One of the central issues facing medieval feminist scholarship is the question of how to judge the influence of the negative view of the feminine presented in male-authored texts for and about women. It has long been accepted that, while negative stereotypes cannot be assumed to reflect the reality of women's lives and natures in the Middle Ages, nonetheless these stereotypes were influential in creating attitudes that fundamentally shaped both how medieval women were perceived by the society in which they lived, and how medieval women perceived themselves. Yet the question of how far the assumptions of misogynist male authorities can be held to be definitive for the attitudes of society in general and women in particular raises both practical and theoretical problems for those who wish to study the female readers (as opposed to the male authors) of such texts. Feminist studies of medieval misogynist stereotypes too often focus on the male authors, thus over-emphasizing the pervasiveness and power of negative stereotypes, assuming that the images which defined how women were perceived by an admittedly small and elite group of authors also defined how they perceived themselves.

One corrective to this problem is to turn to female authors and search for the "female voice" which will speak for an again admittedly small group of literate women, who comprised the audience to whom these texts were addressed. Indeed, it becomes apparent from the study of women authors that, while they were strongly influenced by the cultural and symbolic formulations of their time, these women did not always interpret the traditions and symbols of their culture in the same way as their male contemporaries (see, for example, Bynum 1987, 1992; Margherita 1994; Staley 1994; and Watson 1996). Yet, their "resistance" to negative stereotypes is not such as can be classified as truly "feminist" in twentieth century terms, and even an author like Christine de Pizan, who consciously challenges the misogyny of her day, often subscribes to a view of
female nature which is profoundly influenced by the very attitudes which she rejects. Thus, many feminist critics are uncomfortable with the idea of such authors as "subversive," preferring rather to see them as participating in their own subjection through the internalization of the negative stereotypes which confine them (see, for example, Delany 1990). Yet, as Watson has suggested, such women’s responses to the stereotypes which sought to define them still have much to teach us about disenfranchisement, and the ways in which it can and cannot be overcome. And the (to us paradoxical) acceptance by women writers of many of the terms on which misogyny was and is built has an especially important role to play in our reflections on a discourse which is so often assumed to be homogeneous (Watson 1996, 11).

This being the case, how are we then to reconcile the negative picture created by historicist analysis of medieval misogyny with the sense that, in some way, women writers did at least attempt to "resist" the stereotypes which, at the same time, they continued to use? One solution has been offered by psychoanalytical criticism, which evades the perceived incompatibility between historicism and feminism by studying the aspects of women’s reading, writing, and language which are shared across the boundaries of time and space. For example, Irigaray’s concept of “mimicry” suggests that by a deliberate adoption of the terms of cultural femininity created by masculine voices, women can create their own subjective speaking voice, commonly described by the term *écriture feminine* (see Peters, nd).1 A similar approach is that suggested by Gayle Margherita, who, in a recent study of Margery Kempe, argues that Margery inverts the patrilineal hegemony through the use of a “maternal metalanguage” created by the use of stories and images of mothers and wives, reflecting a maternal identification which is not lost in the transition from a pre-linguistic state to language.2

While the insights produced by such an approach are illuminating, there is a danger of falling into an essentialist theory of reading which assumes that there is a feminine reading, and that all women will necessarily read alike, at least on the sub-conscious or meta-linguistic level. The supposition that a woman’s reading is influenced primarily by psychological factors is as disturbing as the assumption that a woman’s reading is influenced largely by biological factors. If we are to take seriously the contention that gender is a socio-cultural category, then we must also take seriously the idea that socio-cultural formations are profoundly influenced by historical situation.
A similar problem of de-contextualization is found in the theoretical stance of
semiotics, which again provides useful interpretations of medieval texts at the
cost of removing them from the historically specific contexts which produced
them, and is therefore limited in its applicability. It is not enough to simply
state, as does Jennifer Ash (1990, 75-76), that “For the semiotician, objections
such as these are irrelevant.” To recognize that “the text is not an autonomous
entity, but is, rather, historically specific, bound to the signifying network, the
cultural context which produced it” and that “we will never be able to read that
text from a position within the culture that produced it” does not make
considerations of historical and cultural context irrelevant; it merely outlines
the difficulty of the task at hand. To move from the recognition that “my reading
of medieval texts and textuality will necessarily be constrained by the discourses
which inform my own position within late-twentieth-century Western capitalism,
those discourses which have constructed me as a thinking, speaking subject” to
the assumption that those constraints make an examination of a text within its
own cultural and historical context not only impossible but unnecessary is to
beg the question. In fact, Ash’s own study shows the importance of context as
she continually situates the text she examines in the context of medieval
devotional representation and practise.

The answer, then, is not to dismiss historical context. At the root of the unease
regarding the alliance between feminism and historicism which runs as an
undercurrent to much contemporary feminist analysis lies the very real problem
of the concentration of much of contemporary historicist study of misogyny on
the context of the public, masculine world reflected in the works of male authors.
While an understanding of this essentially masculine world is indeed necessary,
it must be remembered that women’s historical and cultural context (and thus
women’s “readings” of gender and misogyny) was also shaped by the domestic,
private and feminine world of kitchen and hall, convent and anchorhold. If the
barriers set up between these two worlds are inscribed in texts for and about
women by male authors concerned to contain and control their female readers,
it must also be admitted that women readers and authors can re-define those
boundaries by subtly altering the interpretations of images and metaphors used
to establish them. As Watson points out, part of the difficulty here is that much
feminist scholarship (and, indeed, scholarship in general) tends to treat the subject
of misogyny itself in a typically undifferentiated manner. He suggests that
“medieval women writers would presumably not have agreed either with one
kind of feminist view that patriarchal society’s way of defining woman is
coterminous with misogyny, or with the resulting tendency (evident in many recent analyses) to treat explicitly misogynistic propaganda ... as somehow expressing the real truth about medieval culture, instead of being (as de Pizan could believe) a 'heresy' in that culture's essentialist terms” (Watson 1996, 29-30). Thus, medieval women writers often respond to the gender stereotypes which they inherit from their culture neither by accepting nor by rejecting them, but rather by thinking through them in as active and positive a way as possible, identifying with them and even intensifying them to the point where their "authorized" meaning (as understood, for example, by institutionally powerful men) undergoes basic shifts (Watson 1996, 8).

