

Julian of Norwich
A Woman's Vision, Book, and Readers

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The anchoress Julian of Norwich (1342–after 1416) – the first woman author writing in the English language who can be identified – could hardly be bolder in interpreting her visionary experience to affirm that God is as truly our mother as our father.¹ For Julian, God as our mother is an informing theme that unlocks her revelations. As Julian understands it, motherhood was in the role and nature of the Son as Second Person of the Trinity before time began or any human mothers were created, so it is less that Christ acts like a mother than that mothers at their most maternal share in Christ-like characteristics. Not only did God become flesh in a woman's womb but, as a mother, Christ carries humanity within himself to term and, after the most painful labour (on the cross), gives birth to us into life and to bliss, breastfeeding us with the sacraments (ch. 60, ll. 13–17, 22–4). Moreover, since Julian sees humanity's redemption as always divinely intended from before time – and man's fall as therefore incidental – she never mentions Eve and completely ignores the whole misogynist tradition of blaming women's supposed guilt for human fleshly weakness and temptation. Nor does Julian bother to include conventional recommendations of virginity and chastity, or marriage and widowhood – as if to specify them would delimit women, where Julian's focus is always on humankind itself. Here is the stunningly independent and original testimony of a medieval English woman author.

Julian's motive as an author, and the source of inspiration for her writing, are implicit in her text. Julian becomes an author because she experiences some extraordinary revelations and acknowledges a divine imperative to make them known. Her text, however, is much more reflective about its nature and evolution than a mere report. It embodies in itself Julian's struggles to interpret numinous revelations that provide her authority and subject matter as a woman author but also test

troublingly the boundaries of orthodoxy. In the process, Julian becomes the first person of any gender to write serious theology in English. The nature of her text and aspects of its reception history are correspondingly challenging witnesses to how one astonishingly audacious woman author negotiated a role within medieval literary culture.

It is an indication of Julian's contemporary reputation that Margery Kempe records seeking out Julian for her advice on deceptive revelations, 'for the ankres was expert in swech thyngys and good cownsel cowlde yevyn'.² Julian dates her revelations to May 1373 and says she was thirty-and-a-half (ch. 2, ll. 1–2; ch. 3, l. 1), but otherwise little is known of her circumstances beyond what can be deduced from her texts, which never explicitly acknowledge being authored by an anchoress. Four surviving wills record legacies left to a recluse named Julian in Norwich or at St Julian's Church in Norwich between 1394 (when Julian would have been fifty-two) and 1416.³ It seems unlikely that Julian was not an anchoress before 1394 – she dates to 1393 her breakthrough in interpreting her revelations (ch. 51, l. 69) – but no record survives. Kempe refers to Julian as 'Dame Jelyan', a customary form of address for nuns, but this is the only indication that Julian might have been a nun before becoming an anchoress. Since there was only one nunnery in Norwich, at Carrow, it is sometimes claimed – plausibly, albeit without evidence – that Julian was educated there. Julian describes herself as a simple unlettered creature (ch. 2, l. 1), and although this may be a claim to ignorance of Latin rather than illiteracy, it was probably prudent at times for Julian as a woman author to claim both. Her characterisations of the alphabet as an elementary level of learning (ch. 51, ll. 209–10; ch. 80, ll. 6–8) imply that she could read and write in English, as do her painstaking revisions of her writings. Where Julian acquired her manifest learning remains unknown, but late-medieval Norwich had a vibrant religious culture, and Kempe's experience witnesses also to an empowering oral culture of holy conversation with clerics and contemplatives in which a woman was a welcome participant.

Julian's text survives in two authentic versions, one four times longer than the other. A single copy of the Short Text (ST) survives in British Library, MS Add 37790 (a Carthusian anthology of contemplative material). This manuscript was copied *c.* 1450 but retains a rubric claiming that this text of the short version preserves one copied during Julian's lifetime: it identifies the text as a vision 'to a devoute woman, and hir name es Julyan, that is a recluse atte Norwyche and yitt ys on lyfe, A.D. 1413'.⁴ This Short Text includes various circumstantial details about the revelations as an event and experience which do not appear in the longer version and suggest

this is an authentic early version closer to Julian's experience of her revelations. Precisely how early remains a matter of debate, but it is notable that this relatively undeveloped version of Julian's text is still being circulated forty years after the date of the revelations, perhaps because its immediacy kept it very accessible. By contrast, no complete medieval copies of Julian's Long Text are extant and it survives only in post-Reformation copies. This might imply that this profoundly original version was never widely circulated, possibly by design at a time when official anxieties over the spread of heresy would make risky any expression of unorthodox views.

In Julian's Short Text and Long Text, the different perspectives on female authorship that are represented in one woman's two versions of her life's work point to how women authors might negotiate their contemporary literary culture. The short version is open about its authorship by a woman and defiantly rejects being precluded from authorship by her gender, but its content shows, as yet, little of a distinctively female approach to Julian's revelations. The much longer version, audaciously original, is the inverse of this: it suppresses all reference to its author's being female but develops Julian's uniquely woman-centred exposition of her revelations.

