The Passion of Christ: Stigmata and Mysticism Across Time and Gender

by

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Preface

"Why'd you bring me dead people?" These were the first words that came out of Natuzza Evolo's mouth when Anna walked into the church in Calabria, Italy.

Anna stood there mystified, hands trembling as she clutched the two photographs of her deceased parents. Supposedly, this woman Natuzza not only could communicate with the dead; she could communicate with Jesus and Mary themselves. Natuzza's name and miracles could be heard about all over town, everyone finding fascination in her stigmata and in the wounds shaped like holy symbols appearing on her body. People from all over came to visit Natuzza but Anna could not help but feel skeptical when she first heard of these stories.

Anna came here with the intent of challenging Natuzza—to see if the stories she heard were real, to see if she could truly tell the dead apart from the living. She was going to show Natuzza photographs of her parents without informing her that they were dead. Surely, Anna had thought, this would disprove Natuzza's validity; up until now, she had felt confident.

Now she stands there, incense burning her nose, staring into the eyes of the woman who could communicate with the dead. Anna has realized that she made a grave mistake. The look in Natuzza's eyes tells her that she knows everything.

Natuzza's question about the purpose of Anna's photos was rhetorical: Natuzza knew the reason of her visit. Without letting Anna utter one word, she told her everything that her parents wanted to communicate to her. She confirmed that her parents were resting peacefully in heaven. The same could not be said for Anna's friend, who had brought a picture of her recently deceased husband. Natuzza informed this friend that he was stuck in purgatory and needed their prayers to help get him to his final resting place.

Anna left the church only having spoken goodbyes. A mix of emotions coursed through her as she stepped back onto the streets of southern Italy. She could not deny feeling a bit ashamed for having offended Natuzza, for having tried to trick her and disprove her. But at the same time a sense of joy enveloped her. Childhood memories of her parents filled her head; the knowledge that they had reached a peaceful place gave her a reassurance she did not know she had needed. Best of all, she could no longer deny the miracles Natuzza Evolo exhibited. From that day forward, she too was devoted to Natuzza Evolo.

So goes Anna's story, reported to me by Anna herself. Everywhere I travelled in Calabria, I have found similar testimonies—similar stories concerning the miracles and phenomena of Natuzza Evolo. She was a woman who symbolized peace for many, whose existence continues to have effects on many today, even after her passing in 2009. For me, learning about Natuzza was the spur that led me to write this project, which explores the impact of mysticism and stigmata across history into our contemporary world.

Introduction

When you find yourself in Calabria, Italy, you will see photographs of a woman named Natuzza Evolo displayed in almost every Catholic house or business establishment. Recently, when walking out of a supermarket, I came face to face with the image of Natuzza Evolo pasted on a sky-blue background with the Virgin Mary floating above her. Images of Natuzza, as well as some of other saints were plastered on the walls near the exit of the supermarket, further establishing how religiously driven Italy is. Anyone living in Calabria, even if they are not religious, surely will know the name of Natuzza Evolo due to her impact on the whole region. Having lived a portion of my childhood in Calabria and having Italian immigrant parents, I have been aware of Natuzza and the miracles she has done for my whole life. Though I have never had the honor of meeting her, her story is very present in my head, and this constant presence ultimately led to this project.

But why is she so famous? From the story above one can interpret that she was a communicator with the dead. This is technically not wrong, but the miracles Natuzza exhibited were far more complex than that. Natuzza Evolo's miracles are examples of two crucial phenomena: mysticism and stigmata. Mysticism in the Catholic faith can be defined as an intimate union with Christ that can be attained through direct communication with the divine or some sort of spiritual trance or ecstasy. Stigmata, on the other hand, is a phenomenon where wounds appear on the body that correspond to Christ's crucifixion wounds. These wounds tend to appear on the wrists, hands, and feet and are always accompanied with pain and blood. We can understand stigmata as internal faith becoming external: Christ's Passion physically becomes relived through the stigmatic's body, but why and what does this tell us?

Due to my upbringing, I've become fascinated by these questions and wanted to explore them in this project. I do not aim to determine whether stigmata is real or not, as I feel that it is far more complicated than that. Instead, what I am interested in is seeing the impact mysticism and stigmata have on the people experiencing it and those who witness it. Stigmata is meant to invoke emotions; people are meant to react to it. I believe that people have the freedom to choose how they interpret stigmata, and to prevent that only inhibits their freedom.

What I have come to understand is that these phenomena serve to teach people to feel compassion by seeing the Passion of Christ relived on one's body. The mystics I investigate desire to feel Christ's suffering: a concept also known as affective piety. In understanding Christ's suffering, many mystics such as Natuzza have become more compassionate towards the sufferings of others, even dedicating their life to alleviating it. This dedication is what attaches many people to these mystics, giving them hope and perhaps reinforcing their own faith. This project also aims to analyze the reactions people have towards these mystics as it is vital to understanding the phenomena. Furthermore, I pay particular attention to mysticism in association to the female body. More women than men experience this phenomenon and I analyze how this has empowered women throughout history to see their bodies as divine.

In my first chapter, I give a brief history of mysticism and stigmata, especially in association to the female body. Then I analyze *The Book of Margery Kempe* to further understand how a female mystic was perceived in the Middle Ages and how her autobiography gives us an early look into a mystic's life. From here, I jump into our contemporary world in investigating the impact Natuzza Evolo has on her community. To understand its full impact, I conducted ethnographic research in Natuzza's town of Paravati, conversing with locals who knew Natuzza and those who were devoted to her. To further understand the variety of ways

religion is used and interpreted, I analyze *The Five Wounds*, a recent novel by Kristen Valdez Quade that reflects many issues—about the relationship between pain and piety and about gender—that I bring up in my essay. In this section, I analyze the Passion of Christ through physical penance and how holy images are misconstrued to promote a patriarchal society. I conclude my project with Ron Hansen's novel *Mariette in Ecstasy* to further emphasize my points and leave us with an understating of the meaning of stigmata.

Chapter I

History of Mysticism and Stigmata

Mysticism in the Christian faith has been around since the beginning of Christianity, with it appearing in the Bible several times. However, mysticism only took a spiritual form and occurred inwardly— that is, until 1224 when the first case of stigmata occurred. Francis of Assisi, while preparing his second month of retreat, went to Monte La Verna contemplating the Passion of Christ. During his prayers, Francis became so transfixed that he saw a six-winged seraph approach him. The seraph took the form of a person crucified, and, when it left, Saint Francis had the five marks of Christ on his body: two holes on his hands, two on his feet, and one on his side where Jesus had been slashed. Thus began the phenomenon of stigmata. Saint Francis's stigmata revealed to others that the fruits of mysticism were not only spiritual, but could take form on the physical body. Since then, more cases of stigmata across Europe occurred from the 13th century up until the present.[1]

Numerous stigmatics are also associated with other miracles: they are able to heal others, have visions and prophecies, see holy beings, and read souls. A famous stigmatic who experienced all these gifts and more was Padre Pio. Born on May 25, 1887, Padre Pio was a monk and priest who dedicated his whole life to Christ. Impressed by his piety, thousands of individuals from all over visited him, seeking advice and claiming that meeting Padre Pio was a life-changing experience. On September 20, 1918, the wounds of Christ appeared on his body, making him the first priest to experience the stigmata. Padre Pio endured stigmata for fifty years with people all over the world visiting him to witness his miracles. Along with stigmata, it is said that Padre Pio had the ability to heal others, communicate with divine beings, and be at two

[1] Sabatier, Paul, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi,* 2006. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18787/18787-h/18787-h.htm#CHAPTER_XVII.

different places at once (also known as bilocation). When a young man pilgrimaged from Poland to encounter him, Padre Pio prophesied he would become pope one day. That man ended up being pope John Paul II. Later on, he canonized Padre Pio on June 16, 2002, saying, "Prayer and charity—this is the most concrete synthesis of Padre Pio's teaching."[2]

Female Mysticism in the Middle Ages

These are only two out of many cases of stigmata and mysticism throughout history. Notice I only mentioned men, both individuals impacting the faith and becoming canonized for it. This is not because there were not many female stigmatics or mystics. Quite the contrary: the abundance of female cases outnumbers male cases by a significant amount. Though it is unclear how many reported cases of stigmata have occurred, females seem to have always been the majority. There could be many reasons for this, but it ultimately comes down to how differently women experienced the Christian religion from men, especially during the Late Middle Ages. Women during this period suffered from oppression by the patriarchy: in all kinds of ways, they were prevented from having the same privileges as men. In this period, people saw a woman's body as less divine, making them unable to connect with God, therefore giving them lesser rights within the church. However, once women began to experience mysticism, a wave of empowerment surged. God's gift gave them the power to silence misogynist voices and go against the beliefs placed on their sex. As one scholar puts it, "Positive religious female imagery took its place among misogynistic female imagery. The traditional acceptance of women as unable to access and interpret the mystery of God is not reflected in the women who chose to

[2] "A Short Biography," Padre Pio Devotions, accessed November 4, 2021, https://padrepiodevotions.org/a-short-biography/.

write about their visions or the undeniable exchanges they had with the Trinity."[3] More women began to write down or have others write about their religious experiences, giving them the right to voice their own faith. Their writings gave them recognition and even sainthood for many.

Recording women's mystical experiences is so important because it gives them recognition and authority throughout history. Perhaps the most notable example of this process is Joan of Arc who, believing she had divine guidance, aided France to victory during the Hundred Years' War. Joan began having visions from angels and saints around the age of thirteen. She would see these figures almost three times a day, when they would order her to wear male clothing, find a hidden sword behind an altar, drive the English out of France, and so on. Joan waited four years to tell others about these visions, perhaps knowing the consequences a woman claiming to hear voices would face. Anne Llewellyn Barstow, who focuses her research on mystical women such as Joan of Arc, explains that the greatest gift these voices gave her was the "belief in herself."[4] Ultimately, Joan revealed her visions to help her country in the war. She told her admirers that "no one in the world … can recover the kingdom of France; there is no succor to be expected save from me … because my Lord wills that I should do it."[5] Joan was given the courage and ability to do what women were not allowed to do. As many know, Joan led France to victory, but not everyone viewed her happily. Joan was immediately imprisoned and burned at the stake for heresy: a destiny many women faced if accused of witchcraft or being a heretic. Barstow explains, "As a female prophet wearing male clothing who moved into the world of men

[3] Sanders, Charlotte, "The Female Body and Christian Mysticism in the Late Medieval Era," The Classic Journal, accessed November 4, 2021, https://theclassicjournal.uga.edu/index.php/2020/11/30/the-female-body-and-christian-mysticism-in-the-late-medieval-era/.
[4] Barstow, Anne Llewellyn, "Joan of Arc and Female Mysticism," Indiana University Press, accessed March 31, 2022, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002016.

[5] Ibid.

and beat them at their own game, Joan was a prime candidate for witch accusations."[6] Because breaking gender norms was seen as a crime, Joan's achievements were pushed aside and her name was slandered. However, since Joan's mystical visions were written down, many years later she was acquitted and canonized in the Catholic church. Her story teaches us about the harsh punishment women faced and the importance of writing down accounts—accounts that, when recovered years later, finally gave women some spiritual authority.

