Julian of Norwich and the Varieties of Middle English Mystical Discourse

DENISE N. BAKER

Writing near the end of the fourteenth century, the anonymous author of the Cloud of Unknowing warns his disciple that the language of spirituality is radically metaphoric:

& þerfore beware þat þou conceyue not bodely þat þat is mente goostly, þof al it be spokyn in bodely wordes [...] For þof al þat a þing be neuer so goostly in itself, neuerpeles ȝif ȝif it schal be spoken of, sîpen it so is þat speche is a bodely werk wrouȝt wþ þe longe, þe whiche is an instrument of þe body, it behouþ alweys be spoken in bodely wordes. Bot what þerof? Schal it þerfore be taken & conceyuid bodely? Nay, it bot goostly.¹

The Cloud author’s remark is usually regarded as a criticism of the sensational language of the first Middle English mystic, Richard Rolle (c.1300–49), and other literal-minded practitioners of contemplation. However, his words also provide a warning to those who study texts about mysticism: we must regard them as metaphoric discourse rather than as literal accounts of experience.

Over the last two decades, scholars have heeded the Cloud author’s advice and focused greater attention on the language contemplative writers employ rather than any experience informing their texts. In his magisterial three-volume study, The Presence of God, for example, Bernard McGinn acknowledges that since readers can never have access to the mystic’s consciousness, they can only explore the language he or she uses to describe it. Like the Cloud author, McGinn recognizes the metaphoric complexity of texts about mysticism and compares their deployment of language to poetry.²

Mystical masterpieces ... are often close to poetry in the ways in which they concentrate and alter language to achieve their ends ... [and employ] verbal strategies in which language is used not so much informationally as transformationally, that is, not to convey a content but to assist the hearer or reader to hope for or to achieve the same consciousness.³

² For a discussion of Julian specifically as a poet, see Ena Jenkins’ essay in this volume, pp. 181–91.
In his study of the apophatic tradition, *The Darkness of God*, Denys Turner also insists that one can only study the mystic's language. Despite the continuity of metaphors of interiority and ascent, of light and darkness, and of oneness with God in the Christian discourse of spirituality, he contends that the meaning of these metaphors is radically different for medieval and modern writers. Thus, Turner argues, scholars must not only concentrate on the metaphoric language of a mystical text, but also articulate the different philosophical and theological principles informing it.

McGinn's and Turner's observations about the metaphoric language of mysticism provide a method for assessing Julian of Norwich's position in the Christian tradition of contemplation. Pertinent issues here are her familiarity with the tradition and which of her predecessors influenced her, especially during the twenty or more years during which she revised the Short Text into the Long. These issues are difficult to address not only because all medieval mystics share the common beliefs and vocabulary of Christianity, but also because the various strands of the contemplative tradition are so complex and interwoven. Julian of Norwich is usually identified as one of the group of five writers known as the Middle English mystics; this group also includes Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and Margery Kempe. Certainly, from the early 1320s, when Rolle left his father's home wearing his sister's tunics as a hermit's habit, to the death of Margery Kempe around 1440, the production and dissemination of texts about contemplation written in or translated into Middle English increased dramatically. These five writers participated in a 'flowering of mysticism' that began on the continent in the thirteenth century, but took root in England a century later.

Recently, however, Nicholas Watson has questioned the critical practice of regarding the five Middle English mystics as a group. This categorization, he argues, emphasizes their relationship to each other rather than their involvement in the broader context of the late medieval vernacular theology and culture. Such a grouping implies that the four authors who followed Rolle knew his works and each other's. In fact, this assumption holds true for three members of the group. The *Cloud* author, Hilton and Kempe were all familiar with Rolle; the two male authors knew each other's texts; and Kempe had heard of Hilton. Because the three male authors wrote works to guide religious or recluse in the practices of the contemplative life, it appears plausible that Julian of Norwich, who may well have been a Benedictine nun prior to 1373 and was certainly an anchorite at least by the early 1390s, might have been familiar with their writings. This assumption is bolstered by Julian's claim to be 'a simple creature unletterde' (*Revelation*, 2.1), which is usually interpreted to mean that she did

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not know Latin rather than that she was illiterate. Thus, vernacular texts would seem to have been her primary source of spiritual guidance.