The Short Text does not conceal its female authorship, although claiming ignorance and disclaiming intent to teach by writing: 'Botte God forbode that ye schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nought soo . . . For I am a woman, leued [ignorant], febille, and freylle' (ST, ch. 6, ll. 34–5). At the same time, Julian sounds almost indignant in the Short Text when querying why she should be precluded by her gender from authoring what she understood God wished her to make known: 'Botte for I am a woman, schulde I therfore leve that I schulde nought telle yowe the goodenes of God, syne that I sawe in that same tyme that it is his wille that it be knawen?' (ST, ch. 6, ll. 39–40). To create space for herself as a woman author, Julian lays strategic claim to an ignorance that is patently belied by her writing and pre-empts potential criticism by disclaiming the male clerical role of writing to instruct. Julian's Short Text also retains tantalising hints that she lived and wrote within a female support network. It records her curiosity to learn about the spiritual progress of a female friend (ST, ch. 16, l. 12). The Short Text also implies a close mother–daughter relationship, telling how Julian's mother was present at Julian's bedside during the supposedly mortal illness when Julian experienced her revelations, and how her mother believed Julian to have died: 'My modere, that stode emangys othere and behelde me, lyftyd uppe hir hande before

me face to lokke myn eyen, for sche wenyd I had bene dede' (ST, ch. 10, ll. 26–7).

By contrast, the absence from the Long Text (LT) of any reference to its author's being a woman may be variously interpreted. It may signal prudent caution, mindful of the singularity of female authorship, yet it also leaves behind any explicit defensiveness. This may reflect an increased authorial confidence that makes earlier apologetic uncertainty no longer relevant to include. The passage on Julian's concern about her female friend has been rewritten so as to obscure the friend's gender (ch. 35, ll. 1–4). Reference in the Short Text to her mother being present during Julian's revelatory experience while gravely ill disappears from the Long Text, yet it is the Long Text that includes Julian's extended exposition on the theme of Christ as our mother (chapters 57–63), which is not yet present in the Short Text. With this come references to female bodily experience – childbirth, breastfeeding, and nursing – as channels for spiritual understanding. In this way, a hint in the Short Text of Julian's closeness to her own mother is rewritten by the Long Text into Julian's transformational understanding of Christ as mother to us all.

For Julian, 'this fair lovely word "moder" it is so swete and so kynd of the self that it may ne verily be seid of none but of him' (ch. 60, ll. 34–5). Julian is eloquent about how Christ 'usith the condition of a wise moder' (ch. 61, l. 37). Christ's sustaining and nurturing of humanity resembles a mother's role in first breastfeeding her child, nursing it, and then modifying her maternal role but not her love as the child grows, allowing it to learn from its falls while being always the child's first recourse and constant loving support (ch. 60, ll. 22–44; ch. 61, ll. 24–38). For Julian, humanity achieves 'non heyer stature in this life than childhode' (ch. 63, ll. 32–3), implying that spiritually we remain in a childlike dependence on Christ, like the child on its mother. Yet Julian's sensitive account of this 'moderhede of werkynge' is only the third and least mysterious of her 'three manner of beholdynge of moderhede in God' (ch. 59, ll. 33–7), which also include Julian's understanding of creation and redemption.

As Julian explains it, the higher part (or 'substance') of the souls of all those who will ever be born was created all at once and united with the Second Person of the Trinity ('He made us all at onys', ch. 58, ll. 4). This 'first making' pre-exists the union of substance with the lower part of the soul (the 'sensuality' or our whole sensory consciousness) when the soul descends to earth at an individual's birth. This first making is Julian's first 'manner of beholdynge of moderhede in God', for she sees this initial creation of all our souls as a kind of maternity, just as the second maternity

is Christ's assuming of human flesh in his incarnation ('And thus is Jesus our very moder in kynde, of our first makynge, and he is our very moder in grace, be takynge of our kynde made', ch. 59, ll. 29–30). God who 'knew us and lovid us fro aforne any tyme' always intended 'that the second Person shuld becom our moder' and be the fount of all human motherhood ('All the fair werkyng and all the swete kindly office of dereworthy moderhede is impropried [appropriated] to the second Person', ch. 59, ll. 30–1). In taking on human sensuality in his incarnation as fully human, the Second Person restores sensuality to its original relation with the divine substance, but Julian ignores the traditionally gendered view of a masculine higher part of the soul and a fallible, female lower part. Just as a child was believed to derive its physicality from its mother, Christ is our mother in that he has reunited the higher and lower parts of our existence, both substantial and sensual, body and soul. In the whole performance of motherhood by earthly mothers, 'it is he that doth it in the creatures be whom that it is done' (ch. 60, l. 38), and yet in his care and protection of us he surpasses the most caring of earthly mothers (ch. 61, ll. 24–7).