Mysticism empowered these medieval women as they began to view their bodies in association with Christ. More female mystics in the late Middle Ages had bodily experiences such as trances or levitations compared to men. By this means, the female body began to have more spiritual authority.[7] These miracles allowed females to view their bodies with importance, something lacking in their time. In an analysis of the female body in thirteenth- and sixteenth-century mysticism, Charlotte Sanders describes "women actively challenging what was believed to be set truths in Christian theology by reinterpreting the body and femininity from one of lesser status, to one of equal importance."[8] This was not the cure of misogyny: many factors still limited a woman's freedom. Still, women began to view themselves outside a male's gaze and insert themselves where they were not wanted. Mysticism aided women in gaining authority and giving them a voice that had been previously silenced. They grasped at the right to communicate the teachings of Christ and they stopped at nothing to do so, even if there were others against it.

Furthermore, women also began to use Christ imagery to explore their femininity. One of the ways was viewing Christ as mother: "Christ's sacrificial death and crucifixion 'generated redemption' and was described as a mother for her child," and, finally, transubstantiation in

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Sanders, Charlotte, "The Female Body and Christian Mysticism."
[8] Ibid.

wince and the Eucharist was seen as Christ feeding the soul, "like a mother nursing her baby."[9] This validated females in the pure female act of childbirth. Julian of Norwich, an English anchoress and mystic during the late 14th century and early 15th century, most famously makes this comparison in her book *Revelations of Divine Love.*[10] She distinguishes our "earthly mother" from our "heavenly mother" defining the latter as Jesus. Norwich writes on this matter, "The [earthly] mother may give her child suck of her milk, but our precious [heavenly] Mother, Jesus, He may feed us with Himself, and doeth it, full courteously and full tenderly, with the Blessed Sacrament that is precious food of my life."[11] Julian assigns attributes of motherhood to Jesus, seeing him in a positive feminine manner. She not only sees him as a nurturing being, but as someone who physically created humanity. One scholar writes on this, "What is new in Julian is the idea that God's motherhood is not merely love and mercy … but also taking on our physical humanity in the Incarnation, a kind of *creation* of us, as a mother gives herself to the foetus she bears."[12] Julian and other mystics viewing God as mother reflected how they may have felt empowered in the act of childhood and breastfeeding.[13] Imagery such as this connected to mysticism began to let women view the female body as divine.

[9] Ibid.
[10] Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love,* 2016, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52958/52958-h/52958-h.htm.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* University of California Press, 266.
[13] Sanders, Charlotte, "The Female Body and Christian Mysticism."

Chapter II

The Book of Margery Kempe

The Book of Margery Kempe, considered one of the earliest autobiographies in English literature, describes the pilgrimage of a mystical woman during the early Middle Ages. Margery lived in England most of her life, but her pilgrimages took her to Rome, Jerusalem, Norway Spain, and other places. Margery Kempe's book focuses on her relationship with Christ, where she claims to have visions of him and other divine beings such as Mary and the saints. The constant dialogue we see Margery Kempe have with Jesus is very intimate and intense, reflecting her high devotion and dedication to Christ. *The Book of Margery Kempe* gives us insight into how religion and mysticism was used during this period—more particularly, into how women experienced it through the senses of their body. The autobiographical account documents how the Passion of Christ and the Holy Ghost works through Kempe, leaving her constantly weeping as if she herself is witnessing the Passion right in front of her.

Due to this, Kempe is best associated with affective piety as she is always in high contemplation of Christ's Passion. Affective piety is when someone experiences emotional devotion to Jesus' birth and death and the sorrows of the Virgin Mary.[14] Her tears represent her own passion and sorrow for Christ, leaving those who witnessed her crying either in awe or annoyance. Though there were many people who were fond of Margery Kempe, there were many more who despised her and wanted her dead because her unconventional manners made people see her as a heretic. Kempe's testimonies did not shy away from the hate and discomfort she felt during her lifetime because they served as a sign of her deep relationship with Christ. In

[14] Anne Clark Bartlett & Thomas H. Bestul (1999). "'Introduction'". *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

the proem of the book, it is written that, for Kempe, "it was a kind of solace and comfort to her when she suffered any distress for the love of God … the more slander and disgrace that she suffered, the more she increased in grace and in devotion … which our Lord spoke and intimated to her soul, teaching her how she should be despised for His love" (*Kempe* 4). The hatred she invokes in people serves as a sign that she is being received like Christ. This only further fueled her devotion because, she believed, Jesus told her it made him love her more.

It is necessary to mention that Margery Kempe did not write the book herself: she was illiterate and had a priest transcribe the stories she told him. The book was written twenty years after Kempe had her first revelations, once Christ gave her permission so that "His goodness might be known to the whole world" (*Kempe* 5). Mysticism and stigmata become effective when seen or experienced by others, so others too are reminded of Christ's Passion. Kempe's book can be viewed as a result of wanting to transmit Kempe's devotion to others as witnessed by those around her. In the previous chapter, we saw how valuable written accounts such as these are, as they reflect the deeper history of a female mystic's life, and Margery's life and book are no exception.

Margery Kempe claimed that, before receiving revelations, she was troubled by demons and tempted to commit heinous acts. These demonic visions would appear to her "opening their mouths all inflamed with burning flames of fire, as though they might have swallowed her in, sometimes pawing at her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes pulling her and dragging her around … the devils also cried out after her with grave threats, and told her that she should forsake her Christianity" (*Kempe* 11). Their torments succeeded: in her own narration, she claims to have lost all virtue and goodness, treating those around her horribly. She became mad, even injuring herself in response to the demons taunting her: "she bit her own hand so violently that

the scar could be seen afterwards for her whole life. And she also violently tore her skin on her body over her heart with her fingernails, for she had no other instruments and she would have done something worse" (*Kempe* 12). These torments sound like they come from a place of guilt and uncertainty of her faith—or even that God was trying to test her worthiness. This self-inflicted scar is perhaps the only physical wound Kempe has on her body in association with her mystical experiences. The irony of it is that it appears on her hand just as stigmata would. However, instead of the scars symbolizing Christ's Passion, they serve as reminder of Margery's own troubles. Kempe admits that, before she was touched by God, she lived a sinful life full of envy, greed, and pride. Christ does not make her injure herself, but perhaps Kempe unconsciously does it as an act of penance.

It was during this time of torments and weakness that Margery had her first interaction with Christ. He appeared to her in the likeness of a beautiful man, saying to her, "'Daughter why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?' Then at once, as He had said these words, she truly saw the air open up as bright as any lightning" (*Kempe* 12). Heavenly beings such as God and Christ are frequently associated with light: a weapon against the darkness. The air opening as bright as light figuratively shows the Passion of Christ awakening her, as the brightness defeats the dark presence of demons tormenting Kempe's life. Christ literally saves Kempe, and for that she feels she owes everything to him. These visions are directly associated with mysticism because they are a bodily and spiritual experience of and with Christ; using the senses to create a deeper connection with him. Christ does see something special within Kempe and continues to bless her life with the Passion and revelations, possessing her body with his being.

Compassion

Margery's response to Christ's vision is to go on pilgrimages to visit holy places and spread his love. She not only shows her love spiritually but also physically in journeying to spread Christ's message. She uses her physical body to accomplish this when Christ makes her weep involuntarily, especially when she witnesses the Passion:

> The memory of our Lady's sorrows, which she suffered when she beheld His precious body hanging on the Cross and afterwards buried in front of her sight, suddenly occupied the heart of this creature, drawing her mind entirely into the Passion of our Lord Christ Jesus, whom she beheld with her spiritual eye in the sight of her soul as truly as if she had seen His precious body beaten, scourged, crucified with her physical eye; the which vision and spiritual observation performed by grace so fervently in her mind, wounding her with pity and compassion, so that she sobbed, roared, and cried and, spreading her arms wide, said with a loud voice, I'm dying! I'm dying!' so that many people were astonished by her and wondered what was wrong with her (*Kempe* 127).

Kempe almost goes into a trance whenever she finds herself near the Passion; it is as if she is experiencing it herself. Though she never experiences the physical passion as stigmatics do, Margery experiences it emotionally, as her sorrow completely engulfs her, sending her into a fervor. Empathizing with Mary's sorrow sets Margery down the path of emotional stigmata as these visions are "wounding her with pity." These lines show that Kempe not only witnesses the Passion but feels it throughout her whole body: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Margery sees this vision through her "spiritual eye" but simultaneously feels she is seeing "His precious body beaten, scourged, crucified with her physical eye." These descriptive sights of the Passion

are called forth in our own minds, making us see how powerfully Kempe experiences affective piety. Yet it is not enough for these wounds to be viewed spiritually. They need to take some sort of physical form. Her yelling "I'm dying! I'm dying" shows how Kempe permits her body and mind to feel the pain Christ suffers when nailed to the cross. Her affective piety then takes form in her tears and sobbing, resulting in the rest of the world wondering at and criticizing her.

Kempe wants Christ to use her body in this manner so his pain becomes relived. Compassion plays a major role: "the vision and spiritual observation performed by grace so fervently in her mind, wounding her with pity and compassion." Compassion has been defined as "the feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it."[15] The word "compassion" stems from the Latin word "compatior," which derives from "patior" meaning to suffer, and "cum," meaning with.[16] Compatior or compassion literally means to suffer with and its usage stems from the Christian practice of willfully identifying with Christ's Passion, as Kempe does (she repeatedly describes herself as possessed by "compassion for his Passion"). Here we have Margery taking on the pain of Christ, specifically leaving her wounded "with pity and compassion." Christ wants and allows her to almost feel as he did when dying on the cross—a feeling many Christians crave and find honorable, a feeling that is also associated with affective piety. The compassion Margery feels towards the Passion makes her weep violently because she feels it within her own body but becomes helpless towards it. The term "passion" is defined as "a strong and barely controllable emotion," whose roots also come from Latin word "patior." This again means to suffer.[17] Margery literally becomes passive through her own passion for Christ.

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[15] Oxford English Dictionary
[16] McNamer, Sarah, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, 11.
[17] Oxford English Dictionary

Ultimately, she cannot stop those nails breaking through Christ's flesh and bones no matter how many times she witnesses the act. Yet Christ intends not to change history but to have his sacrifice continuously live through her and many other mystics. Margery's tears not only represent the Passion and taking on Christ's pain, but also taking on the pain of others. Compassion leaves one with the desire to help those who are suffering (we will see how this quality is shared among many mystics and stigmatics later in this essay). We see this compassion play out in the *Book*: "if she [Margery] saw a person or a beast, whichever it was, who was wounded, or if a man beat a child in front of her, or struck a horse or another beast with a whip, if she could see it or hear it, in her thought she saw our Lord being beaten or wounded" and she would weep more (Margery 65). Margery begins to see Christ in every being, especially if they are suffering. When Margery sees someone physically suffering with her "physical eye," she associates them with Christ. Her compassion for Christ spreads to those near her, signifying the way the Lord's message continues to live through her body. We see again the ways her spirituality turns into something physical.