In this essay, however, I contend that Julian of Norwich is the odd person out in this group of Middle English mystics. Even though Margery Kempe visited Julian around 1413, she does not identify the anchorite as a writer; nor do either Hilton or the Cloud author ever mention her or allude to her texts. Furthermore, as I will show, both chronological and textual evidence make it very difficult to ascertain whether Julian of Norwich knew the works of her male counterparts. Whatever resemblance the two versions of her text may have to those of the three male Middle English mystics may be due to their common participation in the rich discourse of the contemplative tradition rather than any direct influence. By examining the language these four authors employ to describe union, I will show that they make very different assumptions about the nature of God and of humankind’s relationship to the divine.

The terminus a quo for the two versions of Julian’s book, *A Vision Shewed to a Devout Woman*, the Short Text, and *A Revelation of Love*, the Long Text, is the date of her visionary experience, May 1373. Although it is not clear how soon after this experience she composed the Short Text, Julian says that in 1388 and again in 1393 she achieved realizations that helped her to complete the Long Text. Watson speculates that *A Vision* may have been finished in the mid 1380s and *A Revelation* at any time between the mid 1390s and Julian’s death after 1416. Based solely on chronology, it is certainly possible that Julian might have known Rolle’s English epistles, written in the last decade before his death in 1349, either before her visionary experience or while she composed one or other version of her book. However, she could not have read either book of Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* or the *Cloud of Unknowing* until after she completed her Short Text, even if it were finished as late as the mid 1380s, because these books were composed in the decade between 1386 and 1396. Hilton began the first book of the *Scale* sometime after he entered the Augustinian Canons in 1386. Clark argues that the *Cloud of Unknowing* refers to *Scale I*, placing it after 1386 but before Hilton’s response to the *Cloud* in the second book of the *Scale*, which must have been finished by his death in 1396. Thus, the possibility that Julian of Norwich could have known either book of the *Scale of Perfection* or the *Cloud of Unknowing* while she revised *A Vision* into *A Revelation of Love* depends on how soon she completed the Long Text after she achieved an understanding of the parable of the Lord and Servant in 1393. The closer to that date the revision

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7 I do not discuss *The Book of Margery Kempe* since it was dictated several decades after Julian’s death. For a thorough analysis of similarities and differences between these two women authors, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004).

8 Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds), *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Shewed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (Turnhout, 2006), p. 1 and p. 2. All references to Julian’s writing will be from this edition, with section/chapter and line references appearing parenthetically in the main text.

was finished, the less likely it is that she would have had access to manuscript copies of Hilton's and the Cloud author's books.

While the chronological evidence about the plausibility of Julian's knowledge of her male counterparts' work is inconclusive, the textual evidence does not provide a stronger case because, despite their common indebtedness to the Christian contemplative tradition, each of these Middle English mystics represents one of many diverse strands of mystical discourse that had developed by the fourteenth century. Richard Rolle's language of union derives from the affective mysticism of the twelfth-century Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux. The Cloud author writes in the tradition of the via negativa, the apophatic mysticism initiated by Pseudo-Dionysius in the fifth century, but as interpreted by Thomas Gallus 700 years later. Walter Hilton is most indebted to the introspective mysticism which developed from Augustine's De Trinitate. Although Julian of Norwich is also in the Augustinian tradition, her language of union differs significantly from Hilton's as well as from that of the two other male writers. Thus, although it is possible that Julian knew works by her male counterparts, there is no decisive textual evidence that either version of her book was strongly influenced by any of them.

The earliest of the Middle English mystics, Richard Rolle, uses sensory imagery to describe the culmination of the third degree of love in contemplative union. In Ego Dormio, for example, he provides a detailed account of the experience:

At pe begynnynge, when þou comest thereto, þi gostly egh is taken vp in to þe light of heuyn, and þre enlumyned in grace and kyndlyt of þe fyre of Cristes loue, so þat þou shal feel verrayly þe brennynge of loue in þi herte, euermore lytynge þi thought to God, and fillyng þe ful of ioy and sweetnes, so myche þat no [eke]nesse ne shame ne anguys ne peneance may gref þe, bot al þi lif shal turne into ioy. And þan for heynesse of þi hert, þi praiers turneth in to ioyful songe and þi [boghtes to melodi. Pan Ihesu is al þi deiire, al þi delit, al þi ioy, al þi solace, al þi comfort, so þat on hym wil euer be þi songe, and [in] hym al þi rest. þan may þou say 'I slepe and my herti wakeh. Who shal to my leman say, for his loue me longeth ay'? 11

