GOD’S TEACHERS:
WOMEN WRITERS, DIDACTICISM, AND VERNACULAR RELIGIOUS TEXTS
IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

DISSERTATION

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By

Elizabeth Farrell Zimmerman, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Karen Winstead, Advisor
Professor Richard Firth Green
Professor Sarah-Grace Heller
Professor Lisa Kiser

Approved by

Advisor
English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

During the Middle Ages, women were restricted from most formal teaching roles, particularly due to their exclusion from the all-male universities and cathedral schools flourishing across Europe. Despite these institutional and cultural restrictions, women found opportunities to take part in the transmission of knowledge: women often taught their children informally at home, took part in the education available in convents, and developed communities in which they shared texts among themselves.

A number of extant medieval texts feature women who adopt teaching roles, although this aspect of these texts has not received close scholarly attention. My dissertation, “God’s Teachers: Women Writers, Didacticism, and Vernacular Religious Texts in the Later Middle Ages,” examines a selection of these texts written by the medieval women writers Clemence of Barking, Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries. My project focuses generally on how these women used their texts to transmit knowledge to their audiences. Specifically, my research examines how these women writers engaged their readers with their texts. In each of the texts by these medieval women there is a significant didactic, or instructive, element that encourages—and even requires—its readers to actively engage with the text in order to acquire the knowledge it contains. My other primary
interest is to examine how female writers claimed authority by positioning themselves as transmitters of knowledge that would benefit their readers. My analysis of these texts reveals that the women writers adopted a number of strategies which enabled them to fashion themselves as authoritative transmitters of knowledge in spite of their gender.

I have chosen to focus on texts written in the vernacular, or the writer’s native language, because women became increasingly involved in the vernacular literary culture that began to flourish in Europe in the twelfth century. Recent scholarship has done much to illuminate medieval women as readers and writers who were more engaged with texts written in the vernacular than those written in Latin—the language in which the vast majority of literary texts had previously been written but that was predominantly confined to the male learned elite. In these studies, scholars have investigated the socio-historical context of women’s engagement with literate culture, thus expanding our understanding of women’s education and literacy during the Middle Ages. My project builds on this scholarship by examining how women writers perceived themselves within this burgeoning culture and how they negotiated their positions as authors within that culture. My project also focuses on religious literature because religious women often had more access to education and literate practices than laywomen and were therefore more likely to leave their own written accounts.

The historical approach of my project allows me to examine how the texts reflect—or differ from—the literary traditions of which they are a part, and to consider what they reveal about the similarities and differences of authorizing strategies between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. I have also adopted a comparative approach, which
allows me to consider how certain authorizing strategies were used by women writers from different cultures. Therefore, in addition to texts written by medieval English women in the English vernacular, I am examining a text by an English nun who was writing from within the Anglo-Norman culture that greatly influenced literature in England for a century and a half after the Norman Conquest in 1066, as well as a text written by a woman on the continent in her French vernacular that was later circulated in translation in England.

Throughout my dissertation, I argue that these female-authored texts depict women as authoritative transmitters of knowledge who are driven by didactic purposes. This didacticism has been largely overlooked in scholarship, despite the fundamental importance of this didacticism to the texts. My project thus addresses significant gaps in our understanding of women’s active participation in the literary and intellectual history of the Middle Ages in spite of the institutional and cultural restrictions that limited their involvement in these aspects of medieval culture.
Dedicated to Wakefield
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VITA

February 1978 ....................................................... Born, Louisville, KY

May 2000 ............................................................. B.A. English, Georgetown University

June 2005 ............................................................. M.A. English, The Ohio State University

September 2003 – March 2008 .......................... Graduate Teaching and Administrative Associate, The Ohio State University

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INTRODUCTION

In the early-fifteenth century, two of England’s female mystics—Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich—met and conversed during the “many days þat þei were togedyr.”¹ In Margery Kempe’s account of this meeting, she explains that she visited Julian, to whom she “schewyd hir þe grace þat God put in hir sowle,” because “þe ankres was expert in swech thyngys & good counsel cowd þe euyn” (18:42.9-10 and 18:42.16-17). Julian does not disappoint: as Margery explains, Julian responded by “cownselynge this creatur to be obedyent to the wyl of owyr Lord God and fulfyllyn wyth al hir mygthyys whatevyr he put in hir sowle” (18:42.19-21). Furthermore, Julian instructs Margery to be obedient and fulfill the will of God for both “þe worshep of God & profyte of hir euyn-cristen” (18:42.21-22).

One of the most remarkable—and significant—aspects of this meeting is that it demonstrates that Julian had obtained such a reputation for being an authoritative counselor that Margery, who was struggling to gain approval for her recent choice to

¹ The Book of Margery Kempe, eds. S. B. Beech and H. E. Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (London, 1940) 18:43:20. All quotations from The Book of Margery Kempe are taken from this edition and cited by chapter, page, and then line number(s).
devote her life to God, sought the advice of this seemingly renowned mystic on the visions Margery had received from God. The encounter is thus an example not only of women sharing the knowledge which they had gained from God but also an example of women possessing authority to counsel others: not only does Margery seek Julian’s counsel, but Julian also explains that Margery’s duty is to God as well as her “euyn-cristen.”

This dissertation examines the texts of four women, including Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, who went to great lengths to counsel and share their knowledge with others: Clemence of Barking, Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe number among the few women known to have written texts which circulated in England during the Middle Ages. Their desire—and authority—to share their knowledge stems from the fact that they were given their knowledge by the authority of God. In this dissertation, I consider the relationship between these women, God, the vernacular religious texts they authored, and the audiences to whom they directed their texts. I demonstrate that each of these women employs her text to transmit knowledge given to her by God.

Specifically, this dissertation explains how these female writers claimed the authority to share their knowledge through their texts by positioning themselves—in spite of their gender—as authoritative transmitters of knowledge that would benefit their readers. As each chapter demonstrates, the transmission of this knowledge was directed to audiences which were conceived by the writers to be increasingly broad and diverse, largely due to the increased access more people had to literature written in the vernacular.
Accordingly, the other primary focus of this dissertation is to examine how these women writers engaged their readers with their texts. Each of the texts authored by these medieval women contains a significant didactic element that encourages—and, in fact, requires—its readers to actively engage with the text in order to acquire the knowledge it contains. By positioning themselves as authorized by God to transmit their knowledge and didactically employing their texts to engage and instruct their readers, Clemence of Barking, Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe become what I call in the dissertation’s title “God’s teachers.”

In spite of the fact that they were restricted from most formal teaching roles because of their gender, medieval women found opportunities to take part in the transmission of knowledge: women often taught their children informally at home; they took part in the education available in convents; and in many cases women developed communities in which they shared texts among themselves. What distinguishes these four women writers is that they chose to transmit their knowledge by authoring texts themselves. These medieval women writers thus not only possessed extensive knowledge in a culture in which women were neither expected nor encouraged to be learned, but also authored vernacular religious texts in order to transmit that knowledge to their audiences. These four women writers are thus exceptional in a number of ways and are not representative of the experience of medieval women. However, these four writers and their texts reflect larger shifts which were occurring during the Middle Ages in England and elsewhere: specifically, women were increasingly involved in literary culture; the vernacular was flourishing as a medium for texts in general and religious
texts in particular; and women had access to some levels of authority through both formal and informal religious devotion.

During the later Middle Ages, women were increasingly turning to—and taking part in—the burgeoning vernacular literature. Although Latin continued to serve as the standard written language of early medieval Europe, literature written in the vernacular became increasingly popular during the later Middle Ages, beginning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Felicity Riddy, Mary E. Erler, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, and others have shown that women were a significant part of this shift. These scholars have demonstrated how women from the twelfth century through the late Middle Ages took an active part in literary culture, reading principally in the vernacular (although not exclusively). The work of these scholars has also been crucial not only to an understanding of a literacy that encompasses oral, auditory, and text-based literacies but also in bringing attention to the existence of female communities and networks in which women could exchange and discuss texts.

