

‘Reformyng’ and ‘Restoryng’:
Vision and Revision in *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*

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Julian of Norwich, a mystic writing in the fourteenth century, composed two versions of her text, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, in which she gave an account of a series of revelations granted to her by the divine. The first of these accounts, the Short Text, was presumably written soon after she received her visions in 1373.¹ Julian presents her visions in the Short Text, seemingly in their entirety. She certainly provides no textual indication that she for any reason left out a part of her vision. Twenty years later, however, Julian writes another text of her *Showings*,² the Long Text, in which she expands on her original account, including visions she had not initially included in her text. Julian explains, “And fro the tyme þat [the vision] was shewde, I desyerde oftyn tymes to wytt in what was oure lords menyng. And xv yere after and mor, I was answeyrd in gostly understandyng” (LT³ 732. 13-15). Julian received her vision fifteen years or more before she had understanding of it. The Short Text then includes those portions of her vision that she understood in the time immediately following her visions, whereas she writes the Long Text only after she reaches a more expansive “gostly” understanding. I want to argue that the changes in both the visions she recounts as well as the language in which she analyzes them are the product of a period of contemplation upon her visions, a period of contemplation which led to a revision and a “re-vision” of her text. I want to argue further that Julian asserts her own authority and agency as author through her “re-vision” of God’s divine gift of the revelations in the context of her own memory and understanding.

Julian’s immediate visions and her initial understanding of them, while already complex in the Short Text, do not provide her fully with “wytt” of the Lord’s meaning. During this

¹ Colledge and Walsh write, “We may suppose, though we cannot prove, that the short text was recorded soon after the event” (19).

² Julian writes, “For twenty yere after the tyme of the shewyng saue thre monthys I had techyng inwardly” (LT 520. 86-87).

³ In order to differentiate between quotations from the Short Text and the Long Text of Julian’s *Showings*, all citations from her text will be marked with an ST for those from the Short Text and with an LT for those from the Long Text.

interim time between her visions and her fuller understanding, Julian lived as an anchoress at the Church of St. Julian in Norwich. Isolated from the world, administered her last rites, Julian would have been left in a position to pursue a contemplative existence separated from the constant interactions and relationships necessary when living in any community such as the Church of St. Julian. Speaking on how anchoritic guidance writers understood the life of anchorites, Mari Hughes-Edwards writes, “These guidance writers, then, conceive of a contemplative state which, at its height, transcends the flesh and, indeed, the world” (136). As an anchoress, Julian would have been in an ideal position to transcend the world and the flesh in order constantly to recall and review her visions in her memory.

Julian, to record her visions, must literally re-vision. As she remembers them, she must see them, not only from her initial position as witness, but she must witness them from a new perspective in her memory that will allow her to have “wytt” of God’s meaning. In the Short Text, those visions which she explicates are primarily focused on bodily visions, specifically on the Passion and the body of Christ. Towards the conclusion of the Short Text, she even writes, “For the bodely sight, I haffe sayde as I sawe, als trewlye as I cann. And for the wordes fourmed, I hafe sayde thamm ryght as oure lorde schewed me thame. And for the gastely sight, I hafe sayde som dele, bot I maye neuer fully telle it” (ST 272. 60-63). Julian chose to speak on those bodily sights, and she has spoken the Lord’s words. However, Julian has only spoken “som dele” on the ghostly sight. She has not fully recorded it, and she tells that she may never fully do so.

Julian even tells that she receives the visions in a time of great bodily pain and illness, an experience that would seem to be entirely focused on her sensual experience. The illness began

in May 1373 when Julian was 33, and it lasted for three days and nights.⁴ The illness was so grave that she was administered last rites, and she tells, “And I was annswerde in my resone and be the felynges of my paynes that I schulde dye” (ST 208. 15-16). She accepts that her physical existence is about to end, assenting to “be atte god ys wille” (ST 208. 17), and her body slowly begins to lose its feeling. In this moment she writes, “And in this sodeynlye alle my payne was away fro me, and I was alle hole, and namely in the overe partye of my bodye, as evere I was before or aftyr” (ST 209. 42-45). Julian’s focus on the bodily leads her toward an experience wherein her entire being “beganne to dye, as to my felynge” (ST 209. 38-39). And yet, at this moment, she is made whole. Here, Julian presents her first paradox of wholeness being brought about not only in separate parts, but parts which are in the process of breaking down further. This illness, which results in a break down of her body, leads to wholeness, a wholeness that can only be understood in light of a re-vision. Julian, should her focus have been entirely in the sensual, would surely never have written that she was “alle hole.” Instead this transformation to wholeness is constituted by her turning her mind and her gaze toward the ghostly.

The state of uncompounded wholeness seen in Julian’s perceived death, suggests a state of wholeness in the ghostly that she is able to take part in as her mind moves away from her bodily suffering. This sort of perception of wholeness in the ghostly is similar to Aquinas’ writings on divine simplicity wherein the divine, the ultimate expression of the ghostly, is entirely simple. He describes divine simplicity:

Cum enim in Deo non sit compositio, neque quantitativarum partium, quia corpus non est; neque compositio formae et materiae, neque in eo sit aliud natura et suppositum; neque aliud essentia et esse, neque in eo sit compositio generis et differentiae; neque subiecti et accidentis, manifestum est quod Deus nullo modo compositus est, sed est omnino simplex. (I. 3. 7)

⁴ Julian writes, “And when I was xxxth yere old and a half, god sent me a bodily sicknes in the which I ley iij daies and iij nyghtes” (LT 289.1-2).

For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His "suppositum"; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple. (Tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province)

Aquinas defines divine simplicity as being in "*nullo modo compositus*," in nowise composite. The term he uses for simple, *simplex*, carries not just the meaning of its English derivative simple, but also means single and unmixed. For Aquinas, *simplex* defines God as an uncompounded substance, one that is complete and whole. Furthermore, because God is simple, than all of the Trinity, which is compounded in him, must be simple and uncompounded as well. In this way, God and the entire Trinity are divinely simple, namely they exist in a state of single, undivided wholeness.

Julian's writing of herself in the Short Text seems to suggest a relationship wherein she is entirely dependent on God and his goodness, and one which ultimately calls her to find an uncompounded wholeness (reminiscent of the divine simplicity spoken of in Aquinas) in the ghostly and the sensual. The Short Text begins by explaining the source of Julian's visions, namely that they were "schewed be the goodenes of god to a deuoute womann" (1. 1-2), that woman being Julian. The goodness of god is the source of her visions, and she, as a devout woman, is thus dependent on him, as the author of the visions. Julian here has much in common with Walter Hilton, author of the *Scale of Perfection*, in the relationship of dependence and devotion she crafts. Walter Hilton writes that God out of his goodness will assure the recipients of divine showings and visions that they are sent from him "in confort of symple deuoute soulis for to encrease ther trust and there desire to God" (42). God responds to the devout by giving

them visions that bring “confort.” The “devoute soulis” are in turn dependent on God for the visions and their comfort.

Similarly, Julian writes that God “schewed” (ST 201. 1) the visions to her not out of any action on her part, but out of his divine goodness. Julian “desyrede three graces by the gyfte of god. The fyrst was to have mynde of Cryste es passionn. The seconnde was bodelye syeknes, and the thyrd was to haue of goddys gyfte three wondys” (ST 201.6-8), so that she desires that God gift her with three bodily experiences: a focus on Christ’s bodily passion, her own bodily sickness, and three bodily wounds. These desires come about through her desire that she would have “alle manere of paynes, bodelye and gastelye, that I schulde have ʒ yf I schulde dye, alle the dredes and tempestes of feyndys, and alle manere of (opere) paynes, safe of the owʒ te passyng of the sawlle” (ST 203-4. 34-37). Julian wants to experience the intense suffering of Christ on multiple levels, bodily and spiritually. She sees the body and its incredible corporal suffering as the way for her to obtain this bodily pain wherein she is also tormented by ghostly images and fiends.

As she lies dying, Julian receives a fulfillment of her earlier desires through her devotion to the Passion. When the curate instructs Julian to look on the crucifix and take comfort in the image of the suffering Christ, he directs her to a particular image that is a representation of bodily suffering. By looking to the cross, the physical representation of the Passion of Christ’s sensual body, she is forced to focus on the sensual. Thus the contemplation of the cross brings her closer to realizing the three appeals she had made earlier to Christ. It is a fulfillment of her desire to see “alle the dredes and tempestes of feyndys”; when she begins to contemplate the cross, her sight begins to go dim except for the cross: “there helde a commonn lyght...Alle that

was besyde the crosse was huglye to me, as þ yf it hadde bene mykylle occupyede with fendys” (ST 208-9. 35-37).

