opposition.
4. I was stuck on religion: concept. I was writing about it, I was making a film about it, but both of my projects depicted characters in their adjacency to religion, avoiding the subject head-on.
5. I was also, concurrently, reading medieval women writers. I loved them. To complement my surface knowledge of the facts of their lives, I brought a passionate, if not very complex enthusiasm to all things medieval women.
6. I use the term “medieval women” a lot, and you should know, when I do this, that I am referring to religious women—mystics—and I am referring, mostly, to writers. All of the medieval women I discuss are European, and lived between the late eleventh and the mid-fifteenth centuries. These are famous figures, these are visionaries, these are women many are familiar with, at least by name. So though my term may seem overly general at times, or constructed—the category of “woman,” alone, is certainly a construct—please put up with it, at least for a while,

- because, well, it is. You can choose to reject my structure, but then you'll just be left sitting under a pile of medieval-shaped blocks that don't serve any sort of purpose.
7. One woman was having orgasms just by being with Him in her mind. *Nice*, I thought, smirking. Another woman got conveniently sick whenever she didn't get her way, until the men attempting to wield control over her body gave up. *Passive resistance*, I wrote down in my notebook, next to a drawing I had done of a "medieval woman," who looked suspiciously like me wearing a long ragged dress. These were pretty cool concepts, because *everyone thinks medieval times are boring, but I know that they are actually exciting times filled with sex and drunkenness and not just rolling around in the mud, eating rocks*, I thought smugly.
 8. But, there was one thing actually solid, arresting, that stuck with me beyond the short span of my coursework: the texts that these medieval women wrote survived, despite their radical natures, despite the even more repressive, patriarchal societies they were born within. And the key to all of this power lay in religion. Religion as empowerment—this I did not know.
 9. What I did know: just the opposite. The secular was power, or, more accurately, the evasion of religion was power, the disdain for, the rejection of it. But not the evaporation. Religion—Judaism, to be precise—was still around, scratching at the wreathed doors, mewing under the tables at Christmas dinners. Why was this? And how to make it solid? How did the medieval women do so?
 10. But first—how to study medieval women?
 11. I find out, after pounding my skull through a quite dry book on medieval women's historiography, that the history of medieval women's scholarship effectively tracks the history of feminism. In both the first and the second-wave, the idea of the

medieval woman was taken up, idealized, championed for its membership within a “golden age” of womanhood.² The history of medieval women scholarship is, to some substantial degree, a history of usurping aesthetics of medieval women’s lives for contemporary social, political ends.

12. There are two major examples of approaches to the study of medieval women, to the study of medievalism and medieval time, that most powerfully squirm within this professional field of study, that refuse to rely on any single methodology, that refute the “seriousness” of this study as a whole. Their approaches are (in their own words) pluralistic, heterogeneous, fragmented, attached, affected—like the subjects and subject matter of which they write.
13. Caroline Walker Bynum calls her tactic: “history in the comic mode,” or taking a “comic stance.”³ Carolyn Dinshaw, an “amateur” approach, or “amateur reading.”⁴
14. To explain: “Comedy tells many stories, achieves a conclusion only by coincidence and wild improbability, and undergirds our sense of human limitation, even our cynicism about our motives and self-awareness. Comedy is about compromise. In comedy there is resolution for only a moment,” Bynum writes.

In comedy, the happy ending is contrived. Thus, a comic stance toward doing history is aware of contrivance, of risk. It always admits that we may be wrong...a comic stance welcomes voices hitherto left outside, not to absorb or mute them but to allow them to object and contradict. Its goal is the pluralistic, not the total...in such historical writing as in the best comedy, the author is also a character.⁵

And, perhaps most importantly, she sums up—“comedy is fun.”⁶

15. *Yes, I shriek. Comedy is fun!*
16. To explain: “postmedieval engagements of medieval texts featured [in my book] are all amateur, in some definitive way. These engagements take a variety of forms...and that heterogeneity is part of the point about the nature of

- amateurism,”⁷ Dinshaw writes. “[A]mateur medievalist readings bring out or enact temporal multiplicities found in the medieval texts that are the foci of their affections.”⁸ The amateur approach draws upon “ways of knowing that are derived . . . from positions of affect and attachment, from desires to build another kind of world.”⁹
17. In a vein that strikes me as not unrelated, Franco Moretti argues that close reading is a religious practice—though whether this is a positive, in his mind, is a wholly other matter: “It’s a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of a few texts taken very seriously.”¹⁰
 18. There is no genesis; at least no clean one. In the beginning, I was reading medieval women. And my grandfather said *I believe religion is one of the greatest evils in this world.*
 19. Here is the story: Harry Houdini is our (distant) cousin. A letter he wrote to our slightly less distant cousin hangs in my basement. In trying to read this letter back to its origin, I questioned straight into the matter of evaporating religion. Houdini, one biographer asserts, was an “Embarrassed Jewish Individual”—one who is “embarrassed in relation to his own background...often wondering the extent to which as a Jew he will remain always an outsider, defined by his Jewishness.”¹¹ And so he disentangled himself from it.
 20. But this is only a sleight of hand. Something must engage the viewer’s attention, replace that which is disappeared.
 21. The puzzle looked like a rug, with an intricate border bearing dozens of animals, which I would soon know to be symmetrical, and then concentric borders that held birds, strange cat-dogs, geese, peacocks, and everywhere else, gilding over a black background. In the center was a brick castle, with columns wrapped in snakes, and

- windows revealing a candelabrum, a little table, and a clock. The title was MIZRAH: Decoration for the Eastern Wall. I smirked and brought it out to my self-ascribing atheist Jewish family.
22. My dad walks in on my brother and me at the breakfast table, hunched over our respective pieces, his blueish, mine brown. *This is so Jewish*. He walks out. I fit two pieces together.
23. “That amateurs—these fans and lovers laboring in the off-hours—take their own sweet time, and operating outside of regimes of detachment governed by uniform, measured temporality, these uses of time are queer,”¹² Carolyn Dinshaw writes. This queer time can be used to “explore forms of desirous, embodied being that are out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life, that engage heterogeneous temporalities or that precipitate out of time altogether,”¹³ she continues. Queer time is time unstructured, unfettered by the temporal frameworks that rule day-to-day life.
24. Eventually, one might get to such a monochromatic section of a puzzle that the only way to solve it is by examining shapes. I have been known to sort such sections into like-shaped pieces—all the ones that are full outies in one pile, full innies in another, innie on three sides and outie on the right here, and so on. This takes considerable time; this is possibly a fanatic practice.
25. My aunt and I sit down at the breakfast table to do the puzzle. I dump out all the pieces onto the table, and start flipping them up. *Let’s start with the edge*, I say. *I’ve actually done a puzzle before, Juliet*, she replies. We work on it together as the sun glances golden over the long table in streaks. *Sunset’s coming*, my grandmother calls. *Hub, I have never seen one of those, since yesterday*, I say quietly, as my dad passes by.

You're so jaded, he says, *jeez*. Then, *that puzzle will always be there, but this sun is going fast*. I roll my eyes, but my aunt has left to gaze at some lessening light. I puzzle alone until my eyes cramp from piecing in the darkness.

26. Augustine considers non-secular time, and a dichotomy between human and God time: “As opposed to our own sublunar existence, God’s eternal being is in a timeless *now* that is without before or after, past or future.”¹⁴ Human time, for Augustine “is a good, because created by God, but it is also associated with life on earth, which is ultimately an exile from the timeless divine realm, eternity,” leaving us humans in “a tragic condition”—aware of “the essential asynchrony of life.”¹⁵ We are waiting, impatiently, to get out of time.
27. Could one imagine a secular time that exists out of the usual modes of schedule, construction of one’s time for a purpose? What does it mean to spend time, or kill time, or waste time?
28. In Norway, the aunt of the friend I am visiting finds out I am Jewish. Her English is very good, but she is timid about it, like many Scandinavians, so it takes me a moment to figure out what she is asking me. Her face lights up. *Oh! Jewish! You play that game...with the...top? You spin? Dreidel?* I nod. *Haba. Yes. You spin and you get chocolate coins depending on what the dreidel lands on.* The table dissolves in laughter. I am the first Jew any of them has ever met. *Barely*, I want to say.
29. The further I get from New York the more Jewish I am, I realize. Or: the more my Jewishness drapes about me, like a costume.

30. *Dreidel*? A particularly secularized Jewish pastime. It is not even an originally Jewish game, but an adaptation of the British Christmastime game, “totum” or “teetotum.”¹⁶
31. Tree-trimming was an important family pastime while I was growing up. My parents would unload the boxes from the garage, which had built up a year’s worth of dust and dirt, and gently unpack the fragile glass balls wrapped in sheets of newspaper, while allowing my brother and me to handle the less delicate ornaments. My dad would wrap the lights around and around the tree, and affix the two-dimensional silvery angel to the top with wire. Then my brother and I would be allowed at it, placing ornaments in sporadic clumps, which my parents would later redistribute.
32. These include: a rubber square of Jarlsberg cheese with a piece of green yarn tied in a loop through one of the holes, a collage of photos of my father at various stages of his young life stuck together with some bricolage of glue and tape, an assortment of metallic dolls shuttered inside plastic boxes, what was once a full set of tarot cards, with hooks punched through them so as to hang.
33. *I went to one day of soccer but I cried and mom never made me go back*, I say, examining a fully orange puzzle piece for flecks of blue. My aunt says, *the same thing happened to me but with Hebrew School. A desk slammed on my hand, and I never went back*. My grandma says, *that’s ridiculous, why would I ever have sent you to Hebrew School?*
34. In her writing on Hope Allen, an independent scholar who worked to produce a scholarly edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*—commonly considered the first autobiography written in English—Dinshaw identifies an important impediment to the completion of Allen’s amateur works: lack of constraints, in time or form.¹⁷

- When it comes to a personal project motivated by passion, there is some need for self-inflicted constraints, else one might go on and on, editing, making changes, reediting, reveling in the now of the project, and never completing it, never shunting it into a entity within the past.
35. Of course, there were a number of other reasons for Hope Allen’s inability to complete her projects—after graduating from Bryn Mawr, she quickly took on the care of her father until his death,¹⁸ she cared for her brother following the death of his wife,¹⁹ and she suffered from osteoarthritis, which impeded her mobility and significantly slowed her work down, obliging her to care for herself.²⁰
36. In a letter she wrote in 1949, she snapped back at editors who asked when “she would get down to [writing] in bitter earnest” noting dryly, “*bitter earnest*” *being the sort of mood which would deprive me of most of my sleep and undermine my power of getting on at all.*²¹
37. By 1957 she gave up hope of finishing Volume Two of her study of Margery Kempe. She was fine with this. *The time is not ripe, there is still a great deal of work to be done. In the meantime I have left my notes.*²²
38. She was not without constraints. Hope Allen, as an “amateur” who came from wealth, did not have the constraints of the academy thrust upon her, or socio-economic constraints, but she did bear the weight of other physical, temporal, day-to-day constraints. Her scholarly work has been remembered, but, as Dinshaw argues, “Her magnum opus was never finished, because...of her absorption in the object of her study.”²³ Amateur time is at risk for being forgotten, if not reframed, re-constrained, restrained.
39. “Amateurism is not miraculously free of the shaping institutions of modernity; it may indeed be a kind of ruse of late capitalism,” Dinshaw reminds. But, she asserts

- “the increasing impact that amateurism is having on sacred professional arenas, intensely specialist preserves such as, say, archival transcription.”²⁴
40. It is in part thanks to people like Hope Allen that we have access to medieval women’s texts. It is also thanks to the fandom of these medieval women during or after their lives. It is also thanks to Church record-keeping.
41. I know the urge to continue writing forever—but I have a deadline, a framework. My time operates in Dinshaw’s “professional” meter, while I amateurishly read and re-present medieval women.
42. *How to best, most ethically, most empathetically, write about these women so distant in time?* I wonder, as I sit at the sandy puzzle table, trying to reconstruct in miniature the Eastern wall of a nineteenth century Ukrainian synagogue.
43. When I began writing I knew: a tiny bit about medieval women. I had: seven months, and the purchased, or loaned, time to make the best possible work within.
44. *I am not worried about Juliet or Elijah, because I now know that they can do absolutely anything, my grandma says at dinner. We all look around at each other. After seeing them accomplish that puzzle, purely out of Juliet’s sheer will, I mean, something so tedious! I mean it’s such a boring thing to do!* I laugh; my grandmother does a crossword puzzle every Sunday.
45. *What do you say when people ask your religion?* she continues. *I always just say ‘culturally Jewish,’ I guess.*
46. Hildegard of Bingen, a German Christian mystic living in the early 12th century, is commonly considered the first polymath. Hildegard lived with an anchoress—a woman who chose to live in a single room attached to a church, an anchorhold, for much of her life. From the age of eight, she served as companion to this woman,

- her aunt. It was there she learned prayer, reading, and singing. More and more women came to live and study with them; the anchorhold became a convent, Hildegard became abbess. Later in life, she moved her convent further away from the gaze of the monks, falling opportunely ill until they agreed to let her do so. Hildegard wrote songs, books, wrote down the visions she received from God. She invented her own language. She wrote about natural science, she wrote music; she wielded immense authority as a visionary and passed along God's word.²⁵
47. And then there are her prints—illuminations—these glowing images of God, man, woman, herself, egg. It is hard to explain their beauty, but to look at them evokes in me an irrational urge to touch.
48. This could be seen as success when it comes to medieval art—corporality, particularly as it pertained to the faith of medieval women, was a distinctive quality. Medieval devotional art was meant to be touched²⁶—one would touch the body of Christ, and in doing so would physicalize the prayer—a form of communion.²⁷ This was not *not* sexual.²⁸ Her images beg to be held, or maybe grasped.
49. Dinshaw suggests that it is “measurement—that one side of the Aristotelian temporal problematic” that renders our structured lives secular—much as Weber “contended that the ‘rational’ scheme of monastic hours was the precursor of secularized Protestant time-consciousness.”²⁹ If professional time is secular, then amateur time is closer to religious practice.
50. But perhaps: amateur time can also exist in a self-consciously secular space—one not governed by teleology, except to bring itself into existence.
51. They come for half hours at a time, now. First my grandma, then my mom, then my dad for a minute. My aunt, uncle, and cousin have left the island. My brother

and I stay, speaking only to give each other bits of bird or a flash of green. I think *people lose their ability to concentrate when they get old*. There are five pieces now, and now three. And I want so badly to get that last piece, not to do it alone, but so I can do it with another, so that someone else doesn't finish it off quickly, on their own time. I pick it up, matter-of-factly, holding it between two fingers. Slowly, as my brother and grandma tilt their heads together, in toward mine, and my mom and dad hover above, I slide the piece toward the space it exists to erase. I want my brother or grandmother to add their fingers to mine, so we can end it together, but they don't know I want this and they do not do it. We all grin in silence. We shake hands. I feel a high. And a now-what, an emptiness. We go to the beach.

