A Novel Approach to Hildegard von Bingen: Talking with Mary Sharratt about Faith and Fiction

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A little girl is playing with wooden dolls in her Bermersheim backyard when an orb floats out of the sunlight and catches her eye, yet it vanishes before she grasps it, like the butterfly escaping the killing jar. Hildegard von Bingen is just five years old. And her mother is horrified; good children do not see heavenly objects, she declares, but the orbs repeatedly return, hurtling and careering "close by my [Hildegard's] head, echoing with music that sounded like the harps of angels." God seldom spares Hildegard. The visions rarely go away. And the inventive theology as well as convoluted life that proceeds out from such visions pulsates at the heart of Mary Sharratt's 2012 novel, Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). The following interview with Sharratt, conducted over e-mail in the summer of 2016, is the second in a four-part series of interviews with women and men who employ fiction to probe the Christian faith of an individual theologian or an apology of theologians in a specific time. The winner of the 2013 Nautilus Gold Award (Better Books for a Better World), Illuminations spirits us into the German mystic's troubled, twelfth century environment and, as an example of Christian historical fiction, it invites us to take notice, not so much of the orbs but of Hildegard's full-bodied, animated faith—the same faith that caught the eye of Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, when he named her a Doctor of the Church.

DJNM: Anyone who reads about your life and literary art soon discovers that you are a transcultural thinker and writer. Born, raised, and schooled in the Upper Midwest of the United States, you secured

a Fulbright fellowship that took you to Innsbruck where, in the late 1980s, you discovered your passion for the German Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). In time you journeyed from Austria to Germany, married a Belgian man, and now you live and work from northern England. How has your background shaped your development as a storyteller?

MS: My home is everywhere and nowhere. A wanderer, I have lived in many different places, from Minnesota, my birthplace, with its rustling marshes full of redwing blackbirds, to my former home of Germany with its dark forests and pure streams where otter still live, to my present location in windswept Lancashire England, haunted by its history of witch trials. From all this traveling, I feel I've developed a keener sense of place and culture that you generally don't get if you live all your life in the same place. Even speaking another language draws you into a completely different worldview. This is the gift of being the outsider, the foreigner.

As a novelist, evocation of place and culture is my passion. The question I ask myself is what makes this place I'm in now unique, unlike any other? What song does the land sing? What stories does it have to tell? I am obsessed with history, with writing strong women back into history, and how the stories of these women in centuries past merge with the landscape itself.

For twelve years I lived in Germany where Hildegard has long been enshrined as a cultural icon, admired by both spiritual and secular people for her ethereal music and her concept of Viriditas, or greening power, that speaks so powerfully to our modern environmental concerns. And if you visit the Hildegard sites along the Rhine in Bingen and Eibingen, you can see the lush forested hills and vineyards that must have served to inspire her revelation of the sacred life force manifest in the natural world. In modern Germany, naturopathic doctors still practice 'Hildegard Medizin,' Hildegard's own holistic method of treatment drawing on herbal medicine and dietary advice.

In Germany Hildegard's cult as a popular saint long predates her official canonization and elevation by the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran Church in Germany reveres Hildegard as a prophet of

the Reformation. This popular reverence certainly informed my fictional portrayal of Hildegard.

DJNM: Generally speaking, what inspired you to write about religious subjects and theological themes?

MS: When writing my 2010 novel, Daughters of the Witching Hill, based on the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612, the most remarkable thing I learned in my research was how Jacobean England conflated Catholicism with satanic witchcraft. Mother Demdike, my first person protagonist, was a cunning woman, or healer, of longstanding repute. Her charms, cited as evidence of diabolical witchcraft in the trial transcripts, were Catholic prayer charms using exclusively Christian imagery. They bore absolutely no evidence of satanic belief or practice. For example her 'Charm to get drink' was 'Crucifixus hoc signum vitam Eternam. Amen.' (The crucifix is the sign of eternal life.) Readers can see more of Mother Demdike's charms on my website.

These revelations led me into a deeper understanding of the unspeakable tragedies borne of the English Reformation that literally demonized Catholic belief. Of course, Catholics persecuted presumed witches, too. But it's important to stress that the witch hunting hysteria that raged across Europe and later the British Isles and Colonial America was not a phenomenon of the Middle Ages, as popularly believed, but of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the so-called 'witches' being the victims caught out in the crossfire of sectarian strife.

Hildegard, a visionary who also employed prayer charms and believed in the healing properties of gemstones, wasn't all that different from Mother Demdike, although she was of a higher social standing and much better educated in terms of literacy and so on. Had Hildegard been an unlettered woman of the sixteenth century instead of a twelfth century nun, I believe she, too, would have been persecuted as a witch. Fortunately the pre-Reformation Church gave her a platform, so to speak, for her unique visionary experience—at least after the male hierarchy decided she wasn't a heretic. Teresa of Avila, living in Renaissance Spain amid the turbulence of the Counter Reformation, had to tread far more carefully not to run afoul of the Inquisition.

DJNM: The period of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (c-500-1500) witnessed its fair share of theologians. Besides Hildegard, do you have a favorite?

MS: Female mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila provide an important counterbalance to male dominance and provide a uniquely female as well as transcendent and universal experience of the sacred.

Like Hildegard herself, Julian of Norwich called God Mother. Her Revelations of Divine Love, believed to be the first book written by a woman in the English language, celebrates Christ as a nourishing mother and honors women as Christ's imitators. Teresa of Avila's practice of mental prayer and her masterpiece, The Interior Castle, are still hugely influential to contemplatives of diverse spiritual backgrounds today. Her descriptions of the absolute bliss of spiritual ecstasy that comes from complete union with God are some of the most beautiful that have ever been written. The writings of Margery Kempe, a laywoman describing her mystical experience, reveal how medieval Christianity enabled ordinary women to transcend their social role and travel the world as passionate pilgrims. Kempe's autobiography, the first ever written in the English language, is a fifteenth century *Eat, Pray, Love*. Of course, I also deeply admire male mystics such as Meister Eckhart.