Julian’s vision begins to narrow so that she can only see the particular sensual image, can see nothing but the cross. And as her pain leaves her and she begins to fade into what she thinks is death, Julian comes suddenly to the vision of Jesus bearing the bodily sufferings of his Passion as if he had been translated from the curate’s crucifix to the world of her mystic vision. She recalls, “sodaynlye I sawe the rede blode trekylle downe fro vndyr the garlande, all hate, freschlye, plentefully and lyvelye, ryght as me thought that it was in that tyme that the garlonde of thornys was thyrstede on his blessedde heede” (ST 210. 11-14). Jesus is revealed to Julian in the form of a specific moment in his Passion. He is so captivating that his physical image dominates the beginning of the vision, and it seems as if her vision will be focused on this particular witnessing of Christ.

This, however, proves not to be the case. Her revelation leads her to the knowledge and understanding that he is “both god and man, the same sufferde for me” (ST 210. 14-15). She beholds a corporal sight, a being whose suffering is indicative of the human nature of Christ in his capacity to feel pain. In her sensual, bodily vision, Christ is simple, meaning lowly;⁵ he is human, humbled in his Passion. However, she is also aware that Jesus, because of his divine nature that comes from God, is also divine. Thus, the bodily vision reveals the dual nature of god and leads to a vision that reflects the Trinity.

Julian further expounds on this vision and understanding of the Trinity in the Long Text. She recalls from her younger’s self’s memory the image of particularity focused on the bleeding Christ and transforms it into a moment of community and wholeness, one which reflects a Trinity and divinity that is whole and complete. Julian states,

⁵ The MED in its third definition for simple defines it as, “Lowly, common; impoverished, destitute.”

And in the same shewing sodeinly the trinitie fulfilled my hart most of ioy...For the trinitie is god, god is the trinitie. The trinitie is our maker, the trinitie is our keper, the trinitie is our everlasting louer, the trinitie is our endlesse joy and bleisse, by our lord Jesu Christ, and in our lord Jesu Christ...for wher Jhesu appireth the blessed trinitie is vnderstand. (LT 295. 11-15)

Here, Julian moves into an abstract contemplation of the Trinity. The particular focus she has shown both in her bodily sickness and then in her attention toward the physical body of Christ in her revelation has resulted in her beginning to form and develop a theology, which she centers around Jesus and his dual nature. Julian uses repetition to help mold her vision of wholeness. All parts of her statement link chiastically back to the Trinity, “for the trinitie is god, god is the trinitie.” All aspects of God and human joy are connected to the Trinity, “the trinitie is our endlesse joy and bleisse.” And Christ, one of the links that connects God and the Holy Spirit to one another in the Trinity, also, in his dual nature, connects humankind to the Trinity, “for wher Jhesu appireth the blessed trinitie is vnderstand.” He is humanity’s connection to the endless bliss and joy of God, and he is “our lord.” When Julian views this particular moment through ghostly sight, she has an understanding of the Trinity as a being that is simple, whole and uncompounded. Thus Julian brings a moment of community into a revelation of the particular, wherein the divine wholeness and simplicity of the Trinity comes into contemplation.

The devotion that Julian expresses in the opening lines of her Short Text, however, is not only a devotion to God. Her devotion is to God who has granted her the vision out of his goodness, but it is also to the Christian community as a whole. She is an individual who does “as halye kyrke schewys *and* techys” (ST 202. 15-16) by focusing her vision in the Short Text on the bodily “Passionn of oure lorde that he sufferede for me” (ST 202. 13). Julian’s interest in the Passion and the bodily suffering of Christ is therefore the direct result of her obedience to the Church’s teachings.

Not only is Julian's focus on Christ as the object of her visions one taught by the Church, however, but in the body of Christ, the Church itself becomes the object of Julian's vision. The Church is the body of Christ on earth. Paul writes of the Church in his first letter to the Corinthians, "*sed Deus temperavit corpus... ut non sit scisma in corpore... vos autem estis corpus Christi et membra de membro*" (1 Cor. 12: 24-27).⁶ Paul speaks of a joining wherein the body of Christ and the body of the Church have been joined by God. In this union, there is no "schism," *scisma*, but instead a state of wholeness, so that all of the human participants of the Church are members of the body of Christ. In Julian's revelations, the Church, the body of Christ on earth, draws her to focus on the Passion of the body of Christ, so that she is connected both as a member of Christ's body and in her desire to see the Passion of the physical body of Christ. She depends on the Church for this connection and for its teachings.

Julian also displays her devotion as a member of the body of Christ in her pursuing the life of an anchoress, wherein her devotion is expressed through her sacramental vows. Devotion, at its root, derives from the Latin compound of *de* meaning (most likely here) "on account of" and *vovere* meaning "to vow," so that devotion literally mean on account of a vow. More than just obedient to the showings and teachings of the Church, the body of Christ, Julian has a religious vocation, having a particular place within a particular Christian community as a "recluse atte Norwyche" (ST 1. 2). Julian is a devout member of the body of Christ, and as an anchoress is aligned with the Church's authority, the Church which directs her vision to the crucified Christ and the Church which is itself the object of her vision in Christ.⁷ Julian thus

⁶ Translation, "But God has tempered the body together . . . so that there might be no schism in the body. . . Now you are the body of Christ and members of member" (1 Corinthians 12:24-27).

⁷ In this way perhaps she hopes to indicate that her vision is shown not to be the product of demonic or satanic influence, but comes from a different, divine authority. Texts such as Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and the *Ancrene Wisse* express concern over the source of visions and dreams. 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 warns against false prophets who transform "themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder: for Satan himself

aligns her devotion to the divine and to the Church with her desire (a desire which leads to her vision) to have a “knewynge of bodelye paynes” (ST 202; 20) so that she “wolde have beene one of thame [Christ himself and Mary] and suffrede with thame” (ST 202; 23). As a member of the body of Christ, the object of her desire and of her vision, is bodily to experience the suffering of Christ (and his mother Mary) so that she will have experiential knowledge of the bodily pain of the incarnated Christ whom she sees. Her desire in the Short Text is explained as a part of her devotion to God and to the Church; in order to see this desire and devotion fulfilled, however, Julian relies on God to relate the visions that could bring her the object of her desire.

This relationship of dependence and devotion is reflected, although without the revision that occurs in Julian’s *Showings*, in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which details the affective, mystic experience of Julian’s contemporary Margery Kempe. Her amanuensis writes of Margery as “this creatur which many yerys had gon wyl and evyr ben unstable” (17-18) before she was drawn to the perfection of Christ. “Creatur” becomes a term in *The Book of Margery Kempe* that denotes a series of dependent relationships. Liz McAvoy notes, “Margery’s self-depiction as a ‘creature’ can . . . be acknowledged as an attempt to imitate the style adopted by the male authors of traditional saints’ *Lives* and imbue what is an intensely subjective narrative with a measure of objectivity and authority” (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, 13). In this way, the amanuensis uses “creatur” to validate Margery and her work by using a familiar, authoritative vocabulary (here from a masculine source), so that part of the authority in Margery’s voice is dependent on this relationship with a literary trope from male authors.

The use of creature further denotes the relationship between God and Margery. God is creator, and she is the “creatur,” the being that he has created. Furthermore, in her role as

transformeth himself into an angel of light.” The *Ancrene Wisse* applies this warning to dreams and visions, claiming that they are the product of the “angelum lucis - thet is, ‘engel of liht’” (4.560).

created being, Margery has an authority, in so much as her authority comes from being a recipient of the words of God. Margery, fully dependent on God, thus only pursues the writing of her text by seeking out a willing scribe: “whan it plesyd ower Lord, he comawnded hyr and chargyd hir that sche schuld don wryten hyr felyngys and revelacyons and the forme of her levyns that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world” (64-66). Unlike Julian, whose Long Text was the product of her own contemplation, and whose work was the product of her own authorial decisions, Margery writes at the command of God. He, not Margery, is ultimately the author of her text, while she is a creature who serves as the receptacle of his words and visions. The very act in which the book was inscribed suggests Margery’s lack of control over the actual contents of the book. The amanuensis writes that the book itself “is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn” (99-101). Again, unlike Julian, whose text indicates that contemplation and revision were important elements of her work, Margery’s amanuensis indicates that the writing of Margery’s text was considerably different. It was the product of a divine creator, filtered through a creature, who has recalled as best she can those elements that the divine author relayed to her.

Because of this dependent relationship between the divine author and the creature, the interaction between a masculine vocabulary (in such terms as creature) and Margery’s feminine experience, with the feminine metaphors that appear in the text, forms a complex set of gendered relationships. The experiences that Margery must address as a woman and as a person in communication with the divine are specifically feminine. McAvoy writes, “Margery has resource to the experiences of her own body and its female specificity in order to forge an alternative —and feminine— route to religious expression and salvation” (*The Book of Margery*

Kempe, 15). And in many ways, this can explain the feminine focus of many of the metaphors in the text which detail the relationship between God and his creatures. In discussing the birth of Margery's first child, her amanuensis writes, "Whan this creatur was twenty yer of age. . .sche was maryed to a worschepful burgeys and was wyth chylde wythin schort tyme, as kynde wolde" (130-31). Margery is categorized as a creature who marries and gives birth according to "kynde," so that her particular status as a creature is defined by her capacity to marry and ultimately give birth.

