DIRECTING READER RESPONSE: JULIAN'S REVELATION AS GUIDED MEDITATION

The link between the practice of affective meditation, with its strong emphasis on visualization, and visionary experience has been highlighted by recent studies of late medieval English visionaries and their texts. Guided meditations in the affective tradition, such as Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule for a Recluse* and the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, were designed to help the reader visualize the events of Christ's life and "awaken" her "visionary imagination." Within religious communities, such texts were used to help cultivate visionary experience. They took their place with other meditational techniques like visualization in prayer, *lectio divina*, and focused attention on sacred objects in a training program designed to promote the experience of visions. The translation of these meditations into English made them available as a model for lay devotions and as a means for the laity to experience, in one book, a process by which "pious imagination could shade into visionary experience." In her 2005 article, "What did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," Barbara Newman explores in detail the fine line between visualization and vision in the practice of affective meditation. Newman argues that among both religious and laity, the use of guided meditations led to the creation of visions that were essentially more "scripted" than those that "grew out of free-form *meditatio* or *inventio*." According to Newman, these meditational texts (which she calls "visionary scripts") promote visions of a certain kind, a kind that, crucially, has very clear boundaries. While encouraging the reader to "imagine and think" beyond the text, the written meditations carefully circumscribe imaginative freedom by enforcing the limits set by the origi-
nal biblical narrative: the “authorized visions” that the text inspires “cannot overtly contradict the sacred text.”6 Visualization and the interpretation of what is seen or experienced is therefore kept within safe boundaries: these texts grant “opportunities for a reader to create her own variants on a standard script, but not for free-form visionary invention.”7 The impact of these meditational scripts on the individual visionary is, Newman suggests, best demonstrated by Margery Kempe whose visions (as opposed to the distinctive events of her life story) are imitative and “by the book.”8

Speculation remains as to whether Julian of Norwich was a religious or a laywoman at the time of her original vision; in either case the affective tradition would have played a large role in Julian’s intellectual formation.9 Julian’s exposure to texts like The Privity of the Passion, and other English adaptations of the Meditationes vitae Christi, and the influence of that tradition on her devotional life and her text are often acknowledged.10 As Denise Baker remarks, “the meditative tradition ...influences not only what Julian sees, but also how she chooses to report it.”11 Julian’s portrayals of the crucified Christ—the drops of blood that fall from the crown of thorns, his discoloured face, and the blood that pours copiously after the scourging—owe something to Passion meditation as well as to those “paintings of crucifixes that er made be the grace of god aftere the techinge of haly kyrke to the liknes of Cristes passion als farfurthe as manes witte maye reche” (63).12 The Meditationes may have influenced other aspects of Julian’s narrative as well, including the format of her conversations with Christ (similar to the addresses to Christ in the Meditationes), certain points of theology (A Revelation’s attention to the fact that Christ suffered in his “manhode” and found no “socour of the godhead,” even though he was never parted from it [19091], echoes the Meditationes’ concern with this point13), and Julian’s emphasis on an emotional response to the description of the sights she witnessed (like texts in the affective tradition, Julian is concerned that readers’ feelings are fully engaged).

However, while the practice of visualization, learned through her reading, prepared Julian for her experience and even facilitated it, it is not the sum of that experience. In contrast with a figure like Margery Kempe, there is little in Julian’s account that can be described as formulaic or scripted.
Julian’s experience took her beyond the “devout ymagynyng” of any visionary script that was available to her (although not, she would argue, beyond the limits of “byleve” and “gude maneres”). This was a development she had actively sought after: Julian’s initial request for “bodely sight” of Jesus at his Passion suggests that she wanted more than that “sumdeele feeling in the passion of Christ” she had already acquired through meditation (125). The desire for “bodely sight,” for sensory perception, suggests a “sense of frustration over the limits imposed by mere meditation as a means of communion with Christ.” It seems that, as Nicholas Watson puts it, having internalized affective theology’s “call for sapientia,” Julian “finds the devotional aids it provides inadequate and so creates one herself in the form, first, of an experience, next, of a text.”

Julian’s departure from the visionary script available to her, and the reasons for it, are among the things that have made her so interesting to readers. In this paper, however, I want to consider an area where Julian stays on script, where she is, in other words, fundamentally shaped by the guided meditations that would have comprised so much of her reading. This area is Julian’s concern with channeling and shaping reader response. Julian’s relationship with her audience is most often seen in terms of her expressed wish that readers realize the text for and in themselves, perform it, and thereby “make the same pilgrimage of love” she has made. Even when her role in influencing reader response or acting as exemplar (and therefore as another kind of text) for her readers is noted, or the text’s role in performing the reader is acknowledged, the reader’s freedom to participate seems always to be assumed. Setting Julian’s text within the greater context of controversies over visionary and vernacular writers and readers, however, raises the question of how much freedom Julian would have wished to grant her theoretically universal audience.