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As the number of vernacular texts flourished and women became increasingly involved in literary culture, questions arose concerning who had access to what knowledge, who could take part in the transmission of learning, and in which language this transmission should occur. These questions were particularly pertinent not only because women had more access to literature in the vernacular than in Latin, but also because in the later Middle Ages, the vernacular became a means for discussing religious and theological matters, which had previously been confined largely to Latin and the male learned elite to whom Latin was accessible. Nicholas Watson and Bernard McGinn have cogently argued that this literature defined a genre of its own: vernacular theology. Women’s engagement with and involvement in this genre was aided by the increased diversity of formal and informal religious devotion available to women. Rather than having to take religious vows and become nuns if they wished to devote themselves more to their faith than the average layperson, women enjoyed an increasing number of opportunities to adopt other forms of religious devotion. The four women writers


5 For an overview of the new types of roles available to women in the later Middle Ages, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 13-23.
considered in this dissertation represent this diversity of opportunities: Clemence of Barking was a nun; Marguerite Porete has been associated with the Beguine movement that flourished across continental Europe (and particularly the Low Countries) and the heresy of the Free Spirit; Julian of Norwich dedicated herself to the anchoritic life; and Margery Kempe pursued the “mixed life” that encouraged laypersons to live spiritually in the everyday world. Similarly, their texts reflect the diversity of religious literature now written in the vernacular, such as hagiography, debate, allegorical drama, and mystical texts.

Whatever their individual forms of religious devotion, the four women writers wrestle with a number of shared concerns and their texts demonstrate a number of similarities. For example, Clemence and Marguerite explore the distinction between earthly and divine knowledge; Marguerite and Julian argue that greater understanding of God and his works is only possible after one’s death; Clemence and Margery reveal in their texts the threat that others believed was posed by women modeling atypical behavior; and Julian’s and Margery’s texts include particular emphasis on both the oral and aural nature of their relationships to God. However, the most remarkable of the similarities between the texts is their shared concern with salvation in general and universal salvation in particular (the latter especially in the later texts). As Watson argues, belief in universal salvation is evident in a number of medieval theological works,

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6 I refer to the women authors by their personal names not to refute the feminist argument that referring to women authors by their personal names signifies less respect than afforded male authors, who are almost always referred to by their surnames, but because I have chosen to use first names throughout this dissertation as a means of consistency. Because Clemence of Barking and Julian of Norwich do not have surnames to which I could refer, I have chosen to refer to all four women writers by their personal names.
and this belief is universalism emerged “not only out of a general lay tendency to think of God as merciful but out of the way the ‘vernacular’ itself (or ‘common tongue,’ as it was also known) was a powerful, affective, natural bond linking all the English people and, by extension, the world into one community.” This dissertation builds off of Watson’s argument by demonstrating that salvation—particularly universal salvation—is certainly a predominant concern for these four women writers. However, this dissertation further contends that these four women are certainly not unanimous in believing in the universal nature of God’s mercy: while all four writers actively engage with questions surrounding and implications arising from God’s ability to be both merciful and judgmental, they do not all endorse belief in universal salvation.

Clemence of Barking’s La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie, a twelfth-century example of a woman writing in the vernacular and the focus of chapter 1, presents an early example of a writer choosing to write for a broad audience and of the diversity of didactic strategies required to bring religious knowledge to members of that audience. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that the prologue and epilogue to this text, in which Clemence considers her roles as a writer and vernacular translator, demonstrate that Clemence perceives herself as extending the male-dominated tradition of translatio studii, the transmission of learning from one culture to another, rather than disrupting it due to her gender. Clemence takes part in this tradition by situating herself as a transmitter of knowledge whose purpose was to educate a broad and diverse readership that was part of the flourishing population of those who were vernacular-

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7 Watson, “Visions of Inclusion” 170.
literate but did not necessarily read Latin. By choosing to write in Anglo-Norman, Clemence positions her text so that it can reach a broader audience than Latin allowed and, as her prologue and epilogue suggest, Clemence envisions an inclusive audience for her text—one that was not predominantly composed of one gender or the other and was certainly not limited to the male learned elite. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze Clemence’s account of St. Catherine, which is the only medieval account of the highly educated and extensively knowledgeable female saint known to have been written by a woman in England. I argue that Clemence’s depiction of St. Catherine generally and of the saint’s conversion of two principal characters particularly portrays Catherine as a didactic figure who is adept at transmitting her knowledge to the vast majority of those she encountered. All of the various individuals Catherine encounters—except for the emperor, who represents the folly of clinging to the earthly realm and of possessing neither faith nor reason—obtain salvation due to the effectiveness of Catherine’s teaching.

As demonstrated in chapters 2 through 4, women took advantage of the opportunities afforded to them to write—often in the vernacular—as a result of the mysticism that flourished throughout Europe during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. In chapters 2 and 3, I explore two highly intellectual mystical texts: Marguerite Porete’s *Le Miroir des simples âmes* and Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love*. Each explores the relationship between the human soul and the divine in a manner that requires its readers to intellectually engage with it. While these texts have been the subject of considerable scholarship, little attention has been given to those
readers whom the authors so clearly wish to engage through their texts. Because this fundamental aspect of the texts—that is, the audience—has been overlooked, the didactic element essential to both texts has also been neglected. Certainly, the fact that previous studies have not considered the texts’ relationships to their audiences and the didactic goals of their authors may be due in part to the paucity of information regarding the texts’ authors and audiences. The scant evidence we do possess indicates that while Julian’s *Revelation* was written in East Anglia in the last decade of the fourteenth century, it did not enjoy widespread circulation. Similarly, Marguerite’s *Mirouer*, while written in France at the close of the thirteenth century, enjoyed limited circulation in France initially and then in England during the fifteenth century.

Despite the lack of information regarding the text’s provenance, it does appear that Marguerite’s *Mirouer* is one of very few texts recording the mystical experiences of a woman which was originally written in the vernacular on the continent and then translated into English; it thus provides unique insight into the vernacular literary culture of England and the insular reception of a female-authored continental mystical text. As chapter 2 demonstrates, Marguerite uses her text to instruct her readers on the intrinsic importance of rejecting all intermediaries between themselves and God, including reason and eventually the *Mirouer* itself, in order to achieve salvation. While she asserts that not all who encounter it will understand her text, Marguerite must direct her text to all because it is not for Marguerite to know which of her readers will understand her book’s

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8 The work of Felicity Riddy is a notable exception: she has insightfully considered Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love* as belonging to a textual community of both nuns and devout gentlewomen in “‘Women talking about the things of God’” 104-127.
meaning. Similarly, as she makes clear in her text, it is only God who knows who will attain salvation, and it is not for her or any other soul to understand his ineffable mercy. Marguerite’s authority to instruct her readers, I argue, comes from a divine source: circumventing the authority of the traditional, male transmitters of religious knowledge, Marguerite claims in the *Mirror* that the true author of the text is God. Despite Marguerite being burned as a heretic for continuing to disseminate her text, the *Mirouer* was able to circulate within England in large part because it was unknown there that the author was a woman. As this chapter argues, the preface and glosses appended to the English translation of the *Mirouer* demonstrate the translator’s focus on instructing his English readers how to read and comprehend the theologically complex text, as well as his ignorance as to its authorship—an ignorance that allowed a woman’s text to be circulated and studied widely. The translator thus introduces another level of didacticism to Marguerite’s text as it circulated among its English readers.

Chapter 3 analyzes Julian’s account of her mystical experience in light of its depictions of the author and text as intermediaries to bring its readers to divine understanding. I argue that by recording within her text the process through which she came to understand her visions, Julian provides a model for her readers by which she instructs them on how to respond to and meditate on the visions themselves. Julian’s authority to share her knowledge and her warrant to model for her readers comes from a divine imperative. Moreover, it is God who elucidates the universality of Julian’s visions, instructing Julian to take the revelation of universal salvation that is at the heart of her text to all “evyn cristen.” This chapter demonstrates that Julian’s didacticism is
particularly evident in her response to Christ’s words in the second half of her sixteen visions. In these eight visions, which have received significantly less critical attention than those revelations that precede them, Julian forms much of her theology by translating, interpreting, and explicating Christ’s statements to her. By performing these acts on Christ’s words, Julian becomes the intermediary through which her visions can be understood, a bridge between God’s ineffability and human comprehension.