A scholar who writes about female mysticism brings up this idea of compassion in her essay "That Glorious Slit: Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound." Amy Hollywood explains how, in medieval religious life, Christ's suffering and death played a crucial role in spiritual devotion, especially and directly related to compassion. Narrative accounts based on this were created in order "to evoke heightened emotional responses in the reader" (Hollywood 175). Hollywood writes, "By calling forth the events of Christ's death with compassion and identification, the person meditating both commemorates and participates in the redemptive power of that moment" (Hollywood 175). In association to Margery Kempe, her compassion towards Christ serves both as an understanding of his pain and a way for his

sacrifice to live on, as his Passion physically works its way through her—and then, through her, to others. In seeing Christ in the suffering, Kempe weeps and prays, hoping to save them: "she wept for another hour for the souls in Purgatory; or another hour for those who had suffered misfortune, poverty, or some distress" (*Margery* 128). Kempe clearly feels compassion for the Lord and those that remind her of him. But one can ask, what is Kempe really doing to alleviate people's suffering besides crying for them? She identifies extremely with affective piety, but her actions do not appear to be as charitable as they could be. Perhaps this is where Kempe becomes troublesome for many and may even appear self-absorbed. It appears all her compassion is only reserved for Christ. Further in the essay we will see how Natuzza Evolo, unlike Kempe, uses her connection with Christ to dedicate her whole life to helping alleviate people's suffering. Nonetheless, the Passion of Christ, compassion, and suffering are crucial in understanding the inner mechanisms working in a mystic's life.

Tears and Blood

As explained previously, Margery experiences the Passion without bearing a scratch on her body. She does not bear the physical wounds of Christ as stigmatics do, but her spiritual experiences and constant weeping for the Passion can be interpreted as stigmatic in nature. In its most physical form, blood and tears are a liquid pouring out from the body to make internal pain external. These two visible forms inform the outsider that something is happening with the individual. In a way, blood and tears represent the individual in its raw, humanly nature. In the essay "Slayn for Goddys lofe: Margery Kempe's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears," Laura Kalas Williams considers Kempe's weeping, exploring the connection between blood, tears, and melancholia. Comparing blood and tears, she writes, "The theological association of blood and tears is illustrated as early as the fourth century CE by the bishop and rhetorician Gregory of

Nyssa, who called tears 'the blood in the wounds of the soul.'"[18] Where blood represents a wound on the physical body, tears represent the wounded soul. The soul cannot be seen, but tears reveal the sentiments from within. The devotion Margery feels towards Christ and his Passion becomes externalized through her weeping instead of through blood. It is crucial to remember that it is not just ordinary crying but intense wailing and screaming that can be heard by everyone: "sometimes she could not stand but rather fell down amongst the people and cried very loudly, so that many people were amazed and astonished at what was wrong with her, as the fervour of the spirit was so severe that the body failed and could not endure it" (*Margery* 178). Margery becomes a visible sign of sorrow as the Passion takes control of her body and mind. In this moment, Margery exhibits the Passion through her body, and while her physical body remains in reality for others to witness, her mind and spirit travel elsewhere: "Her mind was entirely drawn from earthly thoughts and earthly sights, and focused entirely on spiritual sights, which were so delectable and so devout that she could not, in the time of fervour, withstand her weeping, her sobbing, and her crying" (*Margery* 178). It appears her spiritual mind and physical body are fighting over control, which lets Margery externalize the Passion. Kempe, like many mystics, manages to connect the forms of spirituality and corporeality as the Passion from within externalizes for others to bear witness.

In "Acute Melancholia," Amy Hollywood analyzes the role melancholia plays in a woman's mystical experience. In one section she talks about how the internal works with the external to showcase the Passion experienced by mystics. Hollywood explains the four stages Margaret Ebner (another mystic) goes through that she believes can be related to other mystics as well:

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[18] Williams, Laura Kalas, "Slayn for Goddys lofe": Margery Kempe's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears."

> Ebner moves through four stages: first she actively remembers Christ's Passion, aided by the recitation and reading of scriptural texts, meditative guides, prayers, and the divine name, as well as by devotional images and artifacts; eventually she is unable *not* to cry out in the face of Christ's suffering; she then *involuntarily* remembers these events; and, finally, she fully internalizes and reenacts them in and on her body (Hollywood 79).

This is the way the Passion has come to be understood as it is externalized through the mystic's body. Ultimately it goes from something being suffered to something being reeanacted. We see Margery Kempe herself go through these four stages in her connection with the Passion and her weeping. The external image of Christ becomes internalized so deeply that it re-externalizes itself in the form of weeping and stigmata. It seems to me that the last step is the most crucial, as it is the way the Passion becomes relived repeatedly for others to now witness and have their own responses to it.

Though Margery suffers from sorrow every time the Passion works its way through her, she desires that Christ never cease her weeping: "And then, when she was thus devoid of tears, she could find neither joy nor comfort in food and drink and conversation, but was always depressed in her expression and countenance until God would send them to her again, and then she was happy enough" (*Kempe* 178-79). Suffering for the Lord is desired and honored by all mystics; it is why the stigmata is praised among them. Hollywood in her essay writes, "Ebner's desire for the stigmata entails a desire not only for visible signs of Christ's suffering on her body, but also for the pain of that suffering" (Hollywood 76). This desire to suffer is very common because it is seen to honor Christ and bring about his miracles to everyone else. Julian of Norwich (who Kempe meets in her lifetime to have her experience validated) as well writes

about her desires to feel Christ's sufferings, or as she calls them, the "three gifts of God" (Julian 3). These three gifts were: 1) the witness of his Passion, 2) bodily sickness in youth, and 3) God's gift of three wounds. This desire to suffer as Christ again is associated with affective piety. What Julian writes, "Therefore I desired a bodily sight wherein I might have more knowledge of the bodily pains of our Saviour and of the compassion of our Lady and of all His true lovers that saw, that time, His pains" (Julian 4). Again, we see this notion of compassion, especially in relation to the Virgin Mary when desiring to suffer with Christ. Suffering his wounds makes sure the Passion is constantly relived and remembered. It is a reminder that Christ is present in their souls.

While Margery's tears represent the Passion, they also represent Mary's sorrow at witnessing her son die. Christ constantly asks Kempe to think of his mother's suffering as he makes her witness the Madonna crying for him. In a previous quote, we see how "the memory of our Lady's sorrows … occupied the heart of this creature" (*Margery* 127). In another section Christ tells Margery, "'I give you great cries and roaring in order to make the people afraid at the grace that I put in you, as a token that I wish that my mother's sorrow be known through you, that men and women might have the more compassion for her sorrow that she suffered for me'" (*Margery* 164). This quote stands as evidence that Christ gives Margery these outbursts to communicate to others, as we will see later with Natuzza's stigmata. Being a mother herself, Margery experiences Mary's sorrow as she witnesses her crying under the cross her son is nailed to. Margery's weeping embodies Christ's Passion and what the church describes as the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary. This is quite significant because we see two important beings in the Christian faith represented in one singular body.

Perhaps this is what differentiates Margery: her tears in a way maker her both Christ and Christ's mother. Scholar Liz Herbert McAvoy brings up the Virgin Mary as well when she "notes how blood flow and tears were 'constantly allied' in the Middle Ages, tending to be associated with feminine piety because of their association with the suffering of the Virgin as *mater dolorosa* in relation to the wounds of Christ at the foot of the cross."[19] "Mater dolorosa" means sorrowful mother, which asks us to think about the Virgin Mary's grief over her dead son. Our Lady of Sorrows is often depicted with tears in her eyes and having a dagger pierced through her to represent the pain inside her. Furthermore, over the years statues of the Virgin Mary around the world have been found with tears of blood coming out of her eyes. Some instances have been inexplicable and described as miraculous; while others have been proven to be done by people. Whatever the cause, these bleeding tears signify Mary's pain and grief for her son and for the sins of this world. It essentially reminds us of all the grief and pain that inhabit this world. Additionally, it further emphasizes the similarities between blood and tears as they emerge to externalize pain from within. Margery's own tears are an embodiment of this suffering and Passion connecting her to both Christ and Mary.

Patriarchy in Kempe's World

As stated previously, though many came to admire Margery, many more despised her and believed her to be a heretic. Kempe managed to anger many Christians by committing acts that were outlandish for a woman. However, that did not stop her from practicing her faith the way Christ asks her to. As we have learned thus far, many women could not practice their faith as freely as they desired to, since men dominated the faith so much. Like Joan of Arc, Kempe experienced a miracle in receiving the power and courage to go against the norms and eventually

[19] Williams, Laura Kalas, "Slayn for Goddys lofe."

empower many women in the future. Through her mystical experiences, Kempe found the courage to be heard and stand up for her own beliefs. For this fact, many people, particularly men, hated her because she would not obey them. In one example, Christ commands her to wear white, and she complies even though she faces scrutiny for it. During this time a woman who lost her virginity could not wear white since the color symbolizes purity. Since Kempe had a husband (and thirteen children), she was considered to be a heretic for wearing white. In one situation, an Archbishop asks her, "'Why are you going about in white? Are you a virgin?' Kneeling on her knees in front of him, she said, 'No, sir, I am no virgin; I am a wife.' He ordered his followers to fetch a pair of shackles and ordered that she should be fettered, because she was a faithless heretic" (*Kempe* 113). These "rules" controlled women and made sure they remained inferior. They used labels such as "faithless heretic" to justify the harsh punishments given to women. The color white tends to represent purity; women are expected to wear white on their wedding day to show they have never laid with another man. Under these "rules," Kempe cannot wear white because it represents something she is not, so they arrest her. This reaction is misogynistic and an invasion of privacy because it forces women to publicize their life and their sexual history. It further allows women to be exploited and controlled in a man's world. Joan of Arc faced similar consequences when she broke gender norms and wore men's clothing. This gesture enraged men so much because it signified that they were losing control over women. In arresting, threatening, and killing these women, they hoped to instill fear and keep women inferior. One person even admits this to Margery: "I believe that you have come here to take our wives away from us and lead them off with you" (*Kempe* 105). They fear Kempe will revolutionize other women, leaving men to be all alone. Margery was seen as a threat to the patriarchal powers set in place.

We must acknowledge that Margery and even Joann's actions were not purposely intended to be feminist actions; only now scholars interpret them as such. The most important thing to take away, and perhaps why we associate them with feminism, is that these women stood by their beliefs in moments where their lives were on the line. When men were harassing Kempe, calling her names and threatening to burn her, Kempe, "through the strength of Jesus, said back to them, 'Gentlemen, I'm afraid that you shall be burned in eternal Hell unless you correct yourselves for swearing oaths, as you do not keep God's commandments. I would not swear as you do for all the money in the world.' Then they turned away, as if they were ashamed" (*Kempe* 113). Maintaining her composure, Kempe called out her harassers' hypocritical behavior and made them feel shame. They called Kempe and women like her heretics, yet they disobeyed the commandments themselves by inflicting worse cruelty.

There are many instances where supposedly holy men slander Kempe's name with hate and persuade others to do the same, which only further emphasizes their hypocrisy. A patriarchal society permits these actions, but Kempe courageously and ironically manages to make these men feel ashamed for it, the same shame they force women to feel. Yet unlike them, Kempe does it peacefully without eliciting anger, only further driving home her point. Kempe and Joan's connection with Christ empowered them to stand up for women's rights, even if they did not fully comprehend it yet. Their mission was to follow Christ's orders. Unbeknownst to them, they paved the road for the fight for women's freedom. Perhaps it was not seen in the moment, but in the future, written accounts of Joan, Margery, and similar women empowered other women, teaching them to stand up for their own rights.

