

THE LITILLE THINGE THE QUANTITE OF A HASELLE NUTTE
Recovering the Significance of Julian of Norwich's Short Text

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For my family &

For all those who listened and shared moments of the writing process with me: Sara Torres, Elizabeth Alexander, Hasan, Becca, Karl Shuve, Elizabeth Fowler and the students of the Alderman Circulation Desk.

This is a project about voice; thank you for helping me to find the strain present here.

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OPENING THOUGHTS

One of the most recent publications on Julian of Norwich, Amy Laura Hall's *Laughing at the Devil: Seeing the World with Julian of Norwich*, opens its preface with a brief section of "fundamentals a new reader needs to know" about Julian; part of this summary is the typically slim set of dates and facts known about the woman presumed to be the first female author of English (xii). In her lucid prose, Hall writes,

She was born in 1342. She received a series of visions from God in 1373, while she was on what she and others around her thought would be her deathbed. It took Julian two decades to sort out what she first saw when God granted her visions of love and truth. This is the reason we have a Short Text (ST) and a Long Text (LT) describing what she saw. She wrote down her visions soon after she received them (the Short Text) and then took her time to think about how to write what is referred to as the Long Text. It took her years and years to think about the ramifications of what she had seen (xii).

I have placed the above summary here not with the intention of evaluating Hall's work specifically, but simply because Hall's prose so easily and quickly conveys the contemporary story of Julian as author. Specifically, Hall narrates what we regularly assume to be Julian's relationship to her two texts: a woman has an incredible set of experiences, takes up the pen to record it, and years later imbues that naïve record with a great deal of personal reflection, wisdom, and theological argument—and we as readers get to witness that process of self-actualization first hand when we read those two manuscript witnesses. Denys Turner tells this story in a different tone in the preface to his *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, but the fundamentals of the narrative remain the same: "Julian's work in the form of the Short Text is the first writing

in the English vernacular of which we can be sure that its author was female, and I am convinced that the Long Text, written twenty or more years later, is one of the great works of medieval theology in any language by an author of either gender (x).”

As stories go, it's a pretty good one, full of self-discovery, actualization and progress—spiritually, literarily and theologically. I certainly fell in love with it, and as a reader I wanted to experience for myself this intellectual and literary gold in Julian of Norwich's LT. Yet as I heard it invoked again and again, across all manner of sources and arguments about Julian, I began to wonder why it needs to be told, and what we as modern readers and theologians gain when we tell it to ourselves. I became specifically obsessed with the need for this narrative when I opened Watson and Jenkins' 2006 edition of both texts, and at the risk of painting myself as an unusually emotional reader, sat astounded at the beauty, brevity, sheer intellectual and poetic potency of the words of the ST, while being at the same time utterly overtaken by the intimacy of the voice in the ST. It simply wasn't the journal-style record of visionary experiences I had been led to expect. Intuitively, it felt far more akin to some early twentieth-century prose poem, all artless images, symbolism and talk-about-the-divine wrapped in a delicious middle English vocabulary.

The thesis which follows is, as much as anything, a reflection on the above set of intuitions and feelings concerning Julian of Norwich's ST and the value of reading it. Alexandra Barratt, in a 1995 attempt at reconstruction of the readership for Julian's thought, wrote:

...a study of the textual progeny of the revelation of Julian of Norwich...does little to rehabilitate them [the texts]. Rather it tends to support the view that a history of reading is indeed a history of misreading or, more positively, that texts can have an organic life of

their own that allows them to reproduce and evolve quite independently of their author (27).

In her account which follows, Barratt describes how the individuals who read her texts saw in them something of their own pursuits, and as a result have constructed for themselves a woman behind the text who is at turns proto-protestant, proto-catholic modernist, “early ecumenist,” a “Georgian county gentlewoman,” and although Barratt does not use the term, even a *proto-feminist* “woman of letters” (33-35). To assume that the following thesis is at all free from such readerly biases and subjectivities would be naïve; I am likely interested in plumbing how the first female author in English found her voice—how she found the sheer courage I imagine it must have taken for her to write—because I am invested in finding my own voice. I do not intend for this project to deny my own subjectivity as an “author,” such would be a task that Barratt’s summary illustrates is partial, a bit deceptive, and underproductive; for “...textual scholars have a duty to emphasize that our concept of “Julian of Norwich” can be no more than that of a group of texts of obscure and uncertain history” (38). What I do intend for this project to accomplish, by means of close reading in the ST, is to offer the reader a sense of why we tell the story about this pair of manuscript witnesses the way we do. I will do this by attempting to decontextualize that narrative, and give a sense of what a reader could gain by regarding the ST with the same sense of authority, of canon, as the LT.

This decontextualization is approached by two means. First, in Section 1, through a consideration of the medieval understanding of authorship heavily mediated by the work of Mary Carruthers, I highlight the anachronism in imagining the ST as the raw, experiential material that requires revising into the LT, and I sketch the passive concept of authorial agency that this

narrative requires, resulting in a hampered modern reader who readily devalues the ST. Secondly, I argue in Section 2 for a ritualistic structure visible in the ST, as well as the text's use of performative speech to show how the ST interacts with genres and practices akin to it in order to effect experience for the reader. This is part of a broader attempt to show how the ST, however it may define itself as record of visionary experiences, is rhetorically and ritually engaged in producing just such an experience for its reader.

Finally, in Section 3, I describe how the ST uniquely constructs space for the female narrative voice by invocation of symbolically-invested female figures; I compare its use of these symbolic women to similar invocations of them in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—and so relate them to gendered female speech and authority forms. I suggest how such intertextual symbolic relationships may create problems for feminist readings of the ST, in literary or theological modes of study.

This thesis argues that Julian of Norwich's ST has been subject to a story that places it artificially in the guise of a first draft; the ST is a literary and theological effort of its own, witnessed to in a unique manuscript record—British Library MS Additional 37790—whose readership remained largely dormant¹ between its copying in 1435 and a translation into modern English in 1911, and officially in a scholarly edition by Frances Beer 1978 (Watson and Jenkins

¹ Barratt credits the Carthusians with the ST's preservation, noting that the manuscript is one of only two pre-reformation witnesses to Julian's thought (27). Barratt writes of the ST: "Until the nineteenth century...her Short Text was not known at all" (29). For more information on how the Carthusian order compiled the manuscript, and functioned in the middle ages, see Cré. Cré writes that "The manuscript draws us into the Charterhouse rather than showing us how the Charterhouse reached out to the outside world" (49). The ST is however part of an anthology of mystical texts that have become considered classics in current scholarship on mysticism without necessarily having widely circulated in the medieval period (Cré 11). These include Rolle's *Mending of Life* and *Fire of Love*, Jan van Ruusbroec's *Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, and Porète's *Mirror of Simple Soules*, Cré notes that all by Julian's text are translated into middle English (11).

458-461). Such a narrative limits our experience of the text and forecloses an opportunity to read the originary document that the ST represents. The ST presents the thought of Julian of Norwich in a unique argument with distinctive features of other contemporary practices and genres as well symbolic modes unique to this text.

§1 KEEPING WORDS IN MIND: AUTHORITY AND THE SHORT TEXT

To return briefly to the account of Julian-as-author provided by Hall, the narrative that often gets told about the existence of the ST and the LT is one which offers up the LT as a thoughtful expansion of the raw, visionary material recorded in the ST. This narrative carries with it a few assumptions about the act of composition: 1) that the ST is a *record of experience*, a characterization that undermines the text's status as an intellectual or literary piece of art, 2) thus the resulting piece is placed at a distance from the LT, and the agency and choices made by the individual who composed the ST are—while this is rarely stated outright—presumed inferior, almost as though they were akin to the juvenalia of prominent 19th or 20th century authors. The following section seeks to address both assumptions, beginning with the first.

The ST is frequently characterized as an *experiential*² record of Julian's visions. One can find an example of the deployment of the word experience specifically in Barry Windeatt's chapter titled "Julian's Second Thoughts: The Long Text Tradition," a piece that employs as an epigraph a quote from the LT in which the narrator declares, "This boke...is not yet performed, as to my sight" (Windeatt 101). In describing the ST as a means of explaining its presence to readers before focusing on the LT specifically, Windeatt describes the ST as "a narrative self-

²Watson and Jenkins write in the introduction to their edition of Julian's texts: "Altogether more ambitious, *A Revelation* is a full-scale expansion and rewriting of *A Vision*...*A Revelation* is more than four times the length of *A Vision* and shows deep respect for the words and ideas of its predecessor even as it transforms them into something new: a speculative argument, only dimly visible in *A Vision*..." (2). Rebecca June writes "the vast majority of criticism juxtaposes the two, with those comparisons indeed marked by a lack of enthusiasm for the ST in contrast to its longer form" (30). Gillespie describes Julian's prose as follows: "In chapters 83 and 84 of her Long Text, with a hard-won confidence and expository clarity that is the fruit of many years of reflection and rumination on her showings, Julian of Norwich finally presents her 'even-cristen' with the apotheosis of her thinking..." (7). Windeatt writes "*A Vision* had presented a narrative self-account of an experience. In *A Revelation*, however, the unity of a narrative line gives way to the more exploratory continuum of a meditative commentary that foregrounds all the analytical subtleties of a contemplative and theologically informed mind..." the praise continues (102-103).

account of an experience” (102-103). The word experiential carries an Enlightenment connotation of observing something outside one’s self; the OED derives the word from the Latin *experīrī*, meaning to try or put to the test (“experience, n.”). This is not an inherently incorrect way to characterize the ST—the visions described are indeed an account of something which the author/narrator claims to have experienced. The ST manuscript begins, “Here es a vision, shewed...”, in contrast to the outline that begins the LT: “This is a revelation of love...” (line 1, 63; line 1, 123). *Vision* is a more immediately sensory word than *revelation*, which has less of a correspondence to bodily experience, so readers are primed to construct what follows differently. The use of the word *experience* in English is dated by the OED to *Piers Plowman* in 1377 (“Thorw experience..I hope þei shal be saued”), and as such use of the word is contemporary with the composition of the ST (“experience, n.”). Yet there is still that objective, Enlightenment distance in our modern use of the word—it’s a distance that lends credibility, but it can also render the author as a passive entity, someone who *observes* and does not *create*. And thus when readers are told in one source that the ST is “a narrative self-account of an experience” in which other scholars declare that the LT’s “speculative argument, [is] only dimly visible” (Windeatt 102-103, Watson and Jenkins 2), readers are primed to view the ST in a manner that is dismissive, nonconstructive, as will be argued, misrepresentative of the relationship between the two manuscript witnesses.

A reader is at risk of interpreting at face value the modesty topos invoked more prominently in the LT than the ST. The LT’s second chapter opens with, “This revelation was shewed to a simple creature unletterde, living in deadly flesh...” (lines 1-2, 125). By contrast, the first section of the ST begins far more actively with, “I desirede thre graces be the gifte of

God” (line 1, 63). The shift in characterization of the narrator is marked, in the LT the active *I desirede* is replaced by the passive and diminutive *was shewed a simple creature unletterde*. As such when the LT is presented as the more authoritative document, its modesty topos is easily extended outside of those pages and read as truly indicative of the narrator and author’s character rather than as a rhetorical device.³ This can cause the ST to be further dismissed subconsciously as *unlettered* efforts—as, essentially, a first draft.