A significant link between Julian’s *A Revelation of Love* and the focus of my fourth chapter, Margery Kempe’s fifteenth-century *Book of Margery Kempe*, is the oral nature of the women’s mystical experiences. This emphasis may reflect the oral and aural nature of reading in medieval culture: texts were read aloud, even when one was reading alone.9 This orality is central to the didacticism of these women’s texts: Julian and Margery both model for their readers how to respond to the knowledge transmitted orally within their texts. Whereas Julian provides her readers with a means for further understanding by explicating Christ’s words to her, Margery models for both those she encounters and those who read her text how to actively respond to Christ’s words within their everyday lives, as she adopts an explicit teaching role by speaking with Christ’s voice herself.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the colloquiels between God and Margery that occur throughout the *Book* perform important didactic functions both within and beyond the text itself. First, within the *Book*, they offer instruction to Margery on her own religious

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development as well as provide Margery the authority and ability to instruct others through speaking to them. Second, I argue that the didacticism extends outside of the Book, because Margery crafts the text as a vehicle to transmit God’s voice—both spoken by him directly and through Margery—and instruction to those who read the Book. As this chapter demonstrates, both within and beyond the Book, Margery is significantly focused on teaching the laity who could choose to live lives devoted to God as she does. Whereas much previous scholarship has focused on her encounters with male ecclesiastical and secular authorities, I argue that Margery employs her text to teach the laity how to listen to God’s words, how to respond and take action based on them, and possibly how to attain salvation by leading a mixed life devoted to God. However, this chapter demonstrates that Margery differs significantly from the other women writers considered in this study, for while her Book is intended for a wide audience, she makes clear that not everyone will attain salvation, and thus not all readers will accept or comprehend the lessons imparted by the text.

The four texts on which this dissertation focuses reveal a great deal concerning how the authors view themselves and their relation to their audiences. In particular, as this dissertation demonstrates, the texts reveal the importance each writer places on her text as the vehicle to transmit knowledge of the divine from author to reader. All four women writers position themselves as possessing the authority to instruct their readers, and moreover actively engage their readers with their texts so that their readers may gain the divine understanding the texts contain. Significantly, none of the writers considered in this dissertation emphasizes her gender as an impediment to writing or teaching. This
dissertation thus provides insight into these women writers’ participation in the rise of vernacular literature and theology, and the opportunities afforded to—or, more likely, carved out by—them within that culture.
CHAPTER 1
ANGLO-NORMAN NUN AND ALEXANDRIAN SAINT: WOMEN’S TRANSLATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN CLEMENCE OF BARKING’S LA VIE DE SAINTE CATHERINE D’ALEXANDRIE

As Bernard McGinn succinctly observes, “All hagiography is didactic.”¹⁰ Hagiographies during the Middle Ages were generally malleable tales that reflected more about what the writer wished to teach his audience—what he wished his readers to praise and sometimes emulate—than about the actual life of a holy person. However, the vast majority of medieval hagiographies were written by men. This fact raises an important question: are hagiography and didacticism so intertwined when one examines hagiographic texts written by women? Of particular significance to this chapter is consideration of what it means when a medieval woman chooses to write in a genre so clearly linked to didacticism.

For his part, McGinn observes that the “male-authored lives of holy women” on which he focuses may not be congruent with the vitae that these holy women might have written themselves:

The male-authored lives of holy women tell us how men wanted to present the message contained in the lives of these mulieres sanctae, something that was often not quite the same as what the women thought about themselves, or how they formulated their own teaching, whether in hagiographical form or not. It is not that there is no relation between the

two perspectives, but rather that we always need to be sensitive to both the variety of viewpoints and the interchanges between men and women present in the evidence at our disposal.\footnote{McGinn xiii.}

McGinn’s insightful and important observations about male-authored texts of the lives of holy women raise significant questions concerning female-authored lives of holy women: What message did medieval women writers want to present in their lives of holy women? What did women writers think about themselves and how did they formulate their own teaching? What viewpoints do female-authored texts present? How did women writers perceive the interchange between men and women?

This chapter addresses these questions by examining one of the first texts written by a woman in England after the Norman Conquest: Clemence of Barking’s twelfth-century \textit{La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie}. Clemence’s text offers a unique two-fold opportunity to examine the relation between women and didacticism because Clemence includes both a prologue and epilogue to her text in which she considers her role as a writer as well as the process and purposes of writing and because Clemence’s text offers the only medieval account of St. Catherine known to be written by a woman in England. First, Clemence’s prologue and epilogue to \textit{La Vie de Sainte Catherine} shed light on how Clemence perceived her role as a vernacular translator, and how she perceived taking part in the male-dominated tradition of \textit{translatio studii}, the transmission of learning from one culture to another. Clemence’s prologue and epilogue also reveal how she constructed her authority as a female writer—and used that authority to confidently transmit knowledge to her audience. Second, the fact that Clemence’s text

\footnote{McGinn xiii.}
offers the only known female-authored account of St. Catherine in medieval England is particularly remarkable because the legend of St. Catherine tells the tale of a female saint who is extensively educated and who possesses a vast amount of knowledge, both sacred and academic. Clemence thus chooses as her subject not only one of the most venerated saints in the Middle Ages, but also an extensively learned woman.

This chapter will investigate both aspects of Clemence’s text—beginning with her own prologue and epilogue and then turning to her treatment of Catherine—in order to investigate how Clemence constructs herself and her female subject as authoritative transmitters of knowledge. This examination will demonstrate that Clemence establishes herself and Catherine as extending rather than disrupting the male-dominated tradition of *translatio studii*, and as adept at teaching both men and women. The twelfth-century vernacular translator and the fourth-century virgin martyr are thus united as didactic figures sharing their knowledge with a broad audience.

Written at the close of the twelfth century, Clemence’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine* is early evidence of the popularity of St. Catherine, which extended throughout the Middle Ages. In both Europe and Britain, Catherine was one of the most popular saints in general and one of the most widely venerated female saints in general and virgin martyrs in particular. Catherine’s popularity was part of the much larger devotion to saints in medieval Europe—a popularity which was reflected in the flourishing of hagiography

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12 For an overview of the cult and popularity of St. Katherine in England during the Middle Ages, see Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2000). Following scholarly convention, when referring specifically to the female saint of Clemence of Barking’s text, I will use the name “Catherine”; when referring to other lives of the saint, I will use the name “Katherine.”
during the Middle Ages. Originally these hagiographies were composed in Latin, and
texts relating the legend of St. Catherine are no exception: the eleventh century provides
us with the first extant Latin texts of Catherine’s passio, including what is known as the
Vulgate version, an anonymous account written in the mid-eleventh century whose name
derives from the fact that it was the most widely disseminated of the Latin versions of the
legend. It is extant in over one hundred manuscripts and was copied through the fifteenth
century. The Vulgate version of St. Catherine’s legend, the Passio Sancte Katerine,
provided the basis for many of the written legends of St. Catherine that followed—
including Clemence of Barking’s version, as will be discussed below.\footnote{For a description of the Vulgate Passio Sancte Katerine and its provenance, see Seinte Katerine: Re-Edited from MS Bodley 34 and the Other Manuscripts, ed. S.R.T.O. d’Ardenne and E.J. Dobson, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), xv-xxvi. A critical edition of the Vulgate version can be found on pp. 144-203; all references to the Vulgate will be to line numbers in this edition. Lewis notes that Katherine’s life underwent a detailed elaboration in England during the Middle Ages, expanding from earlier passiones to expanded vitae that describe Katherine’s genealogy, birth, early life, conversion and mystical marriage; see Lewis 14-15 and passim.}

As the number of texts written in the vernacular began to increase as the Middle
Ages progressed, so, too, did the number of vernacular hagiographies. As William Calin
explains, hagiography was a particularly successful genre in Anglo-Norman England: as
evidence for his argument that hagiography was “perhaps the most successful literary
genre cultivated by the French in England, after romance,” he notes that “Some 240
verse lives in Old French have survived […]. Of the 250 extant manuscripts, more than
100 are Anglo-Norman. Almost one-half of the thirteenth-century texts and two-thirds of
the twelfth-century ones are of insular provenance. Hagiography was therefore a
particularly English or Anglo-Norman preoccupation.” This “preoccupation” gave rise to only three hagiographies known to be written by women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: *La vie d'Edouard le confesseur* by an anonymous nun of Barking, *La vie sainte Audrée* by a writer only identified as Marie in her text, and the *Vie de Sainte Catherine* by Clemence. The surviving manuscript evidence indicates that Clemence’s version was the first vernacular life of the saint written in England. In addition to being the earliest of five renderings of the *Vulgate* text into Old French dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Clemence’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine* appeared well before the

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15 See *La vie d'Edouard le confesseur, poème anglo-normand du XIIe siècle*, ed. Östen Södergaard (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1948) and *La vie sainte Audrée, poème anglo-normand du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Östen Södergaard (Uppsala: 1955) for scholarly editions of the first two hagiographies. All subsequent references to these hagiographies will be to line number(s) in these editions.