It is thus necessary to seek a theoretical model which can both recognize the potential for subversion in the writings of medieval women authors and retain the historical contextualization which will avoid what Watson terms the "unthinking idealization of medieval women writers" as the vanguard of radical feminism (Watson 1996, 9). Through rigorous attention to context, the influence of gender as a socio-cultural construction can be taken into consideration, while acknowledging that medieval women themselves might not have recognized it as such. At the same time, it becomes possible to see medieval women's writing as a "negotiation" between women authors and the authoritative cultural text of their time, while avoiding the essentialist conclusion that women in general would read these texts thus and so (see Watson 1996, 10). One must continually keep in mind that what is empowering in the twentieth century would not necessarily be empowering in the thirteenth; a twentieth-century woman's reading will be as different from a thirteenth-century woman's as her cultural and historical context, as different (or more so) as a thirteenth-century man's.³

There is, of course, no one theoretical model which will adequately address all of the problems outlined above. Yet, some models may prove more helpful than others. One theoretical approach which has largely been neglected by medieval feminist scholarship yet which, I propose, offers a potential solution, is the kind of feminist/historicist models which were developed in the early stages of feminist criticism to open up the worlds and words of nineteenth-century women novelists. The nineteenth century and the late middle ages bear some similarities in their treatment and views of women: both were fairly restricted in their views of "woman's place," yet both had a vigorous sub-culture of educated, writing
women, and a rising class of educated middle-class women readers. One main
difference, of course, lies in the area of genre and subject matter: much of
women's published writing in the nineteenth century is in the novel form, and
tends to deal with "realistic" subjects such as love, marriage, social roles etc.,
while English medieval women's writing is characteristically devotional and
visionary.  

In the pages which follow, I would like to explore some of the implications of
reading the Revelation of Julian of Norwich using such a theoretical stance, in
order to show how Julian creates metaphorical possibilities for reinterpreting
the gendered stereotypes of her day, without rejecting them entirely. Such an
approach will enable us to examine both what medieval women writers take
from the culture in which they are situated, and how they reinterpret it, as well
as what medieval women writers share with women in other times and places,
and what they do not.

Elaine Showalter, in A Literature of Their Own, describes three stages into which
she categorizes women's writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The
first stage, which Showalter dubs "feminine", is characterized by imitation of
the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards and social roles. The
second, "feminist" stage is characterised by protest against those standards and
values and advocacy of the rights and values of the minority (including, but not
restricted to, women), accompanied by a demand for autonomy. The third,
"female" stage begins women's search for self-discovery and identity, through
a turning inwards (Showalter 1977, 13). While these stages do overlap, Showalter
sees them as essentially sequential, representing three distinct historical
"movements." Thus, the stages which represent subversion, autonomy, self
identification and fulfilment occur subsequent to, not coincidentally with, the
"feminine" period of conformity to the patriarchal tradition.

Showalter's three "stages" are extremely useful for analyzing and describing
characteristics of women's writing. However, there are some problems with the
"sequential" view which she adopts. By attaching her theoretical framework so
closely to a particular period, Showalter limits the ways in which her theories
can usefully be applied to other women in different times and places. As well,
by theorizing women's writing in terms of an historically determined
"progression", Showalter fails to account for writings which do not fit neatly
into one of her three "stages". For example, the feminine stage, characterized
by the internalization of the domestic view of women, cannot represent a kind
of literature which conforms for practical and potentially subversive reasons, but can only express the repression characteristic of the early nineteenth century, with only negative consequences, and little or no liberating potential. However, when one looks at the novels produced during this period, one is struck by the ambiguity of their authors' so-called conformity to the patriarchal traditions in which they lived and worked.

A more fruitful approach is, I think, that offered in Gilbert and Gubar's indispensable and now standard study The Madwoman in the Attic. Gilbert and Gubar describe the novels of the nineteenth-century women writers whom they investigate (including the Brontës) as "palimpsestic", works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning. Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards ... (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 73).

They argue that these results are achieved through various strategies of revision (or re-vision, in the case of Julian) and disguise, which enable women authors to promote a submerged, hidden, feminine agenda which has the potential to redefine the patriarchal tradition in which they are bound, while at the same time circumventing the problematic strategies resorted to by many of their contemporaries, of either apologetically defining themselves as "mere women" or "mimicking" male authors, forms and subject matter (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 72).

In this theoretical framework, then, Showalter's three "stages" can merge in the work of one author, both consciously and sub-consciously. This "merging" of conformity, subversion and self-discovery, I will argue, provides a useful theoretical framework for an analysis of both the process and maturation of Julian's writing from the Short Text to the Long Text, and for understanding the changes that occur between the two texts (in particular, Julian's growing confidence in herself as a writer and a visionary, and her use of the concept of the motherhood of God).

One of Gilbert and Gubar's starting points is the "anxiety of authorship" which they identify in women's writing, an author's fear that, because she is a woman, she cannot create (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 49). Julian, too, displays an "anxiety of authorship"; for Julian, however, the fear is not that she cannot create, but
that she should not. Nevertheless, for Julian, as for nineteenth-century women novelists, this anxiety results from the fact that her precursors are almost exclusively male. The standards and rules for both the form and content of writing (whether, in the nineteenth century, novels and poetry, or, in Julian's case, devotional and visionary texts) are, therefore, set and defined by men. Indeed, in the fourteenth century, writing and its precursor, education, are not only male, but predominantly Latin categories, and therefore doubly inaccessible to women. For Julian, then, as much as for the women novelists studied by Gilbert and Gubar,

\[\text{not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority ..., they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes ... drastically conflict with her own sense of her self—that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer’s male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 48).}\]

As a visionary, writing about a mystical encounter with God, Julian is doubly subject to the authority of her male precursors (and contemporaries). Not only was the medieval church hierarchy exclusively male and auctoritas a Latin, male category to which women were denied access in both theory and practise, but Julian herself would have been subject to the authority of a male priest/confessor as an anchoress. Julian's anxiety on this account, and her struggle with the dichotomy identified by Gilbert and Gubar (quoted above) is clear in the Short Text. The Short Text clearly indicates Julian's recognition that the deeply rooted ambivalence towards women's writing is tied, not only to the theological issue of women's teaching, but also to the metaphorical concern with the woman's "voice": the words which she speaks are dangerous, and the language in which she speaks, hears, reads, and writes is suspect. Julian's anxiety on this account is clear; she is convinced that her vision has much to teach her "evyn crystenes", and that God has revealed it to her in order that she may make it known, yet she is uneasy at the thought that she herself, as a woman, might be considered a "teacher":

\[\text{Botte god for bede that 3e schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nougt soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a}\]

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wommann, leued, febille and freylle. Botte I wate wele, this that I saye, I hafe it of the schewyng of hym that es souerayne techare. Botte sothelye charyte styrres me to telle ʒowe it, for I wolde be my selfe to the mare hatynge of synne and lovyng of god. Botte for I am a womann, schulde I therfore leve that I schulde nouȝt telle ʒowe the goodenes of god, syne that I saw in that same tyme that is his wille, that it be knawenn? And that schalle ʒe welle see in the same matere that folowes aftyr, if itte be welle and trewlye takyn. Thane schalle ʒe sone forgette me that am a wrecche, and dose so that I lette ʒowe nought, and behalde Jhesu that ys techare of alle (ST 222.40-51).8

