

Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and  
The Tradition of Affective Piety

by

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For Dennis

“Thus was I lerned that love is oure lordes mening.”

(Julian of Norwich)

## Abstract

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The writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe attest to a common origin in the medieval devotional tradition known as affective piety. Chapter One suggests that to read either Kempe or Julian is to see the influence of this tradition in the affective responses of both writers to the passion of Christ in particular and to the “homely” love of God in general. In Chapter Two it is argued that Kempe’s record of her protagonist’s intimate encounters with the divine and of her various spiritual gifts speak to an effort to produce a work of auto-hagiography. As Chapter Three demonstrates, however, the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich takes the form of a theological treatise in which Julian addresses the retributive theodicies of Augustine and his medieval successors and seeks to offer her readers comfort and hope by assuring them of the capaciousness of God’s love for humanity.

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## Introduction

In her provocative book entitled *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, Liz Herbert McAvoy refuses to compare the two authors who are the subject of both her study and the present one. McAvoy's refusal to compare the two writers originates in previous attempts to treat them in relation to one another, efforts which, according to McAvoy, have "usually left Margery wanting as the hysterical, hyperbolic, noisy and undignified renegade who fails to match up to the wisdom of the peaceful, serene woman of intellect and dignity which Julian is generally perceived to be."<sup>1</sup> This obstacle to a comparative analysis notwithstanding, McAvoy sees a purpose in treating Julian (ca.1343-after 1416) and Kempe (ca.1373-after 1439) within the confines of single study.<sup>2</sup> For example, although one was thirty years the senior of the other, the two writers were contemporaries who hailed from the same English county (Norfolk) and the same socio-religious background: in fact, according to Kempe, on one occasion the two women actually spent several days in one another's company talking about Kempe's spiritual life.<sup>3</sup> No less significantly, as McAvoy notes,<sup>4</sup> both Kempe and

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<sup>1</sup> McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Because it is customary, after an initial citation using the full name, to refer to male authors by their surnames, critics have quite rightly taken to referring to Margery Kempe as Kempe. I have followed suit, even though I have no alternative but to call Julian by the given male name assigned to her at the time of her enclosure. We have no way of knowing what Julian's actual name was. The related issue of differentiating between Kempe the writer and Margery the character about whom she writes will be addressed later in this introduction.

<sup>3</sup> B.A.Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 77-79, Chapter 18. I propose to adopt the unusual practice of citing chapter numbers as well as page numbers when referring to both Kempe's text and Julian's. I do so because the chapter numbers will allow readers to locate the referenced material in editions and/or translations of the texts different from the translations used in this study. All quotations from *The Book of Margery Kempe* in this thesis will be taken from the Windeatt translation, hereafter referenced as Windeatt, *The Book*, followed by page and chapter numbers. Because most of the quotations and references will be to Book I of Kempe's text, I have not bothered to identify the chapters belonging to the first book; any references to chapters in the second book will be so designated—e.g., 277, Book II, Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 25.

Julian have won widespread recognition in recent years among literary scholars and theologians alike for their respective contributions to the developing tradition of religious writing in the vernacular during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Indeed, Julian is credited with authoring the earliest extant text in the English language known to have been written by a woman, Kempe with writing the first autobiography in the English tongue by a writer of either gender. Finally, as McAvoy observes, both Julian and Kempe qualify as members of what has come to known as the English Mystical Tradition, a largely fourteenth-century phenomenon encompassing *The Cloud of Unknowing* (author unknown), the work of Kempe and Julian, and the English and Latin writings of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton.

Understandably, it is within the context of this mystical tradition, whether or not such a “tradition” actually ever existed,<sup>5</sup> that the works of Kempe and Julian have traditionally been interpreted, repeatedly, as McAvoy has pointed out, to the detriment of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In his influential study entitled *The English Mystical Tradition*, for example, David Knowles argues that “[Kempe’s] book is not in any real sense a treatise on contemplation, and Margery herself, however interesting a figure she may be to the student of religious sentiment or psychology, is clearly not the equal of the earlier English mystics in depth of perception or wisdom of spiritual doctrine, nor as a

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Watson has grave doubts, explaining that it is anachronistic to apply the term *mystics* to the group of writers in question. According to Watson, moreover, even if these writers had thought of themselves as constituting an emerging tradition, Kempe and Julian would have been excluded from such a construct because of their gender. See Watson, “The Middle English Mystics,” 543-44. Denise N. Baker has argued that there is little evidence to suggest that Julian knew the works of Rolle, Hilton, or the *Cloud*-author. See Baker, “Julian of Norwich and the Varieties of Middle English Mystical Discourse,” 53-63.

personality can she challenge comparison with Julian of Norwich.”<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Riehle casts neither Kempe’s book nor her “personality” in any more compelling terms: “The fact that we are including Margery Kempe in our study needs some justification. For the excessive emotional piety of this wife of a citizen of Lynn shows pathologically neurotic traits. Nevertheless some of the mystical passages in her autobiography are of some value. The very fact that Julian, who had a conversation with her, considered her piety to be genuine, forces us to include Margery in our study.”<sup>7</sup> While some of this female stereotyping is clearly the result of misogynistic prejudice, it must be noted that women scholars are also guilty of having differentiated between Kempe and Julian in ways that are unflattering to the former: Julia Bolton Holloway, for example, has contended that St. Birgitta of Sweden “gave to these two other very disparate women, the hysterical Margery of Lynn and quiet Julian of Norwich, the same pattern for their lives, of women who could attain praise and respect . . . through their visions and their writings.”<sup>8</sup>

What critics of Julian and Kempe have repeatedly failed to recognize, it seems to me, is that there is as much to be said for being what McAvoy terms “a hyperbolic, noisy, and undignified [female] renegade” as there is for being “a peaceful, serene woman of intellect and dignity.” Kempe is not to be censured for being who she was or for seeking to do with her book something different from what Julian was hoping to accomplish with hers. Just as much to the point, neither is to be denigrated for doing with her text something different from what the male mystics of the English Middle Ages were hoping

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<sup>6</sup> Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, 139.

<sup>7</sup> Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Holloway, *Bride and Her Book*, 128.

to accomplish with the various treatises they authored; indeed, each of the latter is as different from the other as Margery's text is different from Julian's.<sup>9</sup> In short, as desirable a quality as it may be for critics like Knowles and Riehle, conformity is not a phenomenon to be expected in the work of the English mystics, be they male or female.

Hence it is that we are afforded the freedom to focus in this study on two works that are very different from one another. Once widely hailed as the first autobiography written in the English language, *The Book of Margery Kempe* has more recently come to be recognized as what Lynn Staley has termed a "sacred biography," a fictive narrative based in fact but featuring a character who is essentially a literary persona, as opposed to the actual historical figure known to her contemporaries as Margery Kempe.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, critics have taken to differentiating between the "Margery" of the text and the writer Kempe who tells Margery's story. Although the two are obviously related at several levels, I am less interested in the relationship between the historical and the fictional Margery Kempe than I am in what Kempe was attempting to do by telling Margery's story as she chooses to tell it. Indeed, I shall be arguing in Chapter 2 that, with the help of the priestly amanuensis who edited the first book of her text and recorded the second one, Kempe was engaged in producing what might best be regarded as a work of auto-hagiography, a *vita* or saint's legend drawing attention to the singular endowments of Margery, a woman whose life is that of a holy woman, if not already a saint in the

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<sup>9</sup> For a useful overview of the writings of the English mystics, see Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," 547-65. Also useful is Carolyn Dinshaw's discussion of the distinction between the tradition of 'negative' mysticism espoused by Hilton and the *Cloud*-author and the tradition of 'affirmative' mysticism embraced by Kempe, Julian, and Rolle. See Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe," 233-34.

<sup>10</sup> See Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, 37.

making. Although the question of who is actually telling Margery's story remains a vexed one, I am inclined to agree with Anthony Goodman and Lynn Staley that, despite the third-person narration, the voice we hear speaking in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is the voice of Kempe herself and not that of either of her amanuenses. I make this claim notwithstanding the fact that the second amanuensis occasionally makes his voice heard by inserting himself into the narrative for the purpose of lending credence to the claims being made about Margery's saintly attributes.<sup>11</sup> McAvoy concurs when she claims that "in spite of the scribe's transliteration of her oral text into the physical and written book, the text's literary focus remains within the spoken—and female—word as primary vehicle for the dissemination of its mystical content."<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting in this regard that when the second amanuensis undertakes the task of deciphering the transcription of his predecessor, he does so in close collaboration with Margery: the Proem informs the reader that "[the scribe] read over every word of it in this creature's presence, she sometimes helping where there was any difficulty" and that "she had nothing written but what she well knew to be indeed the truth."<sup>13</sup> In short, as much as her amanuensis may have assisted her in doing so, we are probably safe in assuming that it was Kempe who set about to produce what amounts to a saint's life featuring a fictionalized version of her life. If, indeed, this was the case, her purpose in telling Margery's story could hardly have

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<sup>11</sup> See Windeatt, *The Book*, 90-94, 191-93, Chapters 24 & 62; Goodman, 'The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter,' 347-49; Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 178. See also 200-201 for a compelling argument to the effect that the structure of Kempe's text speaks to the organizing principles of the oral voice.

<sup>13</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 36-37, Proem.

differed more from Julian's objective in recording her visionary experiences of May 13, 1373.

For the benefit of her fellow Christians, she tells us, Julian records her visions in two texts written, according to Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, "sometime between the mid-1370s and Julian's death more than forty years later."<sup>14</sup> As Watson and Jenkins have also observed, in the second and longer of these texts Julian succeeds in transforming herself from a participant in her story into an interpreter of it; in keeping with this objective, Julian succeeds in transforming her original record of her visionary experiences into "a work with no real precedent: a speculative vernacular theology."<sup>15</sup> As far removed from the world of auto-hagiography as a work of speculative theology may seem, there remains good reason to consider *The Showings* of Julian of Norwich in relation to *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Although the similarities are perhaps more readily apparent in the case of what is usually referred to as the Short Text, even the Long Text<sup>16</sup> betrays Julian's deep indebtedness to what Denise Nowakowski Baker has described as "the range of later medieval devotional attitudes, practices, and rhetoric

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<sup>14</sup> Watson and Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 1. Elsewhere, Watson argues that the Short Text was composed between 1382 and 1388 and the Long Text sometime in the early fifteenth century. See Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," *Speculum* 68 (1993) : 637-83. Colledge and Walsh argue that Julian wrote the Short Text shortly after her visionary experiences in 1373 and revised it into the Long Text in two stages, the first beginning in 1388 and the second in 1393. See Colledge and Walsh, eds., *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols, I: 18-25.

<sup>15</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Although Watson and Jenkins differentiate between these two texts by naming the shorter one *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and the longer one *A Revelation of Love*, I have elected to stick with the traditional designations Short Text and Long Text because I see them as two versions of the same work. For the purposes of the thesis, I shall be quoting from Colledge and Walsh, trans., *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, hereafter referred to as Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, followed by page and chapter numbers. Unless designated as coming from the Short Text, all textual references in the thesis will be to the Long Text.

collectively referred to as affective spirituality,<sup>17</sup> or, as the phenomenon is more commonly known, affective piety. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in the chapter to follow, Kempe was no less indebted to, and no less a product of, this devotional tradition than Julian was.

## Chapter One

*“The Passyon of Crist sleth me!”* (Margery Kempe)

### The Tradition of Affective Piety

To no small degree, the ongoing persecution to which Kempe tells us that her protagonist is repeatedly subjected consists of nothing more than a litany of annoyed responses to the dramatic emotional outbursts for which Margery has become famous, if not infamous. Although some of them take place in private, many of Margery’s bouts of weeping and loud crying take place in public, often in church, and invariably to the annoyance of the presiding clergy and/or Margery’s fellow worshippers. One such episode is triggered during a Good Friday service as Margery finds herself contemplating the events of the passion:

Her mind was drawn wholly into the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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 and crucified with her bodily eye, which sight and

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<sup>17</sup> Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book*, 20.

spiritual beholding worked by grace so fervently in her mind, wounding her with pity and compassion, so that she sobbed, roared, and cried, and spreading her arms out wide, said with a loud voice, ‘I die, I die,’ so that many people were astonished at her and wondered what was the matter with her.<sup>18</sup>

This astonishment is no doubt increased in the case of the priest who carries Margery out of the church and into the Prior’s Cloister, where “she turned all blue like lead, and sweated dreadfully.” To use McAvoy’s adjectives, as “hyperbolic, noisy, and undignified” a performance as it may be, this account of Margery’s very emotional response to the passion merits comparison with Julian of Norwich’s expressed desire for precisely the same kind of religious experience.

Although she admits to having had occasional “feelings” about the events of passion, Julian tells us at the outset of her text that, prior to the visions shown to her in May of 1373, she had long prayed for a participatory and affective experience of Christ’s suffering comparable to that described by Margery: “Therefore I desired,” declares Julian, “a bodily sight, in which I might have more knowledge of our saviour’s bodily pains, and of the compassion of our Lady and of all his true lovers who were living at that time and saw his pains, for I would have been one of them and have suffered with them.”<sup>19</sup> In short, Julian’s hope is that a vision (“a bodily sight”) of the passion will afford her the

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<sup>18</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 179, Chapter 57.

<sup>19</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 178, The Second Chapter. As Karma Lochrie has observed, this desire to share in Christ’s suffering is echoed later in Julian’s text when she expresses the desire that “my body might be filled full of recognition and feeling of his blessed Passion. . . for I wished that his pains might be my pains.” Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 180, The Third Chapter; Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 34.

same experience of compassion for Christ's suffering that Margery experiences when meditating on the subject.

When Julian goes on to express the hope that such compassion will lead her to feel contrition for her sins and increase her longing for God, she is speaking directly to the tenets of affective piety, a medieval devotional tradition whose aim, as Clarissa W. Atkinson declares, "was not so much to teach doctrine or offer formal worship as to move the heart of the believer."<sup>20</sup> Atkinson's claim is reminiscent of Rosemary Woolf's contention that the purpose of the Middle English passion lyric, a literary form also originating in the affective tradition, was "to persuade the average Christian to ponder and *feel* (my emphasis) what he already believes."<sup>21</sup> What the late medieval Christian believed, of course, was the satisfaction theory of salvation as proposed by Anselm of Canterbury at the end of the eleventh century, a soteriology that, as Baker has claimed, "plac[es] the humanity of Christ at the center of the salvific drama."<sup>22</sup> The Son of God is able to redeem humanity, Anselm argues, by taking on our human nature:

For, it was appropriate that, just as death entered the human race through a man's disobedience, so life should be restored through a man's obedience; and that, just as the sin that was the cause of our damnation originated from a woman, similarly the originator of our justification and salvation should be born of a woman. Also that the devil, who defeated the man whom he beguiled through the taste of a tree,

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<sup>20</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 17.

should himself similarly be defeated by a man through tree-induced suffering which he, the devil, inflicted.<sup>23</sup>

It is the suffering endured by Jesus on the tree that is the focus of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and, according to Nicholas Watson, of his *Orationes Sive Meditationes*.<sup>24</sup>

The devotional practices encouraged by Anselm were to be embraced in the twelfth century by two Cistercians, Aelred of Rivaulx and the equally influential Bernard of Clairvaux.<sup>25</sup> Available to Julian and Kempe in both its original Latin and a Middle English translation dating from the fourteenth century, Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum* encouraged the practice of meditating "on things past" by imagining oneself a participant in the events of Christ's life, particularly the events of his passion.<sup>26</sup> As Baker has argued, Bernard of Clairvaux was equally enthusiastic about meditating on the events leading up to and including the crucifixion because he was persuaded that the compassion likely to be engendered by this meditative act would result in contrition for one's sins, a recognition of God's love for humanity, and a desire for union with God, temporally through meditation and, ultimately, in the beatific vision.<sup>27</sup> Bernard's sense of the rich benefits to be derived from contemplating Christ's humanity, and particularly his suffering, is to be discerned in the following extract from one of his sermons:

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<sup>23</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 268-69.

<sup>24</sup> Watson, "Middle English Mystics," 545.

<sup>25</sup> For an informative discussion of the contributions of Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux to the evolution of the tradition of affective piety, see Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 129-39.

<sup>26</sup> See Ayto and Barratt, eds., *Aelred of Rivaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum*, 39-51 for what Aelred has to say about meditating "on things past."

<sup>27</sup> See Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 25-27.

But as for me, whatever is lacking from my own resources I appropriate for myself from the heart of the Lord, which overflows with mercy. And there is no lack of clefts by which they are poured out. They pierced his hands and his feet, they gored his side with a lance, and through these fissures I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone—I can taste and see that the Lord is good.<sup>28</sup>

The practice of sucking “honey from the rock” by entering emotionally into the lives of Christ and his mother, and particularly into their respective sufferings, received further encouragement in four influential works of Franciscan piety dating from the thirteenth century: the *De Perfectione Vitae* and the *Lignum Vitae* authored by Bonaventure; James of Milan’s *Stimulus Amoris*, with which Kempe was familiar;<sup>29</sup> and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* attributed to Bonaventure but probably authored by Johannes de Calibus in the late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth century. Quickly translated into the different vernaculars of Europe, the manuscript history of the *Meditations* in England alone is testament to its influence on the tradition of popular piety into which Julian and Kempe were born: astonishingly, no less than seven adaptations of the text from Latin into Middle English still survive; as Baker has noted, moreover, the work was obviously also very popular in Latin, given that “more than a third of the surviving 113 copies of the Latin text of the *Meditationes*. . . were found in English libraries.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, sixty-first sermon on *The Song of Songs*, quoted by Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich, Autobiography and Theology*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 182, Chapter 58.

<sup>30</sup> Diane N. Baker, trans., *The Privity of the Passion*, 86. *The Privity* is one of the surviving Middle English adaptations of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Even more influential was Thomas Love’s vernacular redaction of the Latin text entitled *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* (ca. 1410), which Kempe is likely to have known and which Julian may have read towards the end of her life.

Like other examples of the literature of affective piety, the *Meditations* invited its readers or listeners to focus their devotions on the humanity and suffering of Christ and his mother during the passion:

With your whole mind you must imagine yourself present and consider diligently everything done against your Lord and all that is said and done by Him and regarding Him. With your mind's eye, see some thrusting the cross into the earth, others equipped with nails and hammers, others with the ladder and other instruments, others giving orders about what should be done, and others stripping Him.<sup>31</sup>

As Baker has noted, the imperatives and injunctions common in passages such as this one—*imagine, consider, see*—promote “a sense of immediacy” that invites identification with Christ and participation in his suffering.<sup>32</sup> The point of exercising the imagination and the heart in this fashion, of sharing imaginatively and affectively in the sufferings of Jesus and Mary, was, as Richard Rolle was to emphasize in the first half of the fourteenth century, a form of penance as well as a recognition of, and an expression of thanksgiving for, the divine love to which the incarnation speaks—indeed, shouts. Rolle addresses these two objectives of affective piety as eloquently as any of his predecessors in his influential *Incendium Amoris*, on which Kempe draws repeatedly, and, as its title might suggest, in his *Meditations on the Passion*, a popular work dating from the mid-fourteenth century that Kempe and Julian may both have known.

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<sup>31</sup>Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, trans., *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 333.

<sup>32</sup>Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 47.

