

The Word Made Flesh:
The Perception of Holiness in the Texts of Late Medieval and Early Modern
Women in England

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Madeleine L'Engle. Her books first made me realize that literature could wrestle with the numinous. In particular, it is because of *A Wrinkle in Time* that I understood Julian of Norwich. Thank you.

Abstract

This project analyzes the perception of holiness in the texts of four late medieval and early modern holy women. It argues that lived holiness was defined not by strict religious standards, but by the reaction of the communities in which these women lived and wrote. These reactions could be influenced by factors ranging from the type of spiritual expression that was manifested to the political circumstances in which the holy woman lived. These women used their texts as a way to advocate for the holiness of their spiritual experiences and their lives.

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Introduction: The Image of Holiness

If asked, most people could probably enumerate a list of qualities that a holy person might possess. Selflessness, perhaps. Possibly asceticism. Some people might describe a woman who tirelessly worked to serve the poor. Others might speak of a man who sacrificed his life for the rights of others. People might suggest a person with great devotion to God, a leader of a major religion. But if asked to give an absolute definition of holiness, the qualities that any holy person must possess, as well as the attributes that would cancel the appearance of holiness, people might come closer to articulating something like Justice Potter Stewart's concurrence in *Jacobellis v. Ohio*: "I know it when I see it."¹ An absolute definition of holiness is nearly impossible to write.

In an ideal world, holiness ought to be a matter strictly between a woman and her God. But the perception of holiness – whether or not the society in which that woman lives will consider her to be a holy woman or something else altogether – is a real world perception made up of real world factors. These factors might include the cultural context in which the woman lived. A French woman would have a difficult time establishing her holiness to the English during the Hundred Years War, and a woman who did not adhere to the Six Articles stood a good chance of being found guilty of heresy during the latter days of Henry VIII. The factors used to judge holiness might also include the fact that she was a woman, as the characteristics associated with holiness varied for men and women. For quite some time, the only categories under which a woman could be included in the calendar of saints were virgin or martyr. Men's categories added doctor and confessor to those options. The perception of her holiness might also be based on how well her thinking followed established lines of Church

¹ *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964) (Stewart, J., *concurring*).

doctrine, or how closely her behavior mimicked previously understood patterns of holiness, such as those seen in the lives of the saints. Regardless of what precise factors were considered to be important, the key thing to remember is that it was the woman's community that decided. "One is a saint" – or a holy person – "only to and through other people."² Holiness may well have occurred in isolation, but it was not recognized as such.

Recognition is a key component of lived holiness, but it is a component that, in its execution, often clouds the issue of exactly what is being recognized. Indeed, as Kieckhefer points out, during the medieval period, quite often a community that on the surface was making a judgment about whether a particular woman was holy or not was making a very different sort of evaluation. The community "claimed to be judging objective qualities inherent in the woman, while in fact what they were judging was their own relationship to the woman."³ In other words, the perception of whether someone was possessed by the Holy Spirit or by the devil might well turn on whether or not her crying in church annoyed her neighbors. The community evaluated the holiness of the behavior by considering the person whose behavior they were evaluating, and as there was no universal definition of holiness, the outcome could vary greatly: "what one community considered piety another considered hysteria; what was extraordinary for a king might be a monk's everyday duty."⁴ Community in these circumstances is more

² André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, Jean Birrell, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 141.

³ Richard Kieckhefer, "The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe," in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 310-337, 319.

⁴ Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 149.

broadly defined than simply the members of the physical community in which the woman lived. It might encompass anyone who would witness to or interact with her spiritual expression, whether in life or by reading her text. But regardless of definitional nuances, the reality remains that, “the author for sacred biography is the community.”⁵

It is, of course, impossible to know “what exactly convinced a community to accept one person as a saint, but deny another’s claim, even though, on paper at least, their claims look equally strong.”⁶ Hagiography, like history, is written by the winners. The increasingly close connection in the later Middle Ages between holiness and heresy meant that people who were not seen as holy might find that the only audience for their story was an inquisitor. While a *vita* might give evidence of what was perceived as holiness, the perception of holiness was a prerequisite for the writing of the *vita*. Stories of those who tried for recognition of holiness and failed are difficult to find, as, if a *vita* exists for someone who remains uncanonized, there was likely to be at least a local cult to their memory, or some other preliminary recognition of holiness from their community. But even though it does not tell the whole story, hagiography can provide important clues as to how the perception of holiness was constructed, and to the characteristics that, in a certain place and time, might be more likely than not to cause someone to be seen as holy.

“The pursuit as well as the perception of holiness mirrored social values and concerns,” and those values and concerns in turn shaped the self-perception and self-presentation of those people who wished to present themselves or their experiences as

⁵ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 19.

⁶ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 152.

holy.⁷ Quite often, simply following what was said to be a God-given directive was not enough to establish someone as a holy person. Without context, a woman with a non-traditional form of spiritual expression could easily be seen as something altogether different to holy. As demonstrated by Newman, at least as early as the thirteenth century, the boundary between a holy woman and a demoniac – “a line at once so absolute in its moral polarity and so blurred in its empirical phenomenology” – was particularly vexed.⁸ The line between holy woman and heretic was equally permeable, and equally fraught. The question in the later Middle Ages was never whether a woman was having revelations, but whether those revelations came from God or from the devil. And their content did not always correlate with the answer.

In order to demonstrate that her extraordinary spirituality came from God and, more importantly, to share the divine message inherent in that gift of extraordinary spirituality, a holy woman needed context, not so much for herself, but for her actions. That context might be found in writing about her experiences, or in enacting her spirituality before witnesses, who “are the necessary link between the saint and society.”⁹ No behavior or behavior.

One of the best ways for a woman to assert her claim to holiness was to adhere to the conventions: to follow, in a recognizable manner, the precedent set by those who came before. The need to mimic the behavior of previous holy people was especially true for women, as “the *via media* for medieval female sanctity illustrated in the lives of

⁷ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 6.

⁸ Barbara Newman, “Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century,” *Speculum* 73 (1998) 733-770, 735.

⁹ Benjamin Semple, “The Male Psyche and the Female Sacred Body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan,” *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994) 164-186, 169.

saintly women is narrow and strictly prescribed.”¹⁰ This is because “the image of women in the clerical mind was not *a priori* a favorable starting point for any member of their sex to acquire the title of saint. The monastic tradition, going one step further than the misogynistic St. Jerome... consistently emphasized the close connection between women and sin.”¹¹ Any hint of extraordinary spirituality displayed by a woman would be much more likely to be viewed with suspicion as potentially diabolical in origin or heretical in nature than it would be as a genuine gift from God.

The presence of a person with an exceptional spirituality could act as a disruptive force on a community. Even people who were seen by their community as holy often had behaviors that were odd and upsetting, such as Christina the Astonishing’s habit of throwing herself into burning furnaces. The best way to minimize that disruption was to offer reassurance that the exceptionality skewed in the direction of the divine, rather than the diabolical. The consequences to the holy woman of the misinterpretation of her spiritual expression were serious, and could be fatal.

But the fact remains that even in similar times, places, or communities, not everyone’s expressions of holiness would manifest along similar lines. In his analysis of the types of lay female sainthood from the thirteenth century on, André Vauchez observes that “the complexities of their personalities and situations means we cannot make these women conform to one single model.”¹² Hagiographical signs of holiness tended to fall in patterns, but the expectations of the genre may well have influenced the qualities in their subjects that hagiographers emphasized. A woman living her day to day life might display forms of holiness that deviated from the patterns written in

¹⁰ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 188.

¹¹ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 370.

¹² Vauchez, *Sainthood, in the Later Middle Ages*, 372.

hagiography, and when she did, the community would decide if her behavior was a new form of holiness or a manifestation of heresy.

Not every form of spiritual expression had easily identifiable antecedents, and even when they did, there was no guarantee that the audience for the holy person's life would acknowledge the relevance of those antecedents. Margery Kempe's scribe did not initially know of the tradition of holy weeping, and allowed himself to be swayed from her cause by the complaints of those who found her crying an annoyance. If a witness does not want to see a person as holy, he will not look for evidence that her behavior is. Holiness is always seen and evaluated through the prejudices of the person watching its performance.

Holiness is performative, at least if recognition for that holiness is desired. Without a witness, there is no independent confirmation of holiness, and Church doctrine, through teachings like *discretio spiritum*, emphasized that people, and women in particular, were unable to properly judge the divine quality of their own experiences. The relationship between a holy woman and her audience is mutual, and each influences the other. As much as her Church and her community signal to her about the behaviors they are willing to classify as stemming from God, her behavior will also have an effect on what is seen as holy. A seventeen-year-old woman's claim that she wears armor and carries a sword because God told her to becomes less preposterous, and more reminiscent of biblical heroines like Judith when she also raises the siege of a major city in an occupied kingdom.

"Hagiographical writings are an excellent indication of trends in popular piety" and holy women might engage with these trends in their own writings as a way to give

evidence of their sanctity.¹³ The texts written by holy women might also show, as does *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the hostility and disbelief that a holy woman faced when her spirituality expressed itself along less well known avenues of holiness. The disbelief of the community could lead to accusations of pride, attention seeking, and even heresy.

Writing a text about a holy woman had less immediate pressures than living as a holy woman, but they still existed. In the writing of a text, there are ways to attempt to influence the audience's perception of the author's holiness. Yet even in a text, expectations must be met: "the biographer of a new saint had to produce just enough hagiographical commonplaces to convince the reader of the subject's sanctity and enough neutral and unconventional material to convince the reader of the writer's sincerity."¹⁴ This is particularly true when the biographer, or her revelation, is also the subject of the text. She must provide enough exemplarity to justify her writing and, in particular, to justify the audacity of a woman writing, yet must remain within the accepted paradigms of holiness.

Texts written by the holy women themselves offer a unique way to see the relationship between the holy woman and her audience. These texts are a means of discovering how these women presented themselves and their spiritual experiences. As Amy Hollywood writes, when seeking to understand how women experienced their spirituality, their own writings "must be the basis for any account of their self-understanding."¹⁵ Their writings are the best way to see how they thought of their spiritual experiences, and how they experienced the reaction of witnesses to those

¹³ Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhardt* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 6.

¹⁴ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 54.

¹⁵ Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*, 5.

experiences. These texts can also provide insight into the reaction of the community to the woman and her spirituality – a means of discovering which elements, and in what contexts, were thought to be holy, and which were not. This project uses four of these texts – Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*, the Trial of Condemnation of Joan of Arc, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and *The Examinations of Anne Askew* – to examine how holy women constructed their spiritual experiences and expressions in order to demonstrate their holiness to the witnessing community.

Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*, and its precursor text, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, illustrates her struggle to reconcile her belief in an extraordinary revelation from God with the teaching of the Church. Julian's audience is, as she calls them, her even Christians, her fellow believers. While her text does not show her engaging with them directly, it does show her own process of coming to belief in the holiness of her visions. Julian uses her own uncertainties as stand-ins for those of her readers, and thus her own process of coming to terms with the promise God makes in the course of her revelations, and how that promise ought to be seen in relationship to Church teaching, substitutes for the reactions of witnesses as well.

Joan of Arc's Trial of Condemnation shows how much influence outside factors had on the perception of holiness. The greatest factor predicting whether someone was likely to see Joan as a holy woman or as a heretic was not anything inherent in Joan's behavior, but what side of the Hundred Years War the person judging was on. Joan's interrogators made no attempt to hide the political component of her trial, and asked questions about whether God and her voices hated the English. The political factors so controlled the outcome of Joan's trial that she is the only condemned heretic who is also a canonized saint.

Margery Kempe encountered many uncomprehending and hostile reactions to her spirituality, ranging from the complaints of her neighbors, to being barred from attending Church services, to imprisonment for heresy. In her *Book*, Margery uses these reactions as a way to construct evidence of her holiness. The negative reactions to her behavior give Margery the opportunity to self-contextualize and explain to her audience of readers how and why her actions are holy. She embraces the fact that her spirituality requires explanation, and uses those explanations in her text as a way to portray herself in the best possible light.

The Examinations of Anne Askew show that even when there is agreement on what holiness is, people can differ on the best way to make that holiness recognizable to an audience. Although Anne Askew and John Bale, who published and commented on her text, are both writing the story of a holy woman for a reformed audience, their accounts differ greatly as to the qualities that should be emphasized in order to best convey that holiness. Bale's writing more closely follows the established patterns of sanctity, as seen in the *vitae* of Catholic saints, whereas Anne's writing uses her text to show her allegiance to the definitions of holiness created by the reformed faith.

The key similarity in these texts is that, in each instance, the woman in question acknowledges that perception matters in the evaluation of holiness. Each woman faces moments of doubt, either her own or that of others, over the origin of her spiritual experiences, or the genuineness of her faith. Likewise, each text records the steps its author took in her life, in her writing, or in both, to attempt to overcome that doubt, and to advocate for the divine origin of her spiritual expression, for the unwavering quality of her faith.

Reading the texts written by the holy women themselves gives a different

perspective than would be found in texts written about them. Hagiography, which is almost always written after the death of the subject, and after a cult in her memory has formed, emphasizes successes, whereas these texts acknowledge the lived reality of their authors. Julian has doubts about the origin of her visions, is tormented by a fiend, and takes over fifteen years to understand her revelations and their place in Church doctrine well enough to fully articulate their meaning in written form. Although Joan was posthumously declared orthodox and later canonized, and Anne Askew became a hero of the Protestant Reformation in England, both were burned to death as heretics. While obviously the plethora of venerated martyrs in the Christian pantheon demonstrates that dying for one's faith is hardly an indication of a lack of holiness, these two women were condemned as heretics by their fellow Christians, not martyred by non-believers. Joan's male attire gave even members of her own party pause and Anne was rumored to have denied her faith to save her life – even without politics, the two women had aspects of their behavior that witnesses did not necessarily interpret as holy. Margery had multiple periods of doubt over her the origin of her spiritual gifts, and the people around her did as well. Their texts are not the stories of a series of victories that lay out the path to sainthood, but the stories of actual responses to the entirety of their lives, and of all aspects of their spiritualities. They provide the fullest picture of what it actually meant to live as a holy woman in late medieval and early modern England.

Chapter One: Through a Glass, Darkly:

Julian of Norwich's Reconciliation of Doctrine and Belief

Julian of Norwich begins her discussion of her revelations by locating them in time. When she was thirty and a half years old, Julian became ill, almost to the point of death. In her extremity, she had a series of visions, or showings, given to her by God. She wrote a record of, and theological meditation upon, the showings, which is extant in two texts, the earlier *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, and the more fully realized *A Revelation of Love*.¹⁶ And while *A Revelation* is, at its heart, a magnificent treatise on the love of God for humanity, reading Julian's work reveals the potential peril inherent in writing about even such a seemingly benign topic.

At the beginning of *A Vision*, Julian makes the first of many affirmations of her belief in the teachings of the Church. Before she relates any part of her visionary experiences, Julian writes that she "leeved sadlye all the peynes of Criste as halye kyrke shewes and teches" (*Vis.* 1.9-10). It is a striking hesitation to find in a writer who has the reputation for assured serenity. But the anxiety Julian displays here is well-founded. Of the four women this project focuses on, three – Joan of Arc, Margery Kempe, and Anne Askew – were tried for heresy. Two – Joan and Anne – were burned. The risks of being found to speak incorrectly about God or matters of religious doctrine were serious.

Julian's risks were no less serious because her life was lived less publicly than those of the other women. Julian did not become the symbol of a new religion, like Anne Askew, or the symbol of a country, like Joan. Nor was she as controversial of a local figure as Margery. But in a large city, like Norwich, an anchorite would not have been

¹⁶ Julian of Norwich, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins, eds. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). All citations will be to *A Revelation*, also known as the Long Text, unless otherwise specified.

completely cut off from life outside her cell and, indeed, Margery's visit to that cell shows that Julian had a reputation for holiness that stretched beyond her city. The simple fact that she lived as an anchorite meant that Julian had contact with the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Norwich, in order to secure their approval for her enclosure. Her orthodoxy would have been closely scrutinized. As an anchorite, Julian's writing would have been subject to scrutiny from the Church in a way that the words of the other women were not. As Felicity Riddy points out, because Julian was part of the Church, "it is inconceivable that she could publish a book in Norwich without official sanction."¹⁷

But for all the seriousness of the issue, to speak about the anxiety around heresy merely in terms of avoiding risk is to ignore a very real component of the issue. Maintaining orthodoxy is an actual concern for people of faith. We cannot erase the actual, lived, belief in God and the Church from the lives of authors of works of religious writing just because this belief does not best fit our modern sensibilities, without then making manipulative cynics of our subjects. To claim that Julian merely mouthed adherence to Church doctrine as a kind of strategy to ensure that her text was published removes the characteristic of reflection from her writing. And, as Steven Justice persuasively argues:

This convention of describing strategy without belief or commitment has little enough to say for itself in theory; in practice, it freezes historical subjects into an idiot deadpan behind which either of two extreme possibilities might lie: they must speak either in a cynical and nearly sociopathic detachment from the truth-content of their words, or in a

¹⁷ Felicity Riddy, "Julian of Norwich and Self-Textualization," in *Editing Women*, Ann M. Hutchinson, ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998) 101-124, 105.

nearly delusional bondage to interests they do not even recognize as the source of those words.¹⁸

By making professions of belief to be – at best – little more than magical invocations against harm, scholars reduce religious writing to self-aggrandizing fiction, a categorization that is completely opposite to the way in which those works present themselves.

Modern readers of Julian, and indeed, of any work of medieval religious writing may well, as Barbara Newman writes, “prefer inner authority to that of Holy Church.”¹⁹ But those who do must remember that theirs is a modern preference that does not reflect medieval reality. Julian’s love of God and respect for the teachings of the Church were real, not authorial constructs she hid behind in order to subvert the patriarchy, and so she struggled to actually reconcile her understanding of the truth of her visions with the parameters of the doctrine in which she believed. Ignoring or trivializing this struggle leads to ignoring a vital thematic component of Julian’s writing.

Julian’s *A Revelation of Love* acts as “an instrument of mediation between a revelation and its public.”²⁰ She speaks often of the showings being full of privities, yet still strives to explain the meaning of her revelation of love to all of her even Christians. Because she is mediating a personal revelation, Julian must take care not only to explain God’s meaning, but also to fit that meaning in with the revelation, such as Church doctrine, that is already known.

Thus, in expounding on her revelation, and explicating its meaning, Julian must

¹⁸ Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?” *Representations* 103 (2008) 1-29, 11.

¹⁹ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 132.

²⁰ Nicholas Watson, “Desire for the Past” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999) 59-97, 70.

see things from a doubling of perspective: from the perspective of God, who shows the revelation so that she may share its meaning, and from the perspective of the even Christian, the everyday person, to whom the meaning must be explained. This even Christian is, like Julian, a member of the Church, and familiar with its doctrines and teachings, which means that Julian must communicate the meaning of her visions in a manner consistent with those teachings in order not to alienate her audience. She must balance the holiness of the divine communication against the fact that what God has revealed originally seems so extraordinary as to be unbelievable.

As her showings occurred, Julian saw multiple visions, had multiple truths simultaneously revealed. Even though these truths were separate from each other, they all fulfilled the function of increasing Julian's understanding of the revelation. In her text, Julian comes to treat the relationship between the showings and the teachings of the Church in a similar fashion – not as two separate truths, but as two parts fulfilling the same function: the explanation of a truth that will only be completely comprehended in the fullness of time. It is through time that she comes to this understanding. Not simply the time in which the revelations occurred, or the time between the original revelations and her writing of her book, during which period she had additional teaching from God, but from meditation upon the nature of time itself. Through this contemplation, Julian comes to an understanding that the Church and the truth of its doctrine exists in human time, which is subsumed into the divine, eternal time in which God, and the realized truth of his revelation to her exist. By perceiving her revelations as part of God's time, Julian is able to reconcile their promise, and the truth of the teaching of the Church, and understand her visions as holy.

I. "What we call the beginning is often the end

**And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”**

T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

Some concern for orthodoxy is to be expected in any work of religious writing that argues for new ideas or new interpretations of existing doctrine. And “in view of clerical suspicion of most women who dared to assume an authoritative teaching role, it is natural that some of these works nevertheless display in one form or another a certain insecurity, an awareness of actual or potential external pressures.”²¹ An intelligent writer is aware of her potential audience and will want to help to forestall suspicion of her text by acknowledging the areas that may be problematic. But Julian’s concerns run deeper than an awareness of the normal clerical suspicion of women’s writing.

During her showings, Jesus tells Julian, “sinne is behovely, but alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thinge shalle be wel” (27.9-11). It is one of the most-quoted passages in Julian’s text, and serves as a statement of unadulterated comfort to her modern readers. For Julian, however, there is conflict, as well as comfort, in Christ’s promise. For next to this promise, there is the problem of sin, and the Church teaching on the disposition of sinners: “All theyse shalle be dampned to helle without ende, as holy church techeth me to beleve. And standing alle this, methought it was impossible that alle maner of thing shuld be wele, as oure lorde shewde in this time” (32.37-40). What Jesus seems to be proposing by his assurance that all shall be well, is apocatastasis, or universal salvation. This doctrine “maintained that the entire creation, including, sinners, the damned, and the devil, would finally be restored to a condition of

²¹ Nicholas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love*,” *Speculum* 68 (1993) 637-683, 644.

eternal happiness and salvation."²² The Church holds this doctrine to be heretical.

The apparent contradiction between Christ's promise and the Church's teaching is a source of conflict for Julian, a conflict that manifests itself in her writing. The Parable of the Lord and Servant, arguably the focal point of *A Revelation*, and of all of Christ's revelations to Julian, is utterly absent from *A Vision*. This parable is the showing that articulates the way in which God has made and will make all things well, the crux of the potential heresy. As Sprung writes, there is an easy way out of this conflict, which is for Julian to assert that "God's doom of essential perfection is 'higher'" and so the divine promise of all things being made well must be the correct perspective.²³ She could merely assert that the human perspective with its emphasis on sin and damnation is wrong. But the Church's teachings are based on the human perspective, and to simply tell the Church that God is right and it is wrong is to wind up like Joan of Arc.

