NECESSARY FICTIONS: READING AND VISIONARY LITERATURE IN

PEARL, PIERS PLOWMAN, A REVELATION OF DIVINE LOVE,

AND *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

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NECESSARY FICTIONS: READING AND VISIONARY LITERATURE IN *PEARL, PIERS PLOWMAN, A REVELATION OF DIVINE LOVE,* AND *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

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When the Dreamer of *Pearl* first encounters the Maiden, he attempts to describe a giant pearl affixed to her bosom and finds he can only say, "A manneȝ dom moȝt dryȝly demme / Er mynde moȝt malte in hit mesure. / I hope no tong moȝt endure / No sauerly saghe say of þat syȝt." Just when he hopes to be able to say something about the Maiden, the Dreamer's language fails him and he has to give an approximation of what he sees. In my dissertation, I explore the outcomes of such failures of language in visionary writing. Instead of dwindling into silence in the face of the ineffable, as one might expect, English visionary writing exploits language's fecundity. Past work on visionary literature separates so-called mystic visions from what are supposed to be their more poetic counterparts, identifying mystic visions as primarily religious texts and poetic dream visions as primarily literary texts. I argue instead that mystic, what I call "waking," visions and dream visions are inextricably linked through the way they engage the reader in the work of the vision. I identify waking and dream visions as a part of visionary literature, a body of writing that questions the sufficiency of language even as it reaches out to the reader to recuperate some of language's failures.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hannah Byland grew up in the corn fields and red dirt roads of Oklahoma, where she spent most of her time reading science-fiction and exploring dry creek beds. As a college freshman, Hannah took a course on Dante's works and has been a medievalist since then. Currently, Hannah lives in Pennsylvania with her husband, David. She teaches critical writing at the University of Pennsylvania. Hannah is also a yoga teacher and finds a balance in her life through teaching and practising yoga. When not teaching or writing, Hannah enjoys hiking, baking, and knitting.

Dedication

For my family and my friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

WRITING VISIONARY LITERATURE

> *'His deeth saugh I by revelacioun,'*
> *Seide this frere, 'at hoom in oure dortour.*
> *I dar wel seyn that, er that half an hour*
> *After his deeth, I saugh hym born to blisse*
> *In myn avision, so God me wisse!'*
> (SumT. III 1854-8)

In the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Friar's Tale*, and the *Summoner's Tale* are often linked in an irreverent triumvirate. Alisoun's audacity to claim an authoritative voice stings the Friar and pushes him to tell a tale about a wicked summoner. This, in turn, spurs the Summoner to tell his story of a friar whose greed ends up forcing him to share even a fart with his brethren. When we read these three tales together, we are more often interested in their wickedly sharp wordplay and search for authority than we are for their visionary elements. However, Alisoun's tale begins with an (unfulfilled) quest to see fairies; the Friar's tale invokes a short aside from the Summoner about a friar he once knew who "ravysshed was to hele / In spirit ones by a visioun" (CT Sum. Prol. 1676-7). The Summoner's *Tale* includes a little *revelacioun* that Friar John has of Thomas' dead son, though it is often pushed aside in favor of the larger problem of how to share a fart among thirteen men. Yet, the desire to see fairies, the vision of hell, and Friar John's speech taken together invite the reader to consider the role of visionary moments in these three tales.

Twice in the *Summoner's Tale* Friar John uses the word "saugh" to describe his supposed interaction with the dead child, and the thing that he "saugh," he alternately calls a "revelacioun" and an "avision." Although John and the Summoner are not reliable

narrators by any measure, we do start to wonder if there is a distinction between revelation and vision and if he saw these things, how he saw them.[1] The twelfth -century abbess, Hildegard of Bingen, perhaps a more reliable narrator than John, describes her visionary sight in equally ambiguous terms. In the introduction to *Scivias* she claims,

> The visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places, as God willed it. How this might be is hard for mortal flesh to understand.[2]

While it does not matter to John to justify or explain the nature of his seeing (for, as we suspect, he saw nothing), Hildegard is completely aware that she needs to express how she experienced her visions. Christopher Cannon claims that "thinking occurs by means of that 'infinite wealth of forms, shapes, appearances' which constitute the material world, that ideas are simply the 'inward pulse' that can be detected 'still beating' in those 'outward appearances' we call things."[3] Hildegard's internal, waking sight is at once representative of that 'inward pulse' and opposite of it. By articulating this complex experience in a language that other human persons can comprehend, Hildegard has created a textual object that itself represents both more and less than whatever it is and

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[1] Chaucer himself famously wonders about the distinction between different kinds of vision. See HF 1.3-11 and 2.509-28. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Chaucer are to line numbers from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed, ed. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). This project will not engage significantly with Chaucer beyond these first few pages, but in the longer project I hope to add a chapter that inquires after Chaucer's place in the development of visionary literature.

[2] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 60.

[3] Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9. Here Cannon is referencing Hegel, see fn. 21.

however it was that Hildegard experienced her vision. It is indeed difficult for a human person to understand.

John, however, experiences no such problem in the recounting of his relationship to his "vision" and Christ. He confidently tells Thomas and his wife,

> Oure orisons been moore effectueel,
> And moore we seen of Cristes secree thynges,
> Than burel folk, although they weren kynges (III 1870-2).

John claims that his prayers have given him visions and those visions have revealed Christ's "secret things."[4] Embedded as they are in self-aware layers of fiction, John's visions are empty for the reader; they contain none of the compelling concerns for the problematic process of making a visionary text that the visionaries studied in this project deal with. Yet what happens when we force such formally fictive works (*Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*) into a discussion with formally "true" works (the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich and the *Book of Margery Kempe*)? It is less easy to dismiss the author of *Pearl*'s lament, "I playned my perle þat þer wawtʒ spenned" (53) than John's "with many a teere trillyng on my cheke" (III 1864).

This project is located at this intersection between poetic visionary writing and "mystic" visionary writing in 14th-century and 15th-century England. In particular, I am interested in working through the way that visionary texts speak across generic boundaries to create an understanding of literary writing that involves the active participation of the reader. Visionary writing as a whole has a complicated relationship to the reader; it at once creates the visionary experience for her and excludes her from that

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[4] For more on secrets in the Summoner's Tale, see Mary Hayes, "Privy Speech: Sacred Silence, Dirty Secrets in the Summoner's Tale," *The Chaucer Review* 40, no. 3 (2006): 263-88.

experience. Hildegard is called upon to write what she sees and hears, even though what she hears and sees can be baffling:

> And I, a person not glowing with the strength of strong lions or taught by their inspiration, but a tender and fragile rib imbued with a mystical breath, saw a blazing fire, incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life, with a flame in it the color of the sky, which burned ardently with a gentle breath, and which was as inseparably within the blazing fire as the viscera are within a human being.[5]

She offers a sight that seems impossible at first: a blazing, incomprehensible fire with a flame inside it the color of the sky, although she does not tell us what color that might be. The flame could be the blue of a summer morning or the flaming shades of an autumn sunset. Only if we parse her language, the vision becomes more understandable, or at least more imaginable. In essence, it is this relationship between visionary and reader that concerns me most. Although I use Hildegard's writing as a kind of prototype, I focus almost entirely on the way that English "mystic" and poetic visionaries deal with the conventional forms of visionary literature. Typical scholarship on visionary writing has held "mystic" and poetic visions apart, seemingly because each kind of visionary writing has an obviously different *telos*. Recently, though, authors like Jessica Barr have suggested that the categories of "mystic" and literary vision be (at least partially) collapsed and considered as corollaries in a broader literary conversation.[6] My project aims to continue this reconfiguration of the way that visionary literature is viewed. In the

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[5] *Scivias*, 149.

[6] Barr's book, *Willing to Know God*, is mostly concerned with the ways of knowing that visionary texts engage with. Her argument is that "authentic visions" and "pragmatic visions" share a common concern with how to know God. See *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010).

following pages, I will argue that these two styles of visionary writing display a complex relationship with the literary in fourteenth-century England and the dream vision is born of and continuing the work of the "mystic" vision.

My chapters are organized around a series of texts that best exemplify the kind of writing and reading phenomena I describe in this introduction and my first chapter. Guided in part by Howard Bloch's succinct version of the literary as "a giving of visual form to that which is invisible and of verbal form to that which can henceforth be seen," the foundational work of my first chapter, "Forming Visions," involves a conversation with scholarship on the idea of the literary in medieval fiction.[7] I engage with Bloch's visible verbal form to offer my own understanding of the literary in visionary texts as an invitation that enlists the reader in the work of creating or finishing a visionary text. This definition has some similarities with Wolfgang Iser's reader response theory, where he suggests that texts have gaps which readers are encouraged to fill.[8] Unlike Iser, however, I argue that visionary literature's gaps are fixed and seem to require that readers fill those gaps the same way every time they read. That is not to say that visionary literature has fixed meaning and a limited amount of interpretations. Rather, the hidden gaps in the text are foregrounded by another hidden meaning to which the written words are themselves supposedly responding. Every time a reader offers an interpretation of a visionary text, she uncovers new gaps in her language and her own representation of the vision.

Visionary literature necessarily struggles with appropriate or enough language to

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[7.] Howard Bloch, *Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 247.

[8.] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History* 3, no.2 (1972): 279-99.

represent the visionary episode. These moments of linguistic insufficiency point toward the author's awareness that language is limited in its ability to signify. The inevitable movement to silence, or to not writing, in visionary literature provides the necessary fiction of my title. Though language does and must fail to represent the ineffable, the work needs to be written and understood. To that end, visionary literature makes use of several different ways of interacting with a written text. I present as a taxonomy: *auctor*, participant observer, scribe, interpreter, and reader. For a waking visionary text, the participant observer (the visionary herself) is often also the interpreter, yet in a dream vision the participant observer (the Dreamer) rarely understands anything of the dream. So it is that the reader has an opportunity to engage in interpretation, whether "alone" or along with the visionary.

I begin my argument with the poetic form in Chapter Two, "Seeing Spots: Reading the Middle English Pearl." *Pearl*, in particular, uses both form and content to keep all interpretation and understanding from the poem. As has been so often noted of *Pearl*'s content, the poem becomes a kind of self-contained gem, complete and wholly enticing. However, the Dreamer's inability to understand and the author's apparent powerlessness to produce a perfect form have driven critics to see the poem as the sum of its failures. What most critics read as flaws in form and character are better understood as authorial strategies to activate and regulate the reader's response. In fact, the author's anticipation of the reader's response has allowed him/her to hem in the reader at every possible breaking point. The clearest example of this is the famous "missing" line 472, which modern editors have put back into the text with an often unnoted ellipsis. Yet, the primary evidence that a line is "missing" is that the poem falls one line short of the

numerologically important 1,212. My chapter argues that perceived flaws like this in the

pearl's shine are evidence of the operating principle behind *Pearl*. Rather than risk

unmediated reader response, I suggest that the author purposefully constructed *Pearl* at

the point of near completion to allow the reader to finish the vision in controlled, and

orthodox, ways. The *Pearl*-poet manages this by exploiting the reader's expectations that

a visionary text would necessarily struggle with insufficient language and silence.

Chapter 3, "'Rule Thi Tonge Bettre': Seeking Silence in *Piers Plowman,*"

examines *Piers* as poetry that is not striving for formal completeness and in fact despairs

at the thought of linguistic completion. Instead, *Piers* offers a looping, recursive narrative

that struggles with language. The Dreamer constantly asks questions of his allegorical

companions, but as the narrative progresses he is more and more often told to be silent. In

addition to Will's silence, the poem problematizes its own textuality. It cannot seem to

decide if texts are repositories of true knowledge, learning, and understanding or if texts

are worthless and weighty images of political and spiritual oppression. These problems, I

argue, contribute to an enticing and wholly impossible call to the reader. She is asked to

recuperate Will's failures, to follow *Piers*, and yet also to suspect that silence may be the

best course. By making use of memory-searching strategies, Langland produces a text

that looks toward waking visionary writing. It demands a revisionary reader, one who

will both re-read and re-view Will's endless dreams.

I argue in my fourth chapter, "(Re)Vision in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations"*

that the performance of *A Revelation* requires an interpretive mode of reading and

understanding the visions that Julian herself initiates for the reader. For Julian, the

practice of the vision is not in simply "having" it, but rather in those long years spent

mulling over the meaning of what she saw. By playing with temporality and understanding, Julian invites the reader to join her in this process of re-vision. In 1373, Julian had a spiritual experience in the form of visions that she later wrote down in a kind of hurried way (what we call the *Short Text*). About twenty years later, she produced the *Long Text* of *A Revelation*, which is nearly six times as long as the *ST* and includes much more developed interpretations of the visions. That temporal distance gives a valuable illustration of Julian's interest in narrative structure as a way to locate the meaning of her visions. Yet, as she famously says, "this boke is begonne by Goddys gyfte and his grace, but it is nott yett performyd as to my syght." In her additions to the *Long Text*, Julian repeatedly emphasizes a new understanding of the vision as it applies to all her *evencristen*. Where she initially thought the vision was for her alone, Julian now sees that it has value for her community. Though she does not say how the book is to be performed, I propose that she models proper performance through her reinterpretations of her own language and her new inclusions of the Christian community as a whole.

   Finally, I consider Margery Kempe, whose book is not a dream vision, but neither is it properly a waking vision. Chapter Five, "Performing the Book: Margery Kempe and Textual Authority," examines someone in the real position of a 15th-century reader of visionary texts. Echoing *Piers'* disjointed narrative, *The Book of Margery Kempe* purports to represent a life in fragmented, nonlinear time. The spectacular messiness of Kempe's narrative has caused problems for her readers, who seem reluctant to see an organizing force behind the mess. Yet I argue that this process of interpretive reading sensitizes readers to the careful artifice behind the apparently casual work. As such, her text highlights the tension of the necessary fictions of my title. In her obsession with

claiming authority, Kempe struggles with the truth and the true representation of her visions. Her nonverbal tears express a kind of first translation of the divine, one that she leaves untranslated in her text and open to the interpretation of her listening and reading audiences. As she sets herself in an inimitable position, a kind of second St Bridget, Kempe also situates herself as the kind of reader she hopes to attract to her own book. That is, through repeated references to textual authority and stability, Kempe's *Book* asks the reader not simply to interpret and fill out the text. Instead, she suggests that the reader interpret her life as text. Kempe is deeply aware of the conventions of visionary writing and exploits them to structure and arrange Margery's life to highlight certain important moments, often relating to textual authority. Margery thereby becomes the textual embodiment of Kempe's understanding of the place of a visionary in literature.

CHAPTER 1

FORMING VISIONS

I have from earliest childhood seen great marvels
which my tongue has no power to express
Hildegard of Bingen

What did it mean to say, 'I saw'?
Barbara Newman

To write the divine vision is to write a contradiction, as the divine vision is

literally *contra dictionem*, beyond the capacity of speech. So it is that this project must

revolve around the issue of fictions. From the language of the written text, to the status of

visionary episodes, to the Dreamer on a riverbank, visionary literature requires fictions in

order to be comprehensible. To find these fictions, I first want to articulate a definition of

what I call visionary literature in 14th- and 15th-century England. It is a body of written

texts that use the form of a vision to engage the reader in such a way that she is driven to

complete the work the text produces. A close analogue to my definition can be found in

the work of Wolfgang Iser and reader response theory. Iser's notion that the relationship

between the text and its reader is the thing that produces meaning resonates with my

understanding of visionary literature as something that requires the active participation of

the reader to reach completion. Iser claims, "by reading we uncover the unformulated

part of the text, and this very indeterminacy is the force that drives us to work out a

configurative meaning while at the same time giving us the necessary degree of freedom

to do so."[9] My formulation of visionary literature suggests that reading does uncover

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[9] Iser, "The Reading Process," 292.

some unwritten part of the text, but that this uncovering is anticipated by the text and the unwritten gaps seek fulfillment in the same way by each reader every time the text is read. When linguistic problems are solved, new ones arise and the project of visionary literature is to continue to fill these verbal gaps, to continue to meditate on the meaning behind the language of visionary writing.

Michelle Karnes' work in *Imagination* provides another useful way of thinking about the way that medieval readers interact with textual artefacts. She offers an Aristotelian way of understanding imagination, one wherein the imagination provides the content of the understanding reached by the intellect. The imagination links the senses and the intellect, making the sensed world accessible to the intellect. Karnes suggests that the imagination can be trained to better comprehend the written text, and it is in this way that my work overlaps with hers. That is, she emphasizes the medieval notion that "vivid reading and successful meditating required an active imagination."[10] This is precisely how visionaries in my project require readers to interact with their texts. They must read with their imaginations, moving the written text inside to become intelligible to the intellect. Moreover, visionaries must write with language that is imaginitive. As Karnes notes, "the author cates to the capacities of imagination . . . By doing so, he can get the most out of imagination, using it to create vivid mental images that have cocnrete spiritual rewards."[11] Not only must visionary literature try to represent an ineffible experience, but it must in some way recreate that experience accurately enough for the reader to internalize it and imagine the text within her mind.

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[10] Karnes, *Imagination*, 169.

[11] Ibid., 176.

Another way to understand the workings of visionary literature is through recourse to the category of language termed performative. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the performative to this study is the elimination of the need to inspect visionary literature for truth-value. While the true status of a vision certainly matters for the readers and writers of visionary literature, it can prove to be a sticking point for scholars. The neurologist Oliver Sacks said of Hildegard of Bingen's visions that "they provide a unique example of the manner in which a physiological event, banal, hateful, or meaningless to the vast majority of people, can become, in a privileged consciousness, the substrate of a supreme ecstatic inspiration."[12] Convinced that her visions were reports of a migraine experience, Sacks provides a reading that makes Hildegard's visions "true." His observations and expertise make the migraine claim both tempting and plausible. But what the performative can do in a case like this is take away the need for truth from a reading of visionary texts. In *How to Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin famously claims that performative language cannot be true or false, it simply is. When one promises, whether or not the promise was misleading, one has still promised.[13] Of course, the problem with invoking Austin is that he explicitly excludes literature from the realm of performative speech. A promise cannot be made while "joking, for example, or writing a poem."[14] Yet, literary criticism has taken up the idea of performativity as a powerful tool

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[12] Sacks, *Migraine*, 301. Katherine Foxhall discusses the way that men and scientists have tried to dissect Hildegard's work through postmortem medical diagnoses. See, "Making Modern Migraine Medieval: Men of Science, Hildegard of Bingen and the Life of a Retrospective Diagnosis," *Medieval History* 58, no. 3 (2014): 354-74.

[13] J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 10-11.

[14] Ibid., 9.

for understanding what literature does. Jonathan Culler notices that "literary works claim to tell us about the world, but if they succeed, they do so by bringing into being the characters and events they relate."[15] When Hildegard writes, "I saw . . . a wondrously beautiful image. It had a human form, and its countenance was of such beauty and radiance that I could have more easily gazed at the sun than at that face," she creates for the reader a human shape, glowing with a painfully bright light.[16] Hildegard's utterance, the way it draws readers, and the way that readers interact with that utterance constitute the literariness of the vision. That sense of performativity's constitutive power makes the reader's involvement with visionary literature all the more significant. Indeed, as I hope to show with my discussions of Julian of Norwich and *Pearl* in particular, the reader's performance of the text through the act of reading and interpreting allows the visionary text to overcome its limited representation of the vision itself. I don't offer this as a way of solving the ever-pressing problem of "truth" in the realm of visionary literature, but rather as a way of reading that allows us to pursue visionary texts as literary objects.

In *Anonymous Marie de France*, Howard Bloch says that when we enter the world of literature, we are consumed by

> A self-conscious focus upon the process of writing itself, an awareness of the question of what it means to make literary texts. More precisely, we enter from the start into literature's questions to itself about language: about the difference between ordinary and poetic language, about intention and reception, about esthetic value, about the social implications of esthetics, in short, the question of origins.[17]

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[15] Culler, *The Literary in Theory*, 152.

[16] Hildegard, *Book of Divine Works*, 1.1 (8).

[17] Bloch, *Anonymous Marie de France*, 38.

Bloch's definition asks us to consider as literary anything that is concerned with its own form, with the language of its own writing, and with the way that it uses that form and language to elicit some response in its readers. Much later in that book, Bloch even more simply states that the literary is "a giving of visual form to that which is invisible and of verbal form to that which can henceforth be seen."[18] This is particularly useful for the world of visionary writing, which is consumed by the problem of giving a form to that formless experience of a vision. In fact, what's at stake here is not whether or not visions fit into a literary category; they do. What's at stake is how the category they fit into works and how they interact with one another in that category. Authors like Julian and Margery Kempe had to be aware of other kinds of visionary writing as well as conventional religious writing in order to make sure their own products were not dismissed outright.[19] They had, in other words, to care about the form their visions took.

Partly this concern for form comes from the driving force of the ineffable in visionary texts. The visionary's compulsion to speak in the face of the unspeakable makes the text one of linguistic failure; language has to collapse at some point. Waking visionaries find that human language is not enough to express the language of the vision. So too, dream visionaries push language to the point where it breaks down or expresses

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[18] Bloch, *Anomymous*, 247.

[19] Tracing the continental influences on Julian's texts has proven challenging. For a concise overview of these problems, see Crampton, "Introduction." See also Watson and Jenkins, "Introduction," 6-10. For more on Margery Kempe's sources, see Jenkins, "Reading and the Book of Margery Kempe," esp 120-8. For more on medieval women reading generally, see Carol M. Meale, "'alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500,* ed. Carol M. Meade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128-58.

more than the dreamer can understand. Visionary literature, then, turns the unspeakable

into words, and does so in a carefully structured way. This sense of the overabundance of

meaning one can extract from a careful arrangement and use of words also resonates with

a definition of the literary that Steven Knapp offers in *Literary Interest*. There he writes

that the literary is

> Any linguistically embodied representation that tends to attract a certain kind of
> interest to itself; that does so by particularizing the emotive and other values of its
> referents; and that does *that* by inserting its referents into new 'scenarios'
> inseparable from the particular linguistic and narrative structures of the
> representation itself.[20]

In this sense, the visionary text provides a bridge between the ineffable and literature. It

gives form (though a self-admittedly approximate form) to the formless in a way that

provides access to its readers. For the waking visionary author, the struggle is how to

represent the unrepresentable, but for the dream visionary the challenge is to make form

seem formless.

Finally, I turn not to a contemporary theorist, but to Augustine of Hippo's theories

of the dream and the vision. Augustine's writing resonates through all the authors

included in this project, though it is certainly not my intent to study these texts for their

Augustinian elements.[21] Instead, I offer Augustine's three-part theory of visions as a

medieval guide for understanding kinds of visions and the appropriate way to deal with

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[20] Knapp, *Literary Interest*, 2.

[21] For more on Augustinian influence on other medieval visionaries across
Europe, see Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Rochester,
NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), esp 58-71. Frank Tobin, "Medieval Thought on Visions
and Its Resonance in Mechthild von Magdeburg's 'Flowing Light of the Godhead'," in
Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio,
ed. Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas H. Bestul, Janet Goebel, and William F. Pollard
(Oxford: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 41-53.

them. Naturally, we need to proceed with caution when suggesting Augustinian influence

in late medieval texts. Jesse Keskiaho provides a thorough overview of the medieval

inheritance of *De Genesi,* suggesting that while it was not the most commonly studied of

Augustine's works, it and the theory of visions included therein survived across Europe

through the Middle Ages.[22] Indeed, Augustine's explanation of the charism of *discretio*

spiritum in *De Genesi* was profoundly influential on late medieval authentication of

visionary episodes.[23] The categorizations of visions itself comes in Book 12 of *De*

Genesi. There, Augustine writes,

> When we read this one commandment, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself,*
> we experience three kinds of vision: one through the eyes, by which we see the
> letters; a second through the spirit, by which we think of our neighbor even when
> he is absent; and a third through an intuition of the mind, by which we see and
> understand love itself (12: 6.15).[24]

In this delineation, Augustine sees visions proper as belonging to the third part, as the

first involves the physical body, the second the memory or imagination, and the third is

the movement of pure intellect. He clarifies a few lines later that the third kind,

"embraces those objects which have no images resembling them which are not identical

with them . . . In the case of love, is it seen in one manner when present, in the form

which it exists, and in another manner when absent, in an image resembling it? Certainly

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[22] Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions*, 148-70.

[23] I will discuss *discretio spiritum* more closely in Chapter 4.

[24] *St Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, "Ecce in hoc uno praecepto cum legitur: *Diliges proximum tuum tamquam teipsum* tria genera visionum occurrunt: unum per oculos, quibus ipsae litterae videntur; alterum per spiritum hominis quo proximus et absens cogitatur; tertium per contuitum mentis, quo ipsa dilectio intellecta conspicitur" (PL 34, col.458).

not" (12: 6.15).[25] For Augustine, a vision requires intellectual effort on the part of the

seer, while a dream exists in the second realm of imagination and memory. Keskiaho says

of Augustine's visionary schema that "Recognizing the nature of one's visionary

experience is not easy, but a matter of intellectual vision. The latter is required in order to

recognise that one has seen images of corporeal things and not corporeal things

themselves, that one has experienced an ecstatic vision and not a delirium, that one has

seen something that requires interpretation."[26] Visionary episodes need interpretation;

partly interpretation proves the vision's reality, partly the vision is incomprehensible and

must be clarified.

Later in Book 12, Augustine names and defines those categories of seeing he

created above. He comments,

> Hence let us call the first kind of vision corporeal, because it is perceived through
> the body and presented to the senses of the body. The second will be spiritual, for
> whatever is not a body and is yet something is rightly called spirit; and certainly
> the image of an absent body, though it resembles a body, is not itself a body any
> more than it is the act of vision by which it is perceived. The third kind will be
> intellectual, from the word 'intellect.' *Mentale* (mental) from *mens* (mind),
> because it is just a newly-coined word, is too ridiculous for us to employ (12:
> 7.16).[27]

[25.] Taylor, trans. "Tertium vero illud quo dilectio intellecta conspicitur, eas res
continet, quae non habent imagines sui similes, quae non sunt quod ipsae. Nam homo vel
arbor vel sol, et quaecumque alia corpora, sive coelestia sive terrestria, et praesentia
videntur in suis formis, et absentia cogitantur in imaginibus animo impressis; et faciunt
duo genera visorum, unum per corporis sensus, alterum per spiritum, quo illae imagines
continentur. Dilectio autem numquid aliter videtur praesens in specie qua est, et aliter
absens in aliqua imagine sui simili? Non utique; sed quantum mente cerni potest, ab alio
magis, ab alio minus ipsa cernitur: si autem aliquid corporalis imaginis cogitatur, non
ipsa cernitur" (PL 34, col. 458).

[26] Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions*, 145.

[27] Taylor, trans. "Primum ergo appellemus corporale, quia per corpus percipitur et
corporis sensibus exhibetur. Secundum spiritale; quidquid enim corpus non est et tamen

The visionary event necessarily includes active participation and engagement of the will

and the intellect. This kind of engagement is clearly at play in *Piers Plowman* where Will

is constantly pulled between a search for knowledge and a search for understanding,

which seem to be different things. Sebastian Sobecki, in linking Augustinian theory with

Piers Plowman argues, "if, for Augustine, cognition is defined as visual and the

acquisition of knowledge is an epistemological concern, then this dichotomy of vision

must correspond to his proposed dichotomy of knowledge. True knowledge of eternal

substances (*sapientia*), therefore, can only be received and assimilated in the form of

intellectual visions (*visiones intellectuales*)."[28] In *De Genesi* Book 12, Augustine makes

clear that the three modes of seeing are linked in that intellectual is the highest of them all

and in a sense relies on corporeal and spiritual vision to provide a starting point for

intellectual vision. He writes, "after the eyes have taken their object in [corporeal] and

announced it to the spirit, in order that an image of it may be produced there [spiritual], if

it is symbolic of something, its meaning is either immediately understood by the intellect

or sought out [intellectual]; for there can be neither understanding nor searching except

by the functioning of the mind" (12: 11.23). However, as Karin Schlapbach points out,

"intellectual vision also amounts to understanding the symbolic meaning of the images of

spiritual vision, in case there is such a meaning."[29] If spiritual visions are those formed in

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aliquid est, iam recte spiritus dicitur: et utique non est corpus, quamvis corpori similis sit, imago absentis corporis, nec ille ipse obtutus quo cernitur. Tertium vero intellectuale, ab intellectu; quia mentale, a mente, ipsa vocabuli novitate nimis absurdum est, ut dicamus" (PL 34, col. 459).

[28] Sobecki, "Augustinian Vision," 33.

[29] Schlapbach, "Intellectual vision," 240.

the mind through memory or contemplation, then Schlapbach's interepretation provides a useful entry point for the way we can understand the relationship between visionary and reader. The visionary makes textual objects out of intellectual visions, objects that then provide the opportunity for a reader to have an intellectual vision as she works on interpreting those textual objects. We will see Julian and Margery Kempe especially engaged in this kind of work, which Schlapbach says, "is extremely important in regard to divinatory visions, i.e. visions that are signs of something else and therefore need to be interpreted."[30] By invoking Augustinian understanding of visions, this project seeks to acknowledge interpretive strategies employed in the Middle Ages. It also serves to highlight the rhetorical moves of visionary authors, who often strive to minimize the appearance of their own contributions to their texts.

Waking and Dream Visions

In the above paragraphs, I have forestalled any discussion of the difference between dream and "mystic" (what I have been calling "waking") visions by taking for granted the reader's familiarity with the terms. Indeed, the ease with which we say dream vision and "mystic" vision indicates a customary demarcation between these different kinds of writing. In her book, *Willing to Know God*, Jessica Barr argues that we call these two styles "literary and authentic." She problematizes her own categorizations, but goes on to state that "the paradigmatic type of the mystical vision text typically claims to be authorized — or even 'authored' — by God himself . . . Dream vision poets, on the other hand, do not usually employ the same kinds of authorizing strategies as visionary authors

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[30] Schlapbach, "Intellectual vision," 242.

and their amanuenses."[31] This observation captures the general critical feeling toward visionaries and dream visions—dream visions are "literature," waking visions are "theology." However, as my project intends to show, *Scivias* is no less literary than *Pearl* and the theology espoused in *Piers* is no less sound than that in the *Shewings*.

As a counterpoint to the usual categories, I offer Augustine's shared vision in *Confessions IX*.[32] He describes the moment he and his mother were looking at the garden at Ostia and says, "our minds were lifted up by an ardent affection towards eternal being itself. . . . We ascended even further by internal reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our own minds."[33] Along with his mother, Augustine works at achieving a waking vision through reflection and internal speech.[34] For Augustine, the vision is a much more openly intellectual effort than it seems to be for later visionaries, but still there is that shared sense of internal ascension and reflection. Should we call Augustine's vision authentic at the cost of its importance as a literary element in his autobiography? Or would it be possible to say that this is a literary device that Augustine used to share his spiritual oneness with his mother right before her death,

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[31] Barr, *Willing*, 4.

[32] For more on the availability of *Confessions* in medieval England, see Teresa Webber, "The Diffusion of Augustine's Confessions in England During the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *The Cloister and the World*, ed. John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 32-9. For a comprehensive look at Augustine in the 14th century, see Aers, *Salvation and Sin*.

[33] *Confessions*, IX, 24 (171).

[34] Of course, Augustine is not the first in the tradition of western Christian mystic visions. Paul, in 2 *Corinthians* 12 shares an example of a man he knew who had a vision, but was not permitted to share the secrets he learned. In fact, Augustine is driven by this verse when he begins writing about visionary seeing and dreaming in *De Genesi*. See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 43-53. See also the last section in this chapter on Hildegard.

at the loss of some of the vision's authenticity?

In order to move away from language that creates false relationships and prevents important ones from forming, I return to the texts themselves to see what the authors were calling these visionary events. Of the five authors considered in this study (Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, the *Pearl*-Poet, Langland, and Margery Kempe), Hildegard is the only one who distinctly says she had her visions while awake. The opening to *Scivias* reports, "the visions I saw I did not perceive in dreams, or sleep, or delirium, or by the eyes of the body, or by the ears of the outer self, or in hidden places; but I received them while awake and seeing with a pure mind and the eyes and ears of the inner self, in open places, as God willed it."[35] She reiterates this sentiment in the prologue to the *Book of Divine Works* when she says, "everything I had written in my earlier vision and came to know later I saw under [the influence of] heavenly mysteries while my body was fully awake and while I was in my right mind. [. . .] In this connection I was never in a condition similar to sleep, nor was I ever in a state of spiritual rapture[36] . . ." It is important for Hildegard to be explicit to her reader that she was awake and of sound mind while writing. In *Causae et Curae*, Hildegard's medical treatise, she explains some of the problems with dreaming:

> For, very often, a human being is also oppressed in his sleep by the thoughts, opinions and aspirations with which he is occupied while awake . . . If the thoughts are good and holy, then often God's grace shows him something true in his sleep. If however the thoughts are vain, the Devil sees it and torments the human soul and mixes his own lies into the person's thoughts.[37]

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[35] Hildegard, *Scivias*, 60.

[36] Hildegard, *Book of Divine Works*, 6.

[37.] Hildegard, *On Natural Philosophy*, 66.

The danger of dreams is that they come from the human imagination and are influenced by whatever mental state a person might happen to have been in before bed. As Ebenezer Scrooge tells Jacob Marley, "there's more of gravy than of grave about you!"[38] Dickensian punning aside, the general view of the truth of a dream vision in the twelfth century seems to have hinged on the person's moral state.

Hildegard's perception of dreaming comes in part from Augustine, who fears that "the illusory image within the soul has such force upon my flesh that false dreams have an effect on me when asleep, which the reality could not have when I am awake."[39] Real dreams are out of the dreamer's control but are created from the dreamer's experience. Chaucer echoes this sentiment in his prologue to the *House of Fame,* where he playfully lists the many kinds of dreams without making any comment on the theory that hangs the dream types together. Like Hildegard and Augustine, he wonders

> . . . yf that spirites have the myght
> To make folk to dreme a-nyght;
> Or yf the soule of propre kynde
> Be so parfit, as men fynde,
> That yt forwot that ys to come (HoF, Bk. 1, 41-45)

Dreams are not inherently bad or false, but there is real danger that they might not be reliable; perhaps they come from wily spirits wandering the night. Augustine articulates the problem more clearly in *Confessions* when he says, "From the wide gulf between the occurrences and our will, we discover that we did not actively do what, to our regret, has somehow been done in us."[40] As discussed above, for Augustine the visionary event

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[38] Dickens, *Christmas Carol* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911): 26.

[39] *Confessions*, X, 30 (41).

[40] Ibid. Here Augustine is concerned with the morality of dreaming and the

requires active participation and engagement of the will and the intellect. Dreams, on the other hand, happen not only *to* a person, but also *from* a person. While Hildegard would argue that her visions are divine visitations which happen *to* her, she would also say that they are not something created *from* her own will.

Julian is not as clear as Hildegard as to her mental state at the onset of the visions, other than to say, "I desyred a bodely sight, wher in I might haue more knowledge of the bodily paynes of our sauiour . . . Other sight nor shewing of god desyred I never none til whan the sowle were deperted from the bodie . . ." (LT, 2).[41] Julian's body feels increasingly paralyzed and in pain until, "sodenly all my paine was taken from me, and I was as hole, and namely in þe over parte of my bodie, as ever I was befor" (LT, 3). While she does not say that she was fully awake, Julian also does not say that she swooned or slept, nor does she give indication that she was out of her mind in any way. So, here it seems safe to say that Julian was fully awake for her first, and subsequent visions. Indeed, this assumption is verified by a later incident (which I cover more fully in Chapter 4). Shortly before her sixteenth vision, Julian does fall asleep and tells us, "ande in my slepe at the begynnyng me thought the fende sett hym in my throte, puttyng forth a vysage fulle nere my face lyke a yonge man" (LT, 16. 67). This dream Julian calls an "vgly shewyng" and she says that it was "made slepyng, and so was none other" (LT, 16.67). By this, we can understand that Julian's other visions, her non-ugly showings, were made to her while she was fully awake and conscious. Verifying Augustine and

culpability one has for nocturnal emissions.

[41] All citations of Julian are from Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*. References to LT are the long text version. All translations of Middle English are mine.

Hildegard's caution that dreams result from a person's pre-sleep disposition, Julian's

sickness causes her to have an actual dream vision, yet she is careful to say that it was

ugly and not trustworthy or healing like her waking visions.

The cautionary regard with which Julian and Hildegard hold dreams does not give

them more veracity or authenticity, but it does mark them off from Langland and the

Pearl-poet, whose narrators clearly fall asleep before the vision. Langland's Will says,

> And as I lay and lenede and loked on the watres,
> I slombred into a slepyng, it sweyed so murye.
> Thanne gan [me] to meten a merveillous swevene —
> That I was in a wildernesse, wiste I nevere where. (9-12, B text)

I fell asleep and I had a marvelous dream. There is no censure here, no sense that the

dream-quality of the vision undoes the truth of the vision (as Hildegard seems to have

feared). This same scene is repeated in the opening of *Pearl*:

> I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte
> On þat precos perle wythouten spot.
> Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
> My body on balke þer bod in sweuen. (59-62)

Body here, spirit there, both engaged in the acts of sleep and dream. Julian's only dream

was a nightmare, an ugly vision, but these dreams are beautiful and wonderful. Because

of the clear positivity with which these poems enter into and regard dreaming,

maintaining "dream vision" seems completely appropriate. However, I suggest a shift

from "mystic" to "waking" as a more accurate way to encapsulate the texts of Julian and

Hildegard.[42] I also apply this term to Margery Kempe and her visionary episodes, though

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[42] I am not the first to use the term "waking vision." In *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Steven Kruger rather casually and interchangeably uses waking vision as a potential term for mystic visions. See, for example, pp. 28-32 and 119-22. Andrew Galloway suggests that we use the terms "half-dreaming" or "half-waking" to talk about

Kempe seems a special case, partly the Dreamer and partly the waking visionary. Kempe has both waking and dream visions and while Julian's one dream vision was bad, Kempe's seem to operate as a poetic dream vision might.