As is the case with Rolle, the indebtedness of Julian and Kempe to the tradition of affective piety is to be readily discerned in the way the two writers respond to the humanity of Christ, and in particular to the circumstances surrounding his birth and death. In the infancy narratives making up Chapters 6 and 7 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for example, Margery imagines herself present at the birth of both Jesus and his mother, having taken on the role of maid and servant to both St. Anne and the Virgin Mary as each prepares for and embarks upon the experience of motherhood. As manuals such as the *Meditations* had instructed her to do, Margery imagines herself at the scene participating in events as they unfold:

And then the creature went forth with our Lady to Bethlehem and procured lodgings for her every night with great reverence, and our Lady was received with good cheer. She also begged for our Lady pieces of fair white cloth and kerchiefs to swaddle her son in when he was born; and when Jesus was born she arranged bedding for our Lady to lie on with her blessed son. And later she begged food for our Lady and her blessed child.<sup>33</sup>

In engaging in this kind of meditation, Margery is doing precisely what texts like the *Meditations* had instructed her to do:

Kiss the beautiful little feet of the infant Jesus who lies in the manger and beg his mother to offer to let you hold Him a while. Pick Him up and hold Him in your arms. Gaze on His face with devotion and reverently kiss Him and delight in Him

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<sup>33</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 53-54, Chapter 6.

. . . Then return him to his mother and watch her attentively as she cares for Him assiduously and wisely, nursing Him . . . and remain to help her if you can.<sup>34</sup>

Because they attest to one of her earliest attempts at engaging in the “high meditation and true contemplation” that Jesus himself had recommended to Margery,<sup>35</sup> Kempe’s infancy meditations are not particularly sophisticated. What makes them interesting for our purposes, however, is what they have to tell us about what Kempe apparently wanted her readers to know about Margery at this early stage of her biography—in particular, about the singularity of Margery’s relationship with Jesus and his mother. It is surely noteworthy, for example, that in Kempe’s meditation it is Margery, as opposed to the angel Gabriel, who informs Mary that she has been chosen to become the mother of Jesus. Mary responds to Margery’s announcement by saying that she wishes she “were worthy to be the handmaiden of her who should conceive the son of God.”<sup>36</sup> When Mary subsequently conceives, confirming the accuracy of Margery’s prophecy, Margery declares that she is no longer worthy to be Mary’s servant: “I am well pleased with your service,” Mary declares in response, a sentiment that is shortly to be echoed in the text by Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, who assures Margery that she is executing “[her] duty very well.”<sup>37</sup> As Gail McMurray Gibson has argued, Margery’s worthiness as a servant seems to have originated in Kempe’s desire to draw attention to the sanctity of her protagonist: “Margery has been chosen worthy handmaiden by St. Anne herself; it is *she* who has fulfilled the longing of Mary to be handmaiden of God’s handmaiden.

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<sup>34</sup> Ragusa and Green, *Meditations*, 38-39.

<sup>35</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 52, Chapters 5 & 6.

<sup>36</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 53, Chapter 6.

<sup>37</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 53, Chapter 6.

Indeed, since exaltation comes from service, Margery has, in a sense, out-humbled and out-performed the Virgin Mary herself by being not just handmaiden but handmaiden to the handmaiden.”<sup>38</sup> The arrival of the magi marks another attempt on Kempe’s part to draw attention to Margery’s singularity, although in this instance, the reader’s attention is directed to Margery’s gift of tears. At the arrival of the wise men, Margery “wept marvellously sorely” and, upon their departure, “she cried so grievously that it was amazing.”<sup>39</sup> This is a phenomenon that repeats itself when Margery thinks about the passion he will one day have to endure and compassionately swaddles the infant Jesus with her tears.<sup>40</sup>

To compare Margery’s infancy meditations with Julian’s spiritual vision of Mary at the moment of the annunciation is to witness two phenomena quite different in kind and purpose. Unlike Margery, who participates in her meditations, Julian takes on the role of observer or eye-witness and records only what she “sees” in a spiritual, as opposed to a bodily, vision of Mary. The essence of what Julian sees is Mary’s humility and her sense of wonder that she could have been the one selected to bear the messiah:

God showed me part of the wisdom and the truth of her soul, and in this I understood the reverent contemplation with which she beheld her God, who is her Creator, marvelling with great reverence that he was willing to be born of her who was a simple creature created by him. And this wisdom and truth, this knowledge of her Creator’s greatness and of her own created littleness, made her say very

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<sup>38</sup> Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 54, Chapter 7.

<sup>40</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 54, Chapter 7.

mekly to Gabriel: Behold me here, God's handmaiden. In this sight I understood truly that she is greater, more worthy, and more fulfilled, than everything else which God has created, and which is inferior to her. Above her is no created thing, except the blessed humanity of Christ, as I saw.<sup>41</sup>

To compare this revelation with Kempe's infancy meditations is to recognize that it tells us nothing about Julian other than what she has learned as a result of the showing. Unlike Margery, Julian does not take advantage of the moment to point out the singularity of her personal relationship with Jesus and/or his mother—for example, by appropriating the role of the Archangel Gabriel; instead, what Julian chooses to pass on to her readers is what the experience has taught her about Mary's simplicity and humility, about Mary's willingness to become God's handmaiden, and about the stature of God's mother in relation to the rest of creation. Julian's vision, in short, is all about Mary, whereas Kempe's infancy meditations have something to say about Mary but even more to tell us about Margery. Julian has two additional visions of Mary, one as she stands sorrowing at the foot of the cross and the other as she shares in the glory of her son's resurrection; in both instances, Julian's involvement in the revelation is again restricted to that of an observer.<sup>42</sup>

The same is true of Julian's memorable accounts of the passion which take the form of pictorial moments that Julian records in the way that a painting—or, to resort to anachronism, a photograph—is able to record for posterity an image captured in time and

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<sup>41</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 182, The Fourth Chapter.

<sup>42</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 210, The Eighteenth Chapter; 221, The Twenty-Fifth Chapter.

space.<sup>43</sup> Julian's First Revelation, for example, focuses on the specific moment when the crown of thorns is thrust on Jesus's head: "And at this, suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it was at the time when the crown of thorns was pressed on his blessed head."<sup>44</sup> In the continuation of this image a few chapters further on, we are afforded evidence of Julian's efforts to hone her descriptive skills by resorting to colour and the use of simile to revise her original text and render her revelations in even more graphic detail than she had seen fit to do when recording them initially. To the statement in the Short Text that she "saw the bodily vision of the copious bleeding of the head persist,"<sup>45</sup> Julian adds in the Long Text that "The great drops of blood fell from beneath the crown like pellets, looking as if they came from the veins, and as they issued they were a brownish red, for the blood was very thick, and as they spread they turned bright red. And as they reached the brows they vanished; and even so the bleeding continued until I had seen and understood many things. Nevertheless, the beauty and the vivacity persisted, beautiful and vivid without diminution."<sup>46</sup> Julian goes on at some length to compare the copious drops of blood to images drawn from everyday life: to a herring's scales and to drops of water falling from the eaves of a house during a rain storm.

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<sup>43</sup> Windeatt has compared Julian's revelations to pictures or photographs with "clearly defined edges"—i.e., a circumscribed field of vision. See Windeatt, "Julian of Norwich and her Audience," 9. Baker claims that "Julian's style achieves the intimacy of a photographic close-up." See Baker, *Julian*, 49. Watson has described the revelations as "a disparate series of glimpses of Christ's Passion." See Watson, "The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," 65.

<sup>44</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 181, The Fourth Chapter; cf. Short Text, 129, Chapter iii.

<sup>45</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, Short Text, 132, Chapter v.

<sup>46</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 187-88, The Seventh Chapter; Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 199, The Twelfth Chapter.

As might be expected, the ensuing revelations deal with “the diminution” of Christ’s handsome body as his suffering increases: in the Second Revelation, Julian witnesses the physical abuse to which Jesus was subjected—“contempt, foul spitting, buffeting, and many long-drawn pains”—and the discolouration of his face as it becomes caked with blood.<sup>47</sup> As Watson and Jenkins have noted, this occluded blood is quite different from the flowing blood seen in the first revelation.<sup>48</sup> With respect to the Fourth Revelation, it is again worth noting the graphic and evocative language to which Julian resorts in an effort to provoke an affective response on the part of her readers; notice, for example, the use of adjectives and adverbs in the following passage: “The *fair* skin was *deeply* broken into the *tender* flesh through the *vicious* blows delivered all over the *lovely* body, the *hot* blood ran out so *plentifully* that neither skin nor wounds could be seen, but everything seemed to be blood” (my emphasis).<sup>49</sup>

Critics like Elizabeth Robertson and Liz Herbert McAvoy have responded to such passages by making connections between the blood that flows so freely in Julian’s text and the female experience of the natural loss of bodily fluids during menstruation and childbirth.<sup>50</sup> His loss of blood and water during the crucifixion, they argue, feminizes Julian’s Christ and renders him an abject figure with whom Julian’s female readers would

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<sup>47</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 193, The Tenth Chapter; cf. Short Text, 136, Chapter vii.

<sup>48</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 156, n. to l. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 199, The Twelfth Chapter. Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 158, n. to l. 8 observe that “the revelation shows the bloody effects of the blows but nobody delivering them.” Perceptively, the editors go on to compare Julian’s technique to that of carvers of medieval cathedral bosses who sometimes depicted Christ’s tormentors “merely as a spitting mouth or a slapping hand with no bodies attached.”

<sup>50</sup> Robertson, “Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich’s *Showings*,” 154-55; McAvoy, *Authority*, 80-81. For a spirited response to Robertson’s article, see David Aers, “The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love*,” 79-104.

have been quick to identify. Although it is a line of reasoning that strikes me as strained, I am prepared to entertain the prospect of a feminized Christ in the first half of Julian's text because of the quite extraordinary lengths to which Julian goes in the second half to represent the second person of the trinity as a true Mother in nature, grace, and work. That said, I think the attempt to inscribe the feminine upon Julian's text has too often been taken to extremes. A case in point, I would suggest, is McAvoy's effort to illustrate the feminine hermeneutic at work in Christ's invitation to Julian to contemplate the wound in his side:

Now the open-bodied Christ invites Julian, as representative of all Christ's lovers on earth, to enter what amounts to a vagina-like wound in his side. In an extraordinary passage which shows none of the tentativeness in its use of sexualized imagery which characterizes the corresponding passage in the Short Text, Christ is defined in terms of the sexual female as he invites Julian to enter the wound/vagina as his lover in order to achieve union.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not he would have agreed with McAvoy's reading of the passage in question, Christopher Cannon has addressed both what he terms "the startling independence of Julian's thought" and the fact that most of the details comprising her revelations originate in the highly conventionalized traditions of affective piety: "her visions," Cannon claims, "can be read as co-ordinated and consistent responses to the kind of contemplation earlier treatises by monks recommended for enclosed women."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 167. For the passage in question, see Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 220, The Twenty-Fourth Chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Cannon, "Monastic Productions," 339.

Baker concurs that Julian was well steeped in the practice of affective meditation but takes the matter further by suggesting that, even in her use of language, Julian betrays an indebtedness to the tradition of affective piety: “By increasing the evidence of Christ’s physical distress through concrete details, Julian hopes to evoke her audience’s compassion in the manner of writers of meditative treatises on the Passion. The meditative tradition thus influences not only what Julian sees, but also how she chooses to report it.”<sup>53</sup>

The influence of this devotional tradition on Julian’s thinking and rhetoric is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the revisions she undertakes in the Long Text version of her Eighth Revelation, which deals with the “deep dying” of Jesus on the cross. In revising the Short Text account of the changing pallor of Jesus’s face as he dies, Julian becomes more specific in her use of colour: originally, Julian had reported that she “saw his sweet face as it were dry and bloodless, with the pallor of dying, then more dead, pale and languishing, then the pallor turning blue and then more blue, as death took more hold upon his flesh. For all the pains which Christ suffered in his body appeared to me in his blessed face, in all that I could see of it, and especially in the lips.”<sup>54</sup> In the Long Text, the blue turns to brown, the colour of decay—“and then the pallor turning blue and then the blue turning brown”—and, in an addition to the Short Text, the body itself “turned brown

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<sup>53</sup> Baker, *Julian*, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, Short Text, 141, Chapter x. Astutely, Watson and Jenkins note that Jesus’s lips here become an addition to the standard “tokens” of the Passion—the crown of thorns, the nails, the wounds in Christ’s hands, feet, and side, etc.—traditionally used during the Middle Ages as objects of contemplation in meditations and devotions; what is more, they argue, “visionary contemplation here focuses, not on the lips themselves, but on the process they undergo as Christ dies. The object of contemplation is generally static. Here, the lips are seen in time.” *The Writings*, 178, n. to l.5.

and black, completely changed and transformed from his naturally beautiful, fresh and vivid complexion into a shrivelled image of death.”<sup>55</sup> In a further expansion of the Short Text that is notable for its vividness and originality, Julian seeks to explain the drying-up of Jesus’s body and the suffering that accompanies this desiccation:<sup>56</sup>

For at the time when our blessed saviour died upon the Cross, there was a dry, bitter wind, I saw; and when all the precious blood that might had flowed out of his sweet body, still there was some moisture in the sweet flesh as it was revealed. It was dried up from within by bloodlessness and anguish, from without by the blowing of the wind and the cold, all concentrated upon Christ’s sweet body; and as the hours passed these four circumstances dried up Christ’s flesh. And though this pain was bitter and piercing, still it lasted a very long time. And this pain dried up all the vital fluids in Christ’s flesh. Then I saw the sweet flesh drying before my eyes, part after part drying up with astonishing pain.<sup>57</sup>

Less original than the drying-up passage perhaps, but certainly no less affective in its intention, is the following passage that occurs later in the same revelation. It, too, represents a significant expansion on its original in the Short Text and would seem to

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<sup>55</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 206, The Sixteenth Chapter. Although the changes to the Long Text almost certainly originate with Julian, it is worth noting that Birgitta of Sweden’s vision of the crucifixion describes Jesus’s body “as if black and blue and pale and very weak from the constant downward flow of blood.” See Harris, ed. *Birgitta of Sweden*, 189.

<sup>56</sup> Colledge and Walsh see the origins of this passage in either *The Privy of the Passion* or Rolle’s *Meditations on the Passion*, where Christ’s body impaled on the cross is compared to a piece of parchment stretched on a frame to dry: “Pi bodi is streyned as a parchemyn skyn upon the harowe”. I am not in the least convinced by this evidence and think we should instead attribute the drying-up metaphor to Julian’s originality of thought. See Colledge and Walsh, “Editing Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations*,” 412-13.

<sup>57</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 206, The Sixteenth Chapter.

speaking to the influence of the visual arts on Julian's imagination, particularly medieval paintings of the crucifixion, to which Julian herself makes reference at the beginning of the Short Text:<sup>58</sup>

The blessed body was left to dry for a long time, with the wrenching of the nails and the weight of the body; for I understood that because of the tenderness of the sweet hands and the sweet feet, through the great and cruel hardness of the nails the wounds grew wide, and the body sagged because of its weight, hanging there for a long time, and the piercing and scraping of the head and the binding of the crown, all clotted with dry blood, with the sweet hair attaching the dry flesh to the thorns, and the thorns attaching to the flesh.<sup>59</sup>

This description of the *Christus patiens*, a figure so familiar in the iconography of the Middle Ages, culminates with Julian's informing us that she finds the suffering she is enduring during this revelation to be greater by far than any pain she might ever have imagined: "And in all this time that Christ was present to me, I felt no pain except for Christ's pains; and then it came to me that I had little known what pain it was that I had asked, and like a wretch I regretted it, thinking that if I had known what it had been, I should have been reluctant to ask for it. For it seemed to me that my pains exceeded any

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<sup>58</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, Short Text, 125, Chapter i.

<sup>59</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 207, The Seventeenth Chapter. Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous draw attention to this moment because it "links an instrument of the Passion (the crown of thorns) and its principal human agent (Christ) as joint expressions of the divine purpose." See Fanous and Gillespy, "1349-1412: Texts," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, 141.

mortal death.”<sup>60</sup> From the perspective of the tradition of affective piety, of course, the pain which Julian experiences on this occasion is the whole point of entering vicariously into the events of the passion.

No less indicative of the tradition from which it springs is the ensuing revelation in which Mary demonstrates her compassion for Jesus’s suffering. Once again Julian appeals to the emotions and life experience of her audience, claiming that “as much as [Mary] loved him more than all others, her pain surpassed that of all others. For always, the higher, the stronger, the sweeter that love is, the more sorrow it is to the lover to see the body which he loved in pain.”<sup>61</sup>

Although Julian has three additional corporeal visions of the passion, two of them betray a less obvious indebtedness to the tenets of affective piety than the four bodily revelations considered thus far. The Ninth Revelation, which deals with the actual death of Jesus, is not the gruesome event we might expect it to be in light of what has preceded it, but a joyful, resurrection experience for both Jesus and Julian: “he changed to an appearance of joy. The change in his blessed appearance changed mine, and I was as glad and joyful as I could possibly be.”<sup>62</sup> After she is afforded a spiritual vision of Mary in glory, Julian is granted a second vision of the *Christus triumphans* in Revelation Twelve: the risen Jesus appears to her “more glorified than I had seen him before.”<sup>63</sup> Although

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<sup>60</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 209, The Seventeenth Chapter. It is interesting that this intense pain seems comparable to that described by those saints privileged to share in the stigmata. For a description of the stigmata pain, see Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, 94-95.

<sup>61</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 210, The Eighteenth Chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 215, The Twenty-First Chapter; cf. Short Text, 144, Chapter xii.

<sup>63</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 223, The Twenty-Sixth Chapter; cf. Short Text, 147, Chapter xiii.

more firmly rooted in the tenets of affective piety than her two revelations of Christ in glory, Julian's penultimate vision of the passion probably owes as much to the iconography of affective piety as it does to the kind of literary meditations to which attention has already been drawn. In this Tenth Revelation, Jesus reveals to Julian two details of the passion which, as Baker has suggested, were altogether conventional features of medieval paintings, manuscript illustrations, and sculptures related to the death of Christ on the cross.<sup>64</sup> In question here are the wound in Christ's side from which blood and water had flowed and a heart that has been split in two by a spear. Jesus describes the wound as "a fair and delectable place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved and will rest in peace and in love."<sup>65</sup> This is, of course, the same enclosure to which McAvoy has already directed our attention from an alternative perspective.

Unlike Julian's "snapshots" of disparate moments that occurred during the course of the passion, in Chapters 79-81 of her text Kempe affords us a series of "spiritual sights" which originated as individual meditations but which Kempe has combined to constitute a sequential narrative of the events leading up to and including the crucifixion.<sup>66</sup> Notable among these meditations is a very graphic account of the crucifixion itself which attests not only to Kempe's skill as a writer, but also to the fact

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<sup>64</sup> See Baker, *Julian*, 40-44.