Chapter III

Life of Natuzza Evolo

Now we will move on to the case of Natuzza Evolo and see how she carries this long tradition of female mysticism into our contemporary world—and, crucially, how she differs from mystics such as Margery Kempe. Natuzza Evolo, also called Mama Natuzza because of her motherly presence, was a Calabrian mystic born on August 23, 1924, in a small town called Paravati. As a child, she regularly had visions of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, but it was not until 1938 that her mystical experiences began to be witnessed by others. She was fourteen at the time, working as a maid for a wealthy family. One day the head of the household noticed blood coming from Natuzza's feet. A doctor came to examine her immediately and, though there was a significant amount of blood on the upper region of her foot, no cause could be found. This was only the beginning of her lifetime of mystical phenomenon. Mama Natuzza experienced stigmata; she had visions of Jesus, Mary, the saints, and other dead; she

Figure 1: Natuzza Evolo with the Stigmata Visible

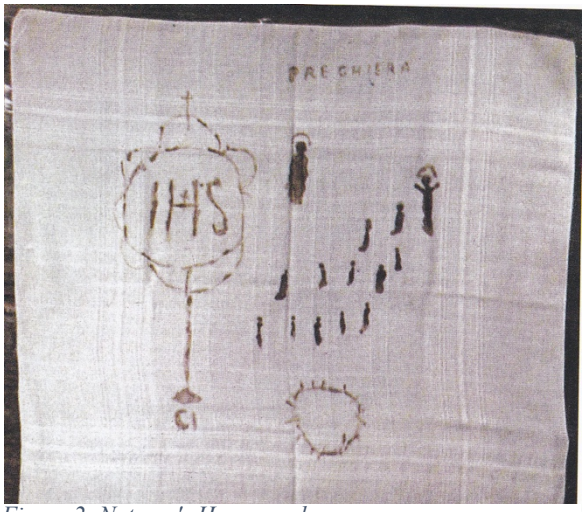

Figure 2: Natuzza's Hemography

experienced bloody sweats; she suffered wounds in the shape of crosses appearing on her skin; she even had hemography—"the process whereby blood from the stigmata or bloody sweat is miraculously formed intro Christian writing, images, and symbols upon handkerchiefs, bandages etc., presumably through Divine intervention" (Dallaire). When Natuzza or others would wipe the blood from her body, witnesses reported seeing images of the rosary, people praying, or words in other languages appear on the cloth.[20] In figures 2 and 3 we can see examples of Natuzza's hemography. The blood stains on both napkins depict holy images such as the crown of thorns, a Christogram, and Latin phrases. Natuzza's blood literally takes form to depict Christly images showing another example of how Christ's message gets communicated through the physical body of the mystic.

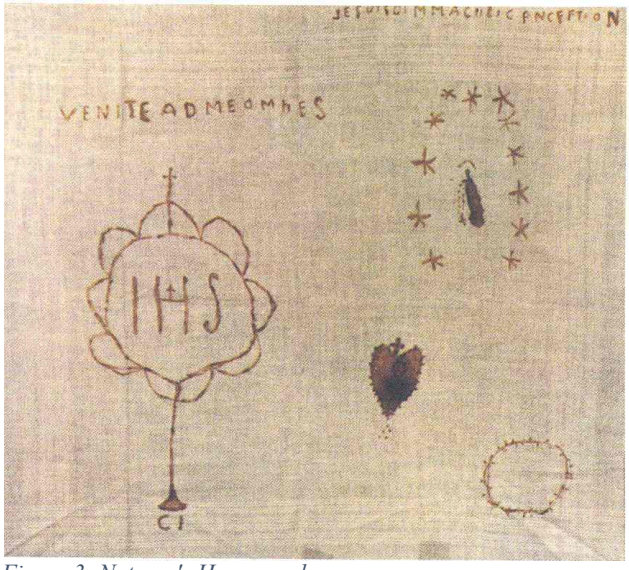

Figure 3: Natuzza's Hemography

It is important to note that Natuzza was illiterate, just like Kempe. People found it fascinating, even inexplicable, when her blood stains would form into the phrases of foreign languages such as the ones on these napkins. On top of this, when people speaking a different language came to visit her, Natuzza could communicate with them in their native tongue. In interviews, Natuzza claimed that an angel would tell her the things to communicate to her visitors, even in foreign languages. In fact, she claimed that she was not herself giving advice to her visitors; rather, she was only a messenger passing down advice Jesus, Mary, or dead

[20] Dallaire, Glenn, "Natuzza Evolo & the stigmatic blood writings – Hemography," *Mystics of the Church*, accessed October 25, 2021, https://www.mysticsofthechurch.com/2012/03/natuzza-evolo-stigmatic-blood-writings.html.

relatives wanted to communicate with others.[21] Once people began to hear stories about her miracles, people from all over the country and eventually Europe came to visit her, hoping to witness these miracles for themselves.

Impact of Natuzza Evolo

I have had the privilege of visiting the Foundation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Refuge of Souls in Paravati. Here you can find Natuzza Evolo's final resting place and a church created from her vision. It was her dream to have this Foundation help those who are suffering. Visitors to the Foundation can visit a church and Natuzza's tomb. There is also an elderly home and a building that houses the homeless and other people who need a safe place to stay. Many visitors come to pay their respects to Natuzza and learn more about her life. On the day I visited the church there was a tour bus that brought visitors who wanted to learn about Natuzza as well, which can be seen pictured in figure 5. I joined the group while they were given a tour to learn more about Natuzza and the effect she had on them.

Figure 4: Natuzza's Church, photo by me

Figure 5: Natuzza's Church with People, photo by me

[21] CAPIZZI, GIANCARLO, *Natuzza Evolo – La Via della Croce*, TV7, April 10, 2012, video, 58:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjdNVqAy3mM.

On this recent research trip, I spoke with Fortunato, one of the workers at the Foundation and a friend of Natuzza, in order to better understand the impact this mystic left on her community. Fortunato knew Natuzza since he was a child, though he admits that, at first, he feared her because she could see the dead. Fortunato explains that this Foundation was created to make Natuzza's visions a reality. He explained that in the 1940s, Natuzza had a dream that Mary took her to this place and told her she needed to build here. Surrounding the outskirts of the church, Natuzza saw thousands of people crying and screaming. She felt an overwhelming yearning: she wanted to help all of these people, to stop all of their suffering. Mary pointed at the crowd of suffering people and told Natuzza she needed to create this place for them; it was her mission to help them. Then she took her on a path filled with flowers, saying that it still wasn't time for the world to know about these visions. Its people weren't ready. So Natuzza kept these visions to herself until May 13, 1987, when she began to work with others to build the Foundation exactly as Mary had told her to.

Figure 6: Natuzza's Tomb, photo by me

Fortunato explained the date was significant because it was the seventy-year anniversary of the apparition of Fatima. To help me really understand just how miraculous Natuzza was, Fortunato explained that when construction first began, the architect told Natuzza that it could not be done in the place she picked because the foundations were not strong enough. Natuzza then walked down the road, pointed at the dirt floor, and said, "Here. You're going to build here." The architect thought she could not understand his dilemma, so to make her happy he

checked the foundations again, finding that the spot Natuzza pointed at was perfect. The architect said he realized in those moments that he was not communicating with Natuzza but perhaps with some other being. Here we see another moment of how the body, specifically the female body, is used to communicate Christ's message. The woman both authorizes and unauthorizes herself to achieve this moment.

Natuzza's dream vision in which she was told to build the Foundations is striking for at least three reasons. First, because we again see how the female body is used to convey messages from the divine. It's another instance where the body becomes sacred but this time in our modern time. Second, we might note that Mary telling her to wait for the right time to reveal these visions. We cannot deny that the forties were a misogynistic period as fascism was prospering in Italy, forcing women to obtain domestic roles and nothing more. Women had to fulfill duties under conservative rules and were not allowed to have any influence on politics. The battles women fought for suffrage had no effect once fascism emerged.[22] Mary, in telling Natuzza to wait, protected her from the potential slander a woman might face during that time. We have seen how Joan of Arc also waited four years before revealing her visions from God to others. Scholars have interpreted this as being a form of protection against heresy accusations women were most likely to face.[23] Preceding from this history of burning and arresting women, we see how many years later in a completely different time, women still feared this fate. Natuzza's own vision protected her against a world that perhaps was not yet ready to hear about her visions.

Indeed, when people noticed Natuzza's stigmata, they and the church made her stay in an asylum because they thought she suffered from mental illness. We could only assume that if

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[22] De Grand, Alexander, "Women Under Italian Fascism," JSTOR, accessed November 15, 2021, http://ezproxy.purchase.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/2638244.
[23] Barstow, Anne Llewellyn, "Joan of Arc."

Natuzza lived in Kempe's time, she would have been locked in a prison instead of an asylum, which is no better but a signifier of a changed time. In the asylum, the workers saw the phenomena occur right before their eyes, eventually setting her free when they saw they could not treat her. After she was released, Natuzza's doctor advised her family to find her a husband and have kids: perhaps domestic life would distract her, and maybe even heal her. Natuzza desired to become a nun but was prevented from doing so because of the doctor's orders.[24] Misogyny influenced the time where they thought the cure for an erratic woman was a domestic life, so of course Natuzza had to stay silent about her visions. Eventually Natuzza broke this way of thinking once others began to take her seriously, and from there she created so much good in her charitable acts once her story began to spread.

The third reason Natuzza's dream vision strikes me is the emphasis placed on wanting to aid the suffering, a reoccurring quality in many mystics. During my research I began to see a theme among stigmatics where they desire to end the suffering of others. Padre Pio's stigmata, for example, led him to take on the pain of others. He felt that his mission was to save others, which can be seen in a letter he wrote to his spiritual director: "For a long time I have felt in myself a need to offer myself to the Lord as a victim for poor sinners and for the souls in Purgatory. This desire has been growing continually in my heart so that it has now become what I would call a strong passion … It seems to me that Jesus wants this."[25] It shows us that stigmatics are willing to sacrifice their wellbeing to help others, like Christ's crucifixion. This correlation is quite important because, according to Catholic theology, Christ suffered on the cross to save humanity from sin and hell. Those who desire to alleviate the suffering of others seek to act like Christ and those with the stigmata are physically marked as such.

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[24] CAPIZZI, GIANCARLO, *Natuzza Evolo – La Via della Croce,* video.
[25] "A Short Biography," Padre Pio Devotions.

It is also important to note the historical events occurring in the stigmatics' time to understand their views on suffering. When Padre Pio first received his stigmata, World War I was still occurring. He later also lived through World War II. Padre Pio saw firsthand how much the war affected the nation and everyone around him, how much people were suffering from it. No doubt it pained him to see this and therefore he used his miracles to aid those who needed it. When World War II ended, Padre Pio and others began construction of a hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo. The hospital, opened in 1956, was named "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza," which translates to "House of Relief of Suffering." There is an emphasis placed on suffering because Padre Pio wanted those who came in to feel like they were at home and at ease. Today this hospital is one of the best in Italy.[26] Natuzza, born in 1924, also lived through war. Her mission in life was also to end people's suffering and she did everything she could to do to make it happen. The plaza at her Foundation is called "Viale della Salvezza," or "avenue of salvation," further enforcing her message. I do not think their stigmata made them more compassionate or charitable but instead it merely emphasized these qualities already in them. The compassionate nature of these stigmatics was heightened by the war and perhaps pushed them further to aid their communities. Though the war may not have been a direct cause of their stigmata, the suffering that came from it contributed to the way their stigmata was experienced and felt by others.