This discussion has served to move dream and waking visions closer together, even just in the realm of semantics. It is much easier to talk about dreaming and waking as related things than about dreaming and mystically communing with a deity. But also, this has been an attempt to offer another way of talking about these texts and authors that gets at a clearer articulation of the texts themselves. I use the term "waking" because it gestures towards Augustine's intellectual engagement while still allowing for Hildegard's insistence that she does not create the content of her vision. Just as my authors struggle with knowing they have the right language to express their experiences ("real" and "fictional"), so too I use these terms knowing they only come close to the way that we might best talk and write about visionary texts.

Writing and Reading the Vision

Another feature which seems to separate dream and waking visions from one another is the moment of interpretation. It is tempting to say that waking visionaries are always successful in their interpretation of the vision and that dreamers do not learn from their dreams. However, I contend that there is a deep uneasiness regarding the accuracy of the written vision within the works of the waking authors. There is an awareness that their words are fractured, partial, and incomplete, and as such can only approximate both

the consciously crafted literary artefact of visionary literature. See his chapter, "Visions and Visionaries," esp. 266.

the meaning of the vision and the vision itself. A key feature of the visionary text is that

failure of language or, as I will call it more frequently, insufficient language. For waking

visionaries, the failure comes in the moment of interpretation from the language of the

vision to written language. Dream visions, on the other hand, explore the way that

language can be stretched to its breaking point, as I will illustrate more clearly in Chapter

2 with a discussion of *Pearl*.

Perhaps the clearest comparative example of an intervening reader is the prologue

to the *Cloud of Unknowing.* This relatively well-known 14th-century treatise aspires to be

mystical and apophatic in the style of the Pseudo-Dionysius. In the prologue, the author is

absolutely clear on who should be allowed to read his text. He says,

> Whatsoever thou be that this book schalt have in possession, outher bi propirté
> outher by keping, by bering as messenger or elles bi borrowing, that in as moche
> as in thee is by wille and avisement, neither thou rede it, ne write it, ne speke it,
> ne yit suffre it be red, wretyn, or spokyn, of any or to any, bot yif it be of soche
> one or to soche one that hath (bi thi supposing) in a trewe wille and by an hole
> entente, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste, not only in actyve leving,
> bot in the sovereinnest pointe of contemplatif leving . . . [43]

Because he works in negations, even the Cloud-author's construction of his audience is

paradoxical, as the few who are allowed to read the text must be perfect followers of

Christ, yet there can be no truly perfect followers of Christ. By attempting to exclude all

but the perfect readers from his text, the *Cloud*-author suggests that the reader may

interact with the text in ways beyond his control. Unlike the *Cloud*-author, who feared his

readers might not be capable of interpretation, the authors of waking and dream vision

literature studied here trust and need their readers to finish the work by parsing out the

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[43] *Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick Gallagher (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute
Publications, 1997), Online.

meanings of the vision. While neither dream vision nor waking vision authors give up the power of interpretation completely (as *Pearl* delightfully shows), they are less cautious about the reader's capabilities than the *Cloud*-author is.

To avoid the unworthy reader that the *Cloud*-author feared, visionary literature makes use of several different roles for both the reader and the writer. The taxonomy I present here has the benefit of succinctness while giving more comparative language to talk about the way that visionary texts shift the burden of interpretation. The five categories I identify within visionary texts are *auctor*, participant observer, scribe, interpreter, and reader.[44] I have tried to articulate these roles in language specific enough to be useful, but broad enough to be applicable to more than one text. *Auctor*, rather than author, is most appropriate for talking about the creator of the vision. A.J. Minnis defines *auctor* as "someone who was at once a writer and an authority, someone not merely to be read but also to be respected and believed. [. . .] An *auctor* 'performed' the act of writing. He brought something into being, caused it to 'grow'."[45] Authorship is a fraught field in the world of medieval studies and it is with some trepidation that I use this word that has the connotation of the highest authority. For someone like Hildegard or Julian, it is impossible to claim authorship of her visions, particularly in the way that Minnis defines it. Hildegard reminds her readers that she heard a voice telling her, "speak, then and now according to me, not according to you; and write according to me, not according to

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[44] Minnis identifies contemporary medieval terms for literary roles: auctor, scriptor, compiler, and commentator. See *Medieval Theory of Authorship,* 94.

[45] Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 10.

you."[46] Neither the visions themselves nor their interpretations originate from Hildegard. Her rhetorical purposes are better served by a clear demarcation between the *auctor* (for Hildegard, God) and the participant. This is not to say that Hildegard has no authority, her rich correspondence shows the opposite, but it is to say that she has no desire to be seen as the creator of any of the content of her visions.

Julian, too, wants to distance herself from that position of authority. In the short text, she famously writes, "Botte god for bede that ʒe schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nouʒt soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a womann, leued, febille, and freylle. Botte I wate wele, this that I saye, I hafe it of the schewynge of hym that es souerayne techare" (ST 129). Julian has taken the humility topos even further than Hildegard ever would (I suspect Hildegard would have no problem calling herself a teacher). In Julian's *Revelation*, she represents herself as neither teacher nor author, but rather a passive receptacle. This declaration of lowliness is absent from the *Long Text,* which suggests that Julian eventually does take responsibility for the content of her writing. However, as Judith Dale suggests, this seems to be done primarily to take out the mistrust a reader may have at encountering a text with a female writer. She notes, "[Julian] rescinds the stance of feminine insufficiency voiced in the Short Text—which would silence the writing— and revises the personality of the narrator by excising specified gender identity entirely."[47] Silence of one kind— contemplative silence—may be a goal for visionary writers, but they do not seek to silence their own texts by undermining their authority.

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[46] Hildegard, *Liber Vitae Divinorum*, Pars Prima, 23-25 (p.9)

[47] Dale, "Response to Alan Fletcher," 93.

The *auctor* in the more poetic dream visions is slightly more complicated, as collapsing *auctor* and poet feels inappropriate and inaccurate. The poet is not an authority in the same way that a divine source would be. But, if we think of *auctor* in terms of originator of ideas or textual content, then it may be possible to conceive of the poet as doing similar work to the *auctor* of Hildegard and Julian.[48] *Piers Plowman* provides an example of this separation, as the text is clearly and carefully authored yet that author's name is hidden. John Bowers suggests that "the absence of the writer's biographical identity, which might otherwise have enforced a sense of authorial property and fixed textual authority, encouraged the sort of massive editorial intervention, amounting almost to co-authorship, in which so many *Piers* copyists engaged . . ."[49] Of course this is one of the very problems of working on *Piers Plowman:* we only think that the author must be William Langland based on a line in the B-text (' have lyved in londe,' quod I, 'my name is Longe Wille' 15.152) and a note at the end of one C-text manuscript.[50] Yet, this absence of the author means that he can both make and not make a claim of *auctoritas*. The separation between Longe Wille and William Langland makes space for a reader who, as she encounters written language, has equal power to write the author and the text.

In this project, I will call that person receiving the vision the "participant

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[48] Foucault suggests the opposite, that the author is a principle that allows one to limit the text. See Foucault, "What is an Author?" (159).

[49] Bowers, "*Piers Plowman's* William Langland," 68.

[50] The C-text manuscript is TCD MS 212 (D.4.I) fol. 89b. See Schmidt, "Introduction," xx-xxiv. See also George Kane, *Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship* (Bloomsbury Publishing repr., 2013). J.A. Burrow, "Fictions of Self," *Langland's Fictions* (OUP, 1993), pp. 82-108.

observer."[51] I have borrowed this language from ethnographic studies, particularly in

field research. For ethnographers, a "participant observer" embeds in a community being

observed and participates in that community while collecting data. In *Ethnography: Step

by Step*, David Fetterman suggests that "participant observation begins with the first

question—even as simple a question as *Apho ha bait shemush*? (Where is the bathroom?).

[. . .] Slowly but surely, the questions become more refined as the researcher learns what

questions to ask and how to ask them."[52] This observation has astonishing resonances

with the Dreamer and with the waking visionary as she moves through her vision. Will, in

Piers Plowman, seems a particularly obvious example of one studying the world around

him and learning about the right questions to ask, when to speak, and when to be silent.

John Chernoff says of the practice of participant observation that "The most important

gap for the participant-observer . . . is not between what he sees and what is there, but

between his experience and how he is going to communicate it."[53] For ethnographers, this

translation is one of turning experience into language; for visionaries, the act is much the

same. Whatever the experience may be, the participant observer in a vision must confront

the distance between the experienced vision and the communicated vision.

My language here also attempts to incorporate some of that effort so crucial to an

Augustinian vision while still maintaining the seeming passivity of someone who

describes being overwhelmed by a fiery light. The participant observer's role is to take in

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[51] I am grateful to Andrew Hicks for suggesting this term.

[52] Fetterman, 37.

[53] Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 1979, 11. Qtd in Barz and
Cooley, *Shadows in the Field,* 209.

without complex immediate understanding. Hildegard's kaleidoscopic visions simply

share what she saw. During the act of seeing, the participant observer knows no more or

less than the reader. Julian's visions are more closely woven with their interpretations

than Hildegard's, but even there Julian will describe a vision — "I saw, beholdyng the

body, plentuous bledyng in semyng of the scoregyng as thus" — and then later write the

explanation — "Than cam to my mynde . . ." (LT 4.12). First Julian sees, then she

comprehends. But while the vision is ongoing it is complete and consuming. Central to

Piers and *Pearl* is the sense that the Dreamer engages in questioning everyone he meets

in the dream. However, when the Dreamer tries to make some change to the world of the

dream, or to act upon it in a physical way, he is ejected out of the dream. Participating

does not mean passively having a vision happen, but it does mean that the event of the

vision is beyond the control of the visionary.

 The role of the scribe in medieval literature has long been a point of contention.

When we talk about medieval manuscripts, we talk about their authorial elements or their

scribal elements as though those are opposed traces on the page.[54] Of course, part of the

reason for this is that the medieval scribe is an unknown quantity; we often cannot know

what the source copy looked like, under what conditions the scribe copied, and how much

of him or herself the scribe let slip onto the page. Matthew Fisher takes an unusual

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  [54.] For an overview of scribal culture in medieval England, see *The Genesis of Books: Studies in the Scribal Culture of Medieval England in Honour of A.N. Doane*, eds Matthew Hussey and John Niles (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011). See also *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, Their Scribes and Readers. Essays Presented to M.B. Parkes* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997). Sarah J. Biggs has published an interesting article on the British Library *Medieval Manuscripts Blog* that highlights representations of scribes in medieval manuscripts: http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2014/06/the-burden-of-writing-scribes-in-medieval-manuscripts.html

approach to the problem of scribes when he argues that even authors-scribes made the same kinds of errors and changes to the manuscript that an amanuensis might. Fisher claims, "For medieval scribes, 'copy' entails a range of behaviours, only some of which generate precise duplications of text or layout."[55] In visionary literature, the scribe's work is not only to write the vision, but often to act as some kind of intermediary between the visionary and the text.

This is illustrated most clearly in the case of Margery Kempe, who occupies a space between literacy and illiteracy.[56] One of the most compelling aspects of Kempe's *Book* is the drama surrounding the writing process. When she tells priests and clerks about her visions, they tell her to write them down in a book: "and [thei] bodyn hyr that sche schuld don hem wryten and makyn a booke of hyr felyngys and hir revelacyons" (1.78).[57] Kempe repeats the story of this request a few chapters later, this time emphasizing that it was a Bishop who asked her to write out her visions. She writes

> Whan the tyme cam, sche schewyd hym hyr medytacyons, and hy contemplacyons, and other secret thyngys, bothe of qwyk and of ded, as owyr Lord schewyd to hir sowle. He was rygth glad heryn hem and suffryd hir benyngly to sey what hir lysted, and commendyd gretly hir felyngys and hir contemplacyons, seyyng thei wer hy maters and ful devowt maters, and enspyred

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[55] Fisher, "When Variants Aren't," 213.

[56] By Kempe's own account, she was illiterate. Scholars working on Kempe in the 1980s seem to have taken this for granted. See Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) and Barry Windeatt, trans. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). However, more recent scholarship has argued in favor of some space for different kinds of literacy in Kempe's text. For arguments in favor of Margery's literacy, see Lochrie, "From Utterance to Text," 97-134 and Tarvers, "The Alleged Illiteracy," 113-24.

[57] All references to chapter and line in Margery are from Barry Windeatt, ed. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

of the Holy Gost, cownselyng hir sadly that hir felyngys schuld be wretyn. (15.1066-72)

In both these instances, Kempe's transmission of her visions is done in such a way that it stays wholly in her control. She *schews* her visions to the Bishop, rather than tells, suggesting some kind of visionary, extra-linguistic sharing.[58] Yet when the clerks suggest that she "wrytyn hyr felyngys wyth her owen handys" (1.80-1), Kempe declines. She tells them, "sche was comawndyd in hir sowle that sche schuld not wrytyn so soone" (1.81-2). They seem to be asking her to maintain control of the visions through writing them down herself, but Kempe claims that God asks her not to write the visions for another twenty years. Kempe is just as concerned as Julian was about finding the proper form for her visions; no other of the authors in this study are as candid as Kempe about the struggle of finding someone simply to write the vision.[59] Kempe may not have been her own scribe, but her desire to control her words leads us to believe that she worked closely with her scribes to produce a book that she could truly call her own.

Locating the role of the scribe in visionary texts thus feels a bit like finding a needle in a haystack. On the one hand, the scribe's interaction with the text feels important. S/he is the first reader and the immediate intercessor between the vision and written language. On the other hand, s/he is often untraceable. We know nothing of Julian's scribe(s), and the anonymity of the *Pearl*-poet makes his/her identity much more tempting a prize than that of his/her scribe.[60] Because this project is mostly focused on reading visionary

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[58] I will return to this interaction more fully in Chapter 5.

[59.] Mary Dixon details Hildegard's relationship with one of her scribes, Volmar, in "Hildegard Of Bingen's Introduction To Scivias: Volmar, A Telling Focus," *Magistra* 14.2 (2008), 3-19.

[60] For more on the manuscript history of Julian see "Part II: Manuscript Tradition

literature for what it has to say about itself, I will for the most part leave discussion of scribal work to the chapter on Margery Kempe. In the longer project I hope to be able to deal properly with scribal interaction with visionary texts. For now, I suggest thinking of the scribe as just that: the scribe of visionary literature is the writer, the physical recorder of the metaphysical vision.

The final roles I identified above, reader and interpreter, want to collapse into the same category. In this schema, the interpreter has to "read" the text and so is, in a sense, also always the reader. However, visionary literature is constructed in such a way that it anticipates both a superficial reader and an inquisitive interpreter.[61] As I noted earlier, the reason reader response theory is a bit inadequate for visionary texts is because the texts foreground their own gaps and provide the way to fill those gaps. For instance, *Pearl* seems to be about the distance between perfect form and human imperfection. It has 1,211 lines instead of 1,212 and the interpreting reader can (and must) add a line and perfect the poem. The poem makes sense and has compelling enough form that a close reading of the Dreamer's language of abundance at the beginning of the poem is not necessary to understand that the Dreamer sees an impossibly beautiful world. But, of

and Interpretation," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich.* Especially interesting is Dutton's article on the 17th-century manuscript tradition, where Julian's text was copied by English nuns in exile in Paris (pp 127-38). For more on the manuscript of *Pearl*, see A.S.G. Edwards, "The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x," *A Companion to the Gawain Poet.*

[61.] Anna Lewis' article, "Directing Reader Response," suggests that Julian shaped reader response as a result of her own readerly interactions with affective texts. She argues that Julian shaped her readers' experience and involvement with the text so that they could not misread her visions. Burt Kimmelman, in "The Trope of Reading," suggests that reading was imaginitive work that was theorized by medievals as self-constructing.

course, it is challenging *not* to try to interpret *Pearl*, as the text provides so many tantalizing opportunities to do so. Julian's *Revelation* presents the reader with similar chances to understand her visions when she assures the reader that "understondnyge" takes a long time. In a sense, Julian was herself a reader of her own visions before she could offer interpretations for what she saw. The driving force behind visionary literature is the complementary work of reading and understanding, of the chance the text creates for the reader to do things to it.

Finally, it is important to note that while I see waking and dream visions as participating in the same kind of literary formation, I do not want to suggest that they are the same kind of text. Instead, they inhabit a spectrum, one end of which presents waking visions and the other dreams. This spectrum means that visionary literature has similar elements and goals (all those outlined above) but makes use of them in different ways. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton puts it clearly when she writes, "We do not and cannot know whether Langland had 'visionary' (that is to say spiritual) experiences, as Hildegard claimed to have. What we can assume is that he could have learned to write the way he did in certain passages from reading apocalyptic vision literature."[62] In borrowing from the literary constructs of waking visionary literature, dream vision literature borrows also the force that compels readers to work on the text.

Still, the distance between waking and dream visions is a kind of ever-shifting line. Writing about the place of early Middle English in the conception of "literature," Christopher Cannon suggests, "what early Middle English can teach all students of English writing, in any period, is that the capacity to read texts apart from all informing

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[62] Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*, 64.

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precedent or lineal relation, in isolation not only from similar works, but from familiar categories, lies within our philosophy, if beyond our current competence."[63] Cannon's search leads him to consider the form of English literature to be much more idiosyncratic and born much earlier than previously thought. I, like Cannon, would like to explore the possibility that "it is the poverty of [literary history's] categories which are at fault, not the literature which will not fit into them."[64] Jessica Barr has already seen the genres of dream and waking visions to be blurred. Her argument is that they are "manifestations of a shared set of presuppositions about the visionary experience."[65] Barr wants to see the vision as "an epistemological tool" with which visionaries open up their own work and teach their reader something.[66] I suggest that placing waking and dream visions closer together in the category of visionary literature allows us to come to better understandings of these tools.

Shifting our language away from "mystic" or "authentic" vision reduces the categories of vision in the way Barr suggests is fruitful, but also opens up new categories for talking about this kind of literature. Even more useful, though, is the idea that English writing of the 14th century is turning to the literary in surprising ways. Even someone like Julian embraces form and reader participation in a way that simply is not true for her foremothers on the Continent (Hildegard, Elisabeth of Schönau, Marguerite d'Oignt), whose need to navigate their own positionality and politics superseded a literary

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[63] Cannon, *Grounds*, 3.

[64] Ibid, 11.

[65] Barr, *Willing to Know*, 7.

[66] Ibid., 8.

relationship with the reader. Hildegard was capable of using the humility *topos*, but she seems uninterested in asking her reader to fulfill the vision. Her bent was toward politics and the influence she had over the institutions to which she belonged. The simple fact of the revision from the *Short Text* to the *Long Text* shows that Julian cared about the way that her vision was written. Her final note that "The Good Lord shewid this booke shuld be otherwise performid than at the first writing,"[67] asks readers to keep performing the text, even after she has written it. Within the context of 14th-century England, with the explosion of vernacular literature and the growing awareness that the English language can *do* things, visionary literature highlights the shared responsibility of waking and dream visions to create more than a mystical representation of the divine.

Hildegard of Bingen: A Study in Unspeakability[68]

> O fragile human, ashes of ashes and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear. But since you are timid in speaking, and simple in expounding, and untaught in writing, speak and write these things not by a human mouth and not by the understanding of human invention, and not by the requirements of human composition, but as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God. Explain these things in such a way that the hearer, receiving the words of his instructor, may expound them in those words, according to that will, vision, and instruction. Thus therefore, O human, speak these things that you see and hear. And write them not by yourself or any other human being, but by the will of Him Who knows, sees, and disposes all things in the secrets of His mysteries.[69]

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[67] This comes from the chapter heading to 16.86 in MS British Library, Sloan 2499. See Colledge and Walsh, fn. 1, pp 731.

[68] I presented a version of this at the *International Medieval Congress* at Leeds, July 2016.

[69] Hildegard, *Scivias*, 59.

What is one to do with a command like that? Write not with human words or composition, but in the same way that you experienced the vision in the wonders of God. Speak not with a human tongue, which by the way is all that you have, but through some other means. This command comes from the opening of Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* and it provides the central question of this short case study. How do visionaries respond to the paradoxical command to speak without speech and write without human words? Though the main body of texts studied in this project comes from 14th-century England, I want to start about two hundred years and four hundred miles away in the Rhineland. Hildegard is most often studied for her vivid visions and her strong presence in the religious world of twelfth -century Europe. Her letters show her to be a well-educated, intelligent woman whose advice was sought by laity and clergy alike and there is no doubt that divine visions are the foundation of that influence and authority.[70] For instance, when she willingly ignores a command from the prelates at Mainz and is subsequently put under an interdict, Hildegard writes them a letter and shares a convenient vision that shows the doom that would fall should she obey their original command (to disinter a man who may or may not have been excommunicated before his death).[71] Although the archbishop of Mainz tells her that this was a "very dangerous act," nevertheless he concedes "[God] has been pleased with your soul and has illuminated it

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[70] For more on Hildegard as letter-writer, see Joan Ferrante, "Correspondant" and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosenski, "Visions and Schism Politics."

[71] *Letters*, "Vol. I, Letter 23: Hildegard to the prelates at Mainz," 76. I say Hildegard 'writes,' although she clearly employed scribes. See Dixon, "Hildegard of Bingen's Introduction to *Scivias*: Volmar, A Telling Focus."

with His true and unfathomable light . . ."[72] Thus, the interdict is lifted.

Yet for all the power of her visions, Hildegard herself displays an attitude of uncertainty toward them. Her fear, as we might call it, is that she cannot articulate the vision in a way that accurately represents the language of the vision or even what she perceives as its deeper reality. Additionally, as María Góngora claims, "the visionary images (words/images) present in the works of Hildegard are open to the imagination and the contemplation of its readers: these are called upon to see and to know, and thus to complete the visionary experience with their own senses and their own images."[73] Góngora does not stretch to a reading of this as a literary experiment, but she does suggest that Hildegard invites the reader into the experience of the vision in a way that engages the reader in a visionary exercise of her own. Barbara Newman suggests that, as a typology of medieval visions, we can see in them the common traits of "the paranormal, the meditational, the aesthetic, and the supernatural."[74] In particular, the last category is the most fraught, as it deals with the visionary's claim to total non-intervention in her own visions. As Newman points out, "to endorse this claim normally meant to endorse the trustworthiness or even saintliness of a visionary, whereas to reject it meant to cast aspersions on her veracity, probity, or mental health."[75] It is not my intention to cast aspersions on Hildegard's mental health or trustworthiness, but it is my hope to show

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[72] *Letters*, "Vol. I, Letter 24r: Christian, Archbishop of Mainz, to Hildegard," 83.

[73] Góngora, María, "Seeing and Knowing, Reading and Imagining in the *Liber divinorum Operum* by Hildegard of Bingen," *Speaking to the Eye: Sight and Insight through Text and Image (1150-1650)*, eds. Thérèse de Hemptinne, Veerle Fraeters, and María Eugenia Góngora (Brepols, 2013): 49-64 (59).

[74] Newman, "What Did It Mean," 4.

[75] Ibid.

some of the structures underlying her claims at non-intervention and to show the effects their claims of non-writing have on the way the reader interacts with the text. This sense of readerly intervention is a necessity for Hildegard. The insufficiency of her language causes Hildegard to need the reader to, at the very least, understand that her visions are not exact representations of what it is she experienced. Rather, her written texts are necessary fictions, close approximations of her encounter with the divine.

Threading through both Hildegard's visions and her letters is a sense of insufficiency and miraculous literary understanding. The first moment this occurs for Hildegard is in her childhood, when she, by her own account, suddenly becomes literate. When she is forty-two, she tells us, "Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain . . . And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel, and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and the New Testaments, though I did not have the interpretation of the words of their texts or the division of the syllables or the knowledge of cases or tenses."[76] Through a vision, Hildegard is able to understand the page without being able to read it. It is, of course, doubtful that she was actually illiterate, so the understanding to which she refers here might be that of the deeper senses of the text, beyond the human artifice of writing. Sabina Flanagan explains that "to say that Hildegard was uneducated according to twelfth-century standards means specifically that she had not followed the prescribed course of education, of which the first requirement was a thorough grounding in 'grammar'."[77] Hildegard herself confirms this reading when she writes to Bernard of

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[76] Hildegard, *Scivias*, 59.

[77] Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life*, 45.

Clairvaux and comments, "I have no formal training at all, for I know how to read only on the most elementary level, certainly with no deep analysis."[78] Of course this is clearly untrue, as her works are all replete with deep knowledge of scripture.[79] Her "lack" of education, then, becomes a rhetorical device by which Hildegard can access both the humility *topos* and the divine authority her writing requires. If she does not know how to engage in analysis, then whatever of her visionary writing is profound must come from the divine.

In her various correspondences, the language of Hildegard's visions becomes increasingly important.[80] She insists to Bernard, "I have from earliest childhood seen great marvels which my tongue has no power to express but which the Spirit of God has taught me that I may believe,"[81] and then she goes on to say she does not hear or see those marvels "in German."[82] Continuing, she beseeches him, "please give me your

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[78] *Letters*, "Vol. I, Letter 1: Hildegard to Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux," 28.

[79] See Peter Dronke's introduction to his and Albert Derolez's edition of *Liber diuinorum operum* (Brepols: Turnhoult, 1996) and "Platonic-Christian allegories in the Homilies of Hildegard of Bingen," *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honor of Edouard Jeauneau*. H.J. Westra, ed. (Brill: Leiden, 1992), 383-84.

[80] It is important to remember that Hildegard invented her own language, the *lingua ignota*, composed of approximately 1011 nouns and a script of 23 invented letters. In fact, Hildegard makes an oblique reference to this in a letter to Pope Anastasius: "He who is great and without flaw has now touched a humble dwelling, so that it might see a miracle and form unknown letters and utter an unknown tongue." (Vol. I, Letter 8). Not much is known about the *lingua ignota* and unfortunately, other than to suggest that perhaps this unknown language is Hildegard's attempt to represent the heavenly language she heard in a more accurate form. For a much better and clearer argument about the *lingua*, see Sarah Higley, *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2007), esp. 111.

[81] *Letters*, "Vol. I, Letter 1: Hildegard to Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux," 27.

[82] Ibid., 28.

opinion in this matter, because I am untaught and untrained in exterior material, but am only taught inwardly, in my spirit. Hence my halting, unsure speech."[83] Hildegard insists that her spiritual training is not enough to allow her to share her spiritual experiences in an exterior way (i.e. speech). This is because the language of the vision and the language of humankind don't seem to have sufficient overlap. In a later letter, Guilbert of Gembloux asks Hildegard, "we desire to know whether you dictate those visions in Latin, or whether, after you have uttered them in German, someone else translates them into Latin."[84] Guilbert's seemingly trivial questions spur one of Hildegard's most important and compelling revelations about the nature of her visions. In her reply, she tells him, "the words I speak are not my own, nor any human being's. I merely report those things I received in a supernal vision."[85] After answering a few other of his questions, she then tells Guilbert,

> The things I write are those that I see and hear in my vision, with no words of my own added. And these are expressed in unpolished Latin, for that is the way I hear them in my vision, since I am not taught in the vision to write the way philosophers do. Moreover, the words I see and hear in the vision are not like the words of human speech, but are like a blazing flame and a cloud that moves through clear air.[86]

Hildegard's fiction then is the awareness that the words she speaks and writes are not the right words, the words of the vision. Of course, they cannot be. She could not speak in a blazing flame, like the words she sees in her vision and instead struggles against language that does not seem to be translatable. Denys Turner argues that a Pseudo-Dionysian

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[83] Ibid.

[84] *Letters*, "Vol. II, Letter 102: The Monk Guilbert to Hildegard," 18.

[85] *Letters*, "Vol. II, Letter 103r: Hildegard to the Monk Guilbert," 21.

[86] Ibid., 23.

understanding of language, "naturally, spontaneously and rightly takes the form of a

paradox, and not merely for the sake of effect."[87] The sensory overload that at once

consumes Hildegard and forces her to become silent presents itself in paradoxical terms:

a sound that can be seen, words that float across her vision like a cloud. Indeed, a

mysterious voice proclaims at the end of the *Book of Divine Works*, "The woman who

saw these things and who made them known in writing them down, sees and does not see,

knows hot ashes and does not know them."[88] So it is that Hildegard needs to seek a form

through which she can manifest the visionary experience.[89] Yet how can one write

something that eschews form?

Partly Hildegard does this by finding the form elsewhere, in the work of Augustine,

and by enlisting the help of the reader.[90] As quoted briefly above, in Book IX of

Confessions, Augustine describes an intellectual vision he shared with his mother. The

fuller version of the text reads,

> Step by step we climbed beyond all corporeal objects and the heaven itself, where
> sun, moon, and stars shed light on the earth. We ascended even further by internal
> reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our own
> minds. We moved up beyond them so as to attain to the region of inexhaustible

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[87] Turner, *Darkness*, 22.

[88] *Book of Divine Works*, 6.45.68 (290).

[89] Some precedence for Hildegard's waking visions can be found in Numbers 24.
Balaam's oracles are redolent with similar imagery to Hildegard's. I think also *Acts* 9 and
10; the book of *Revelation*, and Paul's vision of heaven (2 *Cor.* 12).

[90] There are no records of the library catalog at Bingen or Eibingen. However, she
clearly knew the Bible well and some Augustinian texts. See Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard
of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age* (Doubleday, 2001): 64-67. For a study of English
women reading Augustine's *Confessions*, see Olson, "Did Medieval English Women
Read Augustine's *Confessiones*?" Also, Dronke, "Platonic Christian Allegories in
Homilies of Hildegard of Bingen," fn.11 383.

abundance where you feed Israel eternally with truth for food.[91]

The structure here — first bodily movement, then a shift to the interior — will be important for both waking and dream visions. At the same time, Augustine is much more explicit in his writing that the achievement of a vision requires considerable mental action. Sharing a contemplative moment, Augustine describes moving from the body, to the spirit, and then to the rational faculties and then, "in the flash of a trembling glance [my intellect] attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (Rom. I: 20)."[92] For Augustine, the vision is momentary and, he says, "I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition."[93] Because Augustine's visions are intellectually driven, the state of his intellect determines the length and totality of the vision. Hildegard, on the other hand, seems to be afflicted by an uncontrollable inundation of visions. She tells Guilbert, "fully awake, I continue to see [the visions] day and night."[94] Part of Hildegard's problem with an intellectual vision are her claims to illiteracy and weakness. Hildegard cannot lift her mind to a self-conscious consideration of its divinity because she is in her own words "a humble dwelling."

Although the mechanics of the visionary episode may be different for Augustine and Hildegard, they both struggle with how to represent their visionary achievement.

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[91] *Confessions* IX. ix (24).

[92] *Confessions* VII. xvii (23), p. 127. What he describes here aligns with Augustine's tripartate theory of the vision outlined in *Ad Litteram de Genesi*.

[93] *Confessions*, VII. xvii (23).

[94] *Letters*, "Vol. II, Letter 103r: Hildegard to the Monk Guilbert," 23.

Augustine says, "after all, I have never seen [the vision] with my bodily sight, and if I should say that I had seen it with my mind — that is, with my intellect, how great, after all, is our intellect, and how can it comprehend so excellent a condition?"[95] Hildegard takes Augustine's concern with understanding and translates it into the experience of the vision. In *Scivias, Book II*, she has a vision of a "serene Man" and then hears a voice tell her, "you who are wretched earth, and as a woman, untaught in all learning of earthly teachers and unable to read literature with philosophical understanding, you are nonetheless touched by My light . . ."[96] Although she's using the humility *topos* here, Hildegard is also accessing an Augustinian understanding of the incomprehensibility of a vision of God. Indeed, even her explanation of the vision of the serene Man tells us, "the noble body of the Son of God . . . was touched by the glory of the Father, received the Spirit and rose again to serene immortality, which no one can explain by thought or word."[97] Hildegard is always forced to confront her inability to speak, even though she claims the visions and explanations have all come from the same divine voice. In part, she is driven by the same line from Corinthians that compels much of Augustine's discussion of the eyes of the spirit, which says, "now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). Augustine's concern is that he has not yet experienced the divine and so cannot express in earthly terms that spiritual bliss. He does suppose that we can speculate, commenting, "we may endeavor to infer from the blessings which God

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[95] Augustine, *The City of God,* XXII. 29.

[96] *Scivias*, 150.

[97] Ibid., 156.

bestows upon good men and bad alike in this most troublous life how great will be that joy which we certainly have no power to describe, because we have not yet experienced it."[98] For Hildegard, speculation is not enough or, rather, even necessary. In sharing her visions, in transforming them to writing, Hildegard makes accessible whatever part of Augustine's joy she experienced whilst in the vision.

In the last vision of *Scivias*, Hildegard hears yet another high voice telling her to share her vision but then she turns externally toward her readers. Appropriating the angelic voice, she proclaims, "whoever tastes this prophecy and fixes it in his memory will become the mountain of myrrh, and of frankincense, and of all aromatical spices and the diffusion of many blessings; he will ascend like Abraham from blessing to blessing."[99] Just as Hildegard herself did, the reader is encouraged to store the words of the book in her memory and to continue to ascend through those remembered visions. This benediction comes with a warning, however, that anyone who "rashly conceals these words written by the finger of God, madly abridging them, or for any human reason taking them to a strange place and scoffing at them, let him be reprobate; and the finger of God shall crush him."[100] When Hildegard first began having her visions, she admits that she "refused to write them for a long time through doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words . . . until, aid low by the scourge of God, I fell upon a bed of sickness." [101] By indicating that the person who would do as she did could be similarly

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[98] *The City of God,* XXII. 21.

[99] *Scivias*, 536.

[100] Ibid.

[101] *Scivias,* 60.

sickened and repressed, Hildegard hints at the possibility for the reader to actually experience the visions, albeit vicariously. Her final words in *Scivias* provide almost perfect symmetry of visionary knowing. She tells the reader, (speaking in the persona of the heavenly voice), "let the one who has ears sharp to hear inner meanings ardently love My reflection and pant after My words, and inscribe them in his soul and conscience."[102] The words have now traveled from an unknown cloud of burning fire, to imperfect Latin on Hildegard's tongue, to the reader's ear, and finally to the hand of the reader's soul. Hildegard's translation work is now complete and the divine vision has come to rest, appropriately, back in the soul.

If, as this project suggests, visionaries find language to be inadequate, but nevertheless must find a way to represent linguistically the content of the vision, then it is worth considering if that very inadequacy provides the fecundity of the text. For Julian to understand the wholeness of the hazelnut, she has to open it up verbally and explain the three properties she sees within it. The events within each of her *shewings* happen simultaneously, but textually they must flow and be represented as linear events. What happens for Julian "sodenly" happens for the reader slowly. Likewise, when the divine voice tells Hildegard, "O human, who receives these things meant to manifest what is hidden . . .write, therefore, the things you see and hear" it essentially commands her to make physical and intelligible the unintelligible and the metaphysical.[103] I turn in the next chapter to a consideration of the way the *Pearl*-poet deals with this problem of language. *Pearl* offers a text always on the edge of both comprehension and utter incomprehension.

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[102] Ibid., 536.

[103] Ibid*.,* 60.

CHAPTER 2

SEEING SPOTS: READING THE MIDDLE ENGLISH *PEARL*

> "I halde þat jueler lyttel to prayse,
> þat loueȝ wel þat he seȝ wyth yȝe"
> (VI.301-2).[104]

From the opening lines where the Dreamer swoons into a sleep to the grand finale

parade of pearl maidens, the 14th-century English dream vision *Pearl* entices the reader

with a jewel box of language. Yet, the Maiden censures the Dreamer for loving too well

what he sees with his eyes. He is given a spectacle but asked not to look too longingly at

it. The reader, too, is invited to luxuriate in "the dubbement dere of doun and daleȝ"

(III.121). Drawn in by the brightly colored gardens and the obvious allegories, the reader

delights in unfolding the meaning of *Pearl* as the Dreamer wanders through the *erbere*.

The poem ends, however, with the Dreamer's descent into madness when, "delyt me drof

in yȝe and ere; / My maneȝ mynde to maddyng malte" (XX.1153-4). His delight in the

things he sees causes the vision to come crumbling down around him and he awakens.

The reader is then left, not with some moral or deep wisdom, but with the Dreamer's

assertion that "mad hit arn þat agayn þe stryuen, / Oþer proferen þe oȝt agayn þy paye"

(XX. 1199-1200). The Dreamer, it seems, both learns nothing and can teach nothing.

While *Pearl* does not attempt to invoke a visionary episode in the reader, its

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[104] All references to section(s) and line(s) in *Pearl* are from William Vantuono, ed., *The Pearl Poems, An Omnibus Edition Volume 1: Pearl and Cleanness* (New York: Garland, 1984). Malcom Andrew's and Ronald Waldron's 1978 (rev. 1996) edition is the most commonly used text. However, I have chosen to use Vantuono because of the caution with which he approaches emendations. He has only twelve emendations where Andrew and Waldron have 91. See Sarah Stanbury, "Introduction," for a history of the editorial practices regarding *Pearl*.

sublimely foolish Dreamer and glimpses of heavenly Jerusalem certainly do ask that the

reader treat the dream as though it were akin to a mystic vision.[105] In the first section of

this chapter, I articulate the ways that *Pearl* constructs a world hovering on completion,

on visionary revelation. This sense of near perfection, I argue, invites the reader to

succeed where the Dreamer fails. By aligning itself so closely with mystic visionary

writing, *Pearl* accesses the power of a divine encounter while eluding the problem of

ineffability. That is, the uncertainty inherent in the poem, magnified by time and editorial

intervention, exists to align *Pearl* with the genre of visionary literature. The poem needs

to be arguably perfect and intrinsically imperfect in order to be like a vision of something

divine. The second half of the chapter deals with the poet's use of these easily accessible

symbols and interpretive traps like the putative missing line in the middle of the poem. In

spite of the invitation to finish the work, the poet still seeks to constrain interpretive

readings to be orthodox ones.[106]

Writing the Dream

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[105] The reader of *Pearl* has proven to be a tricky person to find. The poem has no dedication and since it exists in only one manuscript, we have no evidence as to owners as readers. Scholarly attention has suggested that the audience for *Pearl* would have been a courtly one. See John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001). On the identity of the Gawain-poet and possible readership, see Nicholas Watson, "The Gawain-poet as a Vernacular Theologian," *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 293-314. For more on the courtly culture with which *Pearl* has resonances, see Elizabeth Harper, "*Pearl* in the Context of Fourteenth-Century Gift Economies," *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 4 (2010), 421-39.