<sup>65</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 220, The Twenty-Fourth Chapter. Worthy of comparison is a vision experienced by the Blessed Angela of Foligno in which Angela loses her powers of speech, the use of her limbs, and "entered at that moment within the side of Christ. All sadness was gone, and my joy was so great that nothing can be said about it." See Lachance, trans. *Angelo of Foligno: Complete Works*, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 231, Chapter 79: "Such spiritual sights she had every Palm Sunday and every Good Friday, and in many other ways as well, many years together."

that she was as determined as Julian was to awaken in her readers feelings of compassion for Christ's suffering:

Then she saw, with her spiritual eye, how the Jews fastened ropes on to the other hand—for the sinews and veins were so shrunken with pain that it would not reach to the hole that they had drilled for it—and they pulled on it to make it reach the hole . . . She straightaway saw them take up the cross with our Lord's body hanging on it, and make a great noise and cry; and they lifted it up from the earth a certain distance, and then let the cross fall down into a prepared mortise. And then our Lord's body shook and shuddered, and all the joints of that blissful body burst and broke apart, and his precious wounds ran down with rivers of blood on every side, and so she had ever more reason for weeping and sorrowing.<sup>67</sup>

If the memorable details in this passage relating to the nailing of Jesus's hands to the cross and to the destructive effects of dropping the cross into a prepared mortise suggest that Kempe was drawing upon the memory of a performance of the York Play of the Crucifixion,<sup>68</sup> it is interesting that her account of the scourging of Jesus would also seem to have its origins in an artistic rendering of the passion. In this instance, Kempe's inspiration would appear to have been a late-fourteenth century painted retable located in Norwich Cathedral. As Windeatt has noted, the retable in question contains a panel that

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<sup>67</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 233.

<sup>68</sup> On the matter of Kempe's indebtedness to the York Play of the Crucifixion, see Windeatt, *The Book*, 326, n. 4, n. 5, & n. 6. Windeatt speculates that Kempe and her husband had witnessed a production of the play during their visit to York in 1413. See also Claire Sponsler, "Drama and Piety: Margery Kempe," 138. It might be noted also that a comparable stretching of the body to accommodate drilled holes occurs in *The Privy of the Passion*, although in this instance it is the feet that do not match the nail holes. See Baker, *The Privy*, 93.

closely resembles in its details the essential elements of Margery's meditation on the scourging: in both the panel and the meditation, Jesus is depicted as having his arms tied above his head to a pillar while being struck by torturers wielding branched scourges.<sup>69</sup>

Another time she saw in her contemplation our Lord Jesus Christ bound to a pillar, and his hands were bound above his head. And then she saw sixteen men with sixteen scourges, and each scourge had eight tips of lead on the end, and each tip was full of sharp prickles, as if it had been the rowel of a spur. And those men with the scourges made a covenant that each of them should give our Lord forty strokes.<sup>70</sup>

If the two most graphic episodes in the passion meditations of Chapters 79-81 originated in artistic representations of the passion, one of them a play and the other a painted altar panel, it is not altogether surprising that Kempe should also have been inspired by the literature of the affective tradition. Indeed, we see this influence at work in Chapter 81 of Kempe's text, where the four meditations comprising the chapter betray a marked indebtedness to the *Meditationes vitae Christi*.<sup>71</sup> The meditations in question are those dealing with Margery's comforting Mary, with Mary's forgiving Peter for having abandoned Jesus after his arrest, and with Jesus's post-resurrection appearances to his mother and, subsequently, to Mary Magdalene.

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<sup>69</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 326, Chapter 80, n. 1. Although the *Meditationes* says simply that Jesus's hands were bound, *The Privity* specifies that they were bound behind his back. See Baker, *The Privity*, 91. The fact that Kempe's Jesus has his hands tied above his head thus strengthens the link to the altar panel.

<sup>70</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 231, Chapter 80.

<sup>71</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 326-27, notes to Chapter 81.

The meditation in which Margery seeks to comfort Mary is particularly interesting for our purposes because of the associations it calls up with the infancy narratives examined earlier in this chapter. In the passion meditation, Margery once again finds herself “an unworthy handmaid for the time”<sup>72</sup> to the Virgin Mary, this time doing what she can to comfort Mary in the sorrow she feels as the crucifixion draws nigh. Before the event, Mary is grief-stricken at the prospect of losing her son and asks that she might be spared such sorrow by dying before Jesus dies: “Then she saw his mother falling down in a swoon before her son, saying to him, ‘Alas, my dear son, how shall I suffer this sorrow, and have no joy in all this world but you alone? Ah, dear son, if you will die at any event, let me die before you and never suffer this day of sorrow, for I may never bear this sorrow that I have for your death.’”<sup>73</sup> Although no source for this meditation has ever been identified, it is a passage that merits comparison with the kind of dialogue that takes place in the *Stabat Mater* poems of the Middle Ages and in their English equivalents, the “*Stond wel, Moder, under rode*” lyrics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Note, for example, the following stanza from one of these lyrics in which Jesus asks his mother to let him get on with his salvific mission, a request to which Mary responds by expressing the same desire for death to which she gives voice in Margery’s meditation:

“Moder, mercy! Lat me deye,  
 And Adam out of helle beye,  
 And al mankynde that is forlorn.”  
 “Sone, what shal me to rede?  
 Thy pyne pyneth me to dede:  
 Lat me deye thee biforn.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 230, Chapter 79.

<sup>73</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 228, Chapter 79.

<sup>74</sup> “Stond wel, Moder, under rode” in Robert D. Stevick, ed., *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*, 29-32. My translation: “Have mercy on me, Mother! Let me die/ and redeem from hell Adam / and all of lost

As Mary does in this lyric, Kempe's Mary learns that her wish for death cannot be met and stoically accepts her fate. Interestingly, however, just as Mary gets this matter sorted out in Kempe's text, Margery unexpectedly reprises Mary's role: "then the said creature thought she took our Lord Jesus Christ by the clothes, and fell down at his feet, praying him to bless her, and with that she cried very loudly and wept very bitterly, saying in her mind, 'Ah, Lord, what shall become of me? I had much rather that you would slay me than let me remain in the world without you, for without you I may not stay here, Lord.'" <sup>75</sup> There can be no question but that Kempe is inviting her readers to compare Margery's actions to Mary's and that Kempe is deliberately reinforcing the relationship between the two women when Jesus subsequently tells a distraught Margery to stay in the company of his mother until he comes again to "comfort *both her and you*, (my emphasis) and turn all your sorrow into joy." <sup>76</sup> Towards the conclusion of the meditation, Margery is paired with Mary for a third time when Kempe declares: "And then she thought our Lady wept wonderfully sorely, and therefore the said creature had to weep and cry . . . and she thought that our Lady and she were always together to see our Lord's pains." <sup>77</sup>

Margery likewise imagines herself in Mary's company in a subsequent meditation in which she finds herself standing beside Mary at the foot of the cross. After Mary has reprimanded the Jews for what they have done to her son, Margery does likewise in an anti-Semitic outburst that is, unfortunately, all too common in medieval passion

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humanity."/ "Son, what do you advise me to do?/ Your suffering is tormenting me to the point of death:/ Let me die before you do."

<sup>75</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 229, Chapter 79.

<sup>76</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 229, Chapter 79.

<sup>77</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 231, Chapter 79.

narratives, including those by that most inclusive of all people, Julian of Norwich.<sup>78</sup>

Taking advantage of the affective practice of engaging in conversation with the subject of the meditation, Margery speaks to Jesus as he hangs on the cross, asking him what is to become of her and his mother after Jesus has died and how they can be expected to bear their collective sorrow: “This creature then said to our Lord, as it seemed to her, ‘Alas, Lord, you are leaving here a mother full of care. What shall *we* do now, and how shall *we* bear this great sorrow that *we* shall have for your love?’” (my emphasis).<sup>79</sup> After Jesus dies, Margery tries to comfort Mary, telling her that she believes Mary has suffered enough: “And Lady,” she declares, “I will sorrow for you, for your sorrow is my sorrow.”<sup>80</sup> In Kempe’s final passion meditation, as the author of the *Meditations vitae Christi* encourages the reader to do under these circumstances, Margery attempts to comfort the grieving Mary by offering her something to quench her thirst, in this instance, “a good hot drink of gruel and spiced wine.”<sup>81</sup>

The effort to establish and maintain strong links between Margery and Mary throughout these passion meditations is noteworthy because the equation of the two figures serves to elevate the status of Margery in the eyes of Kempe’s readers. As Richard Kieckhefer has argued, “Mary’s position at the foot of the cross gave her a double role in the spirituality of the passion: on the one hand she was a model for others to imitate in her

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<sup>78</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 233, Chapter 80; see also 230-31, Chapter 79. Julian tells us that she sees no Jews present in any of her revelations of the passion but that she “knew in [her] faith that they were eternally accursed and condemned, except those who were converted by grace.” Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 234, The Thirty-third Chapter.

<sup>79</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 233, Chapter 80

<sup>80</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 234, Chapter 80.

<sup>81</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 236, Chapter 81. In his notes, Windeatt points to Chapter 83 of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* as the source of this detail. See Windeatt, *The Book*, 326, Chapter 81, n.1.

compassion for her dying son; on the other, she was herself a fitting subject for compassion, since her identification with him caused her suffering comparable to his.”<sup>82</sup> In the eyes of Kempe’s readers, Margery benefits by comparison with Mary in these two capacities, both as a figure who feels compassion for Christ’s suffering and as a figure for whom compassion can also be felt because of the personal suffering she endures. Interestingly, a comparable bid for special recognition is to be discerned in Kempe’s decision to have Margery in Mary’s company when Christ appears to Mary after the resurrection and also in the company of Mary Magdalen when the risen Jesus appears to her in the garden.<sup>83</sup>

Another of the ways in which Kempe links Margery to Mary is by having Margery weep in compassion as Mary does. Just as Mary weeps “wonderfully sorely” at the sight of her son’s suffering, for example, Margery expresses the sorrow she feels for Jesus’s suffering by weeping bitter tears of compassion and by crying out. However, it must be noted that this weeping on Margery’s part quickly takes on its own character and ultimately emerges as something quite different from Mary’s weeping. When she contemplates the scourging, for example, Margery “wept and cried very loudly, as if she would have burst for sorrow and pain.”<sup>84</sup> When she witnesses the compassion of Mary for the suffering of Jesus and the compassion Jesus feels for his mother, Margery “wept, sobbed, and cried as though she would have died.”<sup>85</sup> Dramatically, when Jesus dies and Mary faints with grief, Margery “thought that she ran round the place like a mad woman,

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<sup>82</sup> Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, 93, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 237-38, Chapter 81.

<sup>84</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 231, Chapter 80.

<sup>85</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 232, Chapter 80.

crying and roaring.”<sup>86</sup> The madness theme recurs as Margery meditates on the deposition from the cross: “And the said creature thought that she continually ran to and fro, as if she were a woman without reason, greatly desiring to have had the precious body by herself alone, so that she might have wept enough in the presence of that precious body, for she thought she would have died with weeping and mourning for his death, for love that she had for him.”<sup>87</sup>

It is surely more than coincidental that Kempe’s account of Margery’s meditations on the passion should contain so many allusions to Margery’s dramatic bouts of weeping and roaring. Although I am not suggesting that this section of the text exists solely for the sake of drawing attention to the singularity of Margery’s gift of tears, the fact remains that a response of tears and/or loud cries marks the conclusion of nearly all the episodes comprising Kempe’s passion meditations; indeed, these emotional outbursts are as memorable a feature of this section of the text as any of the meditations themselves.

That Margery’s response to the passion of Christ should be tears of compassion is not altogether surprising, of course, given the affective tradition from which Kempe’s text hails. As Julian does in her *Showings*, Kempe resorts repeatedly to the imagery and rhetoric of the tradition of affective piety to frame her response to the things she witnesses during her meditations. As has already been suggested, however, when Margery gives voice to the characteristic expression of compassion for the suffering of Christ and his mother, she does so in noisy and tearful outbursts that serve to draw as

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<sup>86</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 234, Chapter 80.

<sup>87</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 234, Chapter 80.

much attention to Margery herself as to the figures/events being contemplated. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in the chapter to follow, this is not a pattern that is restricted to the infancy and passion meditations alone: indeed, it is a pattern that permeates Kempe's text and that would seem to have been part of an overall design meant to demonstrate Margery's singularity as a holy woman, if not also her eligibility for future veneration as a saint.

## Chapter Two

*“boldly clepe me Jhesus, thi love, for I am thi love”* (Margery Kempe)

### St. Margery of Lynn

In an article published almost thirty years ago, Valerie Lagorio argued that Kempe deserves to be recognized for what she was, not the neurotic hysteric, would-be mystic, or minor mystic she has often been declared to be, but a mystic worthy of comparison with her more famous continental counterparts, the *mulieres sanctae* of the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries. According to Lagorio, the features of Kempe's text that invite comparison with the works written by and about these continental female mystics include the nature of Margery's relationship with the divine, her orthodoxy and unwavering support for the Church, the suffering Margery endures at the hands of others, her gift of

tears, her miracles, and the efficacy of her prayers.<sup>88</sup> With the exception of Margery's orthodoxy, which will be considered only in passing, each of the themes to which Lagorio draws our attention as evidence of Margery's mysticism will be treated in this chapter as evidence of Kempe's efforts to write what amounts to an auto-hagiography, a *vita* in which Margery figures as a holy woman deserving of present attention and future recognition as a saint. This is not to say that Margery is not also to be recognized and appreciated as a mystic; indeed, it is my hope that the evidence advanced below will serve only to strengthen Kempe's reputation as an author who knew exactly what she was doing in setting about to record the multi-faceted mystical experiences of her protagonist.

Having been alerted in the Proem that "this little treatise shall treat in part of his [God's] wonderful works, how mercifully, how benignly, and how charitably he moved and stirred a sinful wretch to his love,"<sup>89</sup> we should not be surprised to discover that Kempe's text begins with an account of Margery's conversion. Indeed, Kempe opens her book provocatively with an account of a protracted period of mental illness to which her protagonist succumbs after the birth of her first child and from which she recovers only when Jesus one day appears at her bedside. He does so "in the likeness of a man, the most seemly, most beautiful, and most amiable that ever might be seen with man's eye" and tells Margery that he has not forsaken her.<sup>90</sup> Needless to say, this is the Jesus we have already encountered in the preceding chapter of this thesis as the humanized Christ of the tradition of affective piety. As the ensuing chapter of Kempe's text is meant to illustrate,

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<sup>88</sup> Lagorio, "Defensorium Contra Oblectatores: A 'Discerning' Assessment of Margery Kempe," 29-48.

<sup>89</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 33, Proem.

<sup>90</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 42, Chapter 1. See also Windeatt, *The Book*, 277, Book II, Chapter 5, where Jesus describes himself as being as handsome and good as it is possible to be.

however, Margery's encounter with the divine does not immediately result in a decision to commit to a spiritual life: instead, she attempts to get on with her life after her illness by turning her attention to dressing fashionably and to making a go of two business ventures, neither of which succeeds. Nothing is said in this chapter about the baby whose birth had occasioned so much distress in Margery's life, nor, indeed is anything ever said about any but one of the thirteen other children to whom Margery eventually gives birth, all of whom are summarily dismissed in a single sentence uttered by their mother in defence of herself while on trial at Leicester.<sup>91</sup> Although he fits the description of her original amanuensis, the adult son to whom we are introduced in Book II is never identified as Margery's scribe and figures only briefly in the text, primarily as example of the efficacy of his mother's prayers on the part of those who have gone astray.<sup>92</sup>

Obviously of more interest to Kempe than her career as a mother, wife, and business woman is Margery's spiritual life, to which Kempe returns in Chapter 3. While lying in bed with her husband one night, Margery hears "a melodious sound so sweet and delectable that she thought she had been in paradise."<sup>93</sup> What the melodious sound triggers in Margery are three responses that point to the direction and shape Kempe's text is about to take. The first of these responses is tears: henceforth, the reader is informed, "any mirth or melody" that Margery hears is sufficient to remind her of the merriment of heaven and to cause her "to shed very plentiful and abundant tears of high devotion, with great sobbings and sighings for the bliss of heaven."<sup>94</sup> What is more, from this point

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<sup>91</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 153, Chapter 48.

<sup>92</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 265-69, Book II, Chapters 1 & 2.

<sup>93</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3.

<sup>94</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3.

forward, Margery will not be able to refrain from talking about the joys of heaven and, in so doing, bringing upon herself contempt and rebuke from those who grow “angry with her because she would not hear or talk of worldly things as they did, and as she did previously.”<sup>95</sup> No less significant, however, is the sudden desire for chastity that overtakes Margery after she has heard this melodious sound in the night. A relationship that Kempe informs her readers had always been a source of great enjoyment to both Margery and her husband—“they had often (she well knew) displeased God by their inordinate love and the great delight that each of them had in using the other’s body”<sup>96</sup>—suddenly becomes something “so abominable to her that she would rather, she thought, have eaten and drunk the ooze and muck in the gutter than consent to intercourse, except out of obedience.”<sup>97</sup> Although she will eventually find herself in a position to live the chaste life she now desires to embrace, until she is successful in persuading her husband to forego his marital rights to her body, Margery finds herself obliged to endure their ongoing conjugal relations as best she can: “But he would have his will with her, and she obeyed with much weeping and sorrowing because she could not live in chastity.”<sup>98</sup>

If there could be any question by this point in Kempe’s text that we are dealing with a saint’s life, as opposed to a conventional biography, the fourth and fifth chapters

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<sup>95</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3.

<sup>96</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3. Kempe re-introduces this theme towards the end of her text when Margery takes in and cares for her dying husband. See Windeatt, *The Book*, 221, Chapter 76.

<sup>97</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3.