For Rolle, the sensations of fire, sweetness and song are marks of contemplative union. While it is commonplace for mystics to use metaphors of sight involving light and darkness, Rolle emphasizes touch (fire), taste (sweetness) and hearing (song). These senses, especially touch and taste, are considered more corporeal and less intellectual than sight; therefore, they are often regarded as inappropriate for describing the spiritual. The Cloud author and Hilton, for example,

10 For a more thorough discussion of these similarities and differences, see Denise N. Baker, 'The Image of God: Contrasting Configurations in Julian of Norwich's Showings and Walter Hilton's Scale of Perfection', in Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra J. McAndrew (New York, 1998), pp. 35-60. In a note to Chapter 32, II, 33-38, of A Revelation of Love (p. 222), Watson and Jenkins point out that Julian's speculations about universal salvation contradict the conservative position stated by Hilton in Scale II, Chapter 3. Thus, although Julian may have known Hilton's second book, she was not in agreement with him on this issue.

seem to criticize Rolle for the apparent literalism of the language he uses to describe spiritual union. However, Rolle is not as eccentric as their criticism implies, for he derives this emphasis on the physical effects of love from Bernard of Clairvaux.

From the time of Origen (c.185–252) Christian thinkers had grappled with the problem posed by the Bible's use of sensory language about God, particularly the physical and erotic language of the Song of Songs. Although Bernard does not employ the concept of the spiritual senses first proposed as a solution to this problem by Origen, he does not hesitate in his sermons on the Song to describe union with God in sensory terms. In fact, as Rudy demonstrates, 'Bernard inverts the traditional hierarchy: he places sight first and lowest, taste and touch last and highest. He seems to do so because references to these senses help him articulate the immediacy and mutuality of union with God.'12 For Bernard of Clairvaux and those writing in his tradition of affective mysticism, sensory language is not at odds with the spiritual, for the body is an integral component of the human person.

Denis Renevey demonstrates how Rolle, though idiosyncratic, nonetheless follows such predecessors as Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Thierry in appropriating the language of the Song of Songs to express his own mystical experience.13 As Annie Sutherland puts it, 'For Rolle, personal experience and biblical authority are diagnostically connected. In other words, rather than standing in a hierarchical relationship with each other, the two are mutually informing and validating.'14 Rolle signals this debt with the Latin quotation of Song 5:2 that begins his English epistle: 'Ego dormio “et” cor meum vigilat'. He then refers to his source for the quotation as 'de songe of loue'.15

Rolle's typical conjunction of sweetness and song may, in fact, derive from Bernard's commentary on the Song 1:2: 'Thy name is as oil poured out'. In sermon 19 he concords this verse with Psalm 33:9, 'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet', to characterize 'Thy name' as 'sweet'. Bernard further emphasizes the sweetness of God's name in sermon 15: 'Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, a jubilee in the heart'.16 Although these metaphors employ the physical sensations of taste and hearing, Bernard plays on the relationship between tasting and knowing implied in the Latin similarity between sapio (I know) and sapere (to taste). As Carruthers writes, 'even in these most ecstatic sermons of Bernard's human knowledge is created through natural psychological processes and sensory experiences, because tasting flavors is also a means of knowing, even knowing God'.17 Since Rolle's strong devotion to the Holy Name is obvi-

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12 Curdon Rudy, Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages, Studies in Medieval History and Culture (New York, 2002), p. 57.
17 Ibid., p. 1001.
ously indebted to Bernard, it is very likely that he was familiar with this conflation of sweetness and song. In the 'songe of loue,' the poem with which Rolle ends Ego Dormio, he associates these terms with the name of Jesus:

Ihesu, my dere and my drery, delites art pu to synge;  
Ihesu, my myrth, my melody, when wil jou cum, my kynge?  
Ihesu, my hele and my hony, my quert, my confortynge,  
Ihesu, I couai for to day when hit is pe paynge.  
Langynge is in me lent, pat my loue hath me sent.  
Al wo fro me is went, sethen pat my hert is bret  
In Criste loue so sweete ...  

Rolle extols the sensations of song, sweetness and fire experienced in contemplative union because they increase the longing for the permanent vision of God that will be possible only after death.

Though the metaphor of the fire of love is much more commonplace than sweetness and song, Rolle may also have developed it from the Song of Songs 8:7:  
'[Love's] flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.'  
The metaphor of fire is a multivalent one, indicating both heat and light. In Ego Dormio he alludes to a purifying heat when he claims 'pe fyre of loue hath brent away al pe roust of syn'.  
Rolle also uses fire to emphasize the intensity of love, either divine or human, as indicated in the passage cited above about the third degree of love: 'pi goostly egh is taken vp in to be light of heuyn, and pare ennumyned in grace and kyndlet of pe fyre of Cristes loue, so pat pou shal feel verrailly pe brenmyng of loue in pe herte.'  
Rolle uses the light produced by fire as a visual metaphor; since sight was regarded as a more intellectual sense, light becomes a metaphor associated with heaven and grace.