[106] My work has deep resonances with Arthur Bahr's argument in "Manifold Singularity," where he suggests that the very uniqueness of the *Pearl* manuscript is what opens the text to multivalent readings. Bahr finds the aesthetic of the poem to be a complex combination of the work done by the medieval scribe, medieval author, medieval reader, contemporary editor, and contemporary reader. See, Arthur Bahr, "The Manifold Singularity of *Pearl*," *ELH* 82, no. 3 (Fall 2015), 729-58.

To understand the visionary elements of *Pearl*, I turn first to waking visionary

writing and particularly the convention there of representing an ineffable experience in

words.[107] Of course, waking visionary texts are generically distinct from poetic visions.

Waking visionary literature is often torn between its need to seem divinely inspired,

unfiltered through any human medium, and its pressing concern for form and

comprehensibility. Julian of Norwich, a close contemporary of the *Pearl*-poet, spends

twenty years ruminating on her visions and produces two written texts as a result.[108] In

the Short Text of her *Revelation of Divine Love*, Julian tells the reader, "god for bede that

ȝe schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nouȝt soo, no I mente nevere

so; for I am a womann, leued, febille, and freylle. Botte I wate wele, this that I saye, I

hafe it of the schewynge of hym that es souerayne techare" (ST, vi. 40).[109] By positioning

herself as an unlearned woman, Julian distances herself from the artifice behind the

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[107] Contemporary critical scholarship on the connection between dream and
mystic vision is relatively, surprisingly, sparse. For the most comprehensive overview,
see Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle
Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010). Probably the most common
comparison between the more literary vision and the more religious vision comes through
recourse to Augustine's categorization of visions in *de Genesi ad litteram:* "When we
read this one commandment, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*, we experience
three kinds of vision: one through the eyes, by which we see the letters; a second through
the spirit, by which we think of our neighbor even when he is absent; and a third through
an intuition of the mind, by which we see and understand love itself." *The Literal
Meaning of Genesis*, trans John Hammond Taylor (New York: ACW, 1982), 12.6.15. See
also Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Say?' The Clash between Theory
and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005), 1-43.

[108] There has been some debate on the exact length of time Julian spent writing.
See Nicholas Watson, "The Composition of Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*,"
Speculum 68 (1993), 637-83.

[109] Julian of Norwich, "The Short Text," *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress
Julian of Norwich*, ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute
of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 222.

written text of her vision.

Dream vision poets, alternatively, embrace obvious form, often using it to imbue their work with interpretable moments. *Pearl* provides a self-consciously literary project that offers a representation of the waking vision's conflict between the ineffability of the vision and the necessity of speaking. Indeed, *Pearl's* formal complexity is its most immediate and unrelenting aspect. The poem is organized around repetitive language, with twenty groups of five stanzas that use repeated words to pour into each other.[110] Sarah Stanbury suggests, "In its principles of rhyme, versification, and numbering, *Pearl* is unmatched for complexity in Middle English poetry and perhaps rivaled only by Dante's *Divine Comedy*."[111] Like its waking visionary cousins, *Pearl* needs readers to interact with the text and uncover more meanings behind the words. In short, we could say that dream visionary writing mimics the problem (of how to mediate that which has no form) that bothers waking visionaries. For the waking visionary, the written text is the best approximation of an inarticulable experience. For the *Pearl*-poet, the written text is the best approximation of a waking visionary text.

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[110] For more on the linguistic structure of Pearl, see Alan J. Fletcher, "Reading Radical Metonymy in *Pearl*," *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: New Essays*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 47-61.

[111] *Pearl*, ed. Sarah Stanbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 5. For more on the significance of the poem's structure, see Edward Condren, "Numerical Proportion as Aesthetic Strategy in the *Pearl* Manuscript," *Viator* 30 (1999), 285-305. See also Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman, *From Pearl to Gawain. Forme to Fynishement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995) and Jane Chance, "Allegory and Structure in *Pearl*: The Four Senses of the Ars Praedicandi and Fourteenth-Century Homiletic Poetry," *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the* Pearl-*Poet*, ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1991), 31-59.

Before the dream even begins, *Pearl* problematizes literal readings. The first sixty lines of *Pearl* introduce a jeweler who is, literally, distraught at the loss of a gem. Yet, the poem's structure hints that the pearl may in fact be more than it appears. The jeweler uses language of decay and mourning — "þer such rychez to rot is runnen" (26), "I playned my perle" (53) — indicating that perhaps his pearl is actually a person.[112] Our suspicions are confirmed a few lines later when the Dreamer sees a maiden draped in pearls, "perelez pyȝte of ryal prys" (IV.193). By echoing the poem's opening line -- "Perle plesaunte to prynces paye" – the poet makes unmistakable the connection between the pearl and the Maiden. These linguistic markers give the reader stable footing for understanding the poem while simultaneously they undermine the Dreamer. Where the reader can see the same or a similar word repeated and understand that its meaning becomes more nuanced, the Dreamer cannot seem to complete this kind of equation. As I discuss more in depth later, he names the Maiden his pearl because she looks like a pearl, but she tells him he is a fool -- "Þou says þou trawez me in þis dene / Bycawse þou may wyth yȝen me se" (V.295-6). The Dreamer is not allowed to trust what he sees with his eyes and the reader is likewise encouraged not to trust what she reads as the reality of the vision. If she does not interpret the pearl as an earthly foil for the heavenly Maiden, the reader loses the allegory at the center of the poem.

Summarizing the Dreamer's problem, Piotyr Spyra notes, "the imagery and language of the poem reinforce the clash of the two mutually exclusive systems of logic and thought with countless contrasts, juxtapositions and ambiguities, all fueled by the

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[112] For a compelling reading of themes of mourning and loss in *Pearl*, see David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (Jan., 1993), 54-73.

basic divergence between the joyous illumination of heavenly enlightenment and the blindness of obtuse earthly-mindedness."[113] Spyra's argument revolves around an understanding that the heavenly world and the earthly world operate on fundamentally different principles, such that the Dreamer, no matter how he tries, could not possibly comprehend the spiritual world.[114] Rather than two incompatible systems of logic and structure, perhaps it is better to see the slippage between the Dreamer and the dream vision as one of a purposefully constructed linguistic incompletion. When the Dreamer wants to speak or act, he does so inappropriately or he misunderstands the Maiden or he simply cannot speak. As it navigates its relationship to waking visionary literature, here the poem puts the Dreamer into Julian's position. It is not just that the dream vision operates on foreign logic, but that the Dreamer does not have immediate language to describe the logic he is encountering. The poet's relentless refusal to give the Dreamer understanding results in pushing the burden of interpretation onto the reader.

One way that the *Pearl*-poet directs the reader is through excessive description. In doing this, the poet undermines any sense of reality or understanding in the world of the poem. Along with the repetition of words (which I will address later), the poet creates overwrought, redundant descriptions that begin to take the sense out of the poem. At the beginning of the vision, the Dreamer finds himself in a forest: "Holtewodeȝ bryȝt aboute hem bydeȝ / Of bolleȝ as blwe as ble of ynde" (II.75-6). To say that something is as blue

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[113] Piotyr Spyra, *The Epistemological Perspective of the Pearl-Poet* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 26.

[114] Jessica Barr suggests that the Dreamer does learn and interpret his vision as much as he is capable. See "Worldly Attachment and Visionary Resistance in *Pearl*," *Willing to Know God,* 122-51.

as indigo (as blue as blue) is to create a comparative failure. It is a self-defining description that, rather than adding to the reader's understanding of the moment, forces her to remain stagnant, hovering over a blue thing that is blue. Rather than highlight the marvelous (blue trees!), this repetition in a way conceals it. By pondering the blueness of the blue, the reader almost forgets to notice that the tree trunks are blue, instead of the expected brown. The rocks are made of glass ("crystal klyffeȝ so cler of kynde" II.74). The ground is made of pearls that the poet helpfully tells us, "wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle þay schynde" (II.80). They shine "shiny-ly." This overly wordy description ends up meaning nothing, or at least no more than what one adjective would suffice to tell.[115]

Despite this abundance of words, the Dreamer only spends about one hundred lines on the description of the garden before he runs out of language and starts to look to the other side of the brook ("myry mere," III.158). Josephine Bloomfield argues that the Dreamer here "can no longer attend at all to the beauty around him because he is yearning to see what is beyond the water, presuming it must be even lovelier than the fresh blooming *erbere* that encompasses him."[116] He also begins to search for a new spot ("I hoped that mote merked wore," III.142) because the Dreamer thinks he understands

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[115] It is worth noting that this may be part of the Pearl-poet's project. He may be exploring the accrual of metaphors and the potential limits of excessive language. David Coley suggests that "Within Pearl's intricate structure, key words recur and run up against suggestively inexact synonyms; phrases echo from stanza to stanza, gathering new significances and destabilizing established ones. Such structural and formal virtuosity is integral to the poem's hyper-saturated language and thus integral to the most basic way that Pearl creates meaning." See "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013), 209-62 (217).

[116] Josephine Bloomfield, "Stumbling toward God's Light: The Pearl Dreamer and the Impediments of Hierarchy," *The Chaucer Review* 45, no. 4 (2011), 400.

this new world. He believes that he has told enough of the garden, as he finishes its

description by proclaiming,

> More of wele waʒ in þat wyse
> þen I cowþe telle þaʒ I tom hade,
> For vrþely herte myʒt not suffyse
> To þe tenþe dole of þo gladneʒ glade (III.133-6).

The reason the Dreamer cannot describe the splendor of the garden is not because he

lacks skill as a poet, as we might anticipate him saying. Rather, his *vrþeley herte* is not

sufficient. That is, his worldly imagination, his human mind, cannot summon enough

language or the right kind of language to describe what he sees. Though he may wish to

tell more of the garden, the Dreamer has already run out of words, as he shifts the

concatenation from *dubbement* to *more and more*.[117] No longer does the Dreamer share

what he sees, but now his language has shifted to an internal focus, something he might

know a little more about. The *more and more* here is usually directed at his own longing

or his own looking, not at the increasing beauty of the incomprehensible world around

him.[118]

   As the Dreamer's gaze moves inward, to his thoughts and desires, the way he

interacts with the world of the dream changes as well. The garden scene, where all the

Dreamer can seem to do is describe visual paradoxes, gives way to more introspective

looking. Now the Dreamer uses language like "I þoʒt" (III.137), "I hoped" (III.139), "I

hope" (III.142), "me longed" (III.144), "me lyste" (III.146), and the phrase, "more

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[117] Arthur Bahr deals carefully with the poet's use of themes of more, less, and enough in "Manifold Singularity," esp. 737-46.

[118] "And euer me longed a more and more" (144); "more and more, and ʒet wel mare / Me lyste to se . . ." (145-6); "þat meued my mynde ay more and more" (156).

meruayle con my dom adaunt" (III.157). These thoughts create misapprehensions about the world he sees. When he looks across the river, which he assumes is a division between earthly delights and heavenly, the Dreamer says, "I hope þat mote merked wore" (III.142). Here the Dreamer assumes that a castle will be visible, but in fact he can see nothing. In hoping for a vision of a castle, the Dreamer not only misuses an important word, but he also misunderstands the vision he does have. As soon as the longing begins, the understanding ends. Eventually, the Dreamer has to admit that his mind is overwhelmed (*more meruayle con my dom adaunt*). Suggestively, this line falls right before the Dreamer has his first vision of the Maiden and the use of *dom* and *adaunt* emphasize the awe of the vision. It is not just that his mind is overwhelmed, but that all these marvels have subdued his reason. Though he seems aware that he is overcome, the Dreamer goes on to try to use that very reason to make sense of the rest of his interactions with the heavenly vision.

In spite of the Maiden's caution against trusting what he sees with his eyes, part of the way the Dreamer makes sense of the vision is to look and describe. When he sees the Maiden, he says "On lenghe I loked to hyr þere; / Þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more" (III.167-8). It seems for the Dreamer that time begets knowledge in this world and time is needed to search through the mind for the proper word to name the Maiden.[119] He

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[119] This entire passage has strong resonances with the passages on memory in Augustine's *Confessions*. There Augustine worries, "What when the memory itself loses something? . . . The only place to search is in the memory itself. If something other than what we want is offered us, we reject it until the thing we are looking for turns up. And when it comes, we say 'That is it.' We would not say this unless we recognized it, and we would not recognize it unless we remembered." He goes on to comment, "For instance, our eyes may happen on a person known to us or we may think of him, and we try to recall his name. Other names that occur will not fit the case, because we are not in the habit of associating them with him, and so we reject them until that one comes up which

searches through his memory for someone he recognizes, even though he is thrown off by the Maiden's appearance in such a different place and form. First he says, "I knew hyr wel; I hade sen hyr ere" (III.164) and then, "baysment gef myn hert a brunt. / I seȝ hyr in so strange a place" (III.174-5). The Dreamer's foreknowledge, a hint of an almost forgotten memory, during his search through his mind seems to make him discard the possibility of a new identity for the Maiden, although he does try out a few possible signifiers from his memory. He calls the Maiden a "schene" (III.166), "gracios gay" (IV.189), "precos pyece" (twice: VI.192 and 229), "frech" (IV.195), "gyrle" (VI.205), "special spyce" (IV.235) and "swete" (IV.240). Though the Dreamer uses these words to refer to the Maiden, he does not speak them to her and discards them as quickly as he takes them up.

His first speech to the Maiden includes the final noun that he settles on as being appropriate to her: "O perle" (V.241). Yet, because the Dreamer cannot ever know anything with certainty, he cannot trust the language he has pulled from his memory. Instead, he asks, "Art þou my perle þat I haf playned . . ." (V.242). All of this searching in his memory seems to get the Dreamer to the closest guess at what the Maiden might be or be called. Of course, he gets it wrong. The Maiden chastens him, "Sir, ȝe haf your tale mystente" (V.257). As he must, the Dreamer has misspoken and misnamed the Maiden. While he backs away from the pearl name (calling her next a *juel* and a *geste* and his *blysfol beste* V.277-9), he still insists on thinking of her as his pearl. Even after the Maiden tells him she is not the pearl, a transient little thing, he excitedly dismisses her

at once corresponds to the familiarly known and is accepted as correct." See Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 28.

and proclaims, "I trawed my perle don out of daweʒ / Now haf I fond hyt, I schal ma feste" (V.282-3). Here the Dreamer's thinking fails him on several levels. Even when explicitly told the Maiden is not his worldly pearl, the Dreamer's memory, or his understanding of his memory, traps him into only seeing her as such.

When the Dreamer finds the singing of the birds in the *erbere* to be impossibly sweet, he says, "so gracos gle couþe no mon gete / As here and se her adubbement" (II. 95-6). Not only that, but no man can depict the beauty of the visionary wood: "þe derþe þerof for to deuyse / nis no wyʒ worþe þat tonge bereʒ" (II.99-100). This "no tongue may tell" trope is not unique to *Pearl* but for the *Pearl*-poet it results in syntactical overcompensation rather than silence.[120] Immediately after proclaiming human tongues insufficient to describe the vision, the Dreamer goes wandering and says,

> þe fyrre in þe fryth þe feier con ryse
> þe playn, þe plontteʒ, þe spyse, þe pereʒ
> And raweʒ, and randeʒ, and rych reuereʒ;
> As fyldor fyn her bukes brent. (II.103-6)

The Dreamer must be "no wyʒ worþe" because he seems fully capable of applying many words to the world he thinks he sees. He is not incapable of recording the vision, but seems at times incapable of abiding by his own structure or the limits suggested when he says no tongue could tell of the vision's beauty. As he describes the giant pearl affixed to the Maiden's breast, the Dreamer admits,

> A manneʒ dom moʒt dryʒly demme
> Er mynde moʒt malte in hit mesure.
> I hope no tong moʒt endure
> No sauerly saghe say of þat syʒt. (IV.223-6)

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[120] Anne Chalmers Watts discusses the poet's use of an inexpressibility topos in "Pearl, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99, no. 1 (Jan. 1984), 26-40. She argues that the dreamer uses inexpressibility (absent language) to dwell on the loss at the heart of the poem.

A man's mind, but not the Dreamer's, not *my dom*, could never conceive of the measure and beauty of that pearl. Of course, all this construction of distance between the Dreamer's and a man's mind implodes at the end of the poem, when, as quoted earlier, he admits "delyt me drof in yȝe and ere; / My maneȝ mynde to maddyng malte" (XX.1153-4). The Dreamer's inconsistency ends not only his vision, but the poem itself. As he constructs space between the Dreamer's mind and the reader's, the *Pearl*-poet highlights the difference between the one experiencing the vision and the one imagining it. Embedding linguistic failure and excessive description in the same stanza puts the reader somewhere between the two poles, pushing her towards the silence of an overcome mind and the speech of an inquiring one.

Speaking the Dream

As soon as he enters the vision, the Dreamer knows, yet does not know, his location. He says, "I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace, / Bot I knew me keste þer klyfeȝ cleuen" (I.65-6). As above with the blue trees that are blue, the Dreamer describes the world in these both affirmative and negative terms that end up giving the reader no new understanding. Denys Turner says of negative theology that "we must both affirm and deny all things of God; and then we must negate the contradiction between the affirmed and the denied."[121] Though *Pearl* could hardly be described as negative in the Pseudo-Dionysian way, there is a sense here of grasping at all possible descriptions as though that abundance might come close to approximating the visionary experience and

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[121] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God, Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

then rejecting those descriptions when the Maiden declares them inappropriate or insufficient.

It does seem odd at first to see *Pearl* as approaching speechlessness; after all, the Dreamer's failures come because he speaks too much, not too little. Yet the thing that cannot be spoken and the push to silence are driving forces in visionary texts. Virginia Burrus and Karmen MacKendrick say of language that the object is lost the closer one approaches to that object. They write, "Not only language, but we who would use it, we who are made by it, are lost here; at the asymptote of the approach, God too is lost in the only places we find God: both in saying and in flesh."[122] Even as the Dreamer comes closer to his pearl, it slips away from him through his excessive speech. He pleadingly tells the Maiden, "Ne worþe no wrathþe vnto my Lorde, / If rapely raue, spornande in spelle" (VII.362-3). The Dreamer manages to say many things, yet to learn nothing; the poet describes an abundance, but that abundant world is impossible. The poem, if not the Dreamer, seems to value the craft of language that can move one toward silent meditation.

At the beginning of their interaction, the Maiden tries to tell the Dreamer that it would be better for him to be quiet for a while. After the Dreamer thinks he has settled on the right name for the Maiden and declares that he will join her on the other side of the river, she laughs:

> Wy borde ȝe men? So madde ȝe be!
> þre wordeȝ hatȝ þou spoken at ene;
> Vnavysed, forsoþe, wern alle þre.

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[122] Virginia Burrus and Karmen MacKendrick, "Bodies without Wholes: Apophatic Excess and Fragmentation in Augustine's *City of God*," *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality,* Eds Christ Boesel and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 93.

þou ne woste in worlde quat on dotʒ mene;
þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle. (290-94)

In a moment typical of the poem, the Maiden replies to the Dreamer's three words in one with three admonishments. His foolish words are best left in silence because he does not know what he himself means when he speaks. The Dreamer's speech has failed him because he thinks he knows what he sees and how to describe it. "Now haf I fond hyt," he says, "I shal me feste / and wony wyth hyt in shyr wodschaweʒ / and loue my Lorde and al his lawe / þat hatʒ me broʒ þys blys ner" (V.283-6). Even though his language seems orthodox and what we might call a good speech, the Dreamer's lack of understanding makes words fly before his wit. He cannot catch up with them, no matter how he tries. J. Allan Mitchell points out, "the reader can hardly ignore the asymptotic nature of the dream-vision, an experience to which the Dreamer gives a detailed report, yet simultaneously is condemned to fall short of representing."[123] Mitchell identifies the source of the problem as a failure of speech. But the speech fails not simply because there is nothing human that can wholly encompass a description of the divine. Rather, the Dreamer's speech fails because he does not stop speaking or stop trying to understand the Maiden in relation to his earthly pearl. Language can become uncontrollable, so it is perhaps best left unspoken.

While the Dreamer's relationship with language often leaves the reader wishing he stayed silent, the Poet offers concatenation words as structural respite in the poem itself. Concatenation words are those words or phrases that are picked up and repeated for a few stanzas, before giving way to newly repeated words and phrases. In keeping with

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[123] J. Allen Mitchell, "The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable." *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000), 93.

Pearl's experiment in failure, that structure collapses at moments when it could be most meaningful.[124] When the concatenation pattern actually breaks at line 613, it is during one of the Maiden's speeches. Where she is expected to say something about how the grace of God is enough (thus preserving the inoghe/grace pair), she instead tells the Dreamer, "Bot no thou motes, me for to mate / That I my peny haf wrang tan here . . ." (XI.612-3). Although she may not have taken her heavenly crown inappropriately, the Maiden destabilizes the written structure the reader has been relying on. Partly, she blames the Dreamer. "Me for to mate" can be translated as, "in order to shame me." This word "mate" also has resonances of damage and confusion. She suggests that he wants to speak and confound her, but the Dreamer does not actually speak. In fact, it is the Maiden who damages the poem's structure with this one line. Whatever heavenly logic by which the Maiden operates allows her to subordinate poetic structure in favor of linguistic dexterity. At this moment, the Maiden highlights the significance of the word "mote." Here the word means argue, although often it means spot, as it will when it is concatenated later in the poem in lines 924-73. By speaking "mote," where "grace" is

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[124] Given in order here. The two bold sections represent points where the concatenation pattern collapses for a stanza or so and then resets. *spot* (12/13, 24/25, 36/37, 48/9, 60/1); *adubbemente/dubbe* (72/3, 84/5, 96/7, 108/9, 120/1) ; *more/more and more* (132/3, 144/5, 156/7, 168/9, 180/1); *perles/precios perles* (192/3, 204/5, 216/7, 228/9, 240/1), *juel/jueler* (252/3, 264/5, 276/7, 288/9, 300/1); *deme* (312/3, 324/5, 336/7, 348/9, 360/1) *blysse* (372/3, 384/5, 396/7, 408/9, 420/1); *quen/cortayse/court* (432/2, 444/5, 456/7, 468/9, 480/1); *date* (492/3, 504/5, 516/7, 528/9, 540/1); *more/more and lasse* (552/3, 564/5, 576/7, 588/9, 600/1); ***inoghe/grace (612, 624/5, 636/7, 648/9, 660/1)***; *inoscente/ryghte* (672/3, 684/5, 696/7, 708/9, 720/1); *maskeles/makelles pearl* (732/3, 744/5, 756/7, 768/9, 780/1); *Jerusalem* (792/3, 804/5, 816/7, 828/9, 840/1); ***lesse (852/3, 864/5, 876/7, 888/9, 900/1, 912/3)***; *mote/moteles* (924/5, 936/7, 948/9, 960/1, 972/3); *John the apostel* (984/5, 996/7, 1008/9, 1020/1, 1032/3); *sunne/mone* (1044/5, 1056/7, 1068/9, 1080/1; 1092/3); *delyt* (1104/5; 1116/7; 1128/9; 1140/1; 1152/3); *paye* (1164/5; 1176/7; 1188/9; 1200/1; 1212).

expected, the Maiden blemishes the otherwise perfect structure of these few stanzas.[125]

Indeed, "mote" is a word the Poet is fascinated with, as it appears in various forms and meanings seventeen times in the poem.[126] David Coley suggests that the *Pearl*-poet uses language like this in order "to sustain a multiplicity of metaphoric valences within diverse, sometimes contradictory discourse."[127] At times the Maiden uses "mote" as castle or, as above, argument, at other times she uses "moteles" to mean spotlessness.[128] But the Dreamer seems to be only able to understand *mote* as spot (in the sense of a speck of dust) or spotless ("moteles") and once he identifies a spot as a castle.[129] His literal reading and literal speech mean that the Dreamer must grasp at the

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[125] In the next section, I will trace the valences of "mote" through the poem. For a similar consideration of the word "spot," see Sylvia Tomasch, "A 'Pearl' Punnology," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88 (1989), 1-20. Arthur Bahr deals similarly with the term "date" in "Manifold Singularity," 735-7.

[126] His use of "mote" and its variants is given here with the speaker (D for Dreamer and M for Maiden) noted. 140: I hoped that mote merked wore (D); 613: Bot now thou motes me for to mate (M); 726: Wythouten mote other mascle of sulpande synne (M); 764: For mote ne spot is non in thee (M); 855: For thay of mote couthe never mynge (M); 899: That moteles meyny may never remwe (M); 924: Your wones schulde be wythouten mote (D); 925: Thys moteles meyny thou cones of mele (D); 936: Now tech to me that myry mote (D); 937: That mote thou menes in Judy londe (M); 948: So is Hys mote wythouten moote (M); 949: Of motes two to carpe clene (M); 960: to the meyny that is wythouten mote (M); 961: Moteles may, so meke and mylde" (D); 972: Bot thou wer clene wythouten mote (M); 973: If I this mote thee schal unhyde (M).

[127] Coley, "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence," 217.

[128] There are six entries for mot(e) in the *Middle English Dictionary*. It ranges from "a speck, particle, bit of dirt or foreign matter" to "a trifle," to "a blemish, spot, stain, flaw." See "Mot," *Middle English Dictionary.*

[129] "I hoped þe water were a deuyse / Bytwene myrþeȝ by mereȝ made. / Beȝonde þe broke, by slente oþer slade, / I hope þat mote merked wore" (III.142). Even here though there is an argument to be made that the Dreamer may be using "mote" correctly, as it can be used to mean "a castle, dwelling," See *MED,* "mote (n.1, def. c.)." Problematically, the lines the MED cites here are spoken by the Maiden, not the Dreamer.

first available definition for every word he uses. The Maiden, on the other hand, not only

plays with "mote," but even explores the potential its different forms have. At line 947-8,

the Maiden proclaims, "And as Hys flok is wythouten flake, / So is Hys mote wythouten

moote." In the same line, the Maiden gives two forms, and two meanings, of "mote." Her

heavenly status allows the Maiden to play with language in a way that is inaccessible to

the Dreamer because of his literalism. Even after being so carefully shown the different

potential for this particular word, the Dreamer's next speech begins, "moteles may, so

meke and mylde" (XVI.961). Once again, the ability to make meaning, or to mean

multiple things with language, eludes him even when he's given meaning, even when he

does not have to construct meaning for himself. While the Maiden may have some

disdain for human language or human understanding of heavenly language (which may

be radically different things), she does not, as Stephen Russell suggests, neglect the

"efficacy of language."[130] By using "mote" to mean all those different, yet fundamentally

connected things, the Maiden tries to teach the Dreamer about language's radical

possibility of meaning.

  After the Dreamer collapses "mote" back into its spotty self, the Maiden almost

laughingly points at the Dreamer's stunted understanding. When he asks her to teach him

of that "myry mote" (a happy spot), she explains that he means Judea but, she says,

> Of motes two to carpe clene
> And Jerusalem hyght bothe, nawtheles -
> That nys to yow no more to mene
> Bot 'Ceté of God' other 'Syght of Pes'. (XVI.949-52)

When she says Jerusalem means no more to him than City of God, the Maiden makes two

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[130] J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*
(Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988),163.

implications in one. First, she tells the Dreamer what Jerusalem means to him beyond just its name. With that definition and her use of "yow" here, the Maiden suggests that Jerusalem means more than this to her. Once again, the Dreamer's understanding can stretch to one meaning, but not to many. The Maiden displays a more nuanced relationship to language, as the poem formally mimics the mystic's visionary experience. Language is pressed to proclaim something of meaning and yet also must fail and be inadequate with that proclamation. The Maiden, for all her heavenly understanding, cannot represent Heaven in a way that squares with the Dreamer's understanding of the universe. In one sense, the Maiden speaks another language, even though she speaks English, because she knows that words can have multiple meanings. Russell argues that the Maiden's answers to the Dreamer are "really a tease, a form of verbal unknowing that enacts the fact that, with the language at our disposal, explaining is the last thing that will explain."[131] While Russell seems to see this as a flaw of the poem, I see it as the point of the poem. Heavenly language in the waking visions is understood yet not understandable. So too, here, the Maiden's language must point everywhere and nowhere. It must be true, but also inaccessible to the Dreamer at the level where it starts to mean something more.

The Dreamer's struggles with multivalent language and his inability to keep himself separate from an ordinary person reading the poem come to fruition at the poem's climax with the appearance of the full moon and the heavenly parade. Toward the end of the poem, the concatenation words shift to "sunne" and "mone," although the moon is not actually present. When he insists that the light from neither the moon nor the sun could compare with the light of heavenly Jerusalem, the poet speaks absence into existence.

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[131] Russell, *English Dream Vision*, 164.

The only light the Dreamer can see is from heavenly Jerusalem, yet the concatenation of "sun and moon" allows those orbs to rise and set with every stanza. Before leaving the sun and moon, the Dreamer makes one final attempt to convey just how bright the heavenly Jerusalem is. He proclaims,

> Anvnder mone so gret merwayle
> No fleschly hert ne myȝt endeure,
> As quen I blusched vpon þat baly,
> So ferly þerof watȝ þe fasure.
> I stod as stylle as dased quayle,
> For ferly of þat freuch fygure,
> þat felde I nawþer reste ne trauayle,
> So watȝ I rauyste wyth glymme pure.
> For, I dar say wyth conciens sure,
> Hade bodyly burne abiden þat bone,
> þaȝ alle clerkeȝ hym hade in cure,
> His lyf wer loste anvnder mone. (XVIII.1081-92)

Unlike the *bodyly burne* and *fleschly hert,* the Dreamer surely can gaze upon that glimmering sight without losing his mind. Denys Turner, speaking about the Pseudo-Dionysius, comments, "If the light of the sun is a mind-stunning darkness, so is the reality of the divine a language-defeating silence."[132] Somehow the *Pearl*-poet manages to capture both halves of that statement. The silencing light of heavenly Jerusalem actually has the intended effect on the Dreamer when he stands still as a dazed quail. Yet once again he is not quite representing the vision correctly. By framing his experience of gazing at the walls of heavenly Jerusalem on both sides with lunar imagery, the Dreamer eclipses his vision with the literality of his physical body.

The Poet carefully deploys two bird metaphors (quail and hawk) to make a clear contrast between the Dreamer's interpretive abilities and the reader's recuperative

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[132] Turner, *Darkness of God*, 22.

abilities. Allen Mitchell argues that when he imagines himself into the bird's place (*I stod as stylle as dased quayle*), "speech fails the Dreamer-poet, signaling the ineffability of a certain numinous presence."[133] Perhaps the clearest indication of speech's failure here is that the Dreamer wraps himself in a paradox. While creating distance between himself and those with fleshly hearts, the Dreamer also stands still and is entranced by his vision. To stand like a little bird is all too physical a simile for the Dreamer who wishes to be disembodied. Further, the sight of the heavenly Jerusalem does not produce in the Dreamer some kind of ecstatic revelation and understanding. Rather, he says, "felde I nawþer reste ne trauayle" (1087). One would suppose that the heavenly Jerusalem would cause some change in the emotional state of the onlooker, but the Dreamer is poised between the two emotions. Likewise, he has not created the distance from the *fleschly hert* that he seems to seek. The Dreamer wants to create and maintain a divide between the embodied man and the dreaming self, but that becomes impossible. His body may be still sleeping on the bank, but either the memory of it or the reality of it is too powerful and the Dreamer can never not be the *bodyly burne*.

The first time he beholds the Maiden, the Dreamer makes recourse to another bird metaphor, this time his fowl choice is a hawk. He says, "I stod as hende as hawk in halle" (IV.184). Not only does the author tie these two significant moments together with the bird imagery, but they are also exactly 900 lines apart, a nice round number.[134] In his chapter, "Animal Similes in Pearl," Paul Reichardt works through the different symbolic

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[133] Mitchell, "Middle English Pearl," 93.

[134] They are 900 lines apart without adding in the "missing" line 472. See below for more discussion of that line.

and biblical meanings of the hawk and the quail. He concludes, "The Dreamer's blindness to spiritual truth is thereby attributable to the same pattern of proud rapacity [hawk], inability to deal with adverse fortune [doe], and love of physical pleasure [quail] that colors the animals of the three similes."[135] Yet for all his attention, Reichardt has perhaps been too seduced by the lure of the multivalent birds. The Dreamer scarcely seems capable of knowing that he has connected himself to the biblical quail on which the Israelites fed.[136] While the Poet may use bird imagery because of all the potential interpretations, someone who cannot recognize the Lamb of God when he sees it is unlikely to select the hawk to symbolize, "the fixity of the Dreamer, who is indeed transfixed by the sight of his beloved pearl."[137] Rather than suppose the Dreamer has chosen these birds as particularly apt spiritual metaphors for his mental state at the moment, I propose we read these similes much more literally. When the Dreamer says, "Wyth yȝen open and mouth ful clos / I stod as hende as hawk in halle," he has selected that particular bird because of the predatory appeal of the hawk. He longs to snatch up the Maiden and take her home with him. For the Dreamer (not necessarily the reader or the Poet), there can be no other recourse except to the simplest, most obvious interpretation.

Furthermore, even when constructing his own simile the Dreamer cannot be completely accurate. A hawk with eyes open in hall might not be the stillest bird. In fact, hawks were often hooded in order to calm and soothe them when they were not actively

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[135] Paul F. Reichardt, "Animal Similes in Pearl," *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet*, Eds Robert J Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, NY: Whitson, 1991), 24.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Reichardt, 18.

hunting. Michael Woodford comments, "Once hooded she [the hawk] immediately

becomes immobile . . . All her fears are allayed and shocks to her delicate nervous system

are reduced to a minimum."[138] Medieval hawking manuals are dedicated to training the

hawk's vision and controlling her gaze. In a 13th-century text on falconry, Bartholomaeus

Anglicus writes, "The eyes of such birds should be seeled [sic] and closed, or hid, so she

bate not too often from hand that bears her, when she sees a bird that she desires to take;

and also her legs must be fastened with jesses, that she shall not fly freely to every

bird."[139] Our little hawk, the Dreamer, is neither fastened nor hooded, except perhaps by

the river and his own, clouded misunderstanding. At any rate, he makes a point to say

that his eyes are open so he can understand who the Pearl Maiden is. Faced with the

literality of the Dreamer's simile, the reader is left still desiring to see more there, as

Reichardt did and as I am attempting not to do but cannot avoid. This is because, I argue,

the Poet has chosen this richly symbolic bird to give the reader the opportunity to do that

work of interpretation and analysis. Perhaps these meanings are in the text or perhaps

they are external to the text; regardless, the reader is tempted to apply meaning to each

word and every scene.

The hawk simile also brings with it the one time the Dreamer appears to

comprehend the spirituality of the vision he has. It is a curious moment and is often

glossed over in favor of pointing out the Dreamer's failure. The stanza with the hawk

simile begins thus: "More þen me lyste my drede aros; / I stod ful stylle and dorste not

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[138] Woodford, *A Manual of Falconry,* 67. Qtd in Robin S. Oggins, *Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale, 2004), 24.

[139] Robert Steele, trans and ed. *Medieval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1924),120.

calle" (IV.181-2). When the Dreamer first sees the Maiden, he is afraid and uneasy,

which only increases as he looks at her. And yet, he says,

> I hope þat gostly watȝ þat porpose;
> I dred onende quat schulde byfalle,
> Lest ho me eschaped, þat I þer chos,
> Er I at steuen hir moȝt stalle. (IV.185-8)

Perhaps because the Dreamer so often does not understand what he sees, we let this line

slip past when really it seems this one moment, above all others, gives the reader that

exegetical tool to unlock the whole piece. Somehow he does know that this vision is a

spiritual one (*I hope þat gostly watȝ þat porpose*) and yet he thinks his speech can stop

the Maiden from leaving once the purpose is fulfilled. The Poet's choice of *stalle* here is

perfectly fitted, as it is often used to describe the way prey will stop during a hunt.[140] Yet,

the Dreamer does not describe himself as a hawk hunting, rather as one sitting quietly in

the hall. Further, *steuene*, which can mean the sound of a human voice or speech has also

been used to describe the sound of birds. Chaucer, for example, in the *Book of the*

Duchess, writes, "smale foules . . . songen everich in his wise . . . was never y-herd so

swete a steven, but hit had be a thing of heven" (295-308).[141] This moment has

undeniable resonances of a hunting scene, yet it is framed with a domestic setting. Even

in an encounter where the Dreamer knows what his vision is of, his language is not fully

correct. He cannot hunt while he remains in the hall. All he can do is hope to delay the

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[140] The MED offers this first definition: "To stop, come to a stand; also, take position, make a stand; hunt. of a quarry: stop and remain motionless, freeze; (b) to prevent (sb.) from escaping or advancing, stop; ben stalled, of a ship: become stuck, run aground"

[141] *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. Ed. Larry Benson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. The MED also suggests it has been used to mean the sound of a horn, even once occurring in *Clennesse*: "Sturnen trumpen strake steven in halle."