DJNM: Illuminations follows one of the most eminent Christians of the Middle Ages, a polymath (she was at home in the areas of theology, botany, music, poetry, pharmacology, prayer, drama, vinification, financial management, anti-patriarchal activism, et cetera), and a woman who seems to be experiencing a creative renaissance in churches today: Hildegard von Bingen. What was your experience of both researching and writing about this powerfrau? How long did it take to immerse yourself in her world, for example, and did you ever find yourself holding back on difficult dimensions of her life or wrestling with the disagreeable characters in her story? Did you undertake research trips to Hildegard pilgrimage sites? If so, what did you discover when you roamed around them? And did you consult

any recent theological commentaries on Hildegard's writings? If so, which ones, and how instructive did you find them to be?

MS: Writing a novel about Hildegard was indeed a daunting process. The last thing I wanted to do was churn out preachy inspirational fiction which would be both unconvincing and hypocritical coming from me, a cradle Catholic who struggles with many aspects of organized religion. I consider myself far more spiritual than religious.

I thought long and hard how could I make Hildegard's story seem fresh and relevant to a modern audience. Books that try too hard to be spiritual can have the opposite effect. Educated readers demand books that respect them as discerning adults instead of preaching at them.

Especially challenging was the fact that Hildegard's life—so long and eventful, so filled with drama and conflict, tragedy and ecstasy—proved mightily difficult to squeeze into a manageable novel. My original draft was forty-thousand words longer than the current book. I also found it quite intimidating to write about such a religious woman. In the end, I found I had to let Hildegard breathe and reveal herself as human. Above all, I wanted to write a novel about Hildegard that was accessible to a wide audience of readers, since much of the nonfiction written about her can be so difficult and dense.

It took me four years of intense writing and research to finish Illuminations. I completed a course on Medieval Studies at Lancaster University. I also read extensively in both English and German while listening to Hildegard's ethereal music.

In 2009, I embarked on a research tour to all the locations mentioned in the novel, from the ruins of Disibodenberg Monastery where Hildegard languished in the anchorage, to the site of Rupertsberg, the monastic house she founded for her nuns when life at Disibodenberg had become unbearable. Unfortunately Rupertsberg was completely destroyed in the Thirty Years War, but the location is still very beautiful and inspiring. Readers can see photos on my blog.

Hildegard's second monastery at Eibingen endured right up until the secularization in the early nineteenth century when it was torn down. However, the former convent church remains and is now

the Parish Church of Saint Hildegard, where Hildegard's relics are kept – her heart, her tongue, and her hair. A short distance away is the Abbey of Saint Hildegard, built in 1900, a flourishing Benedictine community and pilgrimage site where suitably enlightened nuns offer wine tasting (they grow their own vintage) and sell books on planting medicinal herbs by the phases of the moon.

Across the Rhine is the Hildegard Forum, also run by nuns who offer outreach for secular people who want to learn more about Hildegard, particularly her philosophy of holistic healing and nutrition. They manage a café/restaurant; offer seminars and retreats; and maintain an orchard and a medieval-style herb garden.
I visited Bermersheim, Hildegard's birthplace. Unfortunately nothing remains of her family home, but there's a statue of her in the churchyard, high on a hill, with views of lush, rolling vineyards. Not far away is Sponheim, her mentor Jutta's birthplace, where the ruins of Sponheim Castle still stand.

Hildegard's visionary theology is quite challenging and complex to understand. The works I found most helpful and illuminating were Barbara Newman's masterpiece, Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine and the more recent anthology Dr. Newman edited, Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World. Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings, edited by Shawn Madigan, C.S.J., was revelatory, as was Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop's translation of Hildegard's own Scivias.

DJNM: Your novel's first-person voice underlines how Hildegard's life and theology stresses an intense, emotional alliance with God as Mother. This approach has the effect of showing that women need not be seen as silent outsiders to divine revelation. Is it fair to say that in re-imagining and then sharing Hildegard's story you were aiming not only for a felicitous re-telling but a way of addressing the troubling absence of women from official Christian doctrine and tradition?

MS: Illuminations was absolutely my way of addressing the troubling absence of women from official Christian doctrine and

leadership. While writing this book, I kept coming up against the injustice of how women, no matter how devout they might be, are condemned to stand at the margins of established religion, even today. Pope John Paul II went so far as to call a moratorium on the mere discussion of women priests. Here in present-day England, women priests and bishops in the Anglican Church remain a source of controversy.

Modern women have the choice to wash their hands of organized religion altogether. But Hildegard didn't even get to choose whether to enter monastic life—she was thrust into an anchorage at the age of eight or fourteen, depending on which of the two conflicting Vitas you read. The Church of her day could not have been more patriarchal and repressive to women. Yet her visions moved her to create a faith that was immanent and life-affirming, which can inspire us today.

Hildegard's re-visioning of religion celebrated women and nature and even perceived God as feminine, as Mother. Her vision of the universe was an egg in the womb of God. Hildegard shows how visionary women might transform the most male-dominated faith traditions from within. And thus her legacy remains hugely important for contemporary women.

DJNM: In 2012, the year you published Illuminations, Pope Benedict XVI named Hildegard a doctor of the Church, and thus she was canonized – there are only three other women like her – for her intellectual as well as spiritual contributions to the Church. Your writings uphold Hildegard's enduring legacy. I see that you've used the HuffPost Religion site to outline "8 Reasons Why Hildegard Matters Now," for example, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit on that – how would you précis the legacy of this talented woman for the development of Christian thought and practice?

MS: I often think that Hildegard was a saint nine centuries in the making. The first attempt to canonize Hildegard began in 1233, but failed as over fifty years had passed since her death and most of the witnesses and beneficiaries of her reported miracles were deceased. Her theological writings were deemed too dense and difficult for

subsequent generations to understand and soon fell into obscurity, as did her music. According to Barbara Newman, Hildegard was remembered mainly as an apocalyptic prophet. But in the age of Enlightenment, prophets and mystics went out of fashion. Hildegard was dismissed as a hysteric and even the authorship of her own work was disputed. Pundits began to suggest her books were written by a man.