Highlighting a few points from Mary Carruthers’ *The Book of Memory* about the medieval writing process helps to remedy the misapprehension of the ST, allowing the close reading of the ST that follows to highlight how the ST constructs authority for itself, intending to be read as a free-standing work. The first claim ventured in Carruthers’ chapter on “Memory and authority” is that the writing of a work is in itself an activity of meditation. She characterizes medieval mediation, citing Hugh of St. Victor as a two-part practice made of up of *compositio* and *diviso*: “As division is the mode of reading...so composition—the placing together of pieces laid away by division and marking—is the mode of text-making, what we, imprecisely, call writing” (234). The simple fact of composition makes the ST a far more deliberate and active

³ Patricia Pender devotes an entire volume to an exploration of the modesty *topos* in early modern women’s writing. While our two texts are composed considerably before the early modern period, Pender’s argument, which seeks to look critically at the scholarly tradition that interprets modesty *topoi* as solely evidence of the repression of female authors by a patriarchal society, suggests that these *topoi* are intentional and rhetorically adept moves made by female authors: “...literal readings of women’s modesty tropes rob them of their formal particularity and historical specificity. Reading early modern women’s modesty tropes primarily for their truth-value, moreover, overlooks the ways in which this presentation signifies rhetorically, as *literary*” (3). Pulling these arguments into a comparison of the topos in the ST and LT may illuminate a changing literary scene between the ST and LT compositions which the author must negotiate, or even perhaps a change in register that felt necessary to a compiler, between when these texts were copied (1435 vs. sometime between 1500 and the 1580s, Watson and Jenkins 458). The topos occurs in half a sentence of the LT, but it dramatically shapes the way a reader interprets the narrator’s character, particularly when one has collapsed the division between author and narrator. The story one tells that accounts for these two different texts can further this risk considerably—enlarging the modesty topos’ influence on both texts.

endeavor than an *experiential narrative* reading implies. By writing, the author was engaged in the intellectual, and in this particular case, the religious practice of meditation; a practice in itself too active to be solely described by sensory dependent words like *vision* or *experience*.

The second claim ventured by Carruthers is that all authorial intention is contained within the words of the text. The fact that there was a person prior to the text—an author—with an intent is not how words on a page were thought of in the medieval world. According to Carruthers, “. . . ‘the intention of the speaker as expressed in the letter is the literal sense.’ Consequently there is no extra-textual authorial intention. . .” (235). This is, of course, not how we think about texts and their creation now. We are often interested, in both the fields most interested in Julian’s work—Literature and Religious Studies—in discerning the *intention* of an author at the time of this or that printing, the purpose for which a certain biblical text was composed and used, etc. But if one accepts Carruthers’ claim on the medieval construction of authority and intention, then the relationship between those two concepts is markedly different. There is no authorial entity outside the text—all the evidence one needs is within it. This medieval construction of intention paired with meaning making becomes wonderfully prescriptive for close reading. Using this framework it colors claims about the state of Julian the *author’s* thought with an air of anachronism (such as Gillespie’s claim, “In chapters 83 and 84 of her Long Text, with a hard-won confidence and expositional clarity that is the fruit of many years of reflection and rumination on her showings, Julian of Norwich finally presents her ‘even-cristen’ with the apotheosis of her thinking. . .” 7). An apotheosis within the LT itself can readily be argued for or against, but not so readily for Julian as an independent entity herself. This perspective raises considerable difficulties for those, like myself, interested in Julian for her

remarkable individual qualities—such as her gender and unusual religious vocation. But it does carry with it a measure of precision, in making arguments about extant texts rather than a modern construction of an author which was simply not thought of as an independent entity when the text was composed. This renders the potential *experiential* qualities of the ST as much a piece of art or argument as anything found in the LT—perhaps the experience here is something constructed by the text for the reader, not a record of the inverse.

Lastly, Carruthers suggests that words—those fragments which hold entirely the intent and meaning of the text—can both suggest and conceal the *thing* or *res* of a text. She writes:

The notion that a text has both *res* and *verba* posits the idea or meaning that lies within speech as some sort of construct partly independent of and greater than the words from which it is constructed, and to which the words can serve as a route or guide. There is...an intention of the text which can, and indeed must, be translated from one mind to another and adapted to suit occasions and circumstances. This adaptation was not believed substantially to alter the enduring *res*...which is in a continual process of being understood. Its plenitude of meaning being perfected and completed. The adaptation process, which is the work of interpretive commentary and meditative reading is crucially what makes the public, the authorized text. (235)

The *thingness*, the substance of the text, is only alive in the presence of a reader. That is the only point at which *res* is created. This places particular creative responsibility on readers, not unlike the relationship between the words *music* and *score* for musicians—one's score records the concept of a note pattern, but the sound only exists through an individual's interpretation which expresses itself through their instrument. For the medieval audience, it is we as readers—and the

commentary that a text provokes as part of that process—that fully actualize a text and grant it authority. This is a process that Carruthers characterizes as trans-temporal, making Julian’s readership today as much a part of her status as an author as her texts’ initial reading communities (264).

SEEING KNOWLEDGE

Section 7 of the short text carefully systematizes the forms of sight used to characterize how the divine communicated religious knowledge to the narrator:

Alle this blissede techinge of oure lorde God was shewed to me in thre parties: that is, be bodilye sight, and be worde formede in mine understandinge, and be gastelye sight. Botte the gastelye sight I maye nought ne can nought shewe it unto yowe als oponlye and als fullye as I wolde. Botte I truste in oure lorde God allemighty that he shalle, of his goodnes and for youre love, make yowe to take it mare gastelye mare swetly than I can or maye telle it yowe. lines 1-6, 75

The three “parties,” which I think of as different modes of sight or knowledge, are repeatedly indicated to the reader throughout the text. The ST exercises considerable precision in specifically identifying the means, the channels for knowledge which the divine is using—either bodily, word-in-mind, and gaestly sight.

Bodily sight suggests a form of sight that is or is like physical sight, with images that pass before a mental eye—such as the “plentyouse bleding of the hede [of Christ]” in the start of Section 5 (line 2, 71). It is in this mode that the ST expresses the many literary images which Julian’s writing is known for—such as the hazelnut image in section 4—and is the most literally visual mode (69). While it may seem that *word-in-mind* is a more strictly intellectual form of

knowledge, it too can take on a visual element. In Section 8, the narrator describes being shown words which are without voice or “opening of lippes” but rather “formede in my saule” (79). The reader can imagine an activity of mental reading, in which the words are written visually—formed—in front of the mind. In describing the “omnitemporality in medieval thought,” through which ancient writers were interpreted for the present with a cosmic sense of intellectual continuity, Carruthers notes medieval thinkers’ obsession with text over other artifacts (239-240). She writes; “...only the letters which compose texts can speak (for letters are signs of voices/ words no longer present); only they can be related to the present and future” (240). The ST’s *word-in-mind* mode shares this investment in textuality and words, and the luminous omnitemporality Carruther’s invests words on a page with.

Gaestly sight seems to connote a form of spiritual insight which the narrator will repeatedly say, apophatically, she cannot adequately communicate to her readers. Similarly, how *gaestly sight* works or functions here is held a little beyond the reader’s comprehension. The word *gaste* is glossed by Michigan’s *Middle English Compendium* with a variety of meanings—from ghost, spiritual being, spiritual force or sod’s breath, to the more metaphysical notions of prophecy and spiritual insight (“gōst n.”). The thing or *res* of this mode of knowledge is concealed, unsaid, or more crucially to the ST’s turn of phrase—un-showable.

These three modes occur continuously throughout the ST, signaled repeatedly with phrases identical or very similar to those systematized in section 7. A table and chart showing the frequency of these signal phrases per section appears in the Appendix. Overall, *bodily sight* is signaled 17 times in the ST, *word-in-mind* 22 times and *gaestly sight* 17 times. Given the

precedent to develop a hierarchy of knowledge forms in other contemplative medieval works⁴, it is tempting to interpret the ST's modes of knowledge hierarchically as well. For instance, constructing contemplative progress from bodily knowledge to intellectual and finally spiritual knowledge due to the fields of meaning associated with the Middle English words. Yet as the charts in the Appendix illustrate visually, there is no distinct reliance on any one mode as the ST progresses through the visions. Rather, all modes are used repeatedly, and frequently layered upon one another. All information channels, as it were, remain open simultaneously throughout the ST. An example of this can be found in section 4, as a preface to the passage in which the narrator is shown the world as a little thing the size of a hazelnut: "And this same time that I saw this bodily sight, our lord shewed me a gastelye sight of his hamly loving" (lines 1-2, 69).

These are continuous channels for the vision of the ST.

The modes of sight contribute in two primary ways to the sense of authority in the ST. Firstly they function as a sort of divine citation—they tell the reader exactly how the ST located this information intellectually. In section 23, the narrator recapitulates the system laid out in section 7:

⁴ From the Prologue to Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*: "I meditated on the ascent of the mind to God...the vision namely of the winged Seraph in the likeness of the Crucified....For by those six wins are rightly to be understood the six stages of illumination by with the soul, as if by steps or progressive movements, was disposed to pass into peace by ecstatic elevations of Christian wisdom" (3-4). From Richard of St. Victor's *Mystical Ark*: "It seems to me that the character of contemplation varies in three ways. Sometimes it effects an enlarging of the mind, sometimes a raising, and sometimes an abstraction of the mind.... In the first degree, we build an ark as it were, by our own labor when we acquire the art of contemplation by our own effort and zeal. In the second degree, just as the arks lifted on the shoulders of the bearers and follows the traces of the preceding cloud, so by our assiduous efforts and the grace of revelation co-operating as if it were going before, the ray of contemplation broadens. In the third degree, the ark is placed in the Holy of Holies and set as it were, inside the veil; so the point of the contemplatives understand is drawn into the inmost septa of the mind and is secluded from memory of external things by the veil of forgetting and abstraction...." (Book 5, Chapter 2).

Alle the blissede teching of oure lorde God was shewed to me be thre parties as I hafe saide before: that es to say, be bodely sight, and be worde formed in min understandinge, and by gastelye sight. For the bodely sight, I haffe saide as I saw, als trewlye as I can. And for the wordes fourmed, I hafe saide tham right as oure lorde shewed me thame. And for the gastely sight, I hafe said somdele, bot I maye never fully telle it. And therfore of this gastely sight I am stirred to say more, as God wille gife me grace.

lines 49-55, 115

A sometimes word for word repetition of the paragraph cited above, with a tense shift, this passage emphasizes the divine source of this text's authority. If there is no authorial intention prior to a text—as Carruthers argues—emphasis on the forms of sight retains the mediating letter of the narrator (the paragraph above uses *I* eight times) while making intellectual distance between the thing or content of the text and that narrator. In other-words, in layering the visual metaphors over and over again, the reader forgets what to modern readers would be the originary source—the author. One is instead, by repetition, placed in an abstract landscape whose sole creator and author of information is the divine. Were the ST to be a linear, journal-like *narrative self-account of an experience*,⁵ why is the reader so deliberately and repeatedly asked to put distance between themselves and their mediator when it communicates visionary content? With the exception of moments where this sight-system is not used, when we get the most *experiential* details about the narrator's illness (Section 2) and her encounter with fiends (Section 23), the reader is encouraged through visual metaphor to forget the self of this narrator (65-67, 113). The reader is also suspended above temporality, oscillating between the modes of knowledge easily

⁵ In the vein of Thoreau's *Walden* perhaps—although I think most readers would insist such a published journal has a clear argument.

for the sake of discovering layered meanings which one moment of ‘vision’ or another may contain. The language of the ST is incredibly additive—the word *and* is used with great frequency⁶—and it contributes to this oscillating focus, like an SLR camera lens smoothly zooming in and out, in which an all is visible or knowable without the need for distinct temporality or particularity.⁷

What I have been taught to find authoritative in modern literature is the experience of the self. As a reader, I tend to value the perceived authenticity of a unique voice, or accounts of personal experiences. But if we accept Carruthers’ perspective, this is not what the medieval reader found authoritative. Through repetitive visual metaphors, the ST is making readers continuously aware of an omnitemporal knowledge source. And it is on this “source” that this text builds its authority: it carefully shows the *res* of text, by repeatedly marking its divine origin.