Rather than entering into a celebration of motherhood, however, the text details a long period after her pregnancy wherein she was tormented by visions of "develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in" (151-52). The amanuensis tells that Margery even laments her state as a fallen creature as she continues to have sex with her husband: "nerthelesse it is to me gret peyn and gret dysese" (1111). The Lord, however, revises her relationship as wife and mother in a way that is contrary to Margery's own understanding of this feminine relationship. He tells her that he wishes it so that she "bryng me forth mor frwte" (1113), finding her state of wifehood and motherhood worthy of praise, loving her "as any mayden in the world" (1119). In his discussion with her, the Lord challenges Margery's own sense of shame in her state as mother, associating her state instead with love and with the purity of maidenhood. Margery depends on him to redefine and revise her feminine role as a creature in a positive way.

Margery chooses to discuss another vision wherein the value of her role as mother is supported: a vision of St. Anne and the Virgin Mary. Here, God makes it so that the Virgin appears as a child whom Margery has watched grow from pregnancy to the age of twelve years. She speaks to Margery, saying "Dowtyr, now am I become the modyr of God" (415). Pregnancy

and the state of being a mother define that point at which, on earth, Mary is most fully in communion with the divine, and it is in Mary's very human role as mother that Margery offers service to Mary. God in his vision revises this creature's role of mother, so that she who acts according to "kynde" in motherhood shares in kind with the Virgin Mary a distinctly feminine relationship with the divine—one of motherhood. By referring to Margery as her "dowtyr," Mary creates a familial relationship, a bond between mothers and lovers of Christ, which they have in kind. Mary gives birth to Christ, connecting her to the divine, and Margery receives validation from Christ of her own motherhood. Thus, in Margery's role as "creatur" and mother, God defines Margery herself within a deeply physical and human role that is at its heart creative. She is a creature who creates and bears other creatures at the behest of God. God, the author of these visions, uses her femininity and her feminine experience as a model for creaturehood wherein the creature acts according to the will of God by acting out her creative potential.

Julian in her revelations, however, does not share her own narrative of motherhood. Father John-Julian certainly argues that it "is well within the realm of possibility" (27) that Julian was the same woman as Lady Julian Erpingham; if this were true, Julian would have been the mother of three children. This attempt, however, to assign Julian the role of wife and mother has no support from the text; Julian never mentions or implies having children. If Julian were a mother, then it only serves to underscore how strange it is that she leaves her own motherhood (or her own potential for motherhood) out of her narrative. Julian is a creature with generative potential just like Margery; however, Julian chooses to leave that potential out of her *Showings*. Julian does not examine her own feminine, maternal creative power. Instead, Julian explores in the Long Text a greater level of agency and creative literary power wherein her visions, dependent on God, become subject to her own authorial scrutiny.

The Long Text is not only another version of her vision, but a “re-vision.” Specifically, Julian introduces “simplicity,” human and divine, where simplicity comes to be associated not only with the lowly and human, but with the divine, not only with the recipient of the visions, but with its divine author. In this series of relationships connected by Julian’s vocabulary of simplicity, Julian revises and “re-visions” in the Long Text, taking on a literary authority. As a part of her revisions, rather than beginning with an explication of who Julian is, the text begins with a summation of the “reuelacion of loue that Jhesu Christ our endles blisse made” (LT 281. 2). Soon after, Julian refers to herself as a “symple creature vnlettyrde leving in deadly flesh” (LT 285. 1-2). She makes no mention of either the word “deuoute” or “womann.” Instead, “deuoute” becomes “symple” and “vnlettyrde leving in deadly flesh” and “womann”⁸ becomes “creature.” The use of “symple” and “vnlettyrde” indicates her unsophisticated and lowly state. She assumes a humble position, one that would seem to indicate that she herself is not an authority within the text. And indeed, Julian seems to place authority in the text instead in the revelation itself, which is given through the “loue of Jhesu Christ” (LT 281. 2); she even begins with a summation of the revelation, so that it constitutes the first information given, occupying a place of primacy. Julian separates herself in the text from the divine source of her revelation, unlike in the Short Text where she communicates immediately that the “goodenes of god” is the source of the vision. In the Long Text, however, Julian speaks of the revelations and their source first, and she does not address herself, the recipient of the revelations, until after listing the showings. This separation of source and recipient indicates the primacy of the divine love of Christ in showing the revelations, but also establishes Julian herself as a separate agent. While

⁸ Barry Windeatt notes, “All reference in this text to the author’s being a woman disappears from [the Long Text] ... Although these features may reflect contemporary anxieties about women’s authorship, they also form part of a larger trend between [the Short and Long Text] to dwell less on the author than the message, and to universalize the message” (113), a connection to the universality of Julian’s language that will be discussed later.

Julian creates this division between herself, the “symple creature,” and the source of her visions in the divine “loue of Jhesu Christ,” Julian seems to grant ultimate authority of the vision itself to God. She, however, as the author, is still the primary authority of the *text*. It is Julian who writes this division between herself and the revelations themselves; it is Julian who has revised her earlier text in such a way that her revelations (and not herself) come first in the text. Thus, Julian’s simplicity has a greater literary complexity than her claims at being a “symple creature” would indicate. She is both the simple witness of her remembered vision as well as the author who must interpret the relationship between the divine and human simplicity.

Aquinas addresses divine simplicity, and its place in authority and primacy in the universe, in his *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas’s conception of divine simplicity, already in part discussed, ascribes to the divine the quality of being “*nullo modo compositus*,” so that in Aquinas the divine simplicity is ultimately that which is not composed of different parts, but is whole and uncompounded. Aquinas ultimately relates this to God’s authority and his place as the first being in the universe. God can be in no ways composite “*quia omne compositum est posterius suis componentibus, et dependens ex eis. Deus autem est primum ens*”⁹ (*Summa Theologica* I.3.7). Furthermore, “*quia omne compositum causam habet, quae enim secundum se diversa sunt, non conveniunt in aliquod unum nisi per aliquam causam adunantem ipsa. Deus autem non habet causam...cum sit prima causa efficiens.*”¹⁰ And because God is “*ipsum*,” here with the sense of “absolute being,” (*Summa Theologica*, I.3.7) he cannot be composite. Aquinas thus terms simplicity a divine trait because of the primacy of the divine. God is the *primum ens*, the uncaused cause, the absolute being. This primacy logically means that he cannot be

⁹ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being.”

¹⁰ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “because every composite has a cause, for things in themselves different cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused. . . since He is the first efficient cause.”

composite because, if he was the first being, there would have been nothing from which he could have been composed. God's simplicity then not only signifies his wholeness, but it also signifies his primacy. God is simple; he is the first being and is therefore able to be the creator and author of all other beings. In this way, Aquinas' use of simplicity in speaking of the divine signals the authority of God. Julian in her discussion of God as author and authority in her visions, as well as being an entity who is entirely whole, places God in a similar position of primacy and authority in the Long Text. Julian, however, is able to work as author of her text to recognize the authority and simplicity of God, while still acknowledging her own place as recipient and later as author in her *Showings*.

Additionally, the reference to Julian as "symple" at the beginning of the text connects explicitly to the *Ancrene Wisse*, written in the mid-13th century. The *Ancrene Wisse* warns against false anchoresses who have the semblance of simplicity, but are instead full of guile, they who "Habbeth efter the vox a simple semblant sum-charge, ant beoth thah ful of gile"¹¹ (3.116-17). These false anchoresses are likened to a fox whose face only holds the outward mold of simplicity, but in truth they are hypocrites. Here, the text relates simplicity with being guileless, so that the hypocrisy lies in the semblance of truth and guilelessness that is assumed under purely false, guileful pretenses. The appearance of simplicity without the inner substance seems to be then the ultimate act of guile and hypocrisy, acting counter to simplicity itself. The very fact that these false anchoresses can use their guile to assume a "simple semblant," however, means that outward simplicity, while a virtue, can be both a shield to vice and a entry point for corruption.

¹¹ Translation from Robert J. Hasenfratz: "[False anchoresses] have after (i.e., in imitation of) the fox an innocent (lit., simple) expression (or, appearance) sometimes, and are nevertheless full of guile."

Outward simplicity shields inward contradiction. These false anchoresses are so convinced of the effectiveness of their “simple semblant” that they “Weneth for-te gili Godd as ha bidweolieth simple men, ant gilith meast ham-seolven” (3.117-18).¹² They seek to beguile God, just as they are able to lead into error “simple men.” The end result is that this act of hypocrisy beguiles most the false anchoresses themselves. This passage not only indicates the guileful anchoresses’ overconfidence in their own semblance, but it also shows that “simple men” are able to be deluded by guile. Those individuals who are truly simple are uneducated in guile and are thus unable to avoid its deceits. Unlike the hypocrites who understand simplicity well enough to replicate it even while not possessing the quality themselves, the simple are unable to grasp the difference between the “semblant” of simplicity and the actual possession of simplicity.