Maiden with sweet chirping.[142]

The lingering, absent-yet-present, full-yet-spotty moon bookends all this bird imagery and the Dreamer's attempts to move past his embodiment. Yet, he cannot cease calling the Maiden by worldly epithets — *my perle* (242), *my blysfol beste* (279), *my swete* (325) — and this is because he cannot seem to see without his worldly eyes. While the waking visionaries are careful to say that they saw not with their worldly eye but with their spiritual, inward, eye, the Dreamer wants to be disembodied, but cannot seem to maintain it. So it is when the Dreamer does try to convey a sense of the metaphysical, he can only grasp at it with earthly similes. *Mone* begins in such an insignificant way, buried at the end of a stanza, but then quickly shifts to enclose the movement of the next five stanzas. In this case, the word is too powerful. When the reader is supposed to be imagining a river of the light "bryghter then bothe the sunne and mone" (XVIII.1056), all she can see is a massive rising moon that is not actually present. In spite of the Dreamer's insistence that "the mone may therof acroche no myght" (XVIII.1069) because it is too spotty and flawed, the absent moon's might does increase until the appearance of the parade of pearl maidens. When the maidens appear, they are preceded by an allusion to the "maynful mone" (XIX.1093). By evoking a massive, white object, the poet super-saturates the reader's vision with, essentially, a pearl. And, just as the moon rises, it disappears. The "earthly" has been displaced by the heavenly, but again not fully. The pearl maidens could just as easily be called moon maidens. They too flood the visual field with whiteness: "coronde wern alle of the same fasoun/ depaynt in perles and wedes

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[142] It is worth noting that, when the Dreamer is a hawk, he twice talks about his dread (*my drede arose . . . i dred)*. In contrast, when he is a quail, the Dreamer says he has no fears at all: "þat felde I nawþer reste ne trauayle" (1087).

qwyte . . . hundreth thowsandes, I wot ther were" (XIX.1101-1107). In essence, the poem becomes the very physical pearl that it wants to discard or leave lost.

Understanding the Dream

Critical scholarship on *Pearl*, when read too frequently, can begin to sound like a chorus of a thousand glittering pearl maidens.[143] This is, perhaps, because we all tend to come to the same conclusions about the poem. The Dreamer's incapacities are too obvious, the Maiden's message is too clear, and the poem's didactic intent seems too strong for anyone to conclude that, for example, the Dreamer is actually a deeply philosophical figure, well-versed in biblical exegesis. As Russell says the Dreamer is "the fool who was offered a vision of the afterlife and ignored it, the boor who was offered a sense of Heavenly courtesy and challenged and repudiated it."[144] Russell has positioned himself in a bit of overstatement to be able to argue that the orthodox ending of the poem recuperates some of the Dreamer's foolishness. Nevertheless, his statement stands and we often tend to agree and, more frustratingly, write something along similar lines.

By choosing words and setting scenes just outside of the limits of earthly experience, the poet constructs a work that is incomplete yet infinitely completable. At every moment, the reader encounters some element that could be interpreted and reinterpreted. The Dreamer may be a fool, but criticism seems bent on recuperating his

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[143] I do not mean to suggest that all criticism of *Pearl* is the same. However, there are undeniable emphases in *Pearl* scholarship on the dreamer's foolishness, the maiden's inaccessibility, and the poet's linguistic skill. For the most recent overview of *Pearl* scholarship, see Robert J. Blanch, "The Current State of *Pearl* Criticism," *The Chaucer Yearbook* 3 (1996), 21-33.

[144] Russell, *English Dream Vision*, 174.

foolishness and learning from it. One particularly powerful example of the "how" is the

existence of what appears to be a missing line (472) in the middle of the poem. The

section in question reads (in part),

> 'Cortasyé,' quoþ I, 'I leue,
> And charyté grete be yow among,
> Bot my speche þat yow ne greue --
> . . . .
> þyself in heuen ouer hyȝ þou heue,
> To make þe quen, þat watȝ so ȝonge. (VIII.469-74)[145]

Critical scholarship has given strong arguments in favor of an elided line 472, which is

suggested to editors because its stanza is the only one that breaks the 12-line, rhyming

pattern. Israel Gollancz, in his 1891 edition, adds what he thinks the line might have been

and then notes, "This line is purely conjectural; the scribe has by accident omitted words

to this effect."[146] Additionally, Edward Condren notes the significance of the number 12

to the *Pearl*-poet. He writes, "*Pearl* gives pointed attention to the twelves noted in John's

description of the New Jerusalem in the apocalypse: 12 tiers, 12 foundations, 12 gems (. .

.). In addition to these literal references to twelve, the manuscript also includes twelve

pictures (. . .) . So, too, each folio has 36 precisely ruled lines — three twelves."[147] With

line 472, the poem would be 1,212 lines long, a perfect twelve. So, editors have added an

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[145] I have here maintained Vantuono's editorial structure. Gordons's 1953 edition, Andrew and Waldron's 1978 edition, and Stanbury's 2001 *TEAMS* edition all provide ellipses in place of 472. Andrew and Waldron, as well as Stanbury, make no comment on the missing line other than to say that it is missing, but Vantuono notes that "the missing line is perhaps prescribal" (*Pearl,* 247, n.472).

[146] Israel Gollancz, *Pearl: An English Poem of the Fourteenth Century (*London: David Nutt, 1891), xlviii, 119.

[147] Edward I. Condren, *The Numerical Universe of the "Gawain-Pearl" Poet: Beyond "Phi,"* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 38.

ellipsis, which in effect brings the poem to completion while at the same time suggests that the poem is in some way incomplete.

Though this silent emendation still occurs, criticism has shifted to suggesting that the line, though "missing," was not intended to be part of the text at all. Indeed, as Claude Willan suggests, "in falling one line short of a numerologically significant count of 1,212, the poem represents the impossibility of creating an accurate image of God or of the heavenly city as described by John the Baptist."[148] This is a convincing reading of the omitted line and there is no reason to dispute it. However, Willan also makes an offhand remark at the end of the same paragraph when he claims, "so alive are editors to the resonances of 1,212 that the spiritual significance of the poem's shortcoming is overlooked."[149] Willan's pointed statement illustrates perfectly the tension between vision and reader, poet and critic. Just as the Dreamer can either gaze at the Maiden or think about what she signifies, so too the reader can focus on only one element of the visionary experience at a time.

Even as he looks at the heavenly Maiden, the Dreamer can only seem to see her as the earthly pearl or person she may have been before. Incredulously, he goes on to say, "þou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede. / þou cowþeȝ neuer God nauþer plese ne pray, / Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede, / And quen mad on þe fyrst day!" (IX. 483-86). So alive, to borrow Willan's phrase, is the Dreamer to the Maiden's physicality that he cannot rightly perceive her spiritual reality. The omission of a line in the middle of the poem brings this

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[148] Claude Willan, "'Pearl' and the Flawed Meditation of Grace," *Modern Philology* 112, no. 1 (August 2014), 61.

[149] Ibid.

shortsightedness into stark relief. If the reader is like the Dreamer, she will only be able to see the blemish caused by the missing line or perhaps go so far as to conjecture what that missing line might say. Yet if the reader is like the poet or like a visionary, she may be able to see beyond the line, to the significance of its absence and the value of its blemish.

Perhaps that addition by subtraction is meant to provide just such an entry point for the reader. By not including line 472, the poet invites the reader to do her own writing, and the editor/reader(s) have done that and more.[150] Gollancz fills in the line with "me thynk thou spekez now ful wronge."[151] Vantuono notes Gollancz's invention, and then asks his reader to "consider also: *to speke of a new note I long*."[152] Willan suggests, "the putative missing line would be a b rhyme with 'among' and 'ʒonge' and would be a qualifying or mitigating clause in the Dreamer's speech to the Maiden."[153] Even though most critics suggest that the loss of 472 is not a loss but a purposeful omission, they find a way to comment on what that line must be. Because the line does not exist, the reader can give it meaning beyond just the supposition that it would follow the rhyme format. It points to the purposeful failure of the poem. But it also points to the way that failure can function as an exegetical opportunity. If only the reader adds that line, she can perfect the pearl.

At the end of the *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian tells her readers, "this boke is

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[150] Because *Pearl* exists only in one manuscript, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x., we cannot comment on how medieval readers may have interacted with line 472.

[151] Gollancz, *Pearl*, 40.

[152] Vantuono, *Pearl*, 247.

[153] Willan, "Pearl," 61.

begonne by goddys gyfte and his grace, but it is nott yett performyd, as to my syght" (LT 16.86). For Julian, performing the work meant continuing to interpret her visions, both on her own and with a community of her readers. In leaving the vision without commentary other than that one should attend Mass and participate in the Eucharist, the *Pearl*-poet seeks a similar kind of performance. Because the Dreamer does not explain any of what his vision meant after he awakens, he does not fulfill his role as a visionary. The reader is thus asked to step in, open, and close the text, filling out the meanings of particularly mystical or challenging moments. In his final lines, the Dreamer declares, "He gef vus to be his homly hyne, / And precious perleȝ vnto his pay" (XX. 1211-12). Perhaps here the Dreamer finally evinces some understanding of his vision and sees that the lowest on earth will become the highest in heaven. Yet, the suspicious reader will notice the simple "and" not "and then." She will wonder why the Dreamer has chosen to see the precious pearls as worthy of the Prince's "pay," which does suggest "pleasure" but also has a connotation of "reward" or "money." The simplicity of the Dreamer's moral thus begins to slip away as each word and phrase blossoms into multiplicities of meaning. Perhaps, when she sees that final line, the reader will find that the poem's work has been begun, but it is not yet performed.

CHAPTER 3

'RULE THI TONGE BETTRE': SEEKING SILENCE IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

> Therfore by colour ne by clergie knowe shaltow [Charite] nevere,
> Neither thorugh wordes ne werkes, but thorugh wil oone,
> And that knoweth no clerk ne creature on erthe
> But Piers the Plowman -- *Petrus, id est, Christus.*
> (B. XV 209-12)[154]

Unlike the dream vision of *Pearl,* which seems to be mostly full of silence, broken by the occasional bird song or calm speech, *Piers Plowman* is cacophonous. Minstrels, jesters, and jongleurs dance around the opening lines, not explicitly speaking but evoking the sounds of speech. Characters are not just constantly making noise, they're also talking about speech. Will, our dream's protagonist, sees people who claim to be pilgrims, and he cautions, "I seigh somme that seiden thei hadde ysought seintes: / To ech a tale that thei tolde hire tonge was tempred to lye / Moore than to seye sooth, it semed bi hire speche" (Prol 50-2). The so-called pilgrims have spoken to Will and he in turn tells the reader about their lying speeches. Beginning this chapter with so much speech may seem an odd way to connect *Piers* to its visionary contemporaries. After all, much of *Pearl* is about how to silence a foolish dreamer and in the next chapter we will see Julian of Norwich exploring the way that language produces profound silences.

Langland is interested in these same problems and addresses them by writing about and struggling with meaningful speech and meaningful silence. Will has a problem both with idle silence and idle speech and so part of the poem's progression is toward a

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[154] Unless otherwise noted, I rely on Schmidt's B-text edition. Where applicable, I refer to Vaughan (A-text) and Pearsall (C-text).

protagonist who understands when to speak and when to listen. Language is productive and the poem explores its creative and destructive potential. Will is told to cease questioning the allegorical figures he encounters or is simply spoken over, as with Anima's long speech in Passus XV. Though Anima's speech produces silence in Will, his first response when Anima pauses is to say, "ac yit am I in a weer what charite is to mene" (XVI 3). Will cannot (and the poem seems unsure if he even should) stop questioning and speaking. As he moves toward toward Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, Will also moves toward appropriate silence and stillness. This brings the poem closer to the visionary tradition than to social satire and apocalyptic writing.[155] At the heart of visionary writing is a silence and stillness, an uncertainty of language. So too, *Piers Plowman* ends with a cry, a dreamer waking and no more speech after he awakens.

At the end of this chapter, I examine the way that Will's silence combines with the poem's linguistic problems to draw in the reader's participation. I do this by locating moments in the poem that point backward in the narrative to things the reader might hold in her memory. This kind of memorative reading is in imitation of Will's quest through the poem. Though he seeks more kind knowing of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, Will also seeks to be like Piers, to "perform" Piers Plowman. Will understands that he can know nothing fully, but that limitation does not necessitate a cessation of work. Yet, at best, Will only mimics Piers. The opening of the *Vita* sees Will, "yrobed in russet," roaming

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[155] For arguments on *Piers* place in apocalyptic writing, see Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as Fourteenth-century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962) and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and* Piers Plowman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For *Piers* as social satire, see Anne Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

about "al a somer seson" (VIII 1-2). This physical imitation pairs Will with Piers without making Will into Piers.[156] When Will stumbles in his imitation of Piers Plowman, the reader finds footing in a text that points outside itself with biblical and classical allusions. In her imitation of Will, the reader can move slowly and nonlinearly through the nonlinear narrative. The nearness to perfection in *Pearl* drove the reader to complete the work through interpretation. For *Piers*, the work is different. The fragmented, mutating poem makes perfection an unviable option for even the most astute reader. Instead, *Piers* offers something more like Julian's *Revelations*. With its complex content, *Piers* invites the kind of reader who would spend twenty years revising her first impression of the vision's meaning. Imitation of Piers and interpretation of *Piers* thus become inextricably linked.

Excessive Language

Just as in *Pearl*, *Piers* starts from a place of excess and move to correct it — too much description leads to silent awe, too much wrathful speech needs balanced by charitable speech. Inherent in the *Piers Plowman* project is a proliferation of language, of words that seem incapable of cessation. As the three extant versions illustrate, superfluous language production can become problematic. Wrathe, for instance, proudly introduces himself as

. . . some tyme a frere,
And the coventes gardyner for to graffen impes.
 On lymitours and listres lesynges I ympted,
Til thei beere leves of lowe speche, lordes to plese,

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[156] This is also an oblique connection to Charity, who Anima says he has seen, "in silk and som tyme in russet, / Bothe in grey, and in grys, and in gilt harneis — / And as gladliche he it gaf to gomes that it neded" (XV 220-2).

And sithen thei blosmede abroad in boure to here shriftes. (V 135-9)

In this introduction, Wrathe gestures to at least two levels of interpretation. His initial

construction creates a tree of wickedness by grafting untruthfulness onto friars and

lectors.[157] This Tree of Wrath also branches into textual production as it obliquely

references letters of confraternity. Langland plays on the multiple meaning of "beere"

and "leves;" "beere" can mean to put forth, but it just as often means bring or carry away.

Leaves of course can grow on trees but they can also be written pages.[158] Letters of

confraternity, Peter Beal remarks, "were fairly mass-produced and might bestow upon the

recipient benefits, privileges, or spiritual rewards in return for charitable donations."[159] R.

N. Swanson observes that "mendicant and monastic confraternity practices . . . offered

participation in the rewards accrued from the devotional activities of the monks and

friars."[160] If they participate in the rewards of Wrathe's letters, people will find

themselves suffering in the afterlife. Simultaneously, those people who might be in

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[157] This line also evokes Matthew 7:17-20, where Christ proclaims "Sic omnis arbor bona fructus bonos facit: mala autem arbor malos fructus facit. Non potest arbor bona malos fructus facere: neque arbor mala bonos fructus facere. Omnis arbor, quæ non facit fructum bonum, excidetur, et in ignem mittetur. Igitur ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos" (*Just as every good tree makes good fruit: so too the wicked tree makes wicked fruit. The good tree cannot make wicked fruit: nor can the wicked tree make good fruit. Let every tree which does not bring forth good fruit be cut down, and thrown in the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them*). Wrathe, being a wicked tree, makes himself known when he sends his fruited friars out to preach impious words to the people.

[158] See "beren (v. 1)" and "lef (n. 1)."

[159] Beal, Peter, "Letters of Confraternity," *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Online Edition: retr. 18 March, 2016.

[160] Swanson, R.N., *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 69.

danger of taking up Wrathe's leaves find mediation in Langland's own leaves, the pages on which Wrathe's escapades are written.

As they accept Wrathe's rewards, friars and priests "speken of spiritualte, that either despiseth oother, / Til thei be bothe beggers and by spiritualte libben, / Or ellis al riche and ryden aboute . . ." (V 147-9). In this instance, those rewards are actually losses. Either the friars lose all worldly goods and live spiritually or they will lose their spiritual life and maintain their wealth. Even the extent of their ability to live spiritually is questionable, as Wrathe ensures they learn not from books of holy writ, but from his books. He says, "I, Wrathe, walke with hem and wisse hem of my bokes" (V 146). Living spiritually, to Wrathe, means soft living, gossiping, and beating one's fellow nuns almost to death. Drinking wine causes Wrathe to have a "flux of foul mouth wel fyve dayes after" and to "coughe" out any wickedness he knows of his brethren (V 177-9). This foul coughing is a kind of non-verbal speech, one that echoes Margery Kempe's non-verbal acts of crying and weeping which I deal with more closely in Chapter 5.

As a creature created and continued by speech, it is only fitting that Repentaunce decides that part of Wrathe's penance will be that he never speak those privy things he knows about people again.[161] "'Repente thee,' quod Repentaunce, 'and reherce thow nevere / Counseil that thow knowest, by contenaunce next-day by speche' . . ." (V 180-

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[161] Briefly at the end of Wrathe's confession, the narrator seems to conflate himself with Wrathe, supplying a "me" and "my" in place of "hym" and "hys." Will relates, "Esto sobrius! [Repentaunce] seide, and assoiled me after, / And bad me wilne to wepe my wikkednesse to amende" (V 183-4). Perhaps this conflation, which is amended in C, speaks to Will's fear of mispeaking or misrepresenting his vision. Bernard Huppé argues that Will is "the instrument of wrath; Will is himself a wrathful man by the evidence of the poem and has earlier in the passus been moved by Repentance" ("Petrus id est Christus," 190).

1). Wrathe's *leves of lowe speche* are excessive; they cause friars and nuns to forget their vows and choke under Wrathe's shade. They forget what they have said in the past and cannot speak in the future. Repentaunce's cure, which we know will not stick, is to silence Wrathe. In fact, in the A-text Wrathe does not speak this confession at all. By introducing it in the B-text, Langland offers the reader more opportunity to understand the importance of the act of silencing inappropriate speech. That is, Wrathe's bad language must be written in order to be silenced, both textually and imaginitively.

In Passus 16, Anima offers a clear parallel to Wrathe's ill confession. It tells Will,

[Charite] is a ful trie tree . . . trewely to telle.
Mercy is the more therof; the myddul stok is ruthe;
The leves ben lele wordes, the lawe of Holy Chirch;
The blosmes beth buxom speche and benigne lokynge;
Pacience hatte the pure tree, and pore symple of herte,
And so thorugh God and goode men groweth the fruyt Charite (XVI. 4-9).

Here, the tree's leaves are faithful words of the law of the Church. Humble and kind speech provide the blossoms and ultimately the fruit of Charite. Will's subsequent desire to see this tree of Charite and Anima's description that it grows "amyddes mannes body" and that men work "under Piers the Plowman" to plow it causes Will to fall into a dream within a dream.[162] While asleep, Will sees Piers and begins to speak to him, asking "I preie thee — whi stonde thise piles here?" (XVI 24). When he sees that the branches of the tree of Charite are held up by props, Will asks a surprisingly intelligent question. As Nicolas Jacobs points out, the tree is at first represented as a young thing, and "three props seem excessive and incongruous for an 'ympe' or 'plante', whether shoot, sapling,

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[162] This is not so in C-text. Piers and Anima have been replaced with Liberum Arbitrium. Will does not fall into a dream within a dream here and Piers is not mentioned at all.

slip, or scion. . ."[163] At Will's question, Piers embarks on a lengthy explanation of the three props, which are the Power of God, the Wisdom of God, and the Holy Ghost. Where the tree of Wrathe is merely grafted onto people, the tree of Charite has roots and divine ordination. It seems young, but also seems to grow before the reader's eyes, bearing flowers and fruit and needing those three strong props. In this inner dream, Langland starts to establish a balance between Wrathe's wicked grafting and Charite's rapidly growing sapling. Wrathe's "ympes" took hold quickly but also were seemingly dug out quickly, whereas Charite's roots grow in the ground of goodness (XVI. 63).

In an echo of Repentaunce's attempts to silence Wrathe, the World and the Flesh try to bite off the flowers and leaves of the tree of Charite. Piers tells Will,

> The World is a wikked wynd to hem that wolden truthe:
> Coveitise comth of that wynd and crepeth among the leves
> And forfret neigh the fruyt thorugh manye faire sightes
> [. . .]
> The flessh is a fel wynd, and in flouryng tyme,
> Through likynge and lustes so loude he gynneth blowe
> That it norisseth nyce sightes and som tyme wordes,
> And wikkede werkes therof, wormes of synne,
> And forbiteth the blosmes right to the bare leves (XVI 27-9).

The Flesh and the World conspire to create images and words that might keep Charite from bearing fruit. Yet, Piers defends the tree with the "*Potencia*" and "*Sapiencia*" of God and "thorugh preieres and thorugh penaunces and Goddes passion in mynde" (XVI 38). Against ill-speech, one needs to rehearse prayers and replay the humanity and death of Christ in one's mind.[164] For Piers Plowman, praying and thinking on God's passion

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[163] Jacobs, "The Three Props of Langland's Tree of Charity," 127.

[164] This moment is powerfully reminiscent of Julian's struggle against the demon from her ugly showing. There, as we will see, she defeated the demon by repeating "spech of Cristes passion and rehersyng the feyth of the holy church" (16.70). In both visionary events, speech and thought are effective; they cause demons to lose power. See

protects the tree of Charite long enough to see it somewhat in fruit. Wrathe's tree scatters its leaves to the wind and sows discord, but Piers protects Charite's tree, keeping it whole and secure. Just as Wrathe simultaneously could exist and not exist, so too the same "rules" must apply to Charite. Charite's leaves are biblical texts but they are also mediated by Langland's leaves. So while Langland's text perhaps provides some safety and distance from Wrathe, in the same token it provides distance and danger with regard to Charite.

In contrast to Wrathe's contorted and disturbing speech, Langland has other characters use good and *kynde* speech. *Lowe speche* turns in the mouth of Piers Plowman to gentle speech. As he tells the pilgrims how to come to Truth, Piers says they will come to a castle where "alle the houses ben hiled, halles and chambres, / With no leed but with love and lowe speche, as bretheren [of o wombe]" (V 590-1). The low speech here is community-building speech and contrasts with the friars' misleading speech. He goes on to warn the pilgrims, "Be war thanne of Wrathe-thee, that wikked sherewe / For he hath envye to hym that in thyn herte sitteth, / And poketh forth pride to preise thiselven" (V 609-11). All kinds of speech are generative, even internal, contemplative speech-acts. By placing Wrathe inside the body, near Truthe's seat in a man's heart, Langland locates self-praise also in that inner space. As the reader imaginatively interiorizes Langland's text, she is given two warnings. The first is that even on the path to Truthe, one may encounter Wrathe's kin, and the second is that language has constitutive power, even if it is not spoken.

Ch. 5.

Memorative Reading

In addition to creating analogous trees, associated with speech, for Wrathe and Charite, Langland links low (homely or kind) speech with the multivalent "lomb" by appealing to the rhetorical strategy of stock phrases. In choosing the language of "stock phrase," to describe Langland's work, I am guided by Wittig and Baugh's demonstrations of the importance of stock phrases in Middle English romance literature.[165] It is unsurprising that a poetic element common to romance poetry would find its way into *Piers Plowman*. After all, as Stephen Shepherd, Anne Middleton, and others have shown, *Piers* has a strong affinity with the genre.[166] Baugh saw the stock phrase as a stable entity that allowed jongleurs to improvise poetry on the spot. He notes, "The secret of this apparently extraordinary ability lies in the fact that improvisation is not a sheer act of creative composition, but the adroit utilization and recombination of elements in a well-stocked memory. These elements are of two kinds: formulas and themes."[167] Stock phrases may be stable, but they are not limiting and Baugh finds them capable of endless reuse. Bernard Huppé argues that Langland used "word play to achieve a large coherency of design and pattern."[168] What Huppé identifies as word play is not mere punning, but

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[165] See Wittig, Susan Albert, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances (*Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

[166] Stephen Shepherd, "Langland's Romances," *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays,* Ed. Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith (London: Routledge, 2001): 69-82. Anne Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman,*" *Middle English Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, Ed. David Lawton (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982): 101-23. See also Wilbur Gaffney, "The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in Piers Plowman," *PMLA* 46.1 (1931): 155-68.

[167] Baugh, A. C., "Improvisation in the Middle English Romance." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 103.3 (1959): 418–454 (419).

[168] Huppé, "Petrus," 172.

the complicated reuse and redefinition of language throughout the course of the poem. In this sense, Langland combines what Huppé calls word play and Baugh calls stock phrases to create phrases whose meanings are both stable and shift the more frequently they are used. For Langland, the stock phrase is characterized by its ability to destabilize language and reading in productive ways. It's not quite the stock phrase of romance literature and in fact relies on evoking and then undermining that notion of linguistic stability or reliability. In *Piers*, the stock phrase relies on the readers capacity to remember and reread the phrase, even if it appears in a modified form. For visionary literature more broadly, stock phrases seem to be particularly useful ways to flag a temporary pause in comprehension. Julian of Norwich does this with a phrase "benedicite dominus" and even Margery Kempe uses the phrase "the creature of whom this book is written." When Julian marks her place in the vision with "benedicite dominus," she returns in the Long Text to offer fuller understandings of the vision at that moment (I deal more fully with this in the next chapter).

Stock phrases allow obscurities to be introduced in a controlled way; they may hint at language's limits without reaching those limits. This is interesting if the phrase itself is static (if it does not change when it is reintroduced) and it is especially interesting if the phrase itself changes slightly with each iteration (as it does in *Piers*). The phrase in question here – "low as a lomb and lovely of speche" – occurs in all three versions of Piers.[169] As it reappears deeper into the narrative, the phrase applies to Truth, then Dobet, and finally obliquely to Christ and directly to "we," the community of those addressed by

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[169] Except for the final instance, where the entire Passus occurs after the A-text has ended.

Scripture in Passus 11. This phrase is a way of representing how individuals talk without presenting their actual speech, a rhetorical device of which Langland seems particularly fond. In the first instance, Piers tells the pilgrims that

'[Truthe] is as low as a lomb and lovely of speche;
And yif ye wil wite where that he duelleth,
I shal wisse you wel, ryghth to his place.' (A. Pas. VI. 39-41)

'[Truthe] is as lowe as a lomb and lovelich of speche.
And if ye wilneth to wite where that he dwelleth,
I shal wisse yow [the wey wel right] to his place' (B. Pas. V.553-55).

"[Truthe] is as louh as a lombe and leel of his tonge,
And ho-so wilneth to wyte where that Treuth woneth
Y wol wissen yow wel ryht to his place' (C Pas. VII. 197-199).[170]

The valence changes slightly in the C-text, which replaces 'lovely' with 'leel' and 'speche' with 'tonge.'[171] A 'leel tonge' is a faithful tongue, speech that rehearses true things according to authority, which would be in keeping with the more careful orthodoxy of C. 'Lovely speche," as rehearsed in A and B has a slightly broader meaning. While for all three versions, Truth is humble and speaks pleasantly, Langland distinguishes between passive speech and active tongue. This phrase may not seem particularly noteworthy in the first instance, as it is not unusual for Langland to begin descriptions of his characters with an account of the way they speak. Lechery, for instance, talks with "laughynge chiere / And with pryvee speche and peyntede wordes" (XX 114-15). In fact, this phrase only starts to be noticeable when Langland reuses it next as he describes Dobet.

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[170] I have included the lines from the A-text, though it is within a believable range of scribal and authorial variation, to show that the change in the C-text may be slight, but seems to be a significant shift.

[171] There may be a tendency in C to replace other descriptions with "leel." Compare B V.600 with C VIII.238.

Passus 8 in the B-text finds Will awake again and wandering about searching for Dowel. After a disheartening encounter with friars, Will lays at a wood's edge and, lulled by the sound of birdsong, he falls asleep. As he wakes into his dream, he says "a muche man, as me thoughte, lik to myselve / Cam and called me by my kynde name" (VIII 70). Langland here makes language do double-duty. Neither "thoughte" nor "kynde name" are proper names, but they call to mind their more accurate counterparts. Five lines later we find that the "muche man" is in fact Thought and Will has already unknowingly named him (*as me thoughte*). After this linguistic play, Langland drops the stock phrase back into the narrative. Will tells Thought, "thow koudest me wisse / Where that Dowel dwelleth, and do me to knowe" (VIII 76-7). In his answering speech, Thought outlines what Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are. He says of Dobet that

'[He] is as low as a lomb, and lovely of speche;
Whil he hath of his owyn he delyth ther most nede is' (A. Pas IX. 78-79)

'[He] is as lowe as a lomb and lovelich of speche,
And helpeth alle men after that hem nedeth.' (B. Pas. VIII. 85-6)

'[He] is logh as a lomb and loueliche of speche
And helpeth alle men of that he may spare' (C. Pas X. 83-4)

While the phrase is preserved across the three versions, the tone of Dobet's charity shifts subtly with each regeneration. The A-text suggests that as long as Dobet has anything, he will share with those who have need. B insists that Dobet will help all who need, eliminating any reference to his own goods. In its final iteration, Dobet's charity considers not those who have needs, but what he might be able to spare. Anne Scott suggests that "Langland scrutinizes the act of giving to the poor. In some ways this appears as a *sine qua non* for salvation. His text repeatedly declares that failure to pass on

God's gifts to the needy negates the spiritual effects of prayer."[172] As he makes Dobet

give only according to what he might spare, Langland highlights Dobet's middle-status in

the C-text. Dobest might give to all who have need, but Dobet only gives according to his

means.

Dobet's charity is not the only significant change in this section of C that seems to

indicate Langland's appreciation of his readership's interpretive capacities. That is, the

stock phrase and the textual shifts around it only "works" if the reader remembers it or

rereads *Piers* and catches the phrase on her rereading. A and B both go on to say that

Dobet

> . . . precheth to the peple Seint Poules wordes—
> *Libenter suffertis insipientes cum sitis ipsi sapientes*:
> [Ye wise], suffreth the unwise with yow for to libbe,
> And with glad wille dooth hem good, for so God yow hoteth (B VIII 91-4).

Langland inserts the English translation seamlessly, almost forgetting to note that he has

changed languages in these few lines. Moreover, his translation of the biblical verse (2

Cor. 11:19) is interesting, as translated literally, it reads "You gladly suffer fools, while

you yourself are wise." The sense one has when reading Paul's letter is that this is a

censure of the Corinthians; the wisdom spoken of here is ironic. Yet Langland turns it

into a compliment and a command from God. Dobet is performing a bad reading when he

literally translates words that are meant to be ironic. The C-text, meanwhile, introduces

and defines the Latin noticeably differently. There Thought says,

> . . . precheth to the peple seynt Paules wordes:
> *Libenter suffertis insipientes, &c.*
> 'Ye wordliche wyse, vnwyse that ye soffre,
> Lene hem and loue hem,' this Latyn is to mene (C X 89-92).[173]

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[172] Scott, "*Piers Plowman* and the Value of Poverty," 143.

[173] It would be impossible to say that the truncated &c. is an authorial

In the C-text, the people receive far fewer of St. Paul's words and lose the ironic "cum sitis ipsi sapientes" and the command from God. Gone also is the literality of the B-text's translation. Instead, Langland offers subordinated clauses and misorders the sentence in a way that almost eliminates the fool all together. Gone also is the bad reading that Dobet provided in the C-text. As written, the sentence may be literally translated from Middle English as, "'You worldly wise, [the] unwise that you suffer, give to them and love them,' this Latin is to mean." By the C-text, one need not live with the unwise, or even have a glad will when giving them charity. Thought's contorted syntax instead emphasizes the suffering the wise might endure because of the unwise. Even as he removes fully half of the Latin aphorism, Langland calls more attention to its otherness in the C-text when Thought says, "this Latyn is to mene." Kathryn Kerby-Fulton suggests that Langland uses coded writing to speak to multiple audiences. She writes, "there can be little doubt of the existence of coded writing in the poem . . . Its prophetic passages also abound in obscurities which Langland must have expected *some* readers to be able to construe (or more precisely, decode)."[174] The Latin is not gone from C; it is present in the "&c" and in the new translation. One only need know the Pauline cipher to discover it and thereby to discover Langland's changes to it through translation. Stephanie Batkie suggests, "the poem's vernacular difficulty comes from Langland's efforts to distance

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intervention, as it is a common practice for scribes to shorten the text in that way. Indeed, shortening the the Latin phrases is more common in C. However, it is not necessarily simply an adoption in favor of saving time and space. Langland could be using the &c. purposefully, as it is not consistently practiced across the C-text, which also often includes long Latin phrases.

[174] Kerby-Fulton, "Bibliographic Ego," 112.

readers from the text so that they can engage in productive *ennaratio* that will shift their devotional perspective. Moreover, Langland looks to create readers who will engage in a productive and active search for meaning."[175] Both B and C encourage this productive reading by pairing the Latin with a vernacular half-translation, an obscurity that needs further explanation to be understood.

As it introduces obscurities and then either parses them or leaves them to the reader to interpret, this section is particularly reminiscent of the medieval *ars praedicandi,* the art of preaching. Just as romances use stock phrases to improvise on a theme or signify emotional or social change in the text, medieval preaching manuals suggest linguistic techniques for engaging a listener's memory. Siegfried Wenzel suggests that Langland was indebted to preaching rhetoric, although there is no direct evidence for a source or sources. Rather, he writes, "we must therefore think of the poem's sermon background as a diffuse and widely dispersed influence, furnishing commonplaces and perhaps even structural patterns that floated from pulpit to pulpit and settled in many written texts."[176] Langland does not seem interested in writing a sermon or even anything like a sermon, but in his double recourse to the *ars praedicandi* and stock phrases, Langland can make use of his reader's memory and also cultural memory. The memory markers allow the text to occupy a liminal space between sacred and secular, as it uses literary practices suitable to both kinds of writing. Indeed, Alan Fletcher suggests that "we consider the debt of Langland to the culture of the preachers less in terms of substantive and formal appropriation than in terms of a more radical inspiration, a shared compositional ethic

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[175] Batkie, "Learning to Read," 175.

[176] Wenzel, "Medieval Sermons," 168.

expressed in comparable (though not, of course, entirely commensurable) textual dimensions."[177] In his borrowing from sermon-writing tactics, Langland focuses on those elements that make his writing more structured and also more accessible through that composition. For instance, Ranulph Higdon, in the *Ars Componendi Sermones*, emphasizes structuring the sermon in such a way that the audience can hold it in their minds. He says, "it is necessary in any theme that its meaningful and significant components allow for authorities on which verbal and actual parallels can easily be brought to bear. Otherwise he will be a foolish preacher who too often limits himself to barren words . . ."[178] Higden goes on to suggest that the way to introduce such parallelism is through linguistic links. For instance, if one preaches on following the path of God, he may decide to emphasize the path and says that "if someone is preaching in English, *to go* can be used instead of *to walk,* since in English the words are interchangeable."[179] Because he sees "to go" as a verb part that will relate to a listener's memory associations with the word "path," Higden suggests that this is a more appropriate and productive word choice.[180] In his adaptation of *sermones*, Langland employs words and phrases carefully and expects a reader who can look for linguistic significance and remember or reconsider repeated words and phrases.

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[177] Fletcher, "Essential (Ephemeral) William Langland," 64.

[178] Higden, 44.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Of note, Higden cautions against such wordplay in Latin if there there are educated men present who would know that "to go" and "to walk" are not actually perfectly synonymous. "It is not proscribed to do this in the mother tongue, unless learned men are present who know the Scriptures and note the verbal incongruity and, on account of this, ridicule the preacher" (45).

Langland's use of dualistic language thus requires the reader to remember the previous use of 'low as a lomb' while maintaining her newfound understanding of Dobet. Passus 5 shows that Truthe is equally as generous as Dobet and Piers tells the pilgrims, "[Truthe] is the presteste paiere that povere men knoweth: / He withhalt noon hewe his hire that he ne hath it at even" (B V 551-2).[181] Just as Dobet will give to each man according to his need (or Dobet's capacity), so too Truthe pays poor men what they have earned at the end of the day. Similarly, when both the pilgrims in Passus 5 and Will in Passus 8 ask about Truthe and Dowel, they do not ask about their characters, but simply where they dwell. The pilgrims ask Piers, "koudestow wissen us the wey wher that wye dwelleth?" (V 533) and Will tells Thought, "thow koudest me wisse / Wher that Dowel dwelleth" (VIII 76-7). Both requests (though Will's is more of a test to see if Thought really is who he says) result not in direct fulfillment, but in circumlocution. For Piers and Thought, the place is perhaps less important than the nature of the thing sought.

At any rate, Thought never tells Will where Dowel et al. dwell and Piers ostensibly does, but in reality he provides a nonsensical map, one that is physically impossible to follow. It is not, however, impossible for the imagination or the memory to follow the map. Hanne Bewernick proposes, "We can see that Langland expects the reader to bring a specific fount of knowledge to the text, a store of linking images which can be accessed, relatively automatically, when certain keywords/symbols are produced."[182]

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[181] In the C-text, this line points even farther back in a reference to C III 301-10. In particular, III 307-8 reads, "as by the book that byt nobody with-holde / The huyre of his hewe ouer eue til amorwe . . ." This is not in either A or B and perhaps provides evidence of Langland's growing interest in producing a self-referential, endlessly refineable text.