Relying on visual metaphors—and the literary images which follow—also provides the ST with an important persuasive tool. Carruthers describes the use of images in oration, citing Quintilian on the importance of images that bring what is absent before the listener’s mind’s eye (254). Through images, “the orator is moved and thus is enabled to move others. The purpose of such images is not description but persuasion” (254). This cuts directly to the kind of misreading of the ST that its classification as an experiential narrative constitutes. The text’s reliance on describing the process of seeing, on portraying the images that resonate even with readers today (the world in the palm of one’s hand, the copiously bleeding Christ, the blood drying on Christ’s pained face) is not a failure of argumentation as comparisons between the ST and LT do

⁶ Seven of Twenty-three sections begin with “and”, as well as many, many paragraphs.

⁷ In my reading experience, this sort of narrative voice is most readily associated with 20th century prose, such as the novels of Virginia Woolf, in which symbols and images connect a work, rather than anything especially temporal or plot driven.

occasionally imply. It is a mode of persuasion—a tool of argument. *Seeing* is a form of knowledge by which a reader can be persuaded.

This can be illustrated through a passage in which the ST narrator describes an entity from which the power of vision is withheld.

A wriched sinne! Whate ert thowe? Thowe er nought. For I sawe that God is alle thinge: I sawe nought the. And when I sawe that God hase made alle thinge, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe that God is in alle thinge, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe that God does alle thinge that is done, lesse and mare, I sawe the nought. And when I sawe oure lorde Jhesu sit in oure saule so wyrshipfully, and luff and like and rewle and yeme all that he has made, I sawe nought the. And thus I am seker that thowe erte nought.

lines 23-29, 113

Found in section 23, to my first reading the above served as significant climax. The force of having the knowledge mode of vision denied to the concept of sin—after 22 sections of being told what one could see, could bear witness to—was considerable. And the contrast is sharp when compared to other medieval works, most famously perhaps being Dante's *Inferno*, in which sin is given such painstakingly expansive imaginative space. Vision—and with it a knowledge of, incarnation of sin—is utterly denied the concept of sin here; and this is achieved eloquently with the repetition of a single phrase, *I saw nought thee*. It is difficult to see a text with that much rhetorical potency as one in which a *speculative argument* is only dimly visible.

PREPARING AND DIRECTING THE CONTEMPLATIVE GAZE

It was argued in the previous section that a visual hermeneutic linked the ST to an omnitemporal, divine authority. There are also instances in which the events of the text derive authority for the

text on the literal level—through the actions it narrates. Carruthers argues that literary composition was an act of meditation, and so it is of interest to note how the “action” of the ST’s vision begins. Meditation, as a practice, is as much about physical preparation as mental preparation; just as reading and composition were associated with digestion. Setting aside the very important preparation the narrator undergoes in praying for an illness, let us focus on two less dramatic elements of physical preparation. The first is the posture the narrator takes in her illness—lying down: “God sent me a bodelye sykenes in the whilke I laye thre dayes and thre nightes...” (lines 1-2, 65). Carruthers cites accounts of Aquinas, Anselm and of a student in the writing of Quintillian as depicting a thinking individual lying down: “Such physical accompaniment of *cogitare* are apparent in all the accounts of composition, prostration being its common posture....It is a position designed to shut out external stimuli, especially visual ones, which would serve to confuse or distract one’s recollective eye...” (248-249). Section 2 of the ST depicts the narrator as lying down for three days and nights. During this time she is administered the last rites, preparing her for what her peers think will be a more permanent transition. She does not remain in this position, but given the associations with *cogitare* which Carruthers suggested this is both indicative of physical illness and mental preparation. By assuming this posture the narrator is readying herself for an intellectual activity—for meditation. In depicting this the ST is recording the authoritative mode in which it was composed.

Next, also within section 2, the narrator’s posture is shifted slightly and her curate has been sent for. The curate “brought a crosse, and be thane I hadde sette mine eyen and might nought speke” (lines 21-22, 65-67). The curate placing it before her face asks her to “Loke theropon,” contrary to her expectation: “Methought than that I was welle, for mine eyen ware

sette upwarde into hevene, whether I trustede for to come. Botte neverthelesse I assended to sette mine eyen in the face of the crucifixe..." (lines 23-26, 67). At this point her sight surrounding the cross fails, and her vision is focused gently on the light emitted by the cross. The narrator's gaze had been misdirected—toward heaven rather than the cross—and a figure representing the church was required to correct it. It is not as if a reader can broadly assume that the figure of the curate can wholly place the authority of the church beneath what follows in the ST, but the institution is required to both administer the last rites and point the narrator in the proper direction so that she might gain access to what will be the contents of her text. Church authority thus frames the ST, directs it, without underwriting the ST entirely. The figure of the curate represents a mediatory function for both the narrator as a character and for the contents of the ST.

Much later, the narrator—and, one might infer the content of the ST—is tested bodily by the presence of a fiend in Section 23:

...the fende com againe with his heete and with his stinke, and made me fulle besye. The stinke was so vile and so painfulle, and the bodely heete also dredfulle and travailous.

And also I harde a bodely jangelinge and a speche, as it hadde bene of two bodies, and bathe to my thinking jangled at anes, as if thay had haldene a parlimente with grete

besines.

lines 1-5, 113

Besye is a word which the Middle English Compendium glosses with *gaze*, *scrutinize*, *contemplate attend too*, and the like ("bisēn, v."). The narrator here is being bombarded with a multi-voiced, odiferous and heated presence—attended and scrutinized by multiple entities. An abundance of overwhelming senses are at work here—sound, touch, smell—all while vision is suspended. It is this episode that leads to the set of *I saw nought thee* statements. Parliament, and

otherwise this-worldly forms of conversation, governance, and bureaucracy are equally invoked. This host of temptations—which the narrator believes are designed to turn her to despair—are resisted by setting her gaze on the same cross invoked at the start (line 11, 113). She also occupies herself with “rehersinge of the faith of the haly kyrke” (line 12-13, 113). The narrator’s gaze does not waver, and with it, the *res* of the ST remains derivative of a divine source, continuously reliant on sight to describe knowledge, undiluted as it were by a kind of multi-sensory source.

There is an interest, at the start of the ST, in bodily readiness—posture, gaze and physical illness all aid in the ST’s pursuit of knowledge and play a significant role in section 2. The return to interest in the body is made in section 23, creating a mirror across the ST’s 25 sections, documenting how the body receives and transmits information. The narrator’s whole body becomes a medium for the reception and testing the moment of knowing.

Broadly, there are three components used by the ST to construct its authority. Its text is saturated with visual language that simultaneously and repeatedly invokes a divine source while being deployed as a rhetorical tool intent on persuading readers. Secondly, the events of the ST link the narrator to the authority of the church and to meditative intellectual preparations. The narrator is additionally subjected to a trial by a fiend, which addresses doubts by means of enfolding them into the body and senses of the narrator. Lastly, part of a medieval text’s authority is enfolded with a text’s readership, and its ability to generate further thought and composition. The activity of composition and reading engaged with here is thus—according to medieval understanding—part of performing the authority of the ST.

§2 READERS AND RITUAL: PERFORMATIVITY AND THE SHORT TEXT

Literary firsts are a common subject of interest, culturally and within scholarship—the first edition of a book of poetry, the earliest witness of a long-canonized text, etc., are frequently the subject of many a loving close-read. As Rebecca June argues in her article “Reassessing Gender in the Course of Julian’s Short Text,” one of the most marked inversions of scholarship on the work and thought of Julian of Norwich is the privileging of the LT over the ST—she writes: “... the reiterated preference for the LT is a bit surprising, particularly in fields which have long given prominence to originary texts and more recently stressed individual redactions when examining forces at play in textual production” (30). It is quite typical, for example, to examine the earliest known edition of a Shakespeare play, and consider it all the more *Shakespearian* for its earliness, the accuracy of its printing, or some other accepted measure of authenticity. This section attempts to counter-balance the presence of the LT as the capstone work of the first known female author in English, and consider the ST for the astonishing originary text it is.

In keeping this project’s focus on text rather than author, this section asks how this earliest witness to the practice of female authorship in English—where a text self-consciously performs the gendered identity contiguous with its author—attempted to make an entrance into conversation. An answer is pursued by two means, the first is by considering a ritualistic structure within the ST, and second by considering acts of performative speech within the ST.

CONNECTING WITH READERS THROUGH RITUAL

In his book *Drama, Fields and Metaphors* Victor Turner forwards a schematization of *rites de passage* by Arnold van Gennep (231). Van Gennep identifies three states within the actions of a given ritual: *separation*, *margin* and *reaggregation*. Separation encompasses the symbolic

activity that divides the individual from a specific state of identifiable social circumstances (Turner 232). Margin is a space that resists boundaries and definition, and thus can prove quite generative and creative. On the other side of the space of margin is separation's inverse; symbolic reaggregation. Symbolic reaggregation occurs when the individual who has undergone the rite of passage is returned into the social structure, frequently with a change of social role (232). Concretely, coming of age rituals most readily illustrate this process, for a person might enter a ritual as a child and come out as an adult community member (examples might be confirmation in the Christian tradition, or graduation in secular contexts). Many, if not most, rituals evoke such transitions and can produce an upward or downward change in the participant's social status (232). Rites of Passage can involve the figurative death of the subject as they are at the start and conclude with a figurative re-birth with new definition (53). In between *separation* and *reaggregation* is the state of *margin*, which may be described as *liminal*—this is the concept which Turner is especially interested in, writing:

“During the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the “passenger” or “liminar”) becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state” (232).

Elsewhere, Turner characterizes liminality further, “...liminality may imply solitude rather than society, the voluntary or involuntary withdrawal of an individual from a social-structural matrix” (52). Turner's concept of liminality describes a space that *resists* definition and is extra-societal but ultimately serves a greater societal purpose.

The text of the ST itself is not a rite of passage or an enacted ritual like those which Turner's writing describes; Turner analyzes contemporary ritual practices which are embodied in a way a text cannot be. Considering that the ST records a ritual-like⁸ experience is also somewhat immaterial if the reader has accepted the relationship between authority and text explored in Section 1—it may well be quite valid in another context, just not in the text-exclusive exercise at work here, solely concerned with the text and that which is created by it. What does become important to consider is the extent to which the ST invokes a ritual form as a rhetorical device or mode of persuasion.

Due to the ST's brevity, it becomes possible to schematize it according to the rite of passage which Turner described—demonstrating how the ST integrates ritual into the structure of the text. For Turner, separation is the ritual state that symbolically marks the ritual subject as distinct from *identifiable social circumstances*. This is how the ST opens—the narrator begins with the active verb “I desirede,” distinctly marking her writing with the statements of her goals for her religious experience:

I desirede a bodilye sight, wharein I might have more knowinge of bodelye paines of oure
 lorde oure savioure, and of the compassion of oure ladye, and of alle his trewe loverse
 that were belevande his paines that time and sithene....And this was my meninge: for I
 wolde after, because of that shewinge, have more trewe minde in the passion of Criste.

lines 12-19, 63

⁸ The visionary experience of the author, to the extent one can imagine it through the ST, is entered ritualistically; marrying the familiar gestures and authorities involved in last rites with the unpredictability Turner finds inherent in a rituals liminality. The concept of ritual to my understanding also carries with it an kind of replicability, it is a practice; it seems to me that it would be very difficult for a reader to construct “the real” ritual experience behind the ST, and doing so is tangential to the concerns here. Considering the text itself to produce a rite of passage for the reader is less so, as it could be considered a rhetorical effect of the text, but this avenue is not explored here.

While the narrator draws on common religious symbols—the passion, Christ, Mary, and (a few lines before the quote above) Mary Magdalene, she is marking off a distinct set of religious musings which fulfill her own spiritual goals. It is for her own sake that she desires *a true mind of the passion*—not for a community or any larger entity. What will later become a vision for all, her *even-christian* is not yet given such a universal purpose. Her spiritual fulfillment has been made distinct. *Desirede* has, according to the Middle English Compendium, a fairly similar meaning to the word’s modern valences. The most unusual resonance for the word is perhaps in a mid-1400’s use of the word to indicate God’s will or a commandment—but as the section opens with the sentence “I desirede thre graces be the gifte of God,” in which the divine’s gifts are the object of the narrator’s desire, the connotation of commandment can be ruled out here (“desīr, n.”; line 1, 63).