Christ may be our mother, but this mother remains 'he' and 'him': Julian never refers to Christ by other than male pronouns. This is an understanding of Christ's motherhood that coexists with the male gender of the historical Christ made flesh in time. There is something comparable with how Julian sees the identification of Christ with wisdom in the Trinity or with the Church ('He will that we taken us mytyly to the feith of holy church, and fyndyn there our dereworthy moder', ch. 61, ll. 40–1). The Second Person is identified with wisdom, and wisdom is personified as female in the apocryphal book of Wisdom (Wisdom 7:8–14, 22–9). Maternity and wisdom, understood as female, become united in Christ: 'thus in our very moder, Jesus, our life is groundid in the forseing wisdom of himselfe from without begynnynge' (ch. 63, ll. 21–2), because in Christ 'the depe wisdom of the Trinite is our moder' (ch. 58, l. 25). Moreover, Christ is identified with the Church, which traditionally is also characterised in maternal terms, so that the Church's administration of the sacraments becomes identified, in Julian's understanding, with Christ feeding us with himself through the sacraments like a breastfeeding mother (ch. 60, ll. 22–4).

Part of her revelations' challenge for Julian was their combination of Passion-themed visions with other revelations involving mysterious intuitions and the hearing of divine utterances or locutions. In representing Julian's process of interpreting them, her accounts of the revelations present an implicitly autobiographical record of a woman author's struggles with her material. Julian's camera-like observation of her Passion revelations may



Illustration 19.1 Christ before Herod. Panel painting; Norwich, c. 1400–1425.
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respond to the stimulus of what Julian had seen in contemporary visual culture, except that for Julian the paintings now move and stream with blood in a way perhaps alert to women's experience.⁵ A fragment of contemporary panel painting from Norwich, showing blood flowing from the crown of thorns over Christ's brow, is broken off at bottom left where the same bleeding face of Christ also appears in an 'Ecce Homo' scene (see Illustration 19.1). In the complete panel Christ's bleeding face apparently featured recurrently in the same plane, not unlike Julian's revelation.

It is only in her Long Text that Julian interprets her perplexing second revelation – of seeing the two halves of Christ's face alternately covered with dried blood – by aligning it with the relic of St Veronica's veil ('It made me to thinke of the holy vernacle of Rome', ch. 10, ll. 27–8). This was the image of his face that Christ left imprinted on the veil with which Veronica wiped his face on the way to Calvary.⁶ Julian thus equates her revelation with this miraculous likeness of Christ's face uniquely vouchsafed to a woman, but which Julian knows to fluctuate bafflingly in appearance, not unlike her own vision. If Julian comes to authorise her vision of Christ's face by thinking of it in parallel with St Veronica's miraculous image, Julian may thereby identify herself with Veronica, who in turn was commonly identified with the 'Haemorissa' in the Gospels. This was the woman suffering with a twelve-year 'issue of blood' (probably heavy menstrual bleeding), and hence regarded as unclean, whose 'fountain of her blood' Christ heals because she believes she need only touch his garment to be cured (Mark, 5:25–34). Julian later alludes to this miracle ('Touch we him, and we shall be made clene', ch. 77, ll. 36–7), suggesting how much she identifies with this haemorrhaging and suffering woman, in the very chapter where Julian's exclamation 'This place is prison . . .' has been read as an autobiographical outburst about her own enclosed life as an anchoress, though it may simply refer to all earthly life.

Flows of blood also suffuse Julian's fourth revelation, which has its visual germ in late-medieval devotional images of the Flagellation that depict Christ covered with multiple bleeding wounds (ch. 12, ll. 1–4). Julian's vision far transcends such images, seeing the saving blood streaming through the whole firmament of earth, heaven, and hell. In Julian's revelation it is the blood that performs Christ's missions to harrow hell, to cleanse earth of sin, and to ascend into heaven (ch. 12, ll. 15–23). This is an astonishing vision of the cosmic plenitude and power of Christ's saving blood but, while Julian contemplates this, it occurs to her that, if it were not a vision, the sheer volume of blood would have so saturated her sickbed that it would have flooded and overflowed (ch. 12, ll. 6–8). The cosmic vision of blood's transformative power goes along with the woman visionary's nightmare panic about what would happen if there were some unstaunchable bleeding, presumably because issue of blood and heavily bloodied bedclothes might be a source of horrified shame as well as a sign of pain.

It is notable in some of Julian's other Passion revelations that she later decodes their details as revealing how Christ is our mother. Julian's eighth revelation is a forensic close-up of the dehydrating of Christ's body during

the Crucifixion. There was a view that since Christ's fleshliness came only from his mother, his flesh was therefore more sensitive than that of a man with two human parents, with the consequence that Christ's capacity to suffer on the cross was all the greater. Julian's focus on the drying and dying body is responding to Christ's words from the cross – 'I thirst' – which Julian later comes to understand as a ghostly thirst or love-longing in Christ as our mother to give birth to us all into salvation (ch. 63, ll. 17–20), a maternal longing that was in him from without beginning (ch. 31, ll. 27–30). On one level, the revelation's comparison of Christ's torn flesh with a cloth sagging as it hangs is the observation of a woman who had grown up alongside the processes of the local cloth-making industry, such as the cloth-drying on open-air frames in St Giles's parish in Norwich.⁷ But later in her text Julian re-envisioned all this photographically detailed physicality of Christ's drying flesh in terms of Christ's child-bearing maternal role, for his ghostly thirst will never let him stop 'till all his derworthy children be born and forth browte' (ch. 63, l. 18).