The Cloud author’s directions to his disciple about the contemplative method seem to be opposed to Rolle’s somatic language. He contends that the practitioner should situate himself between two clouds, of forgetting and of unknowing. The cloud of forgetting is a metaphor for the apophatic or negative method of contemplation itself. In order to concentrate his attention on the utterly unknown deity, the disciple must obliterate all thoughts from his mind and ‘put a cloud of forgettyng binep pe, bitwix pe & alle pe creatures pat euer ben maad’.  
The second cloud is a metaphor for the absolute transcendence and incomprehensibility of God:

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18 Rolle, Richard Rolle, p. 33.
19 Sutherland provides this translation in ‘Biblical Text and Spiritual Experience’, p. 702. Matter’s translation of this verse is a more literal rendering of the Vulgate in Voice of my Beloved, p. xxiii: ‘[love’s] lamps, lamps of fire / and of flames / many waters cannot extinguish charity / nor rivers drown it’. John Alford asserts that Rolle always uses Songs 8:6-7 to describe the highest state of love, in ‘Biblical initatio in the Writings of Richard Rolle’, ELH 40 (1973), pp. 1-23 (22). Sutherland, however, contends that Rolle’s biblical citations are not as schematic as Alford claims: ‘Biblical Text and Spiritual Experience’, p. 707.
20 Rolle, Richard Rolle, p. 32.
21 Ibid., p. 31.
22 The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 5, p. 13.
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This darknes & this cloude is, howsoever thou dost, bitwix thee & thy God, & lette the thee pat thou maist not see him cleerly by liȝt of understanding in thy reson, ne fele him in swnettes of loue in bin affection. & perfore schap thee to bide in this darknes as longe as thou maist, euermore crieng after him pat thou louest; for if ever schalt thou feele him or see him, as it may be here, it behoue thou alweys be in this cloude & in this darknes.  

Interestingly, the Cloud author refers to the light of understanding and the sweetness of affection, invoking the senses of sight and taste as Rolle does, but perhaps making his metaphoric intent clearer by using phrases rather than the single words. Unlike Rolle, though, the Cloud author contends that neither understanding nor affection provides adequate access to the divine.

Despite his suspicion of the imagination and sensory language, the Cloud author again employs metaphors of sight and touch in describing the culmination of contemplative practice in the brief and sporadic penetration of the cloud of unknowing. First of all, the apophasic exercise he teaches involves stirrings or impulses of affection that the contemplative is to direct continually towards God as 'sparcle fro pe cole' or 'as a sharp darte of longing loue'. These metaphors emphasize the rapid succession of upward, piercing movements, sometimes expressed through the repetition of single words like sin or love, to indicate the pulsation of desire. The Cloud author recommends that his disciple repeat this effort until the transcendent deity beyond human conception responds:

Pan wil he summynge parauentre seend oute a beme of goostly liȝt, peersynge pis cloude of vnknowing pat is bitwix thee & hym, & schewe thee sum of his priuete, he whiche man may not, ne kan not, speke. Pan schalt thou feele thee affection enflaumid wiþ thee fire of his loue, fer more þen I kan telle thee, or may, or wile, at pis tyme. For of pat werke pat fallip to only God dar I not take apon me to speke wiþ my blabryng fleschely tonge; & schortly to say, alpof I durst, I wolde not.

Like Rolle, the Cloud author uses both the light and the heat of fire as metaphors for illumination and love, but, alluding to Paul's words about his mystical experience in 2 Corinthians 12:4, he is reluctant to try to describe contemplative union in more detail. Thus, despite the Cloud author's realization of the limitation of language to discuss spiritual experience, he employs the same words as Rolle does in describing the culminating experience of contemplation, although he acknowledges more explicitly the figurative nature of this language.