The intention for her bodily experience set, the narrator proceeds deeper into her illness over about five days. She is administered the last rites and experiences a loathing of death (lines 1-8, 65). Yet she “endurede tille daye,” at which point her “bodye dede fra the middes downwarde, as to my felinge” (lines 16-17, 65). The body and with it the capacity for normal earthly, sensations are slowly dying. The distance between the narrator and her surroundings grows when her curate provides her with a cross to view: “After this my sight begane to faile, and it was alle dyrke aboute me in the chaumber, and mirke as it hadde bene night, save in the image of the crosse...” (lines 29-30, 67). The sense of her detachment is so great that she believes she has “bene deliverede of this worlde” by the section’s end (lines 41-42, 67). It is this separation that enables the narrator to have the first vision—“sodeynlye come unto my minde” (line 1, 67).

Her community believes her to be nearly dead, and so the ST allows its narrator untouched by her worldly circumstances, bodily experiences or sensations, to journey into the undefined, liminal space of margin. This is where the narrator remains for the bulk of the ST. As the visions are witnessed, explained, and narrated over sections 3-20, the plot allows its narrator to remain in this state. Only in section 10 are earthly presences felt when the narrator's mother attempts to close her eyes, as she believes her daughter to be dead or to have just died (lines 26-28, 83). The gesture is used not to disrupt the flow of events, but almost as a catalyst for the narrator's understanding of the pain she is experiencing in conjunction with an understanding of the passion. The final sentence of section 22 makes a transition out of the space of margin, and the visions cease: "And sone efter alle was close, and I sawe na mare" (lines 36-37, 113).

Turner finds that reaggregation, the final stage of a rite of passage, is used to reestablish one in the social system from which one was initially separated. This can be seen as the project of sections 21-25 of the ST. In section 21, following the "failinge of gastelye felinge," the narrator speaks with "a religiouse person" (line 5-6, 109). While the narrator is believed by this individual, she experiences doubts as to whether a priest would be able to believe her account. Other community members also return to the narrative—as they sit alongside and comfort her as she begins to encounter fiends. Section 22 returns the narrator to the visionary state, briefly to provide some comfort, and then the visions truly close. As discussed in some detail in Section 1, section 23 is devoted to describing a period in which the narrator experiences trial by fiends (113-115). And the remaining two sections dissect the realizations which those interactions provoke. The narrator is now thinking and interacting with the world she left in the first place;

while there is no specific personal reassignment within the social structure, the narrator no longer remains outside of it.

There is also a verbal shift that occurs in section 24. Rather than the singular “I” and “me” which the readers have grown so accustomed to encounter in the voice of the ST, this section employs fifteen uses of the word “we,” seven uses of “us,” and multiple instances of the plural possessive pronoun “oure,” the phrase *men and women* twice, as well as other plural referents. Grammatically, the scope of the ST has enlarged, its voice speaks for the collective. These are lessons on the nature of sin for humanity, or as the final lines of section 25 has it, for “oure evencristen” (line 34, 119). The ST has made the grammatical transition from the singular, individual spiritual goals cued by the text’s opening phrase (*I desirede*), to one which makes more universalizing statements and purposes—it has reaggregated that which was originally made distinct.

A counter-example here lies in the section 6—quite early in the ST’s account—in which the narrator declares her meaning to be not relevant only for herself, but for all:

Alle that I saye of myselfe, I meene in the persone of alle mine evencristene, for I am
lernede in the gastelye shewing of our lorde that he meenes so....And ye that heres and
sees this vision and this techinge that is of Jhesu Criste to edification of youre saule, it is
Goddess wille and my desire that ye take it with als grete joye.... lines 1-9, 73

The larger, universal, purpose of the text is communicated here, but the universal is not yet achieved grammatically. It is not *our* and *us*, but *mine* and *you*. The reader is caught in conversation with the narrator. The text is grammatically dependent on the I of the narrator, and the tradition of reaggregation within the ST must wait.

The ST makes this ritual structure more readily apparent than the LT, even though the same sort of ritual—the same “experience”—is enacted in the LT. For the LT has been expanded, or fortified as perhaps some would have it, with the parable of Lord and Servant, an account of Christ as Mother and many other alterations. There is much thought and content to distract the reader from something like a ritual structure present in the LT.

The introduction to Watson and Jenkins’ excellent edition of the two texts frames the brevity of the ST in the following way: “Bold, movingly written, and full of interest though it is, coherent though it is about the “comforthe” it claims God wants to offer its readers (*Vis* 6.7), *A Vision* still labors under the weight of all it has wanted to say and, for whatever reason, cannot” (2). Understanding the ST through the lens of a ritual offers a way of observing the same difference but asking the inverse question: What does the ST stand to gain from *not saying* quite so much? Brevity, as much as detail, can be a distinct choice—*not saying* as intentional as the *act of saying*.

One thing brevity gains for the ST is an awareness of the ritual structure of the text itself. Rather than simply being the artifact of a ritual experience, the ST leads the reader through an aural rite of passage. One is enveloped by an all-encompassing *I* voice, held suspended in the liminal and visionary space of margin in which the reader is utterly dependent on a single information source, before being gently recontextualized into the present with words like *we* and the more commonplace associations (for the medieval reader at least) of bodily illness paired with the presence of a fiend. If readers are more ready to describe the ST as an experiential text it may be due to the fact that that is what the text offers readers; and the production of *experience* becomes a deliberate act of authorial intention, not a matter of record keeping.

The ritualistic structure of the ST gives the text persuasive power by building a common experience between reader and narrator, as well as building on a structure—from separation to margin to reaggregation—that would have felt commonplace and natural to a readerly audience saturated with religious ritual practice. In other words, by constructing the familiar ritual benchmarks of separation and reaggregation, the ST is able to effectively offer new information in the less defined space of margin while still bearing the authority found in the common associations of a ritual space. What a ritual structure also allows the text is an ability to take advantage of the undefined portion right at the heart of ritual, the liminal space of margin. The status of Turner's ritual subject becomes in between roles, without social classification while inside a largely symbolic state (232). This is precisely the sort of freedom-in-symbol, an extra-societal, anchoritic, otherworldly freedom, which the author of the ST must have required to pen the first known work of female authorship in English.

In work on the manuscript that contains the ST, Marleen Cré finds the ST to be significantly reincarnating the genre of devotional passion narrative. Considering the text as part of the British Library MS Additional 37790's own unique "constellation of texts," Cré notes that it is the only one to employ the passion narrative (102, 100). Cré explains that in contemplative practice the passion was used as a conventional way to catalyze meditation, but was considered entry level as "lasting visuals of the Passion narrative halts spiritual growth," and so most authors would mention it in passing (109). The ST by contrast returns to it four times, without the kind of intense physical experience of it usually found, and because of this intellectual rather than bodily engagement with the passion, the ST pulls the devotional practice into the realm of the mystical (Cré 111-113). Cré argues that the ST "integrates" meditation on the Passion with

confessional realization—thus causing “devotional practice [to be] transcended and lifted up into mystical union” (113). This later translates into the ST serving “...an important performative function for the readers, who should read it as God’s message to them, and not just to Julian” (121). The ST is pulling readers’ shared contemplative and devotional⁹ practices to bear through images and specifically presented content to create a liminal experience intent on persuading readers to change the state of their relationship with the divine. Based on Cré’s argument, the ST is also manipulating the existing genres from which it came to achieve something new.

BUILDING RITUAL SPACE THROUGH THE LIMINAL LANGUAGE OF LIGHT

As the summary of Cré above illustrates, there are many avenues to consider how the ST uses the liminal space it constructs. There is also the avenue of the language around perception which has already been discussed in part in section 1. The knowledge metaphors deployed by the ST are exclusively visual, perception and seeing or being shown invested with repeated notions of witness and belief. Because of this dependence on making clear *what has been seen*, I think it is fair to suggest that a reader should expect a text invested in description, in showing by visually *describing*. And as sight is the chosen sense, light and color might be expected to be rendered in detail—these are, after all, *visions*.

Vincent Gillespie argues for the presence and theological import of light and color across the LT. In his essay, “The Colors of Contemplation,” he writes:

⁹ For more on devotional literature as a mode of access for women spiritually, see Sauer, Michelle M. “Devotional Literature” *The History of British Women’s Writing, 700-1500*, ed Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane West, Palgrave, 2012.

Julian's relatively sparse use of light imagery in the early sections of the Long Text is part of her hermeneutic of illumination, her transit through the shadows and colors of the postlapsarian world, through the lumen of faith and prayer and, by special grace, towards the unmediated, unrefracted and unreflected lux of God himself... There is less light in the early showings because she is still far from the delight and delectation that she eventually achieves in the final rhapsodic hymn of praise... (28).

For Gillespie, light is a fundamental theological concept, and represents a kind of knowledge which is revealed in greater and greater detail—by the LT's progression from dark earthy and suffering-associated colors to the sheer luminescence of divinity. There is, less elegantly put, a visual progress narrative that runs throughout the LT. Gillespie argues as well for this kind of hermeneutic's theological traction in the time period, drawing on, among others, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* (10-11). A hermeneutic of illumination is, for Gillespie, one of the key ways in which the LT participates in theological and metaphysical conversations of its time.

I have been unable however to observe any such hermeneutic in the ST.¹⁰ For a text so dependent and constructed by words of perception, there is remarkably little physical light described. The visions begin with alternating of the day and night as the entrance into the liminal state. This alternation most immediately indicates time passing, while the narrator's health deteriorates. But there is an emphasis placed on the events during the night—it is at night that the narrator receives the rites of the church, when she wonders if she will live until day, and when those around her wonder if she is still alive (65). Where day might be expected to bring illumination, the light of day is elided into the events and perceptions of the night. Visual clarity

¹⁰ See the Appendix for a few linear regressions that analyze how language about sight (rather than color) is employed across the ST.

is not to be had as a typical perception of light and time eludes the narrator. It is not until further into Section 2 that a form of light appears; this occurs when the narrator sets her gaze on the cross. What had previously been all dark, murky, and nocturnal as her physical sight is failing is met by a miraculous “comon light” held within the image of the cross (line 31, 67). This is not the startling bright light that one might associate with a divine entrance into human perception, rather this is a gentle, quieting focusing ray that refrains from startling its observer, rather it focuses and guides.

The ST is using light differently from other texts, while maintaining the associations of the visual with knowing and the realm of the intellectual. And as the vision begins the disorienting, sickening alternation between night and day also ceases. Section 25, a section that in part exists as an admonition or warning about various types of fear presents a different and less comforting instance of light. An “ille spirit” is described as “faire” and as coming “undere the coloure” of a “goode angelle” (lines 26-27, 119). The brightness of this faux angel is deceptive and blinding, distorting even. Gone is the soft yet accurate illumination provided by the cross of Section 2. Light in the ST provides necessary illumination, but the quality of one’s encounter with it determines the extent to which it may help or harm. Too bright a light is mistrusted, and thus the dark seems all the better to see with.

Language that surrounds sight takes center stage in the text, to the point at which the reader is ready to mentally construct what is seen to a greater detail than the text in reality describes it. The concept of perception is overdetermined to the degree that the reader thinks they have been shown more than they actually have seen. Light is both distorting and illuminating while darkness has its quieting, refining benefits as well. It seems that imagery of light and dark

in the ST deconstructs the positive and negative associations with each other, eluding definition like the liminal state. The text instead resists the definition of descriptive language while simultaneously gaining the persuasive power and authority that comes from the objective distance produced by seeing rather than feeling—it's the best of both worlds, apophatic and cataphatic renditions of divine knowledge at once. The content of the text is communicated without the crassness or inaccuracy of dramatic visualizations¹¹, demonstrating the ST's remarkable restraint, as well as the unusual theological traction and balance a liminal space creates.