Newman states that Hildegard's contemporary rehabilitation and resurgence was due mainly to the tireless efforts of the nuns at Saint Hildegard Abbey. In 1956, Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, OSB, published a carefully documented study that proved the authenticity of Hildegard's authorship. Their research provides the foundation of all subsequent Hildegard scholarship.

In the 1980s, in the wake of a wider women's spirituality movement, Hildegard's star rose as seekers from diverse faith backgrounds embraced her as a foremother and role model. The artist Judy Chicago showcased Hildegard at her iconic feminist Dinner Party installation. Medievalists and theologians rediscovered Hildegard's writings. New recordings of her sacred music hit the popular charts. The radical Dominican monk Matthew Fox adopted Hildegard as the figurehead of his creation-centered spirituality. Fox's book Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen remains one of the most accessible and popular books on the 12th-century visionary. In 2009, German director Margarethe von Trotta made Hildegard the subject of her luminous film, Vision. And all the while, the sisters at Saint Hildegard Abbey were exerting their quiet pressure on Rome to get Hildegard the official endorsement they believed she deserved.

Pope John Paul II, who had canonized more saints than any previous pontiff, steadfastly ignored Hildegard's burgeoning cult, possibly because he was repelled by her status as a feminist icon. Ironically it was his successor, Benedict XVI, one of the most conservative popes in recent history—who, as Cardinal Ratzinger, defrocked Matthew Fox—finally gave Hildegard her due. Reportedly Joseph Ratzinger, a German, had long admired Hildegard.

I truly believe that Hildegard is a visionary whose time has come, on so many levels. In our age, when many people feel estranged from organized religion and from its concept of a judgmental male

Godhead, Hildegard offers a holistic vision of faith, which encompasses the sacredness of nature, of womanhood, of human beings as the microcosm within the cosmic macrocosm. Hildegard's lesson for our time is that each one of us has our place in the divine order, in this beautiful symphony of life.

Today, as we face terrorism, gun violence, and an increasing sense of divisiveness in our society, we would do well to on meditate on Hildegard's visions of Caritas, or Divine Love, one of the faces of the Feminine Divine—Deus Caritas est. (God is Caritas) As Hildegard reveals in her visionary hymn, Caritas habundat in omnia, "Divine Love abounds in all things." Hildegard revels in this ecstatic vision of love, immanent in all creation, all humanity.

DJNM: Hildegard was the tenth child born to a noble family, and tradition obliged her parents to offer Hildegard as a 'tithe' to the church at an early age. Unusual visions of luminous substances dogged her every childhood move, though, and your novel renders her experience in ways mysterious and terrifying: "A shadow passing overhead made me glance up to see an orb come floating out of the sunlight. A ball of spun gold, yet as clear as glass. Inside grew a tree adorned with fruits as dazzling as rubies. The tree breathed in and out, as a living creature would. My doll tumbled from my arms as I reached out to clasp the heavenly orb when, like a bubble, it burst." Your Hildegard seldom doubts the divine origins of her visions, and this also appears true of the historical Hildegard, but what about you? In a 2015 blog entry for the "Feminism and Religion" website, you question the theory that she suffered from migraines. You say: "One thing we do know is that Hildegard lived in an age of faith. She and those around her sincerely believed her visions were real. Hildegard's revelations of the Feminine Divine and of divine immanence in the natural world make her so relevant for us today. Her authority as a Doctor of the Church rests in her epic trilogy of visionary theology, not in any catalog of physical symptoms." Can you share more of your thoughts about Hildegard, neuroscience, and visionary religious experience(s)?

MS: In his book Migraine, first published in 1970, neurologist Oliver Sacks put forward his theory that Hildegard's visions and the debilitating chronic illnesses she suffered throughout her life can be attributed to migraines. In Scivias, Hildegard describes being bedridden while she received the divine command to write and speak about her visions. Sacks maintains that the symptoms she describes are identical to those of migraine sufferers. He also states that the concentric rings of circles in the illuminations of her visions are reminiscent of a migraine aura.

Critics of this theory will point out that Hildegard, in her medical treatise Causae et Curae, described the migraine in detail but never connected this diagnosis to herself. Moreover she herself did not paint the illuminations that illustrated her visions. So the rings of light could be the illuminator's stylistic interpretation and unrelated to any alleged visual hallucinations on Hildegard's part.

Thus, the migraine theory remains speculative. In our hyper-rationalistic age, I think we are too hasty to 'diagnose' historical figures with readily identifiable conditions—i.e., 'Mozart was autistic.' Feminists will also point out the tendency of male medical experts to dismiss visionary women by pathologizing them as hysterical, hallucinatory, or mentally ill.

To understand Hildegard as a visionary theologian, I think we need to at least try to make that leap of faith and put ourselves in the mind frame of a time and a place that believed that visionary experience was real and divine.

Meanwhile the field of neuroscience has evolved significantly in the forty-six years since Sacks published his migraine theory. New studies provide a tantalizing 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' answer to this dialectic between mystic experience and perceived pathology. In their book How God Changes Your Brain, neuroscientists Andrew B. Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman discuss how the brain scans of nuns engaged in contemplative prayer seem to indicate that regular spiritual practice can literally rewire our neural pathways and change our entire experience of what we call reality. I'm certainly no saint or visionary, but my regular practice of centering prayer and meditation had opened me to sublime experiences I hadn't imagined possible.

Perhaps neuroscientists would argue that Hildegard's brain was differently wired from birth. And yet her mystical experience would be meaningless to us today had she not channeled her visionary inspiration into her music and theology.