Testimonies

Natuzza claims that Christ spoke through her, all while bearing the wounds of Christ. One can view this as possession, but it is not because Natuzza is conscious throughout. Natuzza embodies the Passion and suffering of Christ for all to witness. Stigmata needs to not only be

[26] "Padre Pio's Hospital: Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza," padrepiodapietrelcina.com, June 4 2021, https://www.padrepiodapietrelcina.com/en/padre-pio-hospital-casa-sollievo-della-sofferenza/.

experienced by the stigmatic but also experienced outwardly to others for it to be fully realized. The people's reaction is essential to understanding stigmata because only through them can meaning be derived. Earlier we saw Fortunato express his fear of Natuzza when he was a child, a feeling undoubtedly felt by many when in the presence of a stigmatic. That fear is not directly associated with the stigmatic themselves but rather with what their stigmata represents; how much us humans do not know. People generally use religion to find meaning in life or to answer life's many unanswerable questions. Stigmata, using a mixture of fear and awe, makes us question what we already know and consider the inner mechanisms of faith. Interpretation of the stigmata is extremely important to understand the phenomenon and the impact it has. It is either evidence of God's agency on earth or evidence of Catholic hoax. It essentially comes down to two views: the believer and the nonbeliever. However, I feel there is an important middle ground to explore that may reveal more about the importance of this phenomenon.

Talking to people who met Natuzza or at least knew about her, I began to get an idea about what stigmata means. We have seen thus far how it provided people with hope and solidified their faith with Christ. These people were religious, but one person I talked to was not. Domenico grew up in a Catholic household in Calabria, Italy and was aware of Natuzza. In fact, he met her twice when accompanying his family to see her. Domenico is the perfect example of this middle ground, as he is skeptical of the phenomenon but still feels the importance of it. He claims to not believe in the supernatural and when asked if he believes in God, he replied, "Maybe one day." Domenico, though knowledgeable on Catholicism and how miracles work, cannot find himself connecting to it. On the case of stigmata, however, he finds himself lost and not knowing how to feel. He thinks it is more complex than a simple yes or no answer. To completely regard it as a fallacy would disregard the work people like Natuzza did for their

community. In fact, Domenico appreciates Natuzza for this reason. She reminded people of Christ's true message: love and forgiveness. He feels as though many Christians over time have forgotten this message, and Natuzza, whether or not her miracles were real, dedicated her life to doing that.

The Passion of Christ represents just that; Christ's sacrifice for humanity and stigmata serves as a reminder as well as proof of the Holy Spirit for many. The stigmatic embodies Christ in every form physical and spiritual, suffering with him through the Passion to fully envision his purpose. Natuzza and other stigmatics such as Padre Pio represented this, and this is why they dedicated their lives to aid the suffering. Experiencing Christ's suffering themselves makes them more able to feel compassion, just as we have seen with Margery Kempe. Most significantly, Natuzza remained humble as her popularity grew. She did not let greed or pride interfere with her mission. Paravati, her hometown and the location of her Foundation, is a very small, rustic town in southern Italy. Natuzza grew up and died in this town, only enriching it and herself with wisdom. Similarly, Padre Pio continued to live his vow of poverty even after his popularity grew. Their stigmata did not change their humility but enhanced it as they assisted people day by day.

This humble nature Natuzza holds is what Domenico admires most and why he cannot reject her. As he told me, "I don't know how much I buy into the stigmata ordeal, but I've seen the good she has done. There are so many corrupt and hypocritical people in the church who don't practice what they preach. But Natuzza, she isn't that, or at least I don't think. She dedicated her life to helping others and never asked for anything back. There are very few people in the world like that." This might be read as a cynical statement, but it also gets at the truth. Stigmata did not make Natuzza humble or compassionate, as it was already in her nature, but it allowed her to connect with thousands of people all over the world to remind them of these

virtues. Unlike Margery Kempe, Natuzza physically went out of her way to alleviate people's suffering. What Domenico gets at is that, if stigmata is a scam, at least people like Natuzza use it for charitable means. Domenico views it in this manner but there could be countless other interpretations. One may find it contradictory in itself. If the phenomenon is a scam, the person is fundamentally partaking in blasphemous dishonesty. But, if they are doing it with good intentions, do their charitable actions cancel out? There really is no right or wrong answer as it's quite dependent on one's own interpretation. I find myself to be ambivalent at times as well, but I lean more to viewing stigmata as something real. Though, sometimes I wonder if it is because I was raised to think it is real or because I want it to be real to comfort me in knowing there is something greater. We must remember that this project does not aim to prove whether mystical phenomena is a fallacy or not. It is merely interested in the impact it has over the course of history and people's interpretations.

It is quite understandable why people feel skeptical towards anything religious, especially with the church's extensive history with corruption. Concetta Fortuna, another local I talked to, expressed to me how she has had a difficult time believing in people like Natuzza for this reason. When Natuzza died, everyone from all over went to Paravati to pay their respects. Concetta had went as well to accompany a friend and said she felt disheartened at the scene that laid in front of her. She did not feel disheartened due to Natuzza's death but because among the hundreds of mourners, there were street vendors trying to sell objects with Natuzza's face on them. The objects ranged from shirts to rosaries to posters and even cigarettes. Concetta felt disgusted and for a long time associated this image with Natuzza, thinking that she too had profited off of people in this way. Though now, after having revisited Paravati to accompany me on my research, Concetta began seeing that perhaps this was not Natuzza's doing, but those who took

advantage for personal gain. They commodified Natuzza's image, completely disrespecting her and the sensitive moment of a funeral. This gesture taints Natuzza's message, bringing her importance down to a mere cigarette packet. Acts like this represent the greedy and prideful but is also what ruins religion for many. Natuzza unfortunately could not escape from this but hopefully can teach us how to be better. After Concetta had assisted me with my research, she began to view Natuzza differently, and like Domenico, acknowledged how she devoted her life helping her community.

Architecture of Foundation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Refuge of Souls

During my visit to the Foundation, I could not help but notice the emphasis placed on the Virgin Mary. Obviously, Jesus is the primary figure in the Catholic faith, but here there was an enormous emphasis on the Virgin Mary. This is quite significant because not only does Natuzza recognize Christ's suffering but also Mary's. At the Foundation, Mary is seen as more than the mother of Christ; she is a savior herself, one who represents joy. It shows the overall importance of Mary in the Catholic faith, as she too represents love and compassion. Natuzza communicated most with Mary and had a statue made based on how Mary appeared to her in her dreams, featured as

Figure 7: Virgin Mary Statue

figure 7. Unlike the usual image of a veiled woman, Mary here is represented as a younger woman with a crown instead of a veil, arms open with a big heart in the middle of her chest. The heart in the middle of the chest goes along with the message Fortunato relayed to me that Natuzza said all the time: “Vieni, ti stavo aspettando. C’è spazio per tutti nel mio cuore.” This roughly translates as “Come, I have been waiting for you. There is space in my heart for everyone.” Natuzza claimed that Mary told her to relay this message to everyone, to help bring people peace, so she did just that. Figure 8 shows the chapel where the Mary statue usually stays. Just through the doors in the back you’ll find Natuzza’s tomb—purposely placed close to her Mary.

Figure 8: Mary Statue in Chapel, photo by me

Fortunato explained that the layout of the Foundation represents the body of the Virgin Mary. There is a long plaza leading to the church. On the sides, there are buildings that house the elderly, the homeless, and others who need assistance. Figure 9 shows the view of the plaza from the perspective of the church and you can see these buildings on the side. The two buildings on the side, Fortunato explains, represent Mary’s opened arms, while the church represents her head and the plaza her

Figure 9: Plaza View from Church, photo by me

Figure 10: Viale Della Salvezza, photo by me

heart. Natuzza wanted the plaza to be the heart because that is the place where people gather. Gathering people in the "heart" of Mary goes along with the message, "there is space in my heart for everyone." Acceptance and love oozes from this tactical decision, urging people who gather there to remember these virtues. Figure 10 shows the plaza again, this time from the perspective of the entrance, which you can see leads to the church. I was not able to entirely capture the words on the floor, but they say, "Viale Della Salvezza," which translates to "Avenue of Salvation." This further resonates with Natuzza's desire to save people from suffering and purgatory.


Figure 11: Door Inside Church, photo by me

Perhaps the part that intrigued me most was the church itself and how Natuzza's memories adorned the inside. Besides the main door, the inside had four other doors like the one in figure 11. On each side of the door, there are painted blood stains in the forms of holy symbols—the same symbols that appeared on the napkins that Natuzza's wiped her blood on. The images from Natuzza's hemography were used, showing how these images have now become sacred.

Figure 12 shows the main door to the entrance of the church, which depicts Natuzza and others kneeling in front of Jesus. Floating on top of Jesus is Natuzza's Mary. This door represents Natuzza's devotion to them and how they communicated to others through her body. Figure 13 shows the altar at the church adorned with a mosaic that Fortunato explained to me depicts four different visions Natuzza was given in her lifetime. It depicts how Natuzza's visions urged her to alleviate the suffering in the world.

Figure 12: Door to Church, photo by me

Figure 13: Mosaic at the Alter, photo by me

As Fortunato tells me about Natuzza Evolo, tears begin to form in his eyes, but they are not of sadness but of joy. His emotion shows how much her kind spirit meant to everyone who knew her. All she wanted to do was to take on the pain of others to end their suffering and that is what this building now stands to represent. Even though Natuzza is no longer with us, she continues to help people through the form of this building. Natuzza left so much of an impact that the Vatican

recognized her and began the process of making her a saint. Whichever way we choose to view Natuzza, we cannot deny that she used her position for something good.

Chapter IV

The Five Wounds

The rest of my essay considers how some of the notions I discussed so far—namely, suffering, compassion, and gender—appear in contemporary works of fiction. Though *The Five Wounds* is fiction, it reflects some ways religion is used in our contemporary world. Kirstin Valdez Quade's *The Five Wounds* takes place in a town heavily influenced by the Christian faith whose holy symbols have been tainted and misconstrued to fit egotistical motivations or promote patriarchal standards. The normalization of these standards has blinded the characters from seeing how their suffering is a result of their practices. Amadeo's extreme act of penitence—specifically, reenacting Christ's crucifixion with real nails as part of a religious festival—becomes an outward performance rather than an inward experience of self-reflection, prohibiting him from resolving the issues in his life. His falseness does not allow Amadeo to fully be impacted by the faith. The further misinterpretation of the faith affects the women as well, as they constantly struggle to maintain the ideal image of the Virgin Mary society expects them to fulfill, all while they try to navigate their own self-identity and growth. Those who "fail" in achieving this image become outcasts, a fact that can be seen in the language and morals characters use when speaking about women. The same can also be said for those who try to overcome this standard and show that women are not just beings meant to be domesticated. We will see how the novel moves from seeing Mary as a figure of purity to discipline women, to a figure of understanding suffering and compassion.

Penitence and Misinterpretations

Amadeo Padilla is a deadbeat father, jobless, still living with his mother and suffering from alcoholism. He lives in a town in New Mexico and like many who turn towards religion in

moments of suffering, Amadeo joins a religious group—in his case, the group is called the *hermanos*—in the hopes of redeeming himself from his past errors and becoming a better person. Seeking to change, Amadeo resorts to extreme acts of penitence during holy week as he prepares himself for the role of reenacting Jesus' crucifixion. More specifically, Amadeo whips himself and allows the *hermanos* to slash his back with a knife on Ash Wednesday: "there were practical reasons for the sellos – the three vertical cuts that were going to be made in his back – when he began whipping himself, the blood would flow from the wounds, so the skin wouldn't swell or bruise" (Quade 13). These "sellos" are supposed to represent Christ's suffering and serve as a reminder of why Christ died on the cross. The "three vertical cuts" to some may be a direct call to the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each gash sliced deep into one's skin serving as a constant reminder of what Christ did. The followers, or in this case Amadeo and the other *hermanos,* inflict this pain upon themselves to experience Christ's suffering and repent of their own sins. When Amadeo's daughter, Angel, asks him about the procession, he explains it to her as: "'You get a chance to feel a little of what Christ felt. You can thank him, to hurt with him just a little'" (Quade 32). This, again, is affective piety and reminds us of the mystics from earlier who desired to hurt like Jesus. Yet, the difference here is Amadeo self-inflicts these wounds on himself to feel compassionate of Christ. However, Amadeo seeks these wounds to show his own holiness, as opposed to reforming himself.