This also suggests that the simple are ignorant of their own simplicity, or at the very least, that they are “simple” in the sense of being “unsophisticated,” not in the sense of “imitating divine simplicity”; the guileful can “bidweolieth” them and lead them from a simple state because they do not understand their simplicity as part of a necessarily *complex* relationship to the divine. The hypocrites, however, are themselves beguiled. They believe that God will be deluded as easily as the simple men, but the *Ancrene Wisse* indicates that they beguile most themselves (3.118). The hypocrites seem to have some understanding of simplicity that is much like that seen in the first objection of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* I.3.7: “*Videtur quod Deus non sit omnino simplex. Ea enim quae sunt a Deo, imitantur ipsum...Sed in rebus quae sunt a*

¹² Translation from Robert J. Hasenfratz: “They expect to beguile (i.e., trick, fool) God as they confuse (or, lead into error) simple (or, honest) men, and (i.e., but) mostly beguile themselves.”

Deo, nihil est omnino simplex. Ergo Deus non est omnino simplex.”¹³ Those who raise this objection, like the hypocrites, cannot see that human simplicity does not necessarily have to imitate directly divine simplicity. Aquinas responds to this objection saying, “*quod ea quae sunt a Deo, imitantur Deum sicut causata primam causam. Est autem hoc de ratione causati, quod sit aliquo modo compositum*” (*Summa Theologica* I.3.7).¹⁴ Aquinas acknowledges that caused things imitate the uncaused cause, but he argues that the essence of a thing is to be “*aliquo modo compositum*” rather than, like God, “*nullo modo compositum.*” Much like the hypocrites, those who object to the simplicity of the divine because of the lack of simplicity in his creations fail to see that while simplicity, human and divine, is something that is God given, it is yet different in the essences of the human and the divine. The *Ancrene Wisse* thus indicates that simplicity itself operates on different levels (human and divine) that are, at least in part, difficult for the hypocrites to comprehend. If a human being is to be properly *simplex*, he or she must understand the *complex* relationship between utterly simple maker and composite creature.

Whether or not Julian read the *Ancrene Wisse*,¹⁵ her revelations must contend with such dialogue about guile and simplicity. Julian, especially as a relatively unknown person in the Short Text, must prove herself to be without guile; otherwise her revelations (and the possible sources of her revelations) are suspect. The *Ancrene Wisse* even warns that “Na siht the thet ye seoth, ne i swefne ne waken, ne telle ye bute dweole, for nis hit bute [the devil’s] gile”¹⁶ (4.561-62). Julian does not associate the source of her revelation with the “traître of helle” (*Ancrene*

¹³ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “It seems that God is not altogether simple. For whatever is from God must imitate Him...But in the things which God has made, nothing is altogether simple. Therefore neither is God altogether simple.”

¹⁴ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “Whatever is from God imitates Him, as caused things imitate the first cause. But it is of the essence of a thing to be in some sort composite”

¹⁵ Colledge and Walsh illustrate by examining a similarity in the rhetorical pattern of *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* and anchoritic guidance writings such as the *Ancrene Wisse* that she might have done so (48).

¹⁶ Translation from Robert J. Hasenfratz: “No marvel (or, vision) that you see, either in a dream or waking, consider (imper.) [anything] but deception, for it is [nothing] but his guile.”

Wisse, 4.558), but with “Jhesu Christ our endles blisse” (LT 281. 2), reinforcing this claim through her submission to the Church (in the Short Text) and her careful examination of her own creaturehood (in the Long Text).

Notably, while the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* argues that simplicity in human beings is not a secure state, Marguerite Porete in her *The Mirror of Simple Souls* argues that simplicity is a divinely secure state in the simple soul. A simple soul “doiþ sche al wiþouten hir, and þouþ sche do al wiþouten hir, what meruaile is it, sche is nor more for hir. þanne lieueþ sche of diuine substaunce, þere is oon substaunce permanable, oon fruycion agreable, oon coniunccion amiable” (335). For Porete, the simple soul has been so completely made “nouþ ted. . . whanne sche hap no felinge of nature, ne no werk of inwardnesse, ne schame, ne worschip, ne drede of noþing þat may falle, ne noon affeccion hap” (335) that she lives only in the divine substance and simplicity and is thus as secure and uncompounded as the divine simplicity itself.

This security in Porete, however, means the end of the individual. The simple soul is “nouþ ted,” completely annihilated. Porete references Mark 12:30: “*et diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo et ex tota anima tua et ex tota mente tua et ex tota virtute tua hoc est primum mandatum.*”¹⁷ She then provides an analysis of Mark: “þat we loue him wiþ al oure herte, it is to seie þat oure þouþ tes be alwei verrili in him. And wiþ al oure soule, þat is to seie, upon oure liif we schulde not seie but trouþe. And wiþ al oure uertu,¹⁸ þat is þat we schulde do alle oure werkis pureli for him” (252). Here, Porete tells that the true followers of this gospel not only to love God with all of their heart, soul, and virtue, but moreover that in doing so all of their thoughts, the progress of their lives, and their works must be given over to God. She leaves no room for partial devotion, but in her conception of the truly simple soul who follows this gospel,

¹⁷ Translation from the Douay-Reims Bible, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength.”

¹⁸ What Porete translates as virtue is the Latin word *virtute* from *virtus* meaning virtue, but more literally manliness.

Porete indicates with her repetition of “al” that every part of the soul and all of the soul’s actions must be directed to the divine. Here, Porete indicates that a unity with God, in following the “greatest” commandment, means an end to the individual. This is in contrast with Julian’s own conception of the simple soul. While Julian is a simple creature, certainly devout, and depending on God for her visions, in her writing the individual is not completely dissolved into the will of the divine. In the Long Text especially, Julian attempts to work out the theological complexities of an individual’s participation in the *deus simplex* through her examination of herself as both witness and literary author.

Aquinas speaks of the individual’s participation in the *deus simplex* in his discussion of the Incarnation where the human does not merely participate in a relationship with the divine, but is itself divine and divinely simple. As has already been discussed, Aquinas perceives God as simple, being immutable and uncompounded. He further argues that there are several persons in the Trinity (I.30.1),¹⁹ with these persons, as he later explains, encompassing the three persons of the Trinity.²⁰ Despite these different persons Aquinas shows, however, that God is one, as the Bible informs us in Deuteronomy 6:4 (*Summa Theologica* I.11.3).²¹ Under this definition of divine simplicity, if God is simple and one and the Trinity is one and uncompounded in God, then all aspects of the Trinity must be simple. Christopher Hughes explains the implications of this rationale for the Incarnation,

¹⁹ He writes, “*Respondeo dicendum quod plures esse personas in divinis,*” which the Fathers of the English Dominican Province translate as, “I answer that, It follows from what precedes that there are several persons in God.”

²⁰ Aquinas writes, “The definition of “person” includes “substance,” not as meaning the essence, but the “suppositum” which is made clear by the addition of the term “individual.” To signify the substance thus understood, the Greeks use the name “hypostasis.” So, as we say, “Three persons,” they say “Three hypostases.” We are not, however, accustomed to say Three substances, lest we be understood to mean three essences or natures, by reason of the equivocal signification of the term (*Summa Theologica* I.30.1), translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

²¹ Aquinas argues that God is one from three sources: his simplicity, the infinity of his perfection, and the unity of the world (*Summa Theologica* I.11.3).

If the Word and the man Jesus Christ are one and the same person, one and the same individual, then—by the indiscernibility of identicals—the man Jesus Christ and the Word have all the same properties...those things that belong to God are attributed to that man, and those things that belong to that man are attributed to God. For instance, we may truly say of the man Jesus Christ that He is God, and that He created the stars and everything else. (247)

Hughes argues that logically, because of the nature of the Trinity, the different persons of the Trinity must share the same attributes. Furthermore, whatever God has done, Christ has done, and when God existed, Christ existed. Hughes goes on to add, “Now if the Word is God, and if whatever is God is immutable and atemporal, then the Word is immutable and atemporal. In that case, if the Word is the very same hypostasis or individual as Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ is immutable and atemporal” (253).²² Because of both this relationship that Aquinas reasons out between the members of the Trinity and because of Aquinas’s assertions that God is divinely simple, Christ as well must be divinely simple and thus immutable and also atemporal, having existed with God, being uncomposed, from the beginning.