52. I don't know if "amateur" appropriately describes time my family shares. Maybe it is a second cousin; an almost apt depiction that fails to fully belong upon scrutiny. What feels related is the shared sense of time—time that insists on its object of focus—in our case, time that is insistently secular. Or could I say, religiously secular?
53. My favorite part of Hildegard of Bingen's polymathy is her language—the *Lingua Ignota*—whose function is little understood. Literally: the unknown language. How else to say something entirely in your own voice, entirely on your own authority, but to reinvent the way of saying it?
54. Sarah Higley, scholar of Hildegard's unknown language, leaps in with a qualifying note: "Hildegard cannot be said to have created a 'linguistics of the feminine' in her *Ignota Lingua*," as it "expresses the hierarchies of the patriarchic era she lived in. Furthermore, no particularly feminine aesthetic or grammar can be ascertained in any language created by a woman."³⁰ But her language and her writing "exposed,

- rather than hid her ideas”; “Hildegard’s greatest strength...lay in her lack of secrecy,”³¹ Higley argues.
55. We leave the puzzle on the table—a physical mark of a family feat, something that will mean nothing to the other family coming home to it. What would they respond—*thank you?* We let our brag lie fully formed, not bothering to puzzle out what it means to any of us, to complete something together, to be united and fit into a unit, if only for a moment.
56. I lied when I said Hildegard’s language is my favorite of her inventions. When I look at her prints I feel an ineffable urge to have them inked on my skin. I want to put her marks inside of me, to become her self-portrait. To become in the fullest sense of the word—that is to say in all the senses: to come to be; to occupy or wear with fitting grace; to look well in.
57. Imagine it: Hildegard on the inside of my left bicep. Only a thin black slightly raised line outlines her form as she holds stylus to wax tablet, her eyes veiled, embraced by the walls of her earthly room.
58. How does that feel?

2A Fate Worse Than Death in Life

1. I never told my grandmother that I got a tattoo. I have plenty of other Jewish friends for whom this is a similar secret-kept-with-good-intentions. Their grandparent would be devastated to learn that they couldn't be buried in a Jewish cemetery, and, despite their varying degrees of lapsed practice, it would be nicer for everyone if their grandparent went on believing that they could revert to full orthodoxy at the drop of a yarmulke. No, my grandmother just has particular tastes. I assumed she would not like tattoos.
2. This past summer, I lived with my grandmother in her sprawling apartment on the Upper West Side, in her gaping guest room. When not shuttling south to work in Brooklyn, or back, I spent a lot of time in that room. Through the window-bars I could see the neighbors in the adjacent apartment building. I read, I watched TV, movies, I ate some nuts, I drank a lot of seltzer. I peed, in the bathroom that linked me to the rest of the house. I watched the next-door neighbors open packages, and tried to figure out the relationship between the three elderly people who all seemed to be there at all hours. One often stood ironing, even around midnight.
3. I thought about Julian of Norwich.
4. An anchorhold: a small room, attached to a church, that religious authorities would live in for years at a time, during the Middle Ages, in order to be closer to God—their life is often referred to as a “living death,” or “death in life.”³²
5. Anchoress: a position that allowed women to attain power they might not otherwise have had access to—their visions allocated them an authority technically forbidden.³³ They were not supposed to write letters.

6. Julian of Norwich: one such anchoress, living in the late 14th century, in Norfolk, England. There is little known about the life of Julian, but we believe she was born in early 1343 and began living as an anchoress, at the church of St. Julian in Norwich, around age fifty. When she was thirty-three she was struck ill, and in the process of recovery was shown sixteen visions by God. She mostly likely lived in the anchorhold until her death, which was probably in her early seventies.³⁴
7. Julian wrote her Short Text—one of the two parts of her *Showings*, the complete work of her revelations—as a list, a numeration of her visions and close interpretations of their meanings.
8. Her specialty: *discretio spirituum*—discerning whether others were truly in communion with God or not—and she met or corresponded with many, despite her sequestered status.³⁵
9. We know: she had a maid or two, people bequeathed her money, she met in person with her contemporary mystic, Margery Kempe.
10. We know: there is much room for speculation.

Her grandmother came out of the bathroom, obscured by the large bag of cat litter she held in both of her arms, the rest of her body a sling of support. She poked one eye out from behind the edge of the unwieldy sack, and asked her something. Julian did not respond. It was not that she did not want to; it was just that she could not hear the words her grandmother was saying. This was not what she imagined it would be like to be deaf, so she was not alarmed. She could hear the sounds of her grandmother's voice coming reliably in time with the movements of her mouth. The words were just not discernable. They sounded how German had only a few weeks

before, when she had not known a word. But now, just the opposite was taking place. The more German she learned, the less easily she could understand English.

“Julian, why are you staring at me like that?” her grandmother asked. “Can you open the door? It’s already 6 p.m., I’m going to be late to dinner.”

Julian realized the sound she had been hearing was, in fact, the sound of her grandmother’s bird clock, which pealed the sound of a different North American songbird on the hour. Six p.m. was the Baltimore oriole. She opened the door and practiced her *ich* sound.

“Why are you always hissing, Julian?” her grandmother asked.

Julian moved on to practicing milk. It was harder than I, because it was meant to be pronounced in one go, but you had to make two separate sounds. She pressed her tongue hard into the back of her bottom teeth, mashing it against her permanent retainer. *Mill-ich, millich, millch, milch*, she breathed. Her grandmother rubbed her ear into her shoulder. Perhaps she was going deaf.

11. My grandmother recently told me, for the first time, that she identifies as an existentialist. There are a lot of things we do not talk about.
12. We avoid the subjects of: drugs, drinking, partying, sex, the nitty-gritties of politics, schoolwork, future plans, death, happiness, sadness, money, emotions. We most definitely do not talk about religion.
13. My grandmother texted me, in response to my asking her if we could talk about religion:

Ok – later this morning – have to go to the store now. Will think about yr question...

Sorry, I left phone message instead of text – am home anticipating a serious conversation about existentialism and Simone de Beauvoir...

Instead of the Torah. X

14. There is much speculation that Julian of Norwich had a cat, probably mainly to eat the mice, so that the loneliness of the anchoress's existence did not have to be further accentuated by the sole company of vermin. Portraits of Julian consistently feature a cat curled up on the side of the frame. It is difficult to tell if it is always the same cat; Julian likely lived in the anchorhold for around twenty years, so either way is possible.

Julian's grandmother's cat was not a nice cat. Her name was Arabella, after the Strauss opera, and she lived up to her diva status. Julian sometimes thought Arabella was just a great performer, though if she were performing, she committed to the part, Method-style.

One time, when Julian was a small girl, she had thought it would be fun to bop the cat on the head, but she did not think to approach her gently, hand forward in offering, so as to show the cat that she was not a threat. Instead, she dove her hand straight for Arabella's head, right toward her eyes, shooting over and past them, for the desired white spot on the top of the cat's otherwise dusky black head, and received, for her interest, a firm swat. That was that for their relationship.

15. *A fate worse than death, that's what that means*, my grandmother said. I had just walked in the door of her apartment, and was standing in the kitchen entryway with my bag and jacket.

16. At a dinner party, she had been sandwiched between a woman with Alzheimer's and a German man who had had a lot of money in Norway and Sweden, and at some point (during a war?) was locked up in solitary confinement in Norway, and then somehow managed to escape, and get his money back, and now is ninety and tells this story with the frequency and ease of a nightly prayer. My grandma had already read a book in which similar events took place, and the man's voice was very low and difficult for her to make out, so she had *not* had an enjoyable time.
17. The woman to her right just wanted to go home. *Who is that man*, she would ask my grandma, pointing at the host of the dinner party.
18. *She remembers how to properly respond; she would say, "Oh he's so nice!" and then five minutes later she would ask me again.*
19. The kitchen was silent. I tilted onto the other foot.
20. *She kept getting up and getting her purse, and her husband would say, "Where are you going?" and she'd say, "I'm going home! It's time to go home," and he'd say, "Well, would you wait for me?" and she'd say, "Ok," and sit back down for a moment, and then a second later she would be reaching for her purse and her husband would say, "Where are you going?" and she'd say, "I'm going home, it's time to go home," and they must have gone through the routine five or so times.*
21. *Only it's not a routine, you know.*
22. My grandmother rested her chin in her hand, and gazed off for a moment. *As I was saying, she was a very powerful lawyer, and had a million clients, and now she's...*
23. Quiet, quiet.
24. *She kept asking, "How do I know you?"*
25. My grandmother's cat brushed into the room.
26. *Ok, I'm going to go to bed! Oh, hello, Arabella!*

The door to the bathroom that led, Jack-and-Jill style, to Julian's bedroom, in the back of the house, was wood paneled, and heavy, but balanced just right, so that if one gently pushed it, it would drift toward the latch and slowly, unswervingly, click shut. Julian spent hours at a time testing this door. She would open it all the way, and gently push it, first with her pinky, then her fourth finger, and so on, seeing just how little pressure she could exert and still get the door on its trajectory. Each time it click-clunked shut she felt a little jolt of satisfaction in her shoulders, as her body unclenched.

One day, as Julian was sprawled, one leg crossed underneath her bottom, the other spread out hypotenuically, pressing the door at different points with her big toe, her grandmother came bursting through. She jumped, let loose a burble at the sight of Julian beneath her, and dropped a shower of envelopes on Julian's head.

"Hi Grandma," said Julian.

"Ah," replied her grandmother.

The two sat down at the small desk that was covered in stacks of how-to guides.

"It's time you learned how to write a proper thank you letter," Julian's grandmother told her.

Julian did not know who she would be thanking, and for what. She wondered if perhaps her grandmother wanted her to thank God for the to-go section of Whole Foods, but her grandmother said not to talk nonsense.

Julian was going to have to take over the family business one day—the one that her grandmother toiled over day in and day out, despite her feebleness and miserably old age. Julian did not think that her grandmother seemed particularly feeble, but her grandmother assured her cheerfully that she would likely die soon, and Julian must be sure to uphold her funeral requests impeccably. It was going to be a very nice funeral.

Everyone would be devastated, assuredly, and all of her many correspondents would show up, too sad to speak. In fact, speaking would be strictly prohibited at the service, naturally, out of respect. One could emit noise only if it were a particularly moving sob.

“It can’t be helped if they are emotionally overcome,” Julian’s grandmother conceded, generously.

Julian began to write a thank you note for illness condolences. It was not too bad, she determined. You just had to follow the formula, and then you could add your own flourishes. For example, if you opened with a simple, “Thank you for your concern,” you could then add specific details, particularly about the exact nature of your ailments. Her grandmother did not seem to be a huge fan of Julian’s additions, but she also did not cross them out. She did tell Julian she would have to work on her handwriting.

“Your written word is what you will be remembered by in hundreds of years,” her grandmother told her. “Do not disgrace me with poor penmanship.”

Then the orioles went off, and Julian stopped listening, though her grandmother’s mouth continued to move. Eventually Julian’s grandmother walked off, and Julian busied herself with perfecting the ultimate envelope licking technique. She decided that the most effective way was to chew on her tongue for a few seconds, and then to gently put it to the envelope and hold it still, while nodding her head in an arcing motion. She left fifteen or so envelopes licked on the table, and stuffed the letter she was most proud of inside of one. Then she thought about looking for a stamp, but that seemed tiring so she plopped back down by the door and went back to her door-pushing exercises.

27. My grandmother tells me that not only are we free to choose our own model of belief, but we are obliged to, to make a moral commitment to behave in accordance to beliefs. She tells me that she identifies as an existentialist. That hers is a humanist belief system.
28. Then she tells me, *I would never deny that I was Jewish. That would be absurd.*
29. How did my Jewish relatives become existentialists?
30. According to my grandmother: It was the fifties, New York, and my great-grandparents were first-generation Americans by way of Hungary. They were trying to be Americans, not Jews. They celebrated Passover. Their parents could read Hebrew and speak Yiddish. They themselves were learning English. They would go to their parents' house for Passover, and would write out the four questions for the oldest child—my grandmother—phonetically, so that she could play her role.
31. My grandmother says: existentialism was perfect as a substitute for religion. There was no one looking out for you or making the rules for you—you were free to choose, and had to choose, a way to live in the world without God. You only had yourself, and your responsibility and commitment, and maybe if you believed in this hard enough, other people would see you outside of your cultural identity—JEW—and as your constructed identity—AMERICAN.
32. That last part is my interpretation. We put ourselves inside of the quotes we scare the word Jew with.
33. “Julian in many ways, imagined the Crucifixion as taking place in Norwich,”³⁶ scholar Cate Gunn argues. This becomes more crucial when considering the way that time worked for Julian.

34. “[T]he anchorhold...brings the anchoress out of marketplace time into her own ‘heterochrony’ of God-time: a mélange of liturgical schedule, personal time of life and death, and universal eschatological time. For Julian, we can also add to these the time of her vision and the time of writing,”³⁷ Laura Saetveit Miles writes.
35. And then perhaps we can also add to these Heidegger’s existential understanding of time—“The future is not later than having been, and having-been is not earlier than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been.”³⁸ More simply, every event, every moment, of our existence is a combination of past, future, present—with no single dimension of temporality taking priority.³⁹
36. Liz Herbert McAvoy writes:
- What is clear...is that we do not have any definitive version of what Julian wrote, either in the short or the long version, and that it becomes very problematic to talk definitively about her ‘texts’, and how—or even *if*— they were circulated or disseminated during the medieval period. Thus...it may be more helpful to consider Julian and her writing in less theological terms: as plural, as multiple, as variable, as unstable, metamorphosing between the centuries and becoming different things for different audiences and, yet, containing at the core the stability and consistency of God’s message to humankind, common to all manuscript versions, that ‘love was his mening.’⁴⁰
37. There is God time, there is personal time, there is vision time, there is writing time, there is existential time; there is also the time of her life that we cannot know, this lost time, that I can try to make up for by rewriting her time in my own frame-rate, on my own time. We can reframe her existence within metaphors we can realize; within something we can touch, something corporeal. Many have done so. It is worth noting how many have devoted their lives to reading Julian’s life’s work. It makes her time stretch.

38. Being an anchoress was not challenging to a medieval society—Julian of Norwich embodied perfect Christian life, in a manner that was accepted by the church.⁴¹
39. What was not normal: for an anchoress to write, for her to have a voice of her own, rather than acting solely as a medium for God.⁴²
40. Julian of Norwich is perhaps the most famous medieval anchoress for her non-representation of anchoresses as a group. She has been championed likely because she is an enigma, allowing many writers to tease out the blips that are accepted, or conjectured, and develop their own characters and ideals atop them.⁴³
41. My grandma's back room was good for sitting and thinking. I did this most days. I had recently taken a course on existential philosophy, so I had a framework in place for thinking about myself constantly. When I grew disgusted by my unending egocentric circuits around my own mind, I would take a break and think about Julian, instead.
42. My grandmother had not yet revealed to me her existentialist identity, so this was not something we shared—in fact, I told no one.
43. I sat by myself in my borrowed room, hyper-aware of and entirely rejecting the time passing, and thought: *She is the first woman known to have written a full work in English.*⁴⁴
44. I stared out of the window at some dried pigeon shit and thought: *She put herself in her own constraints, and used them to her advantage.*
45. I walked to the bathroom and sat on the toilet and thought: *She wielded her time like a pen.*
46. I looked at the litter under the sink: *She might have had a cat.*
47. *She literally rewrote the word of God.*⁴⁵
48. *Her name is almost my name.*

Christmas Dinner (2017)

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Grandma (Dad's Mom): Entirely Jewish, but frequently celebrates Christmas and Easter, in a Hallmark manner. Identifies, if asked, as an existentialist.

Grandpa (Dad's Dad): Jewish by birth but views religion as a great evil.

Dad: Staunchly against religion, for reasons that seem mainly inherited—from his atheist Jewish parents, and perhaps all the way from Houdini.