PERFORMATIVE SPEECH IN THE SHORT TEXT

Turning to a second mode of understanding how the ST made an entrance into English literature, this portion considers the role of performative speech in the ST. The *performative* is a concept developed in the philosopher J.L. Austin's 1955 lectures "How to Do Things with Words."

Austin defines performative speech as the sort of speech that creates or incarnates the act which an utterance indicates. After giving examples of performative speech acts such as wedding vows, or the language of making a bet, christening, etc, Austin writes: "In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (6). Put a bit differently, Austin's performative speech is a sort of speech that *is* the action it invokes. Austin elaborates on his choice of the word performative to define this category of speech as follows: "[the name] indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an

¹¹ See section 1, footnote number 4 for an account of Richard of St. Victor's "Mystical Ark" as well as Bonaventure's set of 6 contemplative seraph's wings. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* culminates in the contemplative imagining himself as a one of the Cherubim (41). Elaborate visualizations of entities outside common experience are required for the contemplative flourishing of these thinkers.

action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (6-7). Austin will later contrast *performative* speech with *constative* speech, or speech that is simply a statement that declares something to be the case, and could be true or false (6).

For our purposes here, I interpret Austin’s definition of constative speech as speech that observes or defines—constitutes what is happening, if you will—but it does not enact what it says. It only states it. I interpret Austin’s definition of performative speech as the occurrence of speech acts that are at one with action: quite literally it seems they are *acts*. Later in the lectures Austin will collapse the distinction he made between performative and constative speech in various ways, but for the sake of the experiment here I am keeping the original distinction between performative and constative speech.

In her essay on “Language and Authority in Julian of Norwich’s Showings,” Kathleen Smith argues for the important role of what she terms *incantation* in Julian’s writings (170). These are the phrases—like the popularly known “And all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well” quoted by T.S. Eliot—which get culturally disseminated as the invocation¹² of Julian’s thought (171). They are phrases which, according to Smith, highlight “the affinities of poetic language and religious thought” (171). Smith finds that these sorts of phrases are placed directly after a more logic-oriented theological discussion in Julian’s writing; Smith writes of the *all shall be well* phrase: “[it] functions as the final word on a complex ontological discussion, the troubling subject matter of which proves difficult for Julian to resolve” (173).

¹² Smith begins with T.S. Eliot’s quotation of “all shall be well” at the end of *Four Quartets*, and continues with other popular references to the phrase emblazoned on mugs and used in contemporary iconography of Julian (185-186). While acknowledging the role of marketing in some of these uses, Smith finds that the use of the phrases “equally suggest the central role of the incantation in the Showings” as well as the role the phrase and the place of Norwich play in modern English nationalism (186).

The term *incantation* is defined by the OED as “a formula of words spoken or chanted to produce a magical effect; the utterance of a spell or charm” (“incantation, n.”). It is an utterance that is intended to produce an effect, in which pronouncing it is an *act*. Incantation can be read as performative, as speech which is action. Rather than framing the use of these phrases as the less-logical book-end supplied to diffuse material that the reader or author has difficulty processing, I would like to read them as a moment of action. The reason they reverberate so clearly for readers today—that they seem aurally luminous, alive and ‘magic’ as it were—is precisely because they are so active.

The example of such a phrase that attracted Smith’s attention in what is likely the LT is found in section 13 of the ST, as a quotation attributed to Christ: “‘Botte alle shall be wele, and alle maner of thinge shalle be wele.’ Thies wordes ware shewed wele tenderlye, shewande na manere of blame to me, na to nane that shalle be safe’ (lines 61-63, 93). Considering this to be a performative utterance underscores the ST’s ability to transmit an active, creative voice of the divine. The notion of performative utterance fits with how the ST presents this phrase—*thies wordes ware shewed*—as an instance of the word-in-mind form of knowledge. The words are almost living entities, pieces of knowledge that act upon the narrator; in the consumption of words that is reading, they act on the reader to assist in the performance of the rite of passage.

A performative utterance of this kind is earlier described in the ST. In section 8, while the narrator is witnessing the passion, the following occurs: “And than was...formede in my saule this worde: “Herewith is the feende overcomen.” This worde saide our lorde menande his passion, as he shewed me before.” (lines 30-33, 79). This utterance is again attributed to the divine, and has the same performative word-in-mind effect on the narrator as the more famous

phrase discussed above. But it is also a performative utterance in the context of the passion itself. It is through this act, within the moment of speaking that phrase, that the ST renders Christ carrying out the ritual at the center of western Christianity.

A few paragraphs further, the narrator must again say—must enact—what this vision has shown her:

And after this, I felle into saddehete, and saide: “I see thre thinges: game, scorne, and arneste. I see game, that the feende is overcomen. And I see scorne, that God scornes him, and he shalle be scornede. And I see arneste, that he es overcomen be the passion ofoure lorde Jhesu Criste, and be his dede that was done ful erneste and with sadde travaile.

lines 48-52, 79

What the above demonstrates is the close affinity between seeing, belief and action in the ST.

The three concepts are compacted into that powerful verb. Even while the narrator has recorded the words that were shown her a few paragraphs before—and what those words enacted—she must reenact, restate, and thus perform them to authentically record their impact.

Much later in the ST, following some musing on prayer and the mistakes made by those attempting prayer, Christ is given the following: “And alle this broughtoure lorde sodaynlye to my minde...and saide: ‘I am grounde of thy beseking. First it is my wille that thowe hafe it, and sene I make the to will it, and sene I make the to beseke it—and thowe beseke it!’ (lines 17-20, 103). Watson and Jenkins gloss the word beseke as ask, but as it so close to the *seek*, it seems to also have a connotation beyond petition, and to invoke the kind of journey making that seeking and questing implies. Prayer here is constructed as a performative act, which is enriched and given meaning by putting the divine at the center of this action, as the “ground” of the

performance—summed up in the incantational, performative phrase “thou beseke it” (line 42, 103).

Another phrase of this kind is put forth in section 22, in which the narrator is being comforted and readied for the presence of the fiend; “Thow shalle nought be overcomen” (line 28, 111). This is put to performative use by the narrator (rather than the divine, breaking the greater pattern in the ST) in the following section when she declares that she has scorned the fiend and thus it is overcome—through re-invocation of the phrase used by Christ at the passion (lines 21-22, 113).

The use of performative speech in the ST casts the ST in a very active, declaratory light. It is for these phrases that Julian’s writing is most frequently remembered in popular culture—as Smith demonstrated—and attention to and their role in the work as a whole helps us to understand this witness to Julian’s thought.¹³ These performatives play a role in enacting a ritual experience or rite of passage for the reader. The ST is not something that labors under the weight of all that it has been somehow prevented from saying—an entity which scholarship must rescue and rehabilitate to discover its covert meaning—it is a text that chooses to pithily enact its meaning. To revert to Austin’s example of performative speech in wedding vows, the ST is a text that chooses to enact vows rather than describe those vows being made. As explored previously in the use of light imagery and visual terms, the ST is a text which on the whole eschews description. It favors action and active forms of speech.

¹³ Shelia Fisher exercises a different perspective on authority and female speech; raging that the idea concept of ventriloquism, or finding voice through ready-made authority figures was a necessity for female speech; she focuses on Julian’s ventriloquism of Christ. An area of further study would be a comparison between ventriloquism and performative speech. The phrases Fisher highlights as examples of ventriloquism are those I argue are instances of the performative (221).

§3 I SHALLE MAKE ALLE THINGE WELE: SPACE, SYMBOL AND VOICE IN THE SHORT TEXT

Laura Miles' essay on the use of space in the work of both Julian of Norwich and Bridget of Sweden finds the authorship of these women to be dependent on the construction of different architectures—arguing that the texts and thought they produced were intimately connected to the spaces, physical and social, which the female authors occupied in society. To summarize Miles, Julian of Norwich's experiences of bodily enclosure (through illness and through the anchorhold) results in a rhetoric that can invert space and universalize to the extent that her intimate space with God is entirely inclusive of humanity-bound, this-worldly experiences (137). Bridget, by contrast, as her experiences with cloistering are only for short periods of time, constructs an intimacy with God that is experienced personally and individually as well as dependent on the physical building and architecture of the cloister (133). Miles concludes:

Within the cloister, the female community sanctions and nurtures each woman's call to holy life. Bridget provided an environment that released some women from the demands and critiques of society in order to preserve their marriage to Christ....The private space with God that Julian enjoyed as a physical reality in her anchorhold [and the initial illness described in the ST] thus becomes a reality for Bridget, not in life, but in death: it is Bridget's monastic legacy that brings to life the intimacy with God which she could only enjoy in passing rapture.

By comparing and contrasting the rhetoric of these two women, whom Miles defines as medieval mystics, Miles knowingly¹⁴ sketches the same relationship between physical space and female authorship that Virginia Woolf did a decade short of a century ago. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argued that the quality and abundance of contributions by female authors to English literature was dependent on a woman's ability to physically separate herself from society and possess economic independence: "Here, then, Mary Beton ceases to speak. She has told you how she reached the conclusion—the prosaic conclusion—that it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry (103)." Miles suggests that *this room with a lock on the door* and its attendant economic security is what Bridget created for her order, and what Julian possessed herself. Thus Julian's thought is able to reflect, spatially, the kind of universality that Woolf so privileged in fiction.¹⁵

Universality is not a goal which one may so readily endorse as Woolf did a century ago—thus Miles is likely not trying to make a value judgement between the thought of Bridget or Julian, not claiming that Julian found a way to "consume all impediments" as Woolf said of Jane Austen, to an extent of which Bridget was incapable (67). Rather Miles is concerned with identifying the effect of space and the social structures which determined that space on an author's thought.

¹⁴ "Julian and her 'evenchristen' to which she ss frequently refers can be conflated within the same space because her role as anchoress, physically authorized and contained by the church, can dissolve personal struggle with society. She has a secure **room of her own**, so she can afford to open wide the door of her vision." (Miles 131, emphasis mine). While Miles claims no formal ties to Woolf's 1929 argument, the text is so ubiquitous Miles is likely to know whose words she invokes here.

¹⁵ Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*, "...when people compare Shakespeare and Jane Austen, they may mean that the minds of both had consumed all impediments; and for that reason we do not know Jane Austen and we do not know Shakespeare, and for that reason Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote, and so does Shakespeare. If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstances it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled;... (67).

In this section, I would like to forward Miles' focus on space and gender from a different perspective. Section 2 explored the ritual and performative elements of the ST, looking at the ways in which the text enabled female authorship to gain much needed authority—constructing the text ritualistically and leaning into the advantage that the undefined liminal space of margin offers, using that space to say something new. With Miles and her foremother Woolf as a point of departure, this section will consider how the ST constructs female authority and compare the mediatory function that female figures in the text—most centrally the *I* of the narrator—play with respect to the reader. How these women help the reader and the text journey across intellectual and narrative space will be compared to similar deployments of gender in hagiography and Constance narratives that are part of the popular medieval romance genre.

The catalyst for Miles' comparison between Bridget and Julian is Margery Kemp's own invocation of the two women:

In both these encounters it is not only Julian's and Bridget's physical proximity to the two holy women's spaces of living and praying...As Liz Herbert McAvoy notes, Margery seeks out these experiences in order to 'carefully construct around herself an edifice of female *communitas* and understanding.' 127

While by no means exclusively focused on female sources of authority—it is a male priest who assists the narrator in focusing her contemplative gaze—the opening of the ST participates in a similar invocation of female authority figures. The text opens with the narrator setting an intention for three graces from god—knowledge of the passion, illness, and three wounds. These are goals of the tradition known as *affective devotion*—a predecessor of the ST via of the passion narrative discussed by Cré—a tradition open to female practice that fostered female spiritual

development. In describing this goal, the narrator quickly invokes the desire to witness that passion alongside “Mary Maudeleyne and with othere that were Cristes loverse,” so that she may more fully understand the passion of Christ and “the compassion of oure layde” (lines 6-7,14; 63).