Julian recognizes that she is “disqualified” as a “teacher” on account of both her gender and her lack of learning (which, in this case, seems to indicate a lack of Latin, rather than total illiteracy). Yet, if she must not “teach,” must she also not “tell,” when it is clearly God’s will that she “make known” what she has been shown by the “teacher of all”? The anxiety reflected in this passage is never fully resolved in the Short Text, where Julian simply adopts the strategy of deferring authority to God, a strategy which characterizes much women’s writing. The passage is, however, radically altered in the revised Long Text, where Julian’s anxiety about her authorship and her gender disappears. Instead of emphasizing her “lewdness” or lack of learning and emphasizing that Jesus is the teacher who speaks through the vision, in the Long Text Julian explicitly allies her learning and her vision. The rambling self-justification of the Short Text is condensed into a coherent assertion of the general value of her vision, and the caveat to focus on the message and disregard the messenger is not because she is a woman, but simply because she is human:

Alle that I say of me I mene in person of alle my evyn cristen, for I am lernyd in the gosiely shewyng of our lord god that he meneth so. And therfore I pray yow alle for gods sake, and counceyle yow for yowre awne profyght, þat ye leue the beholdyng of a wrech that it was schewde to, and myghtely, wysely and mekely behold it in god, that of hys curteyse loue and endless goodnesse wolde shew it generally in comfort of vs alle. For it is goddes wylle that ʒe take it with a grete ioy and lykyng, as Jhesu hath shewde it to yow (LT 319.33-320.40, emphasis mine).9
Here, Julian explicitly assumes the Church’s role as counsellor and mediator. The subtle progression by which Julian takes on the priestly role of a mediator between God and unlearned lay believers (or “wretches”) is extraordinary. She begins by claiming that her revelation is meant for all Christians, while still identifying herself as the “wrech that it was schewde to.” In spite of the label “wrech” (altered from the Short Text’s “wretched worm”) and her immediate insistence that “[f]or the shewyng I am nott good, but if I loue god the better; and in as much as ye loue god the better, it is more to yow than to me [I am not good because of the showing, but only if I love God better; and in as much as you love God better, it is more to you than to me]” (LT 321.2-3), Julian clearly sees herself here in a role which is usually reserved for clergy, that of a conduit of God’s teaching and revelation. She quickly moves, however, to an identification with her audience of “evyn cristenes”, asserting that, in his love and goodness, God “wolld shew it generally in comfort of vs alle.” From this she draws the conclusion that all of her readers can benefit from her experience if they will take it “as Jhesu hath shewde it to yow” (emphasis mine).

This identification of her revelation as a teaching or showing meant for all Christians is not new to the Long Text; what is new is the confidence with which Julian presents herself as the divinely ordained mediator of that vision. She follows it up, however, by insisting that she is not better than others who have not had revelations or visions, and by emphasizing that (in spite of her apparently subversive assumption of roles that are traditionally reserved for the male clergy) she conforms in everything to what Holy Church preaches and teaches (“in all thing I beleue as holy chyrch prechyth and techyth [in all things I believe as holy church preaches and teaches]” [LT 323.21-22]). She insists that it is with this in mind that she has contemplated her revelation, and concludes with her conviction that she has contemplated it “as in gods menyng [according to God’s meaning]” (LT 323.27-28). She therefore conflates her “learning” and her readers’ belief in her visions with the teaching of Holy Church and her own belief in those teachings. The anxiety which is clearly evident in the Short Text has now been reduced to an identification of herself as a “wretch” among wretches (an identification which has always been implied by her fellow-feeling with her “evyn cristen”), and the humble concession that it is not her visions which make her “good”.

What seems clear is that Julian’s re-vision, both of her writing and herself, was the result of a long and hard struggle to understand the content of her original
vision and how the authority, and indeed, necessity which she felt it imposed on her to write squared with her identity as “a woman, unlearned, feeble and frail”. Nicholas Watson has recently suggested that the Short Text ought not to be considered the immediate and enthusiastic response to Julian’s initial vision of 1373, but rather as a text which was written over a considerably longer period of time (perhaps as much as 15-20 years). If he is is correct (which he seems to me to be), then we must agree with his assertion that

the qualities of confidence and serenity that are so often admired in L have to be reinterpreted as the products of a longer and more costly struggle than has been appreciated. The historical context of that struggle is also illuminated in such a way as to suggest more precise links than have been made hitherto between Julian’s development and the religious climate of her day (Watson 1993, 673).

The Short Text, itself, as Watson points out, thus

emerges ... as a vastly more interesting text than its general neglect by scholars suggests: not the timid and youthful experiment that it has been presumed to be, but rather a mature and carefully thought out attempt to articulate Julian’s experience — an attempt that is nonetheless, in important respects, a failure (Watson 1993, 674).

One of those important respects is, apparently, Julian’s attempt to reconcile her visionary authority with her sex.

The Long Text, then, can be seen as an attempt at re-vision, in order to achieve this reconciliation. An important implication of this is that the anxiety of authorship evident in the Short Text is far more acute than has previously been assumed, and that it developed over fully as extended a period as did the “re-visioning” with which Julian dispels it. This anxiety cannot, therefore, be simply dismissed as the uncertainty of an unseasoned and untrained visionary, which was removed through maturity, experience, meditation, and study. Rather, it must be acknowledged as something deeply ingrained in Julian’s view of herself, which is not overcome even in the bold (and therefore long-deferred) step of moving from vision to text. For Julian, the establishment of a connection between authority and authorship is a protracted and painful process.
Julian's progress between the Short and Long Texts illustrates Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that for women, the act of literary creation is necessarily a battle for self-creation, and that the battle for self-creation involves the woman writer in the revisionary process. Yet Julian's re-visioning of her text remains cast in terms which stress her allegiance to Holy Church. Thus, the authority which Julian creates for herself is that of a visionary voice authorized by the very institution whose teachings cause her so much dismay. As Staley suggests,

"there are, in fact, times when her avowals of obedience seem designed to function as screens for her own strongly original and often-times bold cast of thought. Her tactics suggest her keen sense of community and her grasp of the ways in which literary texts at once express communal views and test the outer limits of community by expanding upon existing traditions" (Staley 1994, 30).