The Parable of the Lord and Servant's nonappearance in *A Vision* can be explained by means other than Julian's desire to avoid the heretical. Although it is a complex work, *A Vision* is the draft of an idea that does not see its fulfillment until *A Revelation*. Like many writers, Julian does not fully articulate her thoughts in the earlier version of her text. In a way, she cannot. She makes clear that she did not fully understand the showing that included the Parable of the Lord and Servant when it was first shown her: "For twenty yere after the time of the shewing, save thre monthes, I had teching inwardly, as I shall sey: 'It longeth to the to take hede to alle the propertes and the condetions that were shewed in the example, though the thinke that it be misty and

²² John R. Sachs, S.J., "Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991) 227-254, 227.

²³ Andrew Sprung, "'We nevyr shall come out of hym': Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich's *Book of Showings*" *Mystics Quarterly* 19 (1993) 47-62, 51.

indefifferent to thy sight” (51. 73-76). Until she comprehends God’s meaning in this showing, Julian is understandably reluctant to write about it.

It is this uncertainty on Julian’s part that increases her concerns about the orthodoxy of her writing. This uncertainty is mostly apparent in the earlier text. *A Vision* begins by foregrounding Julian’s belief in the Church, speaking about this before she speaks about her revelations, a priority that changes in the later text. Also unique to the earlier text is Julian’s oft-discussed protestation that she is not a teacher: “Botte God forbede that ye shulde saye or take it so that I am a techere. For I meene nought so, no I mente nevere so. For I am a woman, lewed, febille, and freylle” (*Vis.* 6. 35-37). Many critics offer the explanation that this apology is Julian’s way of forestalling the accusation that by writing her book, she is violating the Church’s prohibition on women’s teaching.²⁴ The subtext of this critical assertion is that, of course Julian knows that she is actually preaching, and is mouthing this apologia to satisfy the letter of the law. This interpretation, with its suggestions that Julian saw Church doctrine as something that could be manipulated to fit her purposes, seems unlikely when the entirety of Julian’s text is considered.

In the course of her text, Julian makes a number of statements asserting her firm belief in the doctrine of the Church. In commenting on modern scholars who see these statements of Julian’s as “heresy insurance,” Barbara Newman notes that “it would be

²⁴ See e.g., Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 6. The alternate explanation, as articulated by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, is that, far from apologizing for a lack of education or teaching ability, Julian is, instead, demonstrating her erudition here: “what the passage tells us is that, far from lacking in confidence, she is extremely well-informed about the theological arguments supporting female teaching, or even preaching – arguments usually discretely buried in Latin Scholastic discussions and not well advertised to the laity.” Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 302.

dangerously anachronistic to assume that it was only her ‘even Christians,’ and not also herself, that she needed to assure of her orthodoxy.”²⁵ It is tempting to assume that Julian was always supremely confident in her orthodoxy, or that even if she were not, that she intrinsically valued her personal interpretation of God’s message of love over the Church’s warnings against damnation. Perhaps most tempting of all, is the desire to believe that Julian was simply modern enough not to be concerned with what the Church taught, and that these statements of hers are merely her way of jumping through bureaucratic hoops.

Many modern scholars succumb to the temptation of assuming that if a medieval woman of any intelligence wrote on religious matters, she did so as a way of asserting her independence from the tyranny of Catholicism. This assumption is particularly common in Julian scholarship. McEntire writes that while Julian “could not directly oppose the teachings of the Church, her own spiritual journey led her, particularly during the twenty or more years between the short and long versions of the text, to a set of internally persuasive truths profoundly liberated ‘from the authority of the other’s discourse.’”²⁶ Grace Jantzen bends history to argue that Julian’s statements of belief in the Church were there to protect against being burned as a Lollard, writing that such statements should be seen “in the context of her book as a whole, and indeed of her overall situation, and not as a solemn pronouncement of fidelity to every aspect of the teachings and practices of the ecclesiastical hierarchy which in her time constituted itself

²⁵ Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 132-133.

²⁶ Sandra J. McEntire, “The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich’s *Showings*,” in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998) 3-33, 11 (internal citation to M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 348).

as the church."²⁷

In offering an example of theologian Jean Gerson's hostility toward visionary women, Dyan Elliott quotes his response to "a woman who frequently saw Christ flying through the air: 'this sign of truth has shown, unless I am mistaken, that she was out of her mind.'"²⁸ When a medieval male theologian belittles the experiences of women visionaries, it is often interpreted as a sign of misogyny. No such outcry follows the modern scholars who rewrite medieval women's visionary experiences. It is true that in Julian scholarship this rewriting appears as the superficially laudatory explaining away of Julian's allegiance to the Catholic Church, whereas Margery Kempe is accused of postpartum hysteria and Joan of Arc of gender dismorphism and anorexia. But in recasting the experiences of these women to what scholars feel they ought to have been, what gets lost is the way that the women have chosen to present themselves and their experiences.

In her introduction to *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Bynum addresses the complex issue of the scholarly treatment of the miraculous by writing "while I have a historian's skepticism about all evidence, I also, as a historian, prefer to start my study of the past with what people in the past said themselves."²⁹ Amy Hollywood confronts a similar issue from the opposite perspective in her scholarship on Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Hollywood asks, "is there any way – or any reason – for a twenty-first century feminist historian to take seriously Mechthild's claim that God speaks directly through her.... What – if anything – are we missing by moving too quickly to

²⁷ Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 11.

²⁸ Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc" *American Historical Review* (2002) 26-54, 29.

²⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 8.

claims about agency, legitimation, and authorization, thereby bypassing what Mechthild's own text claims about its production?"³⁰ What we miss by ignoring the text's own claims, and the claims of the text's author, is the purpose of the text's creation in its specific form and genre, and we risk reading past the author's purpose in writing that text. Further, by dismissing the faith and religious experiences of the authors of these texts, we are repeating the activities of those who condemned those authors as heretics for not expressing their spirituality in the appropriate manner: we are evaluating them according to a standard of what we feel they ought to be, and then condemning them for being other.

Julian positions herself in her text as a believer in the doctrine of the Church, one of the even Christians that she writes her text for: "But in all thing I beleve as holy church precheth and techeth. For the faith of holy church, which I had beforehand understonde – and, as I hope, by the grace of God willefully kept in use and in custome – stode continually in my sighte, willing and meaning never to receive onything that might be contrary therto" (9. 17-21). In her analysis of this passage, Staley writes that Julian "carefully distinguished here between the faith of the church, which has been previously taught her, and the experience of revelation. Though she affirms here her absolute belief in the teachings of the church, she nonetheless does not relinquish her right either to see or to seek to understand (and hence explain) what she is seeing."³¹ Julian does not want to abandon what she has been taught by the Church in seeking to understand her visions, but to give the visions the respect of understanding, and to understand them in a

³⁰ Amy Hollywood, "Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography," *The Journal of Religion* (2004) 514-528, 516-517.

³¹ Lynn Staley, "Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth Century Crisis of Authority" in David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 107-178, 144.

framework that allows her to remain a person of orthodox, faith, to continue to be one of the even Christians that she writes her text for.

As important as it is for Julian's modern critics to acknowledge her belief in the teachings of the Church as genuine, it is equally important to realize that Julian's adherence to Church teachings does not indicate a lack of depth in her thought or theology. Nicholas Watson writes that *A Vision* is "held back by its commitment to orthodoxy," a commitment that causes the text to end "in frustration."³² Watson's indictment of Julian's earlier work seems perhaps too harsh. It is true that *A Vision* is a less complex, more theologically conservative work than *A Revelation*. But Watson seems to be evaluating it as if it were meant to be a finished project, not simply a draft, a way for Julian to think her way into the complexity of *A Revelation*.

But like much else in the texts, the meaning that can, and should, be attached to Julian's repeated affirmations of belief in the teachings of the Church shifts from *A Vision* to *A Revelation*. On one level, Julian's "repeated references to the teaching of Holy Church, her repeated insistences that she is only talking about those who will be saved, are carefully and crucially intended to protect her from accusations of heresy."³³ It should not be forgotten that avoidance of accusations of heresy was important for all writers of theology, particularly of what might be seen as speculative theology. But while recognizing the legitimacy of Julian's need to appear orthodox, it should also not be forgotten that her respect for Church doctrine is deep and profound. And, as Abbott writes, "the importance Julian attaches to being perceived as orthodox should not be

³² Nicholas Watson, "Julian of Norwich," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 210-221, 217.

³³ Diane Watt, "Saint Julian of the Apocalypse," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008) 64-74, 71.

underestimated; but she does not let her text lean for legitimacy on a merely formulaic submissiveness to ecclesiastical authority."³⁴ She does not merely mouth adherence to doctrine, but demonstrates that adherence in all aspects of her text, particularly in what she reveals of her struggle to unify her revelations with that doctrine. Thus, "to chart the movement between *A Vision* and *A Revelation* enables us to explore the record of a painful *inward* pilgrimage, which accommodates without compromise a self-authenticating personal vision that seemingly conflicts with authority and convention."³⁵ In building this pilgrimage into her text as a rhetorical tool, Julian also acts to forestall censorship or condemnation of her text. She shows her thought process to the reader, making it clear that the path to understanding was a pilgrimage, and a spiritually arduous one, rather than a leap of heterodoxy. As a result of the inward pilgrimage, Julian comes to a fuller comprehension of the Church doctrine that is so important to her. Thus her text moves from being held back by its commitment to orthodoxy in *A Vision* to being inspired by it in *A Revelation*.

A Vision begins with Julian's profession of orthodoxy, a profession that is repeated with great frequency throughout the text. The earlier text is also replete with other statements of adherence to doctrine, most notoriously Julian's apologia for appearing to teach by writing her book. However, *A Revelation* shifts in tone, and "Julian took care to edit the self-justificatory passages from the first version of her book... out of her revision."³⁶ While Julian's adherence to Church teaching is still present in the revised

³⁴ Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999) 61.

³⁵ Barry Windeatt, "Julian's Second Thoughts: The Long Text Tradition" in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008) 101-115, 114.

³⁶ Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995), 822-864, 852.

text – is, indeed, an important theme – the emphasis of those statements has changed.

Once Julian is able to see how her visions incorporate Church teaching, her references to belief in the Church become statements of belief in the overall message of her showings. As she writes, “and anon I toke me to that our lord had shewed me on the same daye, with alle the faith of holy church – for I behelde it as both one – and fled therto as to my comfort” (67.18-20). She moves from being unsure of what she knows, unable to write confidently about all she has seen for fear that it conflicts with what she has been taught to being able to hold both things together in her mind as one, and to find comfort in that unity.

**II. “Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.”**

T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

The effect of time on Julian’s revelations and her writing is deeply important. She “meditated on her revelation for twenty years, so the accepted datings imply, but her decision to write and then revise [*A Vision*] and the processes of writing and revision themselves were in both cases her immediate responses to divine intervention,” responses that demonstrate the importance of God’s manipulation of time on Julian’s writing.³⁷ As Nicholas Watson notes, the theme of time becomes a crucial one in *A Revelation*, “which is preoccupied to an extent perhaps unique among visionary narratives with the way in which Julian’s understanding of the meaning of her visions has been clarified over the decades.”³⁸ The reason for this preoccupation with time in the text is that Julian’s understanding of time, specifically the distinction between divine and

³⁷ Watson, “Composition” 641 (emphasis in original).

³⁸ Nicholas Watson, “‘Yf wommen be double naturelly’: Remaking ‘Woman’ in Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love*” *Exemplaria* 8 (1996) 1-34, 17.

human time, is the means by which she comes to an understanding of the meaning of her revelations.

The word “time” appears over 200 times in *A Revelation of Love*. This frequency of appearance demonstrates how important the concept is in Julian’s writing. Julian introduces her revelation by placing it in a very specific temporal context. The showings occurred in “the yer of our lord 1373, the thirteenth day of May” (2.2).³⁹ But time’s importance in the text is not limited to a dating of when the visions occurred. Julian also focuses on the time between her revelations and her writing, and the way time occurs within the revelations.

The passage of time is the one point external to her revelations that Julian focuses on in her discussion of her showings. Time does not run in a strictly linear, chronological fashion during Julian’s showings. For lack of a better word, time *splits*, allowing her to experience multiple facets of the showings at once. For example, in the time of Julian’s first vision, that of Christ’s bleeding head, she also receives six showings: “And as longe as I saw this sight on the plentuous bleding of the heed, I might never stinte of these words: ‘Benedicte dominus!’ In which shewing I understood six things” (8. 1-3). The six things she sees are, respectively, the symbols of the Passion; the Virgin Mary; a revelation of the “blissful Godhead,” all mighty, all wisdom, all love; all the things that God has made; that all things were made for love, and a kept by God in love, without end; and that God is all good things, and that all good anything has is God.

These six things progress from specific human things like the Passion and Mary, to the

³⁹ While acknowledging that there may be multiple reasons for Julian to have placed this date in her text, Nicholas Watson suggests that one such reason may be to place the genesis of the text outside of the time period covered by Arundel’s Constitutions. See Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 850 n. 80. While I have no quarrel with his assertion that this is one of Julian’s subtle avoidances of a heresy charge, I am more interested in the inclusion of the date as evidence of the text’s preoccupation with time.

divine itself, to the ideas of what is contained in the divine, love and goodness. This passage, with its split showing, and the progression of the showing from the sight of human things to the understanding of the nature of the divine, serves as a synecdoche for Julian's revelations, and for the manner of her understanding of what is contained therein.

This simultaneity of events occurs often in the course of the showings, and it is quite common for Julian to describe one showing, and then follow that description with the observation that another showing occurred "in this same time" (5.1). The multilayered nature of time in the revelations allows Julian to witness separate parts of her visions in conjunction with each other. It also allows her to begin the contemplative process of analyzing the meaning held within the showings. At the same time that Julian sees the six showings contained within the vision of Christ's bleeding head she is able to consider their meaning. While the showing occurs, she writes, God "gave me space and time to beholde it" (8. 18-19). This phrasing emphasizes the importance of time as a tool of understanding in the showings, as well as its unique character in Julian's visionary experience. As Hilles observes, "the length of time during which a showing is present is not calibrated according to a mimetic standard of historical accuracy, but according to the length of time required for it to be understood."⁴⁰ Thus Julian shows her move away from the linear time with which her text begins toward a quality of time that is specifically associate with comprehension of the showings.

This shift toward time as a means for understanding the showings as well as experiencing them is shown as Julian returns to discussion of the opening vision of her

⁴⁰ Carroll Hilles, "The Sacred Image and the Healing Touch: The Veronica in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998) 553-580, 565.

showings, that of the bleeding head of Christ. Julian writes that “the bleding continued till many thinges were sene and understoded” (7.14-15). Understanding is given the same weight in the visionary experience as seeing and the time is given to Julian to accomplish both.

Julian later makes the connection between time and understanding more explicit: “And after, or God shewed any wordes, he sufferde me to beholde him a conveniable time, and all that I had seen, and all the understanding that was therin, as the simplines of the soule might take it” (13.1-3). This phrasing is a minor but important deviation from how Julian describes the experience in *A Vision*: “And after this, or God shewed me any wordes, he sufferde me to behalde langere, and alle that I hadde seene, and alle that was therein” (*Vis.* 8.29-30). The relevant difference in these two statements is the way in which time is discussed. In the earlier text, Julian sees her vision “longer.” In the later text, she beholds for a “conveniable” – suitable – time, one long enough for her to experience all the understanding that the showing contained. This word choice reflects a movement away from consideration of the strictly chronological aspects of time.

Julian’s great struggle in understanding her visions is the reconciliation of two competing truths, to make a “both/ and” from an “either/ or.” But through the way time runs in her visions, she is given the template with which to think in that manner. Julian foreshadows the means of that reconciliation early in *A Revelation*. At the beginning of her showings, Julian understands them as a type of comfort in her extremity: “Thus I toke it for that time that our lord Jhesu, of his curteys love, would shewe me comfort before the time of my temptation. For methought it might well be that I should, by the sufferance of God and with his keping, be tempted of fiendes before I died” (4.17-20). But even as she describes her early understanding of the visions, Julian acknowledges

that understanding as incomplete, and time-dependent. She understands them in one way at a certain time, which implies that her understanding changes with the passage of time.

Even as she comes to a fuller comprehension within the course of her visionary experiences, Julian acknowledges the temporal dependence of that understanding: "And thus, as it mighte be for the time, the rightfullehedde of Gods working was shewed to the soule" (11.20-21). She is shown the perfection of God's plan, but only to the extent that it can be shown at that time. This link between time and understanding is the means by which Julian is able to reconcile the message of her showings with the teaching of the Church.

Ancient Greek has two different words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is clock-time, the progression from one second to the next, from past to future. The event of Julian's revelations, or the singular revelation of the bleeding Christ, occur in *chronos*. The linear-time writings of the Bible, or teachings of the Church are part of *chronos* as well. *Kairos* is the correct point in time, what the Psalms call an acceptable time, or what Julian calls a convenient time. It is time out of time, rather than time as fixed point. The continual vision of the bleeding Christ that Julian experiences, or God's showing Julian "alle" in her first vision and then giving her "space and time to beholde it" are events that occur in *kairos* (8. 18-19). What occurs in this temporal duality that Julian builds into her text, is that "divine revelation, 'withouten any meen,' irradiates a religious ritual with the transcendent reality it intends to signify, and in the process transforms its meaning."⁴¹ Julian sees the figure of the crucified Christ on her wall, then has a vision of the same

⁴¹ Amy Appleford, "The 'Comene Course of Prayers': Julian of Norwich and Late Medieval Death Culture," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (2008) 190-214, 203-204.

figure at the beginning of her revelations. Then that vision unfolds itself into all of the things that God wants her to see, while at the same time, continuing as itself.

That Julian spent significant time pondering the ways in which things could be both fixed and eternal, self-referential and symbolic, is clear from her text. Time is not the only concept in Julian's text that meets these parameters. As Justine Semmens argues, space functions in this way as well. Julian "imagines that enclosed, sealed, or (according to Julian's lexicon) beclosed space represented by the anchoritic cell, the closed shell of the hazelnut, or the human body, contains the never-ending space of the city of the soul and the uncreated. Sealed space encloses unlimited space."⁴² There is also Julian's famous description of the hazelnut cosmos. As Julian sees the hazelnut, she wonders, "'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus: 'It is all that is made.' I marvelled how it might laste, for methought it might sodenly have fallen to nought for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding; 'It lasteth and ever shall, for God loveth it'" (5.9-12). As creation, it came into existence at a discrete moment, but lasts eternally in the love of God.

The most prevalent example in Julian's text of something that is symbolic of both the human and the divine is Christ's blood. Julian's visions begin with the image of the bleeding Christ. The visions begin with blood: "And in this, sodenly I saw the red bloud trekile downe from under the garlande, hote and freshely, plentuously and lively, right as it was in the time that the garlande of thornes was pressed on his blessed head" (4.1-3). Not only does Julian's visionary sequence begin in the blood of Christ, but as she is careful to point out, "the bleding continued till many thinges were sene and

⁴² Justine Semmens, "Infinite 'Beclosedness' in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 43 (2007) 40-50, 41.

understood” (7. 14-15). Julian’s precise explanation that the bleeding continues not only until things are “sene,” but until they are “understood” speaks to the importance of Christ’s blood as a meditative tool, as well as an image in her text. The image serves as “a provocation to explore metaphysical questions,” and Julian’s phrasing leaves open the possibility that the image of Christ’s flowing blood remained with her throughout not only the original sequence of visions, but throughout the years of supplemental teaching that increased her understanding of her revelations as well.⁴³ As much as it was a vital part of her showings, “this bleeding image was part of a design whose end was to encourage understanding.”⁴⁴

Julian uses a striking amount of detail in describing the vision of Christ bleeding. As Christ’s blood appears, it changes in color: “The gret droppes of blode felle downe fro under the garlonde like pelottes, seming as it had comen oute of the veines. And in the coming oute they were browne rede, for the blode was full thicke. And in the spreding abrode they were bright rede” (7. 10-13). The blood begins as brown, the color of dried, dead blood, blood that Christ shed at the Crucifixion, and then changes to red, living blood, the blood that Christ sheds eternally. As Abbott correctly observes, as we read these passages, “we are not so much to take note of the flow of blood in integral relation to Christ himself as of the images, the formulae, into which the attributes of his blood have been converted.”⁴⁵ One of the most important images that appears in this descriptive section is the use of the description of the characteristics of the blood to

⁴³ David Aers, “The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love*” in *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 77-104, 84.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁵ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 69.

indicate the passage of time that is shown by Christ's bleeding. What is unique is that the blood does not begin as fresh and then dry, as might be expected. Rather, the blood begins as "dead" and transforms to a state of eternal life, marking the unique effect of the Christ-event on the flow of time.

Julian unites the symbolism of blood, time, and understanding in her text in the vision that is shown through Christ's side: "And ther he shewed a fair, delectable place, and large inow for alle mankinde that shalle be saved to rest in pees and in love. And therwith he brought to minde his dereworthy blode and his precious water which he let poure all out for love" (24. 3-6). The place in his side large enough for all the saved is the Church, and is maintained in the loving flow of Christ's blood. This connection that Julian makes between the Church and Christ's blood as its roots in the late medieval depictions of the Crucifixion (which was the image with which Julian's revelations began) wherein the Church, in the figure of Ecclesia "emerges from the wound in Christ's side, taking her very being from him. For Church, we must remember, is not only born *from* Christ's body; she also *is* Christ's body."⁴⁶ By using this symbolism, which united the Church with Christ, Julian also alludes to the unification of Church teaching with her visions.