DJNM: At the tender age of eight Hildegard was sent to live with Jutta von Sponheim, and your novel captures the difficulties of this experience of being "walled in" to Jutta's anchorage, which was situated close to Disibodenberg's Benedictine monastery, in what is now Germany. Here, Hildegard spends thirty years living an unsmiling life for the Lord, or so it seems, before she finds herself elected to church leadership. The luminous visions, "a face bathed in tenderness, the Mother of my deepest longing," persisted: "You are the seed. The anchorage is the husk. Here you will grow and grow until you grow too large for this place and then it will burst and you will step forth." How does Hildegard's Disibodenberg experience help her grow? The monastery's music and library influence her, as you make clear, and Hildegard's robust theology of creation seems inextricably tied to Disibodenberg's spiritual ecology of place (aka: the worts and weeds that grow in as well as around the monastery's nearby woodland and meadow). Thoughts?

MS: I was particularly struck by the pathos of Hildegard's early life. A modern child who claimed to see visions would probably be sent to a neurologist, diagnosed with some affliction, and put on medication. But Hildegard, being a child of her time, was offered up to a monastery and bricked into an anchorage!

Guibert of Gembloux's Vita Sanctae Hildegardis describes this anchorage in the bleakest terms, using words like "mausoleum" and "prison," and writes how these girls died to the world to be buried with Christ. As an adult, Hildegard strongly condemned the practice of offering child oblates to monastic life, but as a child she had absolutely no say in the matter. The anchorage was situated in Disibodenberg, a community of monks. What must it have been like to be among a tiny minority of young girls surrounded by adult men?

It seemed like such a hellish experience, one that might have completely destroyed a person. I think Hildegard must have been very strong and resilient, even as a child, to endure it. I tried to put myself into her head and imagine her feelings of absolute loss, despair, and bewilderment tempered by the transcendent solace offered by her visions and the opportunity to get an education and read the books that were her great mental escape. I imagined that she was so hungry for beauty that she would seize upon any fleeting wonder that came her way, even a leaf blown down from a tree into her walled courtyard or the sound the Nahe River rushing past the monastery promontory.

I think Hildegard was able to survive the horrors of the anchorage because she based her spirituality not on suffering and self-mortification, as her magistra, Jutta, did, but because she embraced the immanent sacredness of life.

Hildegard spent thirty years interred in her prison, her release only coming with Jutta's death. What amazed me was how she was able to liberate herself and her sisters from such appalling conditions. At the age of forty-two, she underwent a dramatic transformation, from a life of silence and submission to answering the divine call to speak and write about her visions she had kept secret all those years. Ironically the anchorage that was her prison also provided her with an education and literacy, an unusual privilege for women—and for most secular men—of her era. Had she led a secular life, she probably would not have made history.

DJNM: "Encircling all this was a ring of flame, the holiness of God, my Mother, blazing everywhere. Our abbot and prior preached that God was above all things, and yet my vision told me that God was in all things, alive inside every stone and leaf." Further: "Reverence overwhelmed me as I knelt to cradle a sweet violet, so pulsing with holiness that I was almost afraid to sever the plant from its roots." On the subject of creation and divine immanence, your Hildegard appears to instantiate a Christian feminist mysticism, which is to say: Hildegard is a woman whose panentheistic vision sees all created realities connected together and unfurling within the all-embracing, enveloping Mother Love of God. Do you recognize your protagonist and her overlay in this description? And if so, might this panentheistic

feminist mysticism serve as a hope-filled sign for the contemporary Church?

MS: Although Hildegard was a woman of her time and not a feminist in today's sense (she never advocated women priests, for example), her visions of the Feminine Divine and of Viriditas, the sacred manifest in nature, have made her a pivotal figure in modern feminist spirituality.

And, yes, I certainly think this is a hope-filled sign for contemporary seekers of all faith traditions. According to a 2015 Pew Study, more Americans are drifting away from organized religion, which is often perceived—particularly by millennials—as authoritarian and out of touch with today's reality. Twenty-three percent of adult Americans report that they have no religious affiliation at all. And not of all of these 'Nones' are atheist or agnostic. Some believe in God, but reject dogma and established religion. And there seems to a parallel trend of people becoming more spiritual, of people reporting deep experiences of spiritual peace and wonder. I believe that many people today are seeking an immediacy in spiritual experience rather than cold, clinical dogma about a distant God. For Hildegard God was not cold and distant, but immanent reality, the Living Light dwelling inside us and the entire natural world. I believe her teachings address the disillusionment that many people today are experiencing in regard to religion and faith.

Hildegard's concept of Viriditas, or greening power, is her revelation of the animating life force manifest in the natural world that infuses all creation with moisture and vitality. To her, the divine was manifest in every leaf and blade of grass. Just as a ray of sunlight is the sun, Hildegard believed that a flower or a stone was God, though not the whole of God. Creation revealed the face of the invisible creator. Hildegard celebrated the sacred in nature, something highly relevant for us in this age of climate change and the destruction of natural habitats: I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon and stars . . . . I awaken everything to life. Hildegard von Bingen, Liber Divinorum (Book of Divine Works).

Hildegard's philosophy of Viriditas went hand in hand with her celebration of the Feminine Divine. Hildegard said that she could only bear to look upon divinity in her visions if God appeared to her in feminine form. Her visions revealed God as a cosmic egg, nurturing all of life like a womb. Masculine imagery of the creator tends to focus on God's transcendence, but Hildegard's revelations of the Feminine Divine celebrated immanence, of God being present in all things, in every aspect of this greening, burgeoning, and blessed world.

According to Barbara Newman's book Sister of Wisdom, Hildegard's Sapientia, or Divine Wisdom, creates the cosmos by existing within it:

> O power of wisdom!
> You encompassed the cosmos,
> Encircling and embracing all in one living orbit
> With your three wings:
> One soars on high,
> One distills the earth's essence,
> And the third hovers everywhere.
> Hildegard von Bingen, O virtus sapientia.

DJNM: I want to ask about your novel's other characters, individuals like Rorich, Hildegard's brother; Volmar, the monk who befriends and remains loyal to Hildegard after she leaves Disibodenberg and establishes her convent in Bingen; and, Richardis, a young woman who comes to voice, quite literally, with Hildegard's assistance. Such allies inspire Hildegard to attempt and then finish her first writing, Scivas, which may best be translated "Know the Ways of the Lord." Even though it is tested from time to time, their companionship helps Hildegard grasp 'the ways of the Lord,' no?