Because of this shared divine simplicity, immutable and atemporal nature, Aquinas must deal with the objection that it is not fitting that God should become incarnate in the person of Christ, specifically that it is not fitting that God “*essentia bonitatis*,” the essence of goodness, be other than “*ab aeterno fuit*,” he was from all eternity (III.1). The word Aquinas uses for fitting, *conveniens*, means a coming together with the additional sense of appropriateness, carrying a similar meaning to the Latin word *decor* in that it implies a certain beauty of proportion. Thus, the objection argues that it does not “come together” or is not “appropriate” for God to be incarnate, a statement which suggests that God in the Incarnation is in some way composite of

²² Hughes, however, goes on to argue that Aquinas’s assertion is incorrect because of the Passion of Christ, “Since suffering increasingly just is a real change, if it is true that the Word suffered increasingly, it must also be true that the Word, and something that is God, is temporal and mutable. And this is incompatible with divine simplicity as Aquinas thinks of it” (256).

separate parts that come together inappropriately, lacking proportion. This imagery is furthered as Aquinas relates another objection: “*Praeterea, quae sunt in infinitum distantia, inconvenienter iunguntur, sicut inconveniens esset iunctura si quis pingeret imaginem in qua humano capiti cervix iungeretur equina. Sed Deus et caro in infinitum distant, cum Deus sit simplicissimus caro autem composita, et praecipue humana*” (III.1).²³ The coming together in this objection is literal, as it is an inappropriate coming together of separate parts in the painted composite being. Aquinas uses a quotation from Horace’s *Ars Poetica* where Horace speaks of the indecorous²⁴ painting that combines parts from different beings that come together in such a way as to inspire laughter instead of admiration.²⁵ In this way, Aquinas uses the language of poetic instruction in order to compose the objection, so that the objection argues that the Incarnation is, like bad poetry, a thing which is indecorous, even laughable.

Aquinas, however, replies to this objection to the Incarnation by revising the language of poetic creation and decorum to show how the Incarnation is in fact fitting and in keeping with decorous, well-composed poetry. He writes,

Ipsa autem natura Dei est bonitas, ut patet per Dionysium, I cap. de Div. Nom. Unde quidquid pertinet ad rationem boni, conveniens est Deo. Pertinet autem ad rationem boni ut se aliis communicet, ut patet per Dionysium, IV cap. de Div. Nom. Unde ad rationem summi boni pertinet quod summo modo se creaturae communicet. Quod quidem maxime fit per hoc quod naturam creatam sic sibi coniungit ut una persona fiat ex tribus, verbo, anima et carne, sicut dicit Augustinus, XIII de Trin. (III.1)

²³ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “Further, it is not fitting to unite things that are infinitely apart, even as it would not be a fitting union if one were ‘to paint a figure in which the neck of a horse was joined to the head of a man.’ But God and flesh are infinitely apart; since God is most simple, and flesh is most composite--especially human flesh.”

²⁴ Horace later uses the word *decor* in his *Ars Poetica*, “*Aetatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores / mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis*” (156-57), translated as “The customs of each age ought to be noted by you [the poet] and appropriateness in movable natures and years ought to be given.”

²⁵ Horace writes, “*Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam / iungere si uelit et uarias inducere plumas / undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum / desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, / spectatum admissi, risum teneatis, amici?*” (1-5). This can be translated as, “If a painter wished to join a horse’s neck with a human head and to cover collected limbs everywhere with diverse plumage, so that from a beautiful woman on top ends repulsively in a black fish, having been asked to look, would you hold laughter, my friends?”

But the very nature of God is goodness...Hence, what belongs to the essence of goodness befits God. But it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others...Hence it belongs to the essence of the highest good to communicate itself in the highest manner to the creature, and this is brought about chiefly by 'His so joining created nature to Himself that one Person is made up of these three--the Word, a soul and flesh,' as Augustine says in XIII *de Trinitate*. (Tr. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province)

In this God's *natura*, nature, is goodness. The *rationem*, or essence, of this goodness is to communicate itself to others. The highest good then communicates itself to the "*creaturae*," gifting the creature out of goodness with its communication. Aquinas sees this gifting from the goodness of God's nature occurring through the Incarnation where God descends from the highest place to communicate with creatures and to be himself a creature. In this way, even though it appears as if the Incarnation is not fitting and is poorly composed, Aquinas argues that it is fitting and appropriate proportionate with God's nature—goodness. In fact, it would be unfitting if God were not to become incarnate and thus act counter to his goodness. Aquinas thus uses the language of poetry to revise the objection and show how the Incarnation is entirely fitting, being like good poetry, decorous and not composed of multiple ill-fitting parts.

In order to bring her *Showings* to a whole and decorous union, Julian engages in a set of literary revisions from the Short to the Long Text. Julian's agency and role as author, in conjunction with a period of meditation, is signaled in the beginning of the Long Text where she distinguishes the time when she began to seek "mynd of the Passion" (LT 285. 5) and the time of her sickness in which she actually had her revelations. The Short Text states, "I desyrede thre graces be the gyfte of god" (ST 201. 6). The Long Text adds that this creature "desyred before thre gyftes by the grace of god" (LT 285. 4-5). The Long Text indicates that Julian's desire had

a particular relationship with time, namely that her desire for three gifts²⁶ (which she receives in the form of her vision) predates the illness in which she experienced her vision. The Long Text, in a way that the Short Text does not, indicates that Julian did not seek these gifts spontaneously or because of her sickness. Instead, her desire was the product of prior thought. She had meditated on these three gifts before. This time of meditation and this prior thought again complicates Julian's depiction of herself as "symple creature," a depiction which has important implication for her literary work and her theology. She had subjected her desires to prior meditation; she was not just the vessel of God's vision, but an agent that had meditated and desired three gifts to be granted by God's grace. She had a desire for him to grant her a specific (bodily) vision. In Julian's recollection of her younger self, she shows how she acts as an agent of meditative action, seeking a particular vision.

Perhaps the most notable revision in the Long Text, however, is in the addition of Revelation 14 in the Long Text. Julian left this vision out of the Short Text, and she explains her reasons for doing so in her explication of Revelation 14. In her initial visions, despite the fact that God "ledde for [Julian's] understandyng in syght and in shewyng of the revelacion to the ende," Julian could "nott take there in full understandyng to [her] ees in that tyme" (LT 518.63-67) because the characters in the parable, such as the servant (Adam), were composed of diverse properties. In order for all of this to be made clear, Julian had to have knowledge of the teaching which she gained in first seeing the vision, her "inwarde lernynyng" (LT 519.77) which she gained after, and all of the vision which God brought before "the syght of [her] understandyng" (LT 520.80). This discussion of how she came to an understanding of the parable makes use of the supposition that things and ideas grasped by intelligence do not immediately disappear from

²⁶ "The first was mynd of the Passion. The secund was bodilie sicknes. The thurde was to haue of godes gyfte thre woundys" (285; 5-6).

the soul.²⁷ Julian, undergoing a period of contemplation before beginning the writing of the Long Text, utilizes these ideas and images grasped by her intellect in her visions, and she recognizes God as being the entity which directs her to bring these ideas and images to her mind again and again. Thus, although she did not have immediate understanding of all aspects of the divine revelations, Julian was able to remember the experiences, physical and ghostly, of her visions and revise them in a new understanding in the Long Text.

Julian calls her readers to a similar devotion to and contemplation of the divine Passion, first at the beginning of her visions and later in Revelation 14. The first image Julian sees is of the bleeding Christ, that vision which was previously discussed in connection to the Short Text where his “reed bloud rynnynge downe from vnder the garlande, hote and freyshley” (LT 294. 1-2). In this passage, Aers notes that the images of the bleeding Christ “draw attention to themselves. In making them do this, Julian shows that her aim is not to evoke Christ’s pain on Calvary, not to induce affective response...On the contrary, the reader is placed in a rather detached, speculative relationship to images which have been designed to emphasize their constructedness, their rhetorical composition” (86). The nature of Julian’s use of sensual images, far from being mere reflections of the agony of the Passion, are devices that Julian uses very carefully to construct her vision of wholeness and unity as realized by the Trinity and Jesus’ dual nature as God and man.

²⁷ Aquinas in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia* expresses a similar view, “But someone could say to this that intelligible species do not remain in the human possible intellect except as long as one actually understands, whereas after one stops actually understanding, intelligible species cease to be in intellect: in just the way that a light ceases to be in air at the absence of the illuminating body. And thus it is necessary, if the intellect wishes to understand anew, that it should again turn itself toward phantasms so as to acquire intelligible species. But this view is expressly contrary to the words of Aristotle in *De anima* III, where he says that, when possible intellect is made singular intelligible things, which happens through their species, then it is also in potentiality for actual understanding. This view is also incompatible with reason, because intelligible species are received in the possible intellect unmoveably -- in keeping with its mode” (70-85).

Sarah Beckwith, speaking on the image of the Passion of Christ writes, “It uses the cathetic, visceral resources of emotions, and of biology itself, antithetically to construct a timeless, perfect world. In this way out of flesh itself, out of what is most subject to death, is constructed the very world that can resist and transcend it: out of immanence of the body is created the very resource of power as it legitimates itself with reference to an eternal, everlasting order” (116). The Passion, as an object of contemplation, becomes a sensual means of contemplating the ghostly, transcendent world. Thus Julian does not linger over the image of Christ, keeping her descriptions graphic, but to the point. Where Julian begins to dwell at length is in her conception of the wholeness of the Trinity (that already discussed from LT 295. 11-15), the ghostly aspects of her revelation that get the most attention. Her use of repetition with the word “trinitie” (LT 295. 11-15) gives the passage a meditative quality, as she calls the reader to contemplative reflection on the trinitie and the different aspects of the trinitie (“maker,” “keeper,” “everlasting louer,” etc.). Julian recorded her bodily and sensual visions of Christ in the Short Text and then revised and re-visioned them after a period of contemplation to reflect a fuller ghostly understanding of the divine meaning in the visions. In much the same way, Julian calls her readers to contemplate the sensual aspects of her visions and then view them again in light of ghostly understanding.