These practices of physical penance are not uncommon and have been associated with affective piety throughout history. Self-flagellation dates back to the 12th century, when people did it to either repent for their sins or share in the Passion of Christ. Fasting, self-denial, wearing hairshirt or chains, are all part of this practice of physical penance.[27] Margery Kempe used to

[27] Nethersole, Scott, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence,* Yale University.

wear hairshirts to repent for her sins, for instance. These practices still occur in our time. During Passion Week in the Philippines, for example, devoted Catholics can be seen shirtless and wearing floral crowns as they whip themselves the entire day until the first layers of their skin are removed. According to a recent article about this practice, "The devout performs different forms of self-infliction of pain to achieve their vows of their sacrifice made with God … some of these penitents are ex-criminals who seek redemption for their past sins. They feel that doing these extreme methods measure up to their own wrong doings."[28] In adding physical penance in the novel, Quade makes us consider how far people will go in intimating Christ's sufferings, a practice dating back centuries. It also tells us that it is not just through mysticism that one experiences the Passion of Christ. The *hermanos* from the novel practice physical penance so Amadeo joins them in the hopes that he can right his wrongs. But it will take Amadeo much more than playing Jesus for him to change.

When the day of the reenactment arrives, Amadeo anticipates that this will be his turning point. Yet, because he views the practice it in a self-glorifying way, his experience does not change his character. On this Easter Sunday, Amedeo carries a heavy cross throughout the village while wearing a crown of thorns. The *hermanos* whip themselves as they follow him: "He scrapes his shoulder under the edge of the cross, wincing when the wood breaks skin. The hot blood rises, his own blood, his own heat. He must leave his body, become something else" (Quade 37). Amadeo welcomes the pain to show his devotion, hoping people will view his courageousness with amazement. Caught in the heat of the moment and obsessed with having a memorable, realistic performance, Amadeo demands the actual nails: "'The other! Give me the other'" he screams after the first nail is stabbed through his hand, "the pain is so immediate, so

[28] Albano, Joseph, "NSFW – Penance Through Pain: A Look at Extreme Catholicism in the Philippines," Resource Travel.

stunningly distilled, that Amadeo's entire consciousness shrinks around it" (Quade 38). Here, Amadeo becomes both aware and unaware of himself, as he practices an almost self-inflicted stigmata to feel closer to God. This experience is interpersonal between the follower and Christ, yet Amadeo manages to treat it as a theatrical performance, demanding that others praise him for it. He turns to egotism instead of fully reflecting upon his own crucifixion. We have seen the reason individuals partake in these acts, yet Amadeo forces himself into this just to prove to others he is a good person. Amadeo does not grasp the significance of these acts because he misguides himself in the faith. We realize this when Amadeo first receives the sellos: "And, as the blade slid into the skin of his back, Amadeo's swelling sense of his own falseness" (Quade 13). His "falseness" shows how he treats these practices in a hypocritical manner. No religious euphoria or realization comes from it. He does not let the faith guide him but instead uses it so others can view him as a messiah.

In"Penance and Mortification," Davide Bianchini claims that "the men and women of history who practiced penance were often the most selfless and self-sacrificing people ever known."[29] Ironically, Amadeo does the opposite of this. The "falseness" comes back every time he picks up a beer can and every time he treats the people in his life badly. Amadeo's crucifixion came from selfishness, not redemption. We notice this in the hospital when Amadeo becomes upset that no one takes notice of his "sacrifice" or honors him: "most of these people don't even seem sick. Not a single other person is losing blood … Where is the carnage? Would someone please explain this unconscionable wait? He is *Jesus,* for Christ's sake" (Quade 39). This quote is very ironic for two reasons. First, Amadeo states that "he is *Jesus"* and so he should have special treatment. The meaning of the Passion is about joining one's suffering to others and

[29] Bianchini, Davide, "Penance and Mortification," http://www.religious-vocation.com/penance_and_mortification.html#.YnhbcRPMJQI.

becoming more compassionate as seen with Natuzza. Here, Amadeo views his own sufferings as more special and holy; not behaving in a humble manner but acting selfish. Overly identifying with Jesus, Amadeo loses the true meaning of the Passion and tell us that his "sacrifice" was merely performative. Second, Amadeo, in expressing his frustration, uses Christ's name in vain. Amadeo, too blinded by his egoism, does not realize how this affects his daughter as well: "'How're you going to hold the baby? Or didn't you even think of that?'" In Amadeo's hypocritical behavior, Quade draws attention to the various ways people misinterpret religion. Amadeo betrays the very nature of what I've argued before: that the stigmatic suffers to become like Christ, the poor, etc. She makes the reader understand the meaning of suffering with Christ, but she does not place those attributes into Amadeo. Amadeo contrasts greatly with Natuzza Evolo, who behaved humbly to give back to the community.

Promoting the Patriarchy

We have begun to see how Amadeo misuses the Catholic faith. Now, I will explore this concept further by analyzing how this mistreatment continues further, promoting the patriarchy. In earlier sections, I analyzed the history of women being persecuted by the Church, especially regarding Margery Kempe and Joan of Arc. We know that women have a long history of dealing with misogyny and not being allowed freedom. Though the setting of the novel takes place thousands of years later, we see how patriarchal notions are still implemented throughout, reflecting the ways misogyny still controls our real-life world.

Being a man, Amadeo experiences religion and life much differently than women do. The men are ignorant of the consequences their actions have because they are placed higher in society. When Angel comes to live with her father, Amadeo treats her poorly both because he is an absent father and because of her pregnancy. Her teenage pregnancy symbolizes shame and sin

due to her young age. In one moment in the novel, we get an insight into what society and Amadeo think of his daughter's pregnancy. When Angel asks her father if she can see the *morada*, he replies, "'Tío Tive don't let women go in there … Women can't go in. And besides…' Before he can stop himself, he glances down at her belly. Her face slackens and she turns back to the TV … It's not his fault. He didn't tell her to be a girl. He didn't tell her to get knocked up" (Quade 33). Here we see how Amadeo behaves ignorantly as he places blame on the gender of women rather than understanding the issues of society. As always, he refuses to take responsibility and quickly points his fingers at others. Angel soon begins crying and then sorrowfully expresses, "'I'm too dirty for your morada. Is that it?'" Her father unconsciously blames Angel and her womanhood for getting into this "mess." His thoughts reflect the misogyny implemented in his society—one that comes from a long history of female persecution. He blames women for every fault instead of understanding the factors of what got her to this point. He does not blame his bad parenting or terrible upbringing but only her "dirty" actions.

The word "dirty" here creates shame and separation for Angel, never allowing her to escape her "sin." This term "dirty" comes up later in the novel, when the whole family is discussing the female anatomy: "'Just call it a vagina, Mother'... 'I hate that word. It's dirty.'" The words "dirty" and "disturbing" are used to describe the female's reproductive organs, indicating that women should feel shame about their bodies and should essentially "cover it up." Already from a young age, they are taught to feel ashamed for who they are. We can see how Angel's circumstances unfortunately define who she is as a person. She will now be branded as being the "dirty," "unholy" girl who got herself pregnant. Furthermore, women being forbidden from entering the morada represents the divide created between women and men "in the name of

God." Quade reflects the history of how women were not allowed to have a voice in their own faith because they were not seen to be divine enough. The shame here reminds us of how Margery Kempe was shamed in her society for not behaving as a woman should. Quade, in portraying patriarchy in her novel, shows us how shaming women is still deeply engraved in our own world. Many women will agree that from a young age society teaches them to feel ashamed in their bodies. Quade's novel shows us how misogyny is deeply rooted in religion as it has been used for centuries to shame women. If women do not behave as the Virgin Mary, they are scrutinized and unwanted.

The image of the Virgin Mary represents everything pure and holy—something that Angel, according to everyone in her life, is not. Angel is sixteen, pregnant, and unwed, which the novel constantly reminds us of. Her pregnancy does not bring joy or a sense of wonder, as bearing the son of God did for Mary. Angel's state reminds everyone of sin and temptation, not of blessed fruit. As Quade writes when Amadeo glances at his daughter, "He looked at the swell of her stomach, his lip twisted in revulsion, and Angel wrapped her arms around herself" (Quade 132). Blame and shame is placed on her for "allowing" herself to get pregnant, for "allowing" herself to explore her sexuality and desires. The image of the Virgin Mary is construed to fit the patriarchy's agenda. Instead of embracing her strength and courage, her image becomes a lesson to teach little girls on how to be docile and "pure."

If we compare Mary to Angel with a wider perspective, we can see similarities between them. Mary was also in her teen years when she became pregnant and was not yet married to Joseph. Her marriage to Joseph saves her from being shunned by society, as does the later revelation that she remained a virgin. Virginity is what separates Mary from Angel: why one is praised, and the latter criticized? Mary's virginity has been misinterpreted to forbid women from

exploring their sexual desires and to keep them docile. We have seen this notion of virginity with Margery Kempe who was condemned for wearing white because she was not a virgin. Quade shows us how notions of virginity continue to be used to control women.

Angel calls out this unjust treatment: "it was a sin, wasn't it? Except that she can't believe that God would be so unfair, letting guy after guy get off scot-free, while saddling girls with either lifelong responsibilities or mortal sins" (Quade 132). Women are burdened with the mess engendered by men. While Angel is left with the responsibilities of her pregnancy, the baby's father can still live freely without repercussions. Her pregnancy has branded her as sinful, but the baby's father does not face blame or scrutiny. Women face the most judgement and control by society. Symbols are important to religion, as they give meaning to things important to us. Unfortunately, here, the symbol of the Virgin Mary changes to scrutinize women. Yolanda, Angel's grandmother, begins to realize this when she reflects upon her life and religion:

> She refuses to look a La Conquistadora, the wooden statue of the Blessed Mother tucked high and snug in an opulent niche in her chapel to the left of the altar. The conquistadors brought her from Spain, hauled her around with them like a lucky charm as they invaded the peoples of the New World, and she served as a placid, unmoved witness to the violence they wrought. No wonder the Spaniards loved her so: O Conquistadora, Our Lady of the Rosary, Blessed Mother, Adoring Mother, Our Mother of Excuse and Turning a Blind Eye, Our Lady of Willful Ignorance and Boys Will Be Boys, Our Lady of Endless, Long-Suffering Hope. In the nineties, in a belated acknowledgment of the Church's violent past – or, more accurately, a feeble revisionist cover-up of that past – the bishop renamed her "Our Lady of Peace." But there's never been peace in this land, not then and not now, not for her family and not for Yolanda. (Quade 81)

In this gut-wrenching quote, we are made aware of what the image of the Blessed Mother has turned into. Something meant to bring peace has been used to excuse violence and cover up the dark history. It is quite symbolic how the statue is displayed beautifully for everyone to see, but also forced to watch the horrors unfold right before her, all of which are done in her name. It represents how the women in the novel, perhaps even other women, have been forced to behave as statues to appeal to male spectators, all while watching them get away with the injustices they commit. This misinterpretation and abuse of the Blessed Mother has influenced new generations to continue this treatment, to force women to act as statues. They are constrained and silenced in this role forced upon them, all while having to face the scrutiny of the spectators. This analogy can only be seen through a women's gaze, a gaze both critical and aware of the truth. It shows how religion has been abused to excuse the behavior that would not be considered morally right. In history, this behavior has led to the persecution and death of many innocent women in an effort to take away their freedom. Religion was used to justify the ill treatment of women. If you were to examine the Blessed Mother closely, you can probably make out a single tear escaping from her eye.