The spiritual programme of the two books of Hilton's Scale of Perfection is closer to Rolle's than the Cloud author's. Like Rolle, Hilton is instructing an anchorite on the traditional stages of contemplative progress, rather than the more advanced apophasic method of the Cloud author. In contrast to Rolle,

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23 Ibid., Chapter 3, p. 9.
25 The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 4, p. 12; Chapter 6, p. 14; Chapter 12, p. 21.
26 Ibid., Chapter 26, p. 34.
however, Hilton more fully articulates the principles informing contemplative practice and places himself in the tradition of introspective mysticism derived from Augustine’s interpretation of the soul as the image of God and the conception of contemplative ascent as a journey into the self and upward toward God. 27 In Scale I Hilton advises the anchorite that she should engage in introspection, ‘that is for to entre into thy owen soule bi meditacion, for to knowe what it is, and bi the knowynge therof for to come to the goostli knowynge of God. For as Seynt Austyn seith: “Bi the knowynge of mysylf, I schalle gete the knowing of God”.28 When the contemplative looks within, however, she finds that the image of God has been disfigured by sin. This recognition of the soul image of sin compels the contemplative to begin the process of destroying the ground of sin upon which it rests. The subsequent chapters of Book I therefore instruct the anchorite on how she can eradicate sin and restore the image of God to her soul. For Hilton, then, introspection begins a process of reform. The Cloud author, in contrast, discourages introspection because it reveals the ‘foule stynkyng lumpe’ of the sinful soul that must be put under the cloud of forgetting.29

Hilton begins Book II of the Scale of Perfection by reiterating the definition of the soul as an image of God and recounting the disfiguration of that image through original sin. In this book he divides reform into two types: the reform in faith necessary for salvation and the reform in feeling that is achieved through the contemplative process and culminates in union with God. Although Hilton speaks of contemplative ascent as a movement inward and upward, he agrees with the Cloud author that the soul must recognize that it is incorporeal and that God is incomprehensible. Using the metaphor of sight, as do his two predecessors, Hilton describes the apex of the contemplation as illumination:

[Jesus] openeth the innere 1ye of the soule whanne He lightneth the reson thorough touchynge and schynynge of His blyssid light, for to seen Hym and knowe Hym; not al fulli at ones, but liti and liti bi dyverse tymes, as the soule mai suffre Hym. He seith Hym not what He is, for that mai no creature doon in hevene ne in erthe; ne he seth Him not as He is, for that sight is ouli in the blisse of hevene. But he seth Him that He is: an unchaungeable beyege, a sovereyn might, sovereyn soothfastnesse, and sovereyne goodnesse, a blysid lyf, and an eendede blisse. This sethi the soule […] with a wondyrful reverence and a priveli brennande love, with goostli savour and heveneli delite, more cleerli and more fulli than mai be written or seid.30

Contemplation, for Hilton, is like the act of staring at the desired object from a distance without hope of achieving complete comprehension in this life. The sight of the deity only reveals humankind’s insignificance because, compared to God, ‘mankynde is as nought’.31 Though the means for achieving contemplative

27 See Turner, Darkness of God, Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 50–101, for an excellent discussion of Augustine’s introspective mysticism.
29 See The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 43, p. 45.
30 Hilton, Scale, Book II, Chapter 32, p. 212.
31 Ibid., Book II, Chapter 37, p. 227.
union is different, Hilton agrees with both Rolle and the Cloud author in using light and fire as metaphors to signify this moment of illumination. In the next chapter, though, Hilton consciously explains the meaning of these metaphors of ascent and interiority, light and fire; as do his predecessors, he associates light with truth and reason and fire with love and affection. Hilton’s discussion is similar to the Cloud author’s analysis of the figurative nature of the language in Chapters 45 to 62 and reveals the influence of Cloud on Scale II.

Although they subscribe to different theories of contemplation, the three male Middle English mystics are similar in several respects. All wrote guidebooks addressed to recluse to instruct them about the stages in a spiritual progression that culminates in an experience of contemplative union. All three agreed that this experience is one reserved for the spiritual elite, those in contemplative life, rather than all Christians. All three described the apex of this process using metaphors of bright light and burning fire that appeal to the senses of sight and touch. If we now finally turn to Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love we will see how different her conception of union is from that of her male colleagues.