[182] Bewernick, 81. For more background on how readers would come to have this fount of knowledge, see Scase, "Latin Composition Lessons." For more on the medieval

When he reuses the "low as a lomb" phrase, Langland marks a trail that points back into

the text and back into the reader's memory of this and other texts she has encountered.[183]

The final use of "low as a lomb" completes the link between Truthe, Dobet, and

"us." Scripture, in the middle of a long sermon on who will be saved and how, tells Will,

(not in A)

So bi hise werkes thei wisten that he was Jesus,
Ac by clothyng thei knewe hym noght, ne by carpynge of tonge.
And al was ensample, for sooth, to us synfulle here,
That we sholde [lowe be] and loveliche of speche
And apparaille us noght over proudly - for pilgrymes are we alle. (B. XI. 236-40)[184]

So by his werkes thei wisten that he was Iesu
Ac by clothyng they knewe hym nat, so caytifliche he yede.
And al was ensample sothly to vs synfole here
That we sholde be low and loueliche, and lele vch man til other,[185]
And pacient as pilgrimes for pilgrimes are we alle. (C. XII. 127-31)

In this last instance, the phrase has changed slightly for B and has almost disintegrated in

C; neither contains a direct reference to a lamb. In C, all references to speech ("carpynge

of tongue" and "loveliche speche") are also removed. Instead, Langland emphasizes

Christ's humble clothing and earthly status, reintroducing his new-found 'lele.' So it is

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ability to interpret wordplay, see Alford, "The Grammatical Metaphor."

[183] In a way, this also connects nicely with Augustine's ordering of visions. The second kind of vision, to which dream belongs, relies on the movement of memory to construct meaning. Augustine writes, "In this case we see nothing with the eyes of the body, but in the soul behold corporeal images: whether true images, representing the bodies that we have seen and still hold in memory, or fictitious images, fashioned by the power of thought" (*Ad Litteram* 12.6.15).

[184] This section occurs after A-text breaks off.

[185] This phrasing occurs in a similar form in C, Pas. XX. There, the Devil and Gobelyne are chatting and Gobelyne says, "For the body, whiles hit on bones yede, about was hit euere / To lere men to be lele and vch man to louye other; / The which lyf and lawe, be hit longe y-vysed, / Hit shal vndo vs deueles and down bryngen vs all" (337-40).

that readers of the C-text are not encouraged to make lovely speech, but to be low, loving and, in another addition, faithful.[186] No longer are they to emulate Christ's tongue, but his poor life. With these omissions in the C-text, Langland quiets — almost silences — his reader, even as he silences himself.

Earlier, Langland named without naming "thoughte," and here he writes without writing "lomb." Scripture proclaims that Christ provided an example ("al was ensample, for sooth, to us synfulle here") so that the "as a lomb" half of the stock phrase has already been implied by the time the reader comes to the place it should be. With Thought, there was a one-to-one correlation between the non-name and the thing later named. Here, the connection is more abstract; Langland deploys another of Bewernick's memory maps. The reader must first suppose that Langland is in fact making use of a truncated form of the stock phrase. She then must supply Christ, read as lamb, to complete the absent adverbial clause. In her search through her memory to find lambs, the reader might also remember the opening lines to the poem — "I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were" (B. Prol. 2) where the narrator dresses himself as a shepherd or perhaps as a sheep. This in turn might initiate the reader's contemplation on the shepherd/sheep and its allegorical relation to Christ and Piers. As Bernewick points out, "one of the ways in which Langland aims to aid the reader in following the winding (in fact, spiral) tale is to employ many (then) familiar mnemonic lists, presumably already securely anchored in the

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[186] For more on patience and *Piers*, see Anna P. Baldwin, "The Triumph of Patience in Julian of Norwich and Langland," *Langland, the Mystics, and the Medieval English Religious Tradition*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 71-83. For more on poverty in *Piers*, see Anne Scott, "'Nevere noon so nedy ne poverer deide': *Piers Plowman* and the Value of Poverty," YLS 15 (2001), 141-66.

mind."[187] Tracing the lamb to Christ, to Piers, to the narrator may prove to be useful work for the reader as she actively engages her memory and imagination to probe the meaning of the later passus. In the C-text, the reader's task is all the more challenging if she heeds the implicit advice for silence— though in silencing her mouth she may need not also silence her thoughts. Rather than lingering in written words, the C-text points outside itself, outside its dream, to the real work of providing charity and suffering patiently.

Controlling Language

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Langland seems incapable of deciding whether written language is helpful or harmful. The past few examples have illustrated that tension and it is never quite resolved. At the end of Passus X, at least, Will seems no closer to understanding that he does not comprehend the world of his vision. In fact, his uninterrupted hundred-line speech has made Will over confident in his linguistic skills and his faith in the power of written words. He tells Scripture, "Austyn the olde, and heighest of the foure, / Seide thus in a sermon — I seigh it writen ones — / 'Ecce ipsi idiote rapiunt celum ubi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur' . . ." (*Behold, the idiots fly to heaven while we wise ones are drowned in hell* - X 454-5). If Augustine's name alone does not give him enough authority, Will amplifies it by specifically identifying it as coming from a written source. Yet, as James Simpson points out, "Will repeatedly turns his reading against the value of reading."[188] All this authority is inadvertently undercut by the content of Augustine's Latin—the unlearned more easily gain heaven than the wise.

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[187] Bewernick, 84

[188] Simpson, "Desire and the Scriptural text," 223.

William Rogers finds it ironic that "in spite of himself, [Will] is an intellectual. But he is an incompletely educated intellectual."[189] As will become more apparent with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a danger of incomplete education is its limited sense of knowledge. Margery Kempe places absolute faith in written texts because they are repositories of what little understanding she might have. Here too, Will trusts without fully understanding the written word.

Will goes on to channel the priest in the pardon-tearing scene when he explains,

And is to mene to Englissh men, moore ne lesse,
Arn none rather yravysshed from the righte bileve
Than are thise konnynge clerkes that knowe manye bokes,
Ne none sonner ysaved, ne sadder of bileve
Than plowmen and postours and povere commune laborers,
Souteres and shepherdes — swiche lewed juttes
Percen with a *Paternoster* the paleys of hevene
And passen purgatorie penauncelees at hir hennes partyng
Into the blisse of paradis for hir pure bileve
That inparfitly here knewe and ek lyved. (X 456-62)

While he may want to be Piers, the honest plowman, Will cannot help but adopt the persona of the clerk. His nine-line translation of Augustine's single line makes questionable his aside that the Latin means no more nor any less than what he will go on to say. Coming as it does at the end of one of Will's more extravagant displays of his scholarly powers, the reader is more likely to associate him with those book-loving clerks than with poor laborers. Further his use of the word "yravysshed" is somewhat problematic, as one might think that he, in his role as Dreamer, is currently ravished with the divine sight. The irony of his position is utterly lost on Will, who ends this

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[189] Rogers, *Intrepretation,* 221.

monologue by saying, "Right so lewed men and of litel kunnyng / Selden falle thei so foule and so fer in synne / As clerkes of Holy Kirke that kepen Cristes tresor — / The which is mannes soule to save, as God seith in the Gospel: / 'Ite vos in vineam meam'" (X 472-6). He does seem to know what Augustine means. Will understands the literal meaning of the words but not anything more than that (more bad reading in the mode of Dobet). He offers a reading of them without pausing to realize that he is enacting the so-called wise.

Will's obliviousness and satisfaction with his own exegesis makes all the more cutting Scripture's immediate and derisive "multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt" (*Many people know many things but do not know themselves* - XI 3).[190] Her scorn here throws Will into a silent rage and he says, "tho wepte I for wo and wrathe of hir speche / And in a wynkynge w[o]rth til I was aslepe" (XI 4-5). In spite of his rage, Will does not seem to recognize just what is so important in what Scripture says. He does not translate her words or reinterpret them, just weeps at them. In a moment evocative of Margery Kempe, Will responds with a nonverbal, vocal action.[191] The reader is left to parse out why Scripture would respond thus and why her response would affect Will so deeply. Gillian Rudd suggests that Scripture's censure attempts to show Will that "self-knowledge is . . . not only a knowledge of one's character acquired by introspection, but also a recognition of the mass of desires and emotions, weaknesses and possible strengths which make up humanity."[192] When Scripture's "skile" sends Will into the first of his inner dreams, he

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[190] In C, this comes long before the "brevis" speech. See XI 160-65.

[191] For my discussion of nonverbal language in Kempe's text, see Chapter 5.

[192] Rudd, *Managing Language*, 172.

clearly begins to recognize those things Rudd outlines as important. Yet, he still does not see the problem of knowing many things and not knowing himself; that is, Will may be able to gloss the Bible, but he does not know whether he is Piers or the priest.

When Will cannot fix himself in the text, the reader finds the space to interpret him and settle him as more or less like Piers. Míceál Vaughan points us toward the Dreamer's last waking at the end of Passus XX. He suggests that this moment indicates Will's shift from a passive sleeper to a contrite narrator. In particular, Vaughan notes of the Easter awakening, "at this moment in *Piers*, then, we must be alert to the gap between intention and performance, and we should also be alert to the moral distance between the Dreamer's articulated desire 'to be houseled' and his fulfilling the penitential antecedents required for a permissible enactment of this sacramental integration into the Christian community."[193] The gap to which Vaughan so skillfully draws our attention becomes the potential space for the reader's own action. Where the Dreamer fails and where his failure opens up the text provide invitation to the reader to recuperate that failure.

I take for my primary example of such an invitation the introduction of Ymaginitif in Passus XI and his lecture to Will on the value of silence. This section highlights both Will's failure at discovering what is Dowel and the reader's subsequent place for intervention. After his fight with Reson concerning mankind, Will awakens from the dream within a dream and once again returns to his play on the meaning of *metels*. He says,

> Tho caught I colour anoon and comsed to ben ashamed,
> And awaked therwith. Wo was me thanne
> That I in metels ne myghte moore have yknowen.

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[193] Vaughan, "Til I gan Awake," 180.

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And thanne seide I to myself, and chydde that tyme,
‘Now I woot what Dowel is,’ quod I, ‘by deere God, as me thynketh!’ (XI 403-7)

Will’s misreading of his own dream here comes quickly to the forefront. His repeated self-references and his insistence that he could not have known more, rather than learned more, provide a puzzling preamble to what he then goes on to claim: that he now knows what Dowel is.[194] If indeed Will’s quest has been to know what is Dowel, then his self-abasement seems to be verbal stumble.

Continuing his trip, Will then reports his own thoughts in the form of speech, “quod I.” Will, forgetful that he always has an audience, thinks to be speaking to himself. Yet Ymaginatif is there, hovering just out of Will’s sight until he looks up and Ymaginitif asks what Will thinks Dowel is: “‘To se muche and suffre moore, certes,’ quod I, ‘is Dowel’” (XI 410). Speaking with certainty here, Will indicates that his knowledge of Dowel has come to him through his own experience. Certainly to this point Will has seen much and, if he understands suffer not as A.C.V. Schmidt understands it as patient waiting, but as loss, then Will must think himself to have suffered as well.[195] Yet his misunderstanding of his own definition draws Will back into the quest. Ymaginitif chides him,

Haddestow suffred . . . slepynge tho thow were,
Thow sholdest have knowen that Clergie kan and conceyved moore thorugh
	Reson;
For Reson wolde have reherced thee right as Clergie seide.
Ac for thyn entremetynge here artow forsake:
Philosophus esses, si tacuisses (XI 411-14).

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[194] C changes this moment significantly. Upon waking, Will says, “Slepynge hadde Y grace / To wyte what Dowel is, ac wakynge neuere!” (C XIII 216-7).

[195] Schmidt, “Inner Dreams,” 34-7.

With this conditional "haddestow suffred," Ymaginitif immediately undermines Will's claim at knowing what Dowel is. Schmidt points out that "to be able to understand suffering, he first has to suffer, since the 'meaning' of *suffraunce* cannot be grasped in any other way."[196] Will's misinterpretation of "suffre" thus causes him to experience Schmidt's *suffraunce*, as he falls out of the dream and comes no further to understanding the nature of Dowel than he was when he began his quest.

It is not enough for Ymaginitif to scorn Will's poor definition of Dowel, but he goes on to link Will's bad speech with Adam's –

> Adam, the whiles he spak noght, hadde paradis at wille;
> Ac whan he mamelede aboute mete and entremeted to knowe
> The wisedom and the wit of God, he was put fram blisse.
> And right so ferde Reson bi thee— thow with thi rude speche
> Lakkedest and losedest thyng that longed noght the to doone. (XI 415-9)

In addition to Langland's punning here (whiles . . . wille), this is a significant switch from the Genesis myth of Adam's taking the fruit from Eve. Adam does not ask about how to gain God's knowledge or mumble about meat and dreams; he simply eats.[197] In representing a broad interpretation of the Genesis story, Ymaginitif makes Will's sin into Adam's sin. Certainly Will has spent much of his waking time mumbling about *metels*, and Langland's wordplay must be intentional, particularly given Will's contention when he woke that he wished he had "in metels" "yknowen" more.

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[196] Ibid., 34.

[197] Genesis 3:6, "vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo qui comedit." (*And the woman saw that the tree was delightful for eating and pleasing to the eye. She took the fruit from it and she ate it. She gave it to her man, who also ate it.*)

Surely Ymaginitif's caution, "ac for thyn entremetynge here artow forsake: /

Philosophus esses, si tacuisses" should apply to the reader as well. This is a stern

warning against meddling, yet it should be remembered that the reader is, at least in terms

of the narrative, often silent. Writing on the riddling contests of *Piers*, Curtis Gruenler

argues that "readers of *Piers Plowman* find themselves in the middle of a high-stakes

game of interpretation. Knowledge of prior riddle contests makes the invitation to this

game more recognizable and can illuminate the models Langland offers . . . of how to

play."[198] Langland embeds directions for how to interact with his text in the text. While

Ymaginitif may be insistent that Will would be better silent, Will does not actually

become silent. The Passus ends with Will acknowledging why Ymaginitif chastised him

and then begging Ymaginitif to share his name. Stephanie Batkie argues that "Langland

looks to create readers who will engage in a productive and active search for

meaning."[199] In this sense, the reader needs Will to keep misunderstanding and

misinterpreting his vision. She needs Will to speak that she might balance his speech with

her own silence. The reader's active search for understanding is only possible through the

Dreamer's failure.

It seems, then, that it is not Will's function to learn, but to give the Reader the

opportunity to learn. As he draws out the interaction with Ymaginitif, Langland illustrates

all the more clearly the need for a reader's hand in the text. After discovering that it

would be better for him to be silent, Will turns to recording the things that he sees as

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[198] Gruenler, "Read Like A Fool," 592.

[199] Batkie, "Learning to Read," 175. In this article, Batkie uses the introduction of
Anima to illustrate a similar point to the one I am making here.

markers of veracity. Once Ymaginitif pauses long enough for Will to speak, he says that

he has "yseyn" (XI 433) the effects of shame often and that he "seigh wel" (XII 20) that

Ymaginitif was honest. Ymaginitif underscores Will's visual orientation when he

declares,

> Clergie and kynde wit cometh of sighte and techyng,
> As the Book bereth witnesse to burnes that kan rede:
> *Quod scimus loquimur, quod vidimus testamur.*
> Of *quod scimus* cometh clergie, a konnynge of hevene,
> And of *quod vidimus* cometh kynde wit, of sighte of diverse peple
> (Pas XII 64-8).[200]

This seems to indicate that Will has found the correct way to react to his vision; he

simply need look at it to understand it. Yet, Ymaginitif speaks in obscurity here. He

limits the knowledge contained in the book to those who can read and goes on to cite that

knowledge in Latin, limiting the reader even farther. Moreover, as Gillian Rudd points

out, "[Ymaginitif] has moved on from a defense of Reson . . . through an appreciation of

both learning and intuition to an unequivocal preference for learning."[201] If it is true that

Ymaginitif at least prefers learning, then why does he command Will to become silent in

his quest to know what is Dowel? Partly this is because Will is not interested in learning

but in knowing.

When he faces the gluttonous friar — another foolish interpreter— at Conscience's

banquet, Will becomes enraged and, though he is quiet for a while because of Patience's

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[200] The C-text is noticeably different here: "Ac clergie cometh bote of syhte and
kynde wit of sterres, / As to be bore or bygete in such a constillacioun, / That wit wexeth
therof and other wyrdes bothe: / *Vultus huius seculi sunt subiecti vultibus celestibus.* / So
grace is a gift of god and kynde wit a chaunce / And clergie a connynge of kynde wittes
techyng" (XIV 30-4).

[201] Rudd, *Managing Language*, 191.

warning wink,[202] eventually asks the friar, "What is Dowel, sire doctour? [. . .] Is Dobest

any penaunce?" (XIII 103). Of course the friar's understanding of Dowel is no closer to

the truth; he uses rhetorical strategies to offer a definition that makes no attempt at saying

what Dowel is, only what it is not: to do well is to do no evil. Excitedly, Will chastises

the friar, "by this day, sire doctour . . . thanne be ye noght in Dowel! / For ye han harmed

us two in that ye eten the puddyng, / Mortrews and oother mete — and we no morsel

hadde" (XIII 106-8). In his anger, Will focuses on the very thing that keeps the friar from

understanding Dowel and shows himself to be no closer to a performance of Dowel than

the glutton.[203] Will does not ask the friar for a definition of Dowel because he thinks he

could actually learn from the friar. Instead, Will asks because he seems to know what the

friar will say and know how to respond to his hypocrisy.

Silencing Will with yet another wink, itself a silent form of communication,

Conscience invites the glutton to respond more fully to the question, "What is Dowel and

Dobet" (XIII 115). The glutton responds, curiously, by remarking that "Dowel [is] do as

clerkes techeth; And Dobet is he that techeth and travailleth to teche othere; / And Dobest

doth hymself so as he seith and precheth / *Quis facit et docuerit magnus vocabitur in*

regno celorum" (*He who is active and who teaches will be called great in the kingdom of*

heaven - XIII 116-8). Harking back to Ymaginitif's earlier proclivity for learning, the

friar expands his simple aphorism to an orthodox outline of the three Dos. In Passus XII,

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[202] Winking is a favorite form of communication in *Piers*. Meed winks at a lawyer
(B IV 152), Waryn Wisdom winks at Meed (B IV 154), Patience winks at Will (B XIII
86), Conscience winks at Patience (B XIII 113), Faith winks at Will (B XVIII 21).
Langland also uses the variant of wynke that means "dozing" a few times (A V 3 and
212), (B XI 4), and (C Prol. 11). Burrow, "Gestures and Looks."

[203] Here too again we find Will obsessed with "metels."

Ymaginitif tells Will, "Forthi lakke thow nevere logik, lawe ne hise custumes, / Ne countreplede clerkes — I counseille thee for evere! / For as a man may noght see that mysseth hise eighen, / Na moore kan no clerk but if he caughte it first thorugh bokes" (XII 97-100). If we accept Ymaginitif's authorizing of clerks on the basis of their "book learning," then the friar's definition of Dowel becomes inextricably linked with textual interaction. The *disputatio* that follows find Clergie, Conscience, and even Patience also defining Dowel in relation to texts. Clergie says that he cannot prove what is Dowel and that even Piers takes "dilige deum" and "domine quis habitabit" as his only texts (XIII 125-7). Conscience suggests that Piers would not speak against Holy Writ (perhaps a text, perhaps a person) and Patience quotes Love saying, "disce, doce; dilige inimicos" (XIII 137). Clergie argues that there are two extremes and that Dobest lies between them, while Conscience and Patience argue that in fact, Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are much more closely related and together form a triad. All this leads into Patience's famous riddle, which I will not attempt to solve but will note that it demands to be solved and is not ever solved in the poem itself.[204] Will's quest to know ends in riddles and textual mysteries from which the reader could learn.

The Reader's Work

All this is to say, that the poem's visionary mode establishes work for the reader. James Simpson suggests that "Langland represents a dynamic reading process . . . whereby reader and text interact, and whereby the reader's own desires and the

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[204] See Gruenler, "Read Like a Fool," 687 and Galloway "The Rhetoric of Riddling in Late-Medieval England: The 'Oxford' Riddles, the Secretum Philosophorum, and the Riddles in Piers Plowman," *Speculum* 70 (1995), 68-105.

contemporary experience contribute substantially to the reading arrived at."[205] Here

Simpson argues that Will models reading for his reader in his replies to Scripture and the

other personifications — that he replies is a kind of reading. This is exactly the mode of

reading and writing presented by Julian of Norwich and creatively reimagined by the

Pearl-Poet. While *Pearl* offered a text with a poor internal reader (the Jeweler), *Piers*

Plowman offers an actively engaged, though often wrong, reader.[206] Just as we will see in

the next chapter, Julian foregrounded gaps in her understanding or her linguistic

representation of her understanding by indicating that she could not say more, so too Will

marks his own incomplete speech. The final section of this chapter will consider a few

moments where Will finds himself unable to say more about his vision.

In Passus XI, Will finally acts as one might expect a dream visionary to do when he

wonders about nature and the way that birds build their nests. He says,

> And sithen I loked upon the see and so forth upon the sterres;
> Many selkouthes I seigh, ben noght to seye nouth.
> I seigh floures in the fryth and hir faire colours,
> And how among the grene gras grewe so manye hewes,
> And some soure and some swete - selkouth me thoughte:
> Of hir kynde and of hir colour to carpe it were to longe (XI 362-7).[207]

Will's reading of his vision here almost immediately stops when he insists that the

wonders of the sea and the stars are not to be spoken of "nouth." His use of *nouth* slows

the reader, as *nouth* can often mean "now," but just as often it means "not" and it directly

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[205] Simpson, "Desire and the Scriptural Text," 232.

[206] I will cover this more fully in the next chapter.

[207] The C-text is nearly identical here. Cf XIII 173-8. This is also a verbal echo of
the line in *Pearl* "þe fyrre in þe fryth þe feier con ryse" (II.103).

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follows "nought." So, this clause can either mean "many wonders I saw, which are not to be spoken of *now*" or it could read, "many wonders I saw, which are not to say nothing." Either Will cannot speak of the wonders or he can but he has to use understatement (they're not nothing!). This initial stumble is compounded when Will goes on to describe the flowers in the field as either *soure* or *swete*. Again, *soure* and *swete* have multiple meanings though the most common use of *soure* was then as it is now, to mean a sour taste. In choosing words that both have relations to the other senses to describe his sight, Will offers a potential misreading for the reader. After much description, Will admits that it would take too long to speak of their kind and color and so he moves on to record why he was angry with Reson. Evoking Julian and the *Pearl*-Dreamer, Will concedes that his *dom* might be *adaunt*.

There are other moments in the B-text like this, where Will runs out of descriptions.[208] However, I want to turn now to a revision from the B-text to the C-text that illuminates Langland's interest in involving the reader in meaning production. This moment occurs all the way at the beginning of the dream and the introduction of Lady Mede. I will give the full comparative quotations below.

> I loked on my left half as the lady me taughte,
> And was war of a womman wonderliche yclothed —
> Purfiled with pelure, the pureste on erthe,
> Ycorouned with a coroune, the Kynge hath noon bettre.
> Fetisliche hire fyngres were fretted with gold wyr,
> And theron rede rubies as rede as any gleede,
> And diamaundes of derrest pris and double manere saphires,
> Orientals and ewages envenymes to destroye.

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[208] What comes most readily to mind is his aside in the Prologue 209-210: "What this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye, / Devyne ye, for I ne dar, by deere God in hevene)!" See also II. 57-64; V. 77-80; V. 186-7.

Hire robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned,

With ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones.

Hire array me ravysshed, swich richesse saugh I nevere.

I hadde wonder what she was and whos wif she were (B II 7-18)[209]

I lokede vppon my luft half as the lady me tauhte

And say a womman as hit were wonderly yclothed.

She was purfiled in pelure, non puryrere on erthe,

And coruned with a croune, the kyng hath non bettre;

On alle here fyue fyngeres ful richeliche yrynged

And thereon rede rubies and othere riche stones.

Here robyng was rychere then Y rede couthe,

For to telle of here atyer no tyme haue y nouthe;

Here aray with here rychesse raueschede my herte.

Whos wyf a were and what was her name,

'Leue Lady,' quod Y tho, 'layn nought yf ye knowen' (C II. 8-18).

Immediately, the contrast between the two passages is apparent, even if the C-text is not considerably shorter than B as it seems to promise. What's most exciting about this change is the linguistic shift or reuse of words to mean something different. In B, Will continually brings in the color red — Mede is covered in red rubies as red as coals with a red robe that has ribbons of red gold. All this pigment slips out of C, which retains the *rede rubies* but then in a brilliant shift, makes her robe, previously *of reed scarlet,* into something that is *rychere then Y rede couthe*. The red robe has become a *read* robe, or an unreadable or inexplicable robe. Especially given the connections one might make to the Whore of Babylon in *The Book of Revelation,* that biblical forerunner of mystic visions,

[209] A is nearly identical to B here, with a few slight variations: "Of the puryste perreye that prince wered everey; In red scarlet robyd, rybaynyd aboute with golde; There is no quene wuentere that quyk is on lyve" (A II. 11-13).

Will's assertion that he cannot read or explain Mede's robe is striking.[210] Will's failure, both to describe and to read, creates a gap in the text by suggesting a reading it does not fulfill. Wolfgang Iser suggests, "with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination."[211] In unwriting his description of Lady Mede and highlighting her "not-there" quality, Langland creates imaginative possibilities for the reader.[212]

In his concluding revision to this passage, Langland links reading, writing, and inexpressibility. After declaring that he cannot read Mede's robe, Will goes on to say, "For to telle of here atyer no tyme haue y nouthe; /Here aray with here rychesse raueschede my herte." Langland presents a sense of strained temporality; time is not sufficient for the unfolding of the vision seen while "raueschede." Perhaps also the problem with insufficient time for Will is that reading requires interpreting. If he wanted to read her robe, he would need a long time to "telle" of it. Stephanie Batkie notes, "Will' struggle to understand and react appropriately . . . initiates, in turn, a similar struggle in Langland's historical readers: they must develop strategies for resolving Will's errors

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[210] There is an oblique connection to the Wife of Bath as well, whose red hose and matching red face we are encouraged to read. "Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed, / Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe. / Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe" (GP 456-8).

[211] Iser, "The Reading Process," 288.

[212] This holds as true regardless of the reader's knowledge of any other versions beyond the C-text. She need not know that Langland has shifted the focus of Mede's description in order to supply her own reading of Mede's robe.

even as they undertake their own journey through the poem."[213] The long time that Will

does not have, he offers to the reader, so that she might complete the task of reading and

interpreting Mede's robe.[214]

In *Pearl,* the reader is invited to finish the poem after its action has ended. Though

the Dreamer is foolish during the dream, the author does not explicitly address the reader

until the dream has ended. When the Dreamer awakens, he invokes the community ritual

of taking the Eucharist and going to mass, saying that the priest shows Christ's blessings

in the form of bread and wine to "vus" (XX. 1210). The final two lines remind the reader,

"[Christ] gef vus to be his homly hyne, / And precious perleӡ vnto his pay" (XX. 1211-

12). *Piers* invites the reader in much sooner. Through wordplay and revision, through

silencing Will and himself, Langland makes space for the reader as soon as Will falls

asleep in the warm summer sun. Though he is the one sleeping and dreaming, Will says,

"it semeth to *oure* sight . . ." (Prol. 32) and "I shal *yow* faire show" (I. 2). As Will

progresses through the dream, so does the reader. When he questions, she does too and

perhaps provides answers of her own. This community building is important for Julian of

Norwich as well. Her text recognizes both the community of those immediately

surrounding her and the absent community of readers. In the next chapter, I will explore

the way that Julian constructs rules for reading and a reading community.

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[213] Batkie, "Learning to Read," 170.

[214] For a few figurative readers of Mede's robe, see Morgan, "The Dignity of Langland's Meed," Burrow, "Lady Meed and the Power of Money," and Carlson, "Lady Meed and God's Meed."

CHAPTER 4

RE(VISION): TIME AND COMMUNITY IN JULIAN OF NORWICH'S
REVELATIONS

> "This blessed parte is open and clere
> and fair and light and plentuouse.
> For alle mankinde that is of good wille
> and that shalle be is comprehended in this part"

> Julian of Norwich, 12.30[215]

In the previous chapters, I have argued that waking and dream visions are linked by a

common understanding that the work of a visionary text can be shared between the

visionary and the reader. Langland explores this by playing with temporality and

memory, requiring the reader to hold previous passages in her memory and to return to

them even as she reads further in the poem. Julian of Norwich, a close contemporary of

Langland's and a waking visionary, requires a similar movement of the memory and of

the reader through time. As she writes and rewrites her visionary experience, Julian

invites her readers actively to imitate her kind of revisionary work. She needs the reader

to remember certain passages to see that language's valence can change over the time

encapsulated in a written text. In Julian's writing, both language and time are capable of

infinite expansion and of minute study. A moment can pass instantly (Julian's word

"sodenly") or can last for an entire revelation (Christ is dead, dying, and alive

simultaneously, see Revelation 9). As she develops time and language in this way, Julian

invites her reader to do the same kind of work. The twenty years spent re-viewing her

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[215.] Unless otherwise noted, I refer to the revelation and chapter numbers of the *Long Text* from Colledge and Walsh, eds, *A Revelation*.

revelations can be a "soden" thing, which nevertheless the reader can, with her own language, pause and re-view for herself.

    This work of seeing and understanding the vision is guided in part by the religious practice of *discretio spirituum*. The author of the anonymous 14th-century work, *A Tretis of Discrescyon of Spirites*, begins by cautioning, "For-þi þat þer ben diuerse kindes of spirites, þerfore it is needful to us discrete knowing of hem . . . for it miȝte seme to somme, þat ben bot litil in kunnyng and namely of goostly þinges, þat iche þouȝt þat souniþ in mans herte schuld be þe speche of none oþer spirite, bot only of mans owne spirite."[216] In a world where spirits and demons were seen as real, it is little surprise that there was a fully functioning, orthodox method by which the voices of those spirits could be tested.[217] What is more surprising it that modern criticism has skimmed over what was one of the most significant ways of identifying a "real" vision in the Middle Ages. To date, the most comprehensive examination of *discretio spirituum* comes from Rosalynn Voaden's book *God's Words, Women's Voices*. There, she argues that "*discretio spirituum* constitutes a discourse which shaped the transcendental experience of the visionary, the articulation of that experience, and the expectations of her audience."[218] In

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[216.] "A Tretis of Discrescyon of Spirites," in *Deonise Hid Diuinite and other treatises on contemplative prayer related to 'The Cloud of Unknowing,'* EETS OS 172, Ed. Phyllis Hodgson (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 80.

[217.] For an overview of the approach to the "realness" of demons and bad spirits, see Voaden, *God's Words,* 7-40.

[218.] *God's Words*, 44. For two other recent articles on discretio spirituum see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Discretio Spiritum in Time: The Impact of Julian of Norwich's Counsel in the *Book of Margery Kempe,*" *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium VII*, ed. E.A. Jones (D.S. Brewer, 2004), 119-32. And "The Making of the Book of Margery Kempe: The Issue of Discretio Spirituum Reconsidered," *English Studies* 92.2 (2011), 119-37.

the particular case of Julian, I want to focus on the elements of articulation and

expectation. Naoë Yoshikawa notes, "although the nature of the doctrine refers to the

experience perceived subjectively, a more precise definition that emphasises the external

aspects of the recipient was constructed towards the end of the Middle Ages until it

became a skill acquired not merely by a gift of the Holy Spirit but through rigorous

theological study and ecclesiastical office."[219] This formalized method of sharing out the

visionary experience allows Julian to legitimize her own work while still drawing on her

reader's knowledge and willingness to be involved in the visionary project.

Although I argue that Julian was reading and authorizing her own texts, Voaden

notes that generally female visionaries were not their own "readers," in the sense that

they did not usually examine their own visions for the seven signs of *discretio*

spirituum.[220] Instead, the visionary turned to her spiritual director, usually an older man,

"a sound theologian and an advanced contemplative."[221] Working together, the visionary

and her director would test, discuss, and eventually write out the vision. Even in the

twelfth century, Hildegard had spiritual directors (notably Guilbert of Gembloux) who

she mentioned and who transcribed her visions for her.[222] Julian makes no mention of a

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[219.] Yoshikawa, "Discretio Spirituum in Time," 121.

[220.] Summarizing the writing of Alfonso Jaén, Voaden writes that these are "whether the person lives a virtuous life under the rule of a spiritual director . . . [Second,] that the soul feels inflamed . . . Third, that the visionary feels a deep inward knowledge of the truth of the revelation. Fourth, that the revelations are always and only of true things . . . Fifth, a true vision is known by the fruit which it bears. Sixth, true visionaries will have the day and hour of their death revealed to them. And finally, seventh, posthumous miracles will establish the status of the visionary beyond all question." Voaden, *God's Words,* 49-50. See also her Appendix, 176-81.

[221.] Voaden, *God's Words*, 58.

[222.] See Joan Ferrante, "*Scribe quae vides et audes*: Hildegard, her language, and

official guidance, either in the ST or the LT. However, there is some evidence to suggest

that Julian was a spiritual director in her own right. When Margery Kempe visits Julian,

she asks Julian to confirm that her visions are valid. Margery says,

> The ankres, heryng the mervelyows goodnes of owyr Lord, hyly thankyd God
> wyth al hir hert for hys visitacyon, cownselyng this creatur to be obedyent to the
> wyl of owyr Lord God and fulfyllyn wyth al hir mygthys whatevyr he put in hir
> sowle, yf it wer not ageyn the worshep of God and profyte of hir evyn-Cristen,
> for, yf it wer, than it wer nowt the mevyng of a good spyryte, but rathar of an evyl
> spyrit (Bk. 1 18.1344-50).

Julian continues with a version of *discretio spirituum*, telling Margery how to see what an

evil spirit is and how it is different from a good one. Yet, as Voaden notices, "what is

most interesting is what isn't mentioned: Julian apparently omits any instruction to be

under the guidance of a spiritual director."[223] Of course, though she never mentions him,

it is impossible for Julian not to have had a close relationship with a male religious

figure. In omitting any possible spiritual director from her text, Julian takes that authority

for herself. Julian has translated what she perceives as a divine experience for her reader.

She is to her reader what her spiritual director would be to her; her text can become a tool

for her reader in spiritual interpretation.

    The rest of this chapter will be devoted to working through the way that Julian

navigates her relationship with her "*evencristen*" (readers) by producing the LT from the

ST. The way that she creates the LT indicates that she was reading and actively

reimagining the visions of the ST in the way that she would have her readers do.

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her secretaries," *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century
Latin*, Eds David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia: University of
Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 102-35.

    [223.] Voaden, 128.

Moreover, those twenty years of contemplation enter the text of the LT and visionary moments or moments of misunderstanding are expanded and paused in the LT where they were briefly glossed in the ST. Though the LT is not yet performed, Julian's revisions make it performable in the same way that, presumably, the ST has now been performed.

Creating the Text

To begin, I want to examine the dream vision to which I alluded in the first chapter. This vision is a peculiar moment in Julian for several reasons. First, it is the only instance of a dream in Julian's text. Second, it seems to come into existence because of Julian's speech while she is awake. Julian plays with language's creative potential during her account of the events leading up to and surrounding the dream. Knowing that she caused the bad showing, Julian explores the other ways that her language can construct meaning for her and for her reader. Finally, the place of the dream vision – after the first fifteen but before the sixteenth – acts as a marker of Julian's charism of *discretio spirituum*. She uses the vision to prove to her audience that she is a reliable reader of her own visionary episodes.

Before describing the dream vision, Julian pauses to speak "as anempt my febilnes, wretchidnes, and blindness" (LT 16.66). After the healing of the first fifteen visions, her sickness returns and her body seems to shrivel up. She cries for help and a religious person enters and asks how she feels.[224] When she replies that she has "ravyd to day," he

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[224.] Julian calls this man a "religious person" and a "man," but she never calls him a priest. In fact, she seems to distinguish between this person and a priest when she goes on to say, ""I cowlde telle it to no preste, for I thought, how shulde a preste belieue me

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"loght *lowde* and *interly*" (LT 16.66, my emphasis). Colledge and Walsh have emended the LT here to follow the ST (they have *interly* here), noting that "P's *inwardly*, followed by C, is barely defensible."[225] That pair of adverbs, *lowde* and *inderly* are paradoxical; one cannot laugh both aloud and internally. There is however some evidence to support the choice of *inderly* here, or at least the reading of *interly* as "inwardly." Julian uses the same form of the word in Revelation 14, where she says, "pray interly, though thou fele nought, though thou se nought . . ." (LT 14.41). Again, Colledge and Walsh favor a reading of *interly* as "whole-heartedly," when "inwardly" makes perfect sense.[226] This prayer done *interly*, Christ says, is "in my sight," suggesting that this kind of prayer occurs in that internal space where the soul is closest to Christ. Indeed, this whole section is devoted to internal acts of devotion. Julian goes on to say "also to prayer longyth thankyng. Thankyng is a true inward knowing . . ." (14.41). This inward thanking, Julian suggests, "some tyme for plenteousnes it brekyth ouȝt with voyce . . ." (14.41). For Julian, the act of prayer has a kind of liminality. It exists within, as a commune of soul and Christ, but it can of its own volition disrupt the body's silence and create sound. So, this particular word, *interly*, is useful for Julian. It often does mean "earnestly, sincerely, or carefully," but almost as often it means "inwardly . . . in the heart or soul."[227] By choosing a word that simultaneously points at two potential ways of praying, Julian asks

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when I by seaying I ravid, I shewed my selfe nott to belyue oure lorde god?" (16.66). Perhaps this is Julian's spiritual director.

[225] Colledge and Walsh, 633, n. 17. Watson and Jenkins follow in this tradition, defining "enterly" as "sincerely' (330. n. to line 13).

[226] Ibid., 464, n.42 and 43.

[227] See MED, "enterly, adv."

her reader to add meaning. When I suggest that "inderly" is appropriate, I am then forced to imagine a paradoxical laugh that is both loud and in one's soul.