In the Long Text, then, Julian can also be seen as adopting the second tactic suggested by Gilbert and Gubar, that of disguise. Julian does not, however, adopt the destructive strategy of assuming a male persona, a strategy which, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, constitutes for the woman author a denial of self (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 69). Rather, Julian recreates herself, moving from a view of herself as a wretch who cannot teach but submits to the authority of Christ, the teacher of all whose words she merely transmits, to a more confident view of herself as one who, although she conforms to the teachings of Holy Church, takes on the role of a visionary, learned in ghostly showing, and therefore qualified to serve as a "counsellor" of her "even-Christians". As Gilbert and Gubar suggest,

[h]er battle ... is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 49).

Julian thus adopts the strategies of subversion through conformity suggested by Gilbert and Gubar, using convention in order to have her potentially subversive work taken seriously. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that this strategy is born not so much from a rebellion against prevailing modes of thought as from feeling guilty about not being able to conform to them (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 75), a feeling which is clearly evident in the Short Text. This inability to conform
produces a feeling of having something to hide, which women countered by assuming accents of acquiescence in order to gain the freedom to live on their own terms:

... in publicly presenting acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 74).

What is hidden, or disguised, is the woman writer’s quest for her own identity, for self-definition; a quest which leads her to revise patriarchal texts, to “shatter the mirror of what woman is supposed to be,” to “assault, revise, deconstruct and reconstruct” the images of woman inherited from male-authored texts (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 76).

Julian’s (re)creation of herself as a “holy woman” is significant here. As an anchoress, she gained access to reading material and the time for study which she needed in order to fully contextualize her visions in the theology of her times. More important, perhaps, she gained the reputation for holiness which gave her authority, a recognition which is evidenced not only in numerous bequests made to her over the years, but also in the testimony of Margery Kempe. She thus gained both the time she needed to work through her visions, and the recognition she required to believe in herself, and to gain the belief of others.

Julian’s redefinition of the image of woman by which she will define herself as a female visionary, however, involves not so much the active reconstruction of the images of female humanity, but the reconstruction of a male icon, the ultimate male model in whose image all humankind is created, into a female figure, the mother of us all in whom we find, male and female alike, the “ground of our being”. By reconstructing the model on which her image of self is based, Julian is able to reconstruct her feminine self, without succumbing to the self-division which Gilbert and Gubar identify in nineteenth-century women novelists. These women must create characters who can enact covert authorial anger, projecting their own rebellion onto passionate characters who can act out their own subversive impulses. More often than not, however, these impulses which are so destructive of the patriarchal structures against which women wish to rebel can only be projected onto mad, monstrous women, not heroines. Women novelists of this period thus dramatize their own self-division, which prompts them both to accept and reject the strictures of the patriarchy (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 77-78). Julian, on the other hand, displaces images of anger and rage
onto the male figure of the devil who appears immediately following her shame-filled acknowledgement that she had, even for a moment, dismissed her vision as raving or madness. Rage recreated as an externalized, masculine trait, and madness too is associated with the male figure of the devil, to whose influence her momentary “madness” of doubting the truth of her vision must be attributed. It is significant that the male cleric to whom Julian makes the statement that she had “raied” dismisses, not her vision (which he takes seriously), but her own dismissal of it as madness.

The concept of madness is also linked to the “anxiety of authorship” which is so evident in many women’s texts. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the isolation of the woman writer’s struggle (which arises from a lack of a female precursor or model) is like an illness, her alienation like madness, and that this explains (at least in part) the recurrence of themes and experiences of illness and madness in their writings and their works (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 51). In this context, the illness which inaugurates Julian’s vision might be seen as a symptom of her sense of “dis-ease” about her ability and worthiness to be the kind of “holy woman” who experiences visions, just as nineteenth-century women writers express their own “dis-ease” with writing through illness (see Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 58-59).

The self-doubt, the sense of inferiority and inadequacy which is produced by nineteenth-century women’s education in “femininity” is also evident in the “madness” of wanting to be a writer (and by the mad characters who haunt some of their works, and provide the title for Gilbert and Gubar’s study of their writings (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 60)). This concept of “madness” is interesting in light of Julian’s initial assessment of her visions, contained in both the Short and Long Texts:

Thann comm a religiouse personn to me and asked me howe I farde, and I sayde that I hadde raied that daye. And he lugh lowde and enterlye. And I sayde: The crosse that stode atte my bedde feete, it bled faste; and with this worde the personn that I spake to wex alle sadde and meruelande. And onn ane I was sare aschamed for my reklessenes, and I thougt thus: this man takys it sadilye, the leste worde that I myght saye, that says na mare Jjerto. And when I sawe that he toke it so sadely and with so grete reuerence, I wex ryght aschamed, and walde haffe bene schryffenn. Bot I couth teile it na preste, for I thought, howe
schulde a preste leue me? I leued nought oure lorde god. This I leued sothfastlye for the tyme that I sawe hym, and so was than my wille and my menynge for to do with owtenn ende. But as a fule I lette it passe fro my mynde.

Loo I, wrich! This was a grete synne and a grete vnkyndnes, that I for folye of felynge of a litille bodely payne so vnwyselye lefte for the tyme the comforth of alle this blissede schewynge of oure lorde god. Here maye 3e see whatel am of my selfe ... (ST 266.7-267.23).

Julian’s initial perception of her vision as “raving” seems to be a correlative of her illness, both symptoms of her lack of self-assurance as a woman and as a visionary. It is also, interestingly, immediately followed by a sense of shame and guilt which is prompted not only, or even primarily, by her sense of having been untrue to the divine source and subject of her vision, but to herself, to her “wylle” and her “menynge.” Julian requires all Jesus’ assurance, “Witte it welle, it was na raunye that thowe sawe to day, botte teke it and leue it and kepe þe ther to, and þou schalle nought be ouercomenn [Know well, it was no raving that you saw today, but take it and believe it and keep yourself true to it, and you will not be overcome]” (ST 260.25-27), to counter-act the shame produced by her failure to acknowledge the truth of her vision to her first interlocutor.