<sup>98</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3. David Aers concurs with Sheila Delany’s reading of this ongoing sexual relationship as “legal rape” and sees Margery’s desire for a chaste relationship with her husband as evidence of her need “to fashion an identity in accord with clerical versions of purity and sanctity.” See Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, 95. See also McAvoy, *Authority*, 107-08 where it is argued that, after pledging herself to Christ at the time of her conversion, any subsequent sexual relations Margery has with her husband render her “the fornicating, adulterous wife of Christ himself.”

put the question of genre to rest once and for all. Whereas the second chapter had dealt with Margery's worldly pride in her appearance and in her business acumen, the fourth chapter deals with her spiritual pride and the temptations to which she is subjected as a result of it. For three years she is tormented by sexual temptation and by an inclination to despair occasioned by the fear that God has forsaken her. That God has not done so is made abundantly clear in the fifth chapter, however, where Jesus "ravishes [Margery's] spirit" while she is weeping for her sins and informs her that all of her sins have been forgiven "to the uttermost point." As a result, and in a gesture which suggests that she is truly one of the blessed, Margery is informed that she will never have to experience hell or fear purgatory and that, at death, she will be transported immediately into the bliss of heaven. "Therefore I command you," Jesus continues, "boldly call me Jesus, your love, for I am your love and shall be your love without end."<sup>99</sup>

This profession of love is accompanied by instructions for a new rule of life for Margery: she is told to give up wearing her hair shirt because she will be afforded a hair shirt in her heart that will please her more. Secondly, she is to give up eating meat and to feed instead every Sunday on the body and blood of Christ: since communion once a year was all that was expected of the faithful in the Middle Ages, an invitation to communicate weekly attests to the high regard in which Margery is held by the one who has set out to woo and win her.<sup>100</sup> In another manifestation of her singularity and saintliness, Margery is told to devote more time to "high meditation and true contemplation" and to report to her

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<sup>99</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 51, Chapter 5. As Windeatt has observed, the notion that Margery's sins have all been forgiven is a repeated conviction in Kempe's text; the theme recurs in Chapters 8, 15, 22, 29, 36, and 57. See Windeatt, *The Book*, 303, n. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 51, Chapter 5.

confessor all “the confidences and counsels” revealed to her during these private “dalliances” with her divine lover.<sup>101</sup> In the coda to this chapter, Margery’s confessor sums up the significance of this particular conversation when he informs Margery—and Kempe’s readers—that she now is “sucking even at Christ’s breast.”<sup>102</sup>

The remainder of Kempe’s lengthy and often unwieldy text is devoted to an effort to demonstrate that Margery is deserving of the confidence Jesus places in her at the time of her conversion because she is an exceptional woman whose singularity finds expression in a number of ways, all of which attest to the holiness of her lifestyle, if not also to the potential for her future sanctification. Foremost among these singularities is the “homely” relationship that Margery enjoys with the second person of the trinity, who defines their relationship in the following terms:

When you strive to please me, then you are a true daughter; when you weep and mourn for my pain and my Passion, then you are a true mother having compassion on her child; when you weep for other people’s sins and adversities, then you are a true sister; and when you sorrow because you are kept so long from the bliss of heaven, then you are a true spouse and wife, for it is the wife’s part to be with her husband and to have no true joy until she has his company.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Wendeatt, *The Book*, 52, Chapter 5. Kempe’s use of the term “dalliance” to describe the conversations that Margery enjoys with her lover Jesus is noteworthy. While *dalyawns* can mean nothing more than social conversation in Middle English, it is a word often employed in the medieval romance to describe flirtatious talk or as a euphemism for sexual relations. Given the intimate nature of the relationship Kempe constructs between Margery and Jesus, one wonders if the ambiguity of meaning inherent in her use of “dalliance” was not deliberate.

<sup>102</sup> Wendeatt, *The Book*, 52, Chapter 5.

<sup>103</sup> Wendeatt, *The Book*, 67, Chapter 14.

The nuptial metaphor in the final line of this passage is one to which Kempe resorts repeatedly in her attempt to define Margery's relationship with the divine: it is echoed, for example, when Jesus refers to Margery as "my own blessed spouse"<sup>104</sup> and when he expresses his gratitude to her for preparing herself so diligently to receive the sacrament every Sunday "with all manner of meekness, humility, and charity, as any lady in this world is busy to receive her husband, when he comes home and has been long away from her."<sup>105</sup> The intimacy implicit in the use of this nuptial imagery becomes explicit in passages like the following:

For it is appropriate for the wife to be on homely terms with her husband . . .  
Therefore I must be intimate with you, and lie in your bed with you. Daughter, you greatly desire to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your dear darling, and as your sweet son, for I want to be loved as a son should be loved by the mother, and I want you to love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband. Therefore you can boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want.<sup>106</sup>

Because God's love for humanity is a theme that will figure prominently in the discussion of Julian of Norwich's text in the ensuing chapter of this thesis, it is important to document in this chapter the extent to which Jesus goes in Kempe's text to define his love for Margery. Calling upon his mother and all the angels and saints in heaven as his

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<sup>104</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 88, Chapter 22.

<sup>105</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 254, Chapter 86.

<sup>106</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 126-27, Chapter 36.

witnesses, Jesus declares, “I love you with all my heart, and I may not forgo your love.”<sup>107</sup> If it were still possible for him to suffer pain, Jesus says to Margery on another occasion, “I would rather suffer as much pain as I ever did for your soul alone, rather than that you should be separated from me without end.”<sup>108</sup> Later in the text Jesus declares, “You may boldly say to me *Jesus est amor meus*. Therefore daughter, let me be all your love, and all the joy of your heart.”<sup>109</sup> When Margery tells Jesus that she wishes she were worthy enough to be as assured of his love as Mary Magdalene had been, Jesus responds, “Truly, daughter, I love you as well, and the same peace that I gave to her, the same peace I give to you.” As if to equate Margery with them, Jesus continues by saying “For daughter, no saint in heaven is displeased, though I love a creature on earth as much as I do them.”<sup>110</sup> Margery is also linked to the saints the following passage in which she attempts to articulate her love for Jesus: it might be noted that Jesus is not alone in having to resort to the hyperbolic to describe the intensity of the love these two feel for one another:

Now, truly, Lord, I wish I could love you as much as you might make me love you. If it were possible, I would love you as well as all the saints in heaven love you, and as well as all the creatures on earth might love you. And I would, Lord, for your love, be laid naked on a hurdle for all men to wonder at me for your love—so long as it were no danger to their souls—and they to throw mud and

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<sup>107</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 85, Chapter 21.

<sup>108</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 65-66, Chapter 14.

<sup>109</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 200, Chapter 65. This same motto is engraved on the wedding ring Margery has made to mark her sacred marriage to the Godhead, although she refers to it when she loses it as “my good wedding ring to Jesus Christ.” See Windeatt, *The Book*, 114, Chapter 31.

<sup>110</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 216, Chapter 74.

slime at me, and to be drawn from town to town every day of my life, if you were pleased by this and no man's soul hindered—your will be fulfilled and not mine.<sup>111</sup>

If no more graceful a profession of love than the passage cited above in which Jesus clumsily resorts to the erotic to express his feelings for Margery,<sup>112</sup> Kempe is clearly seeking to define the relationship that Jesus and Margery share as the kind of love to which both she and Julian of Norwich refer as “homely” loving. Although the adjective has since fallen out of usage, in Margery's day *hamly* or *homly* meant “intimate” or “familiar”, although it could also mean “simple,” “plain” or “direct” and sometimes “equal”.<sup>113</sup> Thus, when Jesus says to Margery, “I thank you highly, daughter, that you have allowed me to work my will in you, and that you would let me be so homely with you,”<sup>114</sup> he is suggesting that he and Margery share an intimate relationship, although he may also be implying that he and Margery relate to one another as equals. The same ambiguity is implicit in an anchorite's use of the term to explain to Margery why her confessor has been having so much trouble believing the things she has been telling him about the nature of her relationship with God: “He [the confessor] knows very well that you have been a sinful woman, and therefore he thinks that God would not be on terms of homely familiarity with you in so short a time.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 224, Chapter 77.

<sup>112</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 129-30 attributes this eroticism to the allegorical language employed by the bride and bridegroom in the *Song of Songs*

<sup>113</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 68, n. to ll. 16-17.

<sup>114</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 251, Chapter 85.

<sup>115</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 80, Chapter 18.

Although Julian of Norwich contends that God desires to enter into the experience of homely loving with all of humanity (or at least with all individuals who will be saved), Kempe wants us to believe that the intimate relationship Margery enjoys with her lover is unique because Margery, to use Kempe's term, is a "singular" individual. This singularity is announced early in Kempe's narrative as we find Margery agonizing over her lost virginity. Having expressed the wish that she had been killed immediately after her baptism so that she might never have displeased God by sinning, Jesus attempts to comfort Margery by reassuring her that her sins have all been forgiven and that the two of them will be "united" together in love forever:<sup>116</sup> "To me you are *a love unlike any other*, daughter, and therefore I promise that you shall have a *singular* grace in heaven" (my emphasis).<sup>117</sup> Jesus makes further reference to Margery's singularity in the following declaration:

Daughter, when you are in heaven you will be able to ask what you wish, and I shall grant you all your desire. I have told you before that you are a *singular* lover of God, and therefore you shall have a *singular* love in heaven, a *singular* reward and a *singular* honour (my emphasis). And because you are a maiden in your soul, I shall take you by one hand in heaven, and my mother by the other, and so you shall dance in heaven with other holy maidens and virgins, for I may call you dearly bought and my own beloved darling.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The Middle English text reads "we ben onyd togedyr": we have been 'one-ed'—made one—together. Wendeatt, ed. *The Book*, 135, Chapter 22. Julian of Norwich also uses "onyd" to mean unified.

<sup>117</sup> Wendeatt, *The Book*, 86, Chapter 22.

<sup>118</sup> Wendeatt, *The Book*, 88, Chapter 22.

In another acknowledgement of her singularity, Margery tells the vicar of St. Stephen's, Norwich that when the three persons of the trinity communicate with her, whether they do so individually or collectively, "she never heard any book, neither Hilton's book, nor Bride's book, nor *Stimulus Amoris*, nor *Incendium Amoris*, nor any other book that she ever heard read, that spoke so exaltedly of the love of God as she felt highly working in her soul, if she could have communicated what she felt."<sup>119</sup> It is surely noteworthy that within the confines of this single sentence Kempe succeeds in suggesting that, if only she could have articulated her experiences, what Margery could tell the world about the love of God would surpass anything ever said on the subject by Walter Hilton, Birgitta of Sweden, Pseudo-Bonaventure, or Richard Rolle, four of the theological heavyweights of Margery's day.

The connection Kempe establishes between Margery's singularity and her life as a holy woman, if not also a saint in the making, is sometimes made indirectly, as for, example, when Jesus says to Margery, "I am in you and you [are] in me. And they that hear you, they hear the voice of God. Daughter, there is no man so sinful alive on earth that, if he will give up his sin and do as you advise, then such grace as you promise him I will confirm for love of you."<sup>120</sup> Speaking even more pointedly to Margery's saintly potential, however, is Jesus's promise that he will bestow upon Margery at her death the same grace that he has already bestowed upon St. Katherine, St. Margaret, St. Barbara, and St. Paul: this is a grace that will apply to any petitions made to her until the Day of

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<sup>119</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 75, Chapter 17.

<sup>120</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 57-58, Chapter 10; cf. the same assurance at 121-22, Chapter 34.

Judgement by individuals who believe in God's love for her. Such petitioners, Margery is assured, "shall have [their] boon or else something better."<sup>121</sup> As Katherine J. Lewis has remarked, Kempe is here "specifically granting Margery the same intercessory powers already enjoyed by four of the so-called universal saints; those who were venerated across medieval Europe. These long established saints, drawn from the Bible or the early centuries of Christianity, were perceived as figures of great importance and power and the *Book* here strives to present Margery as one of their number, both in terms of her intimacy with Christ and her abilities."<sup>122</sup> On four occasions in the text Margery is explicitly assured that the grace with which God has endowed her will one day make her famous throughout the world:<sup>123</sup> indeed, at some point in the future, Jesus implies, Margery will be honoured and commemorated for her gifts in her own parish church, which will become a site of pilgrimage:

In this church you have suffered much shame and rebuke for the gifts that I have given you and for the grace and goodness that I have worked in you, and therefore in this church and in this place I will be worshipped in you. Many a man and woman shall say, 'It is clear to see that God loves her well.' Daughter, I shall work so much grace for you, that all the world shall wonder and marvel at my goodness.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 87, Chapter 22.

<sup>122</sup> Lewis, "Margery Kempe and Saint Making," 202.

<sup>123</sup> See Winteatt, *The Book*, 109, Chapter 29; 177, Chapter 56; 247, Chapter 84.

<sup>124</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 195, Chapter 63.

Given the length to which Kempe goes to announce God's willingness, if not also God's eagerness, to grant the petitions made by the future "Saint" Margery, it is not surprising that Kempe should make equally certain that her readers learn about the promising miracles that have come to be associated with her protagonist. Twice within the space of a single short chapter that occurs early in the text, we are informed that "a great miracle" occurs when Margery calls upon God's mercy and is instantly relieved of the pain she is suffering as the result of being struck on the head and back by a stone and beam that had fallen from the roof of St. Margaret's church.<sup>125</sup> Another "very great miracle" is reported towards the end of Book I when Margery succeeds in restoring to sanity a woman suffering from a post-natal illness that is clearly meant to remind the reader of the illness to which Margery herself had succumbed at the outset of Kempe's text.<sup>126</sup> Whereas in the initial case, Jesus had performed the healing, in this instance God works through Margery to restore the woman to health. Indeed, Lewis has argued that in this instance Margery stands in for St. Margaret, "the protectress" of women in childbirth, "the implication being that [Margery's] intercession with God will be just as effective as that of the virgin-martyr."<sup>127</sup>

Although Kempe does not identify them as miracles, there are several instances in her text where Margery's prayers are shown to be sufficiently efficacious as to border on the miraculous. A memorable case in point is that in which Margery calls upon God to preserve her from her husband's sexual advances and, to his dismay, John discovers that

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<sup>125</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 56-57, Chapter 9.

<sup>126</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 218, Chapter 75.

<sup>127</sup> Lewis, "Margery Kempe," 203.

“he had no power to touch her at that time in that way, nor ever after with carnal knowledge.”<sup>128</sup> The efficacy of Margery’s powers of petition is also to be witnessed when she implores God to save her parish church from destruction by fire and is subsequently informed by her confessor that “because of her prayers God granted them to be delivered out of great danger.”<sup>129</sup> Also testifying to efficacy of Margery’s petitionary powers is the episode dealing with the physical and spiritual rehabilitation of her wayward son and the fact that she is frequently called upon to pray at the bedsides of the sick and dying, even by those who, when healthy, had maligned her for her weeping and crying.<sup>130</sup>

Also bordering on the miraculous are the prophetic powers with which Kempe endows Margery. In three chapters preceding her account of Margery’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Kempe informs her readers about Margery’s success in predicting the fate of a number of local people who will be struck down with serious illnesses: as Margery predicts will happen, some die, whereas others who are expected to die, manage to recover; indeed, in one instance, Margery’s intercessions and abundant tears are sufficient to persuade God to show mercy to a sick woman who had been destined for damnation.<sup>131</sup> Margery is also shown to be sufficiently discerning to be able to predict that her amanuensis will be duped by two men he trusts and that the chapel of St. Nicholas will prove unsuccessful in its bid to procure the right to administer the sacraments.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 56, Chapter 9.

<sup>129</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 203, Chapter 67.

<sup>130</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 212-13, Chapter 72; 266-67, Book II, Chapter 1.

<sup>131</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 88-90, Chapter 23.

<sup>132</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 91-96, Chapters 24-25. See also 210-12, Chapter 71 where Margery predicts the future priors of Lynn.

If the subject matter of her prophecies pales by comparison with those of continental mystics like Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden, or Catherine of Sienna, all of whom predict the fates of nations, popes, and kings, the miraculous tokens which God bestows upon Margery are at least comparable to those enjoyed by the influential English mystic Richard Rolle. Indeed, as Karma Lochie and, more recently, David Lavinsky have demonstrated, Margery's various experiences of warmth, song, and sweetness almost certainly betray Kempe's indebtedness to Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*. In question here are the melody heard in the night that results in Margery's conversion and that she continues to hear throughout her life,<sup>133</sup> as well as the tokens bestowed upon her on the occasion of her sacred marriage to the Godhead: the sweet smells and sounds, and the fire of love.<sup>134</sup> Not included because they do not fit the Rollean schema of *calor*, *canor*, and *dulcor*, to which both Lochie and Lavinsky remain tied, are the white specks Margery sees before her eyes on the occasion of her wedding to the Godhead. Equally noteworthy is the token bestowed upon Margery by the Holy Ghost: it is a gift which initially manifests itself in her ears as the sound made by a bellows but which is eventually transformed into the voice of a dove and, ultimately, into the voice of "a redbreast that often sang very merrily in her right ear."<sup>135</sup>

As impressive as Kempe would have us believe Margery's miracles and tokens to be, however, they quickly fade into forgetfulness when stacked up against her gift of tears. As Jesus explains to Margery, this is a gift that can manifest itself in various ways:

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<sup>133</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 46, Chapter 3; 124, Chapter 35; and 225, Chapter 78.

<sup>134</sup> Lochie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 115-18; Lavinsky, "Speke to me be thowt": Affectivity, *Incendium Amoris*, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 339-62, especially 345-47.

<sup>135</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 127, Chapter 36; 124, Chapter 36.

“I sometimes give you slight weeping and soft tears, as a token that I love you. And sometimes I give you great cries and roarings, to make people afraid at the grace that I put into you, in token that I wish that my mother’s sorrow be known through you, so that men and women might have the more compassion of her sorrow that she suffered for me.”<sup>136</sup>

This declaration is interesting for a couple of reasons, the first of which is that it confirms Margery’s repeated protestations to the effect that it is God and not, as her detractors claim, she, who controls her tears. Of equal importance for our purposes, however, is the extent to which this statement anchors Margery’s tears in compassion, the sentiment integral to the tradition of affective piety.

As sympathetic as she is said and shown to be to the suffering of the Virgin, Kempe wants her readers to know that there are other things that make Margery cry. For two or more hours at a stretch, Kempe informs us, Margery would weep “when in mind of our Lord’s passion, sometimes for her own sin, sometimes for the sin of the people, sometimes for the souls in purgatory, sometimes for those that are in poverty or any distress, for she wanted to comfort them all.”<sup>137</sup> She further enhances the saintly concern Margery demonstrates for the welfare of others when Kempe has Jesus tell Margery that, as desperately as she may long for the bliss of heaven, she must remain in the world: “For I have ordained you to kneel before the Trinity to pray for the whole world, for many hundred thousand souls shall be saved by your prayers.”<sup>138</sup> This conviction is repeated

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<sup>136</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 223, Chapter 77; cf. 193, Chapter 62. Anthony Goodman identifies Margery’s roarings as “ecstatic seizures”. See Goodman, “Margery Kempe,” *Medieval Holy Women*, 233.

<sup>137</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 54, Chapter 7; cf. 179, Chapter 57, where Margery prays for the souls in purgatory, for those in any kind of distress, and for the conversion of the Jews, the Saracens, and all false heretics.

<sup>138</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 54, Chapter 7.

later in the text when Jesus declares “Daughter, I have many times said to you that many thousand souls shall be saved through your prayers, and some that lie at the point of death shall have grace through your merits and your prayers, for your tears and your prayers are very sweet and acceptable to me.”<sup>139</sup> The efficacy of Margery’s tears is confirmed by Julian of Norwich, who assures Margery that “when God visits a creature with tears of contrition, devotion, or compassion, he may and ought to believe that the Holy Ghost is in his soul.”<sup>140</sup> An anchorite encountered in Jerusalem echoes Julian when he informs Margery that “tears with love are the greatest gift that God may give on earth, and all men that love God ought to thank him for you.”<sup>141</sup> When she informs us that “Some great clerks said our Lady never cried so, nor any saint in heaven,”<sup>142</sup> Kempe is clearly seeking to elevate Margery’s reputation by comparing her to those already recognized as saints. Comparable attempts to enhance Margery’s status in the reader’s eyes are to be discerned in the equation the Virgin Mary makes between Margery’s tears of compassion and those she and Mary Magdalene had shed at the crucifixion;<sup>143</sup> it is important to remember in this connection the many tears shed by Margery in the company of Mary and Mary Magdalen during Margery’s passion meditations as discussed in the previous chapter. Also noteworthy is the blessing St. Jerome bestows upon Margery for the souls God has saved because of her tears, which he labels “a singular and special gift that God has given you.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 226, Chapter 78.

<sup>140</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 78, Chapter 18.

<sup>141</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 82, Chapter 19.

<sup>142</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 105, Chapter 28.

<sup>143</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 109, Chapter 29.

<sup>144</sup> Winteatt, *The Book*, 136, Chapter 41.