Julian sees the Church enclosed in Christ, but that is not all she witnesses in this vision: "he shewed to my understanding, in part, the blessed godhede, as farforth as he wolde that time, strengthing the pour soule for to understande as it may be saide: that is to mene, the endlesse love that was without beginning, and is, and shal be ever" (24.7-10). At the same time that Julian sees the Church enclosed in Christ, she also sees the Godhead contained in him. The intent of this vision is to strengthen her understanding of

⁴⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 161. Emphasis in original.

the revelation of love, but that understanding is also specifically time-linked: “as farforth as he wolde that time.” Julian is given only the understanding that is necessary to that moment. She can comprehend what is being shown, but a fuller revelation may be yet to come.

**III. “And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”**

T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

When Julian returns to herself after her visionary experiences, she denies the truth of what she saw, dismissing the image of the bleeding crucifix as raving. This disbelief is exactly the reaction that her time and religious culture would have wanted her to have. Some of the major works of religious writing of Julian’s time, “caution readers against any visions they may have, on the respective grounds that their source is certain to be diabolical, that while visionary dreams may theoretically be from God it is impossible to be sure this is so in any given case, and that they do not constitute ‘true’ contemplation.”⁴⁷ This suspicion of visionary experiences was even more pointed when the putative visionary was a woman. Thus, even once she accepted the truth of her showings and their divine origin, Julian knew that her text would be evaluated according to a presumption of disbelief.

By including the references to her own disbelief in and lack of understanding of her own visions, Julian shows that she knows her potential audience. She knows that they will be inclined to view her showings as problematic, and she places herself among them – as an even Christian – by acknowledging that she did as well.

Julian makes no effort to hide the fact that her understanding of what her visions

⁴⁷ Watson, “Composition,” 647-48.

meant changed over time. Her disavowal of the showings as ravings, her statements like “I toke it for that time” which shows that her interpretation of what she was shown changes, and her initial incomplete comprehension of The Parable of the Lord and Servant and subsequent additional teachings on its meaning all testify to the fact that human understanding of divine truths is limited and changeable.

Julian supplements this acknowledgment of the limits of her understanding with the additional observation that each showing contained secrets. As Julian explains, God’s revelation takes place in two parts: “That one party is oure saviour and oure salvation. This blessed parte is open and clere and fair and light and plentuouse” (30.1-3). This part is the common revelation, and includes things like Church teachings, which are necessary for salvation. The other understanding is “hid and sparrd fro us: that is to sey, alle that is beside oure salvation. For that is oure lordes prevy concelle, and it longeth to his sarvantes for obedience and reverence not wille to witte his conceyles” (30.10-13). Not only do we not know these hidden things, but we should not strive to.

The reason that God keeps these privities, is that the time is not yet right for them to be revealed: “And for the gret love that he hath to us, he sheweth us alle that is wurshipfulle and profitable for the time.” Revelations, and their understanding, are time dependent. Things will be known in their acceptable time. It is in this manner, through the link between time and understanding, that Julian is able to fit the teachings of the Church in with the promise of her revelations.

Julian splits the problem of her showings apparent promise of universal salvation into two “dooms”: the higher doom of God, and the lower doom of the Church. As she explains, “the furst dome, which is of Goddes rightfuhede, and that is of his owne high, endlesse love – and that is that fair, swete dome that was shewed in alle the fair

revelation, in which I saw him assigne to us no maner of blame" (45.11-13). And in the doom of the holy Church, Julian, "understode that sinners be sometime wurthy blame and wrath, and theyse two culde I not see in God" (45. 17-19).

This idea, that the teaching of the Church might contain elements not found in God, in no way means that Julian is denying the truth of Church teaching. What she is explaining is that the truth of the teaching of the Church can change over the course of time. As Watson explains, "because the church's role is to mediate its truths to the ever-changing perceptions of the sensual soul, some of the things it teaches (as is clearly implied, although Julian never states this directly) are so limited in application as to be ultimately – at least in a factual sense – untrue."⁴⁸ In other words, just as Julian came, over time, to a fuller sense of the truth of God's revelations, so can the Church come to a fuller understanding of God's truth.

Nor does Julian imply that it is the Church's fault that it perceives things differently than God. Although the one comes from the other, they are different: "For otherwise is the beholding of God, and otherwise is the beholding of man. For it longeth to man to mekely to accuse himselfe, and it longeth to the proper goodnesse of oure lorde God curtesly to excuse man" (52.58-60). The Church is made up of humans, and so cannot behold as God does, "so that in considering people to be sinners, Christians and the Church apply quite different criteria from those applied by God – they see *something utterly different from what God sees.*"⁴⁹ And even though this difference in perception exists, Julian makes clear that everything that God does "is done for the same entent and the same ende that holy church in oure faith us techeth" (53. 20-21).

⁴⁸ Watson, "Remaking 'Woman,'" 21.

⁴⁹ Watson, "Remaking Woman", 21. Emphasis in original.

The difference in perception is caused by the different experience of time for God, who is eternal and experiences all time as one, and for the Church, which is chronological, and experiences only the now of time.

Julian's Parable of the Lord and Servant is, theologically, the most important of the showings she received. It is the showing that is, as Julian writes, "a beginning of teching which I saw in the same time, wherby I might come to knowing in what manner he beholdeth us in oure sinne" (51.98-99). It is also the most complex, and the most potentially problematic, as it seems to come close to promising universal salvation. Julian warns her reader of the complexity of the showing, writing that the "sight was shewed double in the lorde, and the sight was shewed double in the servant" (51.3-4).

In terms of plot, the vision itself is simple. Julian sees a benevolent lord, and a loved and loyal servant. The lord sends the servant on an errand, which the servant moves with good will to do. But the servant, in his desire to do good and to obey the will of the lord, falls, and is unable to complete his appointed task. The lord shows no anger to the servant, only love, saying, "Lo, my beloved servant, what harme and disses he hath had and taken in my servis for my love – yea, and for his good wille! Is it not skille that I reward him his frey and his drede, his hurt and his maime, and alle his wo? And not only this, but falleth it not to me to geve him a gifte that be better to him and more wurshipful than his owne hele shuld have bene?" (51.40-44).

At first, Julian understands the parable only as an allegory for the fall, with God as the Lord and Adam as the servant, but she understands that this is not the entirety of her revelation:

And yet culde I not take therein full understanding to my ees in that time.

For in the servant that was shewed for Adam, as I shall sey, I sawe many

diverse properteys that might by no manner be derecte to singel Adam.
And thus in that time I stode mekille in unknowinge. For the full
understanding of this mervelouse example was not geven me in that time,
in which misty example the privites of the revelation be yet mekille hid
(51. 55-60).

Yet even in stating her lack of understanding, Julian shows how she will eventually see clearly what the showing means: time, which is thrice-mentioned in this passage. After her ongoing meditation on this showing that she understands the way in which it is double, that as much as the servant is Adam, the servant is also Christ: "By the nerehad of the servant is understand the sonne, and by the standing on the left side is understond Adam. The lorde is God the father; the servant is the sonne Jesu Crist; the holy gost is the even love which is in them both" (51. 182-185).

Thus, what Julian sees in her revelation is that Christ's redemption of humanity is simultaneous to Adam's fall. Julian is shown that "Adams sinne was the most harme that was done or ever shalle to the worldes end" (29.6-7). But at the same time, God tells her that "sithen I have made welle the most harm, than it is my wille that thou know therby that I shalle make wele alle that is lesse" (29.13-14). From God's perspective, the greatest wrong was made well upon its occurrence, and since that was possible, no concern over the making well of smaller harms is necessary.

When the servant is seen merely as Adam, God's promise to make all manner of things well, appears too great, and seems to tread the edge of the heretical doctrine of universal salvation. But when the divine perspective overlays the human interpretation, and the servant is seen as Christ as well, the real meaning of God's promise becomes clear, and the conflict with Church doctrine disappears. Fr. John Sachs explains the

resolution in the following manner: “In the most fundamental sense, God has already judged the world and the human race. The Christ event is God’s judgment of love and mercy in the face of the world’s desperate slavery to sin and death. The place where judgment is yet to occur is on our own actions.”⁵⁰ Neither the teaching of the Church nor the meaning of the revelations are changed, only the perspective from which they are viewed – they are seen in different times. From this perspective, it is seen that “the Church teaches what people need to hear, not what is finally true, while *A Revelation* offers a necessary supplement to Church teaching.”⁵¹

In the course of her showings, Julian experiences time as God does, as a whole, and she is able to translate that experience of time to an understanding of what the showings mean. As Nuth writes, “Because of her union with God, Julian sees the world, momentarily, as God sees it. And in God’s view all is well, sin is nothing, and everything is accomplished as God intends. This is a perspective essentially different from the way humans, conditioned by chronological time, view events as destructive or arbitrary or happening by chance.”⁵² Julian reconciles the divine and human perspectives by presenting the “Church’s teaching as provisional, not absolute,” true for this time, and part of a fuller truth that will be known only once we step out of time.⁵³

Julian was not the only holy woman to be troubled by the meaning of her visions. While she was visiting Norwich, Margery Kempe was told by God to visit “an ankres in the same cyté which hyte Dame Jelyan.”⁵⁴ Margery relates that Julian was thought to be

⁵⁰ Sachs, “Current Eschatology,” 250.

⁵¹ Watson, “Julian of Norwich,” 217.

⁵² Joan M. Nuth, “Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 611-645, 630.

⁵³ Nicholas Watson, “Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997) 145-187, 167-68.

⁵⁴ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn Staley, ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute

an expert in determining the truth or falsity of visions. Julian confirms the truth of Margery's visions, and tells Margery that she might believe whatever God puts in her soul, so long as "it wer not ageyn the worshep of God and profyte of hir evyn cristen," a method of *discretio spirituum* remarkable in its simplicity.⁵⁵ Her advice to Margery betrays no hint of Julian's own struggle with reconciling her own visions to both the worship of God and the benefit of her fellow Christians.

It is easy, when reading Julian, and especially when reading *A Revelation*, to be distracted from this struggle by the combination of the assured tone of Julian's authorial voice and the comfort inherent in "alle maner of thinge shalle be wele." However, ignoring or dismissing that struggle means ignoring an important element in Julian's writing and in her visionary experience. It belittles the spiritual pilgrimage she made over the course of her reflection on her visions.

Even at the end of her text, Julian emphasizes the importance of time and reflection in understanding her visions, and acknowledges the limits of that understanding: "This boke is begonne by Goddes gifte and his grace, but it is not yet performed, as to my sight" (86.1-2). Julian does not claim to be the definitive arbiter of her own visions. She points out that there are "many secrets ('privities') God conceals from humanity until death or even the Day of Judgment; there would also be some who would be able to understand her revelation more fully than she could herself."⁵⁶ Human perspective cannot fully encompass that of the divine. Time does not pass in the same way, and human understanding is limited. No matter how beautifully Julian explains, it is still difficult to see how "sinne is behovely but alle shalle be wele," a concept with which

Publications, 1996) 18. 955

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.964.

⁵⁶ Watson, "Desire for the Past," 90 (internal citations to chapters in *A Revelation* omitted).

theologians continue to wrestle. But as long as she presents herself as wrestling with the concept, and seeking greater understanding, it is not heretical to consider. And the final truth that Julian leaves her readers with is that while her revelation may begin the process of understanding, it will not be performed until “alle this shalle we see in God withouten ende” (86.22-23). Once the human experience of time matches up with the divine, all of the revelations – Julian’s, the Church’s, God’s – will all come clear.

Chapter Two: “Puzel or pucelle?” Contrasting Perceptions of Joan of Arc

*“It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in’t.”*

The Winter’s Tale III.ii.148-9

People whose spirituality manifested in an extraordinary way – hearing voices, seeing visions, being called on by God to perform a task – needed to be very careful of how that spirituality was seen by those around them. Saints and heretics became “uncomfortably proximate over the course of the High and later Middle Ages.”⁵⁷ Spirituality that deviated from the expected needed context in order to be interpreted, otherwise, what was divine inspiration might be seen as demonic possession.

The emphasis that context had on the perception of holiness in the Middle Ages is most obvious in the case of Joan of Arc, the only canonized heretic in the history of the Church. Joan’s French supporters wanted to see her as a holy woman, sent by God. Her English adversaries needed to make her into a heretic, a diseased limb that the Church needed to cut off to preserve the health of its body, and who was herself cut off from God. One of the largest influences on the way Joan’s holiness was perceived was the political context in which she enacted her spirituality. Although Joan remained the same, her advocates and her adversaries interpreted her behavior and her words in ways that were diametrically opposed, and designed to fit into categories dictated by what each nation wished Joan to be.

Considering that she was examined and tried by clerics, this dichotomy of views is, perhaps, unsurprising: “scholars, trained in dialectic, were equally adept at subverting

⁵⁷ Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 119.

any positive 'case' by arguing to the opposite purpose."⁵⁸ Elliott adds that "scholastic argumentation leaves a shadow text of discarded or disproved tenets that invite ingenious appropriation."⁵⁹ This is similar to what Margery Kempe does in her *Book*. Margery subverts the hostile reactions to her spirituality in her text, making herself appear as a holy woman. But unlike Margery, who used the writing of her text as a means of having the final say in how she was perceived, the processes that Joan undergoes are unidirectional: the examiners evaluate her and there is no significant opportunity for her to respond to the way they see her. Joan's holiness, or lack thereof, is defined by the witnesses to her words and behavior, and it is rarely Joan who is guiding the way in which she is officially seen.

In her public life, the perception of Joan was constantly constructed by others, pursuing agendas that are tangential at best to whether Joan met the criteria for holiness. Joan was a political figure, and politics drove how she was perceived. Even before her trial began, the English attempted to throw the cloak of religion over the very political machinations surrounding Joan. In his summons to the Duke of Burgundy and Jean de Luxemburg, requiring the transfer of Joan to his custody, Pierre Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, wrote that, "considering what is said," Joan "ought not be considered a prisoner of war," but that King Henry VI would still remunerate those who captured and imprisoned her.⁶⁰ The veneer of religion painted over politics was made even thinner when the English King himself wrote a letter urging that Joan be handed

⁵⁸ Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc" *American Historical Review* (2002) 26-54, 36.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁰ "...qu'elle ne doye point estre de prinse de guerre... considéré ce qui dit est." Collected in *La Minute Française des Interrogatoires de Jeanne la Pucelle*, ed. Paul Doncoeur (Melun: Librairie d'Argences, 1952) 68. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

over to Cauchon so that she might be tried for her offenses against God. The involvement of the King of England made clear that Joan's trial at Rouen was not simply about heresy. Nor was her examination at Poitiers simply about holiness. While no record of the examination is extant, a summary of the process, known as the Poitiers Conclusions, opens by stating: "The king, *given his necessity and that of his kingdom*, and considering the continuous prayer of his poor people to God and to all others who love peace and justice, ought not to turn away nor reject the Maid who says she is sent by God for his succor."⁶¹ Each side had their own use for Joan, and a role they needed her to fulfill.

In order to best understand what those roles were, and the context that Joan lived and died in, some political background is necessary. Joan of Arc's France was a fractured kingdom. Three years after Joan's birth in 1412, the French suffered a tremendous defeat at the Battle of Agincourt.⁶² "[T]his defeat underscored the English claim as God's chosen heirs to William the Conqueror's legacy,"⁶³ meaning that even before Joan's appearance, the struggle was not only over who should rule France, but over who God wanted to rule France. The Treaty of Troyes in 1420 and Henry V of England's marriage to the Dauphin's sister, Catherine of Valois, made Henry the heir to Charles VI and to the throne of France. In 1422, Henry V and Charles VI of France died, and the Dauphin saw his hopes for the French crown dashed as the machinations of the Duke of Bedford placed the boy-king Henry VI on the joint throne.

⁶¹ "The Poitiers Conclusions," in Deborah A. Fraioli, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000) 206-207, 206 (Fraioi, trans., emphasis mine)

⁶² Nadia Margolis provides a clear and precise historical summary of the events of the Hundred Years' War relevant to Joan in her essay, *Joan of Arc*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 256-266, which I have drawn on here.

⁶³ Ibid., 257.

The state of France could not be blamed on the English alone. In 1407, Louis, the Duke of Orleans, was assassinated by partisans of John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy. In 1419, the Armagnac party, loyal to the Dauphin, avenged this murder by assassinating the Duke of Burgundy, thereby reinforcing an alliance between Burgundy and England. Thus the political divisions in Joan’s time might more precisely be described as the Anglo-Burgundians and the Franco-Armagnacs. However, while this is a distinction that Joan was certainly aware of – when questioned as to whether the people of her home village of Domremy sided with the Burgundians or the Armagnacs, Joan replied that she “knew but one Burgundian, whose head she would like to see cut off, that is, if that had pleased God” – as she referred to her party as French and her antagonists as the English, this project will do so as well.⁶⁴

France was fractured and weak, and much as it needed a savior, it also needed a scapegoat. One of the people who came to be blamed for the fractured state of France was Isabeau of Bavaria, the wife of Charles VI and the mother of the Dauphin. Her adulterous behavior during her husband’s periods of insanity cast doubts upon the Dauphin’s legitimacy, and she acquiesced to the Treaty of Troyes, which removed the Dauphin from the line of succession. Because of Isabeau’s suspect behavior, and the rumors that surrounded her, the fallen woman was blamed for the fallen state of France, and Isabeau’s corruptness became a synecdoche for the corrupted state of the country. When Joan appeared, with her divine mission to see the Dauphin crowned and France united and freed of the English presence, she was offered up as a contrasting version of a woman who represented the state of France.

⁶⁴ “...ne congnoissoit que ung Bourguignon, qu’elle eust bien voulu qu’[il] eust eu la teste coupee; voire, se il eust pleu a Dieu.” *La Minute Française*, 105.

Joan was constructed by the French in opposition to the perception of Isabeau, and in a manner designed to fit the criteria of what was needed: a savior of France. Then at her trial, an alternate Joan was constructed by the English in opposition to the perception that had been created of Joan herself.⁶⁵ The perception of holiness was bent to fit the political reality that was occasioned by the Hundred Years War, and Joan's particular role in it. Nationalism became at least as important as Joan's relationship with God when it came to determining if she was a holy woman or a heretic.

**I. Joan of Arc hath been
A virgin from her tender infancy**

I Henry VI V.iv.49-50

Joan was the savior that France needed, in the form of a symbol that the nation could embrace. Part of what made her so useful to the French cause was that she could be constructed in a manner that opposed the common perception of Isabeau: in place of a woman whose troublingly loose morality led to a France that was divided, the virginal Joan could be set into place as a symbol of a France made whole by God. In this context, Joan's most useful characteristic for her supporters was her virginity. It is one of the qualities specifically mentioned in the Poitiers Conclusions as being a reason why Charles VII ought to put his faith in Joan: "in her is found no evil, only goodness, humility, virginity, piety, honesty, and simplicity."⁶⁶ Her virginity was not the only quality that made her cause credible, but it was extremely important.

Marina Warner writes of Joan, "the physical nature of her virginal body... is the

⁶⁵ The records of Joan's trial provide the evidence for the English construction of Joan. The evidence for the French construction of her is, due to the loss of the record of her examination at Poitiers by Charles' theologians, less tangible. This lack of documentary evidence leads to the admittedly circular argument that Joan and her supporters constructed an image of Joan as the virginal savior of France because that is how the French people saw her and that is the image that the English reacted to at her trial.

⁶⁶ "Poitiers Conclusions," 206

starting point of her impact on her contemporaries.”⁶⁷ In the course of her brief time in the public eye, Joan underwent at least four documented examinations of her virginity.⁶⁸ These examinations were important, for although proof of virginity would not, of itself, prove Joan’s divine mission, proof of its lack would have absolutely disproved her claim to have been sent by God. The importance of virginity as an element in the perception of a woman as holy was based on the belief, dating back to classical times and retained in Patristic teaching, that virginity “made the human body a more appropriate vehicle to receive divine inspiration.”⁶⁹ The emphasis on her virginity also emphasized that Joan was a worthy vessel for God to work through. Joan’s virginity was one of the reasons that the French began to believe in her. “Jeanne herself, and the soldiers, captains, dukes, kings, priests, and bishops who met Jeanne, believed that all of her gifts, and especially her visions, were the result of or at least connected to her virginity.”⁷⁰ It was proof of her seriousness about and dedication to her mission. Her vow symbolized her complete dedication of herself to God’s plan.

In this particular instance, the symbolism associated with virginity was something that Joan embraced as well as part of her construction of her public image. Not only at the beginning of, but throughout her brief career, she used her virginity as an extremely powerful and versatile public relations tool. As Nadia Margolis notes, Joan understood “the essential reciprocity between myth and truth while formulating her mission.”⁷¹ Joan

⁶⁷ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 8.

⁶⁸ Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins: From Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 198.

⁶⁹ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 67.

⁷⁰ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000) 17.

⁷¹ Margolis, “Joan of Arc,” 256.

also used this reciprocity when formulating the image of the person who was carrying out that mission. From the beginning of her time in the public eye, Joan consistently used “la Pucelle” when referring to herself in correspondence. Joan’s choice of *nom de guerre* was inspired: “With an instinct for seizing a central image of power, which Joan possessed to an extraordinarily developed degree, she picked a word for virginity that captured with doubled strength the magic of her state in her culture.”⁷² The term became so closely associated with Joan as to function as an alias. In much of the extant correspondence announcing her trial or summoning people to participate in it, Joan is referred to as “Jhenne la Pucelle.” Under questioning at her trial, she revealed that this was the name that her voices addressed her by: “She responded, both before the raising of the Siege of Orleans and after, every day, when they spoke to her, they name her several times as Joan la Pucelle, Daughter of God.”⁷³

Joan’s choice of epithet is a very revealing one: pucelle “was the original word used in French to describe not just a virgin but a virgin saint.... By choosing this particular epithet as her title, Joan thus claims an identity that is both founded in bodily integrity and linked to hagiography.”⁷⁴ This is not to imply that Joan was claiming sainthood for herself. But she was savvy enough to understand that her audience would need a convenient category in which to place her, and that a cross-dressing young woman traveling with soldiers would be more likely to be called “putain,” than “pucelle.” By consistently referring to herself as Pucelle, Joan provides a constant reminder that she has a divinely sanctioned reason to be a part of the army. At the same time, the

⁷² Warner, *Joan of Arc*, 23.