There is an earlier moment in a *Revelation* that confirms an equally inward and outward laugh. The only other time Julian mentions laughter in a *Revelation* comes after Christ shows her that the "feende" is overcome. First, time slows and expands enough for Julian to behold, "hym [Christ] a conveniable tyme, and all that I had seen, and all the vnderstandyng that was ther in" (LT 5.13). Then, Christ speaks to her "without voys and openyng of lyppes . . ." and he forms in her soul the words "here with is the feende ovyr come."[228] Once she pieces together the different things Christ could mean with this statement, Julian tells the reader, "I laght myghtely, and that made them to lagh that were abowte me; and ther lawchyng was a lykyng to me" (5.13). Understanding begets joyous noise in Julian, noise she justifies by saying "I vnderstode that we may laugh in comfortyng of oure selfe and joyeng in god for the feend is overcome" (5.13). She laughs because of what she has pondered and understood. Her inner state has caused laughter to burst forth, a nonverbal vocalization of her inner understanding.[229]

Returning to Revelation 16, Julian strengthens the connection between herself, the religious person, and her previous joyful interaction with Christ. Once Julian explains her visions more clearly, the religious man first laughs and then "waxsed all sad, and

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[228.] There are important changes here from the ST. There, Julian makes no mention of a *conveniable* time. Instead, she writes, "he suffyred me to be halde langere, and all that I hadde seene, and alle that was there yn. And than was with owtynn voyce and with owte openynge of lyppes formed in my sawlle this worde: here with ys the feende ouer commynn" (ST viii).

[229] This kind of nonverbal activity will be critical for Margery Kempe, although her reactions are more often in the form of tears and cries than laughs.

merveylyd" (16.66). Julian too, falls into a sadness after her laughter in Rev. 5. She says, "after this I felle into a sadnes," which comes about because in fact, the joy that made her laugh has not yet happened (5.13). The flip in emotive states — from loud laughter to quiet depression — juxtaposes Julian's humanity with what she sees in Christ, "that is to say an inward shewyng of sothfastnesse without changyng of chere. For as to my syght it is a wurschyppfull propryte that is in god, which is durable" (5.13). Even as she explains and unfolds her visions, speaking occasionally in Christ's voice, Julian is careful to distinguish herself from him. Laughter is befitting the overthrowing of the devil. Serious sadness is appropriate for contemplation of the divine. So it is that the religious man grows quiet and marvels when Julian describes the bleeding cross.

Even before she has the ugly dream, Julian's false naming of her visions as raving puts her authority into jeopardy. She tells her reader that she thinks, "how shulde a preste belieue me when I by seaying I ravid, I shewed my selfe nott to belyue oure lorde god?" (16.66). Julian says that she believed it was God when she saw the vision, and she intended to keep believing, but it slipped out of her mind. Rarely does Julian directly address the singular reader, choosing instead to say "us" or "myn evencristen." But here, Julian tells the reader, "A, loo how wrechyd I was! This was a grett synne and a grett vnkyndnesse, that I for foly of felyng of a lytylle bodely payne so vnwysely left for þe tyme the comfort of alle this blessyd shewying of oure lorde god. *Here may yow se what I am of myself;* but here in woulde oure curtesse lorde nott leeue me" (16.66, my emphasis). This frank address, which so rarely happens, reveals Julian's failure of understanding to her reader. Liz McAvoy suggests that "Julian is quick to learn that the gift of prophetic insight is wholly irrelevant without the gift of wisdom, and that wisdom

is unattainable without teaching and learning from God's example. Moreover, such

wisdom is acquired with experience and contemplation *over time*."[230] In this case, we see

Julian performing that acquisition of wisdom for her reader. Her direct identification of

yow makes this moment simultaneously individualistic (you look at me) and communal

(you look at yourself as similar to me). There is also a mitigation of that individuality —

what I am of myself is juxtaposed with the image of the Lord not leaving her—the self,

though it acts unwisely at times, is never really alone.

The ugly showing itself is complicated, both for the changes that Julian makes from

the ST to the LT and for the rhetorical work that it does for her. The details of the dream

from both the ST and the LT require full, comparative quotations.

ST, xxi	LT 16.67
And in my slepe, atte the begynnynge, me thought the fende sette hym in my throte and walde hafe strangelede me, botte he myght nought. Than I woke out of my slepe, & vnnethes hadde I my lyfe.	And in the slepe at the begynnyng, methowte the fend set him in my throte puttand forth a visage ful nere my face like a yong man, and it was longe and wonder lene. I saw never none such. The color was rede like the tilestone whan it is new brent, with blak spots therin like blak steknes fouler than the tile stone. His here was rode as rust evisid aforn with syde lokks hongyng on the thounys. He grynnid on me with a shrewd semelant, shewing white teeth, and so mekil methowte it the more oggley. Body ne honds had he none shaply, but with his pawes he held me in the throte and wold have stranglid me, but he myte not.

In both visions, Julian maintains the language "in my throat," indicating that her earlier

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230. McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 214.

identification of her visions as raving was dangerously false speech.[231] She implies that this bad, bodily vision is the result of bad bodily action. The demon's failed attempt to strangle Julian can also be seen as a repercussion of her false speech, though her subsequent truth-telling keeps the demon from having any actual effect on her voice. One might expect that, if it was her false speech that brought the demon into existence, he would encourage her to speak more. Instead, the attempted strangulation proves to be the demon's way of seeking to keep Julian from "unspeaking" him.

After she wakes from the dream and is comforted, Julian has another showing where God tells her that, indeed, that was the devil come to tempt her and she should not say that she "raved" again. Then, the stinking fiend returns, but this time Julian is prepared. She says that she "comfort my soule with bodely spech, as I shulde a done to a nother person þat had been traveyled" (LT 16.69). Though she cannot be her only spiritual director, Julian does act in this instance as her own guide. With that true bodily speech, she attempts to undo the false speech that set the demon at her throat in the first place. She goes on to set her "bodely eye" on the cross and replace the demon in her throat with "spech of Cristes passion and rehersyng the feyth of the holy church" (16.70). For Julian, language is not simply true or false, it is effective. She rehearses this speech for about twenty-four hours until, "they were alle goone and passyd, and there lefte nothyng but stynke . . . And I scornede hym, and thus was I delyured of hym by þe vertu of Crystes passion" (16.70). Although Julian ascribes some of her deliverance to Christ's

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231. This vision echoes the earlier vision Julian has of Christ's embodiment. There she says, "His clothing was blew as asure, most sad and feyer. His chere was mercifull, the colour of his face was feyer brown whyȝt with full semely countenannce, his eyen were blake, most feyer and semely, shewyng full of louely pytte, and within hym an hey ward long and brode, all full of endlesse hevynlynes" (LT 14.51).

passion, most of the work is her own. The only speech she records is her self to her self — "I thought to my selfe . . . thou hast now great besenes to kepe the in þe feyth" (16.70). Although her previous conversations with Christ have enabled Julian to identify the demon and to speak against it, ultimately she uses her own tongue to deconstruct what she initially allowed to exist.

In spite of that linguistic work, Julian is careful to say that it is Christ's words, not the showings or any evidence she might be called to produce, that give meaning to the visions: "he lefte with me neyther sygne ne thyng where by I myght know it. But he lefte with me his owne blessyd worde in tru vnderstandyng, byddyng me fulle myghtly that I shulde beleue it, and so I do" (LT 16.70).[232] This shift to the focus on Christ's words rather than the vision that might fade is not in the *ST*, where Julian is closer to the moment of the vision. As she writes about Christ's comforting speeches in the *LT*, she returns over and over to the words, to the language of his speech — "I am bounde by alle hys owne menyng with the nexte words þat folowen" (LT 16.70). When she bemoans that she openly said she had raved, Christ shows her the vision again but this time it seems that he shows her with words: "he shewde hyt all ageene within my soule, with more fullehed with the blessyd lyght of his precyous loue, seyeng theyse wordes full myghtely and fulle mekely: Wytt it now welle, it was no ravyng that thou saw this day" (LT 16.70). When the vision fades, the words remain to Julian. She goes on to gloss Christ's speech here, "as if he had seyde: For the syghte was passyd fro the, thou left it and cowth or myght nott kepe it. But wytt it now, that is to seye, no thou seest it" (LT 16.70). Initially,

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232. This section is not in the ST. Instead, Julian has a brief prayer about the nature of sin. ST, xxiii, p. 271.

in the *ST*, all that Julian reports Christ saying is, "witte it welle, it was na rauynge that thow sawe to day, botte take it and leue it and kepe þe ther to, and þou schalle nought be ouercomenn" (ST xxii). She does not offer an interpretation of those words, but instead reminds her readers of what he does not say.[233] In the *Long Text,* the dream vision becomes doubly productive. It tests the veracity of her other visions and allows Julian to explain more fully what Christ's comforting speeches mean.

Rosalyn Voaden notes that "the purpose of *discretio spirituum* is to distinguish demonic illusions from angelic manifestations" and Julian is clearly employing this ugly showing to validate the rest of her visions.[234] In particular, the bad dream comes before the sixteenth showing, but after Julian introduces the final section: "and after this the goode lorde shewde the xvj revelation on the nyght foloyng . . . which xvj was conclusyon and confirmation to all the xv" (LT 16.66).[235] By including the demonic vision in the sixteenth showing, Julian makes herself more of an expert in the distinguishing of true from false visions. Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues*, remarks that "Seeing, then, that dreams may arise from such a variety of causes, one ought to be very reluctant to put one's faith in them . . .The saints, however, can distinguish true revelations from the voices and images of illusions through an inner sensitivity."[236] Like Gregory's saints, Julian knows immediately that it is a demonic vision, but she seems to

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[233.] That is, he does not say you will not be tested. Rather, he says you will not be overcome. See ST xxii.

[234.] Voaden, 51.

[235.] This confirmation is not in the ST.

[236.] Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, trans. O.J. Zimmerman OSB (New York, 1959), 262. qtd in Voaden, *God's Words,* 52.

have trouble distinguishing between what is really happening and what she sees. After she wakes from her dream, Julian lays still for a moment and then notes, "a lyttyll smoke cam it at þe dorre with a greete het and a foule stynch . . . And I went it had bene a bodely fyre that shuld a burne vs all to deth" (16.67). True and divine visions are marked by the visionary's deep inner knowledge of the vision and her lack of uncertainty. Following the expectations of *discretio spirituum*, Julian turns to the community of those in the room with her to ask if they also smell the smoke and they reply not. This immediately shows Julian that she's had a bad vision: "I seyde: Blessyd be god! for than wyst I wele it was the fende that was come only to tempte me" (LT 16.67). Because she says that she thought it was a bodily fire, Julian asks for confirmation from her physical community. She never does such a thing when she experiences her ghostly showings, which indicates that Julian's visions are properly aligned with the principles of *discretio spirituum.* The third set out by Alfonso Jaén states that the visionary "feels a deep inward knowledge of the truth of the revelation."[237] In even asking her companions if they too feel a a fire, Julian shows she knows that there is something amiss with whatever kind of vision she was having.

Moments like the dream vision mark a line between negatively productive language (Julian's false speech) and positively productive language (her restorative recitation of Christ's words). There are also moments where Julian cannot speak as openly as she wishes, producing neither positive nor negative speech, but inadequate speech or speech almost at the point of silence. Particularly, Julian finds her speech inadequate when she tries to express her ghostly sight completely. In both the *ST* and the *LT*, Julian explains

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[237.] Voaden, 50.

how she sees her visions: "all this was shewde by thre partes, that is to sey by bodyly syght, and by worde formyde in my vnderstondyng, and by goostely syght" (I.9).[238] Echoing Augustine's threefold visionary ascension, Julian distinguishes between bodily sight, words formed in understanding, and ghostly sight. The first two kinds of showing seem to be fine for Julian, but the third proves problematic as she goes on to say, "but the goostely syght I can nott ne may shew it as openly ne as fully as I would. But I trust in our lord god almightie that he shall of his godnes and for iour loue make yow to take it more ghostely and more sweetly then I can or may tell it" (LT 1.9). The ineffable ghostly showing is just as impossible for Julian as it was for Hildegard, the *Pearl*-poet, and Langland. Like her visionary companions, Julian presents us with something more significant than a failure of language to express an inexpressible vision. She offers the opportunity to her reader to find the words and make the vision even sweeter than Julian describes. Her words are not insufficient; they are in fact replete.

The inclusion of the reader in ghostly understanding is further complicated by Julian's repetition of this sentiment in her sixteenth showing. There she tells the reader,

> Alle this blessyd techyng of oure lorde god was shewde by thre partys, that is to sey by bodely syght, and by worde formyd in myne vnderstondyng, and by gostely syght. For þe bodely syghte, I haue seyde as I sawe, as truly as I can. And for þe words, I haue seyde them ryght as oure lorde shewde them me. And for the gostely syghte, I haue seyde some dele, but I may nevyr fulle tell it, and therfore of this gostely syght I am steryd to sey more, as god wylle geue me grace (LT 16.73).

Though nearly identical to the first formulation, this iteration of her visionary experience puts more of the responsibility for telling the ghostly sight on Julian. Aware she may

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238. The ST records, "Alle this blyssede techynge of oure lorde god was schewyd to me in thre partyes, that is be bodylye syght, and be worde formede in myne vnderstandynge, and be gastelye syght" (vii, p. 224).

never fully express it, Julian nevertheless must continue trying to explain it. Isabel Davis notes that "All the things Julian sees . . . are equally realized, all being described with the same graphic power, a power which dissolves the distinctions between what is inner and what is outer, what is visible and what is invisible, what is mundanely and what is spiritually 'true'."[239] This moment of self-awareness, where Julian knows that she has not fulfilled her reportation of the ghostly showing, engages in this very dissolution of the boundaries between what may be seen and what is hidden within that which may be seen. In both the *LT* and the *ST* she claims that she is stirred to say more about her showing and the *LT* records more introspection about the showing of the two sicknesses. For instance, in the *ST* she writes, "I speke of swylke menn and womenn that for goddes love hates synne and dysposes thamm to do goddes wille. Thann ere thiese twa priue synnes and maste besye about vs. Therefore it is goddys wille that thay be knawenn, and thann schalle we refuse thamm as we do othere synnes" (ST xxiv). Here Julian explains her vision of the sin of impatience, that is, *im-patientia,* an unwillingness to suffer. In the *LT*, most of this is preserved, but Julian shifts the language of the second sentence to more be accurate in its account of the relationship between humans and sin. She writes, "I speke of such men and women þat for goddes loue hate synne and dyspose them to do goddes wylle. Than by oure gostly blyndhed and bodely hevynesse we are most enclynyng to theyse; and therefore it is goddys wylle þat they be knowen, and than shulde we refuse them, as we do other synnes" (LT 16.73). The introduction of the language of spiritual blindness and bodily heaviness strengthens the necessity of knowing even as it highlights Julian's conception of sin. It is not just something that winds around humans, but it is the

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[239.] Davis, "Expressing the Middle English," 852.

ditch that humans can fall into in their rush to do God's will. Julian's ommission of the mention of "privy sin" here is also striking, as she removes the language of interiority and secrecy in favor of blindness and heaviness. Opening up her text thus allows Julian to open up those sins and consider them more closely.

The *Long Text* is replete with moments like this, where even though Julian has been expanding and explaining her initial visions, she still is incapable of expressing some particular thing. Often these moments are closely tied to Julian's construction of a readerly community. Anna Lewis suggests that Julian creates a community to "unite God, Holy Church, and Christian souls behind common interpretive strategies and a shared understanding of the essential meaning of the vision described in *A Revelation*."[240] Although Lewis goes on to argue that this community building was designed to do exactly the opposite of what I've suggested (that is, to prevent individual interpretation), she points out "for Julian, the sixteen showings possess a meaning independent of the processes of interpretation, a meaning given by their divine author, to be discovered *through* interpretation."[241] It is by that very interpretation that Julian finds the need for a communal understanding of her visions and community participation in interpreting their meaning. As she explains in Revelation 13, "Though oure lorde shewyd me that I shuld synne, *by me aloone is vnderstonde alle.* I conceyvyd a softe drede; and to this oure lorde answeryd: I kepe the fulle suerly. Thys worde was seyde with more loue and suernes of gostly kepyng than I can or may telle" (13.37, my emphasis). The care with which Julian approaches her writing is particularly apparent in this scene. She begins by conflating

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[240.] Lewis, "A Picture of Christendom," 78.

[241.] Ibid., 79.

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individual and community, then singles out the individual once again. The initial equation

of *me aloon* and *alle* allows the reader to understand herself as the object of Christ's

comforting speech, even as it requires her to return to the opening of the sentence and

feel dread that she might sin as well. Just as Langland required his reader to hold the text

in her memory and search out resonances with other remembered texts, so too Julian's

reader has to perform an intellectual movement through her memory.

Expanding the Text

Earlier I suggested that we can perceive Julian's linguistic limits as a kind of

silencing; however, language is also incredibly productive for her. Because her written

words are full of potential meaning, they encourage anyone encountering something on

the edge of ineffability to find a way to speak about it. As she tells her readers,

> Oure lorde god dwellyth now in vs, and is here with vs, and colleth vs and
> beclosyth vs for tendyr loue, that he may nevyr leue vs, and is more nere to vs
> than tonge may telle or harte may thyngke, yet maye we nevyr stynte of mornyng
> ne or wepyng nor of sekyng nor of longyng, tyll whan we se hym clere in his
> blessydfulle chere (LT 16.72).[242]

The failure of the tongue should not stop the soul from seeking sight of the divine.

Although she may be incapable of describing exactly how closely Christ binds his

community, the lack of speech does not inhibit Julian's actions. One way that Julian

"never styntes" of seeking Christ is by filling out moments of linguistic struggle in the *ST*

with fuller descriptions or explanations in the *LT*. There is one stock phrase in particular,

"benedicite dominus" that Julian uses to signal a lack of language to express herself in

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[242.] Not in the ST.

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the ST. There are three instances of *benedicite dominus* in the entirety of both versions of the *Shewings*. Colledge and Walsh note that it could be a salutation, blessing, prayer, or a recourse to a common liturgical phrase.[243] I am not sure that it is just a blessing, since Julian can and frequently does say that in English. For example, she writes, "But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone beryth vs to joye and to endlesse levyng, blessyd mot he be" (LT, 14.60) and "I seyde: Blessyd be god!" (LT, 16.67). The only time it could be argued that it is a salutation is the final instance of the phrase, when Julian awakes and says to the people in her room, "benedicite dominus." There it does appear to be working as a kind of "hi friend!" The other two times are trickier. In fact, *benedicite dominus* is for Julian a sign of the temporary limits of language. Perhaps the most eloquent way to suggest this is to say that just as *benedicite dominus* itself might give a native English-speaker momentary pause, her knowledge of the Latin language would eventually overcome whatever unknowing she initially encountered.[244] The easy translatability of this short Latin phrase allows it to serve as a bookmark which prevents Julian from offering an interpretation that may be incomplete or misleading. As she rereads her *ST*, Julian can thus translate *benedicite dominus* in the fullness of its meaning.

When she first uses that phrase in the *ST*, Julian understands that Christ is the originator of her visions, without any intermediary, then she says *benedicite dominus* out loud. The *LT* version of this includes the initial understanding, but then it adds a sudden

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[243.] See the note to 211.17.

[244.] This also reminds me of the way that MSS have abbreviations for the psalms . . . indicating that the reader has enough knowledge of that material and the scribe need not fill it all out. Marry Carruthers addresses this kind of memory use in *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).

joy, extra understanding, and indication of inner sight, before returning to the externally

spoken *benedicite dominus*. The comparative quotations are given in full here:

ST, iii	LT I.4
I conseyvede treulye and myghttylye that itt was hym selfe that schewyd it me with owtyn any meenn;	I conceived truly and mightly that it was him selfe that shewed it me witout anie meane. *And in the same shewing sodeinly the trinitie fulfilled my hart most of ioy, and so I vnderstode it shall be ine hauen without end to all that shall come ther. For the trinitie is god, god is the trinitie. The trinitie is our maker, the trinitie is our keper, the trinitie is our everlasting louer, the trinitie is our endless ioy and our bleisse, by our lord Jesu Christ, and in our lord Jesu Christ. And this was shewed in the first syght and in all, for wher Jesu appireth the blessed trinitie is vnderstand, as to my sight.*
And than I sayde: Benedicite dominus. This I sayde reuerentlye in my menynge, with a myghtty voyce . . .	And I sayd: Benedicite dominus. This is sayd for reuerence in my menyng, with a mightie voyce . . .

In the LT version, we are meant to read something that represents a simultaneous

occurrence to the internal and the external. The shift from the ST to the LT refigures a

moment of simple understanding to be a re-vision paired with a new understanding

driven by that re-vision. Moreover, the space of time spent seeking comprehension allows

Julian to claim that "this was shewed in the first syght and in all." The meaning of this

first vision that only comes to her after years of contemplation applies to all the visions.

Again, Julian shifts the reader's focus from external to internal and then back to external.

Not just this vision, but all visions. Not just I (Julian), but we (the community of readers).

The second use of *benedicite dominus* also underscores the internal by loudly

proclaiming the external. This second instance has a much longer addition, some 142

lines (with a short anchoring interruption after 90 lines). Here we can see Julian

translating the space between the vision and the exclamation. Because of the length of the

addition, I have given the full text of the ST and the comparable sections of the LT, with a

few select passages from the added materials.

ST 4 (216-17) 8 lines	LT 1.5-6 (301-311) 142 lines
(1) And this is the cause why that na saule ys restede to it be noghthed of alle that es made. Whenn he is noughthid for love, to hafe hym that is alle that is goode, than es he abylle to resayue gostlye reste.	(1) And this is the cause why that no sowle is in reste till it is noughted of all thinges that is made. When she is wilfully noughted for loue, to haue him that is all, then is she able to receive ghostly reste.
	(1a) And also our good lord shewed þat it is full great plesannce to him that a sely sowle come to him naked, pleaynly and homly. For this is the kynde (yernyng) of the sowle by the touchyng of the holie ghost, as by the vnderstandyng that I haue in this schewyng: God of thy goodnes geue me thy selfe, for thou art inough to me, and I maie aske nothing that is lesse that maie be full worshippe to thee. And if I aske anie thing that is lesse, ever me wanteth; but only in thee I haue alle. [. . .]
	(1b) For as þe body is cladd in the cloth, and the flessch in the skynne, and the bonys in þe flessch, and the harte in the bowke, so are we, soule, and body, cladde and enclosydde in the goodnes of god [. . .]
(2) And in that tyme that oure lorde schewd this that I haue nowe saydene in gastelye syght, I saye the bodylye syght lastande of the plentyuouse bledynge of the hede,	(2) And in alle þat tyme that he schewd thys that I haue now seyde in gostely syght, I saw the bodely syght lastyng of the (plentuous) bledyng of the hede.
	(2a) The grett droppes of blode felle downe fro vnder the garlonde lyke

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pelottes, semyng as it had comyn ouȝte of the veynes. And in the comyng ouȝte tyeh were bro(wn)e rede, for the blode was full thycke; and in the spredyng abrode they were bryght rede. And whan it camme at the browes, ther they vanysschyd; and not sythstonding the bledyng contynued tylle many thynges were sene and vnderstondyd. Nevertheles the feyerhede and the lyuelyhede continued in the same bewty and lyuelynes. [. . .]

(3) and als longe as y sawe that syght y sayde oftynn tymes: Benedicite dominus.	(3) And as longe as I saw thys syght of the plentuousnesse of bledyng of the heed, I myght never stynte of these wordes: Benedicite dominus.

As she shifts between writing for a communal reader and for herself as reader, Julian simultaneously makes her text both more personal and more general. For instance, as she explains the *benedicite*, she changes the soul's gender from masculine to feminine (1).[245] Here Julian is reading for herself, for her soul, yet she is also writing for other potential female readers. Almost immediately after that personal change in the LT, Julian moves to speak of "our good lord" and avoids use of a pronoun for the soul. The soul turns into a "sely sowle" always linked to an "our." The soul is Julian's, but it is also the readers', male or female.

In another telling addition to the second *benedicite*, Julian encloses her reader in her

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[245.] This tiny shift may have something to do with Julian's elision of any mention of her "female weakness" or her inability to teach because she is a woman in the LT. She seems to be owning her femininity and her authority. This newly feminized soul is also more active. In the ST, the soul is merely "noughthid for loue," but in the LT the soul now must be "wilfully noughted for loue." On the edge of silence, Julian reminds her reader there is still work to be done. The soul cannot simply be naught, it must will to be naught.

explanation of God's goodness (1b above). The LT is an expansion of the ST, but it is still interested in returning to the internal, and that return results in further moments of linguistic collapse. Echoing her description of the hazelnut – that little thing endlessly interpretable – Julian here takes her readers' imagination deep into the human body.[246] Indeed, Julian seems to revel in the body's humanity, including a strange description of defecation perhaps solely for the purpose of illustrating the body's ability to open and close.[247] At any rate, Julian's interests here are in the power that enclosure has for binding the human soul to God's will.[248] Coming as it does in this opening up of the words *benedicite dominus*, Julian seems to be articulating the way that every opening is itself not an end. The end is sought by being occupied in "knowyng and louyng tylle the tyme comyth that we shal be fulfyllede in hevyn" (LT 1.6). Even in her twenty years of contemplation, Julian still writes, "there is no creature that is made that may witt how much and how swetely and how tenderly that oure maker lovyth vs" (LT 1.6). By repackaging her explanation in clothing, skin, and bones, Julian writes the LT mindful of the continual project of seeking understanding.

The additional sections in the LT also contain the famous imagery of the blood spreading out across crucified Christ's forehead and the likening of his blood to drops of water and the scales of herring. In the ST, Julian mentions that the bodily sight of Christ's

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[246.] Langland includes nut imagery in *PPL C* XII 146-51.

[247.] She really seems to be describing defecating here: "A man goyth vppe ryght, and the soule of his body is sparyde as a purse fulle feyer. And whan it is tyme of his nescesery, it openyde and sparyde ayen fulle honestly." (LT 1.6)

[248.] The resonances of powerful enclosure in an anchoritic text of course cannot be overlooked. See Dyas, et al., *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*.

bleeding head lasted, but does not give any further description. The LT records that lasting, drawing out a difference between the red tones of the blood -- "in the comyng ouȝte they were browne rede, for the blode was full thycke; and in the spredyng abrode they were bryght rede" (LT 1.7). She requires her reader to imagine how blood looks when it first wells up from a wound and then when it spreads and thins across the skin. The absence of this kind of description in the ST could provoke a question of its place in her revelations, for if she did see all this from the start it is surprising that Julian did not include these descriptive passages in the ST. Barry Windeatt proposes that "as more is understood more is visualized," suggesting that Julian shares more details of her vision only after she is sure of the vision.[249] He could just have easily, and truly, said that as more is understood, more is verbalized. Julian reinforces this reading when she asserts, "the bledyng contynued tylle many thynges were sene and vnderstondyd. Nevertheles the feyerhede and the lyuelyhede continued in the same bewty and lyuelynes" (1.7). The bleeding lasts so that Julian can contemplate it and through contemplation come to understanding and yet Christ's fairness and liveliness do not diminish in this showing. She manipulates time, drawing out the kinds and amount of blood, emphasizing the unchanging nature of Christ's visage, to suggest to her reader that the vision may last as long as it is necessary for things to be understood.

Of course, the *benedicite dominus* moments should not be seen as representative of a pattern; that is Julian does not use this phrase as a key every single time she needs to add something more to the initial vision. Instead, it indicates that Julian uses textual markers to hold a place until she can better comprehend that particular visionary moment.

[249.] Windeatt, "Julian's Second Thoughts," 102.

Take, for example, a small subtraction from the ST and a bit longer addition to the LT (emphasis mine)

ST xiii	LT 12.26
And eftyr this oure lorde schewyd hym to me mare gloryfyed as to my syght than I sawe hym before, and in this was I lerede that ilke saule <u>contemplatyfe</u> to whilke es gyffenn to luke and seke god schalle se hire and passe vnto god by <u>contemplacionn</u>. And efter this techynge, hamelye, curtayse and blysfulle, and verray lyfe, ofte tymes oure lorde Jhesu sayde to me . . . [list of 'i it am']	And after thys oure lord shweyd hym more gloryfyed as to my syght than I saw hym before, wher in I was lerned that oure soule shalle nevyr haue reste tylle it come into hym, knowyng that he is full of joye, homely and curteys and blessydfulle and very lyfe. Often tymes oure lorde Jhesu seyde . . . [list of 'i it am']
	The nomber of the words passyth my wyttes and my vnderstandyng and alle my myghtes, for they were in þe hyghest, as to my syght, for ther in is comprehendyd I can nott telle what; but the joy that I saw in the shewyng of them passyth alle that hart can thynk or soule may desyre.
Thies words I declare nought botte for ilke man, eyfter the grace that god gyffes hym in vndyrstandynge and lovynge, resayfe tham in oure lordes menynge.	*And therfore theyse wordes be nott decaryed here;* but evyry man, aftyr the grace that god gevyth hym in vnder standyng and lovyng, receyve them in oure lordes menyng.

Absent from the LT is any mention of the contemplative life or contemplation, and instead Julian performs the contemplation she says one should. Curiously, frustratingly, the performance results in silence. Julian contemplates and discovers that she cannot speak all the words that Christ spoke to her. Colledge and Walsh gloss over the difference at the end of the passage here, although it is a serious change.[250] In the ST, Julian says that the words she declares are not for just herself, but for every person. Yet, in the LT the

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[250.] They focus instead on the disparity between this and chapter 59. See p. 403, fn. 15.

words are not declared at all. It is the responsibility of every person to receive the words on their own. Even though Julian is constructing this community of readers, indeed she needs the community, she still puts part of the onus on the individual reader. Parsing out the meaning of a visionary experience is the responsibility of the visionary and her community, and it is also the responsibility of each member of that community to read and seek completion on her own.

While language may be insufficient for Julian momentarily in the ST, it often becomes productive in the LT. Just as she uses *benedicite dominus* to mark some limits in the relation of the vision, Julian also takes one phrase in particular — *all schalle be wele*—and uses it to convey not only the passing of time, but also the growth of her own intellectual understanding. Every time Julian opens up or expands a phrase, she closes it again in complex ways.[251] With *all schalle be wele*, Julian uses the LT to explain how and when this will come about. At the same time, she uses the implied future of the phrase to contemplate Christ's embodiment and thus his shared experience of the human condition. This in turn leads Julian to intricate community building, where she speaks to the reader through time, through understanding, and through Christ's humanity. These rhetorical devices allow Julian to give the reader the task of piecing together her own relationship to Christ, "now," in the future, and in the past.

Alle schalle be wele first appears in two points in the ST. First, as she is trying to

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[251.] Julian's text is so replete with these opening and closing moments it is challenging to find the right examples. One is worth a small note. At the beginning of Rev. 15, Julian remakrs "thus I vnderstode that all his blessyd chyldren whych be come out of hym by kynd shulde be brougt agayne in to hym by grace." Christ is open, but also constantly reclosing. The text, too, opens itself up and then closes back with the reader enfolded in it.

comprehend her own bodily pain, Julian relates that "[Christ] comfortes redely and swetlye be his wordes, and says: Botte alle schalle be wele, and alle maner of thynge schalle be well" (ST, xiii). These comforting words paradoxically beget in Julian dread and she asks, "howe myght alle be wele for the grete harme that is comonn by synne to thy creatures?" (ST, xiv). Her question forces Christ to clarify what he means and he goes on to say, in possibly the most famous theological construction in Julian aside from the hazelnut, "I wille make alle thynge wele, I schalle make alle thynge wele, I maye make alle thynge wele and I can make alle thynge wele; and þow schalle se þat thy selfe, that alle thynge schalle be wele" (ST, xv). After explaining that these subject-verb pairs mean the father, the son, the holy ghost, the unity of the trinity, and the one-ing of all mankind, Julian leaves this promise of healing action for the rest of the ST. However, in the revision work for the LT, this phrase (the five words) becomes a kind of unifying thread, echoing through the rest of *A Revelation*.

The first uses of the five words in the LT are generally the same, although with more emphasis on the nature of sin and with a slight reordering of the five words to pair more accurately with her explanation of their divine correlatives.[252] This follows Julian's general tendency to clean up the accuracy of her writing in the LT and it fits with the common reading that Julian is revising her theology of sin and the impossibility of

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[252.] In the ST, the list goes *will, shall, may, can,* and *you.* Then she says that she understands father for may, son for can, holy ghost for will, unity of the trinity for shall, and one-ing of human kind for you shall. In the LT, the list gets the order right: "I may make alle thyng wele, and I can make alle thyng welle, and I shalle make alle thyng wele, and I wylle make alle thyng welle; and thou shalt se thy selfe þat alle maner of thyng shall be welle" (LT, XIII, 31).

malicious sin.[253] Yet, as she ruminates on the five words in Revelation 13, Julian moves

from just perfecting her syntax to a systematic change that emphasizes Christ's and

humanity's temporality and community. She continually adds the word "shall" (the verb

associated with the Son), repeating it six times in eight lines (LT 13.31). All this futurity

lands on a declaration that "we be nott now fully as hole in hym as we shalle be then"

(LT 13.31). This is a considerable shift from the ST, which focuses primarily on Christ's

wholeness: "therefore this is the thyrste, the falynge of his blysse, þat he has vs nought in

hym als haelye as he schalle thanne haffe" (ST, xv). By emphasizing not Christ, but the

community, Julian gives her readers responsibility for seeking and procuring that

wholeness that is to come. The language of community also forms a bridge — both

logical and ontological— to the next section, where Julian spends a considerable time

emphasizing Christ's status as God and man.[254]

When she returns to "all shall be well," Julian represents the phrase in widely

expanded time. At first confusing, she says, "oone tyme oure good lorde seyde: Alle

maner a thyng shalle be wele; and another tyme he seyde: Thou shalt se thy selfe that alle

maner of thyng shalle be wele" (LT 13.32). In fact, she has just one chapter earlier

finished writing that Christ said all those things together. Colledge and Walsh suggest

that Julian has conflated two earlier moments in her own text.[255] Yet, for Julian time is a

contemplative space, one that invites introspection by its very existence. Nicholas

Watson argues that "medieval imaginative theory admits . . . that thought, observation,

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253. See Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives."

254. This is an addition to the ST. See LT, XIII, 31-32 (lines 31.21-32.19).

255. See p. 422 (n 2).

and reflection are all products of 'fals and soth compouned,' so that our perception of all reality, past, present, and future, can never be anything other than a negotiation between the false and the true."[256] By taking her earlier construction where each of these things was said in rapid succession and suggesting that in fact they were said at different times, Julian asks her reader to contemplate a single moment of speech. Indeed, it is literally true that Christ said those things "oone tyme" and "another tyme." By forcing her reader to recognize the fixed, yet expansive, temporality of Christ's speech, Julian offers an opportunity to gaze upon each statement and seek both their falseness and their truth. She herself does just that, giving the multiple meanings a soul might ascribe to either of the two statements. Without imaginative time — both in her text and outside it — she cannot offer even one understanding of these phrases.[257]

Julian's next major turn to the five words comes at the end of Revelation 14, which involves her complex figuring of Christ as mother. Again, the words are tied into Julian's understanding of a community of readers who are linked together by their shared relation to Christ's humanity. One seeking understanding of Christ-as-mother should turn to "all þe blessed comonn. For one singular person may oftyn tymes be broken, as it semyth to þe selfe, but the hole body of holy chyrch was never broken, nor nevyr shall be with out ende" (LT 14.61). Julian's disruptive shifts between "we" and "I," "singular" and "common," again force the reader to seek some kind of shared understanding. In one short section, Julian goes from community (we) to general (a child), to community (we) to singular (my and I) and back to community (we). She tells her reader, "So wyll

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256. Watson, "Phantasmal Past," 18.

257. This exegesis is absent from the ST.

[Christ] that we done as þe meke chylde, seyeng thus: My kyne moder, my gracyous moder, my deerworthy moder, haue mercy on me. I haue made my selfe foule and vnlyke to thee, and I may not nor canne amende it but with thyne helpe and grace" (LT 14.61). Not only does she ventriloquize for Christ, but Julian speaks for her readers in the first person. When she says "me," Julian very frequently (perhaps always) means everyone: "and thys is the vnderstondyng of this worde, that it shall be done by me, that is, the generalle man, that is to sey alle that shalle be safe; it shalle be wurschypful , merelous and plentuous, and by me it shalle be done" (LT 13.36). Julian clearly means for her readers to repeat her words, but by using the first person singular as though it were a plural, Julian provides a model for her readers to imagine themselves into her text.

After all this work of building a community of imaginative readers, Julian's final use of the phrase shifts time and voice to establish the work of that community. Toward the end of the LT, she declares

> When the dome is gevyn and we be alle brought vppe aboue, than shalle we clerely see in god the prevytees, whych now be hyd to vs. And then shalle none of vs be steryd to sey in ony thyng: Lorde, yf it had ben thus, it had ben wele. But we shalle alle sey with one voyce: Lorde, blessyd mott thou be, for it is thus, it is wele; now we see verely that alle thyng is done as it was thyn ordynawnce or ony thyng was made. (LT 16.85)

Every other time Julian uses a version of this phrase, it is spoken by Christ; she uses reported speech and is clear that Christ spoke the words to her. [258] In this final version, the words are the community's and they are spoken in the present tense in the future. Speaking in such complex temporality, as Karen Elaine Smyth attests, evidences "a

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[258.] See Rev 14.63 for another example.

consciousness of latent tension between the representation of human action within a specific duration or image of time and the interpretation of the permanence (relevance / reliability) of such a temporal moment in subsequent times."[259] Julian here tries to navigate the distance between the nowness of her text and the futurity of her vision; the futurity of her readers and the pastness of her text. All of this is simultaneous to Julian, and her text embodies that tension of representation as she articulates a future, present, and past community of *evencristen*.