In the beginning of her vision, Julian further addresses the possibility of human agency, not just in contemplation and meditation, but in the act of prayer as a way to reach divine goodness and simplicity. Julian writes that God listens to our highest prayers and “comyth downe to vs to the lowest parte of oure nede” (LT 306. 38-39). This goodness brings him to serve “at the symplest office” (LT 307. 40), so that God’s great goodness leads him down to the lowliest, most common office in order to see to human need. The source of this goodness is the

“loue of the soule that he made to his awne lycknesse” (LT 307. 41). Furthermore, out of this love and likeness to God, humans, body and soul, are inclosed in God in a “more homley” (LT 307. 44-45) relationship with him. Julian tells that it most pleases God when the soul cleaves to him, for his goodnes is “ever hole” (LT 307. 46), whereas the human elements might “vanyssche and wast away” (LT 307. 45). God thus desires that each person be compounded in him, so that they too might be whole, havinge “cleue[d] to hym with all the myghtes” (LT 307. 47). In this way, prayer brings humans closer to God, as God in his great love descends to the simplest office in order that the person praying might cleave to his wholeness.

Julian additionally writes that after she beholds the body of Christ with his blood that “flowyth in all heauen” (LT 345. 30), “he sufferede me to beholde hym a conveniable tyme, and all that I had seen, and all that vnderstandyng that was there in, as the sympylnes of the sowle myght take it” (LT 346. 3-6). In this passage, before God would speak again, he suffered Julian to look at him and to look inward at all that she had seen, until that point wherein the “symplnes of [her] sowle” had complete understanding. Here, Julian depicts a moment in her showings where God (who is simple in his divinity) wishes to reach that which is simple, and thus that which is like God, in Julian.

In Revelation 14, Julian further revises the relationship between the human and divine in her discussion of prayer. In prayer, the sensual, human will itself even comes to reflect the divine will. Julian asserts that “For with his grace it [prayer] makyth us lyke to hym selfe in condescion as we be in kynde, and so is his blessyd wylle” (LT 464.40-41). For Julian, humanity is in nature, in the substance of people’s souls, connected to God. The substance of the soul is both what unites people to God and humankind’s highest reason. It is grace and prayer which restore all people to a condition like to God. He is the grounding of all human prayers,

acting as the universal, driving intellect which pushes every person to prayer. When people pray it is God and the substance of him in our intellect which encourages them to do so, so that this higher intellect drives the substance of the soul to pray, which guides the human will to reflect the will of god.

Speaking further on prayer, Julian asserts, “Than is prayer a wytnesse that the soule wyllle as God wyll, and comforyth the conscience, and ablyth man to grace” (LT 475. 3-5), so that she unites the human will with the divine will through the act of prayer. Later in the passage, Julian establishes that Jesus is the ground from which human prayers spring (LT 477. 26), for it is his goodness, not human goodness, which compels people to seek out the divine. This assertion that Christ is the force which leads the soul to prayer and to the will of God resembles Aquinas’ theories about the connection between the *intellectus agens*, the driving or active intellect, that which leads the process of human intellect in Aristotle, and the divine. Aquinas writes, “*intellectus agens de quo philosophus loquitur, est aliquid animae... Pertingit etiam ad intelligentiam veritatis cum quodam discursu et motu, arguendo. Habet etiam imperfectam intelligentiam... Oportet ergo esse aliquem altiorem intellectum, quo anima iuuetur ad intelligendum*” (*Summa Theologica* I.79.4).²⁸ Aquinas also saw the will as being ultimately governed by the intellect,²⁹ so that if the human will allows itself to be guided by an intellect informed by divine intelligence, than ultimately according to Aquinas the human will would be acting in keeping with the dictates of the divine. In Julian, the divine manifests its will and its power in humankind in the way the human will unites with the divine will in prayer. This divine

²⁸ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “The active intellect, of which the Philosopher speaks, is something in the soul...Moreover it reaches to the understanding of truth by arguing, with a certain amount of reasoning and movement. Again it has an imperfect understanding... Therefore there must needs be some higher intellect, by which the soul is helped to understand.”

²⁹ Aquinas writes, “*Et hoc modo voluntas movet intellectum, et omnes animae vires*” (*Summa Theologica* I.82.4), tr. “In this way the will moves the intellect and all the powers of the soul.”

will to reach down to the “symplest office” in prayer is a reflection of God’s goodness, as well as his will to be connected to the human will.

Julian, however, also notes that understanding of this human will is imperfect. She writes that people fall to sin because of “blynnnes, for he seeth not God” (LT 496.19). There is a limit to human understanding because of mankind’s sensual nature. Appropriately Julian expresses this lack of understanding in the soul by using a term associated with a physical disability. The soul in its sensual nature is removed from God in much the same way that, in their sensual lack of sight, the blind are removed from a knowledge of what the world looks like. Where this blindness and lack of understanding manifests itself is, in part, in her discussion of the Church. Looking at the contradiction in the teachings of God and of the Church, Julian writes, “And betwene thyse two contraryes my reson was grettly traveyled by my blyndnes and culde have no rest for drede that his blessed presens shulde passe for my syght, and I to be lefte in unknowyng how he beholde us in oure synne.” (LT 511. 15-18).

Julian asks for God to guide her reason, in much the same way as Aquinas speaks of God directing the intellect through the *ratio particularis*. Aquinas argues that humankind’s appetites are governed by their will, which is governed by a knowledge of what to do gleaned from a universal intellect or reason. All people have access to this universal intellect through the *ratio particularis*. The *ratio particularis* is the higher judging power (*vis aestimativa*) within people that is coupled with reason, and this particular reason is able to deduce what to do from universal reason or intellect, so they (the appetites) come under the will, which is governed by the intellect (*Summa Theologica* I.81.3).³⁰ This universal reason or intellect seems to relate to how Julian

³⁰ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “In man the estimative power, as we have said above (Question 78, Article 4), is replaced by the cogitative power, which is called by some ‘the particular reason,’ because it compares individual intentions. Wherefore in man the sensitive appetite is naturally moved by this particular reason. But this same particular reason is naturally guided and moved according to the universal reason:

shows that humanity and human will is like God in kind, even as it is sensual in nature. There is a part of human reason which is able to discern a vision of meaning and purpose from a universal intellect or reason, wherein God can be reached through the utilization of a higher reason, somewhat removed from the corruption of sin. This higher reason allows humankind access to see his will, and it is God's will which directs humankind to prayer. The image of God resides in the higher reason or substance of the soul and renders humans like God by nature, but his image is deformed by sin. Grace and prayer restore the soul to its original condition of likeness to God. Julian's devotion ultimately directs her reason to seek this image of God, even as she struggles to reconcile the wisdom of the Church, the body of Christ on earth, with the wisdom of God.

Regarding the contradiction between God and Church that Julian seeks to resolve, she writes,

Then was this my desyer, that I myght se in God in what manner that the dome of holy chyrch here in erth is tru in his syght, and howe it longyth to me verely to know it, where by they myght both be sevyd, so as it ware wurschypfulle to God and ryght wey to me. And to alle this I nee had no nother answeere but a mervelous example of a lorde and of a servaunt...
(LT 488. 27-32)

The wisdom of God is love and assigns no blame, and the Church casts people as sinners. God sends her the vision of the lord and the servant in order to reconcile the wisdom of the Church and God. In this way, the Church, the object of her vision in the Short Text, is met with the vision of the lord and the servant in Revelation 14, an example that is meant to show how the Church is "tru in his syght." God answers her desire with a vision that is meant to make clear how the Church, as an object of his vision, is true in his sight and where Julian is again an agent of vision and contemplative thought on her visions.

wherefore in syllogistic matters particular conclusions are drawn from universal propositions. Therefore it is clear that the universal reason directs the sensitive appetite..."

The will of God and the human will is ultimately most completely joined in the Incarnation, an understanding which Julian gains in the vision of the Lord and the Servant in Revelation 14. God descends in physical form in Christ to the “symplest office” of life on earth. Julian’s understanding of God’s desire to become incarnate is explicated in her discussion of the “tresoure in the erth whych the lorde lovyd” (LT 529. 185). In much the same way as God operates as the driving intellect and the loving will within all people, so too do all people serve as a part of God’s wholeness. God, as the divine does not lack, has no thing that he desires except lack. This may be seen in the servant, for, while he is Adam, he is also the Son, who comes to the earth and inhabits a body. This corporal existence is complete in having its sensual components, components which lead to a longing in all humankind: “And all that be under hevyn whych shall come theder, ther wey is by longyng and desyeryng and longyng was shewed in the servant stondyng before the lorde, or ellys thus in the Son stondyng afore the Fadyr in Adam kyrtyll” (LT 538.260-63). God sent the Son so that he would feel desire, feel a “longyng,” which because of the unity of the Trinity, God could also experience.