While Julian’s “madness” is rooted in self-doubt and does cause a certain alienation both from herself and her vision (represented in her lack of belief and in the assault by the devil which momentarily replaces the comfort of her vision) and from the patriarchy (represented by her desire to be “shriven” and her simultaneous conviction that no priest would believe her when she herself had dismissed her vision as raving), it is not expressed in terms of the “madness” of wanting to be a writer. In fact, it is only through the act of writing, of communicating the revelation which she has foolishly, if momentarily, dismissed as madness, that Julian is able to finally overcome the “madness” of that dismissal. This is interesting in light of Gilbert and Gubar’s question of whether conformity to patriarchal strictures inevitably implies the suppression or repression which leads to illness or madness, or whether, if balanced, it can become a strategy. Such a strategy would enable her to find a middle way between admitting her “female limitations” and suppressing her work entirely, or denying her femaleness by publishing either under a male pseudonym or anonymously (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 62-64).
Gilbert and Gubar argue that women authors must do this by seeking a *female* precursor who proves that revolt is possible, a female model to legitimize their own rebellious endeavour, at the same time as they experience their gender as a painful obstacle or a debilitating inadequacy (Gilbert and Gubar, 49-50). Julian, who does not have any obvious female precursors (or at least none that we can, with any confidence, assert that she knew of) accomplishes her re-vision in an analogous, yet different, way. It is generally accepted that the revision represented by the Long Text was written in response to the secondary revelation of 1393. This second vision provides an explanation of the exemplum of the lord and the servant (LT Ch. 51). Julian had seen the lord and the servant in her original vision, but had omitted it from the Short Text because she found it too baffling. The explanation of the parable in the Long Text is dominated by the image of God as mother, in whom Julian (and all Christians) finds the source and ground of being (LT Ch. 52-63). What Julian seems to be doing here is finding, not a female precursor, but a *feminine* precursor, and thus re-defining herself through re-defining and re-visioning God. Just as nineteenth-century women novelists must struggle to overcome their “anxiety of authorship”, to repudiate their patriarchal legacy and recover or remember their lost foremothers in order to find a distinctive female power, Julian’s struggle to “remember” is also a struggle to “re-vision” not a female precursor, but the definitive foremother of us all, the mother-god in whom she finds the “ground” of her being. As Julian “remembers” or re-visions the exemplum of the lord and the servant, which was included in the original vision of 1373 but not understood, she also re-visions the subject of her vision, from a masculine lord to the divine mother, and she does so in her “mother-tongue”.

Thus, rather than adopt the self-destructive tactic of donning a male role, Julian instead projects the female role of motherhood onto God, endowing the patriarchal model with a female persona. Julian thus avoids the duplicity, compromise and hypocrisy which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, can plague the woman writer who mimics a male author, employing male plots and male conventions. Nor does she simply adopt the patriarchal version of “woman” as inferior or limited. Julian resolves the contradictions and tensions in ST not by denying her femaleness, or by succumbing to the “weak little woman” plot of madness and dreams, but by re-visioning the subject of her vision, God him/herself, and thus re-defines what it means to be “woman” (and indeed, as we shall see, what it means to be human).
In many ways, Julian's description of God as mother, while not new, represents a radical re-working of an image found in the works of a number of male authors. She does disguise her re-vision in conventional language, and reiterates her conformity to the patriarchal strictures under which she works by using the ideas and images which she finds in the books which she reads. However, her re-working of those themes and images shows that her hidden agenda may have been more subversive than her outward conformity suggests.

In addition, Julian uses (or misuses) common male traditions about women in order to recontextualize her search for self, and to re-vision the standard against which her self-hood is measured (although not in the parodic way suggested by Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 80). As Watson suggests, Julian transforms a "woman's theology" into a universal human theology, not only through the transformation of ideas such as the notion of women's "doubleness" (Watson 1996, 19-20), but also through using the terms and assumptions applied to women by misogynistic discourse and rendering them universally applicable (Watson 1996, 24). Thus, Julian not only applies stereotypical feminine imagery to all humankind, but fundamentally re-defines, in feminine terms, who God is, and therefore, what it means to be created in the image of God. Watson suggests that in presenting her vision as a meditation on Christ's suffering body, Julian uses the stereotypical "feminine" devotion to the humanity of Christ, consciously rejecting the more prestigious "masculine" forms of contemplative devotion (Watson 1996, 7). Yet, for Julian, the mother-Christ's body is specifically a female body, the body of the mother who creates and sustains humankind. By applying the imagery of motherhood to the incarnate Christ, Julian makes the feminine normative for the Word made Flesh, and thus for all flesh. By fundamentally redefining, in feminine terms, who God is, Julian thus also redefines what it means to be created in the image of God. The human ideal, therefore, becomes feminine.

Julian's use of the imagery of the motherhood of God is therefore one way in which she revises the images used by male authors in order to promote her own potentially subversive views while at the same time conforming to the structures in which she was confined. In order to illustrate this, I would like to turn now to an examination of this imagery in two male-authored texts (Ancrene Wisse and The Chastising of God's Children) and Julian's Revelation.

In Ancrene Wisse there are two seemingly contradictory attitudes towards motherhood and mothering, both of which are embodied in metaphors associated with the anchoress's ascetic life. The mother is presented as one who either inflicts...
suffering or who herself suffers terribly. The association of motherhood with suffering presents the metaphor of the mother in a negative light; yet, the mother who punishes her wayward child in order to save it is God himself. In addition, through the use of images of impregnation and the association of the body of the anchoress with the womb of the Virgin Mary, suffering becomes redemptive, a participation in Christ’s incarnation as well as his passion.

Throughout Ancrene Wisse the author presents a harsh view of parenting when it is used as a metaphor for God’s relationship with the anchoress, as motherhood is connected with discipline and trial. In a commonly cited passage which later becomes the “title piece” for The Chastising of God’s Children, the author seeks to explain why God might allow the anchoress to be tempted by comparing temptation to a game that God plays with the soul, as a mother plays with her child. In this parable, God is figured as the mother, who hides herself so that the child (the anchoress) will seek her out; the child runs hither and thither, crying bitterly for its mother, and only when the child has been reduced to tears does the mother jump laughing out of her hiding place, to dry the child’s tears and comfort him or her. This seems a rather cruel game; the benign end cannot disguise the pain to which the child is subjected.

The ambiguities in the metaphor of motherhood are also evident in passages where the anchoress is compared to a mother. For example, in Part Three of Ancrene Wisse the author compares the angry anchoress to the pelican who slays its chicks (AW iii.63-64, Savage and Watson 93). After the deed is done, the pelican, with great lamentation, draws blood from its own breast and with that blood restores its chicks. Even so, states the author, the angry anchoress slays her chicks, that is her good works, with the sin of her anger. She must therefore do as the pelican does, restoring her young with confession and penance. Once again, the pelican’s remorse cannot mitigate the harshness of her deed; the mother treats her child with cruelty, which she can only redeem by treating herself with equal austerity.

In the image of the mother pelican, however, the anchoress and Christ are fused. The blood which flows from the tearing of the mother’s breast clearly symbolizes Christ’s torn and bleeding side. The parallel between the wound in Christ’s side and the maternal breast of the pelican also recalls the parallel between Christ’s wounded side and the maternal breast of the virgin Mary in medieval iconography, where Mary is often represented exposing her breast as she intercedes for mankind, just as Christ is pictured displaying his wounded side as he pleads for sinners (see Bynum 1987, 270-273, and plates 23-30).
The anchoress’s identification with Mary becomes more explicit as the anchoress’s enclosure in her anchorhold is identified with Christ’s enclosure in Mary’s womb, in a narrow cradle, on the cross and in the tomb. The maternal metaphor is expanded as the anchoress is depicted not as the child, or as the mother who suffers for her young, but as the mother whose body gives life to Christ. In a complex web of imagery, the anchoress is compared both to Christ, who is enclosed, and to Mary, whose body encloses him.