⁷³ “Respond que, au devant du siege d’Orleans levé, et depuis, tous le jours, quand ilz parlent a elle, l’ont plusieurs foyz appellee: JHENNE LA PUCELLE, FILLE DE DIEU.” *La Minute Française*, 159.

⁷⁴ M McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 198.

epithet offers a subtle reminder that she belongs to a tradition of women called to do God's will, and that that call was the reason for all her actions. More than simply an attempt to establish herself as a holy woman, Joan needed to establish her mission as holy, and to show that God was directing her actions if she hoped to receive support from the Dauphin.

The best way to do this was to resemble other young women, like her counsel, Saints Catherine and Margaret, whose actions had served God. Borrowing from the tradition of hagiography, Joan, as did other women who hoped to present themselves as holy, knew that “the most effective way to establish holiness was to model the life in such a way as to conform to the already established patterns of sanctity.”⁷⁵ It was common for female saints to “designate their virginity as the preeminent sign of their faith,”⁷⁶ and so rather than drawing attention to her unique characteristics – the men's clothes and military mission – Joan wisely called attention to her commonality with other women whose holiness was not in question. She was able to associate herself with a pre-existing set of beliefs about what holiness might look like in order to add evidence to the argument that she ought to be seen as holy.

It is impossible to know how much of the emphasis Joan placed on her virginity came from her conception of her self versus her conception of what might be useful in fulfilling her mission. At her trial, Joan stated that “the first time she heard her voices, she promised her virginity, for as long as it was pleasing to God. She was then thirteen, or around there.”⁷⁷ By the time of her public career, virginity had become a major

⁷⁵ Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001) 42.

⁷⁶ Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 2.

⁷⁷ “La premiere foys qu'elle ouyt sa voix, elle voua sa virginité, tant qu'il plairoit a Dieu. Et estoit

component of her identity, and two of her voices, Catherine and Margaret, were holy virgins. Thus, Joan's emphasis on her virginity may have been merely self-identification, rather than deliberate manipulation of archetype and mythos. However, even as simple self-identification, Joan's claimed identity of la Pucelle was a resonant one.

The emphasis that Joan and her supporters placed on the symbolism of her virginity also provided a vehicle for her supporters to link her to prophecy. During the course of her career, various allusions were made to prophecies that potentially referred to Joan. Joan was aware of, and occasionally referred to, the prophecy that France would be ruined by a woman, and then saved by a woman, a prophecy that many interpreted as being about the promiscuous queen of Charles VI, Isabeau of Bavaria, and the virginal Joan, respectively. The reason for this interpretation was that it was Isabeau's promiscuity during Charles VI's periodic bouts of insanity that paved the way for the Dauphin's disinheritance, and Joan fit easily into the role of female savior. This prophecy seems to be a variation on the Eva/Ave linking of Eve and the Virgin Mary in art and literature, with the theme of salvation lost by a poorly behaved woman and regained through a virgin redeemer.⁷⁸ However, although Joan and her supporters were aware of this prophecy, they had to be careful how they used it in support of Joan, since at the same time it gave credibility to Joan, it cast doubts on Charles' mother, and, thus, also his parentage and worthiness to sit on the throne. A similar, but less politically

en l'aage de XIII ans, ou environ." *La Minute Française* 157.

⁷⁸ This is a particularly interesting connection since "Lancastrian representations of the English claim to the throne of France often brought to bear the example of the Incarnation as a case in which a virtuous woman legitimately transmits a divine inheritance to her son," a clever use of propaganda to get around the Salic Law. Nancy Bradley Warren, *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380-1600* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 61.

dangerous, prophecy was also interpreted as being about Joan. Another French visionary woman, Marie d'Avignon, had predicted to Charles VI that a virgin warrior would soon appear to save France.⁷⁹ The ease with which Joan could be associated with these prophecies contributed to the perception of her as special, specifically sent to perform great deeds for France.

Other Jehannic prophecies were found in two traditionally English sources – Bede and Merlin. The Bede prophecy is an astrological chronogram, cryptic and ambiguous, even in the context of prophetic writing, and a variety of dissimilar versions existed.⁸⁰ The phrase that was interpreted as being about Joan is simply “the maid carries banners.”⁸¹ Like any useful prophecy, the phrase is ambiguous enough to be potentially applicable. Joan did come to be closely associated with her banner – she carried it in battle, so as to avoid using her sword to kill. Also, during Charles’s coronation at Rheims, Joan, who was given a very visible role, stood at the altar, and held her banner throughout the ceremony. However, the French emphasis on this prophecy’s association with Joan began immediately following her examination at Poitiers, before she had ever taken the field of battle. This suggests that the precise text of the prophecy was less important than the ability to claim that Joan had been prophesied by a wide variety of sources.⁸²

The Merlin prophecy that became associated with Joan is extremely brief and existed in three similar forms. The first can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*: “A virgin ascends the backs of the archers/ and hides the flower of

⁷⁹ Charles T. Wood. *Joan of Arc and Richard III: Sex, Saints, and Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 139.

⁸⁰ See Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 62, n. 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 62-64.

her virginity.”⁸³ After Joan’s examination at Poitiers, a Valois translation of this verse, which took liberties with the text so as to more closely associate the prophecy with Joan was widely circulated by her supporters: “There will be a virgin who will ride in arms against the backs of the English archers and her sex and the flower of her virginity will keep secret.”⁸⁴ An oral version of the Merlin prophecy also circulated, and it added an additional opening phrase, *Ex nemore canuto*, to the Valois version of the Merlincic verse, specifying that the virgin it spoke of would come from an oak wood. This, too, was a detail that Joan’s supporters latched onto, since she had grown up in sight of an area called the Bois Chesnu. This version of the prophecy was well known enough that Joan spoke about it at her trial: “And she also said that when she came before the king, many asked of her whether her country had a wood called the Bois Chesnu. Because there was a prophecy that said that from the Bois Chesnu would come a virgin [*puelle*] who would do marvels; but she gave it no faith.”⁸⁵

While Joan may have put no faith in the prophecies, supporters of the French cause certainly did – or, at least, put faith in their potential usefulness as propaganda. After Joan’s examination at Poitiers, which confirmed for Charles Joan’s divine mission, the Merlin prophecy was expanded by supporters of the French cause into a sixteen-line poem, *Virgo puellares*, which was circulated as a military recruitment tool.⁸⁶ In her *Ditié de Jehanne D’Arc*, Christine de Pisan wrote that the Sybil, as well as Merlin and Bede,

⁸³ Acton Griscom, *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: 1929) 397.

⁸⁴ Fraioli *Joan of Arc*, 63.

⁸⁵ “Et dit oultre, quand elle vint devers le roy, que aucuns demandoyent si en son pays avoit point de boys que on appelast le Bois Chesnu. Car il y avoit prophecies qui disoyent que de devers le Boys Chanu devoit venir une pucelle qui venoit faire merveilles; mais en ce n’a point adiousté de foy.” *La Minute Française* 109.

⁸⁶ Fraioli *Joan of Arc*, 65.

foretold Joan's appearance on behalf of France. The invocation of the "revered ancient prophets – Merlin, Bede, and the Sibyl... seemed to give historical weight to [Joan's] mission."⁸⁷ Especially at the outset, before Joan performed military feats that lent credence to her claims, reasons needed to be put forth as to why Charles put faith in her, and the association of Joan with prophecy functioned as one of those reasons. Moreover, the text of the Merlin prophecy, with its reference to "hiding the flower of her virginity," offered an explanation of why Charles would support a woman who wore armor.

The image of Joan as prophesied holy virgin that was advanced by her supporters, together with Joan's military triumphs, caused the French people to embrace Joan as a savior. They behaved as though she was a living saint, and stories of that behavior led to her being questioned at her trial about those in her party who "had Mass celebrated and prayers said for her," and the thoughts of "those in your party, when they kiss your feet and hands and clothing" and "the good women who touch their rings to the ring she wore."⁸⁸ Joan could respond only that she was sure people did no wrong in praying for her, and she could not know the thoughts of anyone. Her responses show the difficult line that she had to walk. She was constructed as the divinely sent savior of France, a perception that Joan herself played a hand in shaping. Yet she cannot appear to claim holiness for herself, for fear of being seen to encourage idolatry or appearing prideful, which would be the wrong sort of behavior for a holy woman to exhibit.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ The questions from which the referenced quotations are from are as follows: "Interrogee si elle scait point se ceulx de son party ayent faict service, messe ou oraison pour elle;" "Interrogee se elle scaivoit point bien le couraige de ceulx de son party, quand ilz luy baisoyent les piedz et les mains et ses vestmens;" and "Interrogee si les bonnes femmes touchoyent point leurs aneaux a l'anel qu'elle portoit." *La Minute Française* 139 and 141.

In a way, Joan's trial at the hands of the English stands as proof of the success of the public perception of her as holy, and sent by God on behalf of France. Had Joan not been perceived in this fashion, the English would not have needed to construct her as a heretic in an effort to prove that God was on their side in the Hundred Years War.

II. "People are often hanged for telling the truth."

Joan of Arc, 24 Feb. 1431

Even more than the process of the construction of Joan as a holy woman who would save France, Joan's heresy trial was about perception. Because she had become such a public figure, the shift in perception from Joan as virginal savior of France to Joan as heretic and liar needed to be done publicly. The English needed to make sure that Joan was no longer seen as someone who had a special connection to God. The most obvious way for them to do this was by focusing on what they thought was represented by her men's clothing. For Joan's interrogators, her adoption of male dress was wrong – in contravention of Scripture – as well as scandalous. Her clothing alone fulfilled the element of *fama* that allowed her to be tried as a heretic. Even the emphasis that Joan and her supporters placed on her virginity was unable to distract the English from her clothing. In a challenge issued to Charles, the Duke of Bedford wrote: "You seduce and abuse the ignorant and rely upon the assistance of the superstitious and reprobate, and even of that deranged and infamous woman who goes about in men's clothes and is of dissolute conduct."⁸⁹ Here, not only did Bedford mention Joan's clothing, but he also stated the assumption that her inappropriate dress signaled that she was inappropriate in matters of conduct as well. In his letter concerning the surrender of Joan to Cauchon,

⁸⁹ Régine Pernoud and Marie-Véronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*, Jeremy Duquesnay Adams, trans., Bonnie Wheeler, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999) 73

Henry VI also foregrounds Joan's male clothes, calling them "abominable before God," [*abhominable a Dieu*] and mentioning them even before accusing her of causing murder to be done.⁹⁰ This emphasis on Joan's male attire before the trial began shows the English awareness of the best way to publicly transform Joan from a divinely inspired virgin to a heretic.

The problematic nature of Joan's clothing had been touched on by her French supporters. There are two contemporary Jehannic documents that address the issue of her clothing. The treatise *De quandam puella*, is an impartial listing of scriptures relating to Joan, both those that support and those that speak against her claims. *Propositio* five against Joan relates how her male clothes and short hair violate Deuteronomy 22:5 and 1 Corinthians 11:6, and how the lack of femininity shown by these actions calls Joan's moral character into question. Another Jehannic document, written later although still before the trial at Rouen, also mentions Joan's male attire. *De mirabili victoria* "was the most popular among contemporary treatises written on Joan of Arc, and... also exerted the widest contemporary influence."⁹¹ It is unquestionably pro-Joan in nature, but it recognizes that Joan's clothing is problematic enough to require defense. This is the only pro-Joan writing to recognize how critical of an issue her clothing would be.

Joan's supporters were able to reason away the difficulties caused by her male attire.

De quandam puella suggests that the men's clothes and military role that Joan adopted could act as a conduit for her, allowing her to better understand the will of God than she would have in feminine apparel.⁹² *De mirabili victoria* addressed the concern about her clothing by providing three principles that could be used to justify Joan's dress. The first

⁹⁰ *La Minute Française* at 71.

⁹¹ Fraioli *Joan of Arc*, 126.

⁹² *De quandam puella*, Deborah A. Fraioli, trans, in Fraioli at 203.

principle states that the New Law [of Christ] has replaced the Old Law, so Deuteronomy's prohibition against cross-dressing no longer applied. The second principle puts the prohibition into the context of morality, by stating that the purpose of the clothing one wears is to protect virtue. Therefore, if it is easier for Joan to protect her virtue among the soldiers by dressing as a soldier, then it is licit for her to do so. The third principle is specific to Joan, and states that, regardless of her hair and clothing, her moral uprightness is proven by her virginity and the saintly company she keeps. For Joan's supporters, her mission defined her holiness, not what she wore to complete it.

During her trial, when Joan was asked if her voices told her to wear male dress, she seemed surprised that an issue was being made of the topic, responding that “the dress was a small thing, and the least one.”⁹³ For Joan, her men's dress really was a small thing. She had been told by her counsel to wear men's attire, so she did. Her counsel had not yet given her permission to resume wearing women's clothing, so she did not. For her interrogators, however, Joan's clothing was a key issue. During her trial, the only subject that Joan was questioned on more closely or more often than her dress was her voices.⁹⁴ Even outside her trial, “as a source for her notoriety, cross dressing was only second in importance to her resounding military victories.”⁹⁵

Joan's interrogators found a useful disconnect between what was represented by her virginity and what was represented by her male attire. By claiming the identity of La Pucelle, Joan presents herself as a holy virgin, dedicated to God. Unless her virginity was proven false, or compromised, her interrogators cannot use it to prove anything

⁹³ “[D]e habitu parum quid est, et de minori.” *La Minute Française* at 114. The French text breaks off in the manuscript shortly before this question, which necessitates relying on the Latin.

⁹⁴ Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 59.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

negative about Joan, and therefore it is, for them, at best a neutral factor in how Joan ought to be viewed.⁹⁶ But they can show her to be corrupt – using the same vehicle of her physical body – by focusing on the appearance of her body and what that symbolizes. Joan's attire created the perception that she was not a holy woman, and so at her trial, the English kept the focus on that perception. It may seem a strange way in which to discredit Joan, but even her supporters found her attire problematic, and in need of explanation. Virginity, although a necessary sign of holiness was not a sufficient one: "much of what is measured and recorded in the writing of and about women visionaries relates to their behavior and demeanor, to their bodies, to the submission and obedience which are believed to demonstrate their inward holiness."⁹⁷ If it could be shown that Joan did not exhibit the proper behavior expected of a visionary, then the holiness of her visions could be called into question. And if Joan could be called into question, then so could the France that she represented.

Barstow claims that "the accusation of cutting her hair and wearing men's clothes, especially of receiving communion in male attire, taking up as it did so many pages of the trial record, indicates how grievously shocked the judges were by her transvestism."⁹⁸ However, this interpretation seems to miss the point of the trial. Joan was questioned extensively about her male dress not because of its shock value, but because it was dramatically and publicly at odds with the perception of Joan as holy

⁹⁶ At one point during her interrogation, Joan is asked "if it had been revealed to her, if she lost her virginity, whether she would lose her good fortune, and [thus] her voices would not come to her." ("... se il luy a point esté revelé, se elle perdoit sa virginité, qu'elle perdoit son heur, et que ses voix ne luy viendroyent plus." *La Minute Française* 197) Joan replied that it had not been revealed to her, and this distasteful line of questioning was pursued no further.

⁹⁷ Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999) 45.

⁹⁸ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Joan of Arc: Heretic, Mystic, Shaman* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986) 83.

woman. The connection between women in men's clothing and corrupt behavior can be found, among other sources, in Aquinas, who argued in the *Summa* that one of the reasons that women ought not to wear men's clothing was that doing so would give them ready opportunities for fornication. Although Joan was a virgin, the perception of what it meant for her to wear men's clothing made it easy for her interrogators to present her as wanton and lascivious, thus arguing that the image she had put forth of herself was false. For the English, Joan's clothing meant that she did not appear to be the thing that she presented herself as. At her trial, the English put pressure on that divide between perception and actuality, until the perception was all that remained.

When Joan was interrogated about her clothing at her trial, the questioning most often followed one of two lines, which are illustrated in the following representative example:

Asked if the voice had ordered her to wear the clothing of a man,

She responded that the dress was a small thing, one of the least, and she had not taken it on the advice of any living person, and she did not take this clothing or do anything else except on the advice of our Lord and the angels.

Asked whether she thought that this command to wear men's clothing was licit,

She responded that everything she had done was at the command of our Lord, and that if he had ordered Joan to wear different clothing, she would have done so, as it would have been by the command of God.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *Interrogata si vox precepit ei quod caperet habitum virilem, Respondit quod, de habitu parum quid est, et de minori; nec cepit habitum per consilium hominis mundi; nec eundem habitum cepit, nec fecit aliquid, quin hoc sit per preceptum Domini nostri et angelorum. Interrogata si videatur*

Both lines of questioning – the one asking who had ordered her to wear men’s clothing, and that which asked whether she thought this to be lawful behavior – were designed to disprove Joan’s holiness. If she felt that she did wrong to wear male dress, yet did so anyway, then she was willfully and arrogantly in a state of sin. If Joan was in a state of sin, then her voices could not be from God. The same reasoning would apply if the voices had told her to wear men’s clothing, which was in contravention of Scripture and divine law. By encouraging her to do so, they prove that they are not holy. If Joan’s voices are not holy, then neither is she, and her stated mission to save France is a lie.

Politics were no small part of the reason why the French supported Joan and wanted to see her as a holy woman. But the Joan of the French – the prophesied holy virgin, symbol of the country she had been divinely sent to save – was not the Joan of the English. The English did not see Joan as a holy woman. They could not, as that would mean admitting that God was really on the side of the French. This political component suffused Joan’s trial for heresy, leading to questioning on very specific components of the behavior of her voices. During the session of preparatory interrogation on 1 March, Joan was asked about her voices, and specifically about Saint Margaret, to whom devotion in England was widespread:

Asked if that voice, that is to say, Saint Margaret, spoke English,

She responded: Why would she speak English? She is not on the side of the English.¹⁰⁰

sibi quod per preceptum eidem factum de accipiendo habitum virilem sit licitum, Respondit quod omne id quod ipsa fecit, hoc est preceptum Domini nostri; et, si alium habitum preciperet eidem Johanne accipere, illum acciperet, ex quo hoc faceret perpreceptum Dei.” La Minute Française 114. The French text breaks off at this point, necessitating reliance on the Latin.

¹⁰⁰ *“Interrogata si illa vox, videlicet sancta Margareta, loquatur anglicum? Respondit: Quomodo loqueretur anglicum? Ipsa non est de latere Anglicorum.” Ibid., 124 (the French is not available for this portion of the interrogation.)*

Joan's interrogation often went down paths that seemed designed to determine how strongly God supported the French cause. While the question might seem odd, Joan's trial was about perception. At issue was not only the perception of whether God was on Joan's side, but also the perception of whether God was on France's side.

Joan was questioned often about the details of the sign that she gave Charles VII that caused him to believe in her divinely supported mission:

Asked about the sign she gave her king to show him that she came from God,

Response: I have always told you that you will not drag that from my mouth. Go ask him.¹⁰¹

There are many reasons why Joan's interrogators are eager to focus on the sign for Charles. They may wish to know what it is as a way of evaluating the truth of Joan's claim. If the sign did not seem to be properly associated with God, then they could say that Joan was lying about it. The type of sign might also serve as an indicator of God's support for Charles. In both instances, the evaluation of the sign would have been solely based on the perception of Joan's interrogators: if they thought it seemed holy, than it probably was. However, Joan never gave them a useful response to their questions on that topic.¹⁰²

While the line of questioning about the sign from God to the French king might

¹⁰¹ "*Interroguee quel signe elle donna a son roy pour luy monstrer qu'elle venoit de par Dieu, Respond: Je vous ay tousiours respondu que vous ne me le tirerez ja de la bouche. Allez luy demander.*" Ibid., 131.

¹⁰² An entire study could be written on the topic of Joan and her sign for Charles VII. During the trial, she continued to maintain that she would never tell what the sign was, as she had sworn not to, yet at various times during her interrogations, Joan seems to imply that the sign was an angel who brought a crown from Heaven, the angel, the crown, or perhaps Joan herself. See esp. 13 March Interrogation, *La Minute Française* 163-169. Scholarly investigation of this line of questioning and the evolution of Joan's responses would be welcome, but the topic is beyond the scope of this project.

arguably be connected to a trial for heresy, some questioning did not pretend to be anything other than nationalistic in nature.

Asked if she knew whether Saints Catherine and Margaret hated the English,

Response: They love that which our Lord loves, and hate that which God hates.

Asked if God hated the English,

She said that, of the love or hate that God has for the English, or what he would do for their souls, she knew nothing. But she knows well that they will be driven from France, except those who die there, and that God will give the victory to the French against the English.¹⁰³

Questioning the political leanings of God and the saints seems rather beyond the scope of a heresy trial, but these questions show how closely the idea of nationhood became bound up with the ideas of Joan's holiness for the English. The questions make explicit the influence that politics had on the perception of Joan's holiness.

Heresy, like holiness, was about perception, and Joan had lived a very public life as a holy woman. The English needed some way to publicly erase that perception of her. They received that when they brought about her abjuration. The precise events at St. Ouen are shrouded in confusion. Much of the detail of the events of that day comes from testimony given at Joan's 1456 Trial of Rehabilitation, twenty-five years later. On 24 May at St. Ouen Cemetery, several platforms were set up. Joan was taken to one, and the

¹⁰³ *“Interroguee se elle sçait point que sainte Katherine et Margueritte hayent les Anloys, Respond: Elles ayment ce que nostre Seigneur ayme, et hayent ce que Dieu hait. Interroguee se Dieu hait les Angloys, Respond que, de l’amour ou hayne que Dieu a aux Angloys, ou que Dieu leur fait a leurs ames, ne sçait rien; mais sçait bein que ilz seront mis hors de France, excepté ceulx qui y mourront; et que Dieu envoira victoire aux François, et contre les Angloys.” La Minute Française* 193.

others were occupied by important English clergymen, who were there to stand witness to the events. Joan was preached to multiple times, and exhorted to confess and give up her heresy. When she protested that she had always been faithful to the Church and asked (again) to appeal her case to the Pope, she was told, illegally and incorrectly, that that was not possible. After she spoke out against English slander of Charles VII, Joan was forcibly silenced. At some point, Joan was shown a cedula, a slip of parchment designed to be attached to a legal document, upon which was an abjuration, and was told that if she did not sign it, she would be immediately burned. Someone held Joan's hand and affixed her sign manual to the document. The English had their heretic. More important, they had her publicly. For the heresy to be purged, "heretics...had to be banished in an open forum, in the face of the community."¹⁰⁴ The abjuration was a public acknowledgement that Joan was not who and what she had claimed to be.