Although Margery is frequently abused by those who are offended by her weeping and sobbing, even stronger objections to her behaviour arise when God grants Margery the gift of roaring during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land:

And when they came up on to the Mount of Calvary, she fell down because she could not stand or kneel, but writhed and wrestled with her body, spreading her arms out wide, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart would have burst apart, for in the city of her soul she saw truly and freshly how our Lord was crucified . . . And she had such great compassion and such great pain to see our Lord's pain, that she could not keep herself from crying and roaring though she should have died for it.<sup>145</sup>

Like her tears, Margery's roaring is recognized as "a most gracious gift of God."<sup>146</sup> Indeed, as Dhira Mahoney has noted, once Kempe has introduced the roaring into her text, she begins to present both behaviors [the weeping and the roaring] in the same breath, as a standard doublet."<sup>147</sup> Out of compassion for her, God withdraws the gift of roaring after ten years so that Margery can listen to sermons without being censured by the clergy or her fellow parishioners or, on some occasions, being banished from churches where sermons are being preached. During the ten years when she is endowed with the gift of roaring, however, Margery weeps and roars whenever she is overcome by feelings of contrition, compunction, or compassion, which is to say, frequently. Thus it is, for example, that when in Bristol awaiting a ship to Santiago, Margery makes her

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<sup>145</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 104, Chapter 28.

<sup>146</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 204, Chapter 67.

<sup>147</sup> Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language," 39.

communion every Sunday “with plentiful tears and violent sobbings, with loud crying and shrill shriekings.” Upon her return to Bristol from Spain Margery travels to the Cistercian monastery of Hailes, where she “was shriven and had loud cryings and violent sobbings.”<sup>148</sup> At the mere sight of a crucifix in a church in Leicester, “the fire of love kindled so quickly in her heart that she could not keep it secret for, whether she liked it or not, it caused her to break out in a loud voice and cry astonishingly, and weep and sob very terribly, so that many men and women wondered at her because of it.”<sup>149</sup>

As indelibly etched in our memories as they may be, however, extended accounts of Margery’s weeping and roaring are, in fact, rare in Kempe’s text, amounting, by my count, to only five in number. Very common indeed, on the other hand, are brief references of the type just cited that seem intended to function as mnemonic and synecdochic triggers calling up in the reader’s mind Kempe’s longer, more detailed accounts of Margery’s dramatic outbursts of tears and loud cries. As succinct as these brief references may be, they are legion; in fact, by my count, 81 of the 99 chapters comprising Kempe’s text (81.8%) contain at least one reference to Margery’s tears and/or roarings. Some chapters contain multiple references.<sup>150</sup> Whatever this may have to say about the repetitiveness of her text, the frequency of these references suggests to me a concerted effort on Kempe’s part to keep Margery’s tears and roarings at the forefront of her narrative; in so doing, Kempe succeeds in drawing repeated attention to the saintliness of her protagonist, a figure endowed, as the text takes such pains to impress upon us, with

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<sup>148</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 144, Chapter 44; 148, Chapter 45.

<sup>149</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 148, Chapter 46.

<sup>150</sup> See, for example, Chapters 28, 29, 72, 73, 78, 79, 80, 81, & 82.

the greatest gift God can bestow upon a human being. Indeed, Kempe has Jesus himself declare that “tears of compunction, devotion, and compassion are the highest gifts, and the most secure, that I give on earth.”<sup>151</sup> Even more pointed connections between Margery’s gift of tears and her saintliness are to be found in the claims that Margery wins many souls from the devil by her weeping and that the saints in heaven will rejoice at her homecoming because she has “given them drink many times with the tears of [her] eyes.”<sup>152</sup> No less happy to see her will be the angels whose thirst Margery has so often slaked with tears that are “like spiced and honeyed wine.”<sup>153</sup>

Almost as frequent as the references to Margery’s noisy theatrical outbursts are statements to the effect that people respond to them with either astonishment or annoyance. While the expressions of astonishment and wonder function in the text to underline the singularity of Margery’s gift,<sup>154</sup> the expressions of annoyance serve an entirely different purpose. Early in the text, we find Margery weeping tears of contrition and compunction for her sins and provoking a public response that will continue to cause her pain and suffering in the years to come: “Her weeping was so plentiful and so continual that many people thought that she could weep and leave off when she wanted, and therefore many people said she was a false hypocrite and wept when in company for advantage and profit.”<sup>155</sup> On other occasions, people mistake Margery’s behaviour for

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<sup>151</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 66, Chapter 14.

<sup>152</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 87, Chapter 22.

<sup>153</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 200, Chapter 65.

<sup>154</sup> See, for example, Windeatt, *The Book*, 97, Chapter 26; 102, Chapter 27; and 120, Chapter 33, where the German priest who befriends Margery in Rome tests her crying by isolating her; he ultimately concludes that Margery cries because the Holy Ghost is at work in her.

<sup>155</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 48, Chapter 3. Margery meets with a similar response in Canterbury (62-63, Chapter 13), in Jerusalem (105, Chapter 28), in Beverley (170, Chapter 54), in Aachen (280, Book II, Chapter 6), and in London (290, Book II, Chapter 9).

demonic possession or a bodily illness because “while she cried she wrested her body about, turning from one side to the other, and turned all blue and grey, like the colour of lead”.<sup>156</sup> Kempe attempts to counter these assaults on Margery’s integrity by having Jesus himself inform both Margery and the reader that “you may not have tears or spiritual conversing except when God will send them to you, for they are the free gifts of God, distinct from your merit, and he may give them to whom he wishes.”<sup>157</sup> Although he appreciates Margery’s suffering, saying at one point that “it is more pleasing to me that you suffer scorn and humiliation, shame and rebukes, wrongs and distress, than if your head were struck off three times a day every day for seven years,”<sup>158</sup> Jesus offers to remove the burden of suffering from Margery if she feels it to be more than she can bear. Margery responds to this offer by saying, “No, good Lord, let me be at your will, and make me mighty and strong to suffer all that you ever wish me to suffer, and grant me meekness and patience as well.”<sup>159</sup> One can hardly hear these words without thinking of Luke 1.38, where Mary responds to the Annunciation by saying “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word.”

Indeed, Margery does her best to imitate the suffering of both Mary and Jesus by embracing her suffering as they had done. That Kempe was consciously seeking to elevate Margery by inviting her readers to associate Margery’s suffering with that of her saviour is surely the point of the abuse to which Margery is repeatedly subjected at the hands of her countrymen and countrywomen. Like the prophets who are always without

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<sup>156</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 143, Chapter 44; cf. 75, Chapter 17.

<sup>157</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 66, Chapter 14; cf. 135, Chapter 40.

<sup>158</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 170, Chapter 54.

<sup>159</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 158, Chapter 50.

honour in their own country and home and among their own kin (Mark 6.4), Margery is constantly harassed at home and abroad by British men and women who find her irritating, theologically suspect, and/or fraudulent.<sup>160</sup> When she is travelling with them on pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to Rome, for example, her English companions abuse her and ultimately refuse to allow her to eat in their company or even to speak to them; an English priest in Rome slanders Margery so severely that her hosts evict her from her lodgings; and, on more than one occasion, her countrymen and women abandon Margery altogether, in two instances by sneaking out of town for the sake of avoiding her company.<sup>161</sup> Diane Watt is quite right in pointing out that this harsh treatment at the hands of her travelling companions stands in sharp opposition to the kindness shown to Margery by the German-speaking priest who becomes her confessor in Rome and by the several Roman women who show Margery kindness by feeding her when she finds herself obliged to rely on charity;<sup>162</sup> not cited by Watt but no less worthy of mention in this regard is the kindness shown to Margery in the Holy Land by the Gray Friars and the Saracens who help her in ways that her fellow pilgrims refuse to do.<sup>163</sup> Although Sarah Salih is to be supported in her assertion that, on the whole, the clergy are more supportive of Margery, and particularly of her crying, than the laity,<sup>164</sup> the fact remains that Margery

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<sup>160</sup> It is worth noting in this regard that when she is being persecuted in Bristol, Margery prays for those who are slandering her in a manner distinctly reminiscent of Christ's begging forgiveness for his "crucifiers" because they do not know what they are doing. See *Windeatt, The Book*, 144, Chapter 44.

<sup>161</sup> See *Windeatt, The Book*, Chapters 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, and Book II, Chapters 6 & 7.

<sup>162</sup> Watt, "Political Prophecy in The Book of Margery Kempe," 153. Watt neglects to mention the two men in Rome who help Margery, one of whom gives her money (130, Chapter 38) and the second of whom, a man named Marcelle, feeds her (130, Chapter 38). It is also in Rome, of course, that Margery meets up with an English priest who has come to the city in search of her and who proceeds to care for her as though she were his own mother (133-35, Chapter 40).

<sup>163</sup> *Windeatt, The Book*, 110-11, Chapter 30.

<sup>164</sup> Salih, "Margery's Bodies: Piety, Work, and Penance," 174. For a more detailed analysis of the support Margery is accorded by the clergy, see Timea K. Szell, "From Woe to Weal and Weal to Woe," 76.

is arraigned seven times in the text by British ecclesiastical and urban authorities.<sup>165</sup> Although this section of the narrative functions largely to assert Margery's orthodoxy, which is repeatedly challenged and repeatedly affirmed, it also serves to emphasize the suffering that Margery is obliged to endure at the hands of her fellow citizens and Christians. As John H. Arnold has remarked with respect to this section of Kempe's text, "it is clear that Kempe regards these calumnies against her faith as a necessary form of Christ-like suffering or quasi-martyrdom: she *needs* 'the people' to be against her, to show that her way of life was a struggle and a sacrifice."<sup>166</sup> Samuel Fanous concurs, arguing that "Collectively, these encounters constitute perhaps the most carefully constructed section in *The Book*, whose theme is Margery's trials, but whose subtext is nothing less than 'The Passion of Margery Kempe'."<sup>167</sup> Gibson makes a similar claim, stating that "If martyrdom by the sword was not available to qualify her for sainthood, martyrdom by slander was, and Margery's *Book* seems quite conscious of the validating implications of such suffering."<sup>168</sup> Indeed, when one considers all the suffering to which Margery is subjected in Kempe's text, one can understand why Christ might tell her that the only purgatory she will ever be required to endure will be "the slanderous talk of this world."<sup>169</sup>

Given the kind of evidence the text affords us, in short, it is hardly surprising that Hope Emily Allen, co-editor of the first scholarly edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*

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<sup>165</sup> The incidents occur in Norwich, Bristol, Leicester, York, Beverley, and Ely and are treated in Chapters 17, 46-49, 50-52, and 54 of Windeatt's translation of Kempe's text.

<sup>166</sup> Arnold, "Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent," 81

<sup>167</sup> Fanous, "Measuring the Pilgrim's Progress: Internal Emphases in The Book of Margery Kempe," 160.

<sup>168</sup> Gisbon, *Theater of Devotion*, 47.

<sup>169</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 87, Chapter 22.

should have declared it to be “a work of active propaganda, not literature, or, in the ordinary sense, reminiscence.” As others have done since, Allen expresses her conviction “that Margery expected to be a saint, and that in all likelihood the book was prepared for prospective hagiography.”<sup>170</sup> Gibson has more recently declared Kempe’s book to be “a calculated hagiographical text” and warned that “Its rambling and conversational style should not distract us from the fact that its true literary as well as spiritual models were the *legenda*—lives—of late medieval saints, especially the fourteenth-century Swedish wife, mother, and mystic, St. Bridget, to whom Margery quite explicitly compares herself—and with whom she often competes.”<sup>171</sup> Although with little more textual substantiation than Gibson affords us, Carolyn Dinshaw has also declared Birgitta of Sweden to be “the most explicit saintly model for Margery.”<sup>172</sup> Julia Bolton Holloway has taken the matter even further, contending that “Margery can be seen to model her life, her book, the cessation of her childbirths, her miracles, and her pilgrimages upon Bride’s.”<sup>173</sup> Although there are clearly similarities between the lives of the two women that merit attention, Bolton is seriously overstating her case: Bride, as Birgitta of Sweden was known in England during the Middle Ages, stopped having children because her husband died, albeit shortly after having agreed to commit to the kind of chaste marriage into which John and Margery eventually enter; both women are credited with performing miracles, but Margery’s miracles point to no obvious imitation of Bride’s; and thirdly, as is attested by the pilgrim badges proudly sported by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, the Holy

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<sup>170</sup> Private correspondence as quoted in Marea Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism*, 34, n. 47.

<sup>171</sup> Gibson, *The Theatre*, 47.

<sup>172</sup> Dinshaw, “Margery Kempe,” 230.

<sup>173</sup> Holloway, “Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice,” 215.

Land, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela were the three major sites of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages; Margery and Bride were in no way unique for having made their way to these destinations, nor is there any reason to think that Kempe made her pilgrimages to these sites because Bride had done so half a century earlier.

While we must therefore exercise caution when discussing the influence of Birgitta of Sweden on Margery Kempe, both the real and the fictional Margeris Kempe, the fact remains that Kempe twice in her text mentions “Bride’s book” as one of the texts that have been read to her;<sup>174</sup> moreover, Bride figures prominently in Kempe’s account of Margery’s pilgrimage to Rome. Margery visits the room where Bride had lived and died and prays on the stone upon which the Swedish saint had been kneeling when God had revealed to her the date of her death. Margery meets Bride’s maid and her maid’s landlord, both of whom are able to tell Margery from personal experience about the saint’s goodness and cheerfulness.<sup>175</sup> Given that the English form of Birgitta’s name allowed for a punning allusion to her widely-known status as the bride of Christ, it is probably no coincidence that Margery’s mystical marriage to the Godhead occurs while she is in Rome. As has already been demonstrated, a marital relationship with Jesus is strongly intimated throughout Kempe’s text; in fact, however, the mystical marriage into which Kempe has Margery enter officially is not a mystical union with the second person of the trinity but with his father, to whom Kempe refers as the Godhead. As Kempe describes it, Margery enters into this marriage very reluctantly “because she was very

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<sup>174</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 75, Chapter 17; 182, Chapter 58.

<sup>175</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 132, Chapter 39.

much afraid of the Godhead; and [because] she had no knowledge of the conversation of the Godhead, for all her love and affection were fixed on the manhood of Christ, and of that she did have knowledge and would not be parted from that for anything.”<sup>176</sup> For all intents and purposes, however, Margery’s marriage to the Godhead is a failed marriage to which I have been able to find only a single and indirect reference elsewhere in the whole of Kempe’s text: towards the end of the work, Margery states that, as a result of having made pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem and “suffered much contempt and reproof for her weeping and her crying,” she was drawn into the affection of the Godhead, with the result that “the fire of love increased in her, and her understanding was more enlightened, and her devotion more fervent than it was before, while she had her meditation and her contemplation only in his manhood.”<sup>177</sup> Since the text offers nothing by way of evidence to support this claim of enhanced love, understanding, and devotional fervour, I am persuaded that Kempe has Margery enter into a mystical marriage with the Godhead while in Rome primarily for the purpose of having her protagonist outstrip St. Bride and all the other brides of Christ whose *vitae* contain accounts of mystical marriages to the divine. The heroine of Kempe’s *vita* enjoys the intimacy of a nuptial relationship with Jesus, as do Birgitta and the brides in other texts, but Margery outdoes her saintly sisters by marrying not the son of God but his father. In doing so, Margery also succeeds in

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<sup>176</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 122-23, Chapter 35.

<sup>177</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 250, Chapter 85. This level of intimacy with the Godhead cannot have coloured Margery’s experiences in Jerusalem and Rome, as Lavinsky argues, since the passage as quoted above goes on to say that God had withdrawn the gift of roaring by the time this experience of the affection of the Godhead takes place: whereas Margery engages in a lot of roaring in both Jerusalem and Rome, it must therefore be assumed that these outbursts of affection are rooted in the manhood of Christ and not in the affection of the Godhead. It is surely worth noting in this connection that, while in Rome, Margery is so conscious of Christ in his manhood that the sight of handsome men in the street or of male children in their mothers’ arms is sufficient cause to provoke outbursts of weeping and roaring. See Windeatt, 250, Chapter 85; 123, Chapter 34; and Lavinsky, “Speke to me be thowt,” 356-57.

becoming the step-mother of the member of the trinity she loves on such homely terms in his manhood. In Kempe's mind, there was obviously nothing incestuous about this arrangement.

As both Atkinson and Windeatt have pointed out, there are other episodes in Kempe's text that may have been coloured by episodes in Bride's book: both Bride and Margery are married women who enter into chaste living arrangements with their husbands; both are given to frequent confessions and at least weekly communion; both are instrumental in saving the souls of their wayward sons; both go on pilgrimages; and both are granted visions of the nativity and the crucifixion.<sup>178</sup> As these visions suggest, however, none of the similarities to which Windeatt and Atkinson point affords us any solid evidence of an attempt on Kempe's part to imitate the contents of either Birgitta's *vita* or her *Revelations*. Birgitta's account of the nativity, for example, could not be more different from Kempe's: in Birgitta's text, a very self-possessed Mary journeys to Bethlehem in possession of expensive linen and silk swaddling cloths and thus is not required to wrap her baby, as Kempe's Mary is obliged to do, in the bits of white cloth Margery has been able to procure for the purpose by begging, nor, it might well be noted, does Kempe's Mary feel compelled to show the curious shepherds during their visit to the stable "the infant's natural parts and male sex."<sup>179</sup> Birgitta's vision of the crucifixion is empathetic and grim, and, according to Atkinson, "contributed to the contemporary style of graphic, tortured crucifixes."<sup>180</sup> As compared to Kempe's passion meditations,

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<sup>178</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 175-79; Windeatt, ed. *The Book*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> Harris, ed., *Birgitta of Sweden*, 203 and 205.

<sup>180</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 172, n.16.

however, Birgitta's vision is almost clinical: it succeeds in drawing attention to the suffering endured by Jesus on the cross, but it does so descriptively, not affectively. Whereas Birgitta informs us, for example, that the vision came to her while she was "most mournfully weeping" at Mount Calvary and that it "filled [her] with sorrow," she makes no further effort to articulate the compassion she feels for Christ's suffering, nor, it should be noted, does she make any effort to promote such feelings in her readers.<sup>181</sup>

Lest we be tempted to dismiss Birgitta's influence on Kempe altogether, however, we must recall Gibson's claim that Kempe appears to have viewed Bride as a rival. After the episode in which Margery witnesses a fluttering of the host and chalice during the mass, Kempe has Jesus declare to Margery "My daughter [Bride] never saw me in this way."<sup>182</sup> As though this were not enough to elevate Margery over Bride, Jesus goes on to tell Kempe's protagonist that "just as I spoke to St. [Bride], just so I speak to you, daughter, and I tell you truly that every word that is written in [Bride's] book is true, and *through you* shall be recognized as truth indeed (my emphasis)."<sup>183</sup> Bride's exoneration as a writer and saint, in other words, will come through the kind of recognition that God has now seen fit to bestow upon Margery, as an author and holy woman during her lifetime, it must be assumed, if not also as a saint after her death.

In addition to "Bride's book" attention must also be directed to the two texts which Kempe's amanuensis claims to have convinced him of the authenticity of

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<sup>181</sup> Harris, *Birgitta*, 188-190.