In the narrator’s desire for knowledge, she seeks the knowledge had by multiple female figures surrounding the passion. On one level, these represent crucial perspectives, for any spiritually invested individual, for they are witnesses to the central salvific event in Christianity as well as iconographically ubiquitous. But they are also the primary means through which a female individual might construct her relationship to divinity in a positive, contemplative and popular mode (i.e. not as the source of the fall). With her third desire—the one which “dwelled continually” in the narrator’s mind, rather than passing from it—is to have three wounds just as the martyr St. Cecille (65). As Rebecca June has noted, this reference to St.Cecille is unique to the ST; June considers the retraction of the reference a detriment to the LT because the story of St. Cecille is causal to the project of the visions:

As stages in mystical union with the divine, these three wounds are central to Julian’s visions, making Cecilia’s example causally important, while in the LT Julian’s desire for three wounds is motivated only by “the grace of God and teching of holy church”.... As articulated in the ST, it is Julian’s “hearing” and “understanding” of Cecilia’s heroic story that “stir” her desire and prayer to be granted three wounds. In contrast, her desire in the LT is born of less individually active, certainly less female forces. 33-34

The ST also constructs its narrator as noticeably female. The male curate, accompanied by a child, who focuses the contemplative gaze for the narrator says to her: “Doughter, I have brought

the image of thy savioure. Loke thereopon, and comforthe the therewith in reverence of him that diede for the and me” (lines 22-24, 67). By contrast, the curate of the LT is unaccompanied by a child and says simply “I have brought thee the image of thy saviour. Looke therupon and comfort thee therewith” (lines 19-20, 131). The reference to the narrator’s gender is erased in the LT, as is the intimacy of the term daughter that helps her construct her relationship to church. Christ is rendered more abstractly in the LT as “thy” saviour, not the equable *thee and me*. The sense of humanity’s fallenness applies to a figure of the church as equally as to the ST’s narrator—the figure of the church in the LT appears to already have been saved or at least not feel the need to express humanity’s universal relationship to the divine in that moment. The presence of a child is inexplicably warranted in the ST as well—whether to express universal humanity, invoke a complete life cycle of christian community, or invoke images of the stages of Christ's life (Christ as child, curate and man with cross) is not clear.

Finally, the ST’s opening is dependent on another female figure: a vision of Mary. Following the vision of Christ’s *plenteously* bleeding at the opening of the passion, the narrator sees all creation as a hazelnut in the palm of her hand and then says; “God brought oure ladye to mine understandinge....a simpille maidene and a meeke, yonge of age, in the stature that sho was when sho conceivede.” (lines 21-23, 69) She then is shown how Mary “mervelande with grete reverence” that the divine would be born through her, drawing the conclusion that it is the virgin’s humility and her envisioning the divine above her that makes her above all that God made “in worthines and in fulhede” (line 25, 31; 69-71). The middle english dictionary glosses “fulhede” as abundance, plenteousness, fulness and perfection (“fulhēd(e n.”). There is here the inversion of space which Miles argued for—the immensity, the overflowing kenosis of creation,

is placed within and in relation to what seems, by the narrator's cultural standards, small, meek, and noticeably female. The ST makes this inversion more explicit than the LT, for it links the vision of Mary directly to that of the hazelnut:

This litille thinge that es made that es benethe oure ladye Saint Marye, God shewed it unto me als litille as it hadde beene a haselle notte. Methought it might hafe fallene for litille. In this blissede revelation God shewed me thre noughtes, of whilke noughtes this is the firste that was shewed me. Of this nedes ilke man and woman to half knowinge that desires to lyeve contemplifelye, that him like to nought alle thinge that es made for to hafe the love of God that es unmade. lines 33-39, 71

The explication continues to conclude that those who occupy their hearts with the divine (that which is above) creation are able to find spiritual rest, while a focus on the fragile and earthly realm will not benefit the contemplative. Mary represents this contemplative ideal, as the one who understood her relationship to the divine and her own small, fragile, created state (71). The LT does not position the vision of creation-as-hazelnut with reference to Mary.

The ST is specifically using the figure of Mary as a model contemplative. She encapsulates the virtues a contemplative ought to have (meekness, simplicity, and a healthy consciousness of one's own created state) and so she possesses the extreme kenotic generative fullness required to place herself in relation to the divine. Mary is not a passive agent at the annunciation, rather it is her ability to marvel and realize "this wisdom and trowthe, knowande the gretnes of hir makere and the litellehede of hirselfe, that is made, made hir for to saye mekelye to the angelle Gabrielle: "Lo me here, Goddes handmaidene" (lines 28-30, 71). Her

wisdom and penetrating vision are what enable her to *actively choose* to address, to *speak* to Gabriel.

The ST text chooses to valorize female speech in its opening sections, building an edifice of female *communitas*, to use McAvoy's phrase on Margery Kempe. The text highlights and emphasizes the narrator's female-ness and her relationship to the central Christian narrative and the church, and it simultaneously evokes active images of female speech through the figure of St. Cecille, and its own unique conception of the contemplative Mary. I use the term Mary, rather than the Virgin, intentionally, for uniquely enough this passage in the ST references her as *our lady* and not virgin. The fact that she is a *simple maiden* is part of her characterization, but it is her cognitive faculties, her perceptiveness, that is valorized—noticeably not her bodily purity or any notion thereof in Section 4 of the ST. She seems to owe birthing the divine to intellectual qualities, not virginity per se, although readers would safely presume that was part of the package. It does makes for a unique retelling, however. It is these female voices that provide the precedent and catalyst for the clearly-marked female narrative voice of the ST, as well as the narrator's ritual experience of the vision themselves.

CLOISTER BLISSFUL: CHAUCER'S ACCOUNT OF ST. CECILIE

Watson and Jenkins point in their commentary on the ST to two primary tellings of the martyrdom of St. Cecilie—*The Golden Legend* and Chaucer's *The Second Nun's Tale*—which are contemporaneous with the ST (64). According to the front matter of *The Riverside Chaucer*, the *Second Nun's Tale* was written between 1372-80 (Benson xxix), a bit earlier than when the ST is thought to have been composed; Watson and Jenkins date the composition of the ST to the mid 1380s, the revelations themselves are said to have taken place in May of 1373 (1-4). The

hagiography of St. Cecilie, particularly in Chaucer, emphasizes the figures' sexual purity (as a reader might expect from the genre) as well as her ability to confront male authority with challenging and persuasive speech. Cecilie sets up the exchange of vows between her and her husband in lines 152-161, and this ultimately lead to his conversion (lines 207-210, 264-265). The pattern is repeated throughout the tale, and rather than describing those Cecilie converts as converted through the holy spirit, the tale invests that power of conversion in Cecilie's speech—characters are “converted at hir wise loore” (line 414, 267). Her speech is described as preaching at least twice (lines 342, 539; 267, 269), and it is her speech that so offends the local authorities and provokes her martyrdom (lines 512-515, 269). The tale itself is quite pervaded with her voice, and as such she seems a sensible rhetorical figure to invoke and thus authorize further female speech—or in the words of the ST “conseyvede a mighty desire” to receive wounds like Cecilie's (line 39, 65). The author of the ST readily builds an edifice of divinely infused female speech, something any author in this period would likely be in much need of.¹⁶

The most interesting linguistic parallel between Chaucer's tale and the ST is the Second Nun's Prolouge's *Invocacio ad Mariam*—here are stanzas two and three of eight total:

Thow Mayde and Mooder, doghter of thy Sone,
 Thow welle of mercy, synful soules cure,
 In whom that God for bountee chees to wone,
 Thow humble, and heigh over every creature,
 Thow nobledest so ferforth oure nature,
 That no desdeyn the Makere hadde of kynde

¹⁶ Kathleen Smith, in her piece “Language and Authority in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*” writes: “Julian...produced a text at a time in English history when it was not only highly controversial for a woman to write, especially about religious topics, but also even owning documents in English was potentially a cause for persecution. The infamous 1409 Constitutions of Archbishop Tomas Arundel (c. 1353-1414) stipulated that new translations of the Bible into English were prohibited and, moreover, that new writing was altogether suspect” (169). Smith also notes that the vows of an anchoress prohibited teaching “in any formal sense” (170). A rhetorical construction of symbolic authority was likely all the authorization such a vernacular text could build for itself.

His Sone in blood and flessch to clothe and wynde.

Withinne the cloistre blisful of thy sydis
 Took mannes shap the eterneel love and pees,
 That of the tryne compas lord and gyde is,
 Whom erthe and see and hevene out of relees
 Ay heryen; and thou, Virgine wemmelees,
 Baar of the body—and dweltest mayden pure—
 The Creatour of every creature.

(lines 36-49, 262)

These two stanzas make much of a few qualities that align with the ST's account of the vision of Mary. There is a similar paradoxical inversion between space and relation—with the phrase *Mother, daughter of thy Son*—that the ST narrator experiences holding all of creation in the palm of her hand. Similarly as well is the desire to place Mary above all creation due to her humble and meek relationship to the divine. This text is more concerned with the literal making of Christ in Mary's womb than the ST is—that text remains strikingly unconcerned with the biology of the incarnation—but Chaucer's prologue describes Mary's womb as a "cloistre blisful" in which "eterneel love and pees" took the shape of humanity (43-44, 262). It is a space as other-worldly, or perhaps "extra-worldly" would be a better phrase, as that which Miles describes as necessary for a female author to incarnate in the first place. Mary—as the primary female symbolic figure—seems to be a required precedent for female speech in the *The Second Nun's Tale*.

Secondly, this invocation to Mary seems to function largely as a way to usher in a modesty topos for the ostensibly female "nun" narrator. This narrator asks Mary to "help.../Me, flemed wrecche, in this desert of galle;" (57-58, 263), and at the conclusion of the invocation addresses her reader:

Yet preye I yow that reden that I write,
 Foryeve me that I do no diligence
 This ilke storie subtilly to endite,

For bothe have I the wordes and sentence
 Of hym that at the seintes reverence
 The storie wroot, and folwen hire legende,
 And pray you that ye wole my werk amende. (lines 78-84, 263)

This female narrator cites her sources and asks her reader to forgive any lack of subtly her retelling may have—but as it is with Mary’s help that she narrates perhaps her concerns are unwarranted. *The Second Nun’s Prologue* connects invocation of the virgin with a modesty topos deployed to counterbalance a female narrator—the two concepts or topoi are integrated over eight stanzas. The ST lacks any such modesty topos, although the narrator repeatedly indicates that she can only partially communicate those visions that came to her via spiritual sight. Yet it becomes prominent in the LT while the necessity of the mediatory vision of Mary is diminished. June finds Mary to be a crucial portal for contemplative understanding in the ST, while in the LT June notes the lack of connection between the vision of Mary and the vision of Christ, arguing that “No connection is made between the visions of Christ and Mary, and Mary loses her function as catalyst in the contemplative process” (36-37).

How such a diminished role for Mary in the LT is interpreted theologically¹⁷ ought to be a subject of further research, but its literary and authorial significance is illuminated by comparison with the prologue of Chaucer’s *Second Nun’s Tale*. Frustration with Mary’s otherworldliness, and the fact that most literature highlights just how unlike the average woman

¹⁷ June cites a Kari Elisabeth Børrenson as writing: “Meanwhile, the Virgin’s role is reduced sufficiently for one author to note that the LT’s Jesus ‘could be understood as having incarnated himself.’” (June 36).

Mary¹⁸ is, rightly keeps modern interpretations of her from understanding Mary as representing any kind of female empowerment. But nevertheless, what might be read as a literary invocation of her in the ST suggests that for the medieval female author, the demarcation of female space she represents is connected to deployment of a female voice. She is the “cloistre blisful” through which the ST is able to incarnate itself, so much so that the voice of the ST feels no need to excuse its obvious femininity—rather it preaches actively, in the vernacular, like the figure of St. Cecile. This is no small effort. When the LT retracts this mediatory function played by Mary, it simultaneously feels the need to specify its source as “a simple creature unlettered” (line 1, 125). If the author of the ST was aware of Chaucer’s version of St. Cecile’s legend, it could have proved an intriguing model of imagined female speech, but it is far more likely that associations with the narrative and the symbolic presences of St. Cecile and Mary were ubiquitous enough for the *topoi* to readily redeploy themselves in the ST—quickly building the same associations in the experience of readers which we are at pains to reconstruct by means of comparison.