MS: The bond between Hildegard and her brother, Rorich, her childhood companion, is irrevocably shattered when she enters the anchorage as an eight-year-old oblate. The rigid gender roles of their age force both siblings into a straightjacketed existence, not of their choosing. While Hildegard becomes an anchorite, Rorich, as the youngest son, is groomed to be a priest. In my novel, Rorich climbs the ranks of hierarchy and influence, eventually becoming canon of Mainz

Cathedral. (The historical Rorich was canon and priest at Tholey Abbey on the Saar River while her brother Hugo was canon of Mainz Cathedral.)

Bereft of her beloved brother, eight-year-old Hildegard finds solace in her burgeoning friendship with the young Volmar who becomes her lifelong confidant and supporter. Brother Volmar and Hildegard's much younger protégée, Sister Richardis von Stade, were absolutely pivotal for her. She might never have successfully written and finished Scivias without them. A thirteenth century illumination depicts Hildegard at work on Scivias while a monk and a nun attend and assist her. I like to think this is an attempt to capture the spirit of her collaboration with Richardis and Volmar.

Volmar acted as her secretary, taking down her dictation and helping to polish her Latin. He stood by her through every storm, even as she locked horns with their abbot. He might have been an author or theologian in his own right, but he selflessly sacrificed his own writing to serve Hildegard and her visions. His one surviving letter to Hildegard, written in 1170 when he feared her to be deathly ill, is filled with both reverence and tender affection. When Volmar died in 1173, Hildegard was devastated and deeply mourned his passing.

Hildegard's passionate bond with Richardis von Stade was much more complicated. Her letters to and about Richardis reveal the abbess at her most human and vulnerable. Only when it comes to Richardis does Hildegard seem to lose all self-possession and appear positively desperate to cling to her young friend who is called to become abbess in Bassum in northern Germany.

Alas, it's far too easy to misinterpret their relationship in an anachronistic light. In her otherwise gorgeously nuanced film Vision, Margarethe von Trotta portrays Hildegard in the throes of a painful midlife infatuation with a woman much younger than herself. This belies the fact of how long their relationship endured: Richardis closely supported Hildegard during the ten years it took her to write Scivias. When Richardis left Rupertsberg despite all Hildegard's attempts to prevent this, Hildegard sank into a pit of despair. Richardis later deeply regretted leaving. She even wanted to ask permission to return to Rupertsberg, only she died before this permission could be granted.

Hildegard's letter to Richardis's brother upon learning of her friend's death is a heartrending testament of love and grief.

Losing Richardis forced Hildegard to confront the darkest, most bullying and domineering side of her own personality, and then to transcend it and let her beloved friend go—first to Bassum and then to God. "God loved her more," Hildegard wrote to Richardis's brother, revealing both her anguish and her humility. Richardis taught Hildegard to "Know the Ways of the Lord" by surrendering ego, grasping, and control to Caritas, divine love.

DJNM: Like the historical Hildegard, your protagonist pens a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), one of the Middle Ages' most powerful and accomplished theologians, requesting his endorsement for her mysticism. Although he eventually recommends her work to Pope Eugenius, Bernard's initial response to Hildegard seems hasty, unhelpful even, and I wonder if here, with this uncomfortable exchange between two superior minds in the medieval intellectual realm, you want readers to sense and then problematize Christian theology's gendered conditioning and character?

MS: In Bernard of Clairvaux's defense, Hildegard caught him at a busy moment. Pope Eugenius had ordered Bernard to preach the Second Crusade so he probably deemed this more pressing than a letter from an unknown nun. But this certainly underlines the gender inequality of the time and how a nun's visionary experience, not all that dissimilar from Bernard's own visions of Mother Mary, could be brushed off as an inconvenient distraction from more important concerns. In truth, Hildegard was fortunate that Bernard deigned to reply to her letter at all.

Bernard was one of the most powerful men in the Church, arguably more influential than Eugenius himself, who had been Bernard's pupil. In her letter to Bernard, Hildegard goes out of her way to diminish herself so that she doesn't appear too prideful. Though she had been at work on Scivias for at least five years by this time, she acts as though she had kept her visions secret from all but her confessor Volmar until this very moment. She knew that she could never hope to publish her work without an endorsement from a high-ranking man

like Bernard. Worse still, she could be condemned as a heretic. And thus she portrays herself in the letter as an ignorant, feeble woman, an unwilling and unworthy recipient of divine visions.

In the twelfth century, it was a radical thing for a nun to set quill to parchment and write about weighty theological matters. Yet by diminishing herself as a woman while claiming to be God's unworthy mouthpiece, this "poor weak figure of a woman" triumphed against all odds to become—in our age if not her own—an even more influential and iconic figure than Bernard himself.

DJNM: Experience teaches me that those readers who immerse themselves in your novel, and then explore further, taking up Hildegard's own writings, soon become struck by her confident criticisms of her bishop, emperor, and Pope. What inspired Hildegard's self-possessed denunciations of political as well as ecclesial abuse(s)? And do you think there's a lesson here – a lesson for present-day Christians, women especially, when they feel beset by the darker dimensions of church and state?

MS: Hildegard 'got away' with her outspoken critique of her male superiors, both secular and ecclesiastical, because Pope Eugenius had proclaimed her a true prophet. She described herself as a "feather on the breath of God." Her prophetic voice came directly from God, she claimed, not from any power or worth of her own. Though Saint Peter claimed that woman was the weaker vessel, God might still choose to speak through a woman—the Old Testament is filled with female prophets. As strong and outspoken as Hildegard's criticisms were, they were tempered with her formulaic recitation of her female inferiority.

Yet, even with such self-deprecation, she still became embroiled in bitter controversy. Late in her life, she and her nuns were the subject of an interdict (a collective excommunication) when they refused to obey their archbishop's orders to disinter a supposed apostate buried in their abbey churchyard. They were then refused the sacraments, the Mass, and even forbidden to sing the Divine Office. Hildegard responded with her usual verve, informing her archbishop that if he denied them their appointed office to sing God's praises

(Hildegard believed that sacred song was the highest form of prayer), the archbishop would find himself in an afterlife destination where there was no music—i.e. hell! He eventually caved in and lifted the interdict, but only a few months before Hildegard's death. She nearly died an outcast.