16 For a study of the development of the cult of St. Katherine before c. 1200, see Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*, Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007). As Walsh’s study makes clear, St. Katherine was one of the most popular saints throughout medieval Europe: Walsh’s study traces the saint’s cult spread from the Greek-speaking lands of the Eastern Mediterranean into Western Europe. Of particular interest to this study is Walsh’s last chapter, which considers the introduction of St. Katherine’s cult into England (concluding just after the composition of Clemence’s text), and her Appendix A, which outlines the early manuscript tradition of the *passio* of St Katherine and provides a table in which she has listed the manuscripts of St. Katherine’s *passio* written prior to c. 1200.

17 The Old French versions include the following: 1) the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman rhymed version by Clemence of Barking, 2) the thirteenth-century rhymed version by Gui, 3) the thirteenth-century rhymed version by Aumeric, 4) an anonymous thirteenth-century rhymed version in Picard, and 5) a thirteenth-century prose version. For an analysis of how the five Old French texts compare to both their Latin source and each other, see William MacBain, “Five Old French Renderings of the *Passio Sancte Katerine*
earliest English account of the saint, the *St. Katherine* included in the *Katherine*-group, the collection of five texts written in Middle English for women recluses in the early thirteenth century.\footnote{The *Katherine* group, as scholars have dubbed this collection due to the position of St. Katherine as first in two of the three manuscripts in which it is found, is composed of five texts: lives of the virgin martyrs Katherine, Margaret, and Juliana; the letter on virginity called by its editors *Hali Meiôhad*; and an allegory on the custody of the soul entitled *Sawles Warde*. All references to *St. Katherine* from the *Katherine*-group will be to line number(s) of d’Ardenne and Dobson’s edition, which contains an edited text based on MS Bodley 34 (B) on pp. 2-130. For a modern English translation of the *Katherine* group, see Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, ed., *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrenne Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); *St. Katherine* can be found on pp. 259-84.}

As author of the earliest vernacular life of the saint in England, Clemence was not a mere follower of a long line of literary precedents, but in fact the first to establish a new trajectory for the virgin martyr legend. To understand the significance of Clemence’s choice to translate an immensely popular text from the Latin into the Anglo-Norman vernacular, one must first understand her role as a vernacular translator and what this role meant in medieval England. There has recently been a growing interest among medievalists in exploring the intertwined issues of the use of the vernacular and the act of translation in medieval literary texts. Particularly within the past twenty years, a number of scholars have effectively argued against the notion that vernacular literary culture during the Middle Ages was devoid of theoretical underpinnings or that it existed merely as the stepchild of a more advanced Latin literary culture. Similarly, scholars have for the most part moved beyond the assumptions that translation during the Middle Ages was a transparent practice. In short, scholars have discredited the long-held assumption that

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medieval translators should be understood simply as conduits for the transmissions of original texts and have similarly disproved that assumption’s corollary that comparing a translation to its source is the only—or even primary—method for analyzing a medieval translation. Rather, as evidenced by a spate of recent scholarly books, medievalists are increasingly considering the ideological, political, theoretical, and cultural contexts of medieval translations and the use of the vernacular.¹⁹

Of particular relevance is one of these recent works, *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, which, as the editors explain in the introduction, “provides material for a history of English literary theory and practice in the two centuries before the so-called early modern period by bringing together for the first time a wide selection of Middle English discussions of writing: its composition, cultural position, real and imagined audience, and reception.”²⁰ The bulk of the contents consists of prologues to vernacular texts written from the end of the thirteenth century through the beginning of the sixteenth century. These prologues proved to be the site where medieval authors most often considered their understanding of literature and their roles as creators; often openly addressing their readers, many authors prefaced their texts with comments that reveal a great deal about themselves and

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their texts. The Idea of the Vernacular has been greatly influential since its publication in 1999 and rightly so: both the anthology and the editors’ essays effectively demonstrate how medieval writers reflected explicitly and implicitly on their writing practices, particularly as they related to their use of the vernacular and the act of translation, their relation to their readers, and their self-fashioning as authors.

Although similarly focused on the insights that prologues provide about medieval authors’ considerations of the act of writing, this chapter examines material beyond the scope—both chronologically and linguistically—of The Idea of the Vernacular. That anthology’s focus on literary theory written in English within certain chronological parameters excludes a great body of vernacular literature written in medieval England. Notably, literature written in Anglo-Norman during the twelfth century is excluded—literature that is crucial to understanding English literary history. In general, twelfth-century Anglo-Norman literature is especially significant because it was written during a period in which vernacular literature burgeoned in an heteroglossic England: after the Norman Conquest, Latin, French, and English all coexisted and vied for prominence, and translations from Latin into the vernacular flourished among a growing readership. One simply cannot fully understand medieval vernacular literary theory or the literary history of medieval England without an understanding of Anglo-Norman literature’s role in the

development of that literary theory and history. In particular, twelfth-century Anglo-Norman literature is significant because it contains numerous “discussions of writing” with which the editors of *The Idea of the Vernacular* are concerned. Implicitly and explicitly in their texts—especially in their prologues—writers during the twelfth century were considering their place in the changing, shifting, growing literary culture of their day.

Texts written in Anglo-Norman during the twelfth century are particularly critical to those who wish to know how women writers were situated—and situated themselves—within their larger cultural and literary contexts. When Anglo-Norman literature is included, writers such as Marie de France and Clemence of Barking—two of England’s earliest women writers—become part of the literary history of England. As Laurie Finke explains, examining literature written in languages other than English aids in the recovery of a tradition of women writers in medieval England: “Only by restoring this heteroglossia to English culture can the extent of women’s contributions to ‘English’ literature become fully visible. The literary canon’s erasure of this multiculturalism ensured the hegemony of the ‘English’ tradition at the cost of obscuring much of the literary activity, and in particular literary activity by women, that went on during this period.”

As established below, the “literary activity” of Clemence, as revealed especially in her prologue and epilogue, indicates her engagement with both the larger intellectual and literary culture surrounding her and the concerns expressed by her male contemporaries and successors.