The cedula may be a place where Joan struck back at the perception of her as a heretic that the English had created with the abjuration. Three extant signatures on documents from before her trial offer proof that Joan could sign her own name. However, the cedula is signed with a cross, a symbol that Joan was said to use in military communications to indicate that the recipient of the letter should do the opposite of what was written. She may have intended that sign to indicate that the Joan on the parchment, who had ostensibly denied her voices, was not the Joan she actually was.

Even before Joan, theologians wrestled with the knowledge that human and divine perception were not identical, and that someone who appeared to be a saint, might, in truth, be a sinner. Thomas Aquinas pondered the problem of whether "all the

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 300.

saints who are canonized by the Church [are] in glory, or are some of them in hell?”¹⁰⁵

But, as Elliott writes, neither Aquinas nor anyone else asks the related question, what if the Church “condemned and executed [someone] as heretical when, in fact, they were destined for heaven? What if the individual was not merely one of the saved, but actually worthy of canonization?”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the question seemed too ridiculous to pose, but in the case of Joan, that is precisely what happened.

Joan’s case was complicated by the political components to her trial. While she was executed as a heretic, not as a traitor, the political reality of the Hundred Years War deeply affected her trial and execution. Because her spirituality was linked so closely to the French cause, the English could not see her as anything other than a heretic and still believe that God was on their side. The purpose of Joan’s trial was to allow the English to maintain that belief. Kelly details the multitude of violations of proper inquisitorial process that occurred during Joan’s trial, including her being interrogated without representation, being forced to swear a blanket oath to tell the truth about any question her interrogators might ask, being interrogated without being formally charged, and being denied the right of papal appeal.¹⁰⁷ He concludes that the political underpinnings of the trial meant that “even if there had been an attempt to follow the correct procedure at the beginning, thus foreclosing a ready supply of confessed material, Cauchon and his English paymasters would have found some other way to get rid of her.”¹⁰⁸ So result-driven was Cauchon that he neglected to observe the formality of releasing Joan to the

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Aquinas, quodlib. 9, q. 8, *Opera Omnia: Quaestiones de quodlibet*, ed. Ordo Fratrum Praedicatorum (Rome: Commissio Leonine, 1996), 25, 1:118.

¹⁰⁶ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 142.

¹⁰⁷ H. Ansgar Kelly, “The Right to Remain Silent: Before and After Joan of Arc” *Speculum* 68 (1993) 992-1026.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1024.

secular arm, meaning that she was executed by the Church. She was burned in the clothing of a woman.

But the discussion of Joan did not end with her death, nor did the outcome of her trial solidify the perception of her as a heretic. The notary who recorded *La Minute Française* left his own commentary in the text regarding the truth of Joan's abjuration:

Here follows the tenor of the cedula which the Bishop of Beauvois and the other judges said was made by Joan and signed by her hand.

I do not believe this.

And it is not credible that she intended that which appears here.¹⁰⁹

Doncoeur's editorial apparatus suggests that the disbelief in the last line of the notary's interjection stems from Joan's retraction of her abjuration. This is certainly possible. But it is also possible that the notary, who was present during the entirety of Joan's trial, might have formed his own perception of Joan's holiness, one uninfluenced by politics and formed only on his impression of the character of a nineteen-year-old woman. If that is the case, that notary had a better definition of how holiness ought to be perceived than any of the theologians involved.

¹⁰⁹ "Ensuit la teneur de la cedulle que ledit evesque de Beauvoys et aultres juges dyent avoir esté faite par ladicte Jhenne et signee de sa main,
Ce que je ne croys pas.
Et n'est a croire actendu ce qui sera icy apprez." *La Minute Française* 271.

Chapter Three: Medieval Self-Fashioning:

The Construction of the Holy Woman in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

The Book of Margery Kempe is the text of the life of a holy woman, a spiritual memoir, written when God commanded Margery “and chargyd hir that sche schuld don wryten hyr felynghys and revalacyons and the forme of her levynghys that hys goodnesse myght be knowyn to alle the world” (Pr. 64-66).¹¹⁰ Margery’s *Book* tells the story of her holiness, narrated through incidents in her life. Because the *Book* is the story of a holy life, scholars have often read it as they would read a *vita*, a saint’s life.¹¹¹ But *The Book of Margery Kempe* is not a typical hagiographical text, which begins with the assumption that its subject is holy and concerns itself with a discussion of devotional practices and miracles performed. Rather, the *Book* is written in a manner designed to prove that Margery was holy through evidence and explanation of her behavior.

The proof of her holiness comes from the reactions of those who witnessed Margery’s spirituality. The variety of responses to Margery’s spirituality that the *Book* records, from hostility and aggression to unhesitating support, all serve distinct editorial purposes. Like the portrayal of her holiness in the *Book*, Margery’s text itself is a purposefully constructed work. In its writing, she and her scribe worked “according to a number of culturally determined blueprints – read discourses – to build, to the best of their abilities, the edifice which was the text testifying to the immanence of the divine,” and, secondarily, to the divine origin of Margery’s gifts.¹¹² Margery’s text builds her

¹¹⁰ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn Staley, ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996) All citations will take the form of the chapter number, followed by line number.

¹¹¹ For such a readings, see Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 116-144.

¹¹² Rosalynn Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999) 3-4.

holiness piece by piece. In order to achieve these goals, Margery “deliberately exerts distinctions of audience for calculated rhetorical ends.”¹¹³ She uses the responses of the audience she presents in the *Book* to construct herself as a holy woman by using their – and her own – disbelief and doubt as the catalyst for explanations that she couldn’t have given had her behavior never been questioned.

The inclusion and use of reactions of witnesses who, although they were her fellow Christians, were hostile to and suspicious of, Margery’s spirituality is one of the things which most separates *The Book of Margery Kempe* from conventional hagiography. The *Book* does not shy away from the fact that the presence of a saint or holy person in a community could put pressure on that community in a way that led to a lack of support for that holy person. Instead, it utilizes these reactions along with more positive ones as a way for Margery to contextualize herself. Even during her lifetime and before the *Book* was written, Margery faced difficulties when her spirituality was taken out of context: “other which had no knowlach of hir maner of governawns, save only be sygth owtforth er ellys be jangelyng of other personys, pervertyng the dom of trewth, seyde ful evyl of hir and causyd hir to have mech enmyté and mech dysese, mor than sche schuld have ellys had, hed her evyl langage ne ben” (18.994-997). People who had merely heard of Margery often did not understand the manifestation of her spiritual gifts as something holy. Therefore, when writing her *Book*, rather than simply telling the story of her life as in a traditional *vita*, Margery included reactions to her behavior. Through the witnessing of those who observed her directly, Margery was able to put her life and her spirituality in context for her reader, and to ensure that context constructed her as a holy

¹¹³ Cheryl Glenn, “Author, Audience, and Autobiography: Rhetorical Technique in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *College English* 54 (1992): 540-553, 544.

woman.

Margery knew, from the reactions to her spirituality that she encountered as well as from her own interest in reading saints' lives and other devotional texts, that she did not fit into the conventional paradigm of the holy woman, and that her spirituality was often misunderstood. Rather than allowing her readers to assume her holiness due to the existence of her *Book*, or asserting it without explanation, Margery uses the reactions of witnesses to her spiritual expression as a means of witnessing her holiness to her readers.

Margery's text constantly questions her religious experiences. This questioning ranges from Margery's interrogation of clerics and holy people, seeking their approval of her visions and of her manner of living, to stories of people who do not understand her loud cries, and are annoyed by them, to accusations of heresy made against her. The aggregate effect of all of this questioning is the implication that no one actually believed that Margery was a holy woman. But the purpose of these episodes in the text is to act as confirmation of holiness. In each instance, the extraordinary aspect of Margery's spirituality – the part that is neither conventionally orthodox nor conventionally hagiographic in nature – is explained in a way that fits Margery, however awkwardly, into the paradigm of holiness. Once it is given context, "Margery's apparently bizarre behavior is clearly placed in a very orthodox religious set of beliefs."¹¹⁴ The explanation of her behavior helps move Margery from the category of heretic or madwoman and toward the category of holy woman.

The emphasis that the *Book* places on the less than supportive reactions to

¹¹⁴ Robert C. Ross, "Oral Life, Written Text: The Genesis of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992) 226-237, 235

Margery's spirituality does not mean that Margery and her scribe did not understand how to write the memoir of a holy life, or that Margery meant her *Book* to be a document of protest against the overly narrow perceptions of a monolithic and patriarchal institution. She is not attempting to use her text to put forward an alternative definition of holiness. The opposite is true: Margery's *Book* was written to show how her spiritual expression places her within the behavior the Church expected of holy women. Margery uses her *Book* as a way to create context for her life, and "this allows Margery to express unimpeachable beliefs while acting a most impeachable life."¹¹⁵ Writing the *Book* is a way for Margery to control how she is presented to an audience, to make sure that her readers possess the necessary information to comprehend God in her singularity, and to recognize that though her life was unconventional, it was the life of a holy woman. Her construction of her self, her life, and her spirituality in her *Book* demonstrates keen awareness of the requirements for holiness, and the manner in which the perception of an audience influenced the perception of holiness.

At the same time that the *Book* constructs an audience for Margery's spirituality, it constructs a Margery who performs that spirituality. In this, I depart from Lochrie, who "would not argue for Kempe's calculated and deliberate self-fashioning."¹¹⁶ By writing a text in which she chooses which episodes to relate, Margery deliberately fashions a self to present to her readers. However, in arguing that Margery is fashioning a self in her *Book*, I do not take my argument as far as Staley, who maintains the distinction between "Kempe" the author and "Margery" the character.¹¹⁷ The self Margery is presenting is her

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,.

¹¹⁶ Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 9.

¹¹⁷ Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

own, her *Book* an extended version of the self-fashioning she engaged in every time she met a holy person and “schewyd this worshepful lord hir maner of levyng and swech grace as God wrowt in hyr mende and in hir sowle to wetyng what he wold sey therto yf he fond any defawte eythyr in hyre contemplacyon er in hir wepyng” (16.834-37).

Moreover, I hold that the most important construction that takes place in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is not that of Margery as character but of the responses of the witnesses to Margery’s spiritual expression. It is through these responses that Margery’s holiness is made clear.

By constructing her self -- and her text -- in the manner that she does, Margery shows that she “recognizes the cultural production of sanctity and foregrounds the formation of identity.”¹¹⁸ Holiness is a matter of perception, and perhaps because of the responses that her religious expression met with over the course of her life, Margery writes her text in a way that will influence the perception of her behavior in the minds of her readers. The life of a holy person is written as a way to stand as witness to their holiness. In this way, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is a traditional *vita*. What the construction of holiness in the *Book* makes clear is how witness-dependent holiness actually was. Because the *Book* acknowledges the role of perception in the construction of holiness, it is written in a manner that attempts to shape the reader’s perception of Margery’s behavior through the reactions of the witnesses to her spirituality, and her responses to those reactions. Even when they are hostile, or misunderstand Margery’s presentation of herself, *The Book of Margery Kempe* uses the responses of witnesses to construct her holiness for its readers. The episodes are placed in the *Book* in such a way

¹¹⁸ Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virgyny in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001) 213.

that they offer evidence of specific components of a holy life —orthodoxy, penitential practice, the discernment of spirits.

I. “And they were scandalized in his regard. But Jesus said to them: a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.” Matt. 13:57

The Book of Margery Kempe opens by indicating the vital role that witness reaction will play in the construction of Margery’s spirituality. It begins with a preface which tells its origin story, the process by which the *Book* came to be written. As the proem relates, many clerks and holy people that Margery had spoken to about her revelations believed that she “was inspyred wyth the Holy Gost and bodyn hyr that sche schuld don hem wrytyn and makyn a booke of hyr felyngys and hir revelacyons” (Pr. 58-60). But Margery “was comawndyd in hir sowle that sche schuld not wrytyn so soone. And so it was twenty yer and mor fro that tym this creatur had fyrst felyngys and revelacyins er sche dede any wryten” (Pr. 61-63). Once God commands her to write, Margery suffers various setbacks that include the death of her first scribe, who has left only an incomplete text, written in “neithyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne the lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as other letters ben” (Pr. 75-76).

Then the priest who eventually becomes the scribe of the *Book* agrees to help Margery. But before he begins work, there was “so evyl spekyng of this creatur and of hir wepyng that the prest durst not for cowardyse speke wyth her but seldom, ne not wold wryten as he had behestyd unto the forseyd creatur” (Pr. 78-81). As a result, four years pass without the *Book* being written. Eventually, the scribe is “vexyd in his consciens” over breaking his promise to Margery, and he eventually has a change of heart and returns to her to assist in the writing of her text (Pr. 91). Margery prays that he might be able to read the existing foul copy, and “the preste, trustyng in hire prayers, began to

redyn this booke, and it was mych mor esy, as hym thowt, than it was beforntym” (Pr. 96-98). As the result of her payer, the priest is able to understand Margery’s story. He becomes her scribe, and *The Book of Margery Kempe* is written.

The extended discussion of the *Book’s* origin is justified because it serves as a preview of the structure of the text, as well as a guide for how it ought to be read. The genesis of the *Book* is presented through the lens of witness reaction to Margery. The first requests that Margery write a book come from those clerics with whom she has shared her spirituality. They have been witness to her behavior, and their reaction is one of support. They “cownseled hyr to flowyn hyr mevynggys and hyr steringgys and trustly belevyn it weren of the Holy Gost and of noon evyl spyryt” (Pr. 55-57). Their approval, phrased this way and coupled with their request that she write a book about her spirituality proves that she and the probable contents of her text have been vetted by the proper authorities.

The scribe’s temporary abandonment of her comes because of the hostile response of Margery’s community to her weeping. He recommits himself to the project when she – through her prayers, which allow him to read the previously unreadable text – quite literally clarifies her spirituality for him, which allows him to see her as a holy woman. As the proem shows, Margery’s holiness will be seen through the eyes of others. Witnesses will either provide support and endorsement of her as a holy woman, or provide the opportunity for Margery to clarify the more controversial aspects of her spiritual life.

Margery even acts as witness for herself, when she has doubts over her own worthiness. Very little about Margery’s life fit into the expected patterns of female sanctity. To begin with, she was not a consecrated religious, but a laywoman. As Sanok

notes, "the contemporary reception of Margery's religious vocation offers surprising evidence that when laywomen did try to imitate the female saints celebrated in vernacular legends, their practice reads as dissent, even heresy – a violation of social codes, rather than their perfect fulfillment."¹¹⁹ Because Margery did not fit the category of person who might plausibly have an unusual religious experience, her religious expression was coded from the beginning as problematic, and possibly inauthentic. Margery did not appear to be the thing that she claimed she was, and therefore she was constantly required to explain herself and her behavior and to justify her actions to herself.

Most problematically, in terms of appearing as a holy woman, she was a wife and a mother, not a virgin. The ideal of perfection for women had for centuries been linked in hagiography with virginity.¹²⁰ With the rise of mystical spirituality, a tradition Margery Kempe situated herself in, the disparagement of married life in favor of the perfection of virginity only increased. As Vauchez observes, "Joan of Arc dressing as a man to accomplish her mission is more representative of the religious conceptions of the age than the many female saints with a husband and children."¹²¹ The patterns of holiness to which Margery wished to belong seemingly had no place for a woman with ties to any man other than God, since "for female saints... the official classification turned on sexual condition: women saints were recorded as either virgin or widow."¹²² Margery knew how far she was from this ideal, and judged herself harshly because of it.

¹¹⁹ Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, xiii-xiv.

¹²⁰ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, Jean Birrell, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 381.

¹²¹ Ibid., 384. Considering the difficulty that Joan's male clothes caused her, Vauchez's observation speaks strongly to the changing perception of holiness over time.

¹²² Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Medieval Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 87.

Margery's secondary conversion experience occurs when she is in bed with her husband and hears a "swet and delectable" melody. As a result of this, Margery regrets that she has ever sinned because "it is ful mery in hevyn" (3.243-44). After this vision, Margery loses all desire for her husband and the marriage debt becomes "abhominably" to her. This event also marks the beginning of Margery's regret for, and anxiety over, her sexual past. What Margery wants is for her past to be unimportant, to erase all of her sexual experience, and to be reborn as a virgin in Christ at the same time that she has rededicated her life to him. This is in fairly strict contrast to the Church teaching that virginity was like a precious vessel that once broken could never be restored. By foregrounding her concern over her sexual past in this manner, the *Book* constructs Margery as her own witness. Her anxiety, her constant need for reassurance that she has value, that she is as worthy of Jesus' love as any virgin, is her own response to her spirituality and her desire to have lived a more conventionally holy life. She is attempting to reconcile what she feels she ought to be, in order to be holy, and what she is. Margery sees herself as falling short: she is unable to perform her own ideal of sanctity. What she sees as her shortcomings grieve her deeply: "For becawse I am no mayden, lak of maydenhed is to me now gret sorwe; me thynkyth I wolde I had ben slayn whan I was takyn for the funtston that I schuld nevyr a dysplesyd the, and than schuldyst thu, blyssed Lorde, an had my maydenhed wythowtyn ende" (22. 1151-1154). However, Jesus offers Margery the reassurance that her lack of virginity is no barrier to holiness, or to special status in heaven: "thu art to me a synguler lofe, dowtyr, and therfor I begote the thu schalt have a synguler grace in hevyn" (22. 1158-1159). He reassures her that she shall dance in Heaven with "other holy maydens and virgyne" because she is a maiden in her soul (23.1200, emphasis mine). Jesus' support of Margery allows her to

come as close as possible to realizing this desire. In terms of the function of this in the text, Margery's expression of a doubt that would almost certainly have been shared by readers of her *Book* leads to Christ himself confirming that she is fit to be considered alongside women who bear the more conventional markers of holiness.

Jesus' affirmation that Margery is as beloved by him as any holy maiden or virgin is serves as a means to assuage Margery's doubts, and the potential doubts of her readers, that she is worthy to attempt to live a holy life. But because she is a wife at the time her life turns to the service of God, sexuality continues to be a component of that life as Margery works toward holiness. Eventually, she is able to live in a chaste marriage, but before that occurs, she constructs her ongoing sexual relationship with her husband as a type of penance, through his response to her desire to alter their relations. When Margery broaches the idea that they ought to live chastely, John echoes St. Augustine in agreeing that chastity would be the best state, but not yet: "hir husbond seyde it wer good to don so, but he mygth not yett, he schuld whan God wold" (3. 267-268). Thus Margery continued to pay her marital debt, weeping and sorrowing when she was required to have sex, and wearing the penitential device of a hair shirt while doing so. What is unique to the *Book*, among hagiographic texts, is not Margery's stated dislike of the sexual act, but rather her description of the purpose that chastity will serve. Margery makes no secret of the fact that in the previous portion of her life, she felt great sexual desire for her husband: "sche in hir yong age had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, and inordinat lovys to hys persone" (76. 4287-89). She makes a similar statement when she attempts to convince John to agree to a chaste marriage, telling him that "thei oftyntymes, sche wust wel, had dysplesyd God be her inordynat lofe and the gret delectacyon that thei haddyn eythyr of hem, in usyng of other," and that they ought

to live chastely in order to make up for their previous sinfulness (3.263-65). By explaining how her sexuality has become a penance to her, Margery uses its presence in her life, and in her *Book* in a way that, if it does not go so far as to become evidence of her holiness, at least does not detract from it.

In reading this section of the *Book*, it must be remembered that John Kempe is in the role not only of Margery's husband, but also of witness to her developing spirituality. This makes the manner in which the *Book* presents his reaction to Margery's proposal very important. He agrees that what Margery wants is good, but is unwilling to sublimate his own desires to hers. The pain that this causes Margery, as described by her relation of sorrowing and weeping through her payment of the marital debt, is real and deep spiritual pain. The construction of John's reaction to Margery's attempt to express her spiritual calling allows Margery to present this part of her life as a type of penance. Moreover, it is a penance that is carefully explained as having its roots in a previous pleasure. Although John's reaction lacks perfect support for Margery's spirituality, she is able to channel his insistence on continuing the fleshly part of her existence – which would not be seen as holy – into penance, an activity that is part of the lives of more traditional holy women.

Margery's spiritual expression was not simply penitential in nature. She was also a visionary, which meant that her visionary experiences needed to be evaluated, in order to prove that their origin was divine. Margery offers that proof to her reader by sharing the responses of those whom she visits in search of this discernment. In the early chapters of her *Book*, Margery quite often seeks out the opinions of clerics and other people who have a reputation for holiness, "and this creatur to dyvers of hem schewyd hir felyngys and hyr contemplacyons, as sche was comawndyd for to don, to wetyng yf

any dysseyt were in hir felyngys" (11. 579-581). She constantly asks for outside confirmation that she is correct to believe in and follow her revelations. Some of this, of course, may simply be Margery seeking to assuage her own anxieties. But by recording her doubts and her questioning, Margery is then given a reason to record the support and reassurance that she receives from Jesus, and from various holy people, thus providing evidence of her holiness that would be acceptable to someone reading her book.