Julian's tenth revelation also develops a cue from visual culture and, after subsequent meditation, comes to interpret what has been revealed as a manifestation of Christ's motherhood. The visual motif behind this revelation is apparently the stylised depiction of the wound in Christ's side, often pictured in close-up, along with the wounded hands and feet, as the focus for devotional contemplation of the Instruments of the Passion or *Arma Christi*. In such pictures, the side-wound is depicted as a long, narrow, vulva-like aperture (see Illustration 19.2).⁸ When Christ in Julian's revelation looks into his side and reveals within 'a faire, delectabil place' which is so mysteriously expansive as to be 'large enow for al mankynd that shal be save to resten in pece and in love' (ch. 24, ll. 3–4), Julian may be envisaging not only a vulva-like side-wound but beyond it the womb in which Christ as our mother carries all mankind to rebirth in redemption. Since Julian is also mindful of the blood and water streaming from Christ's side (ch. 24, ll. 4–5), this mysterious inward space sits very much adjacent to bleeding and bodiliness. Meditating on her vision of penetrating Christ's side-wound, Julian understands this mysterious insight inside Christ's body as a mystical transformation, whereby breastfeeding is transcended by illumination within Christ's breast ('The moder may leyn the child tenderly to hir brest, but our tender moder Jesus, he may homley leden us into his blissid brest be his swete open syde, and shewyn therein party of the Godhede', ch. 60, ll. 29–31).

The complexity of Julian's first revelation had introduced these themes by combining a Passion vision – of blood streaming over Christ's brow like



Illustration 19.2 Instruments of the Passion, Bohun Psalter and Hours (c. 1380), showing the side-wound bottom centre. Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.4., f. 236 v. Used by permission of Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

rain pouring over the house eaves in a shower (ch. 7, ll. 16–17) – with such arresting visionary insights as seeing ‘a littil thing . . . in the palme of my hand’ and understanding ‘it was generally answered thus, “It is all that is made”’ (ch. 5, ll. 6–8). When Julian declares that this little thing she is shown in her hand is ‘the quantity of an hesil nutt’ (ch. 5, l. 6), she is using the language of medieval English cookery, for the size of a hazel nut was a commonly used measure of quantities to be used in English recipes.⁹ When Julian sees in her revelation how ‘the grete dropis of blode fel downe from under the garland like pellots’ (ch. 7, l. 11) – a comparison by which

she seeks to describe the globular droplets ('pellotts, for roundhede, in the comynge out of the blode', ch. 7, ll. 19–20) – Julian is also using a term found in medieval recipes.¹⁰ The everyday measures of a housewife's domestic experience in the kitchen are applied by a woman author to express visionary insights. This first revelation initiates a continuous awareness throughout Julian's text of welling blood and of visions of enclosing and being enclosed that implicitly reference Christ bearing humankind within him like a mother.

The idea of enclosing and being enclosed – of a kind of mutual indwelling – stands at the beginning and end of Julian's revelatory experience, in her first and sixteenth revelations. In the first revelation Julian understands that God enwraps us, so that we are as if enclosed within him (ch. 5, ll. 3–5; ch. 6, ll. 33–4), and this is a revelation of his homeliness with us, the favour of his intimacy, as suggested by a very unusual fifteenth-century Norfolk image of God enfolding his saints within his robe (see Illustration 19.3).¹¹

In the climactic sixteenth revelation, which Julian views as the fulfilment of the rest, Julian sees Christ seated in majesty in the city of the human



Illustration 19.3 Saints enfolded in God's robe; historiated initial of All Saints as Crucifix-Trinity. The Ranworth Antiphoner, f. 271 v; Norwich(?), c. 1460–80. By kind permission of the Parochial Church Council, Church of St Helen, Ranworth, Norfolk.

soul, and thus enclosed within us (ch. 67, ll. 1–6). Between these two revelations Julian rings many thematic changes on these ideas, and one of the most liberating is her exposition of the structure of the soul, in which God is present in the soul at the very point where its two parts, substance and sensuality, are conjoined (ch. 55, ll. 19–21). Indeed, by cross-referencing her sixteenth revelation Julian even equates sensuality with the city of God, and sees Jesus enclosed in our sensuality, just as our substance is enclosed in Christ's soul that sits in the Godhead (ch. 56, ll. 18–20). This dazzling play on mutual indwelling characterises Julian's interpretation of what has been revealed to her about Christ's role as our mother in his incarnation, which is to reunite our substance and sensuality. In an extraordinary passage, Julian describes how Christ, enclosed in Mary's womb, took upon him our sensual soul but then – 'in which takyng, he us al haveyng beclosid in him' – he united our sensuality with our substance (ch. 57, ll. 30–4). Himself enclosed in Mary's womb, Christ then encloses us in himself to effect the reunion of our soul's two parts. Citing both her first and sixteenth revelations in support, Julian sees Christ as our mother in a kind of perpetual childbirth, in which his eternally giving birth to us will never alter our enclosure within him: 'And our savior is our very moder, in whom we be endlesly borne and never shall come out of him' (ch. 57, ll. 36–7). Moreover, Julian understands that at the end of time there will be a kind of spiritual returning to the womb, whereby 'al his blissid children which ben comen out of him be kinde shal be browte ageyn into him be grace' (ch. 63, ll. 38–9).