As Vincent Gillespie has recently pointed out, religious vernacular texts of the first half of the fifteenth century are marked by a conservative attitude to “lay access to spiritual texts.” Confidence in lay readers ebbed and flowed, generally decreasing as the century progressed. At possibly the same time that Julian was writing her shorter visionary account, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing began his work with a forceful warn-
ing against both readers and reading practices likely to misconstrue the text; the Sloane manuscript of *A Revelation* includes, of course, something similar in its scribal postscript, as does the later English translation of the mystical text *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Such warnings—and glosses in the case of M.N.’s translation of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*—have been identified by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Marleen Cré as means of instituting “safe reading” practices among “unsophisticated readers,” guiding readers into “one, acceptable, but also spiritually useful, reading.”

Access to texts like Julian’s could also be limited: Gillespie draws attention to the essentially cautious and less than trusting attitude of the Carthusians (who played a dominant role in the collection of mystical works including the shorter version of Julian’s vision) who tightly controlled the circulation of these texts among religious and a “tight-knit spiritual aristocracy.”

I would suggest that Julian was not immune to this anxiety over readers and that her own response to it is manifested in the way she constructs her text. Like guided meditations, Julian’s text provides a space that offers certain freedoms to the reader but within clearly marked boundaries which are not to be crossed. These boundaries are established by the meaning of the revelation, as revealed by God to Julian in Chapter 86, and by Julian’s interpretations of the showings (incorporated into the expository passages of *A Revelation*). Julian protects these boundaries by employing many of the same techniques as guided meditations for prompting and directing the reader’s response to the text and is actually able to go further than these texts by using her role as representative of her “even cristen” to model right responses and attitudes to the text. Crucial here is Julian’s conviction of her unity with her fellow Christians, a conviction that implies the participation of every Christian in the experience while simultaneously limiting that experience to Julian herself. Consequently, while the majority of the content of *A Revelation* may differ from texts in the *Meditationes* tradition, Julian nevertheless ends up imitating the meditative devotional literature in its guiding of the “simple” reader and discouragement of (and lack of incentive to) unscripted (that is, beyond set boundaries) speculation, thought, or interpretation. Before discussing ways in which Julian’s text resembles the visionary script, it is necessary to look in a bit more detail at the techniques of guidance in the affective meditation tradition.
GUIDING THE READER IN THE AFFECTIVE TRADITION

As the blockbuster success of the guided meditation genre, the *Meditationes vitae Christi* (c1300), a pseudo-Bonaventuran work now frequently attributed to the Franciscan Johannes de Caulibus, was hugely influential in bringing the practice of meditation to the laity. The *Meditationes* was immensely popular, especially, it seems, in England; more than a third of the surviving manuscripts of this Latin work are found in English libraries and there are seven Middle English adaptations. Six of these, including *The Privity of the Passion*, which exists in four manuscripts, and *Meditations on the Supper of our Lord, and the Hours of the Passion* (attributed to Robert Mannyng), which exists in nine manuscripts, are solely focused on the Passion narrative. The only complete translation is the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* by Nicholas Love. While Julian almost certainly knew some of these English adaptations, Love’s work was produced late in Julian’s lifetime (1409) and there is no guarantee she would have had access to this particular rendition of the *Meditationes*. However, as it still provides a helpful indicator of the parameters of meditative practice within which Julian worked, I have here included references to Love’s work along with references to the other translations.

As Laurelle LeVert has pointed out, authors (and adapters) of affective meditations take on the role of active narrators, explicating and clarifying the meaning of events or words, in order to “heighten the reader’s response to the Passion narrative.” The degree of the narrator’s involvement, and the sense of familiarity between narrator and reader, tends to vary between versions and contexts, however. The Franciscan author of the *Meditationes* was almost certainly the spiritual director of the Poor Clare for whom he writes and although he conveys a sense of his authority over her, his personal concern for his “beloved daughter” is also clear. The detailed guidance and instruction that mark the narrative voice would presumably have been received, in the context of the original readership, in a very real and familiar way. Furthermore, the author asserts that he writes for his own benefit as well as his addressee’s, explaining that he participates in, and finds personal value in, the activity of meditation.
This participatory spirit and some of the sense of the personal disappears in excerpted versions. In Mannyng’s version an anonymous narrator addresses an unspecified “crysten creature”; in The Privity of the Passion, which has no prologue, the pervasive voice of the guide becomes disembodied and purely a function of the text. To some extent this remains the case with Love’s translation despite the fact that Love gives his name (almost constantly before the reader’s eyes with the presence of his initial marking his interpolations) and the specific context for the work (provided in the Prologue). Love is writing to a much larger and non-specific audience and, as LeVert asserts, he gives his “narrator” various roles, chief among them being “an expositor/priest/spiritual director figure whose knowledge grounds the narrative in an orthodox framework.” Assuming an unspecified position of authority over an unspecified audience allows Love to emphasize the gap between himself and the “piety he describes.” Simultaneously, however, Love’s alterations to the Franciscan text tend to extend the guide’s involvement in the exercise; Michelle Karnes describes how Love qualifies the reader’s ability to participate directly in biblical scenes by emphasizing the “unmistakably fictive” quality of the experience and by intervening in the immediacy of the relationship between text and author, changing second-person commands to first-person plural statements (a point I will return to).