By demonstrating that her visions and manner of living were vetted by known holy people, Margery is showing awareness of the rules of behavior for visionaries, female visionaries in particular. According to the tenets of *discretio spirituum* – the testing by which it was determined whether visions were divine or diabolical in origin – the visionary must live a virtuous life, and submit her life and visions to the guidance and discernment of a spiritual director.¹²³ By submitting her spirituality for consideration over and over again, Margery shows that she is aware of how a holy woman is expected to behave, and that she conforms to these expectations. She has taken these guidelines so much to heart that she is not content to rely on the opinion of one spiritual director, but rather constantly seeks discernment, and the confirmation of holiness that it provides.

Perhaps the most famous episode of discernment in the *Book* is Margery's visit to Julian of Norwich. Margery seeks Julian out to speak to her and have her perform discernment because Julian has the reputation of being "expert in swech thyngys and good counsel coud gevyn" (18. 960-61). The mention of Julian's reputation shows that it was such both at the time of the visit and of the writing of the *Book* that Margery would

¹²³ See Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 49-50, for a summary of the tenets of *discretio spirituum*.

benefit from her approval. Julian's endorsement of Margery's holiness includes an explicit confirmation that one of the most dramatic manifestations of her spirituality – her holy crying – is a gift from God. Julian tells Margery, “And mech mor, whan God visyteth a creatur wyth terys of contrisyon, devosyon, en compassyon, he may and owyth to levyn that the Holy Gost is in hys sowle” (18.973-75). Julian supports this statement by quoting from Sts. Paul and Jerome, adding biblical and patristic authority to her own. Julian performs the most extensive discernment of Margery as recorded in the *Book*, one that focuses on Margery's most problematic gift. In reference to Margery's tears, Julian tells her that “ther may non evyl spyrit gevyn thes tokenys, for Jerom seyth that terys turmentyn mor the devylle than don the peynes of helle” (18. 978-979). A contemporary holy woman, whose reputation is so great in her own time that Margery seeks her out and records an extended version of their time together, confirms for Margery that her troublesome weeping can *never* be diabolical in origin. Her tears, no matter how disruptive, are always holy, always from God. Julian's approval is a powerful witnessing to Margery's holiness at the time of their visit, and is strong evidence of that holiness for the reader of the text.

Rosalynn Voaden notes that “Margery identifies at least nineteen individual clerics or holy men who commend her way of life and validate her visions, in addition to several clusters of holy men and women whom she cites as having approved of her.”¹²⁴ Margery includes these episodes as a way of continuing to have these holy people stand witness for her, outside of her community and beyond her lifetime. Margery would have realized that if she was constantly seeking reassurance about her experiences and behavior, her audience might benefit from these as well, and so records in the *Book*

¹²⁴ Ibid., 123 n. 45.

these episodes of questioning and confirmation.

Yet the approval of this battalion of clerics and holy people was not enough during her lifetime to go about with her holiness – or even her orthodoxy – unchallenged. The people who do not understand Margery’s spirituality as holy see her as a heretic, and threaten her with the ultimate penalty, telling her, “thow schalt be brent, fals lollare. Her is a cartful of thornys redy for the and a tonne to bren the wyth” (13. 649-650). Margery is aware of how she appears when she is unexplained, and so she uses these accusations of heresy as a means of asserting her orthodoxy in her text. By describing incidents in which her orthodoxy is publicly challenged, Margery not only has the opportunity to demonstrate that her behavior and manner of thinking is not heretical, but to also have that behavior publicly endorsed as holy by those who questioned it. Thus, episodes that begin with incomprehension of her behavior become incidents that prove her orthodoxy.

Most of the accusations of heresy that Margery faces are easily dealt with. But while in Leicester, Margery is actually arrested and put on trial as a heretic. In church, Margery weeps loudly, causing the people of Leicester to wonder at her. The mayor then places her in prison for being “a fals strumpet, a fals loller, and a fals deceyver of the pepyl” (46.2625-2626). At her trial, Margery is examined before what seems like a gathering of nearly all the religious and lay people of Leicester: “Ther was so meche pepyl that thei stodyn upon stolys for to beheldyn hir and wonderyn upon hir” (48. 2695-2696). The trial itself, as presented in the *Book*, is anticlimactic. Margery is questioned over her Eucharistic beliefs and her wearing of white clothing, something that was commonly reserved to consecrated virgins. Margery “answeryd forth to alle the artycles as many as thei wolde askyn hir that thei wer wel plesyd” (48. 2708-2709). Thus what

first appears as a serious accusation of heresy transforms into a way for Margery to demonstrate her orthodoxy.

The Book of Margery Kempe records another episode where Margery’s white clothes lead to an accusation of heresy against her. She is brought before the Archbishop of York. He appears astounded by her garments, asking her why she wears white and if she is a maiden. When Margery responds that she is a wife, the archbishop commands that Margery be fettered, “for sche was a fals heretyke” (52.2925). Margery is examined as to her beliefs and found orthodox, but the Archbishop is reluctant to leave it at that because, as he tells Margery, “I am evyl enformyd of the; I her seyn thou art a ryth wikked woman” (52. 2950-2951). This leads to further discussion with the Archbishop and the other clerics in his retinue. In the course of this examination, Margery is accused of telling “the werst talys of prestys that evyr [was] herde” (52. 2978). At the Archbishop’s request, Margery tells the tale, and “the Erchebisshop likyd wel the tale and comendyd it, seying it was a good tale. And the clerk which had examynd hir beforyme in the absens of the Erchebisshop, seyde, ‘Ser, this tale smytyth me to the hert’” (52. 3008-3011). Margery is able to contextualize herself through her examination and storytelling. Those who have heard troublesome things about her come to support her, and their support acts as confirmation of the correctness of her behavior for readers of her text.

The charge of heresy is the most extreme response that Margery’s spiritual expression generates in her audience. These episodes work in the text as means to allow Margery to give detailed statements of her orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is a necessary, if not sufficient, component of holiness. *The Book of Margery Kempe* does not assume that Margery’s orthodoxy will be taken as a given by her readers, and so includes these

episodes as a way to confirm her adherence to doctrine. Because these incidents are formal – she is examined in front of the mayor and the clerics of Leicester, and the Archbishop of York – they carry more weight with the reader than if Margery had merely included a disquisition on Church doctrine in her *Book*. Margery is not merely telling her reader that she is orthodox, she is showing that others will vouch for her correctness in matters of belief as well.

The most important witness in *The Book of Margery Kempe* may be Margery's scribe. It falls to him to serve as witness to the most consistently challenged aspect of Margery's spirituality: her holy tears. Margery's weeping was quite dramatic, and disruptive. It was also the most consistently and obviously expressed component of her spirituality, making it the one thing that nearly everyone who encountered her would react to. Her *Book* reports that the disruptive quality of her weeping caused many people to think badly of her, including the scribe who eventually helped her write her *Book*. An itinerant preacher comes to King's Lynn, and speaks strongly against Margery's weeping in a sermon, in the hope of shaming her supporters into abandoning her. At least initially, this works: "and than many of hem that pretendyd hir frencschep turnyd abakke for a lytyl veyn drede that thei haddyn of hys wordys and durst not wel spekyn wyth hir, of the which the same preyste was on that aftirward wrot this boke and was in purpose nevyr to a levyd hir felyngys aftyr" (62. 3605-3608). Yet soon after this, "he lovyd hir mor and trustyd mor to hir wepyng and hir crying than evyr he dede befor" (62.3609-10). The intervening event between these two reactions is that the scribe has read the life of Marie d'Oignies, a holy woman, who, like Margery, had the gift of holy weeping. The scribe tells of an episode in Marie's life that is very similar to Margery's situation. A priest, who does not wish to have Mass disturbed by Marie's tears, asks her to remain at the

door of the church. In response, God sends holy tears to this priest during Mass, and he comes to believe that “the good woman, which he had befor lityl affeccyon to, myth not restreyn hir wepyng, hir sobbyng, ne hir cryyng, which felt meche mor plente of grace than evyr dede he wythowtyn any comparison. Than knew he wel that God gaf hys grace to whom he wolde” (62. 3625-3628). This example convinces the scribe that Margery’s tears are holy and “he drow ageyn and inclined mor sadly to the sayd creature” (62. 3633). The scribe sees more grace in Margery’s weeping now than he would have without having the example to compare it to. With his increased understanding, he is able to witness to her holiness in the very concrete manner of acting as the scribe of her *Book*. By assisting her, the scribe shows that he perceives Margery to be a holy woman, and is willing to stake his own reputation on the truth of that holiness. Scribes were to be on guard against potentially false claims to holiness; they were part of “the Church’s first line of defense in the battle against the promulgation of false revelations.”¹²⁵ The existence of the *Book* is due to the scribe’s ongoing willingness to be a witness to Margery’ holiness.

Margery’s situation mirrors Marie’s, and Margery and her scribe use the similarity in order to show how Margery’s behavior, even though it may appear disruptive, can be experienced in a manner that constructs her as holy. Even though her weeping may originally be perceived as annoying, rather than holy, an audience that is willing to learn from examples and explanations of this spiritual gift has the potential to stand as witness her holiness. This description of a change in perception of Margery’s gift is why it is necessary for this episode to be written in the scribal voice. As Lynn Staley observes, one of the purposes of the incorporation of a scribe into a text is to “guide a reader’s

¹²⁵ Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 112.

responses.”¹²⁶ In this section, the scribe is explicitly guiding the *Book*'s audience in perceiving Margery and her gifts as holy. By casting himself in the role of a disbeliever who came to belief through the example of Marie d'Oignies, the scribe places himself at the same level as the audience of Margery's *Book* might be before being convinced of her holiness through reading about her. This section of the *Book* anticipates an audience of people who might not understand Margery's gift, and gives them the tools to understand it if they choose. The *Book* is set in "a society with no common ground for understanding Margery's 'roarings,'" and Margery had no reason to anticipate that this would change, since the example of Marie d'Oignies had not changed it.¹²⁷ Her tears are a gift that requires interpretation, and by detailing his own journey from doubt to belief, the scribe shows how this interpretation can occur and acts as witness to the holiness of Margery's gift. The scribal interpolation is also an opportunity to give readers of the *Book* other tools to use when he mentions works such as *Stimulus Amoris* and *The Fire of Love* that also describe the gift of holy tears. In this way, the scribe models an ideal audience response to Margery, that of being open to understanding her cries as holy once they are explained and placed in context, even if the reader was unable to understand them before that context was provided. The scribe's progression from doubt to belief serves as a reassurance to readers whose own faith in Margery was not immediate.

Even though the scribe's witness to the holiness of Margery's tears is a key element in proving the veracity of her spiritual gift, Margery does not rely on his reaction

¹²⁶ Lynn Staley Johnson, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 820-838, 820.

¹²⁷ Kathleen Ashley, "Historicizing Margery: *The Book of Margery Kempe* as Social Text" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998) 371-388, 378.

alone as testimony in her *Book*. Perhaps because the holy weeping was such an important and controversial element of her spirituality, Margery includes further incidents where the response of witnesses to her weeping allows her to offer further and more specific proof of its holiness. Two priests, who, the *Book* is careful to say, did believe in the weeping itself as a spiritual gift, wondered whether the intensity of its expression was dependent on whether Margery had an audience or not. The priests take her, together with some children, on a local pilgrimage. As Margery is praying, she “had so mech swetnes and devocyon that sche myth not kepyn it prevy but brast owt in boistows wepyng and sobbyng and cryid as lowde er ellys lowder as sche dede whan sche was amongys the pepil at hom” (83. 4754-4756). This causes the priests to have “the mor trust that it was ryth wel wyth hir whan thei herd hir cryin in prevy place as wel as in opyn place and in the feld as in the town” (83. 4763-4764). The priests in this episode serve as stand-ins for readers of the *Book*, people who are inclined to believe that Margery had genuine spiritual gifts, yet still might wonder what worldly considerations might have gone into the expression of those gifts. Their endorsement of all aspects of Margery’s weeping is in the text to assuage that concern.

It has been suggested that Margery’s “particular trial as a holy woman was to be tested in her love for Christ by the odium and slander of others who did not believe her sanctity and who constantly reproved her.”¹²⁸ Suffering slander and being constantly misunderstood may indeed be part of Margery’s service to God, who tells her: “‘Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng unto me that thu suffyr despitys and scornys, schamys and reprevys, wrongys and disesyys than yif then hed wer smet of thre tymes on the day every day in

¹²⁸ Jane Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 110.

sevyn yer” (54.3094-96). But the questioning of and hostile reactions to Margery’s spirituality may also suggest “that communities can feel threatened by the presence of the sanctified person, an aspect smoothed over in traditional saints’ lives.”¹²⁹ Any sort of exceptional spirituality, whether that of a saint or that of a heretic, by its very nature as exceptional, placed pressure on the community in which it was expressed. Margery’s *Book* is unique in both expressing that pressure, and turning it back toward the exceptional spirituality that caused it, using the reaction of the community as a way to construct Margery’s holiness. Because of its openness about Margery’s struggles, *The Book of Margery Kempe* provides an extraordinarily full portrait of precisely what it meant for her to live as a holy woman, while still offering the expected proofs of her holiness.

II. “And he wrought not many miracles there, because of their unbelief.” Matt. 13:58

One can be a saint without the Church’s official recognition: the gap between 1431 and 1920 does not mean that Joan of Arc did not achieve sainthood at the moment of her death. But being included in the calendar of saints requires official recognition. There is a performative component of earthly sainthood, and unless Margery’s behavior is confirmed as holy by witnesses, she will not be recognized as a holy woman. Therefore, as with any work of hagiography, the *Book* includes evidence of Margery’s holiness in order to advance the recognition of her sanctity among those who did not directly witness her life. The difference between traditional hagiography and *The Book of Margery Kempe* is that rather than miraculous stories, the evidence for Margery’s

¹²⁹ Rebecca Krug, “Women and Sanctity” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature, 1100-1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 217-228.

holiness takes the form of the reception that her behavior received – the clerics who supported her, the recognition of her gifts by Julian of Norwich, and the hostility and lack of understanding that Margery’s behavior generated in those around her. Margery writes the story of her holy life through the eyes of those who witnessed it.

The *vita* of a holy person is an essential tool in an individual’s case for the recognition of their holiness beyond their community and after their death. Margery was aware of this, and uses her *Book* as a way to support her cause. She uses episodes in the *Book* to construct her self and her spirituality in a way that maintains her singularity, and at the same time explains her behavior in a manner that places her within hagiographic tradition. Like readers of any genre, the readers of *The Book of Margery Kempe* would have come to the text with certain ideas of what to expect from it. They would have expected the *Book*, like any life of a holy person, to provide just enough hagiographical commonplaces to convince the reader of his subject’s sanctity and enough neutral and unconventional material to convince the reader of the writer’s sincerity.”¹³⁰ While perhaps including more unconventional material than most, *The Book of Margery Kempe* provides all of these things through the vehicle of the reactions of those who were witnesses to her life.

The reason for having these details, and for writing the life of a holy person at all, is to give the readers of that life an example, to show a way in which it is possible to serve God, and to teach others to do so as well. A “vital aspect of [Margery’s] career” as a holy woman was her knowledge that she had “a ministry to teach others.”¹³¹ The

¹³⁰ Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 54.

¹³¹ Nicholas Watson, “The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*. Eds. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005): 395-434, 396.

purpose of writing the *Book* was to teach others: God asks Margery to “wryten hyr felyngys and revalacyons and the forme of her levynys that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world” (Pr. 65-66). What makes Margery’s *Book* unique in its genre is the amount of unflattering detail she includes while telling the form of her living. She includes her own doubts about her revelations and gifts, as well as the doubts and hostility that others expressed to her on account of them. Yet even this is Margery’s way of continuing her teaching ministry, and serving as an example of God’s grace. She tells her story in the form and detail that she does as a means of placing sanctity in the reach of people like she was. Ordinary people, leading ordinary lives, called to serve God in those lives and in the world. It is her place in the world that is key. Margery constructs herself as a “sinning Everywoman,” with a “capacity to be bound more closely in the world than others, at the same time *and in the same way* as she is bound more closely to God.”¹³² Those portions of her life which, at first glance, would seem to contradict the idea that she is a holy woman are the very things which are used in her *Book* to define her holiness.

The Book of Margery Kempe does not gloss over the difficulties that this type of holy life caused for Margery as she was attempting to live it, but rather constructs those difficulties as part of the testimony to her holiness. In conventional hagiography, “the saint herself... is lost to view almost from the beginning,” wiped out by miracles, the saint’s voice subsumed by the voice of God.¹³³ That is not true in this instance: Margery’s voice is vigorously present in her *Book*. But, as Kleinberg observes, in the writing of

¹³² Ibid., 418, emphasis in original.

¹³³ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Foreword” in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, Catherine M. Mooney, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) ix-xi, ix.

hagiography, in order for a saint “to serve as evidence that perfection was humanly possible [she has] to be more than a literary construct; [she has] to be real.”¹³⁴ Margery’s construction of her life and self in her *Book* perfectly presents the necessary elements of reality to bring the potential for perfection into focus. Margery uses the reality of her life – the reality of being misunderstood, rejected, even imprisoned in her quest to serve God – as the means to explain what it meant to her to live a holy life.

As the martyrdoms of Joan of Arc and Anne Askew show, the risks to a holy woman who was seen as other than holy were real and significant. Margery’s *Book* recognizes that although she is one thing, she might seem to be another. Like Joan, Margery does not appear as conventional wisdom says a holy woman ought to. One day, a priest approaches Margery as she stands outside of a monastery, and “takyng hir be the coler of the gowne, seyde, “Thu wolf, what is this cloth that thou hast on?” (50. 2830-2831). Margery does not speak in her own defense, and so it falls to a child passing outside the monastery to answer, ““Ser, it is wulle”” (50. 2833). But while Margery shows complacency at the accusation of being a wolf in sheep’s clothing, she is far more concerned about appearing as a heretic in holy woman’s clothes. This final doubt, the doubt that her readers will be able to see her as she is, is what influences the construction of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and of the Margery that is presented therein.

¹³⁴ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 53.

Chapter Four: Protestant Martyr or Catholic Saint:

The Presentation of Holiness in *The Examinations of Anne Askew*

One of the most compelling figures of the early days of the Protestant Reformation in England was Anne Askew. On 16 July 1546, when she was approximately twenty-five years old, Anne was burned at the stake for violating the Six Articles of 1539, specifically for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation and thereby committing the heresy of sacramentarianism. The sacramentarian heresy was “a radical belief that ultimately owed more to the influence of Zwingli than to Luther: denying that the bread and wine of the consecrated Eucharist could become the body and blood of Christ and asserting that the Eucharist was but a sign or signification.”¹³⁵ It was also a doctrine of the reformed faith. While in prison, she wrote accounts of her imprisonment and interrogation, *The first examinacyon* and *The lattre examinacyon*, which were published after her death by John Bale, and also included in John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*. While Anne’s words are the same in both accounts, this project focuses on Bale’s edition of Anne’s *Examinations* in particular, due to the elaborate “elucydacyons” with which he framed her text, and which present a very different image of Anne from the one she put forth in her writing.¹³⁶ The presence of Bale’s elucidations make Anne’s text

¹³⁵ David Loewenstein, “Writing and the Persecution of Heretics in Henry VIII’s England: *The Examinations of Anne Askew*,” in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, David Loewenstein and John Marshall, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 11-39, 11.

¹³⁶ A brief note on terminology: Although it is customary to refer to authors by their last name, in keeping with the previous custom of this project, I will refer to Anne Askew as “Anne.” Also, in an attempt to better reflect the reality of religion in Henrician England, I will use the terms “conservative” and “reformed” to describe the two main religious factions at the end of Henry’s reign, and reserve the use of “Catholic” and “Protestant” for references to established churches or religious doctrines. The Six Articles legislated that certain doctrinal matters in the English Church mirrored Catholic beliefs. This caused the more reform-minded, such as Bale, to refer to those who adhered to this doctrine as “Catholic” or “papist.” Yet it is important to remember that these men were not Catholic – they, too had broken with Rome and rejected papal supremacy. Thus, the label “conservative” as it is used in this project means only that their beliefs were changed to

feel almost like a co-written project. But Bale's edition of the *Examinations* is not a seamless collaboration. Rather, it reads as if two authors were given a central character and a shared plot, and then left to their own devices to fill in the rest. They are each writing the story, but in a vastly different way.

The greatest way in which these texts diverge is in their portrayal of the main character, Anne Askew. Anne's text and Bale's elucidations both tell the story of a martyr, but they do so by engaging with different definitions of martyrdom. Anne's text focuses primarily on a martyr as someone who stands witness for her faith, and testifies to her beliefs. Bale's elucidations emphasize that a martyr is someone who dies for her faith. The different definitions of martyr that Anne and Bale focus on highlight their divergent purposes in writing, and the different audiences that their words are designed to reach.

Anne writes her text as a woman of faith who wants to stand witness to her belief. While her story ends with her death as someone who fits the more usual definition of martyr, Anne's acceptance of that role is tangential to her desire to present a picture of unwavering faith and stand witness to what she believes in. Bale's interest in Anne is much less about the manner in which she lived her belief as it is about the fact that she died for it. For Bale, Anne's death is a more compelling story than her adherence to her faith. He is writing as an advocate of the new religion, and he tells her story in a manner designed to make Anne into a sympathetic figure of recognized holiness.

Although the pain and death inherent in martyrdom are useful conversion tools, Anne does not write her text as a tool for conversion, and so these aspects of her ordeal are less important to her than they are to Bale. Instead, Anne uses her writing as a way to testify to her faith to those who are already members of her community of reformers.

a more conservative degree than that advocated by reformers such as Anne and Bale.

The prison accounts of martyrs “were a form of witnessing, meant to strengthen others who were suffering or likely to suffer persecution.”¹³⁷ Her emphasis on Scriptural knowledge in *The first examinacyon* and on her true beliefs about the Eucharist in *The lattre examinacyon* show what she believes and what she is willing to die for. Through the records she provides of her interrogations, Anne models her expression of faith, and does so in such a way that her text does not dwell on any unique personal characteristics, but simply on her beliefs. In writing the story of her holiness, Anne “presented herself independently of current definitions,” providing a new example of spirituality for the new religion.¹³⁸ She is writing as a way of witnessing for a faith that is already present in her coreligionists. In her text, “she perceives and represents herself as enacting an apostle-like role,” carrying the news to believers, and using her words to convert those who do not believe yet.¹³⁹ In her text, her death as a martyr is presented as simply the consequences of her living her faith. What is most important for her to show is the way in which, in a particularly difficult set of circumstances, Anne lived her reformed faith.