The most significant woman's body is Mary's; the most meaningful enclosure is the Virgin's womb, as suggested by such contemporary artworks as 'vierges ouvranes', devotional images of Mary where her belly is hinged to open like a cupboard (see Illustration 19.4).¹² As Julian sees it, Mary is also our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and all born of Mary in Christ's birth (ch. 57, ll. 34–6). For Julian, even her revelation of the Annunciation – when Mary learns she will become Christ's mother – signifies Christ's purpose to become our mother (ch. 60, ll. 4–10). Mary consequently makes three appearances in Julian's revelations (ch. 4, ll. 21–31; ch. 18, ll. 1–5; ch. 25, ll. 1–8), but perhaps the most important reference to Mary is a brief passage in Julian's analysis of how she sees 'full mystily a wondirful example of a lord that hath a servant' (ch. 51, ll. 1–2). This 'example' comes in answer to Julian's need to see how God sees the problem of sin's existence (ch. 50, l. 15), and so all normal perspectives of human perception are exploded. The emblematic scene of a lord who sends a willing servant on an errand, in which the servant falls into a ravine, is

(a)



(b)



Illustration 19.4(a) and (b) Shrine of the Virgin. German, c. 1300. (a) Image closed as the Virgin and Child. (b) Image opened to show the Trinity enclosed within the Virgin Mary. God the Father holds a cross (the figure of the crucified Christ and the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit have been lost). The wings depict scenes from Christ's Nativity: (left) Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi; (right) Visitation, Presentation in the Temple, Annunciation to the Shepherds. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. By courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: accession no. 17.190.185a, b.

understood to refer concurrently both to God's initiating the incarnation and to the Fall of Adam. Images of Christ and Adam are as if mutually superimposed on the other, because from God's merciful perspective Christ could not but 'fall' with Adam – that is, humankind – and so redeem all. The fall is into the 'slade' or valley of Mary's womb ('Gods Son fell with Adam into the slade of the mayden wombe', ch. 51, ll. 173–4). Julian can ignore the Genesis narrative of a man tempted by a woman, Eve, who is subsequently scapegoated, for since Julian understands the Trinity as always intending to redeem humankind through the motherhood of the Second Person, Adam's fall was incidental not causative. Nor does Julian mention God's punishment of Eve: 'in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children' (Genesis 3:15). In place of this pointedly absent Eve, the focus is on Mary's womb as the enclosure within a woman's body where the future of humankind is resolved.

It is another pointed absence that also underlines Julian's striking independence as a woman author: her text includes no apparatus of references acknowledging the authority of other texts. Julian's work is implicit with learning, but this is now hard to identify with specific reading. Even biblical references tend to be allusive rather than word-for-word citations. Julian simply does not engage with the familiar nervous tic of (overwhelmingly male) medieval authors who recruit the authority of other, more authoritative texts by citing them to bolster their own works – a cultural tic that Chaucer subverts through a woman's voice in the Wife's account of her husband's habit of reading out examples of 'wikked wyves' to her ('Wife of Bath's Prologue', III.669–787). For Julian, authority lies in the locutions and images of her revelations: as a woman author she is her own authority, through authorisation from the revelatory experience vouchsafed to her. Ignoring any male clerical authorities, Julian instead substitutes a reference system whereby what she records herself seeing, hearing, and understanding becomes self-authorising through a system of cross-references that criss-cross her text. Julian's method enables the evidence of one revelation to become a contributory part of Julian's interpretation of another, so that authority is constructed through an overarching system of interconnecting references that work to strengthen each other and the whole. Julian deploys various types of such cross-reference; mostly she relies on quoting or paraphrasing key phrases: 'And this shewid he in these gracious words: "I kepe the ful sekirly"' (ch. 61, ll. 52–3; citing ch. 37, ll. 6–7). Sometimes she references thematic motifs from earlier contexts: 'For he longyth ever to bryng us to the fulhede of joy, as it is aforneid, where he shewith the gostly threst [thirst]' (ch. 40, ll. 17–18; citing ch. 31, ll. 9–14). Some of Julian's cross-referencing cites from her sixteen revelations by their number in the sequence, with or without the citation of the memorable phrase or thematic motif: 'This was shewid in the first and more openly in the iii wher it seyth "I saw God in a poynte"' (ch. 35, ll. 13–14; citing ch. 5, l. 2; ch. 11, l. 1); 'And this was shewid in the xiii, ner at the begynnyng, wher it spekith of pite. For he seith . . .' (ch. 77, ll. 23–9; cf. ch. 28, ll. 21–6). All such modes of reference exemplify the problems in ensuring accurate cross-reference within texts in a manuscript culture. They thereby reveal Julian's determination to shape her self-authorisation not by reference to external authority, but in effect by citing herself. This self-referencing system goes back to how Julian develops the authority deriving from her original experience, as recorded in her Short Text, by constructing a commentary on it in her Long Text through an apparatus of interlinking cross-references. Textual format here becomes the outward expression of a remarkable woman author's autonomy.