Mom: Raised Catholic until the age of thirteen, with a Catholic father who had renounced the religion, and a Jewish mother who was raised without a religious education. Not religious now.

Aunt: Religionless, though embraces cultural elements of atheist Judaism.

Brother: A Freshman in college at University of Michigan. Learned some Hebrew in middle school by dint of being popular enough to be invited to upwards of ten bar/bat mitzvahs. Grew up celebrating Christmas and Hanukkah, neither in any sort of religious context.

Juliet: At different points in life, identified as: half-Jewish-half-Christian, three-quarters-Jewish-one-quarter-Christian, atheist, atheist Jewish, a Pizza Bagel, anti-astrology,

sympathetic towards astrology, ironically into astrology, “into existentialism”; a consistent attendee of United Church of Christ in Middletown, Connecticut for half a year.

Hildegard of Bingen: A German polymath who lived in the twelfth century, as an abbess. Wrote music, philosophy, medicinal texts, plays, visions of God, and rendered self-portraits writing down these visions. Constructed a language, called *Lingua Ignota*, made up of a 23-letter alphabet, whose purpose and use is little known.

Julian of Norwich: An English anchoress, who lived from 1342 until 1416. Lived, anchored, in a small room at Norwich, with a maid in the next room, and perhaps a cat in her own, for most of her adult life. Most well-known anchoress of this time; remembered, in part, for living in one room for most of her life, and also for being the first woman to write a book in English.

Joan of Arc: A young French peasant, known by different audiences as a warrior, a witch, a maid, a pucelle, a heroine, a heretic, a saint, who lived from 1412 until May 30, 1431, when she was burned at the stake. Led an army in defense of the rightful King of France, as described to her by God. Talked to Saints Katherine and Margaret, and Michael the archangel, who passed along God’s message to her. Frequently wore men’s clothing, which angered many people.

Margery Kempe: An English mystic who lived from 1373 until 1438. Dictated an autobiography detailing her earthly experiences and visions—considered to be the first

autobiography written in English. Prone to public weeping and fits, which angered and annoyed many. Her visions and experiences included a physical intimacy with Christ that caused her “embodied reactions” in the earthly world. Arrested for heresy multiple times. Visited Julian of Norwich, who confirmed the validity of her visions.

Act I: Dinner

Title Card: “Christmas Dinner”

WIDESHOT of MOM and DAD sitting at opposite ends of dining-room table. A sideboard holds the food they have prepared. They sit still, staring off toward the center of the table, in the direction of one another, as though they have fallen into a daze while waiting. Family members enter dining room through two doorways, one to the left of camera, one to the right.

MEDIUM SHOT of characters as they walk through doorway, and past camera. Cuts back and forth between two medium shots of each doorway, as a character passes the camera.

Enter, from Left: Julian, Grandma, Grandpa, Margery.

Enter, from Right: Joan, Aunt, Brother, Hildegard.

WIDESHOT, table now filled.

DAD

So...who wants to say grace? [*Off-screen sound of a snicker being passed around the table.*] A

toast! To family. [*Smirk.*]

CU on center of table, hands holding glasses enter frame.

ALL

To family!

Camera pans around table in CU, as everyone eats. Comments are made about the extraordinary quality of the food.

BROTHER

What's the peanut can story again?

Title Card: "Dinner Table Story A"

AUNT

CU in floating head style, already laughing, face red.

So Peter was being a real asshole as always, and was eating this can of peanuts. And he was having a great time, making snarky comments and waving around this can, tossing peanuts into his mouth...*[she motions with her cup of wine]* and he made some comment...I can't remember what, but he had this huuuge smirk on his face *[laughing harder]*, and he sits down hard on this chair *[gasping for breath]* and the chair collapses...

Everyone laughing, less food on plates.

AUNT

...And the peanut can flies backwards [*motions with hand*] and hits him in the head...[*gasps*] and it leaves this big red mark, and the peanuts just drip [*she indicates a dripping peanut motion by pulling her spread hand downward in front of her face*] down his face.

WIDE SHOT of right side of table. Everyone laughing. WS of left side of table. Everyone laughing.

DAD

I feel like that wasn't me...

Aunt rolls eyes and shakes head slightly and quickly.

Series of CU shots of people's hands and mouths eating food. Sounds of food being eaten, cutlery clinking. Lack of voices becomes more noticeable as sequences grow longer.

SOUND-BRIDGE: harsh sound of laughter. WS of table, everyone finished eating, resting back in chairs, more relaxed now.

JULIAN

CU, looking off-screen to the left.

Are we going to play Scrabble later?

Title Card: "Dinner Table Story B"

JOAN

CU, confessional style.

So dad's cousin isn't here to tell this story, but I've heard it enough times, I can just tell it...should I do a voice? [*Silent for a beat*] yeah, no, you're right, that'll be annoying. Ok. So. So everybody's on vacation somewhere when my parents are in their late twenties? They're still dating, not married yet. So it's mom, dad, grandma, my aunt maybe, my dad's first cousins, and maybe a couple others, I don't know, and they're all playing Scrabble one night. And so I guess my dad's not at his current online-scrabble-level of niche word-play, but still using arcane Scrabble words pretty liberally, and it's late in the night, and they've been playing for a while and he plays this one word—

GRANDMA

AWOL?

HILDEGARD

Snafu?

AUNT

AA?

JULIAN

Pee?

JOAN

...And someone contests it, and he rolls his eyes, or smirks or something, like [*makes a cocky smirking face*], and his cousin gets up from the table and goes [*makes voice deeper*], “You’ve always been such a pretentious asshole,” and starts pummeling him and they’re rolling on the floor punching each other. And my mom grimaces and stands up and says, “Ok, I’m going to bed,” and steps over them and walks out of the room. [*Pause.*]

Normally people are laughing now.

WIDESHOTS of table. Everyone is quiet, settled in their chairs. Grandpa is snoring lightly. Everyone else is on the way to sleep, or staring off into space. Cat walks Right to Left over the table, sniffing at the turkey. No one makes an effort to stop her. She continues walking, finally sitting down in Julian’s lap.

Title Card: “End of Act I”

Act II: Hors D’oeuvres

Title Card: “Three Hours Earlier – Christmas Day”

Camera slowly pans, in a handheld, unrestricted fashion, from conversation to conversation, in MEDIUM SHOT. Sound drifts in and out as documentarian gets bored with a conversation and moves on to the next one.

Joan sits on the floor talking to her Voices on the long white wrap-around couch.

Joan eats a cracker.

Joan's face shifts, looking slightly up and back, listening. After a moment, Joan's face shifts again and she rolls her eyes.

JOAN

I don't know what I'm going to do after graduating! Move to Montreal? Reinststate a proper ruler?

Camera pans.

Julian faces Grandma, also sitting on couch.

JULIAN

[Through a mouthful of cracker]

I *do* like writing and I *am* an English major, but I *don't* think I'm going to have time to take a Shakespeare course...it just won't fit in my schedule. *[Pause]* Oh well! *[Said cheerfully]*

GRANDMA

I just think you should consider it. What is your writing project—your thesis?—on again?

JULIAN

Takes a swallow of champagne.

Well so it's basically on this...

Camera pans.

Brother sits on the floor holding a small toy ball that he tosses from hand to hand, while he cranes his neck up to look at Aunt. She pokes him.

AUNT

Would you pass me some cheese?

BROTHER

Hands Aunt cheese, then looks off-screen to the right and smirks.
She's been like this ever since she got back from college.

AUNT

She's just a little all over the place.

BROTHER

Nah, she read part of the Bible this summer and now she thinks she's an authority on
Christianity.

AUNT

That's crazy, she's Jewish!

Camera pans left, pauses on Joan, zooms past her head to show Christmas Tree behind her.

MARGERY

[Off-screen, somewhere behind the camera]

Did you know that it's the womb, not the egg?

JULIAN

[Heard OS right]

It's just nice to get out of that room...

[Her arm stretches into frame]

Camera pans right, past Julian, Grandma, Aunt, Brother.

Mom and Hildegard sit on the couch facing one another. Hildegard sits with one leg curled under her, gesturing widely with her arms. Mom smiles at her, listening from behind glasses perched on her nose. Both hold glasses of champagne.

HILDEGARD

...And I'm production designing this guy's film, and I'm a writing tutor, and I'm taking a class on printmaking, and I'm getting more into embroidering in my free time, and I'm taking a ballet class, and I learned to bake bread, and I'm producing another guy's film, and I'm getting better at darts, and I'm gaffing another friend's film, and...

Camera pans.

MARGERY

[Heard OS to the right]

If a baby is *delivered* by a Jewish woman, then it will be Jewish.

Dad, and Grandpa sit at the opposite end of the couch, Grandpa settled into the corner against the left arm, Dad sitting in the middle. Hildegard now partially turned around, craning her neck to explain something to them, mid-conversation with Mom.

HILDEGARD

So the concept is based upon different ways in which time is experienced...going outside of everyday lived time, which is constructed around a normative measured temporality. She talks a lot about asynchrony in time, and when in a singular moment, time is experienced in different ways by different people, particularly as it relates to representations of time in medieval texts.

GRANDPA

I just feel like making time queer is taking things a bit too far.

HILDEGARD

Oh do you?

DAD

Okay, Dad, do you want another drink? A cracker?

Camera pans further to the right, almost completing a full circle.

AUNT

Now kneeling on floor, reading prayer phonetically off iPhone screen to laughter.

Happy Hanukkah!

Margery sits on the floor. She is talking, using her entire body for emphasis, at no one in particular, and no one in particular responds to her. Camera pauses on her for a moment, and then keeps moving to the right.

MARGERY

But if a baby's mother *is* Jewish and its surrogate mother is *not* then the baby will *not be Jewish!*

Camera zooms in, and pans in CU past all of the faces, finally settling on Christmas Tree. General room tone heard, but individual words not discernable.

Title Card: "End of Act II"

Act III: Scrabble

Title Card: "After Dinner – A Game of Scrabble"

Camera sits on the edge of dining room table. Focus adjusts, first bringing a rack of Scrabble tiles into focus, then blurring them as a set of hands folded on top of one another in front of the rack sharpen.

JULIET

[From behind camera]

Ok so I'm just going to leave the camera here, and you can all move it wherever you want.

Camera lurches sideways, and then turns around to show BROTHER's face.

BROTHER

Aaaand we're here live at the Scrabble game; it's Christmas night, and right now this is a close match. We've got Dad in the lead by fifteen points, Aunt coming up closely behind, and Grandma not far in the distance. If she stays at the rate she's going she can definitely close that gap. Coming up at the tail end is...well... Uh, Mom's about to lay down a word! Will she get that triple letter score? Let's find out, after the break.

Camera turns back around to show the board, and hands around it. Aunt plays "jasmine."

GRANDMA

That's a proper noun—not allowed.

[Camera whips to show her face]

AUNT

It's allowed.

[Camera whips to her face]

DAD

It is actually allowed.

[Again, camera whips to his face]

GRANDMA

Why is that allowed?

[Back to her]

DAD

Rosemary is too.

[Back to him]

GRANDMA

For God's sake.

[Whiplash blurring effect]

BROTHER

[Camera turns around to show him]

Will 'jasmine' be allowed? A controversy splits the room.

Camera lurches sideways to show Juliet's tray, which has "judgement" set out upon it. She fingers the tiles. Voices heard from OS.

JULIAN

Actually, it's "judgment." No E.

JOAN

I'm pretty sure this way is correct. Definitely an E.

HILDEGARD

Actually, it can be spelled either way. Both forms are acceptable.

JULIAN

How could we possibly know? What if we play it and it's the wrong one? But if we play the one without the E then we don't get the double word score! But if it's challenged then we don't get any points! We have to play soon we're taking way too long!

MARGERY

I'll Google it.

HILDEGARD

That's cheating.

MARGERY

[Sighs loudly, buffs.]

Juliet plays “judgement.”

HILDEGARD

Thirty-five points, respectable.

JOAN

Still only in fourth place—could be better.

JULIAN

Ok, but after *Aunt, Dad, and Grandma.*

MARGERY

I want to be on camera...put it on me!

JOAN

Honestly could you stop whining and just chill out. It’s a game.

BROTHER

[Camera turns back to show his face]

And the tallies are in—“judgement” is acceptable both with and without an E! Juliet holds down fourth place with a solid ninety-eight points. Next up, is

uh...me...bringing up the rear with a total of...fifty points. Let's hear it for the underdogs!

Camera is set down at an angle that shows, in the foreground, a piano, and behind it the living room from earlier, with the white couch, remnants of food, and the Christmas Tree glinting pink and yellow and blue.

JULIET

[Off-screen]

Mom, I think we forgot to light the menorah?

MOM

Oh go do it!

Camera is picked up and carried into the kitchen, which is covered in plates and cups and scraps of food. Cat is sitting on kitchen table, matter-of-factly eating cold turkey remains. Camera is set down on kitchen countertop. Sound of match being struck against flint. Sound of wood snapping.

JULIET

[Heard OS]

Shit.

Sound of lighter being turned on. The left side of the frame becomes increasingly lighter, as more candles are lit. Camera is picked back up, and held placing the menorah in the center of the frame. The flames lick the top of the screen.

JULIET

[Quietly]

Happy Hanukkah!

Title Card: "End of Act III."

Credits Roll.

Tasting Their Words

1. For many medieval women, love is eating and being eaten. One thirteenth century anchoress, Ida of Louvain, “tasted the Word on her tongue and felt flesh in her mouth; when she chewed it, it was like honey, not a phantasm but like any other kind of food.”⁴⁶
2. When I think about it this way, perhaps I am eating these women, swallowing their words and their images to sustain my own.
3. “Telling God” is Anne Carson’s phrase, used in her essay “Decreation: How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God.” Carson describes “the writerly project shared by all three of them, the project of telling the world the truth about God, love and reality.”⁴⁷ She argues that “telling is a function of self.” But Carson’s main point in discussing these three female writers is that for them to write about God is to contradict—in order to write about God, “each of them feels moved to create a sort of dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work and the teller disappears into the telling.”⁴⁸
4. Telling medieval women is my phrase, extrapolated from Carson’s, and something that many writers, filmmakers, and artists have done ever since these women were around to be told.
5. Joan of Arc was not a writer in the same sense that Marguerite of Porete, Sappho, and Simone Weil were. Joan was a warrior, tasked with explaining herself in front of a panel of men who were predisposed to not believe her. But Joan also told God.