Julian of Norwich addresses her Revelation of Love not to an audience of contemplatives but rather to her ‘everchristen’, her fellow Christians. She recounts and interprets the visionary experience she had in May 1373 so ‘that they might alle see and know the same that I sawe, for I wolde that it were comfort to them’ (Revelation, 8.23–4). In the Fourteenth Revelation she discusses union with God in paradoxical language: ‘Hyely owe we to enjoye that God bewonneth in oure soule, and mekille hyly we owe to enjoye that oure soule be in God. Our soule is made to be Goddes wonning; and the wonning of oure soule is God, which is unmade’ (Revelation, 54.7–9). Rather than using the metaphors of bright light and burning fire, as her three male counterparts do, Julian intensifies the intimacy between the soul and God with her metaphors of mutual enclosure. However, her statement seems to be a contradiction: how can the soul be situated in God and God situated in the soul simultaneously? As unusual as her wording sounds, Julian’s conception of mutual enclosure is influenced by Augustine’s introspective mysticism. As Turner puts it, ‘the truth Augustine discovered was that to discover his own inwardness was the same thing as to discover God and that to discover God was to discover his own inwardness – either discovery was the discovery of his true selfhood’. Although Julian, like Hilton, subscribes to the Augustinian model, she does not emphasize the disfiguration of the image of God by sin nor the distance between humankind and the deity as he does.

Furthermore, while all three of the male mystics regard the union with God as the culmination of an arduous spiritual progress reserved for a few elites, Julian instead presents the double conjunction of the soul within God and God within the soul as common to all who will be saved. Julian uses the terms substance and sensuality to refer to the two parts of the soul corresponding to Augustine’s higher and lower reason. She situates the substance, or higher part of the soul,

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32 Turner, Darkness of God, p. 70.
33 The Cloud author and Hilton also use sensuality, but the word has a much more negative resonance for them. See The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 66, p. 56, and Hilton, Scale, Book II, Chapter 13, p. 159.
in God and the image of God in the sensuality, or lower part of the soul: 'For I saw full sekerly that oure substance is in God. And also I saw that in oure sensuallte God is' (Revelation, 55.19–20). Julian explains creation as a process occurring in two stages. The substance of the soul is first created as a substance in God: 'And I sawe no difference between God and oure substance, but as it were all God. And yet my understanding toke that oure substance is in God; that is to sey, that God is God and oure substance is a creature in God' (Revelation, 54.13–15). Thus God is the 'grounde in whome oure soule standeth'. In a second stage of creation, the substance of the soul is joined to the sensuality when it is embodied; at that point the image of God unites the two parts of the soul and becomes the 'mene that kepeth the substance and the sensuallte togeder, so that it shall never departe' (Revelation, 56.10–11). Thus, paradoxically, the soul is both enclosed by and enclosing God. Not only does the substance of the soul rest within God as the ground of its being, but the image of God resides within the soul from the moment of its embodiment with the sensuality.

The concept of God's immanence as the image within the soul is, of course, the basis for the Augustinian tradition and the enabling premise of Hilton's introspective mysticism. However, the notion of the substance of the soul grounded in God, although implicit in Augustine, becomes most pronounced in the mystical writings of the late Middle Ages. Julian's references to the ground of the soul reveal the same concern with 'the exemplary or virtual preexistence of the soul in God' that McGinn identifies as 'an important theme of the new mysticism of the thirteenth century .... a notion that served as at least part of the foundation for new modes of conceiving unio mystica.' Julian refers to this exemplary pre-existence of the soul in the second person of the Trinity as she explains the 'godly wille' of those who shall be saved: 'For that ech kinde that heven shall be fulfilled with behoveth nedes of Goddes rightfulhede so to be knit and oned in him, that therein were kepte a substance which might never nor shulde be parted from him, and that thorow his awne good will in his endlessse forseeing purpose' (Revelation, 53.14–17). As illuminated by Jenkins later in this volume, Julian uses metaphors of knitting and a knot to describe the entanglement of substance that this union entails:

[Th]is deerywurthy soule was precously knit to [Crist's soul] in the making. Which knot is so sute and so mighty that it is oned into God, in which oning it is made endlessly holy [...] all the soules that shalbe saved in heven without ende be knit in this knot, and oned in this oning, and made holy in this holyhede'.

(Revelation, 53.50–4)

For Julian, then, the pre-existence of the soul's substance in the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, is an ontological rather than a mystical union. It is an eternal and essential conjunction rather than a temporary one.

Julian's conception of union and the language she uses to discuss it are very different from that of the three male Middle English mystics. Although there is no evidence that Julian knew the works of the continental mystics like Hadewijch

31 McGinn, Flowering of Mysticism, p. 214.
of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite of Porète or Meister Eckhart, to whom McGinn attributes this emphasis on the pre-existence of the soul in God, further investigation of the similarities and differences between her ideas about God as the ground of being and those of her continental predecessors are warranted.\footnote{Bernard McGinn, 'Love, Knowledge and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition', in \textit{Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue}, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York, 1989) p. 75; Turner, \textit{Darkness of God}, p. 162.}