That same autonomy also lies behind the text's implicitly autobiographical archive: it records severe crises of confidence in her revelations that have evidently been resolved through her own meditation, with never a mention of any clerical adviser's input. Yet if the cross-references suggest a woman author boldly constructing a self-authorising apparatus that dispenses with male clerical authority, her system also implies that the extant Long Text may not be far removed from a private working draft. Cross-references back to already described revelations make sense, but Julian not infrequently cross-refers ahead for authorisation to revelations (particularly the last) that she has not yet reported to the reader. Julian also references her exposition of substance and sensuality (ch. 45, ll. 1–4) before she has provided it (chs. 53–9). All this suggests that, at the time of composing the surviving Long Text, guiding a readership came second to working through the text for her own understanding. This text is still being thought through, and for Julian is her means of thinking through. It is as if the most current state of Julian's text is for her more of a map or chart than a linear narrative, and she moves around it in her mind with a cursor: it is as much spatial and diagrammatic as linear and chronological, which continues to make it exhilarating and inspirational to read.

Julian does not record God instructing her to write a book but reports her understanding that he wanted the content of her revelations known (ST, ch. 6, l. 40). The distinction may explain why, unlike other women contemplatives, Julian nowhere mentions amanuenses or difficulties in getting her book transcribed (which for Kempe makes her dependant on male clerics), perhaps because Julian experienced no great difficulty in a centre like Norwich, but possibly because Julian was unconcerned about transcription. Julian's revelations rarely allude to themselves as a book, once referring to 'the hole revelation . . . that is to sey, of this boke' (ch. 51, ll. 62–3), but the surviving manuscripts of her work represent a history of composition and preserve an archive of developing understanding and interpretation.

This careful editing that is intrinsic to Julian's presentation of her text becomes part of its reception history. Her short text survives in an anthology in British Library, MS Add 37790 alongside some texts definitely not intended for beginners in contemplation. With no surviving medieval copies, the only record of medieval reception of the Long Text rests on selections from it included in a contemplative florilegium of c. 1450 (Westminster Cathedral Treasury, MS 4), most probably made for use by nuns.¹³ Here, unattributed excerpts from Julian are woven into one continuous sequence, following extracts from the mystical psalm-commentaries *Qui Habitat* and *Bonum Est*, and from Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. Just once, a brief connecting

passage inserted by the compiler refers to the author as 'her' (*Revelations*, 169, l. 149). Ironically, this manuscript's women readers may not have realised that they were reading a woman author, whose work has been silently recruited without acknowledgement to provide the concluding summation of a compilation for advanced practitioners of the contemplative life.

If this Westminster text records fifteenth-century nuns reading Julian, it is also to the later reading of Julian by nuns that we owe the survival of her Long Text, since the three extant manuscript copies of Julian's Long Text were probably made by post-Reformation English nuns exiled on the Continent.¹⁴ The houses of English Benedictine nuns in Cambrai and Paris evidently had access to either medieval manuscripts or later copies. In writing the biography of one such nun, Augustine Baker (1575–1641) – Benedictine monk and spiritual director of the Paris nuns – refers to 'the old manuscript Booke' of Julian's revelations as if this was familiar in the milieu of the Paris nuns. This may refer to the manuscript that is now Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fonds anglais 40 (P), or perhaps to an earlier, medieval manuscript. It was from another such source that the copy that is now British Library, MS Sloane 2499 (S1) was transcribed, and the transcription has sometimes been attributed to a nun of the Paris house, Anne Clementia Cary (1614–71).¹⁵ These two post-Reformation manuscripts on which modern editions of Julian are based – P and S1 – represent readings that preserve clues to the reception of Julian's medieval content by early modern women, but they may also record some medieval reception of Julian's work. These two texts are curious opposites of each other. In layout and script P has the appearance of a very tidy fake of a medieval manuscript, but the language of Julian's text that it contains has undergone modernisation. By contrast, S1 is written in a seventeenth-century handwriting that makes no attempt to disguise its period but preserves more of the medieval language of Julian's text. Both texts, or their predecessors, have been subject to forms of textualisation that may not derive from Julian. The reference system inbuilt into Julian's text sometimes makes cross-reference by the numbers of the revelations, but Julian only gives numbers to four of her revelations within her text, other than in the list of revelations in the first chapter that might be an editorial addition. Systematic numbering – and hence demarcation of the boundaries between revelations – is provided by the chapter rubrics in P and the chapter summaries in S1. The latter cannot derive from Julian, at least in their present form, since they both reveal her gender, which she has carefully obscured, and talk of her ('this blissid woman') in terms that she would hardly use of herself. Chapter-division is broadly the same in

both P and S1, and hence derives from an earlier phase of the text but, if editorial, serves to remind us that for Julian the primary units in her work remained the revelations.