The identification of the body/anchorhold of the anchoress with both the womb of Mary and the cross suggests that the anchoress’s participation in Christ’s crucifixion is potentially more than simply an identification with Christ through suffering. The anchoress’s suffering is the labour of a woman in childbirth; her body merges with the body of Christ as her body becomes the womb which encloses him.

The anchoress’s identification with both Christ and the Virgin Mary is reinforced in the presentation of the eucharist. In the eucharist the body of the anchoress merges with the body of Christ, not only in imitating his suffering but also in mystically consuming his body and blood. The eucharist is the moment of the anchoress’s engagement with the incarnation of Christ, an engagement which is portrayed in imagery which emphasizes Christ’s humanity, his incarnation in a physical body which is borne in the body of a woman. This is typical of medieval women’s eucharistic devotion described by Bynum, where eucharist and incarnation merge in “the insistent image and experience of flesh taken into flesh” (1984, 188, emphasis mine). In Ancrene Wisse, the image of “flesh taken into flesh” becomes an image of impregnation, as the anchoress’s purified body is paralleled to that of the virgin Mary, bearing Christ within her. The anchoress makes room for the Christ child who found no room on earth, as Christ descends to the “inn” of her body and finds his shelter (“herbearhe”) there. Her female flesh, the object of so much suspicion throughout the text, becomes the bearer of the incarnate Christ, as, like Mary, she makes her body into his anchorhouse and the human flesh which encloses him becomes her own.

The imagery of motherhood in Ancrene Wisse is therefore not entirely negative. The anchoress is presented with two seemingly contradictory attitudes toward motherhood: the “positive” overtones of nurturing and fertility which are found in those passages which deal with the more “mystical” aspects of the anchoritic life, and the harsher images which are reserved for the author’s analysis of temptation and sin. On the one hand, the anchoress’s ascetic life is a deserved
suffering, a discipline imposed by an angry parent, necessary to overcome temptation and to atone if she cannot. On the other hand, the anchoress’s suffering is an imitation of Christ’s suffering, the labour pains of a devoted and nurturing mother. Through these birth-pains, the anchoress becomes a mother to her own love for Christ and indeed to Christ himself, as she re-enacts the mystery of the incarnation within her body and her heart. Ultimately, female flesh is uniquely transfigured as it reflects and re-enacts the supreme paradox of Christianity, in which that which is weak and shameful is that which redeems the world.

This view of transfigured female flesh embedded in a text which displays the fear of women’s sexuality typical of clerical writings is potentially empowering, capable of radically changing the relation of the female devotee to her male God. She is no longer simply a passive supplicant, but an active participant in the drama of her own salvation and, indeed, the salvation of the world. In addition, the power relations implicit in the male/female hierarchy are potentially disrupted. The anchoress does not simply move from one form of submission to another, transferring her dependence from a human father or husband to his divine counterpart. She is not imaged simply as a submissive bride, but as a mother, a role which is explicitly allied in the text with divine authority and redemption. This is particularly important in countering the clerical culture which denied women any active participation in the enactment of the mysteries and sacraments of institutional religion.

In The Chastising of God’s Children, the metaphor of God as a mother playing with her child is reproduced and expanded, becoming the basis for a long discussion of temptation. The male author of Chastising addresses his work to a “religious sister,” who, he tells us, has asked him (her spiritual adviser) for a treatise on “the matier of temptacions, whiche pistle as me þenkeþ may resonabli be clepid þe chastisinge of goddies children (the matter of temptations, which epistle might, to my mind, reasonably be called ‘the chastising of God’s children’)” (Chastising, p. 95). The subject of the treatise is not merely a guide to the endurance of and remedies for temptations, but also a discussion of “the profit to the human soul of spiritual and physical afflictions” (Chastising, p. 41).

The author of Chastising uses the imagery of motherhood to represent the spiritual immaturity of his charges, who must be nurtured and punished as children are by their parents. He encourages his readers to see temptation as a withdrawing of God’s comforts which are ordained by God for our profit (“bien but for oure
The author displays unease about the subject of mystical devotion, and is careful to categorize visionary experience so that his readers can distinguish true visions from false (he seems convinced that, for the most part, they will experience the latter). He is determined to repress overt "enthusiasm" in mystical experience; in fact he seems to believe "that the pursuit of mystical union by his spiritual charges will represent a danger in itself" (Chastising, p. 48). The author thus sets himself against the affective mysticism typical of such authors as Rolle and Margery Kempe. Rather he encourages his readers to devote themselves to liturgical (Latin) prayer rather than private devotion, even if they cannot understand it. He reminds them that the kind of spiritual joy which can be compared to a spiritual drunkenness (and which manifests itself in joyful song or tears, skipping, running or dancing) is often present in the "first begynnyng" of the spiritual life, as God pampers his young children (Chastising, pp. 103-104). However, when such grace is withdrawn, they easily fall into "grucchynge" and heaviness of spirit, becoming negligent. The author calls this interaction between spiritual joy and despair "the pley of loue," a necessary step on the road to spiritual maturity. God is thus portrayed as a mother whose play with his children involves abandonment and punishment, both forms of discipline which are imposed "for the child's own good".

In Julian's Revelations, on the other hand, the representation of God as mother is quite different. God is not presented as the harsh mother who chastises her wayward child and hides her face from her weeping child; rather, God is imaged as a loving mother who, when her child falls, waits patiently for the child to seek her out, and then comforts and restores the erring child. While the image of the mother chastising her child does occur, it is given short shrift, and is embedded in a long section which focuses on the love of the mother, rather than the shortcomings of the child.

Like the author of Ancrene Wisse Julian associates images of motherhood and the eucharist, depicting the divine mother as one who nurtures and sustains. As the natural mother feeds her child with the milk of her body, so too Jesus
feeds his Christian children with his own body through the eucharist. The wound in Christ’s side is once again paralleled to the breast of the mother; the human mother may lay her child to her breast, but Jesus leads his children into his breast through the wound in his side. Yet Julian moves beyond Ancrene Wisse’s insistence on union with Christ through suffering, asserting that while our human mothers bear us to pain and death, our divine mother bears us to joy and eternal life. The wound in Christ’s side is a refuge for the soul, not in suffering, but through spiritual nurture and vision.