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Epilogues and prologues were regular components of hagiographies throughout the Middle Ages. What sets those written by Clemence apart are their length, theoretical considerations, innovation, and positioning of the author, particularly in terms of her authority to compose her text. Clemence’s prologue unfolds in fifty lines of verse, while her epilogue is eleven lines long. This is in comparison to sixteen lines of prologue and fourteen lines of epilogue for La vie sainte Audrée, and ten lines of extant prologue and thirty-nine lines of epilogue in La vie d’Édouard le confesseur.23 In comparison to the corresponding parts of Clemence’s Vie de Sainte Catherine, which will be discussed in detail below, the prologues and epilogues of the two hagiographies more closely reflect the traditional material contained in hagiographic front and end material. As outlined by Paul John Jones in his examination of prologues and epilogues in Old French saints’ lives, these sections of the texts are highly formulaic and often repeat the same concerns with slight variations: the value of the saint’s vita and the vita’s edifying example, the truthfulness of the life and its relation to an original source, a prayer to the saint, and an exhortation of the audience to pray for the author.24 While each author brought his or her

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23 I am considering the interceding material between the end of the vita and the beginning of the miracles in the Life of St. Edward (ll. 5296-5335) as its epilogue.
24 Paul John Jones, Prologue and Epilogue in Old French Lives of Saints before 1400, Series in Romanic Languages and Literatures 24 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933). Calin supports much of Jones’s arguments in his more recent “Saints’ Stories: The Literary Quality of Anglo-Norman Martyr Hagiography,” where he argues that “In the prologue and epilogues to the Anglo-Norman and French vitæ we find a consistent pattern: the implied authors state that the purpose of their work is to edify the implied readers, causing them to emulate the saint whose life the text recounts. Often the epilogue will invoke the saint’s good offices vis-à-vis the author and his public. Writing a saint’s life is in and of itself a devotional act done in God’s name and to his glory. For the only appropriate, worthy use of one’s talent is to praise God” (42).
own particular emphases and style, the epilogues and prologues appended to hagiographies were generally not considered a place for innovation.

In *La vie sainte Audrée*, Marie includes several of the traditional components included in hagiographic prologues and epilogues. Marie’s prologue opens by extolling the life in which one uses one’s gifts and time for good:

An bon hovre e en bon porpens  
Deveroit chascun user son tens.  
Pur sage deveroit hon tenir  
Celui ke porroit sovenir  
Dont il est fait e qui le cria  
Et quel part il revertira. (1-6)

[For a good work and for a good purpose / should each person use his time. / Each man should be held as wise / who is able to remember / what he is made of, who made him, / and whither he shall return.]  

She continues by reflecting on the rewards of a life devoted to a Christian life, noting that “Cil qui bein font sunt honuré / E de Dieu e del siecle amé” (7-8) [People who do good are honored / and loved by God and also by the world] and that “Gariz est ki desert en vie / La Deu grace e sa compainie” (15-16) [Saved is the one who during his lifetime / has merited the grace and fellowship of God]. After this brief general introduction, she then transitions into the life of the saint by explaining, “Ce fist la virg e sainte Audree” (17) [The virgin Saint Audrey lived that way], since she gave up her kingdom and high

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25 English translations for *La vie sainte Audrée* are taken (with occasional modifications on my part) from *The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France*, eds. June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), which provides a translation into English verse. As suggested by their book’s title, McCash and Barban argue that Marie de France authored *La vie sainte Audrée*, although this continues to be a subject of debate among scholars. Unless otherwise noted, line numbers provided with the French text correspond to those included in McCash and Barban’s English edition.
position for the riches Christ offers to his followers (19-22). Marie also points to others who devote themselves entirely to God:

\[
\text{Li clerc, li moine, li heremite} \\
\text{Ky ont ceste vie despite,} \\
\text{Les saintes verges gloriuses} \\
\text{Ky se firent a Deu espouses} \\
\text{Regnent e vivent e viveront} \\
\text{Ou Deu ki tut cria le mund. (23-28)}
\]

[Clerks, monks, hermits, / who have disdained this earthly life, / and glorious saintly virgins / whose marriage is to God, / now live and will [forever] live and reign / with God the Creator of the world.]

Making sure to include the virgin saints “Ky se firent a Deu espouses,” Marie thus concludes her prologue by describing the heavenly rewards offered to those (like the saint whose vita is recorded in her text) who commit themselves to a holy life.

While the prologue is thus focused on the rewards of a life devoted to Christianity, the epilogue to La vie sainte Aude is offers more information regarding the text and its author. The epilogue begins with Marie’s claim to have translated the vita into French “Si com en latin l’ay trové” (4609) [just as I found it in Latin], her request that the saint “Par sa pité ke a moy entende / Et ce servise a m’ame rende / Et ceus pur ki ge la depri / Ke ele lur äit par sa merci” (4614-4617) [to hear me out of compassion / and give this aid to my soul, / as well as to those for whom I pray: / that she may help them through her mercy], and the single mention of her name “Pur ce ke soie remembree”(4620) [so that I may be remembered]. This last statement, in which Marie

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26 The lines in the epilogue in the English translation by McCash and Barban are numbered differently than those in Södergaard’s edition due to manuscript variances; the prologue in their translation begins at l. 4611 rather than l. 4606, as in Södergaard’s edition. Therefore, all corresponding lines can be found in McCash and Barban’s edition five lines after those numbers given parenthetically.
expresses her wish to be remembered, is one example of her emphasis throughout her prologue on the importance of memory: she states earlier in her prologue that “Ne voil nul mettre en obli” (4611) [I do not wish to let anything be forgotten] as well as that “Mut par est fol ki se oblie” (4618) [One is indeed foolish who forgets herself]. Marie thus includes her own particular focus by extending the traditional convention of asking one’s readers to pray for the author that is included in many hagiographic prologues and epilogues.

The anonymous author of *La vie d'Edouard le confesseur* also includes a significant amount of traditional material contained in the prologues and epilogues included in medieval hagiographies. For example, in her epilogue she requests prayers for both herself and for her community (5324-5335). Furthermore, she emphasizes throughout her narratorial additions that her text is a translation from Latin into French, often in the context of remarking on the weakness of her translating skills. She prefaces the *vita* by explaining that she knows only a “false French” and that she lacks the ability to accurately translate from Latin: “Qu’en latin est nominatif, / Ço frai romanz acusatif. / Un faus franceis sai d’Angletere” (5-7) [What in Latin is nominative, that I will make accusative in romance. / I know a false French of England]. Later, in her prologue, the author of *St. Edward* asks pardon for the deficiencies of her translation:

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Merci crie, si quiert pardun
Qu’el’ emprist la presumptiun
De translater iceste vie.
Des qu’ele n’est mielz acumlie,
Or emblasmez sun numpueir;
Kar aquité s’ad sun vuleir. (5318-5323)
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27 English translations of *La vie d’Edouard le confesseur* are my own.
[She cries mercy, and seeks pardon for having the presumption to translate this saint’s life. That it is not better rendered, blame her weakness, since she has done it according to her will.]

She suggests in this passage that all blame for the weaknesses of the text be placed on her, since no fault lies with her saintly subject. The length of her epilogue results from her extended use of this modesty topos, which, as will be discussed below, she later adds to by blaming the weakness of her gender. By including topoi such as these in their prologues and epilogues, these Anglo-Norman female hagiographers align themselves with literary custom and do not stray significantly from generic conventions.

As seen in these passages from the text, a common thread within the prologues and epilogues of the *La vie sainte Audrée* and the *La vie d’Edouard le confesseur* is their claim to translate a Latin source. This similarity reflects the fact that vernacular hagiography grew out of a strong and long-standing Latin tradition; indeed, the vast majority of vernacular hagiographies during the Middle Ages were translations of Latin sources. Like the authors of *La vie sainte Audrée* and *La vie d’Edouard le confesseur*, Clemence claims that her text originally had Latin sources. However, Clemence differs significantly from her fellow female hagiographers by setting out the reasons why she chose to translate the text. In her prologue, Clemence states that she is spurred by her desire to provide a text that her readers will enjoy more than its Latin predecessor:

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Pur sa pieté m’en deit aidier
A cel ouvre que vuil traitier
D’une sue veraie amie,
De qui voil translater la vie,
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28 Translating from a Latin source is not unique to saints’ lives; such translation is common for non-hagiographical genres as well.
De latin respundre en rumanz
Pur ço que plus plaise as oianz. (29-34)\textsuperscript{29}

[Because he [God] is merciful it is right that he should assist me with this work, in which I intend to tell of someone who truly loved him and to translate her life, transposing it from Latin into the vernacular, so that it will be more pleasing to those who hear it.\textsuperscript{30}]

Clemence does refer to an earlier vernacular version of the legend, explaining that it had been previously translated: “Ele fud jadis translaté / Sulunc le tens bien ordené” (35-36)

[It was translated before and well set out according to the standards of the time]. She claims that the poem is held in low esteem by her contemporaries because “li tens est mué / E de humes la qualité” (41-42) [times and men’s quality have changed] and “ele est asquans corrumpue” (44) [it is defective in places]. However, Clemence does not appear to use this previous translation as her source. In addition to claiming in the lines from her prologue above that she intends to translate the life, “De latin respundre en rumanz,” Clemence reiterates her claim to have translated the text from the Latin in the epilogue, identifying herself as “Jo ki sa vie ai translatee” (2689) [I who have translated her life]. Although Wogan-Browne asserts that Clemence’s text is “one of the earliest literary reworkings to use a vernacular source declared as such,” it is clear from these statements

\textsuperscript{29} The Life of St. Catherine by Clemence of Barking, ed. William MacBain, Anglo-Norman Text Society 18 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964). All subsequent references to Clemence’s La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie will cite the line number(s) of MacBain’s edition, which includes a critical and complete edition of the oldest of the three manuscripts that preserve Clemence’s La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 4503.

that Clemence does not claim the previous vernacular translation as her source.\textsuperscript{31} Clemence clearly wants to be recognized as a translator of a Latin text—and one that she could improve upon in her translation.