The reader of the Meditationes is required to immerse himself fully in the events about which he reads. As The Privity of the Passion puts it,

> a mane [must]...rayse up all the scharpenes of his mynde & opyne whyde the Inere eghe [eye] of his soule In to beholdynge of this b[I]esside passione, and forgett & caste be-hynd hyme for the tyme all other Ocupacyouns & besynes; and that he make hym-selfe present in his thoghte as if he sawe fully with his bodily eghe all the thyngys that be-fell abowe the crosse.

The text contains prompts to help the reader respond to particular moments with the appropriate emotions: “Be-hold hym here mekly and habondandly” or “Be-holde now tinderly how he stode all aschamede.” The
inclusion of apostrophes to Christ or other key figures gives the reader a model for beginning his own conversations with Christ and the saints. This visualization of events is understood by the pseudo-Bonaventure to have many moral and spiritual benefits but it also gives considerable power to the imagination. As the Prologue to the Meditationes states, piously conceived “imaginary scenarios” are a fully acceptable way to expand on the Gospel narrative, providing, of course, they are not “contrary to faith or good morals”:

you should not believe that everything we can meditate on with regard to what he [Christ] had said or done has actually been written down. But I for greater emphasis will tell you about these unwritten things just as if they had happened, or as they can piously be believed to be happening or to have happened.... Therefore, when you will find me relating, “the Lord Jesus said or did this and so”..., if this cannot be proven through Scripture, you ought to accept it all the same as devout meditation demands.34

The Meditationes works from a position that asserts the impossibility of ever really fixing down the subject of Christ’s life. Holy Scripture has no one fixed meaning but may be understood in “many varied ways” as long as such interpretations are in harmony with “the truth of that life” and “doctrine.”35 Love emphasizes this point when explaining the title for his text: Christ’s life, he suggests, “ever blessede & withoute synne, passyng alle the lifes of alle other seyntes,” can never be fully or truly described but can be known only “in a maner of liknes,” like a face in the mirror.36 Given such a premise, the meditations of the devout believer-reader, set within the basic parameters of the facts of the sacred text, are a valid contribution to the understanding of spiritual meaning. Those who visualize become new seers of Gospel events, providing an alternative, more subjective, perspective upon them.

That being said, the episodes described in the Meditationes, and in Love’s translation where they are sometimes slightly embellished, offer varying amounts of freedom to the reader’s imagination with some more important
scenes being described in considerable detail—down to the appearance of a face or the style of furniture—while others are painted with broader strokes. Where scenes are fully detailed, the reader simply visualizes what is being described to her, rather than having to decide for herself whether Mary was smiling or serious when Gabriel delivered his message, or whether the table at the Last Supper was square or round. Notably, this kind of detailed direction is offered at moments of emotional intensity; thus, the introduction to the crucial Passion sequence tells the reader how to imagine Christ: “Thou shalt ymagine & inwardly thenk of him in his passione as of a faire yonge man of the age of xxxijj yere, that was the fairest, the wisest the moste rihtwise in lyvyng & moste godely & innocent, that ever was or mih be in this worlde so falsly accusede, so enviously pursuende so wrongwisely demede, & so despitely slayne.” Where a scene is depicted without such regard for detail, as in the case of the rejoicing of heaven at the proclamation of God’s plan to save men’s souls, there is clearly more room for the reader to colour and embellish as she chooses: “Wherof al the court of heven joyful & glade more than tonge can telle or hert thenk, making a solempne fest & devoutly tonkyng the fadere almighty god, we mowen devoutly thenk & ymagine.”

Sometimes readers are offered a choice, an opportunity to modify the image as they please, most famously in the moment of the crucifixion when the reader is offered two alternative methods by which Jesus could have been hung on the cross. Other choices are in the detail: was Mary reading, praying, or meditating on the book of Isaiah when Gabriel appeared? Did the baby Jesus show his contempt for the gold that was given him at his birth by spitting at it or, “peraventere,” by turning away? Sometimes this choice only appears to be given when in fact the text once again determines what the reader will see. In the question of what Jesus ate to break his fast at the end of forty days in the wilderness—a question on which Scripture is silent—the reader is invited to imagine “this triumphant luncheon” as she pleases. Before the reader has gone too far in visualizing Jesus conjuring great banquets from the sky, however, the pseudo-Bo-

naventuran text sets some limits on the imagination with the reminder that Jesus never displayed his divine powers to create food for himself or his disciples. The text then prompts the reader to remember Jesus’ mother and
ultimately tells the reader exactly what to think: Jesus has the angels fetch him one of his mother's meals, for he likes her cooking best. Thus the text goes from offering an invitation for the reader to imagine this scene as she pleases to telling her to “settle on this possibility” and “assume this as the method.”