Both manuscripts have features possibly retaining traces of female readership or even of Julian's original perspective as a woman author. In its chapters on Christ our Mother, S1 capitalises the initial 'M' of 'Moder' and 'Moderhede' even while following common medieval scribal practice in not necessarily capitalising 'God' or 'Father' as in modern religious language: 'All our dett that we owen be gods biddynge be faderhede & Moderhede' (ch. 60; S1, f.44 r); 'Our gracious Modere hath browte us up to our faders bliss' (ch. 63; S1, f.46 v). In P there are intriguing occasional contexts that refer to the soul as female, as here: 'And welle I wott the more the soule seeth of god, the more she desyeryth hym by grace . . . For whan a soule is temptyd, troblyde, and lefte to her selfe by her unrest, then is it tyme to praye to make her selfe suppull and buxum to god' (ch. 43; P, f. 79 v). But such feminising of the soul soon lapses, to be replaced by the extant manuscripts' more customary reference to the soul as 'it' or 'him', as in the very next sentence: 'But she by no manner of prayer makyth God suppell to hym . . . ' where 'hym' replaces 'her'. Such instances perhaps record the occasional response of women copyists to the material being transcribed, unless they represent vestiges of what was once a more consistent reference to the soul as feminine in earlier copies.¹⁶

Evidence survives both of the nuns' continued reading and copying of Julian – as in the Upholland Anthology – but also of endeavour to live out Julian's example, as in the devotions of Margaret Gascoigne (1608–37), a nun at Cambrai.¹⁷

The Upholland Anthology is a miscellany of excerpts on the contemplative life including, under the heading of 'Saint Julian', her twelfth revelation (ch. 26) and early sections from the thirteenth (chs. 27, 28, 30, 32). The anthology was probably compiled between the 1640s and 1680s by Cambrai nuns, including Barbara Constable (1617–84), from a source resembling the Paris manuscript. 'Certein Devotions of Dame Margaret Gascoigne . . . Found uppon her death, of her owne hande writing' were edited by Augustine Baker, who also provided a spiritual biography of Margaret, interpreting the devotions as her progression towards advanced contemplation. Baker describes how written below the crucifix at which Margaret gazed during her last illness and until her death was an inscription with 'these holy words that had sometime ben spoken by God to the Holie Virgin Julian the ankresse of Norwich, as appeareth by the old manuscript Booke of her Revelations'. These words, as Baker gives them, are 'Intend [attend] to me,

I am enough for thee: rejoyce in me thy Saviour, and in thy Salvation' (ch. 5, l. 28; ch. 36, ll. 35–6). Margaret takes these divine words to Julian 'as appeareth by the booke of her revelations' as also spoken to her, and the words are recurrently cited throughout Margaret's devotions, much as Julian cites herself. Indeed, Margaret cites scriptural phrases, especially from Psalms, and then, despite the different literal meanings of the biblical texts, glosses them by invoking these same divine words to Julian. These words embolden Margaret to aspire to the contemplative's unbroken attention to the divine. Margaret's intent dying gaze at a crucifix, to which an inscription of Julian's words has been attached, suggests both a devout emulation of Julian's deathbed experience and also an identification with the words of her text, perhaps from that 'old manuscript Booke of her Revelations'.

It was from such a manuscript – either P or a text very like it – that Serenus Cressy (1605–74), a Roman Catholic convert briefly chaplain at the Paris convent, produced in 1670 the first printed edition of Julian's Long Text, which he entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*. This first appearance of Julian's work in print provoked Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, to include in his *Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practised in the Church of Rome* (London, 1671) a contemptuous condemnation of the *Revelations* that is strongly gendered. Stillingfleet's rationalist objections to the perceived 'fanaticism' of the Catholic Church include, plural 'the great number of female Revelations approved in the Roman Church' and the way in which 'Private revelations [are] made among them the grounds of believing some points of doctrine'. Stillingfleet repeatedly equates Julian's revelations with fanaticism and madness, referring to 'the Fanatick Revelations of Mother Julian' with 'Some instances of the blasphemous Nonsense contained in them' as also 'the Fanatick Revelations of distempered brains' exemplified by Julian, and 'such Fooleries, which deserve no other name at the best than the efforts of Religious madness'. An observant close reader of Julian, Stillingfleet cites a long list of brief statements culled from her revelations and paraphrased out of context in such a way as to make them sound outlandish to a reader ignorant of Julian's original. His list opens with 'she speaks of our being beclosed in the mid-head of God', and concludes indignantly with 'she discourseth of three properties in the Holy Trinity, of the Fatherhead, of the Motherhood, and of the Lordship, and she further saw that the second person which is our Mother substantially, the same dear worthy person is now become our Mother sensual'. Using 'hysterical' in its old sense, where emotions and intellect are understood to be influenced by disturbances of the uterus, all this and the rest is dismissed as 'the blasphemous and senseless tittle tattle of this *Hysterical Gossip* ... the Canting and Enthusiastick

expressions, which signifie nothing in Mother Julian's Revelations'. Nonetheless, Julian's 'senseless tittle tattle' continued to be copied by hand, not least because Cressy's edition remained the only one until the nineteenth century. At the French Revolution the English Benedictine nuns of Paris fled home to England, having narrowly escaped the guillotine. They were sheltered by the Marchioness of Buckingham, herself a Catholic convert, and a handwritten copy of Julian's *Revelations* is later found in the Buckingham's library at Stowe (now British Library, MS Stowe 42).