The description, "Our Lady of Willful Ignorance and Boys Will Be Boys," shows how much men get away with, as seen with Amadeo. The phrase "boys will be boys" is extremely problematic in our own world, as it excuses boys' behavior when it concerns a woman's well-being. Domestic abuse, rape, and harassment become passable under the notion of "boys will be boys." Girls must cover their shoulders in school because "boys will be boys." Yet obviously the woman, rather than the man, should be blamed if they get pregnant. The Virgin Mary falls victim to this abuse as her image becomes violated in favor of men. We see this in Yolanda's treatment of Amadeo: how he has never been fully reprimanded for his grave mistakes; how Yolanda just

looks at her son in disbelief and lets him of the hook. She knows that even if she tries to stop him, he will not listen to her because it has been instilled in him by prior generations not to.

Indeed, throughout the story we can tell that Amadeo holds up very patriarchal views especially during the Easter dinner with his family. While they are discussing the beauty of womanhood, Amadeo thinks, "When Marissa was pregnant, they didn't talk like this, at least not in front of Amadeo. Something's happened to society in the last sixteen years, though. Now it's like these women just can't stop themselves" (Quade 68). This old-fashioned way of thinking again shows the shame women are taught to feel about themselves and it also shows us why Amadeo does not listen to his mother. To him it is a problem for women to feel free and it is quite ironic he behaves in this manner considering what he did during passion week. The misconstrued image of the Virgin Mary was foreshadowed in the beginning of the novel when Amadeo's tattoos are described: "on his back, the Guadalupana glistens brilliantly, her dress scarred with the three vertical cuts of the sellos, the secret seals of obligation. The lines, each the length of a man's hand, are raised and pink and newly healed, evidence of his initiation into the hermandad" (Quade 4). The Guadalupana's, or Mary's, image has physically been tainted by the hand of a man. They obscured her so that Amadeo could join the *hermanos,* (a group name that ironically denotes maleness), again showing how men selfishly use her image.

Realization and Redemption

Unlike Jesus, Amadeo came down the cross alive and walked to the ER still the same man as before, only now with holes in his hands. We do not get relief from the anticipation the novel placed on Amadeo's crucifixion in the beginning of the novel. In fact, we feel let down and unsatisfied. A miraculous turn of events or revelation does not occur and soon the moment is over resulting in nothing changing. However, change does not happen overnight, and it takes

Amadeo over a year to finally grow. The author Kristen Valdez Quade tackles this concept in an interview about the novel. The novel was originally a short story, ending after Amadeo's performative crucifixion. When figuring out how to expand the story, Quade comments:

> One of the questions for me was "okay, so what happens the next morning?" He's had this big epiphany, he sees his daughter suddenly with clearer eyes, but what happens the next day when he wakes up in his same bed in his mom's house and his pregnant daughter is in the kitchen making scrambled eggs? Obviously as you pointed out, the end of the first chapter is too early in the arc of the novel for Amadeo to have an epiphany. But I think in life too, real character change rarely happens from a single epiphany. Sometimes we need epiphany after epiphany, as well as a lot of steady work to change.

Showing that change takes time and patience makes the novel more real. If the story had ended where it originally did, it would send out a false message to the readers. This manner makes it more impactful for readers since they can relate with the characters as they go on this journey of change with them. We have seen Amadeo misinterpret the faith and behave selfishly countless of times. He commits error after error throughout the course of the novel, but his wake-up call finally comes when he was drunk driving and almost kills his nephew. In the moments when he is uncertaint if his nephew had died or not, "Amadeo prays to die, and he's never prayed so vehemently in his life. *Take me, take me, take me*. But nothing even hurts" (Quade 396). Amadeo, though tragically, finally realizes he messed up so he looks to religion and begins praying for real this time. Thankfully Connor lives and Amadeo has his long-waited epiphany: "As Amadeo speaks the words along with the other men, he pities his old self that once believed there was a single, big thing he could do to make up for all his failings. He missed the point. The procession isn't about punishment or shame. It is about needing to take on the pain of loved

ones. To take on that pain, first you have to see it. And see how you inflict it" (Quade 404). To grow you must first come to terms with who you are. The first step of recovery is realizing you have a problem. Amadeo finally takes responsibility for his actions and understands the real meaning behind penitence. In Amadeo's redemption, Quade offers hope to her readers but also that people can change if they truly want to. Amadeo finally understands the meaning of compassion, perhaps urging readers to understand it as well.

We also see the image of the Virgin Mary begin to shift when Amadeo considers her feelings of being the mother to the son of God:

> The story was sadder for Mary, Amadeo realizes, because Jesus never doubted he was the Son of God. Mary, on the other hand – surely *she* had her doubts. Even if she loved her son and was proud of him, and liked the stuff he was saying about love and humility and all that, surely she sometimes wondered if her kid was nothing more than a deluded narcissist, with gifts, not of prophecy or divinity, but mere charisma … At what point did she begin to believe him … Until they rolled that stone away, was she ever entirely free of doubt? (Quade 339).

In considering Mary's struggles and her doubts, Amadeo starts to acknowledge her courage and perhaps the courage of the women in his life. Mary was a human being as well who surely faced many prejudices, so Amadeo does something significant in viewing her in this light. In every section in this project, we have seen how every person has engaged with the Virgin Mary and seen her with compassion. Amy Hollywood writes on this as well: "Mary is the model of compassionate suffering with Christ on whom the reader is often called to model him- or herself. Yet ultimately Mary's suffering with Christ is so great as to render her Christ-like" (Hollywood 175). Amadeo's character finally reaches an arc where he learns to feel compassionate not just

for Mary but even for the women in his life. We can relate Hollywood's quote to Amadeo at the conclusion of the novel, when Amadeo watches the new Jesus's crucifixion: "To feel a little of what Christ felt, Tïo Tive said over a year ago. And what Christ felt was love. Amadeo doesn't know how he lost track of this. Love: both gift and challenge" (Quade 416). After a year Amadeo finally realizes the ultimate message, that love is the end of all suffering. This message finally resonates with him as it resonates with all the mystics from earlier. Ultimately, this is how the Passion is interpreted, whether through mysticism or practice of the faith. To understand Mary's compassion for her son is to understand love. This is what Natuzza urged people to understand and ultimately what Quade wants her readers to understand as well.

Conclusion

Mariette in Ecstasy

Ron Hansen's novel Mariette *in Ecstasy* takes us to the inside of a seventeen-year-old young woman, Mariette, who becomes a nun and experiences stigmata. Though the narrative is fictional, it beautifully represents the lived experience of a stigmatic from both an insider and outsider's perspective. I had the privilege to discuss the novel with the author himself, and Ron Hansen told me that most of his inspiration and research for the novel came from the real-life stigmata of Saint Gemma Galgani. His fascination led to his depiction of stigmata through the character of Mariette, who embodies many of the qualities we have seen mystics hold in earlier parts of this essay. Rather than have the novel explain to us what stigmata is, Hansen creates a compelling story that makes the reader witness the innerworkings of stigmata. Because the novel powerfully distills, rather than reductively explains, the phenomenon of the stigmata, I conclude this essay with a reading of *Mariette in Ecstasy,* further establishing earlier points made about mysticism and the Passion of Christ. By considering Hansen's novel, we can see the way stigmata is interpreted and used in our contemporary world as a means of fascination and storytelling.

The novel takes place in upstate New York in the early 1900s. Early on, we are introduced to Mariette, who at seventeen joins the Our Lady of Sorrows convent. The nuns react to her with mixed feelings. Some hate her because she seems too prideful; others praise her because of her high devotion to Christ and his Passion. One day Mother Celine, the head of the convent who also happens to be Mariette's biological sister, tells Mariette, "I have a letter from Father that accuses you of being too high-strung for our convent. And he is troubled by gossip from friends and patients about trances, hallucinations, unnatural piety, great extremes of

temperament" (Hansen 31). Mariette's unique approach with her faith troubles many – an irritation that might remind us of the hate Margery Kempe received in her lifetime. We first see Mariette's high devotion towards the Passion when she is changing into her habit in front of a painting of the crucifixion: "Mariette is kneeling on the floor, unclothed and seemingly unconscious as she yields up one hand and then the other just as if she were being nailed like Christ to a tree" (Hansen 16). Mariette has not yet experienced stigmata. However, there still is a sense of urgency and connection to her body and that of Christ. "Unclothed" and "unconscious" are two important terms here. "Unclothed" represents how in this scene and throughout the novel Mariette, and also Margery Kempe, combine the religious with intimacy of the erotic. Her nakedness, her "unclothed body," exhibits a feeling of intimacy, as if she is giving up her body to Christ. "Unconscious" shows how, unlike Amadeo in *The Five Wounds,* Mariette's devotion does not arise from a conscious desire to impress others. Mariette accepts Christ in this gesture, foreshadowing her stigmata later when she finds herself again in the same position. Mariette admits that she has craved this experience since she was a child: "'Ever since I was thirteen, I have been praying to understand his passion. Everything about it. To have a horrible illness so I could feel the horrors and terrors of death just as Christ did'" (Hansen 40). She craves to hurt as Jesus did—a desire seen to be shared among many stigmatics. Mariette craves to understand Christ's Passion by feeling the "terrors of death." The way to understand Christ's Passion is by feeling it directly through the notion of affective piety. Recall Julian of Norwhich, who similarly called unto to Christ to bless her with three wounds. For this, Mariette happily sacrifices her body to Christ and accepts his suffering. We saw Margery Kempe similarly open herself up for Christ, allowing him to use her body for the Passion. Once Mariette has the stigmata, she says, "I have never felt such pain before, and I have never been so happy" (Hansen 129). A sense of

euphoria encompasses these mystics when the Passion is felt so deeply within them. Mariette happily accepts all her pain with honor, knowing that she is coming close to Christ's sufferings, further enforcing her pain, and her sympathy, with Christ.