Christ is human, and his sensual nature is as critical to Julian’s Christology as is his divinity. For, in the human nature of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity is realized, and the Trinity is in turn united to all of humankind. What God lacks is longing, and it is this longing, realized in sin and humankind’s longing for God, that only human beings possess. Julian sees this longing, but does not immediately understand and immediately recognize that the longing is present in both the servant and God. Julian’s own longing to understand manifests in the contemplation of her visions through which she is able to see the visions again in her own memories and understand the longing of God and man in the Servant. Julian writes, “ther way is by longyng and desyeryng” (LT 538. 261), which “For the longyng and desyer of all mankynd

that shall be safe aperyd in Jhesu” (LT 538. 264-65). With her paronomasia in “longing” meaning desire and “longing” meaning belonging, Julian indicates that only in Christ as a sensual and ghostly being is the Trinity made whole and complete, for mankind and its state of longing belongs in Christ. This is not to say that Julian suggests that God has a longing or a lack of something he desires. On the contrary, the Incarnation and the unity of the Trinity make it impossible that God should do so. As Aquinas illustrated in his discussion of the Incarnation in the *Summa Theologica*, Christ, who is whole and one in God, is atemporal and immutable. He has thus, like God the Father, always existed and always had the “longyng” seen in the servant standing before the Father. God’s goodness has made it fitting that he should be so and that he should become incarnate.

In her re-vision of the Lord and the Servant, Julian further realizes that the will of the Servant is also the will of the Lord. Julian writes, “for oonly hys good wyl and his grett desyer was cause of the fallyng” (LT 51.35-36). This links to her earlier discussion of will and how it functions in prayer. Here the human will is truly united in the will of God, a will which humans express and to which they connect through prayer. The servant, knowing the will of God because of His proximity to the servant, rushes to see that the will of God be met and falls in his efforts. God then asks her, “Is it nott reson that I reward hym his frey and his drede, his hurt and his mayme and alle his woo?” (LT 516. 49-50). God, who understands the will of the Servant, shows that the fall is a *felix culpa* as God rewards the servant, humankind, for suffering because of pursuing God’s will.

God understands that the will of the Servant is God’s will and that the fall is in the end a *felix culpa*, but because of the limits of the Servant’s (and all humankind’s) sensual nature, he is not able to understand this or even understand that the true self is not purely sensual. Julian

writes, “But oure passyng lyvyng that we have here in oure sensuallyte knowyth nott what oure selfe is but in our feyth. And whan we know and see verely and clerely what oure selfe is, than shalle we verely and clerly see and know oure Lorde God in fulhed of joye” (LT 490. 1-5). Human sensuality in Julian, that which is connected to the physical world and to the body most closely, does not itself have full understanding of the true human self—that which holds an image and understanding of God. Therefore, humankind must rely on faith that the true self is not simply the sensual self, until it is possible to see (with both the spiritual and the physical eye, after the Last Judgment) and know the Lord.

Because of his sensual nature, the servant does not see that his “wylle was kepte in God’s syght” (LT 522. 107). Julian, however, looking back at her memories, has a new understanding of the vision: “For his wylle I saw oure Lorde commende and aprove, but hym selfe was lettyd and blyndyd of the knowyng of his wyll” (LT 522.106-9). The servant, as well as Julian initially, fails to see the relation between the corporal suffering of the servant and his desire to follow the will of God, as he knows it in the substance of his soul. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the sensual or bodily is purely an obstruction of a true understanding of the divine. Aquinas argues, “*Non enim potest dici quod anima intellectiva corpori uniatur propter corpus, quia nec forma est propter materiam, nec motor propter mobile, sed potius e converso*” (*Summa Theologica* I.84.4).³¹ As Julian begins to understand the vision she sees that, as Aquinas argues, the sensual and bodily elements of mankind are not merely or solely obstructions to understanding. They can, when seen as in compliance with the will of God (known through the substance of the soul), be understood as part of the reason behind God’s decision to “reward hym [the Servant] his frey and his drede.”

³¹ Translation from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province: “For it cannot be said that the intellectual soul is united to the body for the sake of the body: for neither is form for the sake of matter, nor is the mover for the sake of the moved, but rather the reverse.”

In the revelation of Mary in Revelation 1, Julian revises so that she shows that the sensual and bodily elements of her visions lead to a Ghostly understanding. Julian writes, “In this he brought our ladie saint Mari to my vnderstanding. I saw her ghostly in bodily lykenes, a simple mayden and a meeke, yong of age” (LT 297. 29-30). In the person of Mary, there is an understanding of how meditations on the ghostly can lead to an appreciation of the sensual (Zinck, 171). It is from Mary that Jesus inherits his sensual nature (Staley, 119).³² Thus, when Julian writes, “In this syght I did vnderstand verily that she is more then all that god made beneth her in wordines and in fullhead” (LT 297-98. 37-39), Julian shows the worth of the gift of sensuality and longing that Mary gave to her son. Julian revises the longing from her former vision seeing worthiness in its sensual elements. Human flesh, represented in the person of Mary, is therefore in Julian’s *Showings* not a prison or a punishment, but humanity’s connection to Jesus. Thus Julian herself, in the attention that she pays to the sensual and corporal in her desire to experience the Passion of Christ, obtain bodily sickness, and gain the three wounds, reflects the importance of the human body in her Christology that she draws out later in the text. For humans, the body (especially in those visions of the suffering body) becomes a source of spiritual enlightenment (Aers, 103). The human path to an understanding of the Trinity is reached through a contemplation of the corporal body, much like that found in Julian’s own writings, where her longing, which manifests as a desire for and a unity with God, allows her to understand her belonging in Christ as witness and author of her visions.

Julian ultimately expresses this belonging in Revelation 14. Julian discusses the properties of God, explaining that within him exists truth and wisdom, out of which two properties of love ultimately come forth (LT 483-84. 8-12). God also placed these properties in

³² Caroline Walker Bynum in her work *Jesus as Mother* notes that in medieval physiological theories the mother gave the matter of the foetus so that “Thus, the mother was, to medieval people especially associated with the procreation of the physicality, the flesh, of the child” (133-4).

humankind: “And a man’s soul is a creature in God whych hath the same propertes made...Wherefore God enjoyeth in the creature and the creature in God, endelesly mervelyng” (LT 484.13-16). Within these lines, Julian lays out a specific and intentional connection between God and the soul of man, in which both God and man find enjoyment. Furthermore, it is a connection at which they endlessly marvel. Julian’s vocabulary here suggests a visual sight where both God and his creature are able to see each other and to see and find pleasure in their connection to one another. Unlike the human blindness where humanity’s sensual nature blinded and made understanding obscure, in the soul of man, Julian changes the human perspective so that the creature and God are able to see and marvel in enjoyment, connected through the soul to each other.

This passage, however, is also notable for its reference to both God and the soul of all people as masculine entities. It is a “man’s soul” which is the creature, and Julian later writes that, within the creature’s marveling with God, “he seeth his God, hys Lorde, hys maker, so hye, so grett, and so good in regarde of hym that is made that unnethys the creature semyth ought to the selfe” (LT 484.16-19). The repetition of the masculine pronoun is here almost overwhelming, emphasizing both the individual nature of the connection to God as well as the fact that the connection of which Julian writes is specifically masculine in nature. Julian also uses masculine pronouns to refer to “his [God’s] wylle and his wurschyppe” (LT 483.2). She writes a masculine creature viewing his masculine creator in the midst of a feminine mystic’s feminine vision.

And while certainly “man” can be read as something that is meant to speak to both men and women, not being exclusively masculine, Julian refers to the soul as female later in the text. She writes, “Sodenly is the soule onyd to God when she is truly peesyd in her selfe, for in hym is

founde no wrath” (LT 509.43-45). In this passage, the soul is female, “she,” not male. Julian’s willingness earlier in the text to refer to the soul as female suggests that her reference to the soul as masculine here is deliberately gendered. In this critical moment in which she asserts that the product of truth and wisdom is love and that these three things found unmade in the creator are purposely made into the creature, Julian’s references to God and the soul are specifically masculine. God is not the creative mother of later portions of the work, but the creative entity who crafts in his image a masculine creature. It is a creation without any women—except Julian who is present in her writing of the creation.