6. Joan was a warrior—it was the role God gave her, and a role she wore according to her own and God’s specifications—but she was also *la pucelle*, a young, female, virgin. But Joan did not perform the Pucelle correctly all the time: she wore men’s clothing, she wouldn’t work with the church, and worst of all, she wouldn’t shut up.
7. She wrote letters, she travelled around France, she led an army of men, and she continuously asserted her message from God, which she claimed to be obtaining via direct conversation, or vision, or really how exactly *was* she receiving this message?
8. Joan did not suffer “nobly,” in any traditional sense. She whined. According to the trial records, “she complained about being held in chains and in bonds of iron.”⁴⁹ She told her interrogators, *I wished to escape and would still do so, as is lawful for all people who are incarcerated or imprisoned.*⁵⁰ When she didn’t want to answer a question, she would simply refuse, sometimes in a somewhat dramatic tone: *Spare me that. Move on.*⁵¹ She was impatient; she refused to answer questions she had already spoken on: “Asked if she had greatly wanted to be a man when she had to come to France, she replied that she had answered this elsewhere.”⁵²
9. Elizabeth Petroff calls our attention to the importance of oral traditions in medieval women’s devotional writing—we must consider the significance to the “creation of literary texts at the historical moment when oral composition is being replaced by written literature.”⁵³ For one, this speaks to the “impulse toward autobiography, with the dominance of dialogue as a rhetorical strategy in presenting the self”⁵⁴—with the caveat that the understanding of the self, at least in the earliest of medieval periods, was very different from ours today.
10. In the trial records, there is no detail about any preliminary evidence against Joan existing. This goes directly against the rules. Judges could only “bring charges

- against an individual when there were clear grounds, and in particular a widespread public belief that the accused was guilty,”⁵⁵ Craig Taylor notes. “The fact that they omitted any such evidence from the official record...meant that Joan was condemned solely on the basis of her own testimony.”⁵⁶ Legal matters aside, this is significant, because it means that Joan’s words mattered, were taken quite seriously, and were seen as threatening—her words must be burned.
11. Sometimes she got snippy, when she was repeatedly asked the same, leading, frustratingly repetitive questions: *I have said to you enough that it is St Katherine and St Margaret; believe me if you wish.*⁵⁷
 12. On March 26, 1431, Joan was told the charges against her.⁵⁸ And again, the court placed the highest import on Joan’s own words: “usually such charges would be supported by the testimony of appropriate witnesses, but instead Estivet [her prosecutor] relied solely upon the words of Joan herself.”⁵⁹
 13. It seems pertinent to remind that Joan referred to the Saints with whom she spoke as her “voices.”
 14. Petroff suggests “the use of dialogue points to the orality of [medieval women’s] texts.”⁶⁰ She says that “dialogue serves to hasten self-definition, and it provides a justification for women to write.”⁶¹
 15. Joan was also sarcastic: “Asked if [St Michael, when he appeared to her] was naked, she replied: *Do you think God does not have the means to clothe him?*”⁶²
 16. It was Joan’s voice that made up the fabric of the trial—the prosecution, the defense, the moments in between. She was suffering loudly, at anyone who could hear her, and she was given a whole platform upon which to do so.

17. Joan tells God by telling of descending hierarchies: first there is God, then his messengers, then the rightful King of France, and then herself. And she, Joan, is important, because of her relationship with God. Unlike Catherine de La Rochelle, whose visions Joan repudiated (after a consultation with Saints Katherine and Margaret) as *just madness*, Joan is deserving of respect in her own right.⁶³
18. Joan's voices took the forms of the angel St. Michael, and Saints Katherine and Margaret. God figured into her life as someone with whom she could communicate, but not as a bodily presence with whom she could directly speak. Hers was a virginal relationship, not only with those on Earth, but with those beyond Earth, as well. She was the Pucelle, after all. When she said, *I submit to God entirely*,⁶⁴ it was her will she meant, and her actions, but not her body, not quite yet.
19. A medieval understanding of the self, at least in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, included the concepts of the soul (*anima*), the self (*seipsum*), and the inner man (*homo interior*). "The discovery of *homo interior*, or *seipsum*, [was] the discovery within oneself of human nature made in the image of God—an *imago dei* that is the same for all human beings...the development of the self was toward God,"⁶⁵ Petroff notes.
20. Before reading the court transcripts of the trials of Joan of Arc, much of my knowledge of her story was based on the 1928 Carl Theodor Dreyer film, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. Joan has no voice in this film—the film is, in fact, silent. What is Joan's trial about, then, if not her responses to key questions? First and foremost: was she conversing and acting with God, or the Devil?
21. In the trial transcripts, Joan attaches herself to her words—she edits the sentences she is told to have uttered by the court; she sends them spewing back, now more precise, more particular.

22. Dreyer was offered the choice of making a film about Marie Antoinette, Catherine Medici, or Joan of Arc—powerful women of lasting fame. He chose Joan because of her extreme suffering; in his own words, *suffering means ennoblement*.⁶⁶ To Dreyer, then, this suffering could be translated without any of Joan’s words, but merely her face, which we as an audience look down upon, as it stares, moon-like, back up at us. Her eyes are craters.
23. My instinct is that Dreyer’s depiction of Joan of Arc is an act of violence against her—in silencing her he erases her cause, and all we are left with is a woman’s body, burning on a stake.
24. Rather than closing the distance between Joan and us, by separating her from her purpose, Dreyer creates distance, flattens her into an abstract geometric shape like the shadows on the walls of the courtroom.
25. The image on the last page of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s chapter “Erato Love Poetry,” in her book *Dictee*, is a still of Renée Falconetti in *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*.⁶⁷ It shadows a chapter in which Theresa Hak Kyung Cha writes about another Thérèse, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose story she narrates as a film. This is not the only time Cha alludes to Jeanne d’Arc, but it is the only time she alludes to this portrayal of her.
26. Cha’s work—an imagined dialogue—gives word to the character, while the marker of Dreyer’s is a film still—it takes from Joan any life that the film version may have given her. Cha and Dreyer are both telling a story about a woman who told God, a long time ago, and far, far away, but need this have the same result?
27. *La Passion* is a canonized film; I believe rightly so. It draws upon German Expressionism, French Impressionism, and Soviet Montage traditions; it weaves

- them together into a moving image that is ecstatic, affecting, and abstracted, in equal turns. The film deploys light and shadow beautifully; it holds the viewer in thrall by its insistence on the importance of this woman's face, repeated and printed again and again, until we almost see the face, burned into our eyes, on the white expanse of wall, when Dreyer cuts away. I love the film for its own sake, but I don't think it is fair to Joan.
28. The film takes Joan's story out of the context of religion, and attempts to make it a matter of universal suffering, which I do not believe Joan, who was invested, so deeply, in telling God's word, would have appreciated. If she suffered anything, it was the expanses of men and women who refused to take her words at face value, and instead made a problem of her appearance—she was a woman, dressing like a man. Perhaps, on a meta-level, as a story about the character of Joan that misses the point of her personal cause, aestheticizes it, the film is true to Joan's story.
29. The actress who played Joan in the film—Renée Falconetti—has also achieved mythical status. Falconetti was not an actress, but it is her face acting that is so powerful, that brings to life this suffering woman whom Dreyer wished to portray. This was the first and last film she would act in. When it came the day to chop all her hair off, she sobbed and sobbed.⁶⁸ Rumors of the physical and psychological torment that Dreyer enacted upon her abounded around the time of filming. These rumors have been quelled, somewhat, by Falconetti's daughter, and Falconetti herself.⁶⁹ But the violent aura surrounding the film persists—perhaps linking it to the “authentic,” and thus helping to ensure its lasting power. Falconetti was a sort of miracle woman, an amateur able to convey this universal emotion, despite her

- utter lack of training, and, as is often suggested,⁷⁰ though I would dispute, her homeliness.
30. Joan's first goal was to instate the proper King of France, then for God to be told of this by his messengers, and then to be remembered for her "perfect filiality," by God, so as to attain the "final reward" of "the salvation of her soul."⁷¹ So really, there was never any other possible outcome for Joan—her end game was always the afterlife. Her impassioned insistence on this journey just helped speed this trajectory up, a bit. In her assertion of the importance of conversation with her Voices over those on Earth, she maintained a hierarchy that put more value on her message than her body, and effectively erased her physical presence. For Joan, a voice was always more important than a physical presence, which is why in her telling of God, God is strangely absent; it is only God's will, and the bodies of his messengers, that she has access to, and can therefore voice, herself.
31. Marguerite of Porete coined a term, *le loingprés*, or the FarNear, to describe the way she related with God. Only in being further from God could she actually feel close to him, or could she describe the reality of her relation to him.
32. The "glory that the excellent FarNear gives is nothing other than a glimpse which God wants the soul to have of her own glory that she will possess without end,"⁷² Carson writes.
33. Perhaps to contemporarily, creatively, tell medieval women telling God, there is an element of this FarNearness—these idols, as these remembered women might be labeled, serve as an example of glory one might oneself possess without end, but they do so in their distance, in their embodied ellipsis. And to construct oneself

- within these roles is to perform a character, but it is also to learn from this character. *What was she doing that yielded her collective memory?*
34. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that our understanding of medieval women is as fragmented as they were.⁷³ And Petroff, that they wrote subjectively for two, interwoven reasons: “one’s own spiritual history was the discovery of the self made in the image of God, and to tell one’s history was to teach about God. The God about whom they wrote was also made in their image and likeness...the feminine of God, the motherhood of Christ.”⁷⁴ They wrote of God to tell themselves, and they wrote of themselves to tell God, and they wrote of God and themselves to tell.
35. To tell medieval women is to tell of a voice that has both asserted itself astoundingly out of turn and self-consciously disappeared itself entirely, and so to do so necessitates a telling that takes stock of these particular characteristics, runs them over the tongue, and spits them back out, ready to be eaten up again.
36. Last summer, I mentioned to an adult man I had just met that I was writing about medieval writers. *Oh, like Chaucer?* he asked. *No I’m actually writing about Medieval Women Writers*, I responded. He was stumped for a moment, but he was a wealthy, middle-aged, male lawyer, so this did not stop him for long. *Did they speak a different language?* he asked, finally confident he had hit the nail right on the head, pounded it into oblivion. At the time, I said no, attempting, a bit angrily, to explain the relative authority (or lack thereof) inherently allotted to women writing in medieval times, and so my choice to focus on these less-heard voices.
37. Now, having tasted some of their words, and told of them too—having considered more carefully the circumstances from which they came, I’m rather inclined to say yes.

A Rule of One's Own

1. *Christian people may lean upon them, while they hold her up with the holiness of their lives and their blessed prayers. It is for this reason that an anchoress is called an anchoress, and anchored under a church like an anchor under the side of a ship, to hold it, so that the waves and storms do not pitch it over,*⁷⁵ writes the unknown author of *Ancrene Riwle*.
2. I started enumerating my thoughts as an exercise, but now the form seems to me a constraint particularly primed to remind me I must stop.
3. The author of *Ancrene Riwle*—one of the most popular guides for recluses, written sometime after 1167 and maybe well into the 13th century—implicitly describes the role of the Anchoresses to be one of contemplation.⁷⁶
4. When you are writing a thesis you only have so much time. You must make the most of this time. Everyone else is. No one else is. What you make doesn't make you, doesn't make you money, until it does.
5. *Ancrene Riwle* is made up of eight sections: Devotions, The Custody of the Senses, Regulation of the Inward Feelings, Temptations, Confession, Penance, Love, External Rules. It was written by an unknown man for three wealthy women who were taking on the lives of anchoresses.
6. Contemplation, as described in the Rule, was the natural “desirable culmination of our efforts to love God in this life.”⁷⁷
7. Hope Allen also did scholarly work on *Ancrene Riwle*, the translator, Mary Salu, who put this into words I can understand, notes.⁷⁸

8. (Before acquiring this copy of the *Riwle*, acquaintances happened upon me cursing into dusty brown-jacketed books filled with pages of Middle English in the library stacks. *Sanskrit?* one asked, sympathetically.)
9. There are several existing manuscripts. This translation is based upon the Corpus MS, which took, originally, as its name, “Ancrene Wisse,” meaning, “The Anchoresses’ Guide,” as opposed to “Ancrene Riwle,” or “The Anchoresses’ Rule”—which Salu notes has “become the customary name for the work in all its forms,”⁷⁹ though in the time elapsed since 1954, when she wrote this introduction, the custom has shifted back in the other direction.
10. The OED cites *Ancrene Riwle* as either the second or first known use of the word “rule.” This word has multiple definitions. A rule is, first, the body of regulations observed by a religious order or congregation, or the order or congregation itself. A rule is also a particular principle, regulation, governing individual conduct. Rule is also conduct, behavior, manner of acting. All four of these definitions are first attributed to *Ancrene Riwle*. In the context of this document, these women were submitting to a rule, embodying a rule, abiding by rules, enacting anchoress’s rule.⁸⁰
11. *The righteous are those who live according to rule, and you, my dear sisters, have often and earnestly asked me for a rule*, the introduction begins.⁸¹ This unknown author sets out to write down a code of conduct for these three women who chose this life of constraint, and give constraints he does. He lays out two categories of rules that will follow: one interior, governing the heart, and one exterior, governing the body and its actions. The inner may not vary, the outer may, in order to uphold the inner mode.
12. On multiple occasions, in the introduction, he warns the anchoresses against *straining the liquid to get rid of a gnat and yet swallowing a fly*, meaning, making the most

- effort when there is the least need.⁸² It seems he may be attempting to follow this same advice himself—in the writing of this short rule, how can he place emphasis on what is most at stake in the lives of these women? How can he swat at the flies, and maybe swallow a gnat or two in the process?
13. His first attempt: *Devotions*, is reminiscent of a Book of Hours, laying out the precise timeline by which the anchoress should govern her days. Here anchoresses distinctly are not rule, do not rule, but are ruled.
 14. The Books of Hours were medieval bestsellers. They were owned by the average person, and offered a relationship with the Virgin Mary—one more casual than that afforded to mystics or other religious people, but a relationship nonetheless.⁸³
 15. The French-American contemporary artist Louise Bourgeois printed her own version of a Book of Hours on cloth, made to look like scraps of clothing, like blank sheet music paper. She called it “Hours of the Day.” The text within is derived from her daybooks; each spread features a 24-hour clock advancing one hour at a time, on the right, and red text in English or French or both on the left. It is extremely beautiful, and also sings of its own matter, its thingness—another book that begs to be touched.
 16. She writes: *All my actions today will aim to avoid the things that I have to do.*⁸⁴ This is a Book pared down to the passage of Hours and this music that accompanies them, the hum of words in her head solidified as prayers.
 17. In the originals: there are prayers to the Eucharist, there are optional hours, accounts of the weekday hours of Christ’s passion. Whatever you wanted, you could get in your book. How do you want to sanctify your time? You are paying!