While vernacular literary prologues were certainly influenced by Latin tradition—as suggested by those written by Clemence and a number of her fellow hagiographers—these prologues cannot be studied only in relation to their Latin counterparts. As contemporary scholarship has increasingly shown, vernacular writers and translators used the growing and constantly developing idiom to address theoretical questions—some of them original, others age-old questions that were reframed in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{32} Often, the theoretical underpinning of these prologues and epilogues were not explicit. As the editors of \textit{The Idea of the Vernacular} argue in regards to later Middle English prologues, the “theoretical implications must be teased out of them” because most vernacular authors did not include overt theoretical considerations in their texts.\textsuperscript{33} In her discussion of medieval translations, Jeanette Beer makes clear that the implicitness of theoretical concerns was not limited to English vernacular texts of the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, but was a feature of vernacular translations throughout the Middle Ages: “The


\textsuperscript{32} See, in particular, Rita Copeland, \textit{Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages} and Alastair Minnis, \textit{Medieval Theory of Authorship}. Copeland’s consideration of how translations were a site of opposition between learned Latin and vernacular cultures, in which translations could be alternatively understood as an endorsement of the past’s authority or an attempt to displace that authority, is especially relevant here.

translators’ assumptions usually remain implicit, but their lack of theoretical exposition must not be equated with a lack of theoretical principles.” 34 Indeed, prologues to Anglo-Norman texts functioned in the same way, often implicitly conveying their theoretical concerns. The act of translating was not a transparent practice, but was rather a theoretical one that underpinned the prologues and epilogues of vernacular translators such as Clemence.

Any “teasing out” of a vernacular translation’s theoretical underpinnings must begin with the medieval author’s own understanding of translation. As explained by the editors of The Idea of the Vernacular, “In medieval Latin, the world translatio (translation) was often taken to be synonymous with expositio (interpretation)…. If this equation is taken seriously, it provides a justification for understanding vernacular translations not simply as attempts to transfer meaning unchanged from one language to another but as readings of source texts, part of whose purpose may indeed lie in their difference from those texts.” 35 This understanding of translation as much more than transcribing a text from one language to another certainly appears to be the case with Clemence’s text. As noted, Clemence’s source appears to be the mid-eleventh century version of St. Catherine’s legend, the Vulgate Passio Sancte Katerine, which existed in both a full version and numerous shorter versions. It is not known which manuscript

Clemence may have used, but it is clear that Clemence’s text departs in significant ways from the full *Vulgate* version; while she omits little, she does amplify and alter her source. The changes that Clemence made to her source do not extend to the order of events; rather, they are evident in the moral and ethical commentary she includes and the narrative voice she adopts. For example, Clemence frequently comments on the motives of her characters, such as noting in reference to the emperor that he wished to act on his evil thoughts because of his nature: “Kar fel ne se puet celer; Quant il veit liu de mal faire / Ne se puet mie bien retraire” (70-72) [for a wicked man cannot conceal his nature; when he sees an opportunity for evil deeds he is quite incapable of restraining himself]. In addition, she extensively expands a monologue spoken by the emperor when he is faced with having to execute his wife for converting to Christianity (2165-2256). Many of the changes that Clemence made to her text were a result of the literary context in which she wrote; as Catherine Batt has demonstrated, Clemence here and elsewhere in her text infuses the narrative with themes and sentiments associated with *fin’amor*, a dominant literary preoccupation of the twelfth century. Of particular significance for this study is Clemence’s rewriting of her source’s prologue: she includes none of the *Vulgate*’s prologue, but writes her own. This significant change makes clear at the beginning of her the text that Clemence does not view translation simply as a word-for-word vernacular

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36 Clemence’s account of Catherine’s *passio* and the events leading to it will be further discussed in the second half of this chapter.
37 See Catherine Batt, “Clemence of Barking’s Transformation of *Courtoisie* in *La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie*,” *Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed Roger Ellis, New Comparisons 12 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1991) 102-123.
retelling of the original Latin source, but more importantly as an act of adaptation that enabled her to recast a familiar narrative in ways that she saw fit.

In addition to viewing translation as a practice that allowed adaptation and novelty, it appears that Clemence also perceives of translation as a means for gaining authority for her text. By emphasizing her text’s genealogy—whether factual or not—Clemence claims for her text an authority central to medieval concepts of literary theory: auctoritas, which was ascribed to and derived from earlier and respected auctores. As Alastair Minnis has argued, there was a circular nature to the medieval concept of auctoritas: “the work of an auctor was a book worth reading; a book worth reading had to be the work of an auctor. No ‘modern’ writer could decently be called an auctor in a period in which men saw themselves as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants, i.e. the ‘ancients’.”

Medieval women writers may have felt the need for auctoritas even more so than their male contemporaries; if men were standing on the shoulders of giants, women were considered not worthy to be even there. The paucity of extant texts written by women in the flourishing literary culture of twelfth-century England in particular and in the Middle Ages in general points to the fact that women’s exclusion from positions of authority—in the Church, the university, the court, and throughout medieval culture—largely kept them from authoring and translating texts. Clemence’s inclusion of her

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38 Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* 12. The importance of auctoritas extended well beyond writers of academic and scholastic works, as is argued by Minnis along with Kevin Brownlee, Tony Hunt, Ian Johnson, and Nigel E. Palmer in their study of late medieval vernacular texts: “the poets’ sense of standing within a chain of authorities, in which each writer handed on what he could derive from its source, whose authors was similarly placed, emerges clearly in the work of those twelfth-century authors whose narrative materials derived from the ancient world” (“Vernacular Literary Consciousness” 424).
text’s lineage should therefore not be understood as an accident or another incidence of a trope; Clemence strategically includes this information in order to attribute authority to her project.

The *auctoritas* that Clemence gains through her claim to have translated a Latin source bestows on her the credibility to share her knowledge with her readers. In the opening lines of her text, Clemence justifies her translation by suggesting that it transmits knowledge to her readers—knowledge that is especially significant because of its beneficial effects. Clemence begins her prologue by suggesting that her knowledge of “what is good” will positively impact her readers:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cil ki le bien seit e entent} \\
\text{Demustrer le deit sagement,} \\
\text{Que par le fruit de sa bunté} \\
\text{Seient li altre amonesté} \\
\text{De bien faire e de bien voleir} \\
\text{Sulunc ço qu’en unt le poier. (1-6)}
\end{align*}
\]

[All those who know and understand what is good have a duty to demonstrate it wisely, so that by the fruit of its goodness others may be encouraged to do good deeds and to want what is good, as far as they are able.]

In the following lines of the prologue, she implicitly aligns herself with Christ, who taught his followers to be good by his own example: she states, “Car cil ki sul est bon de sei / A nus dunad essample e lei” (7-8) [For he alone who is good by his very nature gave us both precept and example]. As is made evident in these opening lines to her prologue, Clemence asserts that she not only has the authority but also the duty to share her knowledge with her readers. She makes clear that she conceives of her role as a
transmitter of knowledge as stemming from an obligation, a duty to share that knowledge, by using the verb “devoir,” which in the French connotes obligation.