The affective experience of the reader is always designed to prompt a follow-on response of contrition and penance; moral reform should be the result of meditation on Christ’s humanity. The importance of the didactic dimension of the devotional exercise is apparent in the way the *Meditationes* (and the same goes for its various translations) is much more heavy-handed when it draws out the moral meaning or the lesson to be taken from an episode and applied to life. Rather than leaving this to the reader's discretion the text prefers to clearly articulate the message that each event teaches. Here, biblical figures are frequently the models for the reader. Thus readers should learn from Jesus' patience with dumb beasts in the desert to be patient with the difficult people around them, understand from Mary's reticence before the angel Gabriel that it is good to prefer silence, imitate Joseph by showing patience with their wives, and be inspired by Elizabeth's example to seek the fellowship of other Christians. These, it seems, are the lessons to be gathered from these particular events and there is little room for alternative possibilities. This prescriptive approach is designed to help shape the reader’s meditations while leaving her free to focus solely on emotive re-creation of events, without being bothered with working out the theological or moral significance of these issues.

**A REVELATION AS GUIDED MEDITATION**

The works of the *Meditationes* tradition seek to draw readers closer to God by stirring their emotions and by providing moral instruction on living a life that pleases God. Though Julian’s text is, on one hand, a visionary account, it is also devotional: a text focused on God’s love and designed to stir love. This emphasis is apparent throughout the text: the meaning of the revelation given to Julian and, through her, to all Christians, is love. Specifically, God desires that people “knowen” God’s love and forgive-
ness better than they have done; the right response to this knowledge will be the stirring of their hearts to “love him and cleve to him” (379). Indeed, it is the vision’s power to “gretly stirrande...alle thaye that desires to be Cristes loverse” (63) that the scribe of Julian’s earlier text considered to be the quality most worth highlighting about the work. Julian’s own devotion precipitates the showings and her focus on the role of the text in increasing the devotion of her readers is apparent. The vision only matters, says Julian, insofar as it causes love to increase: “for the shewing I am not good but if I love God the better, and in as much as ye love God the better, it is more to you than to me” (153). “Styryng symple soules to the love of god & desire of hevenly thinges,” and “steryng specialy to the love of Jesu,” the avowed aims of an affective work like The Mirror, could also be taken as the aims of Julian’s text.

Like the meditative texts in the affective tradition, A Revelation invites the participation of the reader. Just as the visualization of the individual reader of a meditation is legitmized by her “devout ymagining” (153, 157, 379). Julian considers that future readers of her text might receive their own unique insights (see Sargent, Mirror, 10). Julian does not consider the text to be fixed or perfected but considers it an on-going work. However, as the imagination of the reader of the affective text is always bounded by the truth of the biblical narrative, so interpretations of A Revelation are kept within safe boundaries. These boundaries are laid down by no less than the divine author himself when he reveals to Julian the meaning of the entire text:

What, woldest thou wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening. Who shewid it the [thee]? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherfore she-wid he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therin other withouten end. (379)

In this statement, God, as divine author, establishes the boundaries for interpreting the text of the revelation: everything in it will point to love and no alternative meaning will ever be found therein (with the inference that
when a word or image seems to suggest something other than this reading, it needs to be re-read). Effectively a hermeneutic principle, the instruction is much like Augustine’s caritas-cupiditas framework for interpreting the Bible: “Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity” and thus “whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behaviour or to the truth of the faith [both of which pertain to charity]...must...be figurative.” This exegetical principle provides guidance for the Christian and alerts him to the fact that “all figurative interpretations must promote the love of God and of one’s neighbour. If they do not, the interpreter is either deceived or deceiving, and the interpretations are false.” In a similar vein, God’s words to Julian provide guidance for reading the visions. As with Augustine, though, the simplicity of the formula means that the space for interpretation is broad, potentially offering what would appear to be much room for interpretive exploration. However, like the guided meditations, the true extent that a reader can explore is frequently qualified by the narrator. Through her role as narrator, Julian imitates many of the techniques of affective tradition in order to guide and direct the response and interpretation of her readers.