Just as Miles and Woolf—in disparate contexts—suggested that female authorship needs space outside society in which to flourish, so too does the inner workings of the ST bear this out. Irrespective of its female author’s position in society, the ST requires an extra-societal idealization of femininity to catalyze and authorize female speech, to shepherd its narrator and reader into the more free, open liminal space.

¹⁸ Barry Sparr, in his book of the role of Mary in English poetry writes: We can assume, however, that most of this poetry was written by men: “scholars have long noticed the paucity of women’s writing in Middle English”, and while it is assuredly and invariably poetry of praise of Mary, it is her difference from women, in general, rather than her presentative femininity that strikes us. This may reveal a masculinist response. C.S. Lewis decisively rejected the idea that “the medieval church encouraged reverence for women at all’...” (50).

CHAUCER'S CUSTANCE, CONVERSION, MEDIATION AND THE SHORT TEXT

We have just explored how this literature requires a symbolic female figure—if not multiple figures—to catalyze an entrance into visionary and metaphysical spaces. The second intersection between gender and space which the ST can highlight comes with a comparison to the extensive medieval tradition of Constance analogues, or what are sometimes referred to as the tales of exiled queens. These are not religious texts, and unlike the story of St. Cecily, don't engage quite so explicitly with religious themes as hagiography does; they do occupy however the same imagined, symbolic space. The exiled queen is usually wrongly expelled from her country and forced into an unknown space of some kind—in the case of Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*, the exiled queen Custance is repeatedly forced out on the open sea, in a boat¹⁹ whose only sense of direction is wholly providential. Her travels across a set of literally liminal landscapes in the romance, as in most Constance analogues, results in the conversion of various European realms, and the eventual reaggregation of Custance with her original polity, while peace and Christian *lay* have been achieved with some degree of universality.

The liminal spaces through which a figure like Custance moves are literal rather than metaphysical, but in making such a journey, largely by choosing to assent to the will of God, she manages to carry her entire polity, culture, religiosity and people with her into a state and a place of peace and prosperity. Custance, whose “herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse” (line 167, 89), sets a verbal contemplative gaze while in the ship by directing her prayers “Unto the croys of Crist,” and asking that she be kept “fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe” (line 450, 454; 93).

¹⁹ The rudderless boat is a common topos across medieval romance as well as other genres and media. It is associated with the space of the church as well as state authority (think of the *nave* even in modern church architecture). For more see Fowler, Elizabeth “The Ship Adrift” *The Tempest and its Travels*. ed. Hulme and Sherman, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, pp.37-40.

Her journey across the unknown, liminal space of the sea is a successful one (she makes three such ones throughout the tale, adhering to the Romance genre's overall fascination with repetition and the layering of experiences). The narrator of the ST travels across metaphysical space similarly, by entirely and actively assenting to the will of God ("I asented fully with alle the wille of mye herte to be atte Godes wille," lines 14-15, 65), and by setting her contemplative focus on the cross both at the start of the ST and when she encounters her own fiend in section 23. Despite the difference in genre, the way these figures journey across liminal space is alike.

As Rebecca June argues, much scholarship on Julian of Norwich will characterize the ST as somehow "personal" and the LT as "universal," June counters this characterization by noting how surrounded by people the narrator of the ST is throughout her visions; arguing that in the ST: "There is no discord here between the individual and the collective, the singular and the general. On the contrary, understanding God's love on the individual level leads to understanding that same love on a cosmic scale. More than transcending the personal, Julian's visions explicate the importance of being able to see the many in one and the one in many..." (47). A meaningful realization, through the same curious collapse of space which Miles noted. Another Constance analogue in the Middle English literary canon, *Emaré*, achieves a similar collapse of cultural space by enfolding its exiled heroine in a richly embroidered cloak which tells many stories, citing texts and authorities visually, within a textile.²⁰ The way *Emaré* communicates her significance to the new peoples her boat brings her to is through this cloak, this text of sorts that is enmeshed with her identity as she is wearing it.²¹

²⁰ In the Maldwyn Mills edition of *Emaré*, lines 97-180 are devoted to describing the scenes embroidered on the cloak (48-50).

²¹ "And when hyt was don her upon,/ She seemed non erthely wommon,/That marked was of molde." (lines 244-246, 52).

The ST—and this is perhaps why there is the impulse to call it *personal*—is saturated with the pronoun *I*. The narrative voice is so pronounced, the reader so continually reminded of this speaker in whose individuality the collective *even christen* are contained that the *I* of the ST carries with it the same spiritual universality that *Emaré's* cloak encompassed culturally and textually. And this narrative *I* carries into the LT, even as June suggests the markers of community outside the *I* are lost (47). It is more than tempting to want to treat this narrative *I* as the intimate, self-expressive voice that modern readers like myself hear, and thrill at when we find it to be a female one whose personal speech managed to find voice in her anchoritic, visionary solitude. This voice can be those things—as the readings of the ST in sections 1 and 2 suggest. But the all-encompassing *I* is also paired with a contemporary medieval literary tradition in both hagiography and romance, which equally collapses meaning into a female figure, a female voice; and that takes that voice on journeys, in isolation, symbolically into unknown space. That she is allowed to be invested with such meaning is inspiring. But the intellectual and spiritual surrogacy that symbol represents is troubling. The identity of all civilization, culture, and spirituality rests on one person's ability to successfully navigate a relationship with the divine. In the ST, spiritual realization for the narrator and her readers, is dependent on Mary's right understanding of her relationship to God; humanity's salvation dependent on her ability to give birth; and the reader's affinity for and dependence on the female *I* of the ST crucial for the ability to comprehend the *res* of the text. The medieval genres of Romance and Hagiography put the same pressures on female identities. Even in Woolf's 20th century argument about why women are not as engaged literarily as men; she envisions a solitary, brilliant individual who is

able to set the literary record strait with the help of only a little economic self-sufficiency.²² The vocation of anchorite seems to live on in how we talk about women, gender identity, and writing. I have not been able to find a satisfying explanation for why the symbol of female gender identity and its literary voice—even when invested with important ‘missions’ like speaking, conversion and salvation—must always function for the whole while remaining in complete isolation itself and continually be colored by surrogacy.

The *I* that makes the ST such a brilliant literary artifact, such a joy to read, is lodged in a symbolic tradition of investing the solitary female figure with the weight of all social-political-religious identity. This is done so she might carry us all to a place of right relationship with the divine, usually at no incidental cost to herself. The way gender functions symbolically in this literature—as a kind of shorthand for surrogacy and abstraction—should trouble any theologically intentioned reader, particularly those invested in any kind of feminist-reconstructive work—even within the symbolic space of Julian of Norwich’s thought.

²² Woolf writes, in her final lines of *A Room of One’s Own*, speaking on the ideal of “Shakespeare’s Sister”: “Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.” (112). The ideal Woolf describes is worked for communally, but its incarnation is solitary.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

This thesis has attempted to rewrite the narrative of the relationship between the ST and LT by three means. Section 1 asked readers to consider critically the labor represented in the concept of authorship. To the modern eye, the devaluation of the individual's contributions in favor of the authorization provided by community can seem distorted; we as readers are so used to finding information in the physically published form that readily bears the names of who is relevant to the information creation. Medieval senses of authorship give primacy to the *thing* of the text, and this in turn distributes the concept of author around the community between the person we call author, the texts they cite, and those who read them—information travels not in neat, attributed packages, but in contiguous streams closer to a good twitter thread or the content signature represented in a works consulted list.

This means that the first draft-second draft, first edition-second edition story of Julian's thought simply does not make sense. The ST and LT share much content, communicate the same *res*, and so in this sense they are the same. Two manuscript witnesses *to the same text*. Our future understanding of what makes either one more authoritative over the other (if that is something that is even important to establish) needs to account for readership and the accessibility of the text to readers.

Section 1 also suggests one reason for the first draft-second draft story: the need to undercut the intellectuality and literary artifice of an early text that chooses to emphasize the gender of its narrator by considering it a largely passive construction, a record of visionary experience. This passive construction of authorial agency—because we as modern readers

understand texts as the product of their authors—blinds us to sources of complexity and interest in the ST.

Section 2 rehabilitated the affinity between the ST and notions of “experience” by arguing that experience is not something the text records, but something the text produces. It’s a form of persuasion, a rhetorical tool so effective that, like the participants in a ritual, readers remain a little blind to what is going on. Invoking the ST/LT story helps us patch over the insecurity of not knowing; an insecurity that many a modern theologian communicates not with intimate, lucid phrases, but an overwhelming and disorienting sense of technicality. Put differently, *seeing by not seeing*, is a bit the point of the ST; it has significant mastery of apophaticism. Titling the ST *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* in the 2006 edition is ironic, or at the very least false advertising.

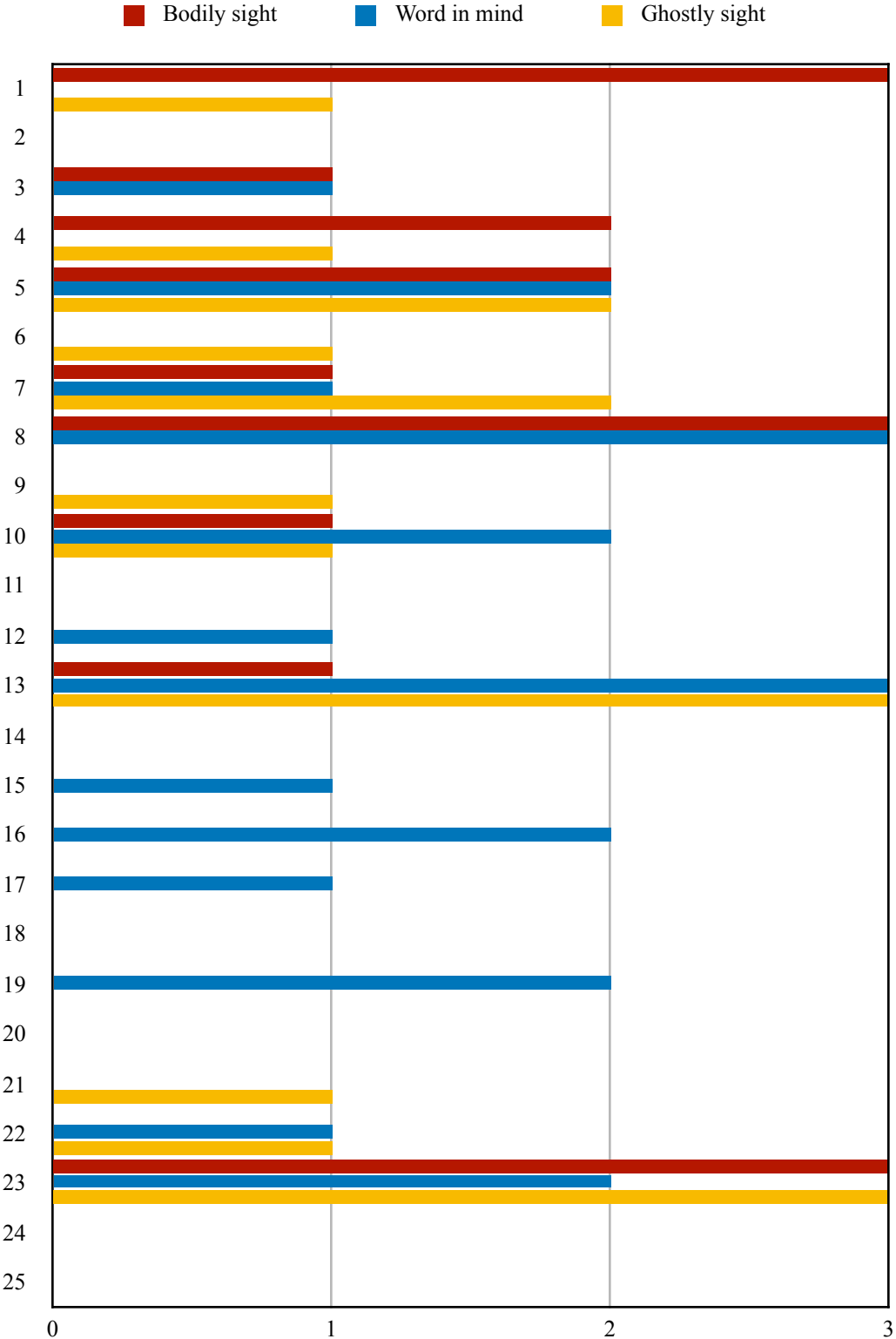
Section 3 pulls at contemporary literary threads to better understand the ST’s relationship to the way the symbol of gendered voices functioned literarily and theologically. It is an exercise in observation more than anything else, a way to illustrate how interconnected the semiotic modes of meaning making are across genres. This is admittedly a selfish argument, a chance for me to push at the boundary that has grown between the study of literature and religion, to sit on the Tillichian borderline and make texts talk to one another. But I do hope it illustrates that when the ST is valued on equal intellectual terms as the LT, we have much to learn and explore.