<sup>182</sup> Windeatt uses the name "Bridget" in his translation but "Bryde" in his edition of the Middle English text—hence my emendation to Bride in these quotations. See Windeatt, ed. *The Book*, 129, Chapter 20.

<sup>183</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 83, Chapter 20.

Margery's tears.<sup>184</sup> Alexandra Barratt has pointed to the second of these texts, the *Revelations of St. Elizabeth*, whether in its original Latin form or in one of its Middle English translations, as having served as a model for several episodes in Kempe's text. A case in point is an episode in the *vita* in which the Virgin Mary asks Elizabeth if, like Bartholomew the Apostle, Laurence the Martyr, and John the Evangelist, she would "be willing for his [God's] love to be flayed, grilled, and to drink poison."<sup>185</sup> Barratt would have us see this episode as the source of Margery's declaration that the only form of martyrdom she could ever conceive of enduring would be decapitation.<sup>186</sup> Since beheading does not even figure among the options Mary gives Elizabeth, one has to wonder how Kempe could have been consciously imitating this episode from the *vita* of St. Elizabeth.<sup>187</sup> No more convincing is the comparison Barratt draws between the fact that both Elizabeth and Margery are told by Jesus that their sins have been forgiven:<sup>188</sup> problematically for Barratt, other texts, such as the *vitae* of Dorothea of Montau and of Angela of Folino, suggest that it is routine for women entering into a mystical marriage with Christ to be absolved of their sins.<sup>189</sup> Even more importantly, Barratt fails to recognize that, when Margery is told that her sins have been forgiven, she is at the same time assured that she will never be required to spend any time in either hell or purgatory. Kempe, in short, would not seem to have been imitating the *vita* of St. Elizabeth in this

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<sup>184</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 190-91, Chapter 62.

<sup>185</sup> Barratt, trans., *The Revelations of St. Elizabeth*, Chapter VIII.

<sup>186</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 65, Chapter 14.

<sup>187</sup> Silah remarks with respect to Barratt's claim that one need not look to the Life of Saint Elizabeth to determine why Margery chooses decapitation, given that "Martyrdom by decapitation is a near-compulsory element of virgin martyr legends". See Silah, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, 199.

<sup>188</sup> Barratt, *The Revelations*, Chapter XI; Windeatt, *The Book*, 51, Chapter 5.

<sup>189</sup> Lachance, trans. *Angela of Folino: Complete Works*, 156. Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea of Montau*, 166.

instance; instead, she seems to have been taking advantage of an opportunity to point to the saintliness of her protagonist by suggesting that she will go directly to heaven and thus be spared the usual options for mere humans—purgatory or hell. Indeed, the only real similarity between Margery and Elizabeth of Hungary lies in the fact that both women shed tears and utter loud cries. As Barratt notes, near the beginning of the *vita*, Elizabeth is described as “weeping most bitterly in prayer” and as “weeping most bitterly, because she could not restrain herself from audible moans and vocal cries.”<sup>190</sup> Although Kempe’s text contains many references to such outpourings of emotion, it is hard to say if Margery’s sobbing and roarings owe anything to the *vita* of St. Elizabeth, especially given that the Latin text contains only the two aforementioned references to Elizabeth’s tears and loud cries.

Certainly more memorable, although no more prolific, are the references to crying that occur in Jacques de Vitry’s *vita* of Marie d’Oignies, the second of the two texts cited by Kempe’s amanuensis. So voluminous are Marie’s tears, in fact, that “Both day and night her eyes continuously brought forth outpourings of the waters that fell not only on her cheeks but also on the church floor, and lest her tears make the ground all muddy, she caught them in the veil with which she covered her head. She used up so many veils in this manner that she often had to change her wet veil for a dry one.”<sup>191</sup> Like Margery, Marie occasionally tries, unsuccessfully, to control her tears: “But when she tried to restrain the intensity of the flowing river, then a greater intensity of tears wondrously

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<sup>190</sup> Barratt, *The Revelation*, Chapters II & III.

<sup>191</sup> Mulder-Bakker, ed., *The Life of Mary of Oignies*, 58.

sprang forth.”<sup>192</sup> Whether or not Margery’s inability to manage her tears owes anything to this detail from Marie’s *vita* is hard to say. If nothing else, it corroborates Margery’s repeated attempts to defend the authenticity of her crying by claiming that it is God who controls her tears. Significantly, however, de Vitry pays no further attention to Marie’s tears, nor is the matter ever mentioned in Thomas of Cantipré’s attempt to supplement the *vita*. Instead, the focus of both texts is Marie’s ministry to the sick and the dying, her struggles with demons, and her gift of prophecy.<sup>193</sup> In short, it seems unlikely, at least so far as the content of her book was concerned, that Kempe was much influenced by either de Virty’s *vita* of Marie d’Oignies or its supplement.

What these Latin *vitae* may well have done for Kempe and her principal amanuensis, however, was to provide them with a template of what a saint’s life looked like. In shaping Margery’s story, Kempe would have known by benefit of their example the kinds of things to which she would need to draw attention when writing what amounts to an auto-hagiography: as I have argued, these elements manifest themselves in Kempe’s text (1) in her representation of the singular relationship that Margery enjoys with the divine, both in the conversations that take place in Margery’s soul and in her meditations on the passion; (2) in the tokens of love that God has seen fit to bestow upon Margery, especially the gift of tears; (3) in Margery’s exceptional powers of intercession; (4) in the miracles that have come to be associated with her; and (5) in the emotional suffering that is an *imitatio Christi* in the sense that, in her own mind at least, Margery feels that she,

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<sup>192</sup> Mudler-Bakker, *The Life*, 57.

<sup>193</sup> See, for example, Mulder-Bakker, *The Life*, 86-90, 105-09.

too, has endured the pains of martyrdom. Although we are probably safe in assuming that Kempe was drawing upon personal experience for the content of her book, it must be recognized that, after more than 20 years of reflection on the events that make up her narrative,<sup>194</sup> Kempe was deliberately shaping the subject matter of her text into something that her original readers would be likely to have recognized as, or at least been inclined to associate with, a saint's life.<sup>195</sup> For our purposes, it is intriguing that she should have taken such a tack when, after a comparable period of reflection, Julian of Norwich elected to revise her original account of her revelatory experiences of 1373 by removing from her text as much personal information as she could manage to extract. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in the next chapter, Julian's motivation in doing so would seem to have been to impress upon her readers that there was nothing "singular" about her or about her personal experience of the homely love of God.

### Chapter Three

*"Thus was I lerned that love is oure lordes mening"* (Julian of Norwich)

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<sup>194</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 69, Chapter 15.

<sup>195</sup> Szell suggests that Kempe's Margery has affiliations with all four conventional hagiographic categories of female saints: the chaste married or widowed woman, the virgin martyr, the reformed prostitute, and the "transvestite" saint. See Szell, "From Weal to Woe," 83. For an informative analysis of Margery's affiliations with the figure of the virgin martyr, see Silah, *Versions*, 166-241.

Julian of Norwich, *oure evencristen*

If Kempe's chief narrative strategy was to draw as much attention as possible to the uniqueness—or, to use her own term, the “singularity”—of her protagonist's spiritual gifts and personal relationship with the divine,<sup>196</sup> Julian of Norwich would seem to have gone to equal lengths to persuade her readers that her revelatory experiences of 1373 did nothing to render her unique or to make her experience of God any different from that of her *evencristen*. *Evencristen* is a Middle English word that is normally translated as “fellow Christians” but that literally means, significantly for our purposes, “equal” Christians.<sup>197</sup> Indeed, this equality comes to the fore early in the Long Text when we find Julian declaring that “we are all one in love, for truly it was not revealed to me that God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace. For I am sure that there are many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I.”<sup>198</sup> It is hard to imagine Margery Kempe ever making so self-effacing a claim.

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<sup>196</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 154, n. to l. 7 argue that “Singularity is usually a negative term in Middle English, suggesting an inappropriate and prideful self-separation from others, a vice any visionary would be warned against.” Indeed, they go on to point to singularity as the antithesis of the *onehede of cherite* (the unity of charity) which Julian embraces instead of singularity (154, ll. 9-14). What Watson and Jenkins have to say on this subject reinforces the distinction I am drawing between Kempe's representation of Margery as a unique being and Julian's efforts to suggest that she is not in any way unique. That said, I remain inclined to let Margery be Margery and Julian be Julian and not to make any moral pronouncements about the “singularity” of Kempe's protagonist.

<sup>197</sup> An equally significant and intentional use of the adjective equal (*even*) is to be found in the parable of the lord and the servant where Julian declares that “The lord is God the Father; the servant is the Son, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is *the even love* (the equal love) which is in them both.” Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 274, The Fifty-First Chapter; Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 283, l. 185.

<sup>198</sup> Colledge and Walsh, trans., *Julian*, 191, The Ninth Chapter.

As B. A. Windeatt has pointed out, moreover, in the course of composing the Long Text, Julian changed the pronouns employed in her original account of her showings so as to reduce the gap between herself and those for whom the revised text was intended.<sup>199</sup> In the Short Text, for example, we find Julian saying, “For this is the reason why *those* who deliberately occupy *themselves* with earthly business, constantly seeking worldly well-being, have not God’s rest in *their* hearts and souls (my emphasis).” More inclusive is the Long Text version of this same sentence, where the pronouns have been altered from third person plural to first person plural: “For this is the reason why *our* hearts and souls are not in perfect ease, because here *we* seek rest in this thing which is so little, in which there is no rest, and *we* do not know *our* God who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest” (my emphasis).<sup>200</sup> The revised sentence includes not only Julian in its compass but “all who will be saved,” a descriptor that purports to eschew the heretical notion of universal salvation but that, for Julian, may have been intended to embrace precisely this possibility, at least eschatologically.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Windeatt, “Julian of Norwich and her Audience,” 5-6. For a further discussion of Julian’s anxieties about the distance between herself and her readers, see Christopher Abbott, who argues that “As a lay-person writing on religious themes in the vernacular; as a woman; as a self-proclaimed, self-authenticating visionary, Julian attains a necessary but problematical singularity.” Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography*, 44.

<sup>200</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, Short Text, 132, Chapter iv; *Julian*, 183-84, The Fifth Chapter. It should be noted, however, that the ensuing sentence in both texts uses the more inclusive pronoun *we*: “God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him.”

<sup>201</sup> I offer this prospect only tentatively since Julian acknowledges that, according to the teachings of the church, there are many who will be damned eternally and consigned to hell (Colledge and Walsh, *Julian* 234, The Thirty-Third Chapter). However, Julian also expresses the conviction that, at the apocalypse, God will perform “a great deed” that will make all things well. (Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 233, The Thirty-Second Chapter). Since this great deed is the “closed portion” and thus the flip side of the “open portion” of the incarnational revelation which tells us of “our saviour and our salvation” (Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 228, The Thirtieth Chapter), it is tempting to think that Julian at least entertained the possibility of universal salvation at the end of human history. In light of such a possibility, it is interesting to hear her declare: “So I understood that all his blessed children who have come out of him by nature ought to be brought back into him by grace” (Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 305, The Sixty-Fourth Chapter). Also willing to believe that

Although there can be little doubt that Julian's representation of herself at the outset of her text as a "simple, unlettered creature"<sup>202</sup> is a rhetorical trope meant to deflect attention away from the fact that she was a highly intelligent, erudite, and articulate woman trespassing in territory considered to be the rightful domain of men alone,<sup>203</sup> the trope also functions as an invitation to Julian's readers to see themselves in her and to feel themselves qualified to share in her revelatory experiences. Indeed, Julian informs her *even cristen* that these visions were intended for their edification as well as for her own: "I was greatly moved in love towards my fellow Christians," she declares, "that they might all see and know the same as I saw, for I wished to be a comfort to them, for all this vision was shown for all men [sic]."<sup>204</sup> The conviction is one to which Julian addresses herself a second time when she announces that

Everything that I say about me I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation. And therefore I pray you all for God's sake, and I counsel you for your own profit, that you disregard the wretch to whom it was shown, and that mightily, wisely and meekly you contemplate upon God, who out of his courteous love and his endless

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Julian is alluding to the possibility of universal salvation as Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 80; Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 154, n. to ll. 16-21; and Ruth M. Nuth, *God's Lovers in an Age of Anxiety*, 107.

<sup>202</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian* 177, The Second Chapter.

<sup>203</sup> No less formidable a figure than Hildegard of Bingen, for example, refers to herself as "a human being, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations, remaining in the fragility of the weaker rib." *Scivias*, Part II, Vision 1. Mark Atherton, trans. *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings*, 9.

<sup>204</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 190, The Eighth Chapter. Colledge and Walsh resort to the sexist term "for all men" when Julian is trying very hard to keep her language gender neutral at this point. The Middle English reads "For alle this sight was shewde *in generale*" (Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 151, l. 23) which Watson and Jenkins more accurately gloss as "a message for everyone" (150, n. to l. 24).

goodness was willing to show it generally, to the comfort of us all. For it is God's will that you accept it with great joy and delight, as Jesus has shown it to you.<sup>205</sup>

According to Denys Turner, this is the only instance in the whole of the Long Text in which Julian addresses the reader using the direct second-person plural: Julian does so, Turner argues, for the sake of emphasizing that “the target of the shewings is not her but her readers.”<sup>206</sup> Christopher Abbott makes a similar claim when he declares that

By working into her text a conception of the union of all Christians, specifically *her* union with her *audience*, in the mystical body of Christ, [Julian] creates an acoustic within which her authorial voice can achieve a distinctive resonance. This sense of union, or more appropriately *communion*, emboldens Julian to adopt quite freely a rhetorical stance by which her insights are presented not merely as significant for her personally but universally significant.<sup>207</sup>

The insights to which Abbott alludes have very broad implications indeed, of course, since they relate to no less universal an issue than the nature of God's love for humanity. Julian tells us at the outset of the work that her book is “a revelation of

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<sup>205</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 191, The Eighth Chapter. Although Julian here refers to herself as a wretch, a term that she uses on other occasions (see, for example, Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 209, 212, The Seventeenth Chapter and The Nineteenth Chapter), the omission of the self-abnegating epithets she uses with reference to herself in Chapter vi of the Short Text speaks to Julian's growing confidence as a writer by the time she was composing the Long Text. For Julian's disparaging comments about herself as a female author and theologian, see Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 133-35 and Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 176-79. Sandra McEntire frames this growing confidence in terms of Julian's reworking of the discourse of patriarchy. See McEntire, “The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*,” 10-12.

<sup>206</sup> Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, 74.

<sup>207</sup> Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography*, 76.

love,”<sup>208</sup> a point to which she eloquently returns in a summary comment at the end of her text:

So I was taught that love is our Lord’s meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be. And in this love he has done all his works, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had our beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him from without beginning. In this love we have our beginning, and all this shall we see in God without end.<sup>209</sup>

Having announced the subject of her text to be love, Julian proceeds to define God’s love for humanity using the Middle English adjectives *homely* (meaning familiar, intimate) and *curteys* (courteous).<sup>210</sup> In her first vision of the bleeding head of Christ, for example, Julian declares herself to have been “greatly astonished by this wonder and marvel, that he who is so to be revered and feared would be so familiar [*homely*] with a sinful creature living in this wretched flesh.”<sup>211</sup> In a similar vein, Julian declares that “truly it is the greatest possible joy, as I see it, that he who is highest and mightiest,

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<sup>208</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 175, The First Chapter.

<sup>209</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 342-43, The Eighty-Sixth Chapter.

<sup>210</sup> Courteous love is a metaphor that derives from the world of the medieval romance, where the term normally refers to the deference with which inferiors respond to their superiors—e.g., knights to their lords or ladies, knights and courtiers to women in whom they are romantically interested; however, superiors can also behave courteously to their social inferiors, as is evidenced in Julian’s parable and in the behaviour of Lord Bercilak in Part IV of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Joan Nuth raises the interesting possibility that Julian uses the term *courteous* to allude to the fact that even a God who is homely is nevertheless God and therefore also a transcendent figure whose ways are not our ways. Nuth, *God’s Lovers*, 117.

<sup>211</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 181, The Fourth Chapter. Compare a similar comment in response to the continuation of this showing of the bleeding head at 188, The Seventh Chapter. See Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 137, l. 16.

noblest and most honourable, is lowest and humblest, most familiar and courteous [*hamliest and curtyest*].”<sup>212</sup> In an effort to render this familiarity in more concrete terms, Julian resorts to metaphor to explain how the homely love of God functions: “I saw that he [God] is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for his love, embraces and shelters us, surrounds us for love, which is so tender that he may never desert us.”<sup>213</sup> In a similar vein, Julian resorts to the use of an analogy that she will later expand upon when she compares God’s love for humanity to the generosity demonstrated by a great king or a mighty lord who chooses to enter into cordial relations with one of his servants. In response to such treatment, the servant can only marvel: “See, what greater honour and joy could this noble lord give me than to demonstrate to me, who am so little, this wonderful familiarity [*this marvelous homelyhede*]. Truly, this is a greater joy and delight to me than if he were to give me great gifts, and himself always to remain distant in his manner.”<sup>214</sup> Additional evidence of God’s homely loving is revealed in Julian’s revelation concerning a splendid heavenly banquet hosted by God “as a lord in his own house”: “Then I did not see him seated anywhere in his own house,”<sup>215</sup> Julian declares, “but I saw him reign in his house as a king and fill it all full of joy and mirth, gladdening and consoling his dear friends with himself, very familiarly and courteously [*fulle homely and fulle curtesly*], with

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<sup>212</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 188, The Seventh Chapter. Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 149, l. 38.

<sup>213</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 183, The Fifth Chapter.

<sup>214</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 188, The Seventh Chapter; Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 147, l. 32.

<sup>215</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 203, The Fourteenth Chapter. Watson and Jenkins note that, “Instead of sitting at the center of the banquet, the Lord makes his friends its focus.” Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 172, n. to ll. 5-6.

wonderful melody in endless love in his own fair blissful countenance.”<sup>216</sup> Later in the text, Julian informs her readers that God wants us to be as familiar with our Creator as God is with us, although she warns that we need to be as courteous in our relationship with God as God is in his relations with humanity:

For our courteous Lord wants us to be as familiar with him as heart may think or soul may desire; but let us beware that we do not accept this familiarity so carelessly as to forsake courtesy. For our Lord himself is supreme familiarity, and he is as courteous as he is familiar, for he is true courtesy. And he wants to have the blessed creatures who will be in heaven with him without end like himself in all things, and to be perfectly like our Lord is our true salvation and our greatest bliss.<sup>217</sup>

Although the intimacy of this experience of the divine may remind us of Margery’s amorous dallying with her lover Jesus, there is a distinction between the homely loving of Kempe’s text and that which is to be discerned in the following passage and throughout Julian’s text. This distinction rests in the fact that the homely love Margery experiences in her relations with Jesus is extended in Julian’s text to encompass all three persons of the trinity:

For the greatest abundance of joy which we shall have, as I see it, is this wonderful courtesy and familiarity of our Father, who is our Creator, in our Lord

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<sup>216</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 203, The Fourteenth Chapter; Watkins and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 173, l. 7. Compare also, of course, the account of the heavenly banquet in Matthew 22: 1-14.

<sup>217</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 331, The Seventy-Seventh Chapter.