For Bale, Anne’s story and her text provides “a ‘safe’ discursive platform from which to antagonize his opponents without risking life or limb.”¹⁴⁰ He uses her words as a foundation on which to write a text that functions as a recruitment device, to convince those who read them of the righteousness of the reformed cause, and the corruptness of

¹³⁷ John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 17-18.

¹³⁸ Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 30.

¹³⁹ Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women’s Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) 147.

¹⁴⁰ Megan Matchinske, *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England: Identity Formation and the Female Subject* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 35-36.

the conservative faction. In order to do this, he emphasizes aspects of holiness that differ greatly from those that Anne emphasizes, drawing on the techniques of Catholic hagiography to make a Protestant martyr. Bale places the focus on Anne's suffering and death, creating in his elucidations a text that resembles nothing more than the *vita* of a medieval saint.

Anne's manner of living her faith is not the focus of John Bale's elucidations on her text. In his article on the hagiographical writing of Bale, Oliver Wort claims that "it is our understanding of the hagiographical traditions in which Bale worked that allows us to expose, as distracting, studies that seek to recover Askew's 'authentic' voice as something distinct from Bale's adornments....It is *Bale's* text that makes Askew a martyr."¹⁴¹ Yet it is important to read Anne's words as distinct from Bale's elucidations, not because her voice is any more or less authentic, but because her purpose in writing is different. It is our understanding of the hagiographical traditions that Bale works in that makes clear the both the different purposes for which Anne and Bale wrote and the model that Bale follows in his presentation of Anne. She is writing herself as a martyr who is a witness, he is writing her as a martyr who is a saint.

The differences in these portrayals of what it means to be holy – or at least what it means to be publicly recognized as holy – are made apparent by the different emphases in the texts. Anne's text shows the ways in which she fits into, and exemplifies, the new paradigm of holiness that the reformed faith brings, and is written to show her fellow believers that she never wavered in adherence to that faith. Bale's elucidations, at the same time as they rail against the conservative faction and the

¹⁴¹ Oliver Wort, "The Double Life of Anne: John Bale's *Examinations* and *Diue Anne Vitam* (sic)," *The Review of English Studies* 58 (2007) 633-656, 655 (emphasis in original).

Catholic Church, are an attempt to fit Anne into a pre-existing paradigm of holiness in order to make her recognizable as a holy woman to readers of her *Examinations*. By writing in this fashion, Bale makes Anne resemble a heroine of the old religion rather than a symbol of the new.

I. "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant"

-- *Emily Dickinson*

Anne does not begin her text as so many saints' lives do, by offering evidence that she had a special relationship with God. There is no conversion experience, no details of how she came to embrace the truths she found in the reformed faith. Instead, this is the opening sentence in the text:

To satisfie your expectation, good people (sayth she) this was my first examynacyon in the yere of oure Lorde M. D. xlv and in the moneth of Marche, first Chrstofe dare examyned me at Sadlers hall, beyng one of the quest, and asked yf I ded not beleve that the sacrament hangynge over the aultre was the verye bodye of Christ reallye (l. 22-26).

She wants the reader to know that she has been imprisoned and interrogated because of her faith, and by giving no personal details, no other introduction, she makes clear that she as an individual is not the focus of her text, that the faith that she has been imprisoned for is.

This reticence with personal details is a pattern Anne follows throughout her first examination. Although Bishop Bonner informs that she is being released because she comes from worshipful stock, the only relative Anne mentions is her cousin, Christopher Brittain, a lawyer of the Inns of Court who appears in the text because he negotiates Anne's release from prison. She follows the same pattern of silence on everything

except her faith in her second examination as well, even when the direction of her interrogation goes in more personal directions, such as an inquiry about her estranged husband. The important thing for Anne is to witness to her beliefs, and she writes in a manner that minimizes any possible divergence from that topic.

The rhetorical strategy that Anne employs during her interrogation has often been referred to by critics as a strategy of silence. Commentary has been made on her taciturnity, on the lacunae in her text that allow Bale to explicate her through his elucidations.¹⁴² But the truth of Anne's beliefs is present in her answers from the beginning of her interrogation. These gaps are not holes in her text, but rather spaces in which she requires interpretation from the reader. As Betteridge writes, "Askewe's narrative fills the gap between the question and Scripture; it is the text and, at the same time announces itself as a non-text, as a negative piece of writing motivated on the one side by questions it does not construct as valid and on the other by a truth that has already, and definitively, been said."¹⁴³ In a very real sense, Anne does not see herself as needing to provide an answer beyond what the Scripture says, as her truths, her answers, have already been recorded in those words for anyone to read. And she makes clear to her reading audience that she understands the danger inherent in speaking at all. At one point, Anne refuses to answer the questions put to her by a priest "because I perceyved hym a papyst" (l. 154-155). She realizes that there is no response that she can give that will be acceptable to this priest and not a betrayal of her beliefs. But what

¹⁴² See Boyd M. Berry, "Of the Manner in Which Anne Askew 'Noised It,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 96 (1997) 182-203, 192 for "taciturnity" and Thomas Betteridge, "Anne Askewe, John Bale, and Protestant History," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997) 265-284, 273 for "lacunae." More recent scholarship has begun to recognize that "Anne's polemical tactics ranged widely," and that silence was far from the only rhetorical technique that Anne employed. Loewenstein, "Writing and the Persecution of Heretics," 14.

¹⁴³ Betteridge, *Tudor Histories*, 105.

she engages in is not a rhetorical strategy of silence, it is a rhetorical strategy that speaks only as to her faith, and in a manner meant to be best understood by members of that faith.

The first query put to her by the quest – the official commission appointed to hold heresy hearings – is whether she believes the consecrated Eucharist, stored in its pyx above the altar, is the actual body of Christ. It is the question on which everything turns, and a negative answer would condemn her to death as a heretic. Anne’s response is to demand “thys question of hym, wherfore S. Steven was stoned to deathe?”¹⁴⁴ The answer, which Anne’s interrogator was unable to provide, but which Scripture does, is that St. Stephen was stoned to death for saying that God dwells not in temples made with human hands. Had the member of the quest known his Scripture, he would have known Anne’s response to his question and would have understood the symbolic meaning of her response as well. The Eucharistic bread is made by human hands, and by answering as she does, Anne is, if in a slantwise fashion, answering the question truthfully.

This strategy, which Anne employs throughout *The first examinacyon*, is effective on two levels. The first, and most immediately important, is that it allows her to respond to her interrogators’ questions without answering in a manner that will directly reveal her deviation from mandated beliefs. The second is that by answering with reference to Scripture, Anne does reveal her beliefs to her intended audience of members of the reformed faith. Anne is not writing in a vacuum, and “religion is the optic through which

¹⁴⁴ Anne Askew, “The first examinacyon,” in *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). I.27-28. As lineation is provided, all citations to Anne’s examinations will be in-text and take the following form: I. or II. to indicate the first or latter examination, followed by line number. As John Bale’s introductions to each examination are separately numbered, they will appear as BI. or BII., followed by line number.

Askew's distinctive rhetorical habits need to be viewed."¹⁴⁵ The specific optic in which to view Anne's writing is the reformed religion, with its heavy emphasis on the reading and contemplation of Scripture. Anne wrote her own record of her interrogation. The sharing of her experiences and faith in the form of the record of an interrogation became a technique closely associated with the reformed faith. The dialogic form allows for communication of doctrine as well as demonstration of belief, and reformed and "Protestant martyrs, through disputation with their examiners and often through prison writings give shape to their faith and seek to communicate it."¹⁴⁶ The opening address of her first examination shows that she had a specific purpose and audience in mind when she wrote. Anne begins her text, "To satisfie your expectation, good people" (l. 22). She records her experiences in response to the interest of a pre-existing audience: the persecuted community of reformers in Henrician England. This community knows who Anne is, and she knows her intended audience as well. Unlike her interrogators, who Anne presents in her text as being unable to comprehend the Scriptural allusions, the intended readers of Anne's examinations will know her precise meanings, and take strength from them. Through her reliance on Scripture, Anne places herself within "a textual community of faith grounded in reading of Scripture," and offers a spiritual kinship between herself and the readers of her text.¹⁴⁷

Anne's strategy requires that she speak, and that her interrogators listen, in a manner that acknowledges only the literal meaning of what is being said. She makes this interpretive intent explicit in the following exchange. Anne is rebuked for speaking about

¹⁴⁵ Kimberly Anne Coles, "The Death of the Author (and the Appropriation of Her Text): The Case of Anne Askew's *Examinations*," *Modern Philology* 99 (2002) 515-539, 518.

¹⁴⁶ Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 50.

¹⁴⁷ Joan Pong Linton, "Scripted Silences, Reticence, and Agency in Anne Askew's *Examinations*," *English Literary Renaissance* 36 (2006) 3-25, 11.

the Scriptures, in contravention of the teachings of St. Paul. She responds:

that I knewe Paules meanyng so well as he, whych is, i. Corinthiorum
 xiiii. that a woman ought not to speake in the congregacyon by the waye
 of teachyng. And then I asked hym, how manye women he had seane,
 go into the pulpett and preache. He sayde, he never sawe non. Then I
 sayde, he ought to fynde no faute in poore women, except they had
 offended the lawe (l. 279-284).

Anne puts the narrowest possible definition – standing in the pulpit and speaking before the congregation – in order to leave room for women to speak about the Scriptures. In doing so, she displays her own talent at understanding and interpreting Scripture, foundational aspects of the reformed faith. Then she tells her interrogator not to find fault in women who have not offended the law: not to find Anne a heretic unless and until she answers in a way that specifically and explicitly violates official doctrine.

At least one of Anne's interrogators acknowledges what she is doing by answering in the manner that she does and, somewhat remarkably, plays along. In response to a question about whether the moral state of the priest affects the sacrament of the Eucharist, Anne says, "that the wyckednesse of the prest shuld not hurte me, but in sprete and faythe I receyved no leese, the bodye and bloude of Christ" (l. 686-688). Bishop Bonner responds to her by saying, "what a saynge is thys? In sprete. I wyll not take yow at that advauntage" (l. 689-690). The only hint Anne's text offers for why the bishop – whose duty it is to combat heresy – refuses to "take her at that advantage" comes later in the text. The record of Anne's first imprisonment and interrogation concludes with her release from prison. Before she is released, the bishop speaks to her, saying "I myght thanke other and not myselfe, of the faver I founde at hys hande.

For he considered (he sayd) that I had good fryndes, and also that I was come of a worshypfull stocke” (l. 1046-1048). This implies that, at least at this time, it was not politically expedient to make an example of Anne, who had family in the higher circles of court, including a brother, Christopher, who was a gentleman of the King’s Privy Chamber.¹⁴⁸ By telling her that he will not take advantage of her phrasing, Bonner lets Anne know that he is aware of the beliefs signified by her answers, but at the same time, he will not convict her of heresy unless she gives him no alternative. By placing this interaction with Bonner in her text, Anne shows how she used her Scriptural knowledge and Bonner’s willingness to strictly construct her words and “negotiated a space in which she could survive,” and in which she could still maintain her faith.¹⁴⁹

In considering the manner in which the text shows Bonner interacting with Anne, it is important to remember that it is Anne writing this record of her interrogation. She can choose which details to include in order to best advance her purposes in writing, and to prove that her faith never wavered in the course of her imprisonment. Bishop Bonner’s reaction offers the reader confirmation of how Anne is structuring her responses to the questions that she is asked. Because he acknowledges that there is more to her answers than the literal meaning of the responses, it is a signal to the reader of her text to look deeper as well, and to see the truth revealed in the words. His reaction also makes the confession that she signs in order to secure her release from prison look less like a loss of faith or equivocation and more like a continuation of the verbal fencing in

¹⁴⁸ Elaine V. Beilin, “Introduction,” to *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, xv-xlii, xvii. Anne herself does not include information beyond Bonner’s statement. The information about her family has been gathered by later scholars. While this is not meant to imply that Bonner was unaware of Anne’s familial connections, it does show that Anne continued to minimize the role of anything unconnected to her testimony to her faith.

¹⁴⁹ Megan Hickerson, “Negotiating Heresy in Tudor England: Anne Askew and the Bishop of London,” *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007) 774-795, 793.

which she had been engaged.

The first examinacyon closes with Anne's release from prison. As a condition of her release, Bishop Bonner requires Anne to sign a confession of belief in the doctrine of the Mass, specifically including the doctrine of transubstantiation: "Also I do beleve it after the consecracyon, whether is be receyved or reserved, to be no lesse than the verye bodye and bloude of Christ in substaunce" (l. 999-1001). Rather than merely putting her name to the document, Anne records that she wrote, "I Anne Askewe do beleve all maner thynges contayned in the faythe of the Catholyck churche" (l. 1063-1064). "Catholic," because of its connotation of universality, was a highly contested term between the conservative and reformed factions. Anne reports that her use of the term made the Bishop, who fully comprehended the sense in which Anne used the word, to fly into a fury over what she has written.

Anne needs her readers to see her signing statement on the confession as another parry in the verbal duel with her interrogators, and one clever enough to cause the bishop to fly into a fury, because the fact that her first examination ends with her release is problematic. She was imprisoned as a heretic, and therefore, in order to be released, she needed to be found orthodox. In other words, she needed to have denied the reformed faith.

Anne's purpose in writing was to provide a testament to her faith, and encourage her fellow believers to remain strong in the face of persecution. To do that, she cannot be seen or even thought to have recanted. The record of her second examination includes a passage where Nicholas Shaxton urges Anne to save her life by recanting. Showing the opinion the faithful has of those who denied their beliefs, risking their souls to save their lives, Anne responds to him with the words of Christ to Judas: "that it had

bene good for hym, never to have bene borne” (II. 814). Those who deny their faith commit the ultimate betrayal. But Anne’s release from prison gave the reformed community cause to wonder if she ought to be considered in the same category as Shaxton. Anne needed to use her text to clarify that perception. She includes a letter in her text that she wrote to John Lascelles while awaiting execution, showing that she is aware of what is being said of her: “I have redde the processe, whych is reported of them that knowe not the truthe, to be my recantacyon. But as sure as the lorde lyveth. I never ment thynges lesse, than to recant” (II. 1203-1205). She continues by stating again the manner in which she signed and repeating the words she had added to the statement: “Then with moch a do, at the last I wrote thus, I Anne Askewe do beleve thys if Gods worde do agre to the same, and the true catholick church” (II. 1229-1230).

What makes this believable as a clever mockery of men whose religion does not allow them to comprehend her meaning rather than Nicodemism, is Anne’s previously documented manner of responding in a manner that employs layers of meanings and Bonner’s refusal to take advantage of what he well knows to be her true meaning.

Not long after her release, Anne is imprisoned again on suspicion of heresy. In *The lattare examinacyon*, Anne’s strategy changes. She turns from writing a document that shows her witnessing to her faith for a reformed audience while at the same time hiding it from a conservative one, to writing a text that serves as a confession of faith to all who see it, in the full knowledge that this will lead to her death as a heretic. The record of her second examination begins on 18 June 1546. On the 20th, the same day she is sent to Newgate prison, Anne is taken violently ill: “Then on the Sondaye I wase sore sycke, thynkyng no less than to dye.... For in all my lyfe afore, was I never in soch payne” (II. 388-389; 391-392). Anne’s illness may be the reason why she changes the

construction of herself that is seen in her text. She believes no less than that she is going to die, and so she makes her profession of faith. She sets this section out in her text, titling it: "The confessyon of me Anne Askewe, for the tyme I was in Newgate, concernynge my beleve" (ll. 414-415). She then makes explicit her beliefs about the Eucharist: "So that the breade is but a remembraunce of hys death, or a sacrament of thankes gevyng for it, wherby we are knytt unto hym by a comunyon of Christen love" (ll. 422-425).

The next time she is interrogated, Anne makes her confession of faith to her interrogators as well. When given the opportunity to do so, she refuses to recant the heretical statements she has been accused of making. Then, the fatal question: "Then wolde they nedes knowe, if I wolde denye the sacrament to be Christes bodye and bloude: I sayd, yea" (ll. 600-602). In a text where her speech was such an issue, it is fitting that Anne needs only one word to accept her role as martyr. She speaks simply and clearly, giving her interrogators a text that is easily interpreted. Having decided to condemn herself, Anne makes the specifics of her belief absolutely clear in her text and to her interrogators. She cites Scripture in support of her position, and baldly states, "and as for that ye call your God, is but a pece of breade" (ll. 604-605). In the next set of responses that she records, Anne denies irrevocably, and in a variety of ways, the presence of God in the Eucharist. To further witness her reformed beliefs, she again quotes Scripture in support of her assertions about the Eucharist: "In witnes wherof I recyted agayne the hystorye of Bel, and the ix. chaptre of Daniel, the vii. and xvii. of the Actes, and the xxiii of Mathew" (ll. 685-687).

The text gives no direct reason for Anne's rhetorical shift from the first examination to the latter. However, the key may be in her illness. When Anne is racked,

she makes no mention of any pain that results, other than to say that she “incontinently swooned” when she was taken down. Yet here, she says that her illness leaves her so sick that she believes that she might die. What Anne writes, and then makes clear to her interrogators after falling ill is her confession of faith. She makes this as clear and detailed as possible, so that if she does die of her illness, there will be no question as to what she actually believed. Confessing in this manner lets Anne choose how she will be remembered in the event of her death. Since her confession to her interrogators means martyrdom, it allows her to have a say in the manner of her death, and to make that death serve her faith. Whatever her reason, the simplicity of Anne’s response – “I sayd, yea” – makes clear that her martyrdom is her choice. She states her beliefs “not because she has been persuaded to do so, but because she has decided to submit to her fate.”¹⁵⁰

Anne writes her book as a way of witnessing to her faith, and strengthening the faith of her coreligionists. Her text makes clear why she chose to speak when she did, and in such a manner: “I wolde rather dye, than to breake my faythe. Thus the lorde open the eyes of their blynde hartes, that the truthe maye take place” (ll. 1120-1122). Thus, even with the difference in her manner of speaking about her beliefs between the first and latter examinations, Anne’s overarching purpose in recording her examinations remains constant throughout. Her writing is “a recreation of her effort to witness to God’s truth for the instruction and support of the faithful.”¹⁵¹ A careful reading of both parts of her text shows that “her discursive practices (both in the course of denying Henrician religious authority and in how she records the procedure of her examinations) clearly

¹⁵⁰ Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997) 100.

¹⁵¹ Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, 56.

register the convictions of Protestantism at an inaugural moment.”¹⁵² Anne registers those convictions by showing her readers both how to live in her faith, and how to die in it.

When Anne decides to make her beliefs inescapably known to her readers and interrogators, she titles that section of her text, “a confession of faith.” In reality, her entire text is the confession of her faith. Anne writes to stand witness to her faith, to make clear what she believes, not as a means of advocating for her own special status as someone uniquely beloved by God, but simply as a believer.

II. “Martyrs bear witness to the truth, not to themselves.”

-- Milton, *Eikonoklastes*

As demonstrated by the content of his “elucidations” accompanying the text, John Bale’s reasons for editing and publishing *The Examinations of Anne Askew* differ from Anne’s reasons for writing. Bale’s words are not there to clarify or expound upon Anne’s writing, as they “only marginally interact with Askew’s initial court responses,” but to advance his own agenda, the promotion of the reformed faith in England.¹⁵³ Anne wrote a personal testament to her faith, while Bale’s purpose was the creation of a sympathetic and compelling public figure as a symbol of a new religion. Thus, Bale requires different things from Anne’s text than she did, and often, different things than she wrote. It is Bale’s commentary that changes *The first examinacyon* in particular from a document of witnessing to a recruiting tool. As Hickerson points out, on its own, *The first examinacyon* on its own, without the long shadow cast by Anne’s eventual torture and martyrdom hanging over it, is “anything but satisfactory propaganda for the

¹⁵² Coles, “The Death of the Author,” 518.

¹⁵³ Matchinske, *Writing, Gender, and State*, 40.

evangelical cause or at least for martyrology but for its spotlighting, or Bale's spotlighting within it, of the bloodlust of the men like the 'Babylon' bishop of London: servants of the Antichrist."¹⁵⁴ He needs to emphasize the doctrinal conflicts between the reformed and conservative factions in England and to demonize the conservatives for their treatment of Anne so as to win sympathy for the reformed cause. At the same time, Bale's project requires that he create in Anne the symbol of an ideal reformer, and a recognizable figure of holiness. Bale produces Anne's text in order "to make her words the source or basis of a magisterial Protestant identity, an identity that Bale himself had wanted, indeed desired, to find and produce out of the martyr's testimony."¹⁵⁵ Yet because she must be a recognizable symbol, Bale needs to make Anne fit into a previously existing pantheon of holiness. He needs to make her resemble a Catholic saint.