18. *If you make your own Hours, are you sanctifying or secularizing your time? Are you capitalizing it, or de-commoditizing it?* I wonder, as I click through image after image of first Bourgeois' hours, then the Hours of Mary of Burgundy, a fifteenth century duke's daughter.⁸⁵ *I would like a book of my hours, I decide, but that does not really clarify anything.*
19. I turn a page and here are the Suffrages: the images of popular saints. Saints—such as Wilgefortis, the patron saint of bearded ladies, who only exists because a Byzantine depiction of a bearded Christ on the cross, dressed in long robes, was parsed as a woman⁸⁶—then Martyrs, such as the cephalophoric martyrs, who were decapitated and then carried their heads around for a while after.⁸⁷
20. And last, here is the Office of the Dead, fittingly closing the book, and attempting to assuage the medieval fear of dying in a state of mortal sin. I imagine someone, in the sparse, Monty-Python-and-the-Holy-Grail-esque room I picture when I think of medieval time, calling out for their Book of Hours in their final raspy tones (*everyone in the Middle Ages probably had a raspy voice, particularly peasants, because of the dust; the air was beige with it*) and receiving it just in time, claspng it to their chest, mouthing the words within that allow them to float straight up to heaven.
21. I sometimes am jolted by how much medieval time I have studied, how many facts about life at this time I can spout, and yet how little of it I can actually see. I return to a 250x259 pixel jpeg⁸⁸ that captures an illumination in a fifteenth century manuscript: a woman's face peeks out from a window that perfectly frames her face and neck, her head wrapped in a scarf as white as the stone of her anchorhold, as white as her face, which is as white as the paper. A bishop stands over her—towering above her short skinny cell, blessing her—she must be sitting cross-legged on the ground to fit. Her eyes appear to be trained somewhere around his

- stomach—or perhaps inward. All that is visible behind her, inside her room, is a halo of black. Is this what medieval time looks like?
22. A Book of Hours theoretically sanctified secular time for the average person, but it was not adhered to as rigidly as prescribed. One would have to be quite privileged, to not have to toil for much of the day to make a living, to actually have the time to pray on command.⁸⁹ It was, rather, a guide, a manner of displaying one's piety, a conductor into a space of religious time from secular time, where the times merged, swirled together, got confused, and ultimately butted heads as the necessities of daily life stepped forward in the form of an empty coin pouch, a rumbling stomach, an untilled field.
23. Few lay people had the time to give their whole day to God. But anchoresses did. *Ancrene Riwle* prescribes a Book of Hours that is more attainable, allowing anchoresses to become an ideal—these elevated ghosts living among humans, already dead, half in this world, half in the next.
24. What is clear: the time of the Anchoresses was heavily regulated, but sometimes the secular world also intruded despite all efforts at purely sanctified time.
25. She must remember that she is living in God's Prison. She must remember that she is dead in life. The dead do not touch the living; an anchoress may not touch a human body. Especially not a man's. Any touch, at all, between man and anchoress *is a thing so anomalous, an action so shameful, and a sin so plain, so loathsome to everyone, and so great a scandal, that there is no need to speak or to write against it, for without any one's writing about it, its foulness is already too clear*, the author writes, slipping into apophasis.⁹⁰ Part II: Custody of the Senses, focuses on protecting each of the five of the anchoress's senses against the outside world. It mainly focuses on the separation of women

- from men, particularly those men who would take advantage of the anchoress's immobile state. God's prison, too, denies those who sin.
26. The author of the Rule begins this section by discussing different curtain options for the anchoress's window. The one an anchoress should use should have a black background with a white cross on it, symbolizing that *you yourselves are black and of no value in the eyes of the outside world, and the white cross symboliz[ing] the keeping of pure chastity.*⁹¹ There are a number of other, practical reasons why a black cloth is ideal, which the author lists—*less harmful to the eyes than other colours and it is stouter against the wind and more difficult to see through, and it keeps its colour better, against the wind and other things*—exemplifying a repeated implication: there is a practical side to be found within the spiritual rules, given by God. Or, in some cases, a spiritual rule may be extrapolated based on a practical necessity.
27. There were ways of bending the rules: medieval women, despite their frequent lack of formal education, were often acquiring literacy as a miracle. In one instance, St. Umilta, an Italian nun and later abbess, in the late thirteenth century, suddenly found herself literate without any prior training “when, as a joke, some of the older nuns asked her to read during the meal.”⁹² *Joke's on you, Sister!* Not to undermine the validity of a miracle, but for a woman who aspired to write in a world where this was not legal, this seems a pretty convenient act of God. *Not my doing, just a God thing, she shrugs.*
28. Instead of cursing, an anchoress should say “*Certainly*” or “*Surely*” or *some such expression.*⁹³ I have tried this; it is, frankly, unsatisfying.
29. If an anchoress heeds these rules, she can anticipate *swiftness and the light of clear sight.*⁹⁴ Is the implication, then, that the world is moving slower for these women, in their

- constrained lives? Or somewhere in between the slowness of the outside world and the speedy world of God? The author promises that *all in heaven shall be as swift as human thought is now*.⁹⁵ The body, as always, is a stumbling block for these cerebral women.
30. Here is a list of ways that the author of the Rule believes anchoresses are like pelicans: they are thin, they are prone to anger, they kill their own young, afterward they feel guilty, they lament, they strike themselves with their own bill, they draw blood from their breast, and they use that blood to bring their young dead baby back to life. The young pelicans are the anchoress's good works, the striking of the breast is confession, and the blood is sin (both can't be tested until they have cooled).⁹⁶
31. Here are some ways an anchoress is like a night-raven: they live under the eaves of the church; they are busy at night or in the dark.⁹⁷
32. Here is how an anchoress is like a lone sparrow: they offer song (prayer) from a place of solitude; their body is tamed by the "falling sickness," or what we might know as epilepsy.⁹⁸
33. Older men have given me a lot of free advice over the course of this project. Though never helpful, their suggestions have, in some cases, helped me to articulate precisely what I am *not* writing about. After I explained the project to one older man, a professor of English whose house was being used as a location for a senior thesis film I was working on, he responded, "You should read *A Room of One's Own*."
34. This was not actually the inspired suggestion he may have thought it to be. The link between the Modernists and Anchoresses has been drawn before⁹⁹—but I find this

- link a bit tenuous. The risk is that the anchoresses are not taken on their own terms—the aesthetics, the facts of their lives, are conflated with those that come later, and ignore the cause of their actualization.
35. Laura Saetveit Miles writes,
- Now that God is Julian’s sole authority figure, with even the parish priest locked outside in the shadow of the divine, she truly shares in the creative freedom envisioned by Woolf. . . Woolf was supported by the reliable income of her aunt’s legacy just as Julian was supported by her parish, so that both women could afford to step outside of their usual social obligations and inhabit a new space of productive self-sufficiency.¹⁰⁰
- Perhaps.
36. But Julian never presents herself as a writer, rather “noughting” herself, to use the verb form of her own word of choice, as Elizabeth Robertson does in her essay that argues for Julian’s Modernist voice.¹⁰¹
37. Julian was not writing fiction. Even to referentially suggest this connection is to delegitimize her purpose in writing. This was nonfiction—perhaps one of the early examples of creative nonfiction, particularly written by a woman.
38. *It is very unreasonable to go into an anchor-house, to go voluntarily and willingly into God’s prison, into a place of discomfort, looking for ease, the power to rule, and the status of a lady beyond anything that she would probably have had in the world,*¹⁰² the *Ancrene Riwle* asserts.
39. I have a tiny room of my own now—it is actually not mine but was given to me by my housemate when he got an office of his own. It is mine, in theory, to enable me to write something, unimpeded by distractions, and to have a place to store books.
40. We know that Julian was given bequeaths; we know she was not fully suffering. She had some level of privilege—to not have to worry about food, shelter—but she almost certainly would have wanted to view herself as poor. The Rule is focused on the ascetic element, the introduction reminds us.¹⁰³

41. “The term [rule] is problematic,” E.A. Jones argues in his introduction to the modern English translation of the *Speculum Inclusorum*, an early anchoritic guide, and the guide that Julian of Norwich would most likely have been reading. These rules were more counsel, or outlines, rather than regulation.¹⁰⁴
42. But why was this the case? Caroline Walker Bynum points out that religious women who lived lives “characterized by more virulent asceticism than men’s and who might have been presumed to need such asceticism to purge their greater physicality, were advised...that theirs should be the way of moderation. [Male writers, therefore,] sometimes said explicitly that women were too weak to be women.”¹⁰⁵ It is worth considering that the women purportedly asked for a rule; the constraint was more than voluntary—it was sought.
43. What does it mean to seek constraints?
44. The matter of the title, of “Ancrene Riwe” versus “Ancrene Wisse,” is a question of severity, and a question of subject. “Guide,” a word not yet in use at the time of the writing of the original document, means, in the manner it is likely meant here, “a book of instruction or information for beginners or novices.” “Guide” was first used as such in the early 1600s. The earliest use of “guide” was in 1362, in the Middle English allegorical narrative poem, “Piers Plowman,” by William Langland, to mean “one who leads or shows the way, especially to a traveller in a strange country.”¹⁰⁶
45. To call this book a guide is to see it as a support, not a statute. To call it a guide is to render the subject of the book its author. The Anchoresses’ Guide is a handbook, an aid in fulfilling duties. The Anchoresses’ Guide is a mortal man whose identity has been lost to time. The Anchoresses’ Rule is, rather, religiously

- regulatory. The Anchoresses' Rule are the collective anchoresses. The Anchoresses' Rule is anchoressness embodied. The Anchoresses' Rule gives anchoresses life, however constrained this life may be—a life that a guide could only hope to shape.
46. For the anchoresses, a religious space was not a family space. The Rule is explicit about this: *close feeling for her family is not proper in an anchoress.*¹⁰⁷
47. Nor was a religious space a family space for my Jewish relatives. They wanted out of their tiny room. For the anchoresses, it was a choice between constraints: give up speaking, but impart some wisdom from God to other women; live in a single room, but avoid a life of domesticity, or farming. For my family it was not a compromise, but rather a full relinquishing of constraint—the result was a positive and a positive, or a positive and a whatever: give up Judaism, become an American; reject tradition and the one uniting family trait, take on a life of secular activities, games, stories, to redefine this shared time.
48. What does it mean to lose constraint?
49. There is good constraint and there is bad. Constraint as the anchoresses wished it allowed for productivity, for focus on what most mattered to them, for the freedom to devote their lives to the most important of relationships and to the images miraculously shown to them, for the sharing of these visions with others and the improvement of lives. Constraint as my ancestors felt it suppressed their voices, their self-expression, their ability to exist outside of an idea that the world they lived in constructed around them. Constraint as the anchoresses wished it is self-selected. Constraint as my ancestors felt it is externally imposed. This is reductive. A framework, a guide.

50. But, consider: if this bad constraint is lost, is the result freedom?
51. What is vacation-time if not freedom?
52. But for how many generations is this freedom, before it becomes pure privilege, squandering of time at the expense of others still under constraints?
53. At what point does the clinging onto the title of (atheist) Jewish merely become an attempt to deflect from the more apt identities of White and Upper Middle Class?
54. How to reckon the real constraint imposed upon our ancestors with our current lack of religious constraint—in fact, our ability to associate freely with Judaism without any practice, without any real risk? This ability that has come, yes, under threat, of late, but that remains marginal compared to the threat that persists in the lives of those whose appearance continues to mark them as targets for violence, who cannot shroud themselves in whiteness to avoid hatred?
55. How to deal with, on a personal note, the matter of my whiteness, if I take Jewishness as an ethnicity and whiteness as race? The matter, which is only a matter because of my slightly, *slightly* darker toned skin than that of many of the white people who surround me, that leads others to ask over and over “what I am,” or “where I’m from,” these questions that do not offend me, because I do not feel prejudiced against in these moments—as I am still light enough to be white, but just dark enough to be “exotic,” or an exciting other—but that anger me because of this implied exoticism. How to deal with the feeling of futility, or powerlessness in these moments to say something useful, and how to deal with the look of skepticism that I know is inevitably coming when I say *I’m white*, or *I’m American*, or the pointlessness of the dawning look of comprehension—or in some, scarier, cases do I detect a tinge of relief?—when I say *I’m Jewish—Hungarian and Russian and Italian?*

56. I'm in Denmark, out at a crowded bar in the meatpacking district—the club scene, where a body can dance until 5 a.m. to a frantic beat, crushed up against so many other strange bodies, almost exclusively clad in black. I walk to my bike with my blonde pale blue Danish friend. Two men call out to us *excuse me*—we turn, *yes?* They walk towards us; I feel us both stiffen, form a rank together.

My friend and I were wondering, where you are from? My friend cocks her hip; I feel her leaping toward defense. *America*, I say, wearily. It's the third time tonight; I'm getting sleepy from the drunk, I'm ready to bike home. *No but where are you actually from*, they continue. I look at them hard for the first time, let my eyes wander over their faces; I smile, a slow understanding. *Ohh*, I pause, it's dawning on me, a revelation, oh gosh, well now I realize what they're asking, silly me, *I'm from New York*. A triumph. Their faces fall. I wonder if they'll give up.

But these men are fighters; they hold their ground. Strength in numbers, they'll show me. The dim-witted not-American, they will break through her skull. *But originally, where are your parents from?* A valiant effort at a last stab. Unfortunately for them, they've moved straight into my queen's domain; I've lined them up and now it's time to give them a gentle tap, a pair of dominos crashing down upon one another. *Ah*, now I can show slight aggravation, they're taking up my time, it's getting late, but fine, I'll give them the information I now totally get that they've been looking for this whole time: *my mom's from Queens, dad's from Manhattan—but*, I almost wink, but no, that's too much, can't get carried away, *the secret is, I'm really from the suburbs*.

They're pissed now, but not as much as my friend. She is indignant; she's ranting about the color of my skin, how they should be ashamed, how Danish they're being,

I'm dragging her *come on, it's not worth it, forget it*. She's saying *she's white but even if she wasn't* and *why do you think you can just ask her, because of the color of her skin and where are your parents from* and I'm on my bike pedaling in circles around and around her until she tires of yelling and the men are gone, lost past the light of a street lamp in the dim, bottle strewn parking lot.

57. How to deal with the fact that a Jewish joke has never felt personally offensive?
58. Would this be different if I grew up outside of New York? If I lived in a place where being Jewish wasn't "normal"?
59. But, importantly, my kind-of religion is not visible—no film coats my skin identifying me as Jew-ish today. Others' perception of my whiteness changes based upon my surroundings, but I have never felt constrained by my appearance. The ambiguous racial space I occupy feels related to my muddled religious identity—and, tangentially, to the lives of medieval women. When I read them I cannot help but consider the ways their appearance influenced their writing, and the way their writing was received. I have the privilege to not have to consider the way my appearance is perceived by others most of the time—but this is a situational privilege, a privilege obtained through time.
60. Consider: being atheist Jewish today means substantial freedom from bad constraint, but we perhaps need to bring back some of that good constraint—to check ourselves in order to be productive to our own moral ends, which my grandmother maintains are necessary, as an existentialist, to create for oneself.
61. But also consider: some of this unchecked time can be valuable—it is worth celebrating freedom.

62. I don't know how best to deal with all of these matters of constraint. Medieval women cannot quite act as models; being a woman or a mystic in medieval time is not the same as being Jewish or atheist Jewish or white or not white today. But I think that these questions are ones to be aware of, to not just forget about or make a joke of because they are difficult ones. And medieval women can help with this, because they are odd figures within their own time. They fit in but stand out, they burst off the page but disappear into a small room, they tell how to seek ultimate ecstasy but rigorously manage their own lives, to the point of earthly pain.
63. But mostly, what they do, is they write—they fill their time with words, questions, answers; they record them on the page. And this, at least, I can use my time to do. Everything I have learned from these Anchoresses Ruled is about time—how you use it, how you fill it, how you record it, and how you balance it, between the day-to-day and the infinite time that follows after your own body is no longer on this earth. I have learned that to write, as a rule, is to record your time.

6

Xmas: A Fun Game for the Whole Family!

The rules of this chapter are as follows:

1. Read out loud.
2. Every paragraph must include mention of:
 - a. Family.
 - b. Festivities.
 - c. Alcohol.
 - d. Great times.
 - e. Judaism.
 - f. All of the above.
 - g. Trick question e goes against parameters of rule 6 and is undermined by rule 8.
3. Each paragraph must end with the word the last paragraph began with, so as to
4. To create some sort of structure that is fun.
5. If you pass “go,” collect yourself.
6. There will be no words related to religion.
7. There will be no mention of the word “secular” or any of its synonyms.
8. Every word related to religion or secularism must be replaced with its antonym.
9. Take a drink every time you see the word “god.”
10. Take a picture every time you see God.
11. Skip a sentence if you get bored, but assume that what you skipped was fantastic prose.
12. The second time a word is repeated in a paragraph, go back two words.
13. All of the rules must be adhered to strictly.