Jesus Christ, who is our brother and our saviour. But no man can know this wonderful familiarity in this life, unless by a special revelation from our Lord, or from a great abundance of grace, given within by the Holy Spirit.<sup>218</sup>

The note sounded in this passage is one that is struck at the very outset of the Long Text where Julian tells us that, in tandem with her first bodily showing, she was given to understand that “the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity.” No less important is the accompanying understanding that “where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood, as I see it.”<sup>219</sup> This declaration bears comparison with Julian’s later claim that “All the Trinity worked in Christ’s Passion, administering abundant virtues and plentiful grace to us by him.”<sup>220</sup> Accordingly, Julian rarely refers to one person of the trinity without referencing the other two persons, often by resorting to the rhetorical device of parallelism.<sup>221</sup> With respect to the success of Christ’s redemptive mission, for example, Julian remarks that “The Father is pleased, the Son is honoured, the Holy Spirit takes delight. Jesus wants us to pay heed to this bliss for our salvation *which is in the blessed*

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<sup>218</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 189, The Seventh Chapter.

<sup>219</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian* 181, The Fourth Chapter.

<sup>220</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 219, The Twenty-Third Chapter.

<sup>221</sup> Although they may well have been intended to pay repeated tribute to the trinity, Julian seems fond of the triad as a rhetorical trope in and of itself. She frequently resorts to parallelism when there is no need to do so, as, for example, when she remarks that “*the higher, the stronger, the sweeter* that love is, the more sorrow it is to the lover to see the body which he loved in pain”, Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 210, The Eighteenth Chapter. Julian resorts to the same triadic structure when she claims that “he [Christ] saw and he sorrowed for every man’s *sorrow, desolation and anguish*, in his compassion and love”, Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 213, The Twentieth Chapter. A third example attests to Julian’s use of adjectives in a parallel series: “It is for love of you that I have made her *so exalted, so noble, so honourable*”, Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 222, The Twenty-Fifth Chapter. Occasionally, the parallelism is more syntactically complex, as is the case in the following sequence of sentences: “I see three things: sport and scorn and seriousness. I see sport, that the devil is overcome; and I see scorn, that God scorns him and he will be scorned; and I see seriousness, that he is overcome by the blessed Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was accomplished in great earnest and with heavy labour.” Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 202, The Thirteenth Chapter.

*Trinity* (my emphasis).”<sup>222</sup> A comparable example of the use of parallelism to explain the workings of the trinity is to be discerned in the now perhaps too frequently quoted promise that God makes to Julian in response to all her questions and doubts: “I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well.” Although this may appear to be a fourfold promise, Julian goes on to explain that it is a statement reflective of the trinity in form as well as content: “When he says ‘I may’, I understand this to apply to the Father; and when he says ‘I can’, I understand it for the Son; and when he says ‘I will’, I understand it for the Holy spirit; and when he says ‘I shall’, I understand it for the unity of the blessed Trinity, three persons and one truth.”<sup>223</sup>

Although Kempe informs us that Margery, too, has direct experience of the workings of the trinity, Kempe’s understanding of this theological construct seems grounded in rote rather than reflection. Clearly, she has not pondered the matter in the way that Julian has, nor is Kempe capable of making reference to the mystery of the trinity with the kind of intellectual and syntactical sophistication that characterizes Julian’s treatment of the subject. Instead, Kempe’s syntax tends to become garbled as she struggles to express in her own words concepts that are familiar to her from her catechetical training but that have not, apparently, been the subject of much further

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<sup>222</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 146, Short Text, Chapter xiii; cf. Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 218, The Twenty-Third Chapter, where the second sentence is omitted. A comparable parallelism, in this case a quadrilateral construction, identifies humanity as the crown bestowed upon Christ in recognition of his redemptive triumph: “For it was revealed that we are his crown, which crown is the Father’s joy, the Son’s honour, the Holy Spirit’s delight, and endless marvellous bliss to all who are in heaven.” Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 278, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>223</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 229, The Thirty-First Chapter.

intellectual or spiritual reflection on her part. Thus it is that we find Kempe claiming, for example, that “Sometimes the Second Person in Trinity, sometimes all three Persons in Trinity and one substance in Godhead, spoke to her soul, and informed her in her faith and in his love.”<sup>224</sup> Not much more precise in its language or illuminating in its theology is Jesus’s assurance to Margery that her knowledge of the workings of the trinity is sound: “You also think that each of the three Persons in the Trinity has what the other has in their Godhead, and so you truly believe, daughter, in your soul, that there are three divers Persons and one God in substance, and that each knows what the others know, and each may do what the others may, and each wills what the others will. And daughter, this is a true faith and a right faith, and this faith you have only of my gift.”<sup>225</sup>

Further compromising the integrity of Kempe’s trinitarianism is the fact that Margery’s dealings with the divine rarely include God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; instead, as was suggested in the previous chapter of this study, her experience of the divine is limited almost exclusively to the second person of the trinity, with whom Margery purports to be on very intimate terms indeed. Claiming that she is afraid of him, Margery only reluctantly agrees to enter into a mystical marriage with God the Father, as has already been suggested. More to the point, perhaps, is the fact this marriage seems not to have extended beyond the elaborate wedding celebrations in which Margery is said to have taken such delight; indeed, in the very next chapter of Kempe’s text, we find the second person of the trinity telling Margery that, as her wedded husband, it is fitting that

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<sup>224</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 75, Chapter 17.

<sup>225</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 252, Chapter 86. More imaginative perhaps is Christ’s suggestion that Margery contemplate the three persons of the trinity as sitting in her soul on three cushions, a gold one for the Father, a red one for the Son, and a white one for the Holy Ghost. See Windeatt, *The Book*, 251-52, Chapter 86.

she should take him to her bed and be “on homely terms” with him.<sup>226</sup> In short, it is probably safe to assert that when Kempe makes reference to the divine, she is normally referencing only the second person of the trinity. When Julian speaks of the divine, on the other hand, she is always referencing the three persons of the trinity, even when her specific focus happens to be the saving work undertaken by the second person of the trinity, in unity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, on behalf of humanity.

As has already been suggested, this saving work is addressed in the first half of Julian’s text in her carefully crafted, “photographic” accounts of Christ’s suffering during the events leading up to and including his crucifixion. In the second half of the Long Text, however, Julian seeks to set this suffering into a theological context by resorting to a very memorable *exemplum* or *similitude*.<sup>227</sup> Among the first to draw attention to the literary and theological implications of Julian’s parable of the lord and the servant was Diane Nowakowski Baker, who recognized it as a highly original response to Augustinian theology, particularly the Augustinian notion that the fall of humanity was the consequence of an act of wilful disobedience on the part of humanity’s first parents. According to Baker, Augustine argues that this act of disobedience was such an affront to God’s justice that nothing could compensate for it but the sacrificial death of God’s own son.<sup>228</sup> Although he has some reservations about her reading of Augustine, Denys Turner

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<sup>226</sup> Windeatt, *The Book*, 126, Chapter 36.

<sup>227</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 272, n. to l. 2 define the similitude as “a genre of narrative associated with Anselm and especially common in *Ancrene Wisse*, in which divine truths are described in closely analogous human terms.” The *exemplum*, of course, was the illustrative example often employed in medieval sermons. A secular exemplum from the same period as Julian’s parable would be the story of the three rioters in Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale*.

<sup>228</sup> Baker, *Julian*, 83-88.

is willing to support Baker's claim that Julian's is not the retributive soteriology expounded by Augustine and embraced by most of the medieval theologians with whose writings Julian might be expected to have been familiar.<sup>229</sup> Unlike Augustine, whose interest was the *cause* of the fall, Julian's interest rests in its *effects*: consequently, to use the terms employed by Baker, Julian's theodicy differs from Augustine's in that hers is teleological, whereas his is etiological.<sup>230</sup>

That Julian was more interested in the effects of the fall than in its cause or causes comes quickly to the fore as her "double" parable of the lord and the servant unfolds. As Liz Herbert McAvoy has pointed out, the lord to whom we are introduced at the outset of the first version of the parable may be "sit[ting] in state" but turns out not to be the "typical Old Testament patriarch" we might expect him to be;<sup>231</sup> instead, the lord sits "in rest and in peace . . . look[ing] on his servant very lovingly and sweetly and mildly."<sup>232</sup> Although McAvoy would have us see in Julian's use of these adverbs a "subtle inscription of the feminine upon the figure of the lord in the parable,"<sup>233</sup> her argument is not sufficiently substantiated by textual evidence to be at all convincing; that said, we would probably do well to take her larger point that Julian may be anticipating, and thus readying her readers for, her representation of God as mother in the ensuing section of her text. Whether or not we see the lord of Julian's parable as a maternal figure, we are certainly invited to see him as a parental figure who, in a perfect world, would be the

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<sup>229</sup> Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, 126.

<sup>230</sup> Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 68.

<sup>231</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 88

<sup>232</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 267, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>233</sup> McAvoy, *Authority*, 88.

consistently *loving, sweet, and mild* mother or father every child deserves to have. Confirming this initial impression of the lord is his response to the servant's inadvertent fall into a pit not long after he has enthusiastically hastened away to do his lord's bidding. As the servant lies in the *slade*,<sup>234</sup> he suffers physical pain but is much more deeply troubled by a "lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving lord."<sup>235</sup> The lord, on the other hand, can and continues to gaze upon his servant "most tenderly . . . very meekly and mildly, with great compassion and pity."<sup>236</sup> Indeed, Julian remarks, "And the loving regard which he kept constantly on his servant, and especially when he fell, it seemed to me that it could melt our hearts for love and break them in two for joy."<sup>237</sup>

Needless to say, this is not the God of Augustine's retributive theodicy, nor is Julian's servant the disobedient Adam to be encountered in Genesis 3 and in Augustine's various commentaries on this biblical text. Instead, Julian's servant falls while attempting to obey his lord's will: "the only cause of his falling," Julian declares, "was his good will and his great desire. And in spirit he was as prompt and as good as he was when he stood before his lord, ready to do his will."<sup>238</sup> As a result of this faithfulness on the part of the

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<sup>234</sup> Julian uses the Middle English word *slade*, which Colledge and Walsh translate, not very helpfully for Canadians, as "dell", *Julian* 267, The Fifty-First Chapter. Watson and Jenkins suggest other possibilities: "valley, hollow, ditch, or any declivity in the ground", *The Writings*, 272, n. to l. 12. I prefer the translation "pit" because of its metaphorical possibilities: as it does in the opening line of a well-known lyric on the subject of death, "put" can mean both pit and grave in Middle English: "Whan the turf is thy tour (tower)/ And thy put (grave) is thy bour (bower)." Stevick, *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*, 12, #9. It may be noteworthy in this regard that Julian describes the pit as grave-like: "narrow and comfortless, and distressful." Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 268, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>235</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 267, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>236</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 268, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>237</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 271, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>238</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 268, The Fifty-First Chapter

servant, the lord has no reason to censure or punish him; indeed, the lord feels the servant to be without blame and worthy of reward “for his fright and his fear, his hurt, and his injuries, and all his woes.”<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, the lord believes that the servant “should be highly and blessedly rewarded forever, above what he would have been if he had not fallen.”<sup>240</sup>

It is noteworthy that, when Julian takes it upon herself to explain the meaning of the parable to her readers, she immediately underscores its universal implications: “I understood that the servant who stood before him was shown for Adam, that is to say, one man was shown at that time and his fall, so as to make it understood how God regards all men and their falling. For in the sight of God all men are one man, and one man is all men.”<sup>241</sup> Although this universalizing principle is one to which the reader has already been exposed in Julian’s efforts to make herself the equal of her *evencristen*, it is noteworthy that she is here using the principle to identify herself and her readers with Adam and thus to implicate them in a human-divine relationship that stretches all the way back to creation.

As significant a theological point as Julian may be making here for the benefit of her readers, she has an even more profound truth to convey in her second iteration of the exemplum. In the second version of the parable, the servant is again standing before his lord but is this time dressed in a tattered tunic:

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<sup>239</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 268, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>240</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 269, The Fifty-First Chapter

<sup>241</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 270, The Fifty-First Chapter.

This is not fitting clothing for a servant *so greatly loved* to stand in before so honourable a lord. And, inwardly, there was shown in him *a foundation of love, the love* which he had for the lord, which was equal to *the love* which the lord had for him. The wisdom of the servant saw inwardly that there was one thing to do which would pay honour to the lord; and the servant, *for love*, having no regard for himself or for anything which might happen to him, went off in great haste and ran when his lord sent him, to do the thing which was his will and to his honour; for it seemed by his outer garment as if he had been a constant labourer and a hard traveller for a long time (my emphasis).<sup>242</sup>

Clearly, the second version of parable is meant to remind us of the first. In both, we encounter a lord who is said to love his servant greatly. Whereas the first servant stands “respectfully” before his lord, however, the second is reported to be grounded in love and to love his lord as much as his lord loves him. Moreover, because of the wisdom with which he has been endowed, the second servant is able to anticipate the request that his lord is about to make of him and, in love, rushes off “to do the thing which was his will and to his honour.” Julian’s pronoun usage in this line would seem to be deliberately ambiguous, since the antecedent of “his” is not clear, and the *will* and the *honour* in question could thus be that of either the lord or the servant. That they are, in fact, one and the same will and honour is no doubt the point that Julian is playfully making. Also implicit in the intentional repetition to which Julian resorts in this passage is the suggestion that the mutual love which exists between the lord and the servant is, in fact,

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<sup>242</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 273, The Fifty-First Chapter.

the mutual love that infuses the trinity; indeed, Julian goes on to spell this out explicitly for her readers when she later declares that “The Lord is God the Father, the servant is the Son, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is the equal love which is in them both.”<sup>243</sup>

Whereas the typological underpinnings of the first version of the parable had linked the servant with Adam and, through Adam, with all of humanity, the universalizing principle that comes into play in the second version of the parable links humanity with both Adam and the second person of the trinity: “For in all this our good Lord showed his own Son and Adam as only one man. The strength and the goodness that we have is from Jesus Christ, the weakness and blindness that we have is from Adam, which two were shown in the servant”.<sup>244</sup> The special connection that exists between humanity and the second person of the trinity is explicated very poetically in a passage that equates Adam’s tumbling into the pit with the tumbling of the second person of the trinity into the womb of his earthly mother:

When Adam fell, God’s Son fell; because of the true union which was made in heaven, God’s Son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind. Adam fell from life to death, into the valley of this wretched world, and after that into hell. God’s Son fell with Adam, into the valley of the womb of the maiden who was the fairest daughter of Adam, and that was to excuse Adam from blame in heaven and on earth; and powerfully he brought him out of hell.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 274, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>244</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 275, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>245</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 274-75, The Fifty-First Chapter.

Although at this point Julian affords us no details about the circumstances occasioning “the true union” of God and humanity in heaven, she later addresses the matter when she declares that it was “[God’s] eternal purpose to create human nature, which fair nature he first prepared for his own Son, the second person; and when he wished, by full agreement of the whole Trinity he created us all once. And in our creating he joined and united us to himself.”<sup>246</sup> As the following passage suggests, both the creation of humanity and its restoration were acts of love undertaken by the second person but endorsed by all three persons of the trinity:

We know in our faith and our belief, by the teaching and preaching of Holy Church, that the blessed Trinity made mankind in their image and likeness. In the same way we know that when man fell so deeply and so wretchedly through sin, there was no other help for restoring him, except through him who created man. And he who created man for love, by the same love wanted to restore man to the same blessedness and to even more. And just as we were made like the Trinity in our first making, our Creator wished us to be like Jesus Christ our saviour in heaven forever, through the power of our making again.<sup>247</sup>

Although Julian does not spell out for her readers what this restitution entails or how it is effected, she twice identifies it as an act of restoration and specifies that that it is a deed that could be effected only by the God who had first created humanity and who, in love, desired to see fallen humanity restored, not only to its original blessedness but to even

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<sup>246</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 293, The Fifty-Eighth Chapter.

<sup>247</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 194-95, The Tenth Chapter.

greater glory. As has been suggested above, Julian elsewhere refers to this saving work effected by the second person of the trinity as the falling of God's Son into the womb of a human mother so that he might "excuse Adam from blame in heaven and on earth" and lead him out of hell.<sup>248</sup> Although Ruth M. Nuth has claimed that Julian is here intimating that "the incarnation had a purpose other than repairing damage caused by sin, and would have occurred even if there had been no sin,"<sup>249</sup> the content of the above quotation would seem to argue against this notion. For Julian, the incarnation is all about repair and restoration. Closer to the mark than Nuth, it would seem to me, is Turner's similar but more encompassing claim that all the events of salvation history speak to the mystery of God's all-encompassing love and plan for humanity:

Creation, Fall, and Redemption are all, somehow, contained within one another, are in some unimaginable way a single divine action eternally willed in a single act of willing, such that Julian can say, "God doth *alle* thing." The whole drama was, for Julian, foreseen, and being foreseen, created as foreseen, and out of, not in spite of, a drama of love, and so of freedom, divine and human.<sup>250</sup>

Interestingly, Turner's claim echoes a declaration that Julian herself makes later in the Fourteenth Revelation: "For I saw most truly that all the works which God has done or will ever do were fully known to him and foreseen from without beginning. And for love he made mankind, and for the same love he himself wanted to become man."<sup>251</sup> It seems

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<sup>248</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 274-75, The Fifty-First Chapter.

<sup>249</sup> Nuth, *God's Lovers*, 109.

<sup>250</sup> Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, 119.

<sup>251</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 291, The Fifty-Seventh Chapter.

worth noting that though she is here referring to the saving work of the second person of the trinity, Julian uses the term God and, in so doing, manages to underpin her conviction that “The Trinity is God, God is the Trinity.”<sup>252</sup>

Although she might well have left things at this, having used the parable of the lord and the servant to afford her readers a theological explanation of the saving work of the trinity, Julian takes it upon herself to devote the remainder of the Fourteenth Revelation to a consideration of God’s maternity. In so doing, Julian succeeds in demonstrating that her theodicy has a pastoral dimension that complements her soteriology. Indeed, as Caroline Walker Bynum has noted, Julian is intent upon bringing reassurance and comfort to her readers by resorting to the use of maternal images of God with which they would have been familiar: “The use of *mothering* as a description for the nurturing and loving (even the disciplining) that the soul receives from God is not new with Julian, nor are Julian’s extended images of Jesus as lactating and birthing mother.”<sup>253</sup> Julian resorts to the last of these maternal images when she compares the trinity’s restoration of humanity on the cross to a mother’s experience of carrying and bearing a child: “But our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life, blessed may he be. So he carries us within him in love and travail, until the full time when he wanted to suffer the sharpest thorns and cruel pains that ever were or will be, and at the last he died. And when he had finished, and had borne us so for bliss, still all this

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<sup>252</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 181, The Fourth Chapter.