As a personal account of the vision she received, Julian’s presence as narrator is central to A Revelation: Julian is the seer or witness of the vision and therefore becomes its primary reader and the one responsible for recreating its sights through written words or drawings. Nevertheless, Julian seems to deflect interest in herself by encouraging readers to shift their attention from her to God and by removing some of the autobiographical detail found in the earlier account. Julian also seeks to diminish her own importance (and presence in the text) by stressing her role as “stand-in for the reader.” Julian believes that “alle this sight was shewde in generalle” (151); in other words, that the visions are not meant for Julian alone, but for all her fellow Christians. Throughout her book, Julian stresses that what she learns from the showings and what she understands to be their meaning and relevance applies to everyone: “that I say of me, I mene in the person of alle my even cristen” (153); “by me alone is understonde alle” (235); “and alle this lerning [teaching] and this tru comfort, it is generalle to alle mine evencristen, as it is afore saide, and so is Gods will” (339); “I saw that his mening was for the generalle man: that is to sey, alle
man which is sinfulle and shall be into the last day, of which man I am a membre” (369). Consequently, Julian’s role as representative of her fellow Christians (a kind of Everyman), rather than her individual self, is what matters. “I” can therefore be replaced by “we” and, indeed, the communal pronoun is a dominant feature of A Revelation. Commenting on Julian’s preferred use of the first-person plural, especially when compared to the shorter text, Barry Windeatt sees it as a sign of Julian’s increasing confidence in her audience suggesting that between the earlier and the later versions, Julian has learned to let go of an unease about communication and a mistrust of her reader’s ability to understand what she intends. I would suggest, instead, that Julian’s use of the communal pronoun resembles Love’s use of it in The Mirror as described by Karnes. Karnes sees in Love’s shift from the second-person command of the Meditationes (“You too go with them”; the style also favoured by Julian in the short version) to the first-person plural (“lat us here go”) of The Mirror, a move away from the union between “the meditator and the biblical scene” to a union “between [Love] as author and the meditator.” By “attaching himself to the meditator” in this way, Love offers his reader an “engagement that is decidedly more textual and remote” because it is filtered through him. In A Revelation, the strong sense of union with her readers that Julian creates by insisting that she is a representative for “alle” makes her a powerful guide for her “evenclristen” for whom—notwithstanding her requests that they ignore her and feel their own participation in the text—the vision can only really be experienced via Julian’s filter.

By being able to offer herself as an example, Julian is actually able to go further in establishing clear boundaries and keeping readers within them than the narrators of the popular texts of the affective tradition. While affective texts can describe a right way to respond, Julian can actually model it while simultaneously—by her focus on her unity with her readers—implying that it is also her readers’ response. For example, at the scene of the Crucifixion, the Meditationes gives prompts and directions leading readers to think on Mary or feel Christ’s suffering, but in Julian’s revelation the readers actually see Julian do these things herself and share the experience with them. The audience of A Revelation watches another reader make all the right emotional responses and experience the most laudable states
of mind, as when Julian states, “I felt no paine but for Cristes paines” (183). Indeed, she goes on to describe how she “loved Crist so much above myselfe that ther was no paine that might be suffered like to that sorow that I had to see him in paine” (183–84), a statement that surely identifies Julian with all the disciples and “tru lovers” gathered at the cross who, explains Julian, “suffered paines more than ther awne bodely dying” as they watched Christ die (185). Julian thus becomes a more immediate model than the possibly distant biblical models invoked in the Meditationes. This applies even to those moments that seem, on the surface, to be personal and unique to Julian.49

As model and guide, Julian can also demonstrate right processes for interpretation. As Elizabeth Alvida Petroff states, Julian wants her readers “to learn not just the content of her revelation...but also her method of reading and interpreting as well.”50 Thus, readers come to understand how Julian has experienced a lengthy process of meditating on, and even re-visioning, aspects of the original showings,51 how she has received clarifications and even interpretations from God,52 and how she filters the entire experience through the “faith of holy church” (157). Knowledge of Julian’s interpretive strategies not only gives others a model to follow; it also establishes the authority on which Julian’s own expositions are founded. The interpretive commentary that supplements the description of the sixteen showings in A Revelation offers, with varying degrees of certainty, explanations of what Julian has seen and heard. In expounding on the showings, Julian sometimes uses language that suggests she is communicating God’s meaning and not simply her own interpretation: “this bodely exsample was shewde so high that this mannes hart might be ravished” (147); “this vision was a leming to my understanding that the continual seeking of the soule pleseth God” (161). She is conveying, she insists, “alle his owne mening” (343, 379). Such language suggests the specific meaning of the vision presented here is the authoritative one, a fact that necessarily curbs the reader’s freedom to establish her own.53 Furthermore, the very structure of Julian’s text makes it very difficult for readers to discern where the original vision ends and Julian’s interpretation begins. Julian’s commentary is not separated from the text of the sixteen showings but is fully integrated with it, reflecting Julian’s conviction that the “hole revelation” (277) (“that is to sey, of
this boke“ according to an addition in the Sloane manuscript [406]) is as important as the original vision. This merger makes it not only unnecessary but also impossible for the reader to survey and interpret the original text of the visions independently. Thanks to Julian’s vivid and detailed descriptions readers of her text see but the presence of her interpretation means that they do not always interpret (indeed, they might be hard pressed to know what to interpret because the lines of distinction between God and Julian are so blurred). While the possibility of some variation in experience is certainly acknowledged by Julian, the boundaries for interpretation have been clearly fixed.