If this thesis has prompted its reader to open the ST, it has succeeded. Carruthers’ observations on the medieval production of authority and authorship argue that authority is a process not based on the genius or artifice of a certain creator. Great authors don’t actualize themselves, readers do. In this sense, you and I exercise profound control over that large,

seemingly homogenous and impenetrable concept of canon. We are not passive receptors of literary and theological canons or traditions—we are those who enact them. If I may, I'll end with an intensely challenging imperative: Let us all make sure those choices are active.

I desire thre graces be the gifte of God.

APPENDIX: WORD ANALYSIS ON SIGHT MODES IN THE SHORT TEXT

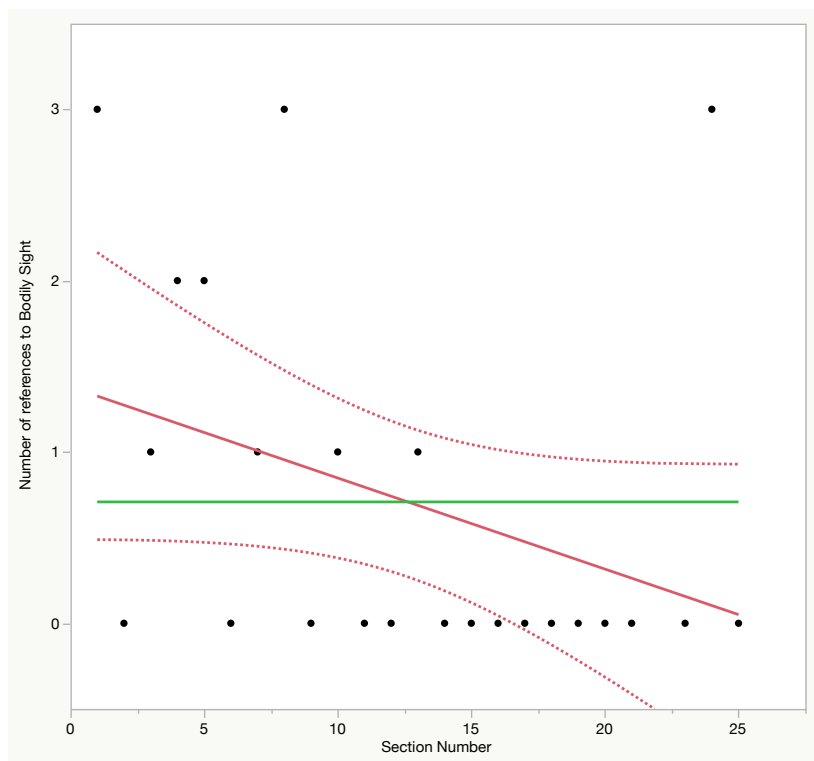


Frequency of Terms by Section, Visualized

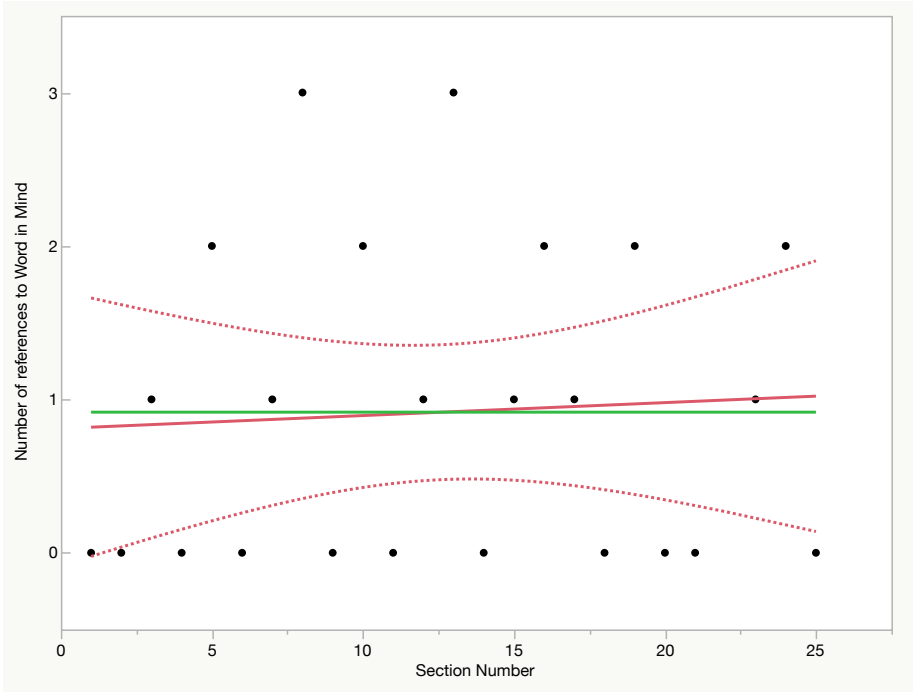
Frequency of terms by Section

Section Number	Bodily sight	Word in mind	Ghostly sight
1	3	0	1
2	0	0	0
3	1	1	0
4	2	0	1
5	2	2	2
6	0	0	1
7	1	1	2
8	3	3	0
9	0	0	1
10	1	2	1
11	0	0	0
12	0	1	0
13	1	3	3
14	0	0	0
15	0	1	0
16	0	2	0
17	0	1	0
18	0	0	0
19	0	2	0
20	0	0	0
21	0	0	1
23	0	1	1
24	3	2	3
25	0	0	0

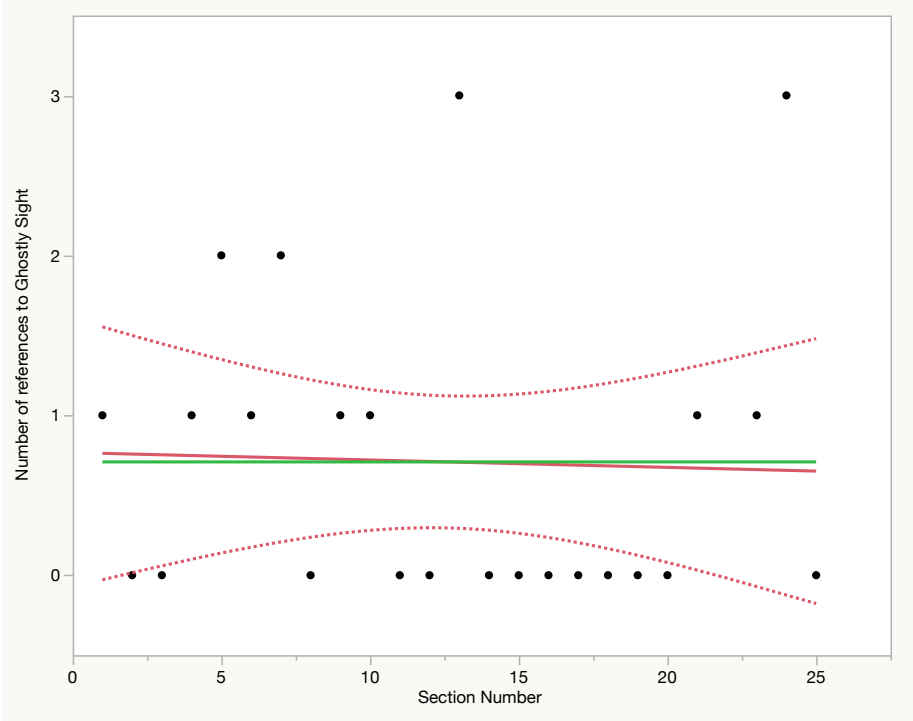
Vincent Gillespie argues in his piece “Colours of Contemplation: Less Light on Julian of Norwich” that the LT builds a “hermeneutic of illumination” through the text’s use of color terms, so that by the end of the piece the LT has a sense of the clear, pure light of faith—a visual form of contemplative progress if you will (28). The ST does not invest much language in color, but it does take particular care to note how concepts are seen, to specify the mode of vision as was explored in Section 1. Were the ST to reflect a hierarchy or progress between these modes, it would be reasonable for the frequency of the modes to change across the text, i.e. the start of the text would be invested in the mode of bodily sight and so that term would occur the most early on, the middle invested in word in mind, and the ST culminate in purely spiritual insights with lots of references to ghostly sight. I had the intuition that the ST does not make such divisions between these modes, but I needed a way to visualize this—the three graphs below represent a linear regression of the above data set.



Regression of the use of Bodily Sight



Regression of the use of Word in Mind



Regression of the use of Ghostly Sight

The solid red line on each graph shows the relationship—known as a *regression*—between the sections of the ST (like little units of time that pace vocabulary use across the text) and where the vocabulary is used. The dots show exactly where a word is used. The green line is the mean number word uses for the whole text. When we compare the red and green lines, one is given a visualization of the relationship between word frequency per section and word frequency overall. The red line is depicting what word is used where to the imagined standard of continuous use (green line)—then when both lines fall between the dotted red (95% confidence intervals), one has an additional measure that determines if the frequency (red line) is statistically different from continuous use (green line). For all three sight modes, no statistical difference is shown as both lines fall between the confidence intervals.

These graphs illustrate that there is no statistical difference between the frequency of invocation of the three modes—all occur, statistically, as frequently as one another. Another way of saying this is they all occur *continuously*. If one had to mark a trend (what the red lines represent) use of bodily sight declines ever so slightly across the text, but this decline occurs within the confidence intervals and so one cannot declare it statistically different from the mean. Word in mind and ghostly sight are completely and utterly continuous—with barely any differentiation from the mean.

An interesting area of further research would be to carry out the same statistical test on these terms in the LT, to see if any kind of progress narrative is represented there. I find it significant, and potentially unique to the thought of Julian of Norwich, that no progress narrative is represented by the ST. Ritual is invoked, the practice of contemplation as well, but the communication with the divine is continuous via earthly and spiritual modes. The awareness of

the divine is omnitemporal, multi-modal, and on many registers at once. There is no disordered desire that must be corrected for the flourishing of intimacy with the divine, no ladder a contemplative needs to climb, no 'earning' of divine interaction—and thus the ST represents a significant re-casting of the medieval theological narrative, a change which scholarship on Julian has not been able to appreciate due to low readership of the ST; I hope this will change soon due to Watson and Jenkins' 2006 edition of the text which makes the ST so readily accessible.

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²³ "We encourage authors to carefully read through and count the citations in their list of references prior to submitting papers as a way to self-consciously draw attention to whose work is being reproduced.... Citation counting is a relatively straightforward way to pay attention to whom we carry with us when we cite, and to be aware of the power dynamics that are unintentionally reproduced therein." (Mott & Cockayne 996) This piece cites, and thus forwards the voices of 15 female authors and 11 male authors; so the authors cited are 58% female 42% male.

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