The Game Board:

It is a Friday, but it is [a day celebrating the death of {name redacted}], so no one has work or school. The family gathers. In the corner of the living room is a tree, with different shapes wrapped in colorful pieces of differently textured paper and shiny string underneath and around it, on top of a floor blanket. The newcomers add more of the shapes wrapped in textured paper and shiny string under the indoor tree. The indoor tree has a lot of other bits of shiny paper and strings and round color orbs that reflect lights that are also different colors and are all attached to one another by a more electric string, and are wrapped in circles around the tree, but not in an orderly way, more like someone was overwhelmed by the amount of lights on electric string they

were holding, and maybe kept getting stuck every time they got to the corner and had to squeeze between the wall and the indoor tree, and got poked by the indoor tree's stabby appendages, and maybe gave up at the end because there is a tail dragging in a pool of light on the floor—but because there are so many different colors of light it all mixes into a festive brown tone. Now I will hit enter.

Enter grandma. She is an existentialist (does this count as religion or secularism? Choose your own adventure!). Oh my god. Enter aunt. She is essentially a [believing {religious group name redacted}].

Redacted rules undermine their own functions. I am breaking lots of rules, and also a color orb or four. The lights suddenly go out, oh my god, we blame it on the cat, gesund heit, somebody is allergic to the cat, good health, I am learning German on duolingo and now I get Yiddish.

Yiddish is a {religious group name redacted} language based on German, the dictionary tells me, like dreidel is to trundl. Everyone drinks. Prosecco, champagne, cheers. We love this day all of us together. Something is on fire oh my god oh my go—it's out it's ok it was just from the candle at the center of the table and someone's sleeve, it's fine, gesund heit, that cat, oh my god, cheers. To family. Everyone takes a drink.

Drinking it all in, the champagne, the mulled cider, the family, the lights, I remember to leave the room and go to the bathroom, where I can use my cellphone. The lights of the bathroom are very white and blue, compared to the reds and greens and browns of the living room with the indoor tree and the lights and the—you get that image already, and my eyes see little pockmarks everywhere when I look in the mirror. By the time I get back to the living room, faces are redder and some have some

schmutz on them and there is on the whole less cheese, or at least holes where cheese used to be on the plate, and it is time to go into the dining room now.

Now drinks are refilled and everyone looks so nice today; it is so nice to be here together as a family. To family! Gesund heit, oh my, cat.

Cat-like reflexes have narrowly saved a plate from tumbling to the ground, and thank god for the distraction because grandpa was about to say something from behind his martini olive again, and, uh, what was it about our famous relative, some escape artist or circus performer or actor or was that maybe a movie or maybe it's time for dessert?

Dessert looks so great thank you mom, yeah thanks mom, and thanks dad wow all the food, great, really, so glad, together, family, delicious, the chefs, hats off, and cousin brought some pies—too kind, no really, too kind, we didn't need more dessert, but really, so kind to think of, it's wonderful, after all—to family!

Family, after all, is what unites us. (God bless you! That cat.) And what do we all have in common but our shared [disbelief] system, a joke; we're such good [adj. describing our religious group redacted].

Group redacted, we censor ourselves together; it's really fun and communal, to family! It's getting late and some should be going soon, so sad, what a nice day, another day, we'll do it all again, so soon! No really, don't try to help clean the dishes, not necessary, have a cookie, such nice gifts all of them, really, thank you thank you, you're welcome to stay over if—of course, understood, early morning tomorrow, but if you want. We'll see you in the new year, love you, goodbye—grab the cat, don't let her out, oh no, gesund heit!! Cat's out of the house.

House feels emptier now, oh my god, we forgot to light the menorah, I can do it; we're useless [collective name for the religious group we technically fall under redacted]—what is it, night 8? Ok I lit the candles, we can all relax now, eat another cookie, finish the wine, lots of plates, let's do it tomorrow.

Tomorrow will no longer be a day of—what I guess we are yielding to—God?

God, gesund, cat. Family!

Key for Sample Game Play:

1. Rule 1, I am doing this; it makes the game much more fun.
2. Rule 2 in **bold**.
3. Rule 3 in CAPS.
4. Rule 4 is its own example.
5. Rule 5^{superscript}.
6. Rule 6 ~~struck through~~.
7. Rule 7 only done in parentheses.
8. Rule 8 underlined.
9. Rule 9_{subscript}.
10. Rule 10_{subscript}.
11. Rule 11 applied to paragraphs 4, 6-10, and 12-13.
12. Rule 12 in *italics*.
13. Rule 14: check.

Sample Game Play:

It is a Friday, but it *Friday, but it is but it is* [a *it is* a day celebrating the death of {~~name redacted~~}], so no one has work or school. The *or school. The* **family** gathers. In the corner of *the corner of* the living room is a tree, with different shapes wrapped in *shapes wrapped in* colorful pieces of differently textured paper and shiny string underneath and *string underneath and* around it, on top of a floor blanket. The newcomers add more of the shapes *of the shapes wrapped the shapes wrapped* in texture paper *in texture paper* and shiny *paper and shiny* string and *shiny string* under the ~~indoor tree~~ *the indoor tree*. The ~~indoor tree~~ *The indoor tree* has *indoor tree has* a lot of other bits of shiny paper and strings and round color orbs that reflect lights that *reflect lights that* also different *that also different* colors and are *colors and are* all attached to one *attached to one* another by a more *by a more*

electric string, and are wrapped in circles around *in circles around* the tree, but *the tree, but* not in an orderly way, more like someone was overwhelmed by *was overwhelmed by* the amount of lights *amount of lights on of lights on* electric *lights on electric* string they were holding, and maybe kept getting stuck every time they *every time they* got to *they got to* the corner and had to squeeze between the wall and the indoor tree, and got *tree, and got* poked by the ~~indoor tree's~~ stabby appendages, and maybe *appendages, and maybe* gave up at the end because there is a tail dragging in a pool of light on the floor—but because *floor, but because there but because there* are so *there are so* many colors *so many colors* of light *colors of light* it all *light it all* mixes into a **festive** brown tone. Now I will hit ENTER.

ENTER **grandma**. She is an **existentialist** (does this count as **religion or secularism**? Choose your own adventure!). Oh my god_{drink}. Enter *my god*. Enter **aunt**. She *Enter aunt. She is aunt. She is essentially a* [**believing {religious group name REDACTED}**].

REDACTED rules undermine their own functions. I am breaking lots of rules *lots of rules*, and also a color orb or four. The lights suddenly go^{collect yourself} out, oh my god_{drink}, we blame it on the cat, *gesund heit*, somebody is allergic to the *allergic to the cat to the cat*, good health, I *good health, I am health, I am* learning German on *learning German on duolingo and on duolingo and* now I get **Yiddish**_{takepicture}.

[Ellipsis]

HOUSE feels emptier now, oh my god_{drink}, we forgot to light the **menorah**, I can do it; we're useless [~~collective name for the name for the religious group we religious group we technically fall under redacted~~]*—what is it what is it*, night 8?

Good luck!

Exodus, I Guess

1. My most spiritual practice is counting upwards to fall asleep; I have chronic insomnia (as did Louise Bourgeois—it is a condition that makes time stretch). I long ago abandoned sheep—I find them too fascinating and anyway counting nothing is more boring. It was my mother who first suggested this.
2. I was eight or nine and we were driving home, past the sprawling cemetery five minutes from my house, when I asked her why people believed in God. I remember where we were—stopped at the long traffic light, in the middle of a snaking line of cars—when the silent thoughts I had been considering finally built up and popped out of me. She thought for a minute. *Religion can be very comforting, for a lot of people*, she replied. Perhaps she referenced those in mourning, or perhaps I only think that because of the location, but this made sense to me. God was comforting, but also fake. God was a story people told to be less sad, or less scared. Embedded in this explanation is some kind of condescension toward those who believe in a god, but I don't think my mother meant it in this way.
3. My mother's mother was Jewish, but not raised with religion. Her father's parents were born in Budapest, and immigrated to the United States, where they had her father, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He married my grandmother's mother who was a Dutch Jew.
4. After my grandmother's mother committed suicide, my grandmother was sent to live with her cousins. This is my other grandmother—not the one who lives in the apartment with the room and the cat, but the one who died when I was seven. However, she also lived, for a time, on the Upper West Side. There, all of the kids

- in the neighborhood were either Jewish or Catholic. My grandmother felt left out—she didn't really have a mother, and she wasn't really Jewish. When she had a daughter of her own, she wanted her to be raised a part of the things she felt she had lost, in her somewhat neglected childhood. Here it comes: my family's religious Renaissance.
5. When my mother grew up in Flushing, Queens in the sixties, she was, like her mother, living in a neighborhood where everyone was either Jewish or Catholic. She was baptized in the Catholic Church, as my grandfather's mother wished.
 6. When my grandmother suggested to my grandfather that they raise my mother in a faith, he said *not Catholic*. So my grandmother went to the temple, where she was asked for five hundred dollars to join. She came home and told my grandfather, *you don't have to go to church; Gina will go to church*.
 7. *After all*, she used to say, *her name is Gina Randazzo; she'll fit in better in a church than in any synagogue*.
 8. Last spring, I took a documentary filmmaking class, for which I was tasked with making a film profiling a figure. I followed, at the suggestion of my best friend, the young, queer, female pastor of the church she attended—First Church of Middletown, a United Church of Christ.
 9. My mother went to church through her confirmation, at which point she renounced her religion, or apostatized. It was a speedy revival; *unto dust our faith returned*.
 10. When my brother was in eighth grade, and on the Junior Varsity basketball team, my mom was approached by another mother on the team, and asked if Elijah would like to join the Christian Youth Organization's team, which played on weekends. All she had to do was become a member of St. Matthew's Church.

11. To join, she had to fill out a questionnaire that detailed where she was baptized, where she did her First Communion, and where she was Confirmed. And that was it. When she went to the office to hand in the form, the old woman who worked there, the grandmother of a girl on my softball team, said, *so you're joining the church; did you just move here? Another resuscitation; thou shalt once again eat bread...*
12. I expected to encounter some hostility, as an outsider intruding upon their sacred space, bringing in a camera and documenting them. I was waiting for this, my body constantly apologizing for my camera and my presence. The other churchgoers would not supply this, though. Many of them were curious about the camera, but often wondered if I were recording the sermons for the website.
13. After a few weeks of my brother playing on the team, she decided she might as well go to service. I imagine her thinking about asking each of us to come with her, and ruling us out one by one.
14. They wondered what I studied. Thought the pastor was just wonderful. They wondered where I was from.
15. And so, on that one Sunday morning, as winter commenced, she dressed in something formal, as she had on so many Sunday mornings in her childhood, and slipped out of the front door. The house still slumbered. She drove down the hill, made a left, and parked in the parking lot outside of the church. Other families were pulling up, too. There were some familiar faces—those on the basketball team, and others she had seen around town, maybe exchanged a few words with, but never known personally. They smiled at each other politely. She followed a family with two small children, an older girl in a green dress, and a younger boy pulling on his dress shirt, through the tall doors and into the church. She stood, for a moment,

upon entering, in the doorway, and surveyed the room. There were rows of pews, but where to sit? She spotted another family, the group that had encouraged her to join the church, and they motioned for her to join them. She sat down next to them. She passed the peace with them. The service continued, ended. She left the church alone.

She drove home, a right, and then straight up the hill, and parked the car in front of her house, with her awakening family inside. She felt lonely, in spite of her family so close, in spite of the community she had just sat with, and celebrated compassion among. She remembered her time going to church as a child, that time that had been spent with her cousins, of whom she was the youngest, and her mom and aunt and grandmother—when she got to follow along, but be valued as an intrinsic member of the group. She felt so lonely, for a few minutes, and thought about crying. Maybe she did. Then she turned off the car and went inside the house.

16. They were excited to see the final product. They wanted to talk film cameras. At one point, my Documentary professor commented that I, like the pastor, was queer within the space of the church, occupying a role not fully categorical, a liminal member of the services, sometimes more or less a participant.
17. My brother continued to play on the CYO team, and she maintained a friendly relationship with the other families, but she never went back to church. Church was not about God, but about family, for her, but her family was not willing to go near God. A brief reawakening, a short fall from grace...*a return unto the ground.*
18. I read a bit of the Old Testament this summer, thinking it could help me think about religion. I had a lot of fun. I found a copy on the bookshelf in my grandmother's back room, next to Virginia Woolf's "The London Scene" essays,

- and I would read it when I was bored, and sure no one was around to see. It felt like a clandestine pastime, one that would be hard to explain if confronted about. In reality, I don't think anyone would have cared.
19. The copy I was reading had these incredible italics, which rendered some lines emphasis, "it *was* good," and others an outpouring of angst: "*Am* I my brother's keeper?" I had no idea the "Begats" existed, where lists of who begot whom are included for pages at a time, like a family's ancestry.com results. I found out that Sodom was *full* of slime pits.
 20. I laughed at Jacob, whining to his mother, "Sam my brother *is* a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth man."
 21. *If the first level of godliness is knowing of good and evil, and the second level is living forever, then might Joan of Arc be half godly?* I wondered, as I concurrently read her court trial records. I was trying to read her on her own terms. I recognized, at least to a degree, the farce of this. Whatever Bible Joan was reading was not the Gideons International leather-bound Bible I was reading, that said on the cover in gold PLACED IN THIS ROOM BY THE GIDEONS THE PROPERTY OF THE GIDEONS, and then below, BILLY BATHGATE. She surely wasn't using a J Crew sock tag as a bookmark.
 22. I gave up when I reached Exodus.

Time Out

1. It sounds extreme when you say it like this: the first book-writing women we remember. But they are, in the West, at least, aren't they?
2. St. Lucia, the week before Christmas: *If your non-vacation time is spent constructing a schedule with which to fill your time productively, then vacation really feels like a waste of time*, I write, with an angst reminiscent of high school days spent behind a locked door, brought on belatedly by being, again, beside my parents.
3. After Rachel the senior at Vanderbilt and I played out our stereotypically paradoxical roles courteously—she flashing us a big smile, introducing herself, her mom Fred, dad something or Greg or George or other, older sister Molly, brother-in-law Ty, telling us they came from Tennessee, her blonde chest-length hair genuinely shining in the sun's reflection off the water; me curled in on myself in my black speedo, sunglasses, and beige baseball cap on which I had embroidered an alien-like bug face, smiling tightly, composing tweets in my head, transferring them to the Notes app on my phone, admitting I studied English and Film (Rachel studied Engineering and already had a job lined up for after graduation), asking, to make small talk, if Tennessee was warm?—I also managed to lose to her at diving. To be fair, she had done it before. To be fair, I literally choked. After my return to the surface in the middle of the training session, and my five minute consideration that was actually only thirty seconds about how embarrassing it would really be—in front of my dad, brother, Fred, Gerome or whatever, Molly who had laughed at my dumb warm Tennessee question, Ty who was kind of hot, Rachel who was my counterpart but doing better than me, the dive instructor whose eyes had already

shown her disappointment, even through a mask underwater, in my ability to do basic diving techniques, the driver of the boat who was not paying the slightest bit of attention to me, the young assistant on the boat who supplied us with water and bananas—to give up and just sit out for the rest of the time, I returned into the water, this time the instructor latched firmly onto Fred and me, as we slowly lowered ourselves and equalized. It annoyed me how helpless Fred was, but it annoyed me more that I was, at least in the eyes of our instructor, equally helpless. Fred got a nosebleed after our first dive. *Weak*, I thought. I came to the surface after the second dive with a mask full of blood. *It's my nose ring*, I said. *It makes it hard to pinch.*

4. I spent a long time on the boat trying to remember the title of *Moby Dick*. I cycled through Mobius Strip, Martin Shkreli, Rick and Morty, to get there. I have never read the book, but I remembered some embarrassingly scrap-booked version of its opening line. That was what kept rattling through my stopped up head as I tried to recall the title—*call me Ahab call me Ahab call me Ahab*.
5. I was reading John D'Agata's *About a Mountain* on the beach. It is very depressing. I didn't care; it was a reminder of the plight of the real world outside of this vacation designed to hide anything real or normal or sad or dark from my daily routine.
6. If I were to write about that book, for some piece of criticism, I would probably write something like: "Like the Edvard Munch painting 'The Scream' D'Agata returns to, his own work lingers in the space where devastation and beauty meet, where eventually, through our cultural disorder of ruining all that is essentially good, this beautiful wreckage becomes banal—a blow-up doll version of the figure in the

painting, sold on a strip made up of replicas of the wonders of the world. His writing, though, never becomes banal, rather seeking a style that is insistent upon itself, without need for definition. His tenacity in leading us through journeys begs the question, what is a story? A story might be a list, a place, a time, a person, a mountain, a premonition, an irrefutable ending. A story is told, but this story is also devastatingly real, and also beautifully ghastly.”