Julian not only models a kind of reading but is also a model of the kind of Christian the reader should be. A wide variety of vernacular devotional literature shows a concern with both the intention or attitude of the readers who approach the devotional text, and the response of those readers to the text. The author of the postscript at the end of Julian’s text expresses concern about the intention of the reader when he notes that the revelation will not “dwelle with him that is thrall to synne” and prays that the book will only reach the hands of those “that will submitt them to the feith of holy church” (415). Julian’s concern with reader motivation and attitude is implicit in her efforts to express the qualities that God desires to see in Christians and to demonstrate the attitudes of heart and mind that make communication with the divine possible. Intrinsic to this revelation that is meant for all is, it seems, instruction on the kind of Christians (and the kind of readers) God prefers. It is “full great plesance” to God when a man comes to him “nakedly, plainly, and homely” (141), realizing that by his reason he “may not profite” unless he “have evenly therwith minde [insight] and love” (303). It is God’s desire that Julian’s readers “be occupied in knowing and loving til the time cometh that we shal be fulfillede in heven” (145). The question of attitude is particularly important when it comes to matters of knowledge and enquiry. Despite the intellectual and theologically complex content of her text, Julian’s expressed views on knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge are markedly conservative. She refuses to see anything that does not fall into line with the teaching of Holy Church and, in contrast with those modern scholars who see a variety of original teaching in her work, Julian insists that she is saying nothing new.
In her extended discussion of God’s “privetees” or secrets Julian models a willingness to resist curiosity and accept God’s right to keep things hidden from his people. Even in one of her own theological dilemmas, her longing to fathom God’s attitude to sin, Julian is blameless, motivated only by her need to “love goodnesse and hate evil as holy church techeth” (273). That Julian acts as representative—and therefore model—for her readers means that the reader’s attitude should resemble Julian’s with her zeal for sharing in Christ’s sufferings, her submission to the church, her humility before God, and her love for him.

As well as having the right intent, the readers of devotional literature are required to demonstrate the sincerity of their devotion by responding to the text in the right way, usually by a combination of emotional (feelings of pity, sorrow, shame, gratitude) and rational (reformed thinking, acts of contrition, or mercy) responses. Thus, in the case of affective meditation, the reader is expected to respond to the different events in Jesus’ life with, immediately, the appropriate emotions and, subsequently, an improved life. As noted above, works of affective meditation could be prescriptive when it came to expressing important lessons or drawing out meanings that were meant to be seen as definitive; the moral application or the theological explanation is provided for the reader, relieving her of the responsibility (or the privilege?) of discovering her own. Julian is also aware of this need for personal response and she works hard to guide her reader into the appropriate responses: the right emotions and the right understanding of moral applications. Similarly to the methods employed in works like the Meditationes where readers are prompted to consider certain points (“Be-holde hym here mekrly & habondandly”; “here... owht we to have compassion, & be stired to the love of vertuouse poverte”), Julian directly exhorts her audience to particular actions (“Think also wisely of the gretnesse of this worde ‘Ever’” [201]; “Beholde and see” [167]) and instructs readers in relevant responses: “But be we not adred of this [sin]... but meekly make we oure mone” (321); “and therefore us nedeth mekille to praye oure lorde of grace, that we may have this reverent drede and meke love” (359); “and than we sorow and morne discretly, turning us into the beholding of his mercy, cleving to his love and to his goodnesse, seeing that he is oure medicine, witting that we do nought but sinne” (375). In Chapter 77, Julian
also provides her readers with words of a petition with which to draw near to God (365). More often, however, Julian’s guidance is implicit in the text through her use of the communal pronouns “we” and “us” and through the model of her own responses and reactions. Julian tells her readers how particular words or images prompted her to think or act and this serves as a guide to them. Examples are found on almost every page and these tend to leave little room for alternative responses: “and thus I saw him and sought him, and I had him and wanted him. And this is and should be our comen working in this life” (159); “for till I am substantially oned to him I may never have full reste ne very blisse” (14041); “saw I sothly that me behoved nedes to assent [I must necessarily assent] with great reverence, enjoying in God” (165); “Here may we see that we have verely of kind to hate sinne, and we have verely of grace to hate sinne” (319). These statements act as prompts to the readers, encouraging them to think along these same lines and guiding them into a particular kind of response. Julian is, after all, the absolute example, representing in herself the struggles, the questions and the ups and downs of Everyman’s Christian life.