There are many startling and poignant parallels between Hildegard's ordeal, so late in her life, and that of her modern day sisters, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), which represents 80% of the Catholic sisters and nuns in the United States, some 57,000 women who work in education, health care, social services, and parish ministries. Many of these women provide frontline services, such as homeless shelters and food pantries, to some of the poorest and most marginalized Americans. Under Pope Benedict, the same pontiff who canonized Hildegard and elevated her to Doctor of the Church, the sisters stood accused of "serious doctrinal problems" and of promoting "certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith." They were criticized for not vocally supporting the Church's official stance on contraception, same sex relationships, and women's ordination.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) placed the LCWR under the authority of Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of Seattle and ordered the sisters to rewrite their mission statement to reflect a more conservative ideology. If the sisters didn't comply, they risked losing their pensions and property. Yet instead of backing down, the LCWR issued a statement telling the CDF that they were wrong in their assessment. Meanwhile Catholics in all fifty states demonstrated in support of the nuns. In attacking the sisters, Benedict met his Waterloo. In February 2013 Benedict resigned from the papacy, citing a "lack of strength of mind and body." In April 2015, his successor, Pope Francis, brought the CDF's investigation of the nuns to a conciliatory end and thanked the nuns for their service.

"Women religious have changed," writes Sister Nancy Sylvester, I.H.M., in her essay "Into the Future" in America. "And that change is shaking the very foundations of what continues to be a Church seemingly caught in an earlier time and place." I believe the sisters of the LCWR are following in Hildegard's footsteps, leading the Church into an age of renewal.

DJNM: Riding in the forest with friends, Hildegard says: "Then I took a deep breath and raised my voice in song, leading the others in a canticle of praise. The soul is symphonic. Such is the sweetness of music that it banishes human weakness and fear, and draws us back to our original state of grace, reuniting us with heaven. All creation seemed to share our joy, the sky a pure and cloudless arc above our heads, the rising sun filling the leaves with gold." And music is "the first language of God," Hildegard later declares. How would you characterize theology's alliance with music? Have contemporary Christians lost Hildegard's sense that music gestures toward the Divine? Does Christian music, and perhaps Christian art in general, promote "dishonesty," as U2's Bono believes?

MS: For most people today, Hildegard is known best for her soaring ethereal music. The first composer for whom we have a biography, she composed seventy-seven sacred songs, as well as Ordo Virtutum, a liturgical drama set to music. Her melodies are completely unlike the plainchant of her era—or anything that has come before or since. Likewise her lyrics are highly original and feel fresh to us even today. She was the only twelfth century writer to compose in free verse.

A Benedictine superior, Hildegard and her nuns sang the Divine Office eight times a day. She believed that song was the highest form of prayer—the mystical power of music reunited humankind to the ecstasy and beauty of paradise before the fall, connecting the singer directly with the divine, and joining heaven and earth in a great celestial harmony.

Singing the divine praises was absolutely central to Hildegard's identity as a nun. "There is the music of heaven in all things," she wrote. "But we have forgotten to hear it until we sing."

I would definitely agree with Bono that much of Christian music today feels "dishonest" in that it often seems so saccharine and superficial. Cloying. Though I love the reforms of Vatican II, I find it a deep pity that the Catholic Church to a large extent has abandoned its centuries-long history of sacred music and polyphony for the dreaded guitar Mass.

Are we to live our lives severed from the kind of music that can truly feed our souls? What can we do to reclaim the power of sacred song in our own lives? Most of us lead busy lives and the stillness of a monastic lifestyle remains an impossible dream. Yet we might find sung devotions at morning and twilight to be deeply enriching. We might start by listening to recorded music that inspires us. From my own practice, I've discovered that Hildegard's music deeply enhances contemplative practice. It soothes the soul and draws the heart and mind to a higher place. Even though songs in Medieval Latin can feel challenging, Hildegard's hymns nourish my soul far more than most contemporary liturgical music.

When teaching a Hildegard seminar at Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality in Saint Paul, Minnesota, my co-presenter Gabriel Ross and I were joined by Katy Taylor, from the vocal ensemble Anima—I highly recommend Anima's Circle of Wisdom CD of Hildegard's music. Katy brought a harmonium and led us all in call and response singing of Hildegard's Caritas abundat in omnia. The audience loved it and sang along enthusiastically! It was kind of like Christian kirtan. This sort of adaptation makes Hildegard's music accessible for amateur vocalists.

DJNM: "My heart pounding, I stood before the high altar. Midwinter sun poured through the windows to bathe the immaculately white altar cloth. I quaked as the brilliance dissolved into a vision of pure light. Embraced in its nimbus, I felt like a girl instead of a despairing old woman. The church, the entire outer world fell away. Before me I saw Ecclesia, crowned and resplendent, the true inner Church who would never shun my daughters or turn us away." Although your novel shows that Hildegard met tremendous opposition from the church leaders of her day, this end-of-life vision reveals that theology was an energetic, relevant feature of her soul. Any thoughts on how Christians should think theologically if they wish to be vital and pertinent to today's world?

MS: Hildegard was a passionate reformer. She fervently preached renewal in the Church—a deep grassroots renewal that took away the reins of power from a corrupt and self-serving Church

hierarchy. Her prophecies show us how a compromised Church might be renewed from within.

The Church of Hildegard's day was riven by papal schism, financial abuse, and sex scandals, and caught in a constant battle of supremacy with secular powers. Hildegard did not trust the institutional Church to reform itself. Instead she envisioned this grassroots movement of visionaries and lay people returning to the purity of early Christianity in the age of the Apostles.

I believe that Hildegard's prophecies are coming true before our eyes as more and more Catholics—and Christians of all denominations—reject the dictates of an atrophying hierarchy in order to answer the call of their own faith and conscious.