By positioning herself as a transmitter of knowledge who derives her authority from classical precedents, Clemence establishes her place within a long line of medieval writers who engaged in translatio studii, the transmission of learning from Greece to Rome and then to Europe. Of primary importance to the understanding of the relationship between present and past cultures in the Middle Ages, translatio studii was considered one of the primary means by which authority was transmitted from one period or place to another. The concept of translatio studii and its significance to medieval literary theory and translation practice have been studied in relation to scholastic and academic vernacular texts as well as to the works of later medieval male authors who consciously modeled themselves after these texts, but literature outside these realms has not received the same attention. Certainly, non-scholastic medieval literature could be concerned with the transmission of knowledge between cultures, as is evidenced clearly in the opening of the late-twelfth-century romance Cligés by Chrétien de Troyes. In this notable passage, which in many ways captures the medieval understanding of translatio studii, Chrétien outlines the transmission of texts and the learning those texts contain:

Par les livres que nous avons
Les fez des ancïens savons
Et del siegle qui fu jadis.
Ce nos ont nostre livre apris,
Qu’an Grece ot de chevalerie

39 See, in particular, Copeland, Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages and Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship. In their considerations of the influence of scholastic and academic prologues on medieval authors, both Copeland and Minnis primarily analyze the works of Chaucer and Gower.
Le premier los et de clergie.
Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
Et de la clergie la some,
Qui or est an France venue. (25-33)\(^{40}\)

[Through the books we have, we learn of the deeds of ancient peoples and of bygone days. Our books have taught us that chivalry and learning first flourished in Greece; then to Rome came chivalry and the sum of knowledge, which now has come to France.]

The learning that Chrétien describes here underwent a significant transformation as it was transmitted to the western world of France and England: as Chrétien’s French text exemplifies, that learning began to be transmitted in the vernacular.

It is particularly significant that Clemence, a woman writer, implicitly claims participation in this transmission of learning because *translatio studii* was predominantly a male enterprise—in large part due to women’s limited access to Latin throughout the Middle Ages. However, as noted in the introduction, women were increasingly assuming active roles in the burgeoning of vernacular literature. By choosing to write in the vernacular, Clemence positions her text (much like her male contemporary, Chrétien de Troyes, does with his text) so that it can reach a broader audience than the traditionally Latin, male concept of *translatio studii* allowed. As her prologue and epilogue suggest, Clemence envisions an inclusive audience for her text—one that was not predominantly composed of one gender or the other and was certainly not limited to the male learned elite. It may be understood that Clemence conceives of a religious audience when she

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announces in her epilogue that she undertook her literary project for the love of her abbey: “De Berkinge sui nunain. / Pur s’amur pris cest oevre en mein” (2691-2692) [I am a nun of Barking, for love of which I took this work in hand]. However, the very fact that she identifies her religious community underscores that her work is intended for an outside audience and not exclusively for her fellow nuns. This intention is evident in her prologue, in which Clemence makes clear that she saw the readership of her text extending well beyond the abbey’s walls. The opening line announces the inclusiveness of her intended audience, for she immediately points to the obligation that all people have to demonstrate goodness: “Cil ki le bien seit e entent / Demustrer le deit sagement” (1-2) [All those who know and understand what is good have a duty to demonstrate it wisely]. Sharing this goodness will cause it to multiply among all those who encounter it, as she explains: “Que par le fruit de sa bunté / Seient li altre amonesté / De bien faire e de bien voleir” (3-5) [So that by the fruit of its goodness others may be encouraged to do good deeds and to want what is good, as far as they are able]. She continues to emphasize the notion of universality when describing the source of this goodness, explaining that God’s goodness “suffist chascun / Car il sul est a tuz commun” (11-12) [suffices for everyone, for it alone is common to all]. Modeling herself after God’s sharing of his goodness, Clemence wishes to reach an inclusive readership.

The universal focus of the prologue is further substantiated by Clemence’s reference to her audience in the passio as well as the manuscript evidence of hagiography generally and of Clemence’s Vie de Sainte Catherine specifically. In her one direct address to her audience in the passio, in a brief addition to the text in which she affirms
that the scholars with whom Catherine debates were rewarded by God for their martyrdom, Clemence uses the term “Segnurs” [Lords]. This address is not specific to any gender, but indicates a generic form of address, suggesting that Clemence directed her text towards a mixed audience that extended beyond the confines of Barking Abbey.\(^{41}\)

The mixed audiences for whom Clemence evidently intends her text were frequently the owners of vernacular saints’ lives. These hagiographic accounts were not intended solely for male and female religious, but were also included in manuscripts in secular ownership and were compiled along with courtly texts in secular manuscripts.\(^{42}\) This manuscript evidence suggests that these hagiographies, so popular during the Middle Ages, reached lay audiences of both men and women in courts and wealthy households. Barking Abbey’s connections to the royal and noble culture of Anglo-Norman England would have allowed Clemence a ready audience among aristocrats; Burgess and Wogan-Browne’s analysis of the manuscript evidence indicates that this is indeed what occurred.

\(^{41}\) This understanding of the term is corroborated by Paul John Jones as well as Burgess and Wogan-Browne. Considering prologues and epilogues to Old French verse hagiographies written before 1400, Paul John Jones argues that “when a form of address is used, the most commonly found is ‘seigneur’. ‘Bone gent’, douce gent’, are also common. Little or nothing can be deduced from these terms, which are much the same in the prologues to the epic and to the mysteries… In general, the terms of address used indicate, by their very vagueness, that the lives had a very wide appeal, and were not designed for any restricted audience” (18-19). In reference to Clemence’s use of the term specifically, Burgess and Wogan-Browne explain, “This term occurs in a number of texts and manuscripts belonging to women in Anglo-Norman Britain and may simply function as an inclusive address. But in a text written by a female religious it suggests that mixed audiences, and audiences outside Barking, were also expected to hear the life” (Introduction, Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths xxvi).

with Clemence’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine*. As demonstrated by the increasing number of analyses of women’s patronage, ownership of manuscripts, and textual communities, women were a vital part of the vernacular-literate lay audience who would have read texts such as Clemence’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine*. Reaching an audience that was at least partially composed of female readers appears to have been Clemence’s intention. Her skill in translating from Latin to the vernacular demonstrates that Clemence possessed a command of Latin that would have enabled her to compose in Latin; however, she chose to use her skill to translate a text from the Latin to the vernacular. Her choice proves that she had a broader audience in mind than those who were learned enough to read Latin—the majority of whom were men.

Envisioning this inclusive audience, Clemence founds her text on an underlying didactic purpose: to transmit the knowledge of God’s goodness and the rewards of a life devoted to Him. Devoting the first twenty-eight lines of her prologue to describing God’s goodness and emphasizing the responsibility to share that goodness, she praises those who submit to God’s unfailing and everlasting goodness:

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Beneurez est ki s’i alie
E a cel grant bien sun cuer plie
Que mueisun de tens ne mue
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44 This point is made particularly evident in Wogan-Browne’s extended analysis of the provenance of one of the manuscripts that contained Clemence’s *Vie de Sainte Catherine* (London, British Library MS Additional 70513, which contained thirteen saints’ lives in total and all the hagiographies that were written by women in England); see Wogan-Browne, “Powers of Record, Powers of Example: Hagiography and Women’s History,” *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003) 71-93.
Ne lai ne reprent ne argue. (15-18)

[Blessed is anyone who turns to him [God] and bends one’s heart to this great goodness which does not change with changing times or suffer reproach or attack from human law.]

The perpetual and unchanging goodness of God that Clemence emphasizes here is in direct opposition to the temporality of the written word and humans’ changing tastes and perceptions: she claims that her translation is necessary “Pur ço que li tens est mué . E des humes la qualité” (41-42) [Because times and men’s qualities have changed]. While it had been translated before and “Sulunc le tens bein ordené” (36) [well set out according to the standards of the time], she recognizes literature’s transience:

Mais ne furent dunc si veisdus
Les humes, ne si envius
Cum il sunt al tens ki est ore
E après nus serrunt uncore. (37-40)

[People then were not so hard to please or so critical as they are in our day, and will be even more so after we are gone.]