<sup>253</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 266. Bynum cites other medieval texts in which these images appear. Nuth, *God’s Lovers*, 112-13 offers useful information about possible scriptural sources for these images, as does Jennifer P. Heimmel, in “*God is our Mother*”: *Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity*, 5-11.

could not satisfy his wonderful love.”<sup>254</sup> Julian goes on to explain that just as a mother feeds a child from her breast, Mother Jesus is able to feed us with himself through the eucharist and the other sacraments and through the teachings of Holy Church. Just as readily, Julian informs her readers, “Mother Jesus can lead us easily into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show us there a part of the godhead and of the joys of heaven, with inner certainty of endless bliss.”<sup>255</sup>

As Julian explains it to her readers in this part of her text, the saving work of the second person of the trinity is the redemption of humanity: “in our Mother of mercy we have our reforming and our restoring, in whom our parts are united and all made perfect man.”<sup>256</sup> The “parts” in question here are the *substance*, which is unfallen and eternal, and the *sensuality*, which is changeable as a consequence of the fall. Whereas our substance is something that human beings share with all three persons of the trinity, our sensuality is something that humanity shares with only the second person of the trinity who voluntarily adopted our human nature:

And our substance is in our Father, God almighty, and our substance is in our Mother, God all wisdom, and our substance is in our Lord God, the Holy Spirit, all goodness, for our substance is whole in each person of the Trinity, who is one God. And our sensuality is only in the second person, Christ Jesus, in whom is the Father and the Holy Spirit; and in him and by him we are powerfully taken out of hell and out of the wretchedness on earth, and gloriously brought up into heaven,

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<sup>254</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 298, The Sixtieth Chapter.

<sup>255</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 298, The Sixtieth Chapter.

<sup>256</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 295, The Fifty-Ninth Chapter.

and blessedly united to our substance, increased in riches and nobility by all the power of Christ and by the grace and operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>257</sup>

Of relevance here is Baker's comment that "While all three persons of the Trinity are substantially united to humankind, only the second person achieves union with the creaturely sensuality. In addition to Christ's special role in enlivening the body in the first act of creation, Julian calls attention to the second person's unique function in taking on a body in the Incarnation."<sup>258</sup> Equally worthy of note is Bynum's perceptive observation that "God's motherhood, expressed in Christ, is not merely love and mercy, not merely redemption through the sacrifice of the cross, but also a taking on of our physical humanity in the Incarnation, a kind of *creation* in us, as a mother gives herself to the foetus she bears."<sup>259</sup> Interestingly, and in affirmation of the claim Bynum makes, Julian employs the same image to describe the saving work of the second person of the trinity: "For in the same time that God joined himself to our body in the maiden's womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us all in himself, he united it to our substance."<sup>260</sup> Christ's success in accomplishing this reunion of substance and sensuality by enclosing humanity within his metaphorical womb has prompted Abbott to identify the second person as the real mother of the trinity:

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<sup>257</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 295, The Fifty-Eighth Chapter.

<sup>258</sup> Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 131.

<sup>259</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 266.

<sup>260</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 292, The Fifty-Seventh Chapter; cf. 292 in the same chapter, where the enclosure metaphor is expanded to include Mary "in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she who is mother of our saviour is mother of all who are saved in our saviour; and our saviour is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come."

The image of the mother has three modulations, each pertaining to the operations of a distinct person of the Trinity, though it is crucial to bear in mind that the image is always primarily christological and that whatever significances it assumes come within that definition. This is to say that the mother as such is Christ, not the Father and not the Holy Spirit; though the operations of Father and Spirit through the mediation of Christ the mother are, by virtue of that christological mediation, describable as motherly activities.”<sup>261</sup>

Abbott’s point is well taken with respect to the third modulation of Julian’s image of divine mothering. Having argued that Jesus is our true Mother in nature (“by our first creation”) and our true Mother in grace (“by his taking our created nature”), Julian concludes her discussion of the motherhood of God by attributing to the trinity the motherhood of work.<sup>262</sup> As Julian explains it, this maternal activity is the means by which “we are brought back by the motherhood of mercy and grace into our natural place, in which we were created by the motherhood of love, a mother’s love which never leaves us.”<sup>263</sup> For the benefit of her readers, Julian devotes this part of her text to explaining how grace operates in our lives, particularly in our “spiritual bringing to birth,”<sup>264</sup> and how grace will continue to operate until human/salvation history ends. Until that moment occurs, Julian insists, humanity will continue to stand in need of grace because human beings will continue to fall as Adam fell. Having made this claim, Julian hastens to assure

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<sup>261</sup>Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography*, 127; cf. Kerrie Hide, who argues that “although motherhood occurs in God, we see the full expression of divine motherhood in and through Christ”. Hyde, *Gifted Origins to Grace Fulfillment*, 137.

<sup>262</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 296, The Fifty-Ninth Chapter.

<sup>263</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 297, The Sixtieth Chapter.

<sup>264</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 299, The Sixty-First Chapter.

her *evencristen* that, when we fall, Jesus the Mother of work will quickly “raise us up with his loving embrace and his gracious touch”<sup>265</sup> and use our falling both to strengthen us and to remind us of our inherent weakness. Indeed, the falling originates in God’s mercy, “for we need to fall, and we need to see it; for if we did not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are in ourselves, nor, too, should we know so completely the wonderful love of our Creator.”<sup>266</sup>

There can hardly be any question but that such claims about the benefits of falling are meant to serve as a gloss on Julian’s controversial contention in the Thirteenth Revelation that sin is “behovely”. Although translated by Colledge and Walsh as “necessary,” I think a more accurate rendering of the term is probably “inevitable”: to her great sadness, Julian recognizes that there is no avoiding sin, as strenuously and conscientiously as one may try to circumvent it. By the same token, however, Julian seems intent upon assuring her readers that sinning is not an entirely unbeneficial experience for humanity. As Baker has pointed out, the Middle English Dictionary extends the meaning of *behovely* to include “useful, profitable, beneficial, good.” Watson and Jenkins concur, citing as possible translations for the term “necessary or fitting, also good or opportune.”<sup>267</sup> Thus it is that Julian is able to argue that, as painful as its effects invariably prove, sin is useful, indeed beneficial and profitable, for humanity because it acts as a scourge that makes us contrite, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to continue the

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<sup>265</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 300, The Sixty-First Chapter.

<sup>266</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 300, The Sixty-First Chapter.

<sup>267</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 225, The Twenty-Seventh Chapter; Baker, *Julian*, 70; Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 208, n. to l. 10. Turner prefers “fitting” because sin “fits” in the context of the drama of divine love that is salvation history. See Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, 32-46, especially 38-41.

trinity's saving work in us: "Sin is the sharpest scourge with which any chosen soul can be struck, which scourge belabours man or woman, and breaks a man, and purges him in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself that he is not fit for anything but as it were to sink into hell, until contrition seizes him by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and turns bitterness into hope of God's mercy."<sup>268</sup> Julian echoes this claim from the Thirteenth Revelation when she declares in the Fourteenth that "the humility and weakness which we shall obtain by the sight of our fall [will be the means whereby] we shall be raised high in heaven, to which raising we might never have come without that meekness."<sup>269</sup> In the Thirteenth Revelation, Julian declares that, throughout the trials to which God subjects us as a means of restoring us, he continues to protect us: "Our good Lord protects us with the greatest of loving care when it seems to us that we are almost forsaken and abandoned because of our sins and because we see that we have deserved it."<sup>270</sup> Affirming this notion of loving protection when we are undergoing periods of great duress is the claim Julian makes in the Fourteenth Revelation when she declares that Jesus the loving Mother will never allow us to perish: "The mother may sometimes suffer the child to fall and to be distressed in various ways, for its own benefit, but she can never suffer any kind of peril to come to her child, because of her love. And though our earthly mother may suffer her child to perish, our heavenly Mother Jesus may never suffer us who are his children to perish, for he is almighty, all wisdom, and all love."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 244, The Thirty-Ninth Chapter.

<sup>269</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 300, The Sixty-First Chapter.

<sup>270</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 244, The Thirty-Ninth Chapter.

<sup>271</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 300-01, The Sixty-First Chapter.

Anticipating a piece of advice that she will offer to her readers in the Sixteenth Revelation, Julian at this point invites her *even cristen* not to run away from God when they fall but to behave like a child by running quickly towards our “courteous” Mother: “So he wants us to act as a meek child, saying: My kind Mother, my gracious Mother, my beloved Mother, have mercy on me. I have made myself filthy and unlike you, and I may not and cannot make it right except with your help and grace.”<sup>272</sup> Comparably, in The Sixteenth Revelation, Julian urges her readers to run to the Lord for comfort and redemption: “Let us flee to our Lord and we shall be comforted. Let us touch him, and we shall be made clean. Let us cleave to him, and we shall be sure and safe from every kind of peril.”<sup>273</sup> Recommending to them the faith of Holy Church, Julian concludes her discussion of the motherhood of God by assuring her readers that “The sweet gracious hands of our Mother are ready and diligent about us; for he in all this work exercises the true office of a kind nurse, who has nothing else to do but attend to the safety of her child.”<sup>274</sup>

Given that “the kind nurse” in Julian’s day was more apt to be a female than a male, there can be no question but that Julian was challenging gender stereotypes. Hide speaks to this issue when she claims that Julian was implying that “both masculine and feminine images are essential in describing who God is in relation to creatures.”<sup>275</sup>

Abbott, however, has taken the matter further and deeper by pointing to the virulently

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<sup>272</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 301, The Sixty-First Chapter.

<sup>273</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 331, The Seventy-Seventh Chapter

<sup>274</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 302, The Sixty-First Chapter.

<sup>275</sup> Hide, *Gifted Origins*, 136.

misogynistic cultural and theological climate of the English Middle Ages and suggesting that

In such a cultural context, the theological extent and consistency of Julian's maternal imagery represents a quite specific achievement. In her hand, the image of Christ the mother, which is given considerable weight within the text, becomes a powerful, alternative and feminine symbol of the incarnation, a corrective to the tendency of traditional christologies (despite the cross-currents) to attach prestige to the masculine as distinct from the human.<sup>276</sup>

The aim of this corrective, of course, is balance: *neither* a male God *nor* a female God, but a God who is sufficiently genderless so as to be capable of taking on the roles of *both* father *and* mother.

What the Long Text affords us, in sum, is a theology that identifies divine love as the motivating factor in salvation history. By means of the connections Julian succeeds in establishing between humanity and Adam and, subsequently, between humanity and the second person of the trinity, Julian seeks to assure her *evencristen* that God does not blame them for sinning because, as she declares at one point, "man will do nothing at all but sin."<sup>277</sup> As a figure of compassion who takes on the roles of both father and mother to humanity, Julian's God is a God who protects us in our repeated fallings and who holds

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<sup>276</sup> Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 126.

<sup>277</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 239, The Thirty-Sixth Chapter.

out the promise of eternal bliss in compensation for the pain and suffering occasioned by human sin.

Although she discloses no personal details, Julian seems to know from her own experience that life can be hard, and that the human tendency to despair in time of trouble is strong. Because of the blindness that has inflicted us since the fall, Julian informs her readers, human beings are incapable of seeing God's face clearly and are thus prevented from recognizing God's love for what it is; to our peril, Julian argues, we are thus too often prone to forgetting that Jesus the Mother is always actively at work in our lives nurturing and protecting us:

And in this I saw matter for mirth and matter for mourning—matter for mirth, that our Lord, our maker is so near to us and in us, and we in him, because of his great goodness he keeps us faithfully; matter for mourning, because our spiritual eye is so blind, and we are so burdened with the weight of our mortal flesh and the darkness of sin that we cannot see clearly the blessed face of our Lord God. No and because of this darkness, we can scarcely believe or have faith in his great love and his faithfulness, with which he protects us. And so it is that I say we can never cease mourning and weeping.<sup>278</sup>

Encouraging her *even cristen* to remain faithful and hopeful, Julian tells her readers that God has revealed himself to her as being among us “as if it were on pilgrimage, that is to say that he is here with us, leading us, and will be until he has brought us all to his bliss in

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<sup>278</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 320-21, The Seventy-Second Chapter; cf. an earlier treatment of the blindness/suffering theme at 279, The Fifty-Second Chapter.

heaven.”<sup>279</sup> Julian affords her readers a second image of God’s immanence when she reminds them that, in reward for his work as the Mother in grace, God has granted the second person of the trinity a permanent dwelling place in the human soul: “He revealed himself several times reigning, as is said before, but principally in man’s soul; he has taken there his resting place and his honourable city. Out of this honourable throne he will never rise or depart without end.”<sup>280</sup> It is to such assurances that Julian urges her *evencristen* to cling when they find themselves feeling overwhelmed, for, as Grace Jantzen has argued, Julian’s text is “intended for the comfort and deeper spiritual understanding of individuals struggling with their own guilt and discouragement and despair, clinging to faith and hope in very difficult times.”<sup>281</sup> Indeed, the universalizing principle to which Julian so often resorts comes into play for a final time in her text as a maternal Jesus assures Julian (and her readers) that, as grim as things may look and, indeed, as grim as things may get, the triune God will see to it that, in the end, all will be well for humanity:

You will not be overcome. And all this teaching and this true strengthening apply generally to all my fellow Christians, as is said before, and so is the will of God. And these words: You will not be overcome, were said very insistently and strongly, for certainty and strength against every tribulation which may come. He did not say: You will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted; but he said: You will not be overcome. God wants us to pay attention

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<sup>279</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 337, The Eighty-First Chapter.

<sup>280</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 337, The Eighty-First Chapter.

<sup>281</sup> Jantzen, *Power and Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 167.

to these words, and always to be strong in faithful trust, in well-being and in woe, for he loves us and delights in us, and so he wishes us to love him and delight in him and trust greatly in him, and all will be well.<sup>282</sup>

Allow me to conclude by responding to this stirring assurance with an anecdote that embodies precisely the kind of human situation to which Julian seems to be drawing the reader's attention in this passage. About a year ago, a friend of mine named Diane found herself obliged to give up the home and garden she and her husband Brian so dearly loved because Brian, still in his sixties, had begun to show signs of early-onset dementia. Within the space of a few months of their move to what they hoped would be a more accommodating venue for Brian's future care, Diane discovered that she had terminal cancer and only a few weeks to live. The few weeks turned out to be two weeks. Because she was too enfeebled to talk on the telephone by the time I received the news that she was dying, I decided to send a fax to the hospice to which she had just been admitted. It contained a very short note which I concluded with the passage from Julian quoted above. It seemed the only appropriate thing to do under the circumstances, given that Diane had been the person who had first introduced me to Julian of Norwich, having long respected and admired Julian and her theology in precisely the way that I have since come to do. I shall never know whether or not the Julian passage brought Diane and Brian the comfort that it holds out for people who find themselves in such dire circumstances, but I sincerely hope that it did. If nothing else, Julian's words gave me reason to hope in a moment when all my instincts invited me to despair.

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<sup>282</sup> Colledge and Walsh, *Julian*, 315, The Sixty-Ninth Chapter.

## Conclusion

As different as they may be in content and purpose, the writings of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich attest to a common origin in the medieval devotional tradition known as affective piety. To read either Kempe or Julian is to see the influence of this tradition in the affective responses of both writers to the passion of Christ in particular and to the homely love of God in general. In the case of Kempe, we see this love defined in terms of God's love for a particular individual, namely Kempe's protagonist Margery, who is shown to enjoy a very intimate relationship with her lover Jesus. Julian, on the other hand, takes considerable pains to emphasize that no one person is especially loved by God because the love of the trinity extends equally to all people, or at least to all who will be saved. Julian's purpose in writing her text thus differs significantly from Kempe's. Kempe's "biographical" record of Margery's intimate encounters with the divine and of her various spiritual gifts, especially her gift of tears,

would seem intended to enhance Margery's reputation as a holy woman, if not also as a saint in the making: as a result, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is probably best regarded as a work of auto-hagiography. In its final form, on the other hand, Julian's *Showings* has come to be recognized as a sophisticated theological treatise in which Julian takes to task the retributive theodicies of Augustine and his medieval successors and seeks to offer her readers comfort and hope by assuring them of God's capacious love for humanity.

This scholarly recognition of Julian's status as a theologian has been a long time coming, in no small measure because she happened to have been born a female. Well into the last half of the twentieth century, Julian's gender continued to encourage male scholars to admire the quaintness of her "spirituality" but not to bother very much about the complexities of her theology. As was suggested at the beginning of this study, Margery's "spirituality" tended to be seen by this same community of scholars as an hysterical variation on Julian's spirituality in particular and the feminine religious response in general. The first wave of feminist scholarship did little to improve things for either Kempe or Julian: as more recent critics have come to recognize, Julian and Margery were not proto-feminists seeking to subvert the power of the church or the political culture in which they lived. Instead, as their texts repeatedly and respectively profess them to be, they were loyal daughters of both church and state, as offensive to some feminists as both of these male-dominated, hierarchical institutions continue to prove. This was particularly the case with Margery, of course, who was repeatedly arrested for crimes against church and state and repeatedly vindicated by the male hegemony of political and ecclesiastical institutions that she seems to have had no interest

whatever in attempting to subvert. Julian's situation is slightly more complex in that she sometimes finds herself at odds with the teachings of the church, particularly with respect to God's response to the fall of humanity. When she finds herself in this situation, however, Julian invariably resorts to a *both/and* strategy, rather than the binary restraints of an *either/or* equation: she assures her readers that her visions are as valid as the teachings of the church and that, even though the two may seem to be at odds at times, in fact, they are not. Although some of her efforts to strike this balance are more persuasive than others, on the whole they speak to a consistency of intent that argues against any effort to undermine the authority of the medieval church.

If the writings of Kempe and Julian in and of themselves have resisted the efforts of critics to impose particular feminisms upon them, they nonetheless bear witness to the lives and accomplishments of two truly remarkable women. Although they are women who may have lived in a fiercely patriarchal culture, it was a culture that failed to silence either of them. As her contemporaries were always quick to find out, it was as difficult to silence Margery Kempe as it was to keep her tending the home fires or her fourteen children for very long at a stretch. For all intents and purposes, Margery was a person who did whatever she wanted to do and travelled wherever she wanted to travel, in spite of the cultural restraints that prevailed for women in the fifteenth century. For all intents and purposes, the same can be said for Julian: using the considerable learning that she had at her disposal and her considerable skill as a writer, she succeeded in transforming her original record of her visionary experiences into a complex theological treatise that turned

out to be the equivalent of anything a male theologian of her day could have hoped to produce.

However much it may have to tell us about how the tradition of affective piety could have given rise to two works as different from one another as *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich, this thesis, like Julian's Long Text, is not yet "performed (perfected), as to my sight."<sup>283</sup> Indeed, so far as the issue of gender in particular is concerned, it never will be complete until the works of Kempe and Julian are compared to those of Richard Rolle, an English mystic of the fourteenth century. In what strikes me as a hazardous binary in which she pits male mystics against female mystics, Grace Jantzen has singled out Rolle for failing to conform to the gender stereotype sanctioned for the medieval male mystic by writers like the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>284</sup> Although Jantzen is quite right in pointing out how different Rolle is from the *Cloud*-author, she fails to notice how very much his works have in common with those of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. As might be expected, at least some of these similarities arise from the fact that Rolle, too, was a product of the tradition of affective piety. Although I doubt very much that I shall be the one to undertake such a study, let me close by suggesting that a comparative investigation into the works of Rolle, Kempe, and Julian could prove to be a much more fruitful undertaking than anyone has hitherto suspected to be the case.

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<sup>283</sup> Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings*, 379, l. 1.

<sup>284</sup> Jantzen, *Power and Gender*, 191-92.

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