The imagery of motherhood is central to Julian’s complex understanding of the Trinity and of the nature of humankind as the image of the Trinity. The traditional association of masculine with active and feminine with passive is reversed: God is the might and goodness of fatherhood, who wills, Christ is the wisdom and “kyndnes” of motherhood, who works, and the Spirit is the light and grace of love, who confirms what the father wills and the mother works. Drawing upon the physiological relationship between a mother and child, Julian describes how Jesus is our mother in creation because he is the “ground” or source of our being (both substantial and sensual, i.e. spiritual and physical): “oure very moder in kynd of oure furst makyng, and he is oure very moder in grace by takyng of oure kynde made (our true mother in the nature (or essence) of our first creation, and he is our true mother in grace by taking on our created nature).” As in the prologue to the Gospel of John, Julian attributes the actual “working” of creation to the second person of the Trinity.

Jesus is also our mother in the Incarnation, through the taking on of that same “kynde” or “ground” of our sensual nature in the maiden’s womb. The incarnation restores the original unity of created human “kynde” through the reunion of our substantial and sensual natures, separated through sin. When, in the incarnation, God joins himself to our sensual, physical nature, he also rejoins our soul, which is also sensual, to our substantial nature, in which the image of God is found. As in Ancrene Wisse, the redemption accomplished by the union of human and divine is imaged in metaphors of enclosure and birth; as Christ’s enclosure in Mary’s womb joins human and divine nature, so too he encloses his children in himself and restores human “kynde” to the wholeness of its original creation. Yet, Christ is also enclosed in his children, dwelling in the human soul as once he was enclosed in the maiden’s womb.21

The comparison of Julian’s writing with Chastising would seem to indicate that medieval women did indeed read differently from their male contemporaries.
Both Julian and Chastising draw upon Ancrene Wisse. Julian is also influenced by Chastising, which she certainly knew and read. Yet Julian interprets the imagery of motherhood quite differently than the male author of Chastising, drawing upon the images of enclosure and nurture embedded within Ancrene Wisse's treatment of the eucharist, rather than the images of discipline and reproach found in Ancrene Wisse's treatment of sin and temptation. For the author of Chastising, God as mother is also other, a figure of authority who chastises his children for their "unkynedeness" or their failure to live up to the divine image which ought to define human "kynde". For Julian, however, God as mother is a figure which emphasizes human likeness to the divine. Rather than punishing human alienation (represented in Chastising as "unkynedeness"), the divine mother restores humanity to his/her likeness by taking on our likeness in the Incarnation, thus also restoring the unity of human "kynde".

While these differences may in part be attributed to the different purposes of the two texts (Chastising is meant as a spiritual guide, while Julian's Revelations is a mystical text), it must be kept in mind that gender and genre are themselves linked. The male author of Chastising assumes that women are weak and frail, subject to temptation and false visions, and unfit for true mystical experience. Julian's own experience has taught her that women can and do encounter God in mystical contemplation. It is hardly surprising, then, that the author of Chastising reads Ancrene Wisse as a treatise on temptation, while Julian reads it as a mystical guide.

The imagery of the motherhood of God is clearly empowering for Julian, in spite of the seeming audacity of claiming God himself as a "foremother". With the introduction of the complex discussion of God as mother in the Long Text, Julian ceases to apologize for being a woman. Julian's self-identification as a "wretched worm," "a woman, ignorant (lewd), weak and frail," is entirely absent from the Long Text, as is her agonizing concern that her sex might stand in the way of her message. The caveat adjuring the reader to disregard the messenger and focus on the divine message, is not, in the Long Text, because she is a woman, but simply because she is human. However, this spiritual and personal growth is not so much due to a redefinition of what it means to be a woman, or even what it means to be human, created in the image of God. Instead, Julian takes the bold step of re-defining (or re-visioning) the God in whose image humankind is created. By re-visioning the God in whom she finds the source and ground of her being as "mother" (or "fore-mother"), Julian removes the necessity of seeing
"woman" as inferior or as "other" than the ideal image of human-kynde. She thus accomplishes the difficult task of re-visioning herself, both as a member of the human race, and as a woman. As Julian's understanding of her visions evolves, so too does her confidence in herself as the female messenger of a God whom she increasingly represents in feminine terms.

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NOTES

1 Watson gives a cogent analysis of both the advantages and the dangers of such a reading of Julian's works (Watson 1996, 31-33).

2 Margery thus creates a "maternal sub-culture" which is "set against the dominant patriarchal social system," placing herself within a "matrilineal system of textual inheritance." She asserts a "counter-cultured canon of texts" through reading texts such as medieval saints' lives "up-so-down," in ways that subvert and feminize the authors' original codings of patriarchal culture (Margherita 1994, 36-37). Margherita concludes that Margery's "counter-canon insists on the right to remain within the framework of sacred history, while simultaneously overturning the tropological and sexual hierarchies in which that history is grounded" (41). However, in order to demonstrate this, Margherita removes Margery from her cultural and historical context and re-contextualizes her within the text of Freudian psychoanalytic discourse. In so doing, Margherita denies Margery the very place "within the framework of sacred history" which Margery herself asserts as her right.

3 As Watson puts it, we must acknowledge "the obvious fact that these writers were no more situated to think as several centuries of radical thought has taught modern feminists to think than are most of the planet's women now. Working as they did within the broad confines of an intellectual system which had no place for the idea that gender is, in part, a social construct, it can hardly occasion surprise that most medieval women accepted that construction as fact, while interpreting it as positively as they could. To put this in the terms used by medieval exegesis, the cultural text defining women was accepted as authoritative, but that text could nonetheless be expounded in different ways" (1996, 10).
This may be one reason why nineteenth-century women authors were never quite successful in overcoming the "real" distinctions between masculine and feminine in their world, while Julian is able, through revision, to "re-vision" the quintessential masculine (God) as feminine. After all, in the realm of the divine, "all things are possible" (cp. LT chapters 32 and 36).

All references to Julian's writings, both Short and Long Text, are cited from Colledge and Walsh (1978) by page and line number, or, in the case of more general references, by chapter. The translations are my own.

This strategy will be familiar to readers of medieval women's writing, both in England and on the continent, as the "poor little woman" motif, which although it appears to accept male definitions of feminine weakness, becomes a powerful tool in the works of a writer such as Hildegard of Bingen, who successfully alters the "humility motif" used extensively by male authors, and turns it to her advantage, using her illnesses and feminine weaknesses to create a formidable persona which clearly intimidates her male "superiors."

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of the dangers of such "mimicry" offers a useful counter to Irigaray's theorizing of mimicry as a means of resistance, discussed above, pointing out how such mimicry often involves submission and denial of one's own true nature.