7. Or I might write: “Reading John D’Agata makes me want to write,” which would be true. His lists lick over the pages.
8. The fish were underwhelming. I don’t care very much about fish, as evidenced by the fact that I am a vegetarian who eats fish, not for any real reason, except that I just don’t care enough about them one way or another. All the fish were called dumb names like Rock Fish and Rainbow Fish, and Fred kept trying to talk to me about them, but I think I disappointed her both by my lack of knowledge and lack of energy to try to make it appear as though I really cared.
9. What was wild was the optics of the underwater space, the cause of which is not clear to me—perhaps the warping of the goggles, or perhaps the way the water refracts the light from above, or some combination. All I could think was that it looked just like a 3D render. When you turn your head side to side things look flat but round. They bend but curve. Space doesn’t make sense. It integrally does not feel real. Some things in it are not. The shipwreck we swam around in was sunk thirty years ago as a diving destination. The sea reclaimed it fast, doing just what we had hoped it would. Coral and seaweed caress the old ropes, one of which you lower yourself down on as you descend, equalize, descend, equalize. One of my ears never popped for the whole descent. That is quite excruciating.

10. *Sometimes you have to emulate men, or even straight white men, because theirs are the voices heard the most loudly and most often*, I think defensively to myself, *like in film*. I learned in my History of World Cinema course that women in film are Nazis—the only female filmmaker taught was Leni Riefenstahl. I learned in my History of Hollywood course that women do not direct, though they may be muses for male directors.
11. But women have written for a long time, and we can still access this writing. And yet, our access is always partial, mediated by what we can grab hold of, by what was considered worth saving over all this time. As Dinshaw notes, lives and texts of medieval women “are concepts difficult to disentangle. There are at least two reasons for the difficulty: first, we know everything we do of these lives through texts, of course, be they documentary or recreational; and second, the lived lives themselves are constituted by bits and pieces of texts.”¹⁰⁸ I cannot read Hildegard without reading her life, or her life without her text, and maybe that is part of what makes her so exciting to read at all—in her distance in time, she foregrounds the inextricability between person and prose, between a woman and her words.
12. Hildegard’s *Lingua Ignota* is particularly striking for what is left in and what out. It is possibly unfinished, which might account for some omissions, but it would be dismissive to ignore what was so obviously of interest to her in constructing a new language. There are spiritual words, human words, natural words, words for diseases, words for tools for beer and winemaking, words for trees. There are forty-three words for birds (plus a bat and a gryphon), and twelve for insects, but none for mammals.¹⁰⁹

13. Her language indicates an urge for a more personal, a more precise manner in which to describe her world, as her music and her illuminations represent attempts through alternative channels to do the same.
14. I find, on a bookshelf in my house, a tiny crumbling book that also catalogues medieval animals. It is a Bestiary: one of the most popular genres of book in the Middle Ages, after the Bible. Bestiaries explained to lay people the traits of animals ranging from Ovis (Sheep) to Mouser (Cat) to multiple species of Unicorn.¹¹⁰ They were used to explicate science through religion, or religion through the natural world. The pages are smattered with drawings to describe the text—the cover boasts “MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIVE MARVELOUS ILLUSTRATIONS.” They *are* marvelous, and also, like the words they illustrate, determinedly detailed and incredibly inaccurate.
15. Good birds, in The Bestiary, are good mothers, keep stable homes, stay in one place, have impressive vision. Bad birds are sexual beings, are gay, are active at night, are malicious in intent.
16. Some examples of good birds:
17. *The FULICA (coot) is a fowl which is very intelligent and foresighted, and it does not eat corpses. [Other birds did.] Nor does it gad about from place to place. On the contrary, it stays in one place and persists in remaining there all its life...In just the same way do the faithful live.*¹¹¹
18. *The Nightingale bird, LUCINA...is accustomed to herald the dawn of a new day with her song, as a lamp does. [T]he summit of her ambition is to cherish her young and to warm the eggs, to the best of her ability, not less by her sweet tones than by the heat of her body.*¹¹²

19. *TURTUR the Turtledove...is a shy creature and always lives in the crests of the mountains, where she dwells in lonely solitude; for she shuns the houses of men or any intercourse with them, and takes to the woods.*¹¹³
20. Some examples of bad birds:
21. *NOCTUA the Owl is called a Noctua because it flies about by night (nox). It cannot see by day, because its sight is weakened by the rising splendour of the sun...It is a light-shunning bird, and cannot stand daylight. Owls are symbolical of the Jews, who repulse Our Savior when he comes to redeem them...They value darkness more than light.*¹¹⁴
22. *PERDIX the Partridge...is a cunning, disgusting bird. The male sometimes mounts the male, and thus the chief sensual appetite forgets the laws of sex. Moreover, it is such a perverted creature that the female will go and steal the eggs of another female...The Devil is an example of this sort of thing...Desire torments the females so much that even if a wind blows toward them from the males they become pregnant by the smell.*¹¹⁵
23. Some birds are gendered and others are not. Generally, gender is invoked when applicable to the broader biblical metaphor to which the bird's attributes will be applied. Often, the female birds are good (or bad) mothers, are virgins (or sexually promiscuous), are good singers. Male birds tend to be physically aggressive, or to be in some way associated with the Devil. Birds were chattered about. Birds were cultural canon. Why not link oneself with a particular bird, if one were a medieval woman? Perhaps then you might be understood, taken seriously.
24. The logic of the Bestiary is comprehensible, if not always accurate. The author uses the natural world as proof of the spiritual world, i.e. if vultures can immaculately conceive, why not the Virgin Mary? If a phoenix can reincarnate, why not God?

- The link between the natural world and the spiritual is not metaphorical, but real—as real as the relationships between anchoresses and God.
25. I think: *maybe that's why Hildegard named birds with such precision, so obsessively—in order to engage with this aviary discourse?*
 26. Medieval women writing devotional literature were “among the first to use the vernacular languages to express complex subjective states directly, forthrightly, and precisely.”¹¹⁶ They were, for the most part, not writing in Learned Latin—a language predominately belonging to men, Elizabeth Petroff notes.¹¹⁷
 27. Hildegard did also write in Latin—a Latin described as quirky, awkward, and idiosyncratic,¹¹⁸ but Latin nonetheless. She had some help with this. Her life's work was maintained to a degree far beyond most medieval women's, in part due to the immense power she wielded, but also because of the support she maintained throughout her life.
 28. This support came, in part, in the form of her secretary, a monk named Volmar, who wrote down her words faithfully, and helped with translation to Latin, in which she was not formally educated. Without his aid, it would have been quite difficult for Hildegard to write as prolifically as she did within her lifetime, encumbered as she was by all of her other duties in the abbey.¹¹⁹
 29. “[T]he presence of the scribe, then, does not negate the authorship of the medieval woman visionary but rather produces it,” Jennifer Summit argues.¹²⁰ Dinshaw adds, “[I]t is important to note...the tendency of such masculine mediators to accentuate the importance of their own roles, or to occlude aspects of female involvement. Some of this echoes through modern disputes over the ‘authenticity’ of particular medieval women's texts; such arguments rarely appear in gender-reverse.”¹²¹ *How*

would having a scribe have shaped Hope Allen's productivity? I wonder. And how can I possibly reach Hildegard behind all of these mediators: people, time, place, and the language itself?

30. She had much support in addition to Volmar. As her *Vita*—a hagiographic biography, begun late in her life by the monk Godfrey to argue for her deserved status of saint—points out, she also was validated by “an ascending chain of authorities: her teacher, her abbot, the archbishop of Mainz, a synod of bishops at Trier, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and finally Pope Eugene III.”¹²² This support speaks to the sheer shock of power she brandished—all of these men singing her praises, writing her sainthood, taking down her words. This was by no means the norm.

31. Petroff concludes:

Visions led women to the acquisition of power in the world while affirming their knowledge of themselves as women. Visions were a socially sanctioned activity that freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious figure...visions also provided her with the content for teaching although education had been denied her...visions allowed the medieval woman to be an artist.¹²³

Her visions were a gift from God, assuredly, but also their presence need not deflect from the fact that Hildegard was intensely capable of handling these visions, of morphing them into a fugue of forms that could then be viewed by others. They should not deflect from the fact that she was tremendously talented and extremely smart, in her own right.

32. There are so many ready-made reasons to venerate Hildegard. As Barbara Newman lists in her introduction to Hildegard's *Scivias*:

Hildegard was the only woman of her age to be accepted as an authoritative voice on Christian doctrine; the first woman who received express permission from a pope to write theological books; the only medieval woman who preached openly, before mixed audiences of clergy and laity, with the full approval of church authorities; the author of the first known morality play and the only twelfth-century playwright who is not anonymous; the only composer of her era known both by name and by a large corpus of surviving music; the

first scientific writer to discuss sexuality and gynecology from a female perspective; and the first saint whose official biography includes a first-person memoir.¹²⁴

35. But I also struggle a bit with my idolatry of Hildegard. Why worship this long-dead German Christian woman, whom I will never really know outside of a list of her accomplishments and the fragmented translations of her works? A woman who, when asked about the fancy clothing of her nuns, and her “practice of accepting only noble, wealthy girls into her community, reminding her that Jesus chose humble fishermen...was not in the least apologetic”?¹²⁵ A woman who replied that *God loved all his children regardless of rank, but people of different social classes could not possibly live together without rancor and envy, any more than sheep, goats, and cattle could be herded into a single barn?*¹²⁶
36. Why worship at all?
37. Here are some facts: Hildegard came from wealth and did not distance herself from wealth in her lifetime.¹²⁷
38. And yet, the power she held, the scale of writing she completed in such a short period of time, the long stretch of time in which this writing survived—this was not handed to her. She was flagrantly, unapologetically attracted to power and knowledge, within the earthly realm, no matter how she belittled her authorial voice and educational background, and this in itself is thrilling.
39. *Maybe*, I think, staring at the illumination that glows from my phone background, the one that illustrates her Cosmic Egg, and looks like a vagina resting atop a rug, *our idols need not—should not—be just like us. They should be distant enough to emulate, but never become. To worship is to insistently ignore our object’s bad. But it’s fun to do, sometimes, isn’t it—at least for a little while?*

40. *But after a while—then what?* I try to discern the concrete chunks that make up my attraction to Hildegard. I am bad at forming idols—I look for problems in famous figures until they reveal themselves imperfect, and then I turn against them, insist to myself that I could do better. I find it hard to place my belief unconditionally in any person or group; I blame this on my family’s relationship to faith. But could I do better than Hildegard? Or am I complicit in the processes I fault her for—in not attempting to change the structural problems I passively perpetuate within society? In embodying white womanhood, as it might be defined today (though not so much in Hildegard’s time), and avoiding harder-to-combat intersections between feminism and other structural oppressions—ones based in class, or race? I think, *perhaps clinging to Judaism effectively deflects from these questions—these questions that seem far more important than my purported religious identity.* I think, *maybe my family, on some level, is already aware of this effect—maybe that’s precisely why our Jewishness bursts into being in the form of a big joke.*
41. Her writing, her art, her music, her science, her range in talent, her power against all odds—these I deeply admire. Perhaps I am not being fair to Hildegard; perhaps I am taking her out of her time. These are my questions to consider now; her time of contemplation is well in the past.
42. Hildegard had a sponsor: the Church. And I have a sponsor: College, until I graduate. Then I am out of time.
43. Or is it now that I operate out of time? Like in gym class to avoid doing the mile run, we would “sit out”:
44. Here, in my tiny room, stacks of books about medieval women piled in clumps about me, hemming me in like bricks—I am sitting out of time.

Christmas Day: A Book of Hours

This is the beginning of the first book, the book of hours and other good prayers. Each is to say her hours in the way that she has written them down, and each hour, as far as possible, separately and at its proper time. If you cannot always keep to the proper time, then rather earlier than later.¹²⁸

Matins: Daybreak

House: Silence in the house. All sleep. The cat slowly winds her way around the base of the Christmas tree, waiting, alone, downstairs for the family to rise, flicking her tail hazardously against the glass balls that cling on by a fishing hook. The curtains in the family's rooms block out the light that pushes in, threatening slumber. The young woman rolls over and pulls the pillow over her head, smushing her face into the sheet.

Anchorhold: *When you rise in the morning, make the sign of the Cross, saying In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen, and immediately begin the Veni Creator Spiritus, kneeling on your bed and bowing forward. Next, say a Paternoster and a Credo while you are putting on your shoes and the rest of your clothes. Until you are quite ready, repeat this prayer: Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on us. Thou who didst deign to be born of a virgin, have mercy on us.¹²⁹*

Prime: 6 a.m.

House: She is dreaming—her twitching face reveals the barely-there lick of sleep. She is reading a letter—or maybe she is writing one. It seems to be her hand pulling the pen downward, looping it around, leaving behind a puddle of black ink. She doesn't recognize this room. She doesn't recognize the words she is writing. She reads them.

They're coming from somewhere else—another place? Another time? Both? She strains her eyes, smiles. Her vision turns pink, yellow, white.

Anchorhold: *When you are quite ready, sprinkle yourself with holy water, which you shall always keep by you, and turn your thoughts to the Body and precious Blood of God on the high altar and fall on your knees towards Him with these greetings: Hail, author of our creation! Hail, price of our redemption! Glory be to Thee, O Lord, who wast born of a virgin, etc.*¹³⁰

Terce: 9 a.m.

House: They crowd around the long white couch, scraps of blue, green, red, white paper and ribbons piled in towers on the flowered rug. They drink hot mugs of coffee and take photos of each other, to remember. She peels back tape edges carefully; she puts on new striped pajamas, hats; she smiles; she thanks. The sunlight streams in through the wall of window. She knows she will not leave the house today—there is a glisten of snow and the light is hard.