In this change of genders, it is possible to see how Julian alters her own vision in looking at her memory and how her perspective changes in writing her text. In the parable of the Lord and the Servant, Julian inhabits a role that is neither that of the Lord nor that of the Servant, but is rather that of witness to the vision itself. Before recounting her understanding of the marveling of God and humanity in the soul of man, Julian writes, “and how I hope by the grace of the holy gost I shall sey as I saw” (LT 483.7). Julian has a role in the interaction of the Lord and the Servant, that of witness to the sight and finally speaker and author of the things that she has seen. In contrast, the Servant, “he seeth his God” (LT 484. 17). Julian has not left herself and the feminine out of her text; rather, she sees the Servant seeing God. Julian, with the repetition of masculine pronouns, “he,” “hys,” “hys,” “hym” (LT 484.17-18), makes her vision distinct from the vision of the Servant. She is a separate entity, from Lord and Servant in the visions; she is an observer and author.

In the later passage, in which the soul is feminine, Julian changes perspectives and thus changes the gender of the soul. She writes, “Thus saw I that god is our very peas; and he is oure suer keper when we be oure selfe at vnpeas, and he contynually werkyth to bryng vs in to

endlesse peas. And thus when by the werkyng of mercy and grace we be made meke and mylde, then we be full safe” (LT 508.40-43). At this point, “our” soul is “onyd” to God, when she is at peace in “her selfe” (LT 509. 43-44). Julian, in her repeated use of “our,” “she,” and “her” here indicates her participation in this unity, so that she is not only the witness to this understanding of what it is to be “onyd” to God, but she is also a participant in this collective human unity with God. She participates in a universal union. Windeatt notes that “Julian’s studied anonymity and self-effacement give her text a distinctive voice, at once individual yet universal” (113). However, I would contend that it is Julian’s insertion of her own feminine identity through which Julian makes her text and her voice both individual and universal. Through her alteration of the gender of the soul, Julian alters her perspective and her place in her visions, re-visioning, so that she is at separate times witness and later a participatory witness within a community in her visions.

Julian not only uses gender, however, to indicate moments of re-vision; she also alters gender and gender roles, in part, in order to communicate in a familiar and distinctly human way what the divine, and what a relationship with the divine, is like. Julian casts God in the role of mother, an assignment of a feminine role to the masculine that appears in other texts of the late middle ages. Caroline Walker Bynum writes on the reasons behind this trope:

Seeing Christ or God or the Holy Spirit as female is thus part of a later medieval devotional tradition that is characterized by increasing preference for analogies taken from human relationships, a growing sense of God as loving and accessible, a general tendency toward fulsome language, and a more accepting reaction to all natural things, including the physical human body. (129-130)

For Bynum, the medieval interest in members of the Trinity as mothers is indicative of a larger cultural change, wherein the literature comes to reflect an interest in relating the divine to the human by describing the divine in specifically human (and familiar) ways. In this way, Julian’s

description of God as “oure kyndly mother” (LT 582. 13) can be understood as a part of her dialogue in which she connects the sensual and the ghostly, where here the ghostly and human relationships with the ghostly are defined in terms of sensual relationships. McAvoy notes this as a part of Julian’s literary style: “Julian starts with what she knows and what she deems her readers or ‘evencristen’ will know, and leads them gently from the familiar to the deeply unfamiliar, whilst at the same time making it known and recognisable” (176). In the passage where Julian equates God with mother, the familiar would be the sensual relationship of mother and child, while the unfamiliar would be the ghostly relationship between God and humankind.

In addition, Julian combines the image of God as mother with the Incarnation in such a way as to communicate the power of feminine agency in the Incarnation. Speaking of the Incarnation, Julian writes, “For in that same tyme that god knytt hym to oure body in the meydens wombe, he toke oure sensuall soule, in whych takyng, he vs all havynge beclosyd in hym, he onyd it to oure substance” (LT 579-80.41-44). Julian asserts that God, in the process of making Christ incarnate, knitted “oure sensuall soule” to him, so that all humankind is “becolsyd” and “united” to God in the substance of the human soul. Thus the Incarnation is not only every Christian’s salvation, in that it makes possible the sacrifice of Christ, but it is also that which ultimately unites every soul to Christ.

This act, however, so central to Christianity, does not merely take place in the corporal, sensual world. Julian makes a point of relating the specific place of the Incarnation—“the meydens womb.” She communicates the centrality of the feminine in the Incarnation, the joining of God and man in the corporal flesh. Simultaneously she makes the womb, a particular feminine place, the site also of the joining of God and all humankind in the ghostly place of “oure substance.” In this way, Julian communicates that the unity and wholeness that exists

between humanity and the divine exists inside every person in a relationship that is distinctly feminine, with Christ “beclosyd” in the womb in the same way that humankind is “beclosyd” in Christ.

Julian further explicates the Incarnation and the unity of humankind and the divine in terms of the feminine, both in the person of Mary and in Christ. She writes, “Thus oure lady is oure moder, in whome we be all beclosyd and of hyr borne in Crist, for she that is moder of oure sayoure is mother of all þat ben sayyd in our sauour; and oure sayoure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlesly borned and nevyr shall come out of hym” (LT 580.47-50).³³ Here, Julian immediately begins to revise and expound on her discussion of the Incarnation and God as mother. Whereas earlier, humankind had been “beclosyd” in Christ, now humankind is “endlesly borned” in Christ. He, as a mother, has a generative capacity, as if he himself has a divine womb in which every person is united in and to him. However, in Christ, Julian re-vision motherhood so that each soul is born in Christ, but paradoxically “never shall come out of hym.”

This unity of humankind and the divine is something which Julian describes as “mervelous” so that each soul is scarcely able to know itself or other Christians because of the different feelings it engenders, “but þat ech holy assent þat we assent to god when we fele hym” (LT 548. 21-24). Recalling her earlier description of God and the Creature “endelesly mervelyng” in each other (LT 484.16), Julian again relates the connection between God and humankind to a visual experience. As before, because of the the human soul’s sensual nature,

³³ McAvoy says of this passage, “The complex conflation of ‘lady,’ ‘moder,’ ‘we,’ ‘Crist,’ ‘sayoure,’ ‘him’ as subjects here points towards the unity of a mystical encounter with God in which the subject is endlessly generated, defined, relinquished and negated, in which all and nothing is possible, a unity which is pre-discursive and extra-linguistic and which, like Julian’s God and the earthly mother, is ‘the endlesse fulfilling of all true desyers’” (179).

the soul's sight is imperfect. It marvels at this unity, but it marvels to such an extent that it cannot fully understand except to know "ech holy assent" given to God as "we fele hym."

Julian, as a member of the "we" who regards the unity as "mervelous" certainly had this lack of full understanding, as is seen in her revision of the Short Text in the Long Text. However, as is reflected in the Long Text, contemplation yielded greater understanding to her marvelling sight. Julian speaks of Christ as mother, saying of him: "in oure moder of mercy we haue oure reformyng and oure restoryng, in whom oure partys be onyd and all made perfyt man" (LT 587.56-58). Julian again defines Christ's relationship with humankind in terms of the feminine, so that humankind's unity with Christ is also termed feminine.

More than this, however, the feminine, the motherhood of Christ is the agent in the Incarnation which causes "oure reformyng and oure restoryng." In Christ, humankind is reformed, created anew. Thus, Julian re-visions the earlier creation wherein no women were present, except for Julian as author (LT 484.16-19). The masculine act of creation in God's making of the creature is converted to an act of feminine creation in the Incarnation. In Christ as Mother, humankind is reformed and restored so that all of humankind's disparate "partys be onyd and all made perfyt man."

In conclusion, from an examination of Julian's changes from her Short Text to her Long Text in terms of the visions she uses and the language in which she discusses those visions, Julian's revision and re-vision of her text can be understood to operate in this same pattern of "reformyng" and "restoryng." Just as God "onyd" the seemingly disparate human and divine, the corporal and the ghostly in the Incarnation within the womb, so too does Julian join the human and divine, the sensual and the ghostly into a unified whole within her *Showings*. This unity is brought about through a reforming and a restoring of her visions, in which she

contemplates and examines her memory of the visions in such a way that she gains ghostly understanding from them. Much like the Incarnation in its unification of the human and divine, however, this coming together of the sensual and the ghostly in Julian is surely a joining that is greater than the sum of its parts. Just as Christ reforms and restores humanity to a greater condition of unity of ghostly and sensual through the Incarnation, Julian reforms and restores, unites and makes perfect, those elements of her vision in which she lacked a “ghostly understandyng,” so that Julian, as the feminine author, acts in the same manner as the feminized Christ.

It is perhaps logical then that Julian’s time of contemplation during which she came to a unity of understanding took place within her anchorhold. For, in speaking of the Incarnation and its inevitable consequence the Crucifixion, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* writes, “Marie wombe ant this thruh weren his [Christ’s] ancre-huses” (6.369).³⁴ The womb and images of the feminine creative power are thus doubly conflated with the Incarnation (and the Passion through which all Christians are reborn) and with the anchorhold. Thus Julian, in her retreat to her anchorhold, a retreat which yields a unity and complexity of vision in her text, moves to a place, not only of contemplation, but one connected to the Incarnation and to a place of feminine creative power and agency.

³⁴ Translation: “Mary’s womb and this tomb were his anchorhouses.”

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