We saw this when Hildegard's twenty-first century contemporaries, the sisters of the Leadership Council of Women Religious, stood accused of doctrinal errors and "radical feminism," and, under Pope Benedict's authority, faced disciplinary actions and an official investigation. American lay Catholics loudly denounced the Vatican and rallied around the nuns. In true Hildegardian fashion, the sisters stood their ground. Rather than submitting to discipline from on high, they insisted on dialogue. Finally, in April 2015, Pope Francis called an end to this modern day inquisition. He convened directly with four of the sisters in a respectful, cordial exchange, and expressed his gratitude for their work for social justice.

More than any other recent pontiff, Pope Francis seems to embody Hildegard's call to humility and renewal. Six months into his papacy, he declared that the Roman Catholic Church was too "obsessed" with abortion, same-sex marriage, and contraception. He chose not to talk about these issues. Instead he called for the Church to focus on the fundamental message of Christianity—redemption in Christ and loving service to the needy. He called for a more inclusive Church, reached out to the gay community, and pushed for action on climate change. Most significantly in line with Hildegard's vision, he announced in 2015 that he intended to decentralize power, stating that the Vatican must now collaborate with local dioceses and lay people, particularly women. But in terms of gender equality, the Catholic Church still has a very long way to go. For Christianity to be relevant

for us today, woman must take their places alongside men and not be pushed to the margins.

And yet the tide is definitely turning. As the National Catholic Reporter states, the "narrow versions of Catholic identity and notions of what religious life should constitute are fast becoming history."

DJNM: Historical narrative has long promised literary lessons for readers, and the genre is enjoying a boom, yet what insights do you think Christian readers can draw on (when reading such work) for their own storied and spiritual lives?

MS: Fiction touches our spirit in a way that film, television, and even art cannot, for instead of presenting the passive viewer with a visual image, good storytelling demands our participation and co-creation. The words become the springboard for our own imagined vision of other worlds and other lives. In this imagined space, we can experience profound insights and revelations—soul-growing experiences we carry with us forever.

Good historical fiction makes history come alive. It can transform the lives of saints from stuffy, self-consciously pious hagiographies into moving stories of men and women who faced the same challenges and self-doubt we face, the same human foibles, and yet who found a way through suffering by following the path of spirit. These people forged a path the rest of us might follow.

Saints and holy people are essentially human, just like us. We all have the potential to follow that path and let ourselves be inspired. As flawed as we might believe ourselves to be, we are all called to rise to our highest purpose. We can all make a difference. We all receive the divine call to adventure on our sacred hero's journey.

I think this might explain the huge popularity of *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir of her 21st century pilgrim's quest, post-divorce. She didn't come off the least bit holier-than-thou, but presented herself, warts and all, as a seeker like the rest of us, with more questions than answers.

DJNM: You are not the only writer to use the novel's form to explore the merits and demerits of selected historical theologians. Are you familiar with other attempts to present medieval and Renaissance Christian thinkers in fiction, stories such as Louis de Wohl's The Quiet Light: A Novel about Saint Thomas Aquinas, Antoine Audouard's Farewell, My Only One [Abelard and Heloise], Ralph Milton's Julian's Cell [Julian of Norwich], and Joan Mueller's Francis: The Saint of Assisi, for example? If so, what do you make of such novels, and why do you think attempts at "faith and fiction" are proving popular with today's readers?

MS: I haven't read those books you mentioned, but I think that good fiction brings these eminent individuals vividly to life for a modern audience in a way that a 500 page theological tome might not. Compelling fiction can make us care about these people in a way that then motivates us to tackle that 500 page tome.

At readings and literary events, I've been approached by so many people who thanked me for writing a book that made Hildegard, her philosophy, and her world so accessible to them. I get Hildegard fan emails all the time, years after the publication of Illuminations. It's so moving and humbling to hear that my novel has inspired my readers.

The "faith and fiction" books that have deeply inspired me include Anita Diamant's The Red Tent, Rebecca Kanner's Esther, Nicola Griffith's Hild (inspired by the early life of Saint Hilda of Whitby), Richard Zimmer's The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon, Louise Erdrich's The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, Alice Hoffmann's The Dovekeepers, and Gita Mehta's A River Sutra.

Most of these books are written by women. Too often both religion and spirituality have been interpreted by and for men, but when women reveal their spiritual truths, a whole other landscape emerges, one we haven't seen enough of. These books transported me to completely new territory.

DJNM: Hildegard fascinates artists, and some of them are novelists and musicians that I feel sure you know, so I'm curious about your take on everything from the Anonymous 4 recording of The

Origin of Fire to Barbara Lachman's The Journal of Hildegard of Bingen: Inspired by a Year in the Life of the Twelfth-Century Mystic. Is Hildegard everyone's secret passion these days?!

MS: I think she is, and for good reason! I haven't read Barbara Lachman, but maybe I should. I adore all the Anonymous 4 recordings of Hildegard's music. But my very favorite Hildegard CD is The Dendermonde Codex by Dous Mal on the Etcetera label. I bought it in Belgium and hope it's available in the U.S.

I believe Hildegard is so hugely popular because her theology, philosophy, and creative output are so complex and multi-stranded that her work and life continue to inspire very diverse groups of people, from conservative Christians to feminist theologians to the New Age spiritual-but-not-religious audience to medievalists to music geeks. People of all backgrounds seem to be fascinated by her.

Between her music, her visions of Viriditas and the Feminine Divine, her work as a reformer, her holistic medicine, her studies on botany and zoology and human sexuality, her courage and strength of character, and her belief that beer is most holy and pleasing to God – there's something to appeal to everyone. Particularly inspiring to many modern day women is the fact that Hildegard's immensely prolific creative career only began in midlife, at the age of forty-two. It's never too late to be a powerfrau!

DJNM: Where do you locate your fiction within contemporary literature? Also, what are you reading now? And what's next for you?
MS: To a large extent women have been written out of history. As a novelist, I'm on a mission to write strong women back into history and make their lives and work accessible to a modern audience.