But God forbid that you should say or take it that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my meaning; for I am a woman, unlearned, feeble and frail. But I know well that what I say has been shown to me by him who is the sovereign teacher. But truly love stirs me to tell it to you, for I wish for God to be known and for my fellow Christians to prosper as I wish to be myself more hating sin and loving God. But because I am a woman, should I therefore believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God, when I saw at the same time that it is his will that it be known? And you will see this clearly in the matter that follows, if it be well and truly taken. Then you will soon forget me who am a wretch, and so do that I do not hinder you, and you will behold Jesus, who is the teacher of all.

All that I say of myself I mean to apply to all my fellow-Christians, for I am taught in the spiritual showing of our lord God that he means so. And therefore I pray you all for God's sake, and counsel you for your own profit, that you believe the beholding of a wretch that it was shown to, and that you mightily,
wisely and meekly behold it in God, who from his courteous love and endless goodness would show it generally for the comfort of us all. For it is God's will that you take it with a great joy and delight, as Jesus has shown it to you.

Watson points out that in her insistence on the terminology of sight ("I saw" and "to my sight"), Julian firmly positions herself as the recipient, not the originator, of what she says (1996, p. 18).

Similarly, Staley argues that in the Short Text, Julian deals with the problem of authority by distinguishing between "teaching" and "telling," constructing herself as one whose authority lies simply in the "telling" of her vision, not in "teaching." Thus, Staley suggests, "she uses the weakness implicit in her gender to a particular end, since only the writings of holy women, whose holiness had been verified by others, circulated with such authority." In the Long Text, however, Julian relies on a different kind of authority, the authority of a writer who, after years of meditation and study, has created "a book designed for serious thought." Thus, "the unlearned and feeble woman has become a voice aligned with the community of the Church (as the oft-repeated phrase 'my evyn crist'en' implies) and speaking with the authority of the seer and the teacher" (1994, 24-27).

Thus, to return once again to Watson's excellent analysis, "for [medieval] women, it was less the stereotypes themselves that were seen as being the problem than a given interpretation of the stereotypes, which constantly threatened to devalue what women were concerned to think of as their 'proper,' positive meaning. ... the determined and difficult maintenance of some such a [sic] distinction—between what female 'nature' is meant, in 'essence,' to be and how that nature is to be judged—sometimes ... in the face of overt misogynistic opposition, was surely central to the intellectual and emotional survival of many medieval women" (1996, 8-9).

Gilbert and Gubar point out that nineteenth-century woman novelists are not the first to do this, citing the Wife of Bath as an example of a woman who projects her own subversive vision of authority onto an old hag who demands complete authority over the knight she claims as husband (p. 79). This strategy is, however, problematic in the same ways as the Wife of Bath's tale, for the "happy ending" requires not only the acceptance but the reintegration of patriarchal authority. Thus the hag is transformed into a fairy, who demands authority only to return it.
14. Then a religious person came to me and asked me how I fared, and I said that I had raved that day. And he laughed loudly and wholeheartedly. And I said, "the cross that stood at the foot of my bed bled profusely;" and with these words the person to whom I spoke became all serious and marvelled. And at once I was sorely ashamed for my heedlessness, and I thought, "This man takes the least word that I say seriously, and says no more about it." And when I saw that he took it so seriously and with such reverence, I became truly and greatly ashamed, and would have been shriven. But I could not tell it to any priest, for I thought, how could a priest believe me, when I did not believe our lord God? I believed truly for the time that I saw him, and at that time it was my will and my intent to do so without end. But like a fool I let it pass from my mind.

Behold me, a wretch! This was a great sin and greatly unnatural, that I for the folly caused by a little bodily pain so unwisely left even for a time the comfort of all this blessed showing of our lord God. Here you may see what I am in my self ....

The Long Text is, perhaps, clearer, but retains essentially the same meaning.

15. In this context it is interesting to note that she once again identifies herself as a "wretch" (see above), and that she calls her failure an "unkyndeness" or unnatural thing.

In the Long Text, changing Jesus' manner of speaking from "fulle soberlye" (ST 269.25) to "full swetely," Julian also rephrases his assurance: "Wytt it now wele, it was no ravyng that thou saw to day, but take it and beleve it and kepe thee ther in and comfort thee ther with and trust therto, and thou shalt not be ovyrcome (Know now well, it was no raving that you saw today, but take it and believe it, and keep yourself in it and comfort yourself with it and trust in it, and you will not be overcome)" (LT 646/55-58) — as if to reinforce the assurance and the confidence which it inspires.

16. Among the "illnesses" or dis-eases which Gilbert and Gubar associate with women writers are aphasia and amnesia, struggles with language and memory. What is "forgotten" is what is denied by the patriarchy — a matrilinear heritage of literary (or in Julian's case, visionary) inheritance. One example which Gilbert and Gubar cite is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh," who "forgets" her "motherland." This may be compared with Julian's struggle, especially in the Short Text, to express the
inexpressible. Julian's anxiety in the Short Text about illiteracy may well be influenced by the contemporary assumption on the part of some male authors that it was impossible to write of certain religious or devotional matters in English, that English had neither the vocabulary or the intellectual capacity to express certain theological truths. Perhaps Julian's anxiety about her illiteracy (which may refer only to an inability to read or write Latin) recedes as she gains confidence in her ability to verbalise her vision of the divine mother in her "mother-tongue."

18 Gilbert and Gubar tend to see duplicity as essential to the literary strategies of subversion through conformity which I am discussing here. However, this suggests a conscious intention to deceive which, I would argue, does not exist in Julian's works. Certainly there may be a sense that a certain degree of conformity is necessary in order to have her work accepted, but this may be simply a practical working from within a system which she wishes to modify but not overthrow, rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive. After all, Marguerite Porete (of whom Julian may or may not have known) was burned, along with her book, for too actively opposing the patriarchal religion of her day, and Margery Kempe (who was certainly known to Julian) experienced untold difficulties gaining a hearing from religious authorities.

19 One implication of the extended period of time which Watson's re-dating of Julian's texts supplies for her writing of both versions, is that she would have had ample time to read and study a number of contemporary texts whose influence seems to appear in her own work. These texts could include translations of the writings of continental women, as well as English works by male authors which were circulating at the time. The two works which I am most interested in here are Ancrene Wisse and The Chastising of God's Children, since the imagery of the motherhood of God occurs in both.

20 Indeed, Julian draws upon Chastising's categories of visionary experience to validate her own. However, the interaction between joy and despair, which she experiences in her vision, is revealed to be a necessary aspect of the human condition, caused not by wilful sin (as in Chastising), but by ignorance; an ignorance which it is the purpose of Julian's Revelations to dispel. Sin itself is imaged as a blindness or wound, which is healed through Christ's love.

33
An examination of Julian's use of the imagery of enclosure in light of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of images of confinement and enclosure (1979, 83ff.) would be an intriguing follow-up to the study presented here, a project which I hope to undertake in the not too distant future.

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