In closing her work, Julian declares that 'This booke is begunne . . . but it is not yet performid [completed]' (ch. 86, l. 1). Unfinished, and perhaps unfinishable, the revelations would never cease yielding understandings for analysis. One characteristic aspect of Julian's analytical method is how alert she is in her revelations to the significance of what she has not been shown. In this, Julian's approach to negative or absent evidence offers a model for how, as a woman author, her text engages with literary culture through the implications of what she does not say explicitly. If Julian does not explain her revelation of St John of Beverley's forgiven but unspecified youthful sinfulness (ch. 38, ll. 19–25), is she thinking of his criminal violence towards women in one version of his legend, where he rapes and murders his sister while drunk? Does Julian's acceptance of incompleteness, of what she does not know, imply that she has not sought (or not been convinced by) any guidance from male clerics to explain, edit, and control? Is not Julian's implicitly positive view of human sensuality – and of unregretted bodily nature – a more independent-minded female approach than clerical group-fear and loathing of the human body, especially female bodies? Julian is shrewdly politic in outwardly disclaiming any intention to teach as a woman author (ST, ch. 6, ll. 34–5), yet her practice is otherwise. Julian's parallels between Christ as our teacher and every mother's teaching role in forming her child morally by correcting and upbringing (ch. 60, ll. 38–44; ch. 61, ll. 24–40) quietly but subversively claims back for the woman author the equality that Julian's understanding of Christ as our mother throughout her revelations so triumphantly affirms.

Notes

1. 'As verily as God is our fader, as verily God is our moder'; see Barry Windeatt (ed.), *Revelations of Divine Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 59, l. 9. All reference to Julian's text is to this edition (hereafter *Revelations*), by chapter and line number.

2. Barry Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), ch. 18.
3. *Revelations*, xiii–xiv, n. 2.
4. *Revelations*, 3, 29.
5. Barry Windeatt, 'Julian of Norwich and Medieval English Visual Culture', in *'Truthe is the beste'*, ed. N. Jacobs and G. Morgan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 185–203.
6. Barry Windeatt, 'True Image? Alternative Veronicas in Late Medieval England', in *Manuscript and Print in Late Medieval and Early Modern Britain*, ed. Tamara Atkins and Jaclyn Rajsic (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2019), 219–40.
7. C. Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (eds.), *Medieval Norwich* (London: Hambledon, 2004), 215, 387.
8. See Flora Lewis, 'The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response', in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (London: The British Library, 1996), 204–29.
9. The size of one hazelnut is the measure of quantity in a medicine taken during childbirth: see Alexandra Barratt (ed.), *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001): 'tak of myrre, þe quantite of j hasull not, & 3yf here to drynk in wyne & with-owtyn fayl sche schall be delyuerd a-noon' (64).
10. See Robina Napier (ed.), *A Noble Boke off Cookry ffor a prynce houssolde or eny other estately houssolde* (London: Elliot Stock, 1882): 'when the potte boileth, put in the peletes like an hassille nott' (93).
11. See Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), 2.325: 'an All Saints initial with a conflated subject of a Crucifix-Trinity acting as a 'Schutzmantel' figure (possibly the only such figure in English book illustration)'. It is more usual for the Virgin Mary to be shown enfolding souls in her robe.
12. For a 'vierge ouvrante' once in Durham Cathedral, see Margaret Harvey and Lynda Rollason (eds.), *The Rites of Durham: William Claxton*, Surtees Society, vol. 226, Catholic Record Society, Records Series vol. 88 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020): 'Over the which alter was a merveyulous lyvlye and bewtifull image of the picture of Our Ladie, so called the Ladie of Boulton. Which picture was made to open with gymers [hinges] from her brest downward . . . And euery principall day the said image was opened, that eueryman might se pictured within her the Father, the Sonne, and the Holy Ghost, most curiouslie and fynely gilted' (165–6). See also Elina Gertsman, *Worlds Within: Opening the Medieval Shrine Madonna* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).
13. See *Revelations*, 165–77, and Barry Windeatt, 'Constructing Audiences for Contemplative Texts: The Example of a Mystical Anthology', in *Imagining the Book*, ed. Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 159–71.

14. See Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
15. A third manuscript, British Library, MS Sloane 3705, derives from S1 but is more modernised.
16. Other instances in P include: 'No sowle is in reste till it is noughted . . . when she is wilfully noughted for loue, to haue him that is all, then is she able to receive ghostly reste' (ch. 5; f. 10r); 'And how a sowle shall haue [behave] her in his beholding, he shall teach hym selfe' (ch. 10; f. 23r); 'And the more that the lovyng soule seeth this curtesy of god, that levyr she ys to serve hym all her lyfe' (ch. 14; f. 30v); 'Sodenly is the soule onyd to god when she [corrected from 'it'] is truly peesynd [reconciled] in her selfe' (ch. 49; f. 91r).
17. For the Upholland and Gascoigne texts, see Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds.), *The Writings of Julian of Norwich* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 437–48.

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