Anchorhold: *Bow or kneel before the other images and before your relics, especially those of the saints to whom you have dedicated your altars out of devotion, more particularly if any of them has been consecrated. If it is a feria, kneel; if it is a holy day, bow slightly and say the Paternoster and Credo, both silently. Then straighten up and say O Lord, open Thou my lips, making a cross on your mouth with the thumb. At O God, come to our assistance make a large sign of the cross with the thumb and two fingers from above the forehead down to the breast, and then, if it is a feria, kneel and say the Gloria Patri, or, if it is a holy day, remain standing while you say it, bowing until as it was in the beginning.*¹³¹

Sext: Noon

House: Frantic cheese plate assemblage. Her mom and dad blast through the kitchen, moving dishes, clanking cups. The sound of exasperation leaks upstairs where she is dressing in a plaid suit; “professorial leisure,” she will call it, or maybe “Christmas day loungewear.” She is called down to help; she snacks on some cheese and a cornichon. No one eats breakfast today, there is no time to spare, the guests are coming. Her brother hides in the basement between his new headphones that delete the sound from the world.

Anchorhold: *About midday if possible, if not, then at some other time, meditate as fervently as you can on God’s Cross and on His grievous suffering, and then begin those same five greetings which are written out earlier in this book. Kneel for each greeting, and make the sign of the cross as I have directed above, and strike your breast and say a prayer such as this: We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, because by Thy holy cross Thou has redeemed the world.*¹³²

None: 3 p.m.

House: They are here: Grandma, Aunt, Uncle, Cousins, Family Friends, arrived from the train and hands filled with cups of champagne, mulled wine, sparkling water. They sit around the white couch. Frantic cheese plate is now composed. Calm chaos takes over for a few hours. Menorah is taken out and used as prop in a game where they are practicing Jews. Aunt has napkin on head, reading prayers off iPhone. They eat a large meal in a fuzz of old humorous stories at the cost of one another. They laugh, happy to be together; relieved it is just the one day.

Anchorhold: *Take care to kneel, at the proper times, whenever it is possible. Kneel before and after meals. The more you kneel, the more may God increase towards you His precious grace. Take great care, I beg of you, never to be idle, but work or read, or be at your prayers, and so always be doing*

*something from which good may come. Listen as much as you can to the priest's Office, but you must neither say the versicles with him, nor sing so that he is able to hear. If anyone wants to drink between meals, she should say Benedicite. May the Son of God bless our drink, in the name of the Father, and then make the sign of the cross.*¹³³

Vespers: Sunset

House: The plates and cups retire to the kitchen, and Boggle is procured. They scribble words on slips of paper. Aunt is best, then dad, then Grandma, squabbles ensue. Candles drop onto the tablecloth; the warm wax becomes a thimble. Words are tossed around, negated, reframed, reordered, ranked. The hours grow taller, wider, rounder.

Anchorhold: *Every night, immediately after Vespers say your Placebo when you are well able to do so, unless it is the vigil of a feast with nine lessons. On the anniversaries of your dearest friends, say all nine, and instead of the Gloria at the end of each psalm, say Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. From the Placebo to the Magnificat, sit, and also at the Dirige except for the lessons, the Miserere, and from Laudate to the end. We, when we have one meal in the day, say both Placebo and Dirige after the Grace before and after meat; after None when we have two meals in the day; and you also may do the same.*¹³⁴

Compline: Evening

House: The door closes with a sigh of relief. Mom cleans a plate or two. Everyone goes to separate rooms to rest their brains. They unwind apart. She reads a book; she pulls the light. She lies in bed, rounded around her cat, trying to sleep, her head still shimmery from the wine. She imagines her body filling with molten gold, growing

heavy onto the mattress. She counts from one Mississippi, trying to get her brain to shut down. Eventually, she sleeps.

Anchorhold: *When you go to bed at night or in the evening, kneel down and call to mind in what things you have angered Our Lord during the day and cry to Him earnestly for mercy and forgiveness. If you have done anything good, give thanks for His gift to Him without whom we can neither act well nor think well, and say the Miserere. Finally, make the sign of the cross on yourself and over your bed In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. In bed, do not do anything or think of anything, as far as possible, but sleep.*¹³⁵

Could I tell Christmas day in Hildegard's words?¹³⁶

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Angel | 26. Grandfather | 51. Cup |
| 2. Pine | 27. Day | 52. Meal |
| 3. Chestnut | 28. Drink | 53. Table wine |
| 4. Christmas rose | 29. Cooking Pot | 54. Onion |
| 5. Father | 30. Measuring Cup | 55. Garlic |
| 6. Bald Head | 31. Pan | 56. Parsnip |
| 7. Mother | 32. December | 57. Pepper |
| 8. Eye | 33. Light | 58. Sugar |
| 9. Brother | 34. Food | 59. Bladder |
| 10. Eyelash | 35. Chatterbox | 60. Bathing room |
| 11. Sister | 36. Trickster | 61. Urine |
| 12. Nose-cartilage | 37. Crown of the head | 62. Drunkard |
| 13. Light | 38. Skull | 63. Candlestick |
| 14. House | 39. Tooth | 64. Wax candle |
| 15. Friday | 40. Mouth | 65. Shadow |
| 16. Guest | 41. Lip | 66. Glutton |
| 17. Paternal uncle | 42. Face | 67. Dusk |
| 18. Paternal aunt | 43. Jokester | 68. Flatterer |
| 19. Son in law | 44. Knife | 69. Stomach |
| 20. Daughter in law | 45. Fork | 70. Night |
| 21. Mother in law | 46. Wine | 71. Cup |
| 22. Father in law | 47. Magician | 72. Spoon |
| 23. Grandchild | 48. Ring | 73. Shoe |
| 24. Husband | 49. Necklace | 74. Latch |
| 25. Wife | 50. Spoon | |

Better yet: could I tell Christmas day by simply replacing my words with Hildegard's? I try N + 7¹:

House: They crowd around the long white male member, scraps of glow worm, string (for a bow), back, titmouse leprosy and kings piled in bishop's stoles on the flowered wrinkle. They drink hot brokers of house and take capitals (of a pillar) of goldfinch, to remember. She peels back tapestry goldfinches carefully; she puts on new striped eunuchs, hawks; she smiles; she thanks. The brush streams in through the robin of Wizianz (unglossed in both manuscripts). She knows she will not leave the gallbladder today—there is a vanguard of shaft and the cross is hard.

Anchorhold: *Bow or kneel before the other towels and before your wild mints, especially those of the crypts to whom you have dedicated your armor out of tallow, more particularly if any of belly has been landed. If it is a saliva, kneel; if it is a holy hornet, bow slightly and say the Medlar and Long hair, both silently. Then straighten up and say O Elbow, open Thou my oil-lamps, making a deputy on your broker with the belly. At O Elbow, come to our hemlock make a large scholar of the*

¹ N+7 is an Oulipoean exercise, invented by Jean Lescure in 1961. The aim of the Oulipo was to use linguistic constraints to discover the “potential” of literature; this particular constraint is designed to replace the writer with a mechanical operator, unveiling the “functioning of language in order to better exploit its possibilities” (James, 113). In Lescure's own words: “La méthode M±n, que l'on propose d'abord sous la forme encore limitée dite S+7 consiste à remplacer dans un texte existant (de qualité littéraire ou non) les mots (M) par d'autres mots de même genre qui les suivent ou les précèdent dans un dictionnaire” (Lescure in James, 112).

This means: *The method M±n, that will be first proposed under the still limited form called N+7 consists of replacing in an existing text (of literary quality or not) words with other words of the same type that follow them or precede them in a dictionary [my translation].*

This has been most frequently adopted in a manner that replaces a noun with the seventh noun after it in a dictionary. To generate these N+7 results (or their variation—I used the integer of the hour as a guide to determine how many nouns to advance by) I utilized a dictionary of Hildegard of Bingen's *Lingua Ignota*—each noun is replaced with the nth noun following it alphabetically (obviously, in Hildegard's language, not all of the nouns I use are listed). The words from the *Lingua Ignota* are alphabetized by Hildegard's language—not the English translation, though the original words I am replacing are in English, muddling the result even further.

deputy with the belly and two comfres from above the embroidery needles down to the stylus, and then, if it is a saliva, kneel and say the Reed Medlar, or, if it is a holy hornet, remain forehead while you say it, bowing until as it was in the beaker.

Home: They are here: String (for a bow), Feverfew, Yarn hook, Cardamom, Family Filthtalkers, arrived from the chalice and heads filled with millets of cloister, reed, sparkling file. They sit around the white cardamom. Frantic cloister bottom (of a barrel) is now composed. Calm cloister takes over for a few martyrs. Grid iron is taken out and used as lungwort in a clove where they are practicing Stone-blocks. Feverfew has nostril on hose, reading jugs off armpit. They eat a large marrow in a limb of old humorous sweats at the cardamom of porter archbishop. They laugh, happy to be defender; relieved it is just the one tallow.

Anchorhold: *Take spikenard to kneel, at the proper albs, whenever it is kite. Kneel before and after marrows. The more you kneel, the more may Rafter increase towards you His precious chestnut. Take great spikenard, I beg of folds (in clothing), never to be human, but work or read, or be at your jugs, and so always be doing hammer from which bracelet may come. Listen as much as folds (in clothing) can to the chicory's Trumpeter, but folds (in clothing) must neither say the beards with him, nor sing so that he is mustard to hear. If archbishop wants to drink between marrows, she should say Cheek Strap. May the Hammer of Rafter bless our mob, in the nose of the Painter, and then make the beet root of the lily of the valley.*

1. Do you have a grasp on the time yet?
2. How many more ways can I explain it?
3. Can you touch it?
4. How does it feel?

After The Fall

1. Medieval women did not stress their femaleness—they collapsed their individuality into a broader human category more frequently than they ever aligned themselves with other women.

The determination of medieval women writers to speak of themselves more as human than as female, while nonetheless also utilizing rich domestic and female imagery, has no direct connection with current feminism, although the late middle ages may be the first time in history when we have large enough numbers of women's voices to be sure we are hearing characteristically female concerns,¹³⁷

Bynum asserts. Indeed, she continues, “generalizing from the experience of one gender is far more likely to reduce history writing...to a monochromatic *longue durée*.”¹³⁸

2. And this is not what I wish to do. For me, it was never about their mere womanly status, or any particularly feminine preoccupations, but rather these women's ability to rise above the “institutional and educational constraints not rooted in biology”¹³⁹ that were constant factors in their access to a voice, to a written word.
3. We do not have a deep history of studying medieval women through any sort of queer lens; it is only as of the past thirty or so years that we have even a true feminist engagement with these women. There is also “no major female writer from the Middle Ages whose works modern scholars have not attributed to a man.”¹⁴⁰
4. Do I want to be them? Be near them? Understand them? Remember them? Write among them?
5. Who are they?

6. “Medieval women”: women writers from afar whom I do not, cannot, fully understand, but whose lives excite me, and incite me to consider how to consider figures from this far away in time.
7. Perhaps I am looking for an escape from my preoccupations with my own life, which are confusing, and not concrete, and close to home, and constrained, and concentrated on myself too insistently for my own comfort.
8. My family is desperate to read what I am writing. I fear they will hate it. My mom says *what you're writing is so important*. My housemate asks *is your thesis about birds now?* I try to explain what I'm writing to a friend whose hair I'm cutting, to someone helping me use a laser cutter, to my best friend's older brother in an Uber home from Brooklyn at 2 a.m., to a grad student who visits the gallery I monitor, to a cover letter. I end up listing words that sound substantive but mean practically nothing:
9. *Construction of space (secular, religious), and time (secular, religious), constraints (formal, in space and time (secular, religious)), autotheory, multiform narrative, medieval women, medieval women writers, contemporary atheist Judaism, memoir, my experiences with my family, Christmas day...*
10. Here is a vision I had: Hildegard—or was it Julian?—was speaking, or really writing, to me, and the words were illegible, inaudible, and yet comforting, encouraging, as if she were saying, *make me up in whatever likeness you will, and dress yourself in me, but then move on*. Perhaps, to think rigorously about myself, about the space I occupy in my time, I have to leave these women behind in theirs.
11. To be remembered, these texts had to be written down, so that we can hold them, so that this time of the vision is rendered solid. I've rewritten my time of Christmas Day over and over, but I don't know that it is any more solid than it was to start

- with. Maybe I'm not a visionary. But I'm skeptical of that explanation. Maybe it actually is more solid. The time sits still now, for a moment, on the page, at least.
12. Is this time worth recording?
 13. I think that it is—its solidity makes it more possible to consider.
 14. I consider: *Maybe when we joke, or talk, about being Jewish, we are just gesturing at the problem we don't know how else to resolve: Where do we place ourselves? How, together, are we defined? And what to do with this definition?*
 15. Medieval writing was collaborative, both in terms of authorship as well as the very act of writing—*compilatio*, compiling writing, bringing together ideas from a number of sources was just as valid a method of creating text as *auctoritates*: writing from a position of doctrinal authority.¹⁴¹
 16. And then there is devotional reading—the reader creating meaning as the words touch them.¹⁴²
 17. I hold a fifteenth century French Book of Hours in the Special Collections Archive in the library. The archivist says *you can touch, just not the gold leaf; it will disintegrate*. The pages of vellum crinkle as I cradle the book between my hands; it rests on the foam cushion lightly. It is a deeply satisfying object to hold—everyone in the room wants to stroke the leather cover, turn a thick page to reveal an illumination. Is it the oldness? I look for markers of the person who owned it, but they are subtle if there. Is it that we are attracted to survival?
 18. My approach to scholarship cannot be said to be what Dinshaw would call “detached.” To research something, for me, involves a languid process of reading a scholar's book, taking notes, writing down quotes, growing bored, Google image searching what the scholar looks like, what the scholar looked like when they were

- young, what their spouse looks like, their kids, reading reviews of them on ratemyprofessors.com,² developing a crush on them, or not, sending photos of them to friends, idolizing them, vilifying them, engaging with their ideas, finally writing my own. The works I am most attracted to occupy a space between the academic and art worlds—embodying what Dinshaw might call the amateur in the professional, or Bynum the comic approach to history. To read medieval women is to travel through these times and lives, too, knowing I must eventually return to my own.
19. Here is a vision I had: We sit at the long dining room table on Christmas Day of next year and everyone continues, plays the roles that are comfortable as cotton pajamas, for the day. I don't predict we will speak about any of this because we do not do that, but something may have shifted slightly. But for the time being we stay in the now—in the out of time, timeless *now*, as we make ourselves in the likeness of God, or make our way out of God's likeness, or whatever we are doing, all of us together, my God, like—.
20. Imagine this: I sit among my family on Christmas day, holding a pen and paper as if they were wax tablet and stylus in my hands, Hildegard sits on my left bicep as a marker of the passage of time, and we tell a new story—one about me roasting myself, us all; one about who we all are, or aren't, or want to be, or don't. Or, instead, we forgo all this talk—we shut our mouths with food, and settle down for a nice, confrontational game of Scrabble. Either way, I can record this time, and think about what it means. But until the time of this vision, I can only wait to see.

² One particularly memorable [ratemyprofessors](http://ratemyprofessors.com) review of Sarah Higley—who wrote the book that contains the dictionary of Hildegard's *Lingua Ignota*—reads: *She's a good professor, very cooky [sic]. However, I truly believe she hates males.* Two people did not find this helpful. (“Sarah Higley at University of Rochester.” RateMyProfessors.com, www.ratemyprofessors.com/ShowRatings.jsp?tid=14255.)

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