My new novel, The Dark Lady's Mask: A Novel of Shakespeare's Muse, published in April 2016, also draws on religious themes. It's based on the life of England's first professional woman poet, Aemilia Bassano Lanier (1569-1645), a woman of Italian-Jewish origin who is believed by some to be the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

As a woman writing in England, Lanier was severely restricted in what she could write. The only literary genre deemed acceptable for

women was religious verse. Her female literary contemporaries, such as Mary Sidney and Anne Locke, wrote poetic meditations on the Psalms. But Lanier turned this tradition of women's devotional writing on its head with her epic poem Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, (Hail God, King of the Jews), which is nothing less than a vindication of the rights of women couched in religious verse. Salve Deus lays claim to women's God-given call to rise up against male arrogance, just as the strong women of the Old Testament, such as Judith and Esther, rose up against their oppressors.

The Dark Lady's Mask is Shakespeare in Love meets Shakespeare's Sister. It explores what happens when a struggling young Shakespeare who's not famous yet falls in love with a young woman poet of equal passion and genius.

My new work-in-progress, Ecstasy: A Novel of Alma Mahler, is about another accomplished, creative woman who was overshadowed by the men in her life. Once an aspiring young composer, Alma Schindler was celebrated as the most beautiful girl in Vienna. The great Gustav Mahler fell in love with her at first sight, but it was Mahler's demand that Alma give up composing as a condition of their marriage that gave rise to her shocking and radical transformation. From the ashes of her own self-abnegation arose a woman who refused to choose between freedom and love, and who insisted on living life on her own terms. An often transgressive and controversial figure, fueled by ecstatic, hypnotic power, Alma brought the most eminent men of an era to their knees—the goddess they yearned for but could never ultimately possess.

Right now I'm reading The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance, a fascinating and haunting family memoir by Edmund de Waal, tracing a collection of Japanese netsuke ornaments handed down from his great-great grandfather's relative, Charles Ephrussi, in belle époque Paris. An art collector and aesthete, Ephrussi became a model for Proust's Charles Swann in Remembrance of Things Past. Over time the netsuke made their way to Vienna and finally to England. But it's primarily a moving saga of a Jewish extended family's rise to wealth and influence before the tragedies they suffered under the Nazis.

End Notes

1. Mary Sharratt, Illuminations: *A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 4. For details, see Mary Sharratt's website: http://marysharratt.com/main/ (Accessed 9/23/2016). I acknowledge the gracious and diligent support of my student assistant, Kelli Pedersen, on an early iteration of this interview.

2. Mary Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill: A Novel* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).

3. On Mother Demdike's charms, see: http://marysharratt.com/main/?page_id=34 (Accessed 9/23/2016).

4. *Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love*, translated by Elizabeth Spearing; with an Introduction and Notes by A. C. Spearing, (London and New York: Penguin, 1998).

5. Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle, or, The Mansions*, translated by John Dalton (London: Thomas Baker, 1893).

6. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe: A New Translation*, translated by John Skinner (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1998). Also see Meister Eckhart: *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*, translated and edited by Maurice O'C Walshe; revised with a foreword by Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

7. On Sharratt's research trip to pilgrimage sites associated with Hildegard, see: http://marysharratt.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/research-trip-to-bingen-germany.html (Accessed 9/23/2016).

8. Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Also see Barbara Newman, editor, *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Shawn Madigan, editor, *Mystics, Visionaries, and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); and, *Hildegard of Bingen, Scivas*, translated by Columba Hart and Jane Bishop; introduction by Barbara Newman; preface by Caroline Walker Bynum (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

9. Sharratt, Illuminations, 26, 49-50, 81, 104, 150, 155.

10. On Pope Benedict's Apostolic Letter, see https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen.html. (Accessed 9/23/2016).

11. On Sharratt's eight reasons, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-sharratt/8-reasons-why-hildegard-matters-now_b_2006626.html (Accessed 9/23/2016)

12. Barbara Newman, "St. Hildegard, Doctor of the Church, and the Fate of Feminist Theology," in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 13.1 (Spring 2013), 36-55. Also available at: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/506663 (Accessed 9/23/2016).

13. Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, 1985).

14. Sharratt, *Illuminations*, 3-24.

15. Ibid., 3.

16. On Hildegard and migraines, see Sharratt's commentary: https://feminismandreligion.com/2015/07/08/were-hildegards-visions-caused-by-migraines/ (Accessed 9/23/2016).

17. Oliver W. Sacks, *Migraine: Understanding a Common Disorder*, expanded and updated edition (London: Pan, 1985).

18. Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

19. Sharratt, *Illuminations*, 19-134.

20. Ibid., 26, 27; also see 44-45, 47-50, 52, 66, 73, 81, 97, 100, 104-105, 124.

21. Ibid., 81.

22. Ibid., 140.

23. On the 2015 Pew Study, see: http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/ (Accessed 9/23/2016).

24. Sharratt, *Illuminations*, 35-49, 51, 56, 61, 64, 77-80, 84-85, 88, 91, 111, 122, 128, 130-144, 148-150.

25. Ibid., 153.

26. Hildegard of Bingen, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, translated by Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

27. *Sharratt,* Illuminations, 165-179.

28. Ibid., x-xiv, 52, 73, 97, 104, 124-134, 147-153, 155, 163-164, 170, 214, 223, 254-258.

29 On Sylvester's article, see http://americamagazine.org/issue/5146/100/future (Accessed 9/23/2016).

30. Sharratt, *Illuminations*, 208.

31. Ibid., 247.

32. On Bono's reflections on contemporary Christian music, see http://www.christiantoday.com/article/bono.why.isnt.christian.music.more.honest/84978.htm Accessed June 26, 2016.

33. In the religious traditions of South Asia, a kirtan is a musical form of storytelling.

34. Sharratt, *Illuminations*, 264-265.

35. See: https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/editorial-hierarchys-flaws-persist-despite-collegial-end-lcwr-investigation (Accessed 9/23/2016).

36. Mart Sharratt, *The Dark Lady's Mask: A Novel of Shakespeare's Muse.* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).