Mariette shares many characteristics with Kempe, as she to confesses having visions from Christ. Hansen shows how, in one letter she wrote to her priest, Mariette confesses feeling guilt but also an urge to save sinners by suffering herself: "*Every day and in the midst of every kind of disobedience and failing, I have asked Jesus to have pity on me and either take my life entirely or, in his justice and mercy, give me a great deal to suffer in atonement for my own foolishness and the sins of the world*" (Hansen 42). The reader gets to enter Mariette's mind through these letters and understand her most private thoughts: about Christ and about her own guilty thoughts and desires which ultimately lead to her stigmata. Mariette's desire to suffer as Jesus suffered emanates from this quote. She believes that her suffering will redeem her from her sins but also save others from "the sins of the world." Mariette's letters go hand-in-hand with *The Book of Margery Kempe,* where Kempe also repents for her sins and asks Christ to bless her with his tears. Saving people from their sins is the essence of the Passion, as Christians believe that is why Christ died on the cross. Stigmatics crave the same thing, as we have seen with Natuzza Evolo and Padre Pio. It is not just becoming Christ but becoming a physical symbol of compassion and then sharing that compassion with the rest of the world. Christ answers Mariette's prayers, telling her that he first needs to test her faith. In the letter she writes, "*Our lord has promised that I will suffer great pain in the course of my life.*" She then goes on to quote what Christ told her directly: "'*You will be tortured by gross outrages and mistreatment, but no one will believe you. You will be punished and humbled and greatly confused, and Heaven will seem closed to you, God will seem dead and indifferent … I shall hide in noise and shadows and*

I shall seem to abandon you'" (Hansen 43). Here again we are reminded of Margery Kempe who was given extreme outbursts by Christ. These outbursts made many turn on her but it was Christ's way of testing them. The stigmatic longs to bring Christ's suffering to the rest of the world, but often it brings them scorn, especially when you are a woman. Christ, however, constantly reassures Kempe that he will never abandon her. Here, however, Christ seems to be testing Mariette, though he also makes it apparent that he won't abandon her even if it seems he will. We see Mariette's loyalty tested throughout the course of the novel, as everyone around her slowly begins to turn on her. Ultimately this suffering leads to her stigmata. We come to understand that Christ found her body and soul worthy enough to experience and embody the Passion.

Mariette receives the stigmata on Christmas, right after her sister, Mother Celine, dies. Someone finds "Mariette in the night of the oratory, intently staring at the crucifix above the high altar, her hands spread wide as if she were nailed just as Christ was … Blood scribbles down her wrists and ankles and scrawls like red handwriting on the floor" (Hansen 107). This reminds the reader of the first time Mariette enters the convent and finds herself in a similar position. Yet here Mariette is no longer Mariette but an embodiment of Christ's Passion. The blood pouring out from her body is described as "red handwriting on the floor," further enforcing the way stigmata lives on, and shares with the rest of the world, Christ's message. It signifies how inward suffering becomes outward manifestation. "Red handwriting" brings us back to Natuzza's hemography, where her blood was unconsciously used to communicate holy messages when she herself was illiterate. In Mariette's case, the reader only understands Mariette's devotion through her handwritten letters; now her blood takes on the same role as her devotion takes physical form. Hansen highlights how blood plays a major role in communicating Christ.

This physicality of the faith occurring during Christmas symbolizes the way Christians view their faith. When the other nuns ask Mariette if she found it surprising that her stigmata appeared on Christmas, she replies, "'No … We celebrate the Word being made incarnate then'" (Hansen 126). The comparison between Christ's birth and stigmata is quite particular because stigmata is always associated with Easter. This analogy focuses on the corporeal aspect of the faith, where in both situations the spiritual becomes the physical. Christmas celebrates the birth of the faith, and here we have Mariette experience the birth of the Passion.

Once news spreads about Mariette's stigmata, many begin to visit the church to witness her miracle. In these moments we see Mariette feel shame and embarrassment because she does not like parading her stigmata around like a trophy. Someone asks Mariette if she felt surprised that Christ chose her out of everyone to experience the stigmata. Mariette replies, "Yes, I do … [because] I have been a terrible sinner" (Hansen 144). To this unexpected response the inquisitor says, "Saint Philip Neri commenced his interview of a presumed ecstatic by asking just that question. She got very angry and grandly told the priest why she was in such great favor with God. Saint Philip promptly halted the interview, knowing that the woman's pride showed that she wasn't special at all" (Hansen 144-45). Mariette shows humility in her response unlike the individual in this story. The quote highlights the sin of pride, revealing the individual's true desire of wanting attention. This takes us back to Amadeo from *The Five Wounds,* who exhibited excessive pride after nailing himself to the cross. He felt like people should kiss his feet for what he did rather than ruminate upon what it truly meant. We see Mariette as having an opposite personal and spiritual response, hiding herself in the church so others will not see her bloody hands and feet. When talking about stigmata, one of the nuns says, "And let us remember that

sainthood has little to do with the preternatural but a great deal to do with the simple day-to-day practice of the Christian virtues'" (Hansen 134).

Having stigmata or any other miracle does not immediately make you a saint, especially if you do not behave morally. In the case of Amadeo, he thought his extreme act of penance would make him a saint even though he continued to behave immorally. Though miracles can have good effects they can also have cruel intentions. There will always be those who try to take advantage. However, it is important to note that Hansen purposely does not verify whether Mariette's stigmata was real. Hansen makes the reader only sees her stigmata through the perspective of other characters instead of giving us an intimate, first person reading of it. What this does is make the reader decide whether they believe in Mariette's experience, much like the way one approaches stigmata in real life. He also adds both believers and non-believers to further allow the reader to make their own decision.

By contrast to Amadeo, Mariette fully understands and embodies the Passion of Christ. We come to understand that knowledge and corporeal experience aren't opposed but deeply intertwined. Again, it's understanding and feeling the Passion that is important. When a priest asks Mariette how she feels in ecstasies and trances, she responds, "'I have lost my body; I don't know where I am or even if I am now human or spirit … And when I have gotten to a fullness of joy and peace and tranquility, then I know I have been possessed by Jesus and have completely lost myself in him'" (Hansen 128). Margery Kempe describes her trances in a similar manner, as the spirit leaves her body and she becomes filled with the essence of Christ. Mariette says, "I have been possessed by Jesus," depicting how a stigmatic is both Christ and themselves in one. Christ possesses the body of the stigmatic so that they might come to understand his Passion and have others witness it. They are Jesus in that moment but at the same time they are not. Mariette

does not call her wounds hers but his, referring to Jesus. She says her wounds are "embodied by me, but not mine" (Hansen 115). Mariette lets Christ use her body as a vessel to have the crucifixion relived; momentarily her body becomes Christ, yet she is not Christ. Mariette is possessed but at the same time is not. Natuzza described her mysticism in a similar manner, saying that Christ or Mary or some other beings used her body to communicate their messages. Essentially, the stigmatic takes on a role as a messenger of Christ, as he uses the physical body of the stigmatic to be reincarnated.

Stigmata mostly becomes effective when viewed by other people, hence why it holds a physical form. The people essentially give stigmata the power to impact their lives. People view Natuzza's wounds with wonder and amazement, proving to them that there is something greater out there. Margery Kempe's tears evoke strong emotions inside of people, either good or bad. Other people's emotions towards the stigmatic are crucial to understanding the phenomenon; without it there is no significance. In our discussion, Ron Hansen described stigmata as being a manifestation of how much we do not know; because of this, there are many mixed reactions. Hansen portrays this reality in the novel, where many are amazed by Mariette's stigmata, and many think her a fraud. One nun in the novel writes, "*We know how susceptible the religious are. Even me! We are bored and dull and tired of each other, and we have such a yearning for some sign from God that this matters, that our prayers and good works are important Him. Is she preying upon that? Is she trying to entertain?"* (Hansen 148). The nun grows suspicious of Mariette's stigmata, yet we cannot blame her because we may be asking the same questions ourselves. While religion aids people in their life, it also leaves many questions unanswered. Religion points towards, rather than solves, mystery. So too does stigmata.

Humans have a yearning to find meaning in everything so their lives can feel significant. This is in part why people travelled from all over the world to meet mystics such as Natuzza Evolo. These mystics provide reassurance and give significance to the faith. We see this occur to other nuns who view Mariette's stigmata more positively. One nun approaches Mariette to see if her wounds are real:

> 'I hope you're not angry,' she says. 'We all were wondering. We didn't think it would be so real.' … She pets Mariette's wrist and kisses a knuckle. She whispers, 'We are so privileged.' … reverence Sister Hermance licks the blood inside the hand wound. 'I have tasted you. See?' Tears streak shining down her cheeks as she says, 'Ever since I first met you, I have loved you more than myself … You have been a sacrament to me' (Hansen 121).

This woman looks at Mariette with wonder, amazement, hope, and reassurance. She views Mariette as a holy being now that Christ blessed her with his wounds. Her wounds solidify the sense of wonderment within the sister and provides her with hope. In turn the sister licks Mariette's blood as if she is tasting the body of Christ during the Eucharist. Because Mariette has claimed that her blood is Christ's blood, this gesture becomes sacramental. The Eucharist represents Christ's final moments on Earth and, for the Catholic, serves as a symbolic representation of his love. In the Eucharist, the believer comes to understand Christ's suffering by incorporating it into their own body. Stigmata works the same way but goes beyond to reassure someone of their faith and that all "this" matters to God.

The stigmata phenomenon is quite complicated to understand because there are no right or wrong answers to its approach. What Ron Hansen emphasized to me is that one cannot simply state whether stigmata is real or not. To completely dismiss it takes away from the experience of

those who have been impacted by it, whether it be the stigmatic or the one who believes in it. Stigmata has, and continues to, affect people spiritually and culturally; all we can do is try to understand its impact. Hansen perfectly puts this in his novel when he has a character tell Mariette, “I personally believe that what you say happened did indeed happen. We could never prove it, of course. Skeptics will always prevail. God gives us just enough to seek Him, and never enough to fully find him. To do more would inhibit our freedom, and our freedom is very dear to God” (Hansen 174). Essentially, we have the freedom to believe in the stigmata or not, to act upon it or leave it be. To force someone to also believe in the phenomenon would inhibit their freedom as well. Stigmata and mysticism are not straight-forward topics, but they are not meant to be. Their complicated nature is meant to evoke emotions, no matter how subjective they are. Whichever way people choose to view stigmata, it has proven to be a topic of interest where now we see it in our contemporary world as a means of storytelling. This storytelling, however, continues to contribute to the phenomenon as a whole.

Postscript

Almost a year after of having talked to Anna, we rekindled our conversation again through the phone, as I updated her on how this project was coming along. We began to talk about Natuzza Evolo again and she began telling me more about her devotion. Anna did not have the most pleasant life, but Natuzza gave her the possibility to hope and feel as though she had someone close to her. In a rough translation of her own words, Anna said:

> For me, the figure of Natuzza represents something particularly unique and the maximum of Christianity. She has been present many times in my life, showing me the right path for my life. Moments I felt her presence close by giving me the right advice, I felt this spiritually even when I wasn't present. Many times, when I turned to her, I was given the answers I was looking for. We Calabrians loved her and continue to love her even today.

After the first time Anna visited Natuzza, she realized Natuzza was going to be an important figure in her life and in her faith. She returned to visit her multiple times thereafter to experience her comforting presence. Anna said that Natuzza was the sweetest woman she has ever known. Even with all her pains, she always radiated joy and love to her visitors.

Before we hung up, Anna showed me the picture of Natuzza she has hanging in her house. She kissed the tips of her finger and placed them on the photograph with a smile.

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Figure 1: Natuzza Evolo with Stigmata Visible. "Blood Writing from the Stigmata of Natuzza Evolo," by Glenn Dallaire. https://www.visionsofjesuschrist.com/weeping1491.html.

Figure 2: Natuzza's Hemography, "Natuzza Evolo & the Stigmatic Blood Writing – Hemography," by Glenn Dallaire. https://www.mysticsofthechurch.com/2012/03/natuzza-evolo-stigmatic-blood-writings.html.

Figure 3: Natuzza's Hemography, "Natuzza Evolo & the Stigmatic Blood Writing – Hemography," by Glenn Dallaire. https://www.mysticsofthechurch.com/2012/03/natuzza-evolo-stigmatic-blood-writings.html.

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