Several examples of changes between the short and the long version of Julian’s text point to this tendency towards prescribing responses rather than leaving them to the reader’s judgment. The first refers to the famous passage early in the text in which Julian expresses her desire that her readers shift their attention from Julian and on to God, for it is God’s will that all of her “evencristen” receive the vision as if God had shown it directly to them. While the longer, later version simply states “it is Goddes wille that ye take it with as grete joy and liking as Jhesu had shewde it to you” (153), the earlier version prefaces this statement with an address to “ye that heres and sees this vision and this techinge that is of Jhesu Criste to edification of youre saule” (73). The short version emphasizes the experience of the reader who is, or should realize that she can be, partaker of the vision: hearer and seer. The omission of this statement in the later version places the emphasis on the mediation of Julian and on the reader’s reception of the account of the revelation as if it had been shown directly, rather than actually experiencing it. In other words, it becomes a quasi-experience rather than a direct experience.56
A second example of the tendency towards greater prescription in the long text comes from the eighth vision in which Julian witnesses the final sufferings of Christ on the cross and, in particular, his dehydration. Both short and long version descriptions of this vision include details such as the changing colour of the body, as reflected in Christ's face and his lips, the drying of the skin and the "wringinge" of the nails (181). Both accounts also include a statement as to the ineffable nature of these sufferings: "swilke paynes I sawe that alle es to litelle that I can telle or saye, for it maye nought be tolde" / "for whiche paines, I saw that alle is to litille that I can sey, for it may not be tolde" (83). Despite this statement, however, the long version is considerably expanded with many more details about the dying and broken body, as if in an attempt to describe rather than concede to ineffability. A significant line is also omitted from the longer version. In admitting the ineffability of the scene in the shorter version, Julian encourages her readers to try and transcend it by following the words of St Paul: "ilke saule [each soul], aftere the sayinge of Sainte Paule, shulde 'feele in him that in Criste Jhesu'" (83) It seems that this encouragement to the reader to try and "feel" Christ’s pains for himself has been replaced in the longer version with further details as remembered or added by Julian. As Windeatt states, whereas in the shorter version "the movement towards a wider understanding of the shewings will occur in the reader’s mind in response to the text,” in the longer version “Julian herself sets out that response to the shewings as it developed through her meditations.”

Julian’s ability and authority to safeguard the boundaries of interpretation for A Revelation are affirmed by two further changes between the short and long text. The first of these is the famous removal of Julian’s statement that she is not a teacher but only a “lewed, febille, and freyle” woman. Julian can omit this statement because of increasing confidence, not in her role as teacher, but in her ability to express God’s meaning (to understand the vision) and because of the need to convey this meaning with effectiveness and authority. One can speculate that the same kind of reasoning lies behind the way Julian changes her account of the tenth vision, the vision of Christ’s heart riven in two. In the first account of this vision, Julian suggests that God shows her his wounded side and cloven heart as an alternative to the “godhede” (89), which she is not able to see. In the later
account, Julian describes how she is actually led into the wound and that there she sees "the blessed godhede" (201). Focusing on what Julian is able to see gives her "reading" more authority. As Watson and Jenkins put it, "A Revelation does not present itself primarily as a resource for others to adapt as they wish but as an authoritative account of a divine intervention in the world" (29).

As devotee (and reader), Julian aspired to something above and beyond mere visualization: a divine vision. As a writer Julian seems more inhibited; she is keen to guide her readers into greater love for God but not necessarily greater knowledge (readers are discouraged from their own theological exploration) or independent thinking (the readers are to simply follow Julian’s lead rather than think for themselves). In this way, Julian reproduces the texts of affective meditation with which she was nurtured but which she outgrew: as they do, she encourages her reader to grow in love but not really in thought (because Julian thinks for the readers who can simply agree with her). A reader’s freedom to interpret the vision and "take it...as Jhesu had shewde it to you" (153) is clearly circumscribed by well established parameters set by God himself and the presence of Julian’s commentary. Julian uses her belief in her role as representative for all her “evencristen” to shape reader response to the visions and by tightly restricting independence of experience, A Revelation actually goes beyond other guided meditations, potentially making the reader a passive observer of a protagonist, Julian. Like a visionary script a sharing in the experience is promised and visualization is encouraged, but personal response or adaptation, any “free-form...invention,” is limited by the degree of detail present in the text.58

While visualization promotes greater love that may, in theory, lead to mystical experiences (and, consequently, the creation of new texts), the promotion of new or alternative interpretations is not the primary goal of either The Mirror, The Privity of the Passion, or Julian’s “boke.” By being theoretically in union with the vision’s percipient and yet, in reality, removed from the interpretive process, the reader of Julian’s revelation becomes practically redundant, an observer of a text-reader transaction.
through which the essential meaning of the text has already been established.

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings, 15–62, and Newman, “What Did it Mean,” 143. Gibson, Theatre of Devotion and Yoshikawa, Margery Kempe’s Meditations also consider the connection with particular reference to Margery Kempe.