One of the more subtle ways that Bale does this is by including in his elucidations certain of the details of her life that she chooses to omit from her text. In his introduction to *The lattu examinacyon*, Bale rails against the "pylde popysh martyrdomes" of Catholic women whose *vitae* include incidents of their abandoning or refusing marriages: "Osytha runnyng away from her husbände, by the intysement of ii. monkes bycame a professed nonne, and was murthered of the Danes. Wenefryda by counsell of a prest, dysdaynouslye refusynge the marryage of a prynce christened, lost her head for it. Maxentia also played a part not all unlyke to thys" (BII. 164-168). The reason for Bale's discussion of these women becomes clear when, at the beginning of *The lattu examinacyon*, Anne is asked about a Master Kyme: "I answered, that my lorde chancellour knewe all redye my mynde in that matter" (II. 128-129). She gives no further

¹⁵⁴ Hickerson, "Negotiating Heresy," 778.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Betteridge, *Tudor Histories of the English Reformations, 1530-83*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) 98.

details, not even a hint as to the identity of Master Kyme. It is from Bale that we learn that Kyme is Anne's estranged husband, whom she was "compelled against her wyll or fre consent to marrye" when her older sister, who had been his fiancée, died (II. 147). Bale also writes that the reason for Anne's estrangement from Kyme is her conversion to the reformed faith, which "so offended the prestes... that he at their suggestion, vyolentlye drove her oute of hys howse" (II. 152-154). This detail is an important contrast with the Catholic martyrs Bale mentioned in his introduction. As he tells their stories, Osytha was enticed to leave her husband by two monks, and Wenefryda refused her marriage on the advice of a priest. However, Anne is different. It is not she who leaves her husband, but he – at the suggestion of priests – who casts her violently from her home. Bale makes clear that Anne's behavior is different from the previous women, and at the same time, demonizes the Catholic Church as an institution that seeks to end marriages. Additionally, Bale takes this opportunity to mention that Anne had two children with Kyme. Interestingly, "no other contemporary sources record the existence of those two children. Considering the importance that Protestantism attached to marriage, we may even wonder whether Bale himself creates the children as a part of the reinvention of Askew as a married female Protestant martyr who would replace the Catholic virgin saints."¹⁵⁶

These details make the *Examinations* about Anne the person rather than about her faith. They also echo *vitae* of Catholic saints in demonstrating that Anne suffered for her faith even before being imprisoned for it, by being violently cast from her house and

¹⁵⁶ Elaine V. Beilin, "A Woman for All Seasons: The Reinvention of Anne Askew," in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France and Italy*. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham, eds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005) 341-364, 349. Obviously, the same lack of sources that does not allow Bale to prove the existence of Anne's children prevents Beilin from proving his invention of them, but it is an interesting question.

separated from her children. Hostility, particularly from family members, towards a vocation is a common trope in Catholic martyrology. Joan of Arc's father, for example, said he would drown her with his own hands to prevent her from leaving with soldiers.¹⁵⁷

It is not only subtly that Bale seeks to analogize Anne to Catholic martyrs. In his introduction to *The first examinacyon*, Bale expends a great deal of effort to turn Anne into an echo of a Catholic martyr, Blandina. While it might seem important for the reformer Bale to reject the Catholic cult of the saints, in actuality, the analogy between Anne and Blandina is a key part of Bale's project. Bale needs to prove that Anne was a holy woman who died a martyr's death, rather than a heretic, correctly condemned to the fire. Holiness is most obvious when it is familiar, and the most familiar figures of holiness in Henrician England are the Catholic saints. Theirs are the lives that even members of the reformed faith have grown up hearing and seeing, the stories that would have shaped their faith and their understanding of what holiness was. Too, as he "had been an orthodox hagiographer in his early career," Bale would have been exceedingly familiar with the common tropes of holiness in saints' lives, and would have been able to use them to draw out the desired response from his readers.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, in order to make Anne appear as a holy woman to those who read the record of her examinations, Bale enumerates her similarities to a Catholic saint:

Prompt was Blandina, and of most lustye corage, in renderynge
her emprysonynges and tormentes. Great was the love, Blandina
had to Christ. No lesse was the love of Anne Askewe. Blandina
never faynted in torment. No more ded Anne Askewe in sprete,

¹⁵⁷ *La Minute Française des Interrogatoires de Jeanne la Pucelle*, Paul Doncoeur, ed. (Melun: Librairie d'Argences, 1952) 161.

¹⁵⁸ Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 103.

whan she was so terrybly racked of Wrysleye the chaunceller and Ryche, that the strynges of her arms and eyes were peryshed (Bl. 190-196).

Bale writes in this fashion, the sentence by sentence mirroring of Blandina and Anne for forty-three lines of text. His language is full of references to torments, imprisonment, racking, and burning – none of which, except for imprisonment, appears in *The first examinacyon*. As Theresa Kemp observes, “over half of these attributes relate to Askew’s body or to her death in all its physicality.”¹⁵⁹ Structuring the text in this way means that, for Bale, Anne’s story begins and ends with her martyrdom. While her torture and death are the more dramatic elements of what Anne endured, but Bale emphasizes these at the expense of the aspects of Anne’s behavior during her ordeal that make her uniquely a symbol of the reformed faith. It leaves the impression that Anne, by herself, is not enough, or, that the new faith has no recognizable models of holiness, and thus must embrace the very thing it was trying to leave behind.

Bale is interested in creating a new paradigm for holiness through advancement of the new religion, but he is not able to completely abandon the old ways of expressing holiness to do so. He wants to give the readers of Anne’s text a sign more obvious than her willingness to die for her beliefs that she is a holy woman. Instead of trusting that the readers of the *Examinations* will, like Bishop Bonner, be able to see through Anne’s verbal subtlety to the underlying faith, he adds his elucidations to her words, making her “speak like any martyr, male or female,” conservative or reformed, Protestant or Catholic.¹⁶⁰ While Anne may not have wished to present herself as unique, she did want

¹⁵⁹ Theresa D. Kemp, “Translating (Anne) Askew: The Textual Remains of a Sixteenth Century Heretic and Saint,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (1999) 1021-1045, 1030-1031.

¹⁶⁰ Berry, “Of the Manner,” 185.

to present herself as a member of the reformed faith. Bale's elucidations make that identity less important than her identity as a martyr.

In telling Anne's story, Bale is telling the story of a martyr, which necessitates the relation of her suffering and death. This means that for Bale to provide the picture of Anne that his readers will expect, he must deviate from the details she gives in her writing. More precisely, he must supply the physical details which Anne omits. One of the places where this deviation is most noticeable is in the description of Anne's torture on the rack.

Anne is racked after she had confessed her beliefs, not as a way to cause her to admit further heresy, but as an attempt to get her to betray any members of Queen Catherine Parr's circle who might also be adherents of the reformed faith. Richard Riche comes to Anne in the Tower to ask her if she will name the names of anyone who is her coreligionist. When she tells him that she knows none, he specifically asks about "my ladye of Sothfolke, my ladye of Sussex, my ladye of Hertforde, my ladye Denny, and my ladye Fizwylyams" (II. 866-867).¹⁶¹ When she declines to speak about any of these women, or of the identity of those who sent her money to maintain herself during her imprisonment, she is racked. The racking of a young gentlewoman was "as morally shocking as it was patently illegal."¹⁶² Anne, as is her custom, uses great restraint when speaking about this event. She offers only two details of her physical state. She first notes that because she "laye styll and ded not crye, my lorde chauncellour and mastre Ryche, toke peynes to racke me their owne handes, tyll I was nygh dead" (II. 1007-

¹⁶¹ It is not outside the realm of possibility that Anne included these names here, when she makes no other mention of any of her court connections, as a means of warning these women that they were under suspicion.

¹⁶² Paula McQuade, "Except that they had offended the Lawe': Gender and Jurisprudence in *The Examinations of Anne Askew*," *Literature & History* 3 (1994) 1-14, 10.

1009). Then, Anne writes that, once removed from the rack, “incontynentlye I swounded, and then they recovered me agayne. After that I sate ii. longe houres reasonyng with my lorde Chauncellour upon the bare floore” (II. 1069-1072). Anne’s account “is exceptionally powerful precisely because its language is so understated.”¹⁶³ Detail would only limit the imagination of the sympathetic reader.

Bale’s account of the same event differs greatly:

lyke a lambe she laye styll without noyse of cryenge, and suffered your uttermost vyolence, tyll the synnowes of her armes were broken, and the strynges of her eyes peryshed in her heade. Ryght farre doth it passe the strength of a yonge, tender, weake, and sycke woman (as she was at that tyme to your more confusyon) to abyde so vyolent handelynge, yea, or yet of the strongest man that lyveth (II. 1048-1054).

He emphasizes the physical consequences of the act, the pain and suffering Anne endured, and reminds the reader that she was already ill when this took place. It is a description designed to cause sympathy for Anne, and at the same time, to cause anger in the reader towards the people and the religion who would behave so abominably. Whereas Anne’s account, with its spare, reserved quality, puts the emphasis on the depth of the faith of a young woman who, when she revived from unconsciousness, argued religious doctrine for two hours with the man who had just racked her.

Bale’s elucidations of Anne’s words often diverge greatly from Anne’s emphasis. After her version of the episode where Bishop Bonner refuses to interpret her words in a manner that would require him to find her a heretic, Bale puts quite a different spin on the bishop’s response to Anne. He alters Bonner’s words to be “I wyll not take you at the

¹⁶³ Loewenstein, “Writing and the Persecution of Heretics,” 29.

worst,” which puts a much more sinister connotation on them (l. 708-709). Bale also implies that the bishop’s statement is not a recognition of Anne’s rhetorical style, but an expression of frustration that she will not betray herself: “And seyng he can winne non advauntage to hys cruel purpose, of her owne communycacyon, he shaketh the bowgettes of hys provyded Judases and betrayers of innocent bloude” (l. 694-696). In that statement with its reference to innocent blood, and again in the same passage, he recalls Anne’s martyrdom to the reader: “yet judgeth it he an heresy, no lesse worthy than deathe, to beleve that Christes fleshe and bloude is recyved in faythe and sprete” (l. 705-706). He calls Bonner’s refusal to take advantage of Anne’s words “the natural workynge of a verye full Antichrist” (l. 701). Rather than focusing on Anne’s fortitude in engaging in a rhetorical strategy that – under prison interrogation – allows her to proclaim her faith and avoid conviction as a heretic, Bale makes Bonner the only active player in the scene, and an incompetent one at that. He turns Anne into nothing more than eventually martyred innocent blood.

But while they are often writing at cross purposes, in no where else in the text is the division between Anne’s purpose in writing about her experiences and Bale’s purpose in publicizing them to apparent as it is in the descriptions of her racking. For all that she chooses not to emphasize it, Anne’s racking is a key moment in her text. After her death, Anne’s *Examinations* become not merely a witnessing of her faith, but a testament to her ultimate act of faith, her martyrdom. Martyrology is an inherently corporeal genre. The suffering and death of the physical body must be emphasized in order to cast the martyr’s reward – the immortal life of their faithful soul – in the proper light. The suffering the martyr endures is a corporeal witnessing of the strength of her faith, and of God’s power in her. Thus, in Anne’s case, the emphasis on her suffering

testifies to the rightness of the reformed faith. Other than to mention that she lay still like a lamb – providing the analogy of the martyr to Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God – and did not cry out, Anne’s silence during her torture is of little interest to Bale.

Bale provides the details that Anne’s silence on the rack and in her text leave out. He writes of her “cruel torments” and “mighty sufferings” and describes Chancellor Wriothesley as “now become a most vyle slave for Antichrist, and a most cruell tormentoure” (ll. 1028-1029). Without knowing about whom Bale was writing, it would be easy to assume that he was writing the *vita* of one of the virgin martyrs from the *Legenda Aurea*. Bale magnifies the importance of Anne’s torture, making it as vivid as possible in the text. He needs the horror of the torture that foreshadows Anne’s martyrdom to speak like the stories of the Catholic saints in whom he no longer believes.

The symbol of Anne’s suffering, or that of other martyrs, is a powerful one. Accounts of Protestant and reformed martyrs dwell “lovingly upon scenes of horror [and insist] again and again that beneath the institutions and symbolic language of the Catholic Church lay ‘mere power and violence,’ ... not because of a private fixation nor even primarily because of the rhetorical capital in unmerited suffering, but because the revelations of such violence attacked... consensual unity.”¹⁶⁴ Bale’s use of Anne’s torture as an attack on consensual unity happens in two ways. The first is the demonstration that the unity of belief claimed by the conservative faction is a false one. If it were not, people would not need to be imprisoned and interrogated about the ways in which their beliefs deviated from the accepted standard. The second is the revelation that the established church will resort to violence in an attempt to force its definition of

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 2005), 79.

consensual unity to be the only one, is likely to inspire at least a degree of revulsion in the readers of the *Examinations*, thus allowing Bale to discredit them, and strengthen support for the reformed cause.

Anne's story gains strength from her silence on the rack. Her lack of speech in this instance becomes as powerful a way for her to witness to her faith as the agility of her speech was during *The first examinacyon*. As the rumors about her release from prison show, she is perceived as perhaps having spoken too much. Anne's purpose in writing her story is to stand as witness for her faith, a faith that her release from prison argues that she denied. By maintaining silence under the most gruesome sort of provocation, Anne gives weight to her assertion that she did not tell her interrogators what they wanted to hear from her under far less strenuous circumstances: if she did not speak, or even cry out to end the breaking of her body, it passes logic to assume that she would speak to deny the faith that gave her the strength to endure being broken.

In speaking to whether the rumors that she denied her faith to secure her release from prison are true, Anne writes that her interrogators had "no graunte of my mouth but thys. That I beleved therin, as the worde of God ded bynde me to beleve. More had they never of me" (ll. 1207-1209). By keeping her silence on the rack, Anne shows that she is in control of her speech. By giving the episode so little attention in her text, she keeps the focus of her readers on the faith that she was willing to endure torture and death for, rather than on the facts of her torture and death.

The relationship between the holy woman and her community is a complex one. This is particularly so in a set of circumstances like Anne Askew's, where the community itself, and thus its definition of holiness, was in flux. Under usual circumstances, the act of publishing the life or text of a holy person "coalesces the myth-making powers of the

community around its paradigms.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the text is meant to serve as the definitive explanation of the way in which that person’s particular holiness manifested. Yet *The Examinations of Anne Askew* do not provide a definitive explanation of the way in which Anne was thought to be holy. It provides two alternative ways to read holiness. For all Bale’s advocacy of the new religion, his definition of holiness looks to the past. Even though, as he reminds his readers, Bale “designed the *Examinations* to replace Roman Catholic *vitae*,” he writes Anne’s story in a way that makes her indistinguishable from a Catholic saint.¹⁶⁶ It is Anne who writes as witness and martyr for the new faith.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 25).

¹⁶⁶ Wort, “The Double Life of Anne,” 639.

Conclusion: In the Beginning was the Word

Lived holiness is a matter of perspective. What it looks like varies situationally, geographically, and temporally. This means that the experience of living as a holy person changes across these variables as well. One of the foundational premises of this project is that the best way to begin to understand what it meant to attempt to live as a holy woman in the late medieval and early modern period is to read the texts written by the women who did. Their texts are the places in which they present themselves and their spirituality, where they explain how they saw themselves, and advocate for the sanctity of their spiritual experiences. Because of their more immediate nature, these texts offer a different perspective on holiness than that offered by the smoothed-over edges of saints' lives. The texts examined in this project show the struggles and failures, as well as the successes, of a holy life, and therefore provide a more complete picture of what it meant to be recognized as holy.

While these accounts provide important insights, they by no means present a complete picture of lived holiness in the late medieval and early modern period. With the exception of Joan of Arc, all of these women lived in England, and Joan's trial, the record of which is the only extant description of her spirituality in her own words, was held under the aegis of the English. A useful comparison might be done with texts written by continental holy woman, especially as the tradition of mystical spirituality was much stronger on the continent. Joan, Margery, and Anne were all laywomen, and they were all charged with heresy. Writings of cloistered women should be examined to determine if an extraordinary spirituality was treated differently when it manifested in a woman who lived under a religious rule. As there were different expectations for men's holiness, and men's spirituality tended to express itself in different ways than women's, it is possible

that men's texts may have had different concerns about the perception of holiness. Another potentially interesting point of comparison might be found in instances where there are extant writings from the holy woman herself, but her *vita* was written by someone else, such as in the case of Saint Catherine of Sienna and her biographer, Raymond of Capua. Although this situation is similar to John Bale's commentary on Anne Askew's text, enough differences exist to justify the additional enquiry. Bale did not know Anne during her life, and was commenting on her descriptions of events. But when a life was written by someone who was actually witness to it, and had a personal relationship with the person they wrote about, the emphases of the texts may be more convergent. It may be worthwhile to examine how periods of great change affected the construction of holiness. Joan's trial occurred in a time of war, and Anne's during a period of religious transition, but there are other factors that promote change and may influence the way spirituality is interpreted.

But as we consider the issue of the perception of holiness, we must keep in mind that "the past is seldom usefully examined by assuming that its specific questions or their settings are the same as those of the present."¹⁶⁷ The things we are searching for by reading these texts may not necessarily be the same things that our subjects questioned. The most immediate question that was asked of the women who are the subjects of this project was whether they, and their spiritual experiences, were holy. It was a question that they struggled with in their own interpretations of their spiritual experiences, and it provided motivation for their writing. The answer to that question had life or death consequences. However, the question of an individual's holiness is not one

¹⁶⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995) 1-33, 29.

that can, or should, be evaluated by literary scholarship. Modern scholars might be more likely to ask what was gained from being perceived as holy, to enquire whether there were secular benefits as well as spiritual ones to being seen as a holy person, and to examine what the most effective ways of securing that status were. For a person in the middle ages, the question of what might be gained from being a holy person would not be raised because the answer would be too obvious: Heaven.

However, simply because the questions of the past differ from the questions of the present does not mean that they or the reasons they were asked ought to be ignored or dismissed. In the preface to his book, *Sacred Biography*, Thomas Heffernan asserts the following: “miracles, mortification of the flesh, belief in demons, necromancy, magical healing, resurrection of the dead, and a host of other transcendent phenomena are rightly given short shrift by modern society.”¹⁶⁸ Heffernan’s assertion goes far beyond saying that things have changed. It puts religious belief in the category of something “rightly” abandoned by modern society. Leaving aside the insult to the people in modern society who do believe in some form of “transcendent phenomena” – an absolute majority of people currently alive – statements like his have the effect of trivializing the beliefs of the past. This is not to suggest that religious belief and its role in society had not changed since the late medieval and early modern period, but a refusal to acknowledge its presence in the modern world creates a scholarly blind spot, and puts belief in a category where scholars are not required to take it seriously, whether that belief was a thing of the past or of the present. It imposes a false separation of experience between past and present, and implies that those who hold religious beliefs,

¹⁶⁸ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) vii.

either then or now, are somehow less than those who do not. Acknowledging that the preoccupations of the past are not necessarily the preoccupations of the present is a recognition of difference, not of superiority.

Dismissing the preoccupations of the past as rightly no longer the concerns of modern society can lead to taking the experiences of those who lived then less seriously, by assuming that we know better than they do what they were actually experiencing. Doing so is a failure of analysis that results in imposing the concerns of the present over the lived reality of those experiences. And much like the scholarship that, without reflection upon the actual events, described the Protestant Reformation as the open-armed welcome of a more rational faith, and the enthusiastic casting off of tyranny and superstition, it misses the nuances of lived experience. Simply because the people of the middle ages were more likely than people of the modern era to attribute extraordinary events to transcendent phenomena, does not mean that they failed to interrogate the world around them. As Justice notes, skepticism was built into faith, even in the medieval period: “our modern scholarly accounts which try to explain belief from the outside, cannot actually explain it.... Naturalizing or demystifying accounts of belief not only are available to medieval sources, but are internal to their acts of belief.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, one of the main tenets of this project has been that people who had exceptional spiritualities were met with skepticism about their behavior, rather than blind acceptance that they were engaging in the miraculous. The fact that the skepticism was not scientifically based does not mean that it was not there. This is why, in order to come to a more clear picture, it is important to examine what was actually believed – what kind of behavior,

¹⁶⁹ Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?” *Representations* 103 (2008) 1-29, 17-18.

from what type of person, was seen as holy, and under what circumstances?

And so perhaps the difficulty in harmonizing the past and the present is not because the questions of the present are different from the questions of the past, but that the present offers a wider range of potential answers. It is easy for modern scholarship to assert that Margery Kempe suffered from post-partum psychosis, and that this is what caused the episode of madness at the beginning of her book. Certainly, that would be an expected part of the discussion if her book were written today. But this is a dangerously anachronistic place to begin scholarship because it offers the scholar an answer that Margery would not have had available to her for her consideration. While physical causes were sometimes offered as reasons for manifestations of extra-normal behavior, and indeed, a preacher who bans Margery from his church offers to let her return if she will admit to a physical cause for her holy weeping, we should be careful not to impose a diagnosis that was unknown at the time. Doing so prevents us from understanding Margery's understanding of her experience and completely alters the experience of reading *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and erases the purpose for which the book was written. *The Book of Margery Kempe* was written as a record of Margery's relationship with God. The difficulties that she endured after the birth of her child are important in her text not for the neurochemical reasons why they might have occurred, but because her recovery illustrates the power of God working in her life. Making claims based on knowledge that is outside the text as well as outside the time period may give insight into modern life, and may even give insight into Margery's life, but it does not give insight into her life as she experienced it.

We, as scholars, must interrogate the past without rewriting it. The first step in this is acknowledging that while the beliefs of the past are not the beliefs of the present,

they have not disappeared altogether: “treating belief as a historically distinct sort of cognitive experience enforces on medieval subjects the immediacy to faith that the ‘age of faith’ dreamed of; this scholarly device, far from expelling an exoticized middle ages, swallows it whole.”¹⁷⁰ Denying the importance of belief in the present only serves to overemphasize its importance in the past. And as the questions put to Joan about which side of the Hundred Years War her voices were on show, religious belief was not the sole factor to be considered when evaluating someone’s behavior in the fifteenth century any more than it is in the twenty-first. Politics, nationalism, and a host of other considerations made up the reality of life then, just as they do now.

In the end, the difference between the questions of the past and the questions of the present, may simply be, like holiness, a matter of perception. The space between past and present, even on matters such as skepticism and belief, is not an impenetrable barrier, but a continuum of experience. Julian of Norwich was able to reconcile the promise of her revelation with the teaching of the Church by the realization that each was appropriate to its own time. She came to the understanding that divine time was more complete than human time, but that human time strove toward the fuller understanding of the divine. In this same way, the understanding of the past is also part of the understanding of the present and the people who lived then looked for the most complete understanding possible, just as we do. We are just perceiving things in a different time.

¹⁷⁰ Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 2.

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