The work of understanding Christ and the visions is begun when he tells Julian "all shall be well" but it has not been performed because the future present of "it is wele" has not yet happened. In spite of "oure sympylle lyvyng and oure blyndnesse here," Julian is confident that "then shalle we clerely see." That simplicity and blindness can be overcome by working endlessly at understanding. By writing the penultimate chapter almost entirely in the first person plural, Julian even more clearly establishes the communal nature of this work. She no longer distinguishes between herself and the general man, but rather implies that this work is done together by all those who love Christ. Carolyn Dinshaw asks, "What are other ways of experiencing time besides objectifying it, segmenting and claiming it, deploying it in an exercise of power or defence of some institution?"[260] She goes on to suggest that multiple temporalities, the experiencing of past as now, queer both time and the person having this experience. Julian's writing answers Dinshaw's question, as she attempts to create a text that embodies all time, expanded visionary time, events that are both immediate and

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[259.] Smyth, "Changing Times," 452.

[260.] Dinshaw, "Temporalities," 111.

prolonged, and a future time that seems already to have happened.

Performing the Text

In the previous sections, I have focused on linguistic moments where Julian was engaged in both exegesis and community building. As we have now seen, Julian's flashes of understanding are often tied to the realization that the visions were not meant just for her, but for her whole community. In articulating what she calls Julian of Norwich's "modernist style," Elizabeth Robertson makes the claim that "Julian positions herself in relationship to her audience as one who does not claim authority over the materials she wishes us to experience, but rather one whose compositional style allows us to become co-participants with her in that experience."[261] So many of the revisions in *A Revelation* revolve around including the reader in her vision. When she initially thinks the vision is incomprehensible or only about herself, Julian often finds that it in fact is for her "evencristen," that community of Christian readers and listeners encountering her work. It is my contention that the participation that Robertson notices is not in the visionary experience itself, but rather in the work that experience produces. My argument aligns somewhat with that of Anna Lewis, when she comments, "Readers can be invited into a space to explore, and continue to decode (and so 'make') the text but only because *A Revelation* has already demonstrated the 'safe reading' practices of the ideal reader."[262] Like Lewis, I see Julian building a community through performing an interpretation of her own text. First, the reader must also attempt to expand and understand the material

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[261.] Robertson, "Julian of Norwich's 'Modernist Style'," 143.

[262.] Lewis, "A Picture of Christendom," 88.

text of the visions. She must imitate Julian in seeing that words can be temporary markers that open into more accurate words. Second, as she understands the text, the reader must also be folded back into the visions, wrapped in the understanding that she reaches.[263]

Julian gives some of the work of interpretation to the reader by presenting her visions in nonlinear time. The affective language in her eighth vision of Christ's "swete face as it was drye and blodeles with pale deyeng, and sithen more pale, dede, langoring, and than turnid more dede into blew, and sithen more browne blew, as the flesh turnyd more depe dede" does indeed capture the reader's imagination as much as a vividly colored painting (LT 8.16). However, as with a painting the viewer's work is in the interpretation of the image. The way that Julian shifts from Christ's dry face to its aging and withering—the passing of time that cannot actually happen in such rapid succession—in fact creates a gap in the way that the reader interacts with the vision. Beginning with the withering face, and then quickly shifting back to the fresh blood, and further back to Christ saying "I threst," she unsteadies the reader's narrative. It almost becomes impossible to imagine, to re-view along with Julian, because the narrative is so disjointed and so unfocused. Yet she gives the reader examples of what to do with this "fast-forward" time. As I noted earlier, Julian herself pauses the quickly shared images and says "one time" and "another time." Even in this section, she explains that she can break down the vision into "iij maner of dryeng" (8.17). While the vision itself may come in confusing ways, there are rules and order that can be applied to understand the vision. Michelle Karnes suggests that this episode illustrates the ultimate community union. She writes, "seeing Christ's flesh and blood merge with the thorns improbably leads Julian to

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[263.] This, for Julian, is always love: "Wytt it wele, loue was his menyng" (16.86).

understand the connection between him and all who will be saved. Physical union suggests more substantial union, both of which are grounded, at least temporarily, in pain."[264] They are also joined in their extratemporal existence; Christ died and is dying and will die just as Julian (and her audience) reads, has read, and will read the account of her vision.

Julian's text means to help the reader seek footing, along with her, in the unsteady stream of her visions. In the instance of Christ's thirst, she invokes the image of the dying body drying on the cross and then plucks out one of the things she sees: Christ's pain. The entirety of the visionary episode lands on an interpretation of the echoes of pain Julian is able to feel because she asks for a vision of Christ on the cross. "Is ony payne in helle lyk thys?" Julian wonders. And she tells her reader, "I was answeryd in my reson: Helle is a nother peyne, for ther is dyspyer" (LT 8.17). Julian is often answered, but it is not clear that when she says "in my reason" she means "*by God* in my reason" or if instead she means "by thinking, I came to an answer." In their notes, Colledge and Walsh suggest the latter, noting "she has asked a question, and she receives this answer 'to my question' . . . suggesting that *resonn* there is the rhetorician's *ratiocinatio*, 'reasoning by question and answer'."[265] In other instances when Julian remarks that she was answered in her reason, she seems to be encouraging herself or answering her own question. When she differentiates between her bodily sight of the crucifix that led her to a spiritual sight in her second vision, Julian writes, "This saw I bodely, swemly and darkely, and I desyred mor bodely light to haue seen more clerly. And I was answeryde in my reason: If

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264. Karnes, "Julian's Art of Interpretation," 341.

265. Colledge and Walsh, fn. 57 (p. 365).

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god will shew thee more, he shal be thy light; thou nedyth none but him" (LT 2.10). In this instance, it is clear that God or Christ is not the interlocutor. When she wants to indicate that Christ told her something, Julian can.[266] Instead, it seems that the answer comes subconsciously from Julian herself. When she uses language like "in my reason" and "in my mind," Julian usually means her thinking, reasoning self. If she means otherwise, she uses conditionals like, "than had I a profyr in my reason, as it had ben frendely seyde to me: Loke vppe to hevyn to hys father" (LT 8.19).[267] Because she distinguishes between understanding given to her and understanding reached by her, Julian offers her reader a practical way of performing the work. One may come to understanding through divine intervention, or through one's rational faculty; both ways have equal validity in Julian's work.[268]

In the examples drawn from Revelation 8, Julian does not introduce a *thou* or an *oure* until after she has unfolded some of her personal experience within the vision. Chapters 16 and 17 present the dying Christ in terms of Julian's desire for him and her affective response to the blood: "Here felt I stedfastly that I louyd Crist so much aboue my selfe that ther was no peyne that myght be sufferyd lyke to that sorow that I had to see hym in payne" (LT 8.17). When she turns to Chapter 18, Julian allows for more

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[266.] See Revelation 36.50; Vision 13.2-5

[267.] This particular instance seems to be actually an unfriendly voice tempting her to remove her gaze from the crucifix, thereby ending the visions. I think this is another instance of *discretio spirituum*, discussed in more depth below. For more on Julian's use of signal phrases generally, see Vincent Gillespie, "Pastiche, Ventriloquism and Parody in Julian of Norwich," esp. 201-03.

[268.] This idea that comprehension can be reached through intellectual effort has resonances with the growing idea that the charism of *discretio spirituum* can be attained through careful spiritual work.

participants in this sorrow. Where before it was only Julian who felt terrible pain at seeing Christ die, now, she says, "saw I a grett *onyng* betwene Crist and *vs*, to my vnderstondyng; for when he was in payne *we* ware in payne, and *alle creatures* that myght suffer payne sufferyd with hym" (LT 8.18, emphasis mine). Christ's pain is Julian's is everyone's. She first shows the reader how to find an anchor in the swirl of her vision, and then includes the reader in her response. Where Robertson sees Julian as asking her reader to "respond, interpret and act directly and without assistance, upon the vivid showings before them," I argue that in fact she provides the model for interpretation and asks her audience to continue interpretation along with her and after her work is done.[269]

The last showing, which Julian claims justifies all the other showings, provides us with a clear point of separation between Julian, the visions, and the reader. Not only does she continue to bring in the reader, but Julian starts to invoke language of interiority and exteriority explicitly in regards to what her reader experiences. As she establishes a kind of *discretio spirituum* in Rev. 16, Julian tells her reader, "for he wylle þat we know by the swetnesse of the homely loue of hym that alle that we see or fele, within or withoute, whych is contraryous to thys, that it is of the enmy, and nott of god" (LT 16.79). Acknowledging that her readers have an internal reaction to the external act of reading allows Julian to emphasize the effect that reading and re-envisioning a visionary text might have. This section is not in the *ST* and instead Julian treats the reader to a much more explicit discourse on *discretio spirituum*. In almost the last lines of the *ST*, Julian exhorts her reader "this is the remedye, to knawe [reuerente drede and false drede] bath

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269. Robertson, "Modernist Style," 153.

and refuse the fals, righte as we walde do a wikkyd spiritte that schewed hym in liknes of a goode angelle" (ST, xxv). This fearful reading has been replaced in the *LT* with a more active reading. Even the false ugly showing, can be reread and reimagined, as a positively educational vision, as Julian herself enacts in the dream vision of Rev. 16. Of course it matters whether the showing is demonic or angelic, but one's understanding of the vision can be tempered by time and active reading.

One of the challenges—and equally one of the values—of including a writer like Julian in this kind of project is her performance of the very phenomenon I am describing. In order to produce the LT, Julian must reread her own text. As she does so, Julian participates in the written form of her visions in an active way. Occasionally that participation results in a kind of second showing, wherein Julian receives more divine inspiration for the interpretation of her visions. Reading between and beyond her own words leads Julian to deeper understanding of the visions and to a more complete text. Yet even after producing the LT, Julian recognizes that the community she has so carefully constructed must continue the work that she has begun. Her final chapter opens with a beginning: "this boke is begonne by goddys gyfte and his grace, but it is nott yett performyd, as to my syght" (LT 16.86). Colledge and Walsh note that "the 'performance' of which she now writes is the continuous life-long expression of a Christian's relationship with all the aspects of the person of Christ."[270] By taking the book out of the equation, the editors can read this as a final appeal to community piety. Yet Julian has not spent the entirety of the LT preparing her reader to simply sit and pray. As I have suggested throughout the chapter, the impending performance is a repeat of Julian's. The

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[270.] Colledge and Walsh, 731 (fn. 2).

reader must indeed contemplate, but through an active attempt to understand Julian's visions and language. Those opening lines are stunning in their simplicity, but even more tellingly, Julian goes on to write, "truly I saw and vnderstode in oure lordes menyng that he shewde it for he wyll haue it knowyn more than it is. In whych knowyng he wylle geve vs grace to loue hym and cleve to hym" (LT 16.86). Though Julian saw the visions, by sharing them she shares the search for knowing with her reader and she indicates that there are still more things that can be known, a longer *Long Text* that can be produced. As I turn next to the *Book of Margery Kempe,* I will suggest that Margery Kempe represents that community of visionary readers, eager to recreate something like Julian's *Revelation of Divine Love*.

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMING *THE BOOK:* MARGERY KEMPE AND TEXTUAL AUTHORITY

> For this ye knowen al so wel as I:
> Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
> He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
> Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
> Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
> Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
> Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
> *Chaucer, CT Prol. 730-6*

In the *General Prologue,* the Host fears that he might bear the brunt of the listener's wrath simply because he reports those tales he was told as truly as he can. He fears he will be held responsible for their content, learned or lewed. Margery Kempe, that famous 15th-century lacrimant, seems to fear that she will not be held responsible for her texts, that people encountering them might dismiss them as the fictive imaginings of a middle-aged woman. Her book, then, should be read in the first place as a rehearsal in that most basic sense; it is a repetition, a recitation of those things previously heard.[271] In other words, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is practice making perfect. Of course, this begs the question of what Kempe is practicing and how this practice makes true, or strengthens the truth, of the content. In this chapter, I will suggest that *The Book of Margery Kempe* practices visionary literature in that it offers an author who is herself a reader and a visionary. Kempe proposes Margery as an imitable figure and she is able to do so because she knows and exploits the conventions of writing visionary literature.

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[271] Of note, the OED records the first instance of "rehearsal" in the 14th century in Chaucer. See, "rehearsal, n.". *OED Online*. Oxford University Press.

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In that respect, this chapter aligns itself with Lynn Staley's delineation between "Margery" and *"Kempe."* In *Dissenting Fictions*, Staley takes the novel approach, though really it should not be, of distinguishing between "Margery, the subject, and Kempe her author."[272] As she rightly points out, "we define the *Book* in terms of its author's gender and so circumscribe our response to it by assuming an absolute equation between the *Book*'s author and its subject."[273] Using Staley's reminder to treat the *Book* as we would any other narrative with an author-as-protagonist, I suggest that Margery, or "the Creature," occupies the role of a dreamer like Will or the Jeweler from *Pearl*. Kempe then plays the role of a waking visionary. The Creature moves through the narrative but she is unmoved by the narrative; we see her growth as a visionary, but the Creature is in many ways as stagnant in her understanding as the Jeweler. At the same time, Kempe structures and arranges the Creature's life to highlight certain important moments, often relating to textual authority, though she rarely steps out of the narrative to offer commentary on its meaning. The Creature thus becomes the textual embodiment of Kempe's understanding of the place of a visionary in literature.[274]

Of course, it is a bit of a stretch to read the Creature as a dreamer when she is represented as a waking visionary. Yet, I would say that she links to dreamers in two

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[272] Staley, *Dissenting Fictions,* 3.

[273] Ibid.

[274.] To clarify, when I use Kempe, I mean the person who actually lived and when I use the Creature or Margery, I mean the person moving through the action of the book. I've adopted this odd language in direct imitation of Kempe's own language (she frequently calls herself 'creatur'). I also want to preserve some of *The Book's* peculiarity and specialness. In calling herself 'creatur,' Kempe signals a space between herself as author and herself as charater.

specific ways. First, the Creature may encounter divine visions and have some special knowledge as a result, but often that knowledge is kept hidden from the reader. Second, where Will turned to his allegorized companions for understanding, the Creature turns to books, readers of books, and scribes who can turn her experiences into books. She also, like the dreamers, makes long pilgrimages to holy places and it is during these pilgrimages that the Creature performs many of her visionary moments.[275] Finally, as I suggested in the previous chapters, the role of the Dreamer is not to understand anything, but to offer the reader the opportunity for understanding. Kempe's construction of the Creature, her elision of interpretative moments, does just that.

Books and Truth

Criticism of *The Book* has long focused on the relationship between the text, the scribe, and the author, swinging between suggesting Kempe had little to do with the final results of the written text to saying she maintained total control. In 1975, John Hirsh confidently declared that, "the second scribe, no less than Margery, should be regarded as the author of *The Book of Margery Kempe.*"[276] Scholarship has generally followed Hirsh in his declaration, giving the second scribe varying authority over the book's content. Lynn Staley, in her now-foundational article on the trope of the scribe, argues persuasively that Kempe's literacy is not as important as we might have thought. Rather, Staley says, "it is likely she exerted a good deal of control over the text itself: either she wrote it herself and created a fictional scribe, or she had it read back to her and was aware of exactly what

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[275] Arguably the Jeweler is traveling when he is in the heavenly garden. The poem is full of movement toward the final vision.

[276] Hirsh, 150.

was in the text."[277] Staley ultimately decides it most likely that Kempe did have a scribe and that she knowingly used this scribe to imbue her text with authority. More recently, Sebastian Sobecki has attempted to solve the puzzle of authorship by arguing that, "we transcend the limitations of such terms as 'author,' 'scribe,' or 'secretary' by embracing the collaborative model of authorship commonly practiced in comparable situations, where a medieval religious woman is forced to rely on the written mediation of a man."[278] Sobecki's claim allows the second scribe, who he is fairly confident was Robert Spryngolde, to have influenced some of the structure and content of *The Book*. Nevertheless, Kempe herself "wrote" it. Noting a little-cited passage at the end of Book 1, Sobecki asks us to consider that Kempe "*had* the book in her before anyone wrote it down."[279] I want to expand on this idea that Kempe had the book in her by suggesting that, in representing herself textually, Kempe also represents herself as the book. She does this through a repeated insistence on the primacy of things physically written down. For Kempe, the act of writing is a testament to reality and truth.

The most natural place to begin such a study is Kempe's representation of her initial struggle in turning her experiences into a text. *The Book* opens with the Creature's first reaction to her own visionary episodes. She finds her own speech to be inadequate, saying "ne hyrself cowd nevyr telle the grace that sche felt, it was so hevenly, so hy aboven hyr reson and hyr bodyly wyttys, and hyr body so febyl in tym of the presens of grace that sche myth nevyr expressyn it wyth her word lych as sche felt it in hyr sowle"

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[277] Staley, "Trope of the Scribe," 835.

[278] Sobecki, "Margery Kempe's Son," 280.

[279] Ibid., 281.

(61-4). By now a common refrain, Kempe continues the visionary trope of finding human language insufficient for expressing whatever the visionary feels in her soul. Concerned with this inability, the Creature says that she visits clerks, archbishops and bishops, bachelors and doctors of divinity, and anchorites to show them what "the Holy Gost, of hys goodnesse, wrowt in hyr mende and in hyr sowle." But again, this is tempered by her inability to express herself, as she explains she did so, "as her wytt wold serven hyr to expressyn it" (70-1). Of course, all those she seeks out tell her that these are truly divine visions and that she should not fear the influence of evil spirits.[280] More surprisingly, some of the clerks with whom she converses suggest that she write these visions down. Kempe notes that they "bodyn hyr that sche schuld don hem wryten and makyn a booke of hyr felyngys and hir revelacyons. Sum proferyd hir to wrytyn hyr felyngys wyth her owen handys, and sche wold not consentyn in no wey, for sche was comawndyd in hir sowle that sche schuld not wrytyn so soone" (78-82). Her inability to speak seems, for the moment, to extend to writing and Kempe insists that she does not attempt to write the visions down for at least another twenty years.[281]

This twenty-year break may in part be because Kempe's quest for a scribe proves challenging. While the clerks originally suggested that Kempe write her visions by her own hand, she either cannot or will not. She is then left with "no wryter that wold fulfyllyn hyr desyr ne yeve credens to hir felingys" until the first scribe comes to England

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[280] This quest to share her vision with as many people as possible is clear evidence of Kempe's awareness of the constraints of *discretio spirituum*. See Voaden, "Margery Kempe: The Woman Who Would Not Go Away," *Gods Words*, 109-54.

[281] Windeatt questions Kempe's dating, suggesting that her initial visions might have occurred "sometime in the period 1398-1403," some ten years earlier. See Windeatt, *The Book*, 323n.

from the Low Countries.[282] The scribe works with Kempe until his death, which marks

both the ending of Book 1, and the beginnings of Books 1 and 2. The proem to Book 1

notes very briefly, "And sythen he deyd," while Book 2 more ornately proclaims, "afftyr

that owr Sovereyn Savyowr had take the persone whech wrot first the tretys afornseyd to

hys manyfold mercy . . ." (Bk 1. 96; Bk 2 1.7424-5). The first scribe's death, while

simply stated, marks the moment when the written text attains primacy. Famously, the

second scribe cannot make heads or tales of the poorly written draft, saying it "was so

evel wretyn that he cowd lytyl skyll theron, for it was neithyr good Englysch ne Dewch,

ne the lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as other letters ben" (Bk 1. 99-101). Even the

written form of Kempe's visions hides behind special obscurity. The words and letters are

almost human language, but not quite. They possess a certain liminality as they slip

between English and Dutch, with marks that could be letters but that seem not to be.

Instead of, as one might expect, starting over and telling the second scribe her visions

anew, Kempe and the scribe both take for granted the importance of making some sense

of the written words. They must rehearse the text. The scribe tells her, "if he cowd redyn

it he wolde copyn it owt and wrytyn it betyr wyth good wylle" (Bk 1. 103-4). In making a

new text, the scribe cannot disregard what might be contained in the first. It fixes

Kempe's visions and grounds them in a material reality. In contrast, Kempe insists that

the scribe's inability to read was not simply due to the ill-formed letters, but to the "evel

spekyng of this creatur and of hir wepyng . . ." (Bk 1. 105-6). Speech, that text not fixed

in the world, interferes with the scribe's will to work with Kempe.

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[282] Windeatt and Sobecki suggest this scribe was her son and I tend to find their arguments persuasive. See Windeatt, "Introduction," 5 and Sobecki, "Margery Kempe's Son."

In spite of his initial reluctance or inability, the second scribe finally returns to the

book and finds he can read it. Kempe interprets his newfound ability as a miracle brought

about by her prayers. Christine Cooper notes that "the miraculous gift of language is an

important part of the assertion of the divine source of [the female visionary's] speech."[283]

Although *The Book* does model itself after the lives of other holy visionaries, this

moment is not simply miraculous understanding. Rather, we find here an important

moment of translation. When Kempe first shares her visions, she emphasizes that her

words and wit are not equal to the task of relating a divine event. It is fitting, then, that

their initial inscription renders those words almost in English, but not quite. Kempe and

her first scribe work together on the primary act of translation. As I have suggested, the

visionary always finds some distance between the vision and the language she uses to

relate the vision. Julian most clearly illustrates that desire to return to the words and

reopen them to find a more accurate representation of the vision. Here, it is almost as

though the first book's status as being "evel sett" and "unresonably wretyn" enhances the

space between Kempe's text and her visions.[284]

The struggle to understand the first copy produces two proems, further distancing

the visions from the reader. In *The Book of the Incipit*, Vance Smith comments that "A

text not only exemplifies a particular beginning, but can also be thought of as a response

to the problem of making a beginning. That is, every text is a liminal text, its beginnings

both intrinsic and extrinsic to it, a problematic that is really just a dilation of the dilemma

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[283] Cooper, "Miraculous Translation," 286.

[284] There is a parallel to be made between Margery's evil words at the start of her book during her post-partum madness and the evil words of the first copy.

of human language itself."[285] With her stuttering beginning, delayed some twenty years and then four more, Kempe settles her reader into that problem. She cannot write her book until commanded by God, but that command does not result in an easy beginning. By including the struggle to write her text, Kempe internalizes the visionary struggle with language and uses it to inform the very structure of her book.

Given her faith in written language, it is no surprise that books and the act of reading from them to an audience are important and effective tools for Kempe. She emphasizes the truth of books and books often reveal reality. As they are still trying to write her book, the second scribe, "the prest whech wrot this boke," articulates his care in determining the truth of what Kempe tells him. He threatens not to write anything unless she, "prey to God . . . and wetyn, whan owyr Lord wold visiten hir wyth devocyon, what schuld be the ende, and trewly wythowtyn any feynyng tellyn hym how sche felt . . ." (Bk 1. 24.1760-67). Her information must come from God, and it must be shared without any "feynyng," pretense or fiction. This moment pairs with the initial inscription scene, where Kempe insists "she dede no thing wryten but that sche knew rygth wel for very trewth" (Bk 1. 138-9). This authorizing strategy — the book is proven not just by Kempe, but by her scribe/confessor — does more than assure the reader that she has not just spent her time on a book of fables. Rather, it continues the narrative that written things are true things or that true things should become written things. Perhaps even more importantly, this moment in Kempe's text illuminates the problem of fictionality in visionary writing. The visions must be true and unmediated but they also require all the mechanics of writing and thus might "lose" something in the mediation between the visionary and her

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[285] Smith, *Book of the Incipit,* 6.

pen. Kempe navigates the problem of the necessary fiction — the language-ing of the ineffable— and the danger of unnecessary fiction — the adding of anything *untrew* to that language — by displaying a special relationship to written texts.

In particular, there are a pair of "tales" that best illustrate Kempe's privileged perception of written texts. In the first, a young man comes to see Kempe's scribe and claims he is sick and impoverished. Rather than listen to Margery's counsel, the scribe judges the young man by his speech. The scene plays out as follows:

> The forseyd preste, yevyng *credens* to the *yong mannys words*, in-as-mech as he was an amyabyl persone, fayr feturyd, wel faveryd in cher and in cuntenawns, *sad in hys langage* and *dalyawns*, prestly in hys gestur and vestur, havyng compassyon of hys disese, purposyng to getyn hym frendys into hys relevyng and comfort, went to a worshepful burgeys in Lenn . . . (Bk 1 24.1787-92, emphasis mine)

Because of the young man's fair features and good cheer (external aspects), the priest believes his sad language and conversation (internal aspects). At this point, "the creatur of whom this boke is wretyn," reenters the narrative (Bk 1 24. 1797). Described in relation to her text, the truth of which has been and will continue to be proven, the Creature is immediately juxtaposed against the *sad langage* of the young man. *Sad* is one of those peculiar Middle English words with so many and so varied meanings that it can be a little tricky to parse. For instance, it could be the equivalent of our modern "sad or sorrowful," meaning that the young man is sharing a "sob story." It has also been used in romances to mean "sore," as with a blow from a sword. The young man's words are indeed a sore hit to the priest, who gives up worldly goods in his belief at their truth.

Sad can also be used in a particular combination with the word truth. The "sad treuth" is a truth-y truth; it is a most reliable truth. In that light, the connection between

the Creature and the young man becomes one of truth. To know that someone is a liar, as the Creature does, one must also know his truth and read beyond his fair face. The young man continues his false speech, "flateryng" the priest and, after the priest lends him silver, promising to "bryng hym ayen hys sylver rygth wel and trewly" (Bk 1 24.1827). Again, Kempe focuses on truth in relation to a dissimulator and immediately after the man leaves we read,

> Whan he was gon, the forseyde creatur, havyng *undyrstondyng be felyng in hir sowle* as owyr Lord wold schewyn that he was an *untrewe* man and no more wold come ageyn, sche, *for to preve whethyr hir felyng was trewe* or *fals*, askyd the preste whethyr the yong man was, that he had preysed so mech. The prest seyd he walkyd a lytil way and trustyd that he wold come ageyn. Sche seyd sche supposyd that he wold no mor se hym, ne no mor he dede nevyr aftyr" (Bk 1 24.1831-5, emphasis mine).

Just as the priest believed the young man's words because of his external appearance, so too we see the Creature proving her internal feeling through external signs. She feels in her soul that the young man will not come back and to prove this feeling she speaks to the priest, making external her inner understanding.

Because the offense of not believing the Creature's words is so serious, the priest must go through another ordeal related to written truth. This time, an old man comes to him with a "portose, a good lytyl boke, for to selle" (Bk 1 24.1842). The Creature's special relationship with written texts leads her to caution the priest, "byith no boke of hym, for he is not to trustyn upon, and that schal ye wel knowyn yyf ye medyl wyth hym" (Bk 1 24.1847-8). Against the Creature's advice, the priest asks why the old man sought him out, since they had never met before. In reply, the old man says, "it was hys wy that awt it befor that, yet I knew any yong preste that me thowt *sad and wel dysposyd*, that he schuld han this boke before any other man . . ." (Bk 1 24.1859-61). Kempe reintroduces

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the word *sad* here, this time making some play on the priest's sincerity, which reads as gullibility. With the Creature's admonition ringing in his ears, the priest asks to see the book and of course it does not exist; the old man leaves and never returns. Kempe concludes this episode by saying, "than the preste knew wel that the forseyd creaturys felyng was trewe" (Bk 1 24.1877). It is important to keep in mind that these are not visions that the Creature has, but rather perceptions. She reads the fictions of the old and young men and perceives their inner truths. In the same way, Kempe's own truth is proven as the reader sees her written account, which, unlike the old man's book, actually exists.

Kempe's confidence in the authority of written texts extends to her own text, which she references as often, if not more, as she does other texts she wants to emulate. Jessica Rosenfeld suggests that "the *Book* recognizes the necessity of imitation in order for devotion to be sanctioned, as well as the vagaries of clerical control over whether that imitation will be recognized. Margery's competitive relationship with other female saints thus allows her to borrow their authority while also asserting her own."[286] Kempe's aggressive imitation of female saints extends to the reverence with which she approaches their and her texts. In a way combining the non-linear narrative of *Piers* and the expectation for rereading and reinterpreting in Julian, Kempe continually points back in her text with phrases like, "as is wryten beforn." In what we might see as an attempt to organize the content of the book around themes, her scribe writes at one point, "her folwyth a rygth notabyl matere of the creaturys felyng, and it is wretyn her for convenyens, in-as-mech as it is in felyng leche to the materys that ben wretyn beforn,

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[286] Rosenfeld, "Envy and Exemplarity," 107.

not-wythstondyng it befel long aftyr the materys whech folwyn" (25.1878-81). As it apologizes for the temporal disjunction, the language here emphasizes the continuity of writing. Because it refers to matters written earlier in the book, this episode is rightly placed out of time. In fact, what connects this moment to the earlier stories (the false young man and the false old man previously mentioned) is the tension between other texts and Kempe's text.

The problem of which her scribe speaks is a domestic debate on the chapels and parish church of Lynn, whether there should be a baptismal font in the chapels.[287] This debate results in the procurement of a papal bull, a written text at odds with Kempe's revelations about the problem. In a very clever way, though, Kempe underplays the written-ness of the bull and instead emphasizes its impotence. She says, "the bulle was put in ple, and divers days wer kept be forme of lawe to prevyn whethyr the funt, yyf it wer had, schuld ben derogacyon to the parysch chyrch or nowt" (25.1896-99). While "in plea" (i.e. moving through the legal system), the wealthy parishioners tried to speed along with well-placed bribes. The bribes of course result in nothing and the bull is not fulfilled as the chapels get no fonts. With all this extra-textual activity, the papal bull then seems not to be a written thing, but a spoken thing. In direct juxtaposition, the Creature once again reenters her text through repeated references to the text itself. We next read, "than the preste whech aftyrward wrot this boke went to the creatur of whom this tretys makyth mencyon, as he had don beforn in the tyme of ple, and askyd hir how sche felt in hir sowle in this mater . . ." (25.1917-20). Time has gone to pieces, with past, present, and future all mixed together in these few lines. In contrast with the wealthy dishonest

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[287] For historical situating, see n. to 1883 and 1892, pp 146-7.

parishioners, the Creature's feeling in her soul is tied to her textuality; her reliability is the result of having been written. Where the bull is argued, Kempe's textuality is fixed and uncontested.

Alternative Language

Perhaps the most memorable parts of *The Book* are those where the Creature loses herself in ecstatic weeping. Thinking on the saints and martyrs and the best way to get to heaven, she tells us, "this creatur had contrycion and gret compunccyon, wyth plentyvows teerys and many boystows sobbyngys, for hir synnes and for hir unkyndnesse ageyns hir maker" (3.393-5). This marks a basic example of the Creature's often uncontrollable tears. She says that, "Hir wepyng was so plentyvows and so contwnyng that mech pepul wend that sche mygth wepyn and levyn whan sche wold, and therfor many men seyd sche was a fals ypocryte and wept for the world for socowr and for worldy good" (3.399-402). Her weeping and its public censure becomes an echo through the book, with people in churches and on the streets distrusting the Creature's affective piety. This crying, I argue, represents for Kempe both a translation moment and a moment of linguistic failure. When she cries, the Creature does so in a vocal, though non-verbal response to her contemplation of the divine and her relationship to the divine. Yet, as Robert Ross rightly points out, "Language informs Margery's self."[288] Her obsessive search for someone to listen to her and someone to write for her, means that Kempe understood her tears as more than an affective response. The semi-linguistic crying then operates as a kind of translation act; it vocalizes Kempe's encounter yet because the tears are non-verbal, they

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[288] Ross, "Oral Life, Written Text," 230.

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do not give even an approximation of that truth Kempe claims to see. Hildegard could speak, though her words were not the right words; the Creature cannot even speak, though she overflows with almost-linguistic signs.

The strange temporality of *The Book* means that Kempe claims that the first time she cries in contemplation is on Mount Calvary on her pilgrimage, a quarter of the way through the book. She has a vision of Christ's passion in the Temple, then on the Mount she says, "beforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygth the mornyng of owyr Lady, of Sen John and Mary Mawdelyn, and many other that lovyd owyr Lord" (Bk 1. 28.2211-4).[289] This particular vision causes the Creature to start weeping uncontrollably.

> Sche had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn that sche myt not kepe hirself fro krying and roryng, thow sche schuld a be ded therfor. And this was the fyrst cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon. And this maner of crying enduryd many yerys aftyr this tyme, for owt that any man myt do, and therfor sufferyd sche mych despyte and mech reprefe. The cryeng was so lowde and so wondyrful that it made the pepyl astoynd, les than thei had herd it beforn and er elly[s] that thei knew the cawse of the crying.

Kempe continues in this manner for a while, articulating the times and places the Creature is driven to cry — Jerusalem, Rome, England, on the street, in church, in the field, in her chambers. For a while, she relates this weeping as the physical reaction to a physical experience, akin to falling to one's knees in the face of the divine. Then, Kempe takes a different tack, one that informs the rest of her weeping throughout *The Book*. As with Hildegard, who said that she tried to keep the visions a secret which made her ill, so too Kempe attempts to keep her weeping within. She says, "whan sche knew that sche schulde cryen, sche kept it in as long as sche mygth and dede al that sche cowde to

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[289] I return to this matter of seeing in her ghostly sight later in this chapter.

withstond it er ellys to put it awey . . . And whan the body myth ne lengar enduryn the gostly labowr, but was ovyrcome wyth the unspekabyl lofe that wrowt so fervently in the sowle, than fel sche down and cryed wondyr lowde" (28.2254-61). Those tears that at first seemed to be affective responses to her visions, now come clearly into view as the non-verbal vocalization of the "unspekabyl lofe" she experiences.

Kempe's relation of her crying and roaring highlights one of her remarkable rhetorical strategies in *The Book*. She gives the vision and her reaction to it in such a way that the reader does not immediately realize that she does not share the content of the vision contemporaneously with the event of the vision. In that sense, then, *The Book* is a bit like Julian's revised *Long Text*, though not as clearly investigating the meaning of the visions. Rather, the similarity lies in the the new speakability of the visions. Where Julian's *LT* emphasizes new understanding and re-vision, Kempe's *Book* shows a new-found ability to speak or write the vision. She manages to move past her tears and her acknowledged silence. Of this incident on Mount Calvary, Kempe makes a claim that she will repeat at different moments in *The Book*. She says, "sche wept, sche sobbyd, sche cryed so lowde that it [was] wondyr to heryn it. Sche was so ful of holy thowtys and medytacyons and holy contemplacyons in the Passyon of owyr Lord Jhesu Crist, and holy dalyawns that owyr Lord Jhesu Crist dalyed to hir sowle, *that sche cowde nevyr expressyn hem aftyr, so hy and so holy thei weryn*" (29.2325-30, my emphasis). Because she does not care about temporality, Kempe does not say, as we might hope, "botte now sche can telle it more fully." Instead, she leaves the reader to understand that her first attempt to share those *holy dalyawns* expressed itself as loud weeping.[290] The reader's

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[290] This use of *dalyawns* to mean her conversations with Christ is a curious one,

current experience of the text is that 'botte now' that one might look for.

Much later in the text, Kempe repeats this sentiment with a slight change that clarifies even further the relationship between her tears and language. At this point, the Creature is back in Lynn and a few priests seek to test the reality of her uncontrolled tears. Of course she passes the test and Kempe ends this episode by writing, "had sche so many holy thowtys, holy spechys, and dalyawns in hir sowle [. . .] that sche cowde nevyr rehersyn but fewe of hem; [. . .] it weryn so hy abovyn hir bodily wittys that sche myth nevyr expressyn hem wyth hir bodily tunge liche as sche felt hem. Sche undirstod hem bettyr in hir sowle than sche cowde uttyr hem" (Bk 1 83.6789-96). Once she establishes that these teachings and visions are outside the limits of her language, Kempe makes little to no attempt to express them or to capture their unspeakability. Instead, she is content to represent the effect of those visionary episodes on her and on the community around her. When they understand that her crying is good, thereby correctly interpreting the non-verbal signification of the tears, Kempe claims the people around her find an increase of merit and profit. On the other hand, when they do not understand the tears, misinterpreting the signification, people find "litil encres of vertu and of merite" (6770). Kempe may not be able to make a complete translation of her ecstasies, but her non-verbal signs allow other people the opportunity make their own translation.

Moving backward in the text, but perhaps forward in time, Kempe also emphasizes the discrepancy between the tears she feels and her ability to express their meaning fully. I will quote the passage in full, as it is one of the more complex moments in the text.

> Sche knew and undyrstod many secret and prevy thyngys whech schuld befallen

given it often means something like 'flirtatious speech.' For a brief investigation see Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditation*, 16-8.

aftyrward be inspiracyon of the Holy Gost. And oftentymes, whel sche was kept wyth swech holy spechys and dalyawns, sche schuld so wepyn and sobbyn that many men wer gretly awondyr, for thei wysten ful lytyl how homly ower Lord was in hyr sowle. Ne hyrself cowd nevyr telle the grace that sche felt, it was so hevenly, so hy aboven hyr reson and hyr bodyly wyttys, and hyr body so febyl in tym of the presens of grace that sche myth nevyr expressyn it wyth her word lych as sche felt it in hyr sowle (Pr 1. 56-64).

Here, Kempe displays with surprising clarity a deep knowledge of the work of visionary texts. The knowledge and understanding that she claims come in direct relation to the Holy Ghost, which closely links Kempe's texts with those of Hildegard. As noted in Chapter One, in a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard writes, "I have from earliest childhood seen great marvels which my tongue has no power to express but which the Spirit of God has taught me that I may believe."[291] In appealing to the Holy Ghost, Kempe and Hildegard both locate their visions at the most mystical part of the Christian godhead.[292] There is also an implicit link to the third kind of vision outlined by Augustine in *De Genesi*. That vision, of course, is the intellectual one which requires effort and interpretation as well as divine favor. In mentioning, however briefly, the Holy Ghost, the third part of the Trinity, Kempe imbues this moment of linguistic failure with truth.

Kempe immediately turns to contrast her inner understanding with the external confusion caused by her non-verbal echo of that understanding. "Many men," she says, wondered because they "wysten ful lytyl" what was happening in her soul. The subtlety of Kempe or her scribe's language here should not be overlooked. The Creature is so full of the sweet heavenly speeches and conversations that she bursts forth in tears and cries.