3. Ibid., 14–18.


8. Ibid., 2, 30.

9. Julian’s 1975 editors, Colledge and Walsh, and her 2005 editors, Watson and Jenkins, conclude that Julian was most likely a nun in 1373. The evidence is not conclusive, however. See Benedicta Ward’s discussion of Julian as a laywoman in “Julian the Solitary.”

10. See Watson and Jenkins, Writings of Julian, 3 and Baker, Julian
of Norwich's Showings, 15–62. Colledge and Walsh describe the influence of the tradition on Julian in their introduction and highlight possible links throughout the text in their footnotes.


12. All quotations from Julian come from Watson and Jenkins, Writings of Julian, and will be cited parenthetically.


19. Ibid., 131–33.


22. In her edition, Stallings-Taney claims that de Caulibus was the author of the Meditationes, but her opinion is disputed. For a review of the ongoing argument see Karnes, “Nicholas Love and
Medieval Meditations on Christ,” 387n28.

23. For details on these manuscripts and other Middle English versions, see Michael the introduction to Sargent, *Mirror*, xix–xx; lxxii–lxxxiv.


29. LeVert, “Subject and Affective Response,” 82.


31. Ibid., 396.


33. Ibid., 203, 204.

34. Taney, Miller, and Stallings-Taney, trans., *Meditations*, 4. “Non autem credas quod omnia que ipsum dixesse uel fecisse meditari possimus scripta sint. Ego uero ad maiorem impressionem ea sic ac si ita fuissent tibi narrabo prout contingere uel contigisse pie credi possunt.... Dum ergo me narrantem inuenies: ita dixit uel fecit Dominus Iesus, seu alii qui introducuntur, si id per Scripturaram non possit probari, non aliter accipias quam devota meditacio
exigit” (Stallings-Taney 10).


37. Ibid., 161.

38. Ibid., 39.


40. Taney, Miller, Stallings-Taney, trans., *Meditations*, 76. “Possumus autem hoc uictoriosum prandium sicut uolumus ordinare” (Stallings-Taney 89).

41. “Immoremur hic ergo, et hunc modum assumamus” (Stallings-Taney 89).

42. Affective spirituality was originally conceived as a “three-stage program for spiritual growth progressing from compassion to contrition to contemplation.” Moral reform was a necessary response to meditation on Christ’s humanity and a necessary preparation for contemplation of his divinity. Only the first two stages of this program were viewed as applicable to the laity (Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings*, 25–26).


46. Qtd. in Wright, “Affective Technique,” 18.


49. One example is the moment when Julian describes how she chose Christ above anything else despite his, and her own, pain and despite the fleshly, “outward” part of her which resists the suffering (Chapter 19). Though, as she describes the comfort that this choice has brought to her soul and the assurance that she would ever choose Jesus for herself, the experience seems to be a purely subjective one, Julian goes on to extend the meaning of the experience to the idea that Man’s inward nature is capable of overruling his outward nature—a message that is for everyone.

50. Petroff, Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature, 32.

51. At the end of the last showing and after an attack of the devil, Julian reports how Jesus showed her the whole thing “all agene within my soule, with more fullehed, with the blessed light of his precious love” (343). Possibly this was the first of many such replays of the entire experience. Even twenty years after the original showing of the parable of the Lord and the servant described in Chapter 51, Julian describes how she is still able to see “inwardly” “all the pointes and the propertes that were shewed in the same time [first time]” (277). Julian acknowledges that her description of the visions has been “renewde by lighteninges and touchinges...of the same spirite that shewed them alle” (329).

52. God provides Julian with an “open example” of a king treating a servant like a friend to help her understand the nature of God’s compassion on Christians (147), and, in Chapter 25, God helps Julian better understand his desire that Mary be exalted by providing her with the “exsample” of a man’s desire to “make alle
other creatures to love and to like that creature that he loveth so mekille” (205).

53. It seems that Julian was successful in creating a consensus about the meaning of what she saw given that, for all the amount of modern scholarship written on Julian, few question the actual accuracy of her interpretation: the fact that the hazelnut represents “all that is made” or that the seabed is a picture of the fact that God is ever present with man, or Julian’s interpretation of the “parable” for the lord and the servant. Few question the route taken in Julian’s reading of the “text” of the visions or consider that the text could have taken “a quite different direction” (Watson, “Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian,” 77). Wolters in his edition is a notable exception. In his Introduction to his modern translation of Julian’s text, he accuses her of mis-reading the revelation on the subject of sin and of falling into “heresy” (37–38).


56. This shift from direct participation to spiritual exercise that remains within confines echoes Karnes’ assessment of the difference between the *Meditationes* and Love’s *Mirror*: the former gives the meditator the “freedom to engage directly with the Bible, whereas Love...permits an engagement that is decidedly more textual and remote” (396).


WORKS CITED


---. *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*. Watson and Jenkins 61–119.