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[291] Hildegard, Letters Vol. 1 (1).

[292] For a comprehensive overview of the place of the trinity in the later Middle Ages, see Davis, "Marriage and Trinitarian Love in the Later Middle Ages."

The men around her, on the other hand, are full of little knowing or understanding. In order to show that incongruity between her and her audience's interpretation, Kempe opens the Creature's soul to the reader. The reader is allowed to see what the Creature could not then and Kempe cannot now fully express. Thus, though the reader may, like the community, understand full little how homely God's grace worked in the Creature, the fullness and littleness of that understanding is closer to Kempe's than it is the men who wondered at her tears.

Once she establishes the precedent of crying, of not-speech, when she is overcome by divine visions, Kempe carries it through the rest of her book. She uses this trope to express the inexpressible and, in some measure, to offer her reader an opportunity to understand her external actions. Halfway through the book, when the reader is well-familiar with the Creature's tears, Kempe says, "in hir sowle sche beheld owr Lord comyng wyth hys apostelys, and sche was so raveschyd into contemplacyon wyth swetnes and devocyon that sche myth <not> stondyn ageyns her comyng, as curtesy wolde, but lenyd hir to a peler in the chirche and held hir strongly therby for dred of fallyng . . . whech was cawse that sche cryed and wept ful sor" (49.3882-8). Courtesy and custom would demand that the Creature stand and acknowledge the Abbot (not the envisioned Christ) who was approaching her and so she offers in way of an apology a depiction of her ravished soul and subsequent cries. Wendy Harding argues that "her tears and sobs represent a response more direct and spontaneous than words. Inasmuch as the written word is privileged, this nonliterary expression is not acknowledged as a discourse. Nonetheless, this very physical reaction suggests not so much Margery's

inability to express herself, as her recourse to a different order of communication."[293] So

the understanding in the Creature's soul immediately reads as physical action and is later

translated by Kempe into textual action.

Underlying all this discussion of a non-verbal cry and a reluctance to explain the

meaning of her visions is the high homely relationship that Kempe constructs with Christ.

Nowhere do we expect that Christ's words might be like a flame in the darkness or blood

trickling down a crucifix. Instead, Christ appears "most semly, most bewtyvows, and

most amyable." To Kempe, Christ is a beautiful human and is understandable through her

semi-physical relationship with him. He speaks to her, "Dowtyr, why hast thow forsakyn

me, and I forsoke nevyr the?" (Bk 1 1.231-2). By emphasizing that he spoke those

particular words, Kempe establishes her authority along lines of orality and affectivity.

As Liz McAvoy suggests, "the textual effect of this prioritising of the insistent and

apparently unmediated female voice is carefully constructed in order to imbue it with an

authority which will ratify the woman's ability to ventriloquise the voice of God."[294]

Christ speaks to her and the Creature in turn speaks — through tears — back to Christ

and also out to the community of those around her. In a dated, but relevant, article,

Karma Lochrie points out that "the language of affective spirituality as it was used by

female mystics needs to be examined for its power to reimagine mystical experience and

women themselves, for its transformation of male mystical discourse, and for its

fundamentally different understanding of the relationship of the physical — the bodily —

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[293] Harding, "Body into Text," 173.

[294] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 172.

to language itself."[295] Kempe's transformation of her close personal relationship with Christ into first tears and then written language represents what was for Lochrie a fundamental difference. Indeed, when we read what Kempe says Christ spoke to her, it is very clear and straightforward. Yet, at the point of reading, we've lost Kempe's emphasis on her mediation of that speech. When she is told by the Father that she should marry Christ, the Creature stalls and does not respond. Christ presses her, asking "What seyst thu, Margery, dowtyr, to my Fadyr's of thes wordys that he spekyth to the?" (Bk 1. 35.2840-1). In reply, the Creature cries: "sche wold not answeryn the Secunde Persone, but wept wondir sor" (2842). As it happens, this conversation unwinds in the Creature's soul and she remains speechless. As it is written, Kempe ventriloquizes for God and Christ, turning their inner speech into text.[296]

Not only does she share rather common, comforting conversations with Christ, but her interactions with people on her pilgrimages are marked with special linguistic clarity.[297] In particular, Kempe constructs a special relationship with Margaret Florentine, primarily through non-verbal communication. The Creature's interactions with Florentine come at a point in her book that is particularly rife with miraculous language. She meets her German confessor and each experiences a miracle whereby they can understand each

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[295] Lochrie, "Good Game," 15.

[296] This is different, but for some reason it reminds me of Augustine's *Sololiquia*. At the opening of the first book he converses with *Ratio* about memory and the place of written texts.

[297] Christine Cooper's article on miraculous translation in *The Book* covers both the initial rewriting of the text and Kempe's interactions with the German priest. She does not, surprisingly, mention this episode with Margaret Florentine. See "Miraculous Translation in 'The Book of Margery Kempe'," *Studies in Philology* 101.3 (2004): 270-98.

other. Unlike the confessor, who fulfills a clear religious need for the Creature, Florentine acts as a social intermediary. When she enters the text, the Creature is in the throes of a particularly rapturous episode in a church in Assisi. She says, "sche wept, sche sobbyd, sche cryed wyth gret plente of teerys and many holy thowtys" (Bk 1 31.2586-7). Kempe claims that these tears were not just for herself, but for her community — "for hirself, for alle hir frendys, for alle hir enmys, and for alle the sowlys in purgatory" (2589-90). It is at this point that Margaret Florentine enters the text, almost as though she is drawn into existence by the Creature's copious tears. Florentine and the Creature do not even speak to each other, and it is Richard "the broke-back" who speaks to Florentine for the Creature. Florentine's role is to guide the Creature to Rome and provide petty justice for her: "whan the forseyd creatur was comyn into Rome, and thei that weryn hir felaws beforntyme and put hir owt of her cumpany weryn in Rome also and herd tellyn of swech a woman was come thedyr, their had gret wondir how sche cam ther in safte" (2598-2600). If Kempe is primarily concerned with constructing a perfect book of her trials and tribulations, she is also concerned with putting those who wrong her in their place.

When Florentine next appears in the text, her coming is represented as the fulfillment of one of the Creature's prophetic visions. Fortune's wheel turns on the Creature while she is in Rome and after her triumphal arrival she finds herself without a "peny ne halfpeny to helpyn hirself wyth" (38.3026). Her poverty results in a pair of visions; in the first Christ tells her he will find her friends to comfort her and in the second Mary invites her to sit at a banquet. Immediately after this Marian vision, Margaret Florentine reappears in the narrative. This time, Kempe shares the way they communicated, saying "neithyr of hem cowd wel undirstand other but be syngnys er

tokenys and in fewe comown wordys" (38.3056-7). With this special language, Margaret Florentine can ascertain that the Creature is living in poverty and, fulfilling the Creature's vision of Mary, offers a place at her table every Sunday. Rather than offering a thank you, *grazie* is simple enough, the Creature "sat and wept ful sor, thankyng owr Lord that sche was so cheryd and cherisched, for hys lofe, of hem that cowd not undirstond hir langage" (38.3064-6). Twisting inward once again, the Creature responds to Florentine's kindness with sobbing, *hir langage*.

Readers and Crowds

In *Language as the Site of Revolt,* M.C. Bodden wonders, "if both [Kempe's] mystical visions and her mystical voice have been rigorously investigated and defended by individual scholars, what other reason might underlie the fact that her status as a mystic cannot garner collective sanctioning by any scholarly (or Catholic) community?"[298] Bodden ultimately argues that this is because of Kempe's often unauthorized speech in public spaces about the security of her position in God's favor. To this argument, she adds a critique of those who assess negatively Kempe's adoption of waking visionary practices and prose style. She notes, "constructing Kempe's voiced visionary experience as largely derivative or as fictional illustrates the difficulty of contemporary scholars in getting past her determination to assert her identity, to create her own 'self.'"[299] In this last section, I will spend some time parsing out this tension between Kempe's parallels to other texts and her desire to be Margery Kempe, a singular woman. As Karma Lochrie

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[298] Bodden, 123.

[299] Bodden, 134.

notes, *The Book*'s clear relation to other works of medieval mysticism has often been used to its detriment. She writes, "in the past, such historical studies have too often succeeded chiefly in marginalizing Kempe rather than contextualizing her. Mystical filiations tend still to be linked to issues of mystical legitimacy . . . Thus, the English mystics are both defined by a contemporary scholarly code of legitimacy and used to reinforce this code."[300] Of course I agree with Lochrie and Bodden that Kempe has more often than not been compared to her contemporaries and been found lacking, a middle-aged woman, illiterate and manipulative. However, it is precisely by locating Kempe in that visionary tradition that we can recuperate space for her voice. My argument suggests that the reason for Lochrie's reluctance to put Kempe in dialogue with other visionaries is because of a misunderstanding of where Kempe should be best placed in that tradition. It is not next to Julian as another unique theologian, but rather next to Julian as a visionary reading herself.

Because Kempe places such power in written texts, it is little surprise that she emphasizes the textual sources of her spiritual guides. Kempe includes the same list of books twice in *The Book* and they include a glossed bible, St Bridget's book, Hilton's book, Bonaventure, the *Stimulus Amoris*, the *Incendium Amoris*, and "swech other."[301] Even as she lists those books that she know, Kempe's imitation of saints and texts collides.[302] She can, it seems, scarcely refrain from mentioning her own book

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[300] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh,* 5.

[301] 58.4819-21. cf 17.1257-8. Windeatt suggests that Hilton's book was probably *Scale of Perfection*.

[302] Julia Bolton Holloway, "Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England," *Margery Kempe: A Book of*

immediately after this list: "and than wist sche that it was a spirit sent of God whech seyd to hir, *as is wretyn a lityl beforn*, whan sche compleynyd for defawte of redyng, thes wordys: 'Ther schal come on fro fer that schal fulfillyn thi desyr" (58.4821-4, emphasis mine). Kempe's strategy of repeated references to her own text reinforces the textual connection to her models over the spiritual connection. Even as she turns to portray herself as a more meditative and spiritual person, Kempe says, "thorw heryng of holy bokys and thorw heryng of holy sermownys, sche evyr encresyd in contemplacyon and holy meditacyon" (59.4832-4). Any increase in her spirituality comes to Kempe mediated through books.

One of the continuing themes of *The Book* is the tension between the Creature and the male keepers of religious authority. In particular, this manifests itself in sermons and speeches against the Creature which are often proven false through more holy or authoritative written sources. Toward the end of *The Book*, Kempe introduces the character of the good friar whose preaching and teaching are unsurpassed, but who positions himself as an enemy of the Creature. When Kempe introduces this friar, she simply says he was "an holy man and a good prechowr. Hys name and hys perfeccyon of prechyng spred and sprong wondyr wyde" (61.4980-1). She continues to emphasize the friar's orality, saying that he "went forth to *sey* the sermown, and *seyd* ful holily and ful devowtly, and *spak* meche of owr Lordys Passyon" (61.4998-9, emphasis mine). When the Creature cannot bear his mention of the passion and breaks out in tears, he "*suffyred* it paciently and *seyd* no word therto at that tyme" (61.5002-3, emphasis mine). By categorizing the friar in terms of speech, Kempe sets up his authority as fleeting and

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Essays, ed Sandra J. McEntire (Garland Publishing: NYC, 1992), 203-21 (211).

insubstantial. His words, which eventually turn negative — "I wolde this woman wer owte of the chirche; sche noyith the pepil" (BK 1 61.5018-9) — spur more negative speech from the people in church with the Creature. Kempe remembers, "than *seyd* summe men that sche had a devyl wythinne hir. And so had thei *seyd* many tymys beforn, but now thei wer mor bolde, for *hem thowt that her opinyon was wel strengththyd er ellys fortifyed* be this good frer" (61.5023-6, emphasis mine). When the people are emboldened by the friar's speech, they create spoken arguments, which Kempe maintains are rebutted by other educated men from the community.

First, she says there was a good priest, "whech had *red* to hir mech good scripture" and he finds another good priest to go with him to try to change the friar's opinion (61.5029, emphasis mine). Immediately, Kempe highlights the priest's (and her own) textuality, locating him in her own text with an immediate reference to the best text — scripture. Then, Kempe says that "a worshepful doctowr of divinite, a White Frer, a solem clerk and elde doctowr . . . toke wyth hym a worthy man, a bacheler of lawe, a wel growndyd man in scriptur and long exercisyd . . . and wentyn to the sayd frer . . ." (61.5043-8). Again, Kempe draws a direct contrast between the men who support her and the brilliant orator by emphasizing their connections to physical writing. Her language here is particularly telling, as she creates a chiasmus of *doctowr . . . doctowr* enclosing the White Friar in his own educational authority and then uses language both of solidity (*growndyd*) and of motion (*long exercisyd*) to describe her confessor-scribe. In spite of all these solemn clerks coming to tell him that the Creature is in fact blessed, the friar, "neythyr yevyng credens to the doctowrys wordys ne the bachelerys, trustyng mech in the favowr of the pepil, seyd he wolde not favowr hir in hir crying for nowt that any

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man myth sey er do" (61.5058-61). Because the friar does not trust written things, he cannot trust the doctor or bachelor whose authority rests in writing. The Creature is then told she should not go to the church when he preaches which seems to continue for years. During this time, she is supported by a textual community — "many worschepful doctorys and other worthy clerkys, bothyn religyows and seculerys" (61.5091-2). Kempe again juxtaposes her supporters with the friar, who she takes care to mention "was at that tyme neythyr bacheler ne doctowr of divinyte" (62.5099-5100). Even so, his powerful orations are enough to turn many people against her, even including her confessor-scribe.

When he strays from his belief in Kempe, the confessor-scribe's error is punished by an inability to write. He is described through his relation to the book — "of [those who turned against the Creature] the same preyste was on, that aftirward wrot this boke" (62.5122-3). In this construction, Kempe emphasizes the temporality of the priest's actions. When he did not believe the Creature, the priest was not writing a book; but afterward, both after his conversion back to belief and after these events, he does write. This unbelief sets in motion a story-within-a-story as the priest reads about Mary of Oignies and the narrative is briefly take over in "co-reading" along with the priest. Kempe connects this to herself by repeating a reference to the written nature of Mary's story. She says, "of the plentyvows grace of hir teerys, he tretyth specyaly in the boke beforn wretyn, the xviii capitulo, that begynnygth, *Bonus es, domine, sperantibus in te,* and also in the xix *capitulo . . .*" (62.5135-7). This section is destabilizing to the reader, as the "he" mentioned here does not have a direct reference other than the confessor-scribe, who is clearly not the one who wrote the life of Mary of Oignies. In using this kind of doubling language, Kempe strengthens the already clear parallel between her

story and Mary's. Once he reads this story, Kempe's confessor-scribe believes her tears more fervently than before.

At the same time, something about Mary's tale brings the confessor-scribe to the limits of his language.

> Than the preste whech *wrot this tretys*, thorw steryng of a worshepful clerk, a bacheler of divinite, had *seyn and red* the mater *beforn-wretyn* meche mor seryowslech and expressiowslech than it is *wretyn in this tretys* (for her is but a lityl of the effect therof, for he had not ryth cler mende of the sayd mater whan he *wrot this tretys*, and therfor he *wrot* the lesse therof). Than he drow ageyn and inclined mor sadly to the sayd creatur, whom he had fled and enchewyd thorw the frerys prechyng, as is *beforn-wretyn* (62.5153-60, emphasis mine).

The scribe's language here is fabulous, stretching to "seryowslech" and "expressiowslech," in order to emphasize just how insufficient his writing might be.[303] Even at the end of his linguistic capabilities, the scribe is still surrounded by texts; he wrote this treatise by the aid of another written text, though his is a pale simulacrum of the first. Moreover, his reading spurs not just writing, but belief in the Creature's tears. He continues to read "*The Prykke of Lofe,*" Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris,* and the life of Elizabeth of Hungary, who "cryed wyth lowd voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys" (62.5173). In a sense, then, the confessor-scribe structures the above paragraph with such an emphasis on the writing of *The Book* as to make it seem as though the text is written contemporaneously with these others. That is, by putting the thing that happened last (i.e. the writing of the book) in the first position, the confessor-scribe makes the Creature's story as reliable and reforming as those others he mentions. At the same time, the

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[303] The MED notes these are the only two instances of this particular spelling variant of either of these words.

Creature's tears are seen as communication by those men who seek to ground them in texts, or more precisely, to translate her tears.

This is yet another instance of Kempe claiming for herself the role of both visionary author and reader. Jacqueline Jenkins points out, "[the reader's] identity is created through being known of seen to read, and the reading participates in the performance of the self . . . For Kempe, reading thus becomes part of the system of self-fashioning she embraces throughout the *Book* . . ."[304] Both Kempe and her confessor-scribe participate in this performance of a self informed by other selves written about in other books. In fashioning herself, her scribe, and the others who support her, as readers, Kempe strategically prioritizes both reading and imitating that which one reads. Her scribe-confessor is converted back to belief in her through reading about other women that the Creature is clearly imitating. Indeed, he himself enacts a physical echo of both the Mary of Oignies story and the Creature's behaviour. Once he finishes reading Mary's *vita*, the priest "wept wondirly so that he wett hys vestiment and ornamentys of the awter and myth not mesuryn hys wepyng ne hys sobbyng, it was so habundawnt; ne he myth not restreyn it, ne wel stande therwyth at the awter" (62.5144-7). With these tears, the scribe-confessor shows readers of his treatise the appropriate way to respond to such affective writing.

Finally, I want to consider a short episode nearly at the end of *The Book* where Kempe explores the danger of unstable spoken language. One of the reasons Kempe has authority is because she can control language, both in writing it and in reading it. As noted earlier, she can read through other people's speech (as with the sad young man) and

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[304] Jenkins, "Reading and *The Book Margery Kempe*," 127.

she can interfere with wrongly written speech (the contested Bull). In this section, Kempe confronts a rumor about her own speech that has come loose from her control. She and her scribe-confessor seek to restrain this errant phrase and to manipulate its meaning to point back at her slanderers. Kempe inserts this episode in Book II, Chapter 9, the penultimate chapter of the entire *Book*. Melissa Raine suggests that this placement, "gives the episode such prominence that it seems reasonable to ask whether *The Book* itself might have had a specific relationship with this slander."[305] The slander in question is a single phrase wrongly (so she says) attributed to the Creature: "Fals flesch, thu schalt ete non heryng" (II 9.8212).[306] As she and her scribe work through whatever personal relationship they have to the phrase, they morph it from being negatively reflective on the Creature to being true about her detractors.

The chapter opens with the Creature disguised and in debt, attempting to negotiate a temporary loan. Even with a kerchief covering her face, a chorus seems to follow the Creature around London, with strangers calling out to her, "thu fals flesch, thu schalt no good mete etyn!" She cannot attend dinner at a friend's house without the other guests launching into a story about a bumpkin from Lynne, "a fals feynyd ypocrite in Lynne whech seyth sweche wordys, and leevyng of gret metys, sche etith the most delicyows and delectabyl metys that comyn on the tabyl" (II 9.8235-7). It is challenging not to smile whilst imagining the Creature sitting through a dinner with a host of people unwittingly

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[305] Raine, 34.

[306] Supposedly, Margery rejects herring for pike, which was more of a delicacy. For an interesting overview of medieval fishing and fish populations, see Richard Hoffman, "A brief history of aquatic resource use in medieval Europe," *Helgol Mar Res* (2005) 59: 22–30.

laughing at her as she angrily plots her revenge. In true Kempian style, she does not delay the revelation and stops barely short of ripping off a mask and shouting "Aha!" Instead, the Creature says, "I am that same persone to whom these wordys ben arectyd, whech oftyntyme suffir gret schame and repref and am not gylty in this mater, God I take to record" (II 9.8240-43). The crowd is chagrined and beg her forgiveness, after which the Creature makes a few moral speeches and then is stricken once again with tears. This episode seems like yet another comical incident in the life of Margery Kempe (and indeed one wonders how sincere those dinner-table apologies were).

Yet behind the social comedy, Kempe's careful storytelling highlights false speech that is also, paradoxically, true. She offers us three versions of the speech in question. The first, "Ah, thu fals flesch, thu schalt no good mete etyn!" she hears from a stranger on the street. The second she reports when she tells the phrase's origins: "Fals flesch, thu schalt ete non heryng" (II 9.8212). Here she also makes room for other versions, but clearly marks them all as false. She says, "sum seydyn the wordys the whech arn beforn-wretyn, and al was fals, but yet wer thei not foryetyn; thei wer rehersyd in many a place wher sche was nevyr kyd ne knowyn" (II 9.8212-15). Kempe says that the words become "a maner of proverbe ayen hir" and repeats the speech once more. The phrase ends at that aforementioned dinner party, where one of the holy men says, "Thu fals flesch, thu schalt non etyn of this good mete" (II 9.8227). This whole section is infused with the language of suffering and martyrdom. The Creature enters London "clad in a cloth of canvas, as it wer a sekkyn gelle" and with her face covered so no one would recognize her (II 9.8179-84). The people who mock her do so for "gret repref" at the behest of the devil. She repeatedly uses the word *repref* before saying that she suffers

because of this language. The Creature tells the dinner party (as quoted above), "[I] oftentyme suffir gret schame and repref and am not gylty in this mater, God I take to record!" She calls to mind her book's opening section, where she declares, "For evyr the mor slawnder and repref that sche sufferyd, the more sche incresyd in grace and in devocyon of holy medytacyon, of hy contemplacyon . . ." (I 49-51). Like a martyr, the more *repreves* the Creature suffers, the purer her soul becomes.

As she emphasizes her suffering at the repetition of this phrase, Kempe also reaffirms her own authority from the beginning of the episode. She juxtaposes the Creature's final speech with those who invented the lie. Kempe writes, "ther was nevyr man ne woman that evyr myth prevyn that sche seyd swech wordys, but evyr thei madyn other lyars her autorys, seying in excusyng of hemself that other men telde hem so" (II 9.8196-99). These people speak with "fals tungys" (8186) and create authorities out of liars. Melissa Raine argues that this scene destabilizies the Creature's authority, by highlighting her dependence on her own embodiment. She comments, "the almost organic circulation of gossip contrasts strikingly with the rather fragile process of authorisation that is the project of the historical Margery Kempe and her amanuensis, whose repeated condemnation of this gossip seems to confirm, rather than to dissipate, the potential of the rumour to undermine the authority of their own text."[307] There is a sense in the text that Kempe has to prove herself, that this rumor was entirely out of her control even as the text was written (so much for that dinner-party apology).

That this incident revolves around food and eating is not coincidental. Lynne Staley suggests that "Kempe uses food as a signifier of both Margery's private and public

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[307] Raine, 'Fals Flesch,' 34

communities."[308] The rumors about her refusing to eat mark the Creature as an outsider, subject to public shaming and censure. Simultaneously, the intimate setting of the final revelation, at a dinner party hosted by a "worschepful woman" points to the Creature's position within the smaller community. As soon as she tells the other diners that she is the one they have been mocking, they believe her. The Creature once again shows a special relationship to language and truth. Moreover, they believe she did not say those things, that she is not the glutton at whom they might laugh. With this revelation, Kempe seems to be punning on multiple meanings of "fals flesch." While the people at dinner and strangers on the street retain the false language, they show themselves to be false flesh. As soon as they stop using this language, they get the "good mete" of the Creature's wisdom: "Sche spak boldly and mytily wherso sche cam in London ageyn swerars, bannars, lyars and swech other vicious pepil, ageyn the pompows aray bothin of men and of women." As a result of these fiery speeches, Kempe relates, "hir spekyng profityd rith mech in many personys" (II 9.8248-52). When she dissolves into tears again, God tells her he is pleased with both her shame and her shaming of others.

What we find in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, then, is an attempt to occupy the space between waking and dream visions, the space of visionary literature. Her construction of the Creature gives Kempe the opportunity to have a protagnoist who moves through the visionary world and relates visionary episodes, but who never seems to find deeper theological understanding of those episodes. In displacing the interpretive action from herself to the reader, Kempe creates a communal project of trusting the written text and seeking understanding of the written text. Because she is also clearly a

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[308] Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 50.

'reader' of visionary texts, Kempe, like Julian, models how she would like readers to interact with her *Book*. They might find themselves weeping in a non-linguistic response or rejoycing in vindication because of parallels between their and the Creature's life. As much as she situates herself in relation to other visionary texts, Kempe wants her own text to provide that same kind of model for her reader.

EPILOGUE: READING VISIONARY LITERATURE

> "This is a long lesson . . and litel am I the wiser!"
> (Piers Plowman, B X.371)

On June 16, 2016, Josephine Livingstone published a review of Simon Armitage's new translation of *Pearl* in *The New Yorker*. She clearly has a deep personal connection to the poem and writes that Armitage, "conveys that feeling of the almost-but-not-quite comprehensible, the feeling that can make medieval art at once eerie and wonderful."[309] Without realizing it, Livingstone has articulated the central core of this project, the driving problem of visionary literature. The texts in this project all slide along that precipice of knowing and not knowing, sharing and not sharing. They rely on the presence of almost-but-not-quite comprehensible language to be visionary literature. In this final section, I return to that gap between waking and dream visions. What visionary literature tells us about its own fictionality is not that dream visions are sorry imitations of waking visions. Rather, both waking and dream visions rely on the intervention of incongruent language between the vision and the text of the vision. They need language to be representative, but inaccurate because visionary literature is always fiction. It is about being very clearly wrong, while almost correct or true.

To now, I've presented dream and waking visions as similar but separate things, each belonging to a different realm of experience. In his commentary on Aritsotle's *De divinatione per somnum*, Albertus Magnus, the 13th-century Dominican philosopher, proposes that "dreams arise in part from human process . . . and involve the 'forma

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[309] Livingstone, Josephine, (2016, June), "The Strange Power of a Medieval Poem About the Death of a Child," *The New Yorker*.

coelesti' [celestial form] only weakly" and that "a waking vision occurs in which the

things seen are also explained."[310] This same distinction seems to hold true for the

majority of the visions studied here, as dream visions lack immediate interpretation and

waking visions have some kind of explanatory guide. But what if a lay-person, educated

in visionary texts and techniques, could embody both dream and waking vision? This

happens in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, in her infrequently studied dream visions.

Kempe alternates between dream and waking almost indiscriminately, abiding by neither

Albertus' distinctions nor mine. Kempe may know the dangers of dream visions,

articulated so clearly by Julian and Hildegard, but her representation of her visions makes

no cautious comment on their potential untruth. In fact, Kempe ties dream and waking

visions closely together, as she emphasizes both her sleep and the ghostly visions she has

while sleeping.

Kempe's dreams have not proven a pressing point of interest for scholarship, but

they are intriguing.[311] The cluster of four visions comes in Chapter 85 where Kempe

quickly recounts many visions relating to her relationship with Christ. The first, and most

famous, dream is the vision of the Book of Life.[312] In a scene reminiscent of *Piers*

Plowman, Margery is in church, "knelyng beforn an awter of the cros and seying on an

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[310] Qtd in Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 120.

[311] I can find no articles published on Kempe's dream visions. Kruger makes a
passing reference to her dreams but offers no bibliography. Windeatt's note suggests that
these are not dream visions, actually. He writes "several visions in this chapter are
preceded by bodily sleepiness" (fn 7018. p, 370).

[312] Jacqueline Jenkins notes this could be evidence of Kempe's illiteracy (though
ultimately Jenkins argues that Kempe was merely deploying the trope of illiteracy). See
her discussion in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 113-28 (esp. 114-19).

oryson," when her eyes droop closed and "sche fel into a lityl slomeryng" (85.6958-61).[313] Her dream is of a young angel carrying a huge book, the Book of Life, wherein is written Margery's name. The second dream shows Margery a vision of someone cutting Christ's breast with a long dagger and in the third dream Margery grabs Christ's toes. The final dream is of Mary, who asks if Margery would like to see the infant Christ. Intercut between these dream visions are waking visions in a similar vein, reflecting on Christ and his humanity. Chapter 85 shows us a distillation of Kempe's relationship with her visions and their subject. Her mind and body struggle to reconcile the visionary experience, to make equal reflection on the vision. At one point "hir mynd was ocupiid in the Passyon . . . [sche] saw owr lord aperyn to hir gostly syght in hys manhod, with hys wowndys bledyng as fresch as thow he had ben scorgyd beforn hir" (85.6982-85). This ghostly vision invokes a parallel "bleeding" in the Creature, as "sche wept and cryid wyth alle the myghtys of hir body" (85.6986). Where Julian might explain what the bleeding wounds signify, the Creature bursts forth in tears.[314] Rather than engender understanding, her tears cause more questions, as Kempe says "sche had gret wondyr that owr Lord wolde becomyn man and suffyr so grevows peynys for hir, that was so unkynde a creatur to hym" (85.6989-91). With this physical reaction, Kempe shows her reader that she must have some understanding of the bloody vision, though she cannot articulate whatever that understanding might be.

When she suggests that she has ghostly showings while dreaming, Kempe

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[313] See B. Pas. XIX, 1-8.

[314] Indeed Julian famously spends a lot of time explaining Christ's bleeding, see LT Rev. 1 chs. 4-5 and Rev. 8 for examples. For more on the themes of blood in Julian, see McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 80-85.

seemingly discards the categorizations of waking and dream visions. It is not unusual for

Kempe to describe things happening to her ghostly sight. The beginning of Chapter 86,

for instance, recounts that "on a tyme owre Lord spak to the sayd creatur whan it lesyd

hym, *seying to hyr gostly undirstondyng . . .*" (7057-8, emphasis mine). Kempe is aware

of that convention of visionary writing and uses it often. What is surprising is when the

ghostly sight makes an appearance in dream visions. Dreams, as I have noted, belong

properly to the second kind of vision, the intellectual but not spiritual vision. Yet, as

Kathryn Lynch notes, the vision is a liminal state, neither totally spiritual nor totally

bodily. She proposes, "medievals were quite interested in the marginal relationship of

body and soul during a vision; it was this aspect of the dream or vision's liminality that

seems to have occupied their thought and commentary more than any other . . ."[315] In

pointing toward Kempe as liminal, rather than marginalized, Lynch identifies Kempe and

her text as transitional, between visionary and lay person, dream and vision. With the

ghostly dream visions, Kempe pushes at the boundaries that seem neither to keep her in

or out.

As with waking visions, Margery Kempe's dream visions happen *to* her, without

any wish or even any warning. In the first vision, Kempe articulates that "hir eyne wer

evyr togedirward, as thow sche schulde a slept. And at the last *sche myth not chesyn*; sche

fell in a little slomeryng" (6959-61, emphasis mine). Her eyes are blinking closed, she

seems to be fighting sleep, but then it just happens to her. Like Will or the *Pearl*-

Dreamer, the Creature slides into a sleeping state. In the second dream, the Creature is

crying in the choir and "sodenly sche was in a maner of slep" (7004-5). During this

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[315] Lynch, 49.

dream vision, Kempe states from the beginning that "sche saw, *wyth hir gostly eye*, owr Lordys body lying beforn hir . . ." (7005-6, emphasis mine). By invoking ghostly sight during a dream vision Kempe dissolves the boundaries between waking and dream visions. When she falls asleep again, it happens suddenly and this dream is both impossibly spiritual and physical. Kempe says,

> And anon, i*n the syght of hir sowle*, sche sey owr Lord standyng ryght up ovyr hir, so ner that *hir thowt* sche toke hys toos in hir hand and felt hem, and to hir felyng *it weryn as it had been very flesch and bon.* And than sche thankyd God of al, for *thorw thes gostly sytys* hir affection was al drawyn into the *manhod of Crist* and into the *mynd of hys Passyon*, unto that tym that it plesyd owr Lord to yevyn hir *undirstondyng* of his *<in>undirstondabyl Godhed* (7019-25, emphasis mine).[316]

As she imagines Christ's toes, his flesh and blood, Kempe explores the potential that visionary seeing has. The resulting passage is a kind of hodge-podge of visionary writing, with dream and waking visionary elements interspersed seemingly at random. One could suggest that this is because Kempe's lack of education and potential illiteracy make her suppose that all visionary writing is generically equal. If Kempe had knowledge of Augustine's three-fold visionary ascension, then she clearly would not suggest that she had *gostly sytys* in a dream vision. Without speculating on Kempe's Augustinian education, I suggest that she makes use of those parts of dream visions that could direct her to a place where she might be more open to a waking vision. Kempe's understanding first attaches to something she knows, to toes and bones and a man's body. As the Pearl-Dreamer thought he understood his vision because he could see the Pearl-Maiden's body or just the sound of Piers Plowman's name sends Will into a swoon, something about the nearly-physical presence of Christ in Kempe's vision leads her deeper into understanding.

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Kempe has made a path between waking and dream visions, one that relies on the physicality of the dream vision and the spirituality of the waking vision.

It's not just that Kempe has realistic visions of Christ's body, but the reality of her own body allows her to make some sense of the incomprehensible ghostly vision. Kathryn Lynch suggests that the liminal state of visions gives them an ability to "body forth what in fact has no body."[317] Kempe exploits this potential and suggests that her body may stand in for that absent one. Where Augustine was drawn by the intellect to somewhere else, moving away from the body as much as possible, Kempe's dreams bring the vision completely into her own body. Each of these dream visions are grounded in her physicality— the Creature dreams while "knelyng" (6958), while she "lay in contemplacyon" (6981), while she "lay stille in the qwer" (7004), while "the seyd creatur beyng in a chapel" (7015), and while "stondyng in hir preyerys" (7046). The body becomes a necessary condition for the ghostly showing, as it provides an initial space for the vision. In the next chapter, Christ tells her "I knowe the holy thowtys and the good desyrys that thu hast . . . in the tyme that thu recyvyst my precyows body into thi sowle" (86.7075-8). Earlier Kempe saw into Christ's mind (*the mynd of hys Passyon*) and now Christ considers hers. With this inter-penetration of body and soul, ghostly sights and dreams, Kempe offers a way of understanding her representation of the incomprehensible. It lies somewhere between her sight of Christ's mind and his sight of hers.

I have suggested in this project that visionary literature needs to be fiction and to have a reader who will play with language and sift through the immediate fiction of the

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[317] Lynch, 50.

written text. Kempe offers herself as a reader and writer of visionary literature; she unravels the fictions of other visionary texts and writes her own. In the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer, like Kempe, presents a visionary reader and writer. He frames the *Parliament* as a dream vision, informed partly by his reading of the *Somnium Scipionis* before bed. The first line, "the lyf so short, the craft so longe to lerne" is compelling for anyone who would pick up Chaucer's text — reader, writer, or lover. While the narrator suggests the craft is love, of course it is equally writing and in the case of the *Parliament of Fowls*, it is the writing of a vision. Invoking Macrobius and Cicero marks Chaucer's place in that long-crafted history of visionary literature. It highlights the work of making a vision, that is of understanding the way one should "have" a vision and then relating it. Chaucer also gives insight to the position of a reader of visionary literature. The narrator declares,

> For out of olde feldes, as men seith,
> Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yere;
> And out of olde bokes, in good feith,
> Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
> But now to purpos as of this matere --
> To rede forth hit gan me so delyte,
> That al the day me thoughte but a lyte (22-28).

Reading is delightful and inspiring. In creating his new science, Chaucer's appreciation for his source materials is clear, even in the silly twittering of the birds. When the dream comes to an end, it is strikingly like the conclusion of *Pearl* or *Piers*. The Pearl-Dreamer wakes up violently, saying "ryʒt as I sparred vnto þe bonc / Þat brathe out of my drem me brayde" (XX.1169-70). The author chooses *brayde,* a violent word that means break or tear*,* here to describe how the Dreamer is drawn out of the dream. In *Piers*, the Dreamer awakens when Consciences cries after grace: "And siththe he gradde after Grace, til I gan

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awake" (B XX.387). At the conclusion of the *Parliament*, Chaucer writes,

> And with the showting, whan hir song was do,
> That foules maden at hir flight a-way,
> I wook, and other bokes took me to
> To rede upon, and yet I rede alway;
> In hope, y-wis, to rede so som day
> That I shal mete som thing for to fare
> The bet; and thus to rede I nil not spare (693-9).

Where the Dreamer of *Pearl* turned to church and attempted to become something that might be pleasing to Christ, Chaucer's narrator turns back to books and searches there to "mete" something that might make him fare better. Langland puns freely on the meaning of "mete" and here too Chaucer plays with language. The narrator does not read and read just because he hopes to have another dream. And yet, so much of visionary literature is directed toward return, recapture of the initial visionary moment. What if readers of visionary literature did read to have a vision?

Of course, we do read to "mete" something that might fare us better. We supply rhymes for *Pearl* and allegory for *Piers*. We suggest that Julian's theology contains an unspoken belief in universal salvation and that Kempe's text is carefully crafted in imitation of her visionary predecessors. In the critical apparatus' that now surround them and the marginal notations in medieval manuscripts, readers of visionary literature have marked their work out in the texts themselves. A rubric at the beginning of the 66th chapter in Julian's *Long Text* reads, "the sixteenth revelation, etc. And it is conclusion and confirmation to all fifteen. And of hir frelte and morning in disese, and lyte speking after the gret comfort of Jesus, seying she had ravid. *Which, being hir gret sekeness, I suppose was but venial synne.* But yet the devil after that had gret powr to vexin hir ner to

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deth."[318] Here we have a reader interacting with the text, but getting their interpretation wrong. Julian's revelation notes that she tells a priest she has raved and he simply laughs. Even in the middle of summarizing the chapter's contents, the note-maker steps into the priest's role and assures other readers (and himself) that this must have been only a venial sin. This is what visionary literature requires — readers who will "rede alway" and seek better "mete" than the literal words of the vision might indicate.

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[318] Watson and Jenkins, "Note: Chapter 66," 410.

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