While she recognizes the transience of her own text, as well as of literature generally, she nonetheless recognizes the didactic purpose it can serve at the present moment. Her prologue makes clear that her text—as fleeting as it may be—can be a device to teach her readers about something everlasting: God’s goodness and how to obtain it through love. The primary way that she teaches her readers these lessons is through the character of Catherine. As Clemence explains in her prologue, her intention with the text is to narrate the life of someone lovingly devoted to God: Clemence asks God to aid her in “cel ovre que vuil traitier / D’une sue veraie amie, / De qui voil translater la vie” (30-31) [this work, in which I intend to tell of someone who truly loved him and to translate her life].

39
She thus tells of the *passio* of someone who did just as Clemence exhorts her readers to do, someone who turns to God and “a cel grant bien sun cuer plie” (16) [bends his heart to this great goodness]. Therefore, while the text Clemence writes is only temporary, it offers an abiding lesson through its retelling of the popular saint’s life.

Although Clemence consciously establishes herself in her prologue and epilogue as an authoritative transmitter of knowledge, she noticeably omits in either the prologue or the epilogue any acknowledgement of the fact that she is a woman writer taking part in a male-dominated transmission of knowledge. She does not emphasize her gender, and her only identifications as a woman are her female name and profession. Clemence provides her name only at the end of her text, in the epilogue to *La Vie de Sainte Catherine*: “Jo ki sa vie ai translatee, / Par nun sui Clemence numee” (2689-2690) [I who have translated her life am called Clemence by name]. She then follows this statement with a further explanation of who she is: “De Berkinge sui nunain. / Pur s’amur pris cest livre orrunt” (2691-2692) [I am a nun of Barking, for love of which I took this work in hand]. She indicates that she provides this information about herself so that her readers can pray for her:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A tuz cels ki cest livre orrunt,} \\
\text{E ki de bon coer l’entenderunt,} \\
\text{Pur amur Deu pri e requier,} \\
\text{Qu’il voillent Deu pur mei preier. (2693-2696)}
\end{align*}
\]

[For the love of God, I pray and beseech all who will hear this book and who listen to it with a receptive heart to pray to God on my behalf.]

\footnote{Clemence provides her name in what Wogan-Browne has dubbed a ‘narratorial signature’: “the presentation…of a narrator figure which may be named or anonymous, but which in any case personifies a translating stance” (“Wreaths of Thyme” 50).}
By identifying herself by name and asking her readers to pray for her, Clemence shares similarity with Marie, the author of *La vie sainte Audrée*, who provides her name at the conclusion of her epilogue: “Ici escris mon non Marie, / Pur ce ke soie remembree” (4619-4620) [here I write my name “Marie” / so that I may be remembered]. The inclusion of these statements is not unusual in hagiographic epilogues; rather, it is representative of authorial identification in Anglo-Norman hagiography and is not gender-specific. As mentioned above, Jones’s analysis of prologues and epilogues in Old French hagiographies identifies an exhortation of the audience to pray for the author as a generic convention. Moreover, Wogan-Browne points out that in Anglo-Norman hagiographies, “a good proportion of the male hagiographers who give their names place them at the end of their texts rather than the beginning (7 cases against 6), while there are 19 cases of anonymous (and probably mostly male) authorship, and a few cases of male authors who give their names at both end and beginning or who name themselves in some texts but not in others known to be by them.” Here, then, Clemence joins the ranks of those male and female hagiographers who provide their names in the prologues and epilogues affixed to their saints’ lives.

In her prologue and epilogue, Clemence neither apologizes for her gender nor for the fact that her text focuses on a woman. Clemence thus significantly differs from the anonymous author of *La vie d’Edouard le confesseur*, who places great emphasis on her deficiencies as a female translator. After having focused in her prologue on her weak

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46 See fn 24 above.
47 Wogan-Browne, “Wreaths of Thyme” 50.
translating skills, in her epilogue the author of *La vie d’Edouard* identifies herself as a nun of Barking but refuses to include her name:

> En Berkinges en l’abeïe  
> Fu translatee ceste vie,  
> Pur amur saint Edward la fist  
> Une ancele al dulz Jhesu Crist.  
> Mais sun num n’i vult dire a ore,  
> Kar bien set n’est pas digne unكور  
> Qu’en livre seit oï ne lit  
> U si tres saint nun ad escrit. (5304-5311)

[In Barking in the abbey this life was translated. For the love of St. Edward a handmaiden of sweet Jesus Christ made it. But she does not want to speak her name there at this time, for she knows it [her name] is not yet worthy to be either heard aloud or read in a book where such a holy name [St Edward] was written.]

This self-effacing humility continues as the author requests that her readers not despise the translation or reject its good, asking them to overlook the fact that a woman had the presumption to translate the *vita* and to recognize that her impotence is to blame rather than her desire:

> Si requiert a toz les oianz,  
> Ki mais orrunt cest soien rumanz,  
> Qu’il ne seit pur ço avilé,  
> Se femme l’ad si translaté.  
> Pur ço nel deit hoem pas despire  
> Ne le bien qu’il i ad desdire.  
> Merci crie, si quiert pardun  
> Qu’el’ emprist la presumptiun  
> De translater iceste vie.  
> Des qu’ele n’est mielz acumplie,  
> Or emblasmez sun numpueir,  
> Kar aquiré s’ad sun vuleir. (5312-5323)

[Thus she asks of all those who listen, whoever shall ever hear the foregoing romance contained on these pages, that it may not be scorned because a woman thus translated it. For no man should despise it nor the good things that there are to be enjoyed within it. She cries mercy, and}
seeks pardon for having the presumption to translate this saint’s life. That
it is not better rendered, blame her weakness, since she has done it
according to her will.]

The length of the front and end materials appended to La vie d’Edouard le confesseur —
while still eleven lines shorter than those in Clemence’s text—are a result of the author’s
extended modesty topos: she builds on this rhetorical convention by emphasizing her
weakness not only as a translator, but also as a female translator.

These passages by the anonymous author of the La vie d’Edouard le confesseur
underscore the very lack of such statements in Clemence’s text. In her prologue and
epilogue, Clemence includes no reference to herself as unfit for the task of translating or
as offering up a sub-standard text for any reason. Likewise, Clemence omits her source’s
emphasis on Catherine’s femininity—and the corresponding weakness of that subject—in
the prologue to the Vulgate Passio Sancte Katerine. In reference to Katherine as the
subject of the passio, the Vulgate states, “infirmioris sexus constantiam et imbecile etatis
uirtutem attendimus” (10-11). Clemence, on the other hand, makes no reference
whatsoever to Catherine’s sex. The only description that Clemence includes of Catherine
in her prologue is her brief statement that Catherine is “D’une sue veraie amie” (31)
[someone who truly loves him [God]].48 By removing any suggestion that being female
means being weak, Clemence removes any suggestion that she herself is weak—or that
her text is.

48 In her analysis of two of the male-authored Old French versions of the saint’s legend in
collection to Clemence’s text, Tara Foster cogently argues that in both their prologues
and the narratives, the male authors (unlike Clemence) highlight women’s inferiority
and/or attempt to curtail Catherine’s verbal skills and authority; see “Clemence of
Barking: Reshaping the Legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria,” Women’s Writing 12
The lack of emphasis on her gender suggests that Clemence does not see herself as disrupting the tradition of *translatio studii*, but rather views herself as extending that tradition. Rather than emphasizing or apologizing for her gender, Clemence uses her prologue and epilogue to insert herself into a patrilineal line of male authority. Moreover, she claims the ultimate male authority and source for her text: throughout her prologue, Clemence appeals directly to God as the origin and authorization for the *passio* which follows. She opens her prologue by devoting over twenty lines to praising God, whom she describes as the source of all goodness:

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Car sil ki sul est bon de sei
A nus dunad essample e lei;
Sa bunté ne nus volt celer,
Mais cumunement demustrer.
De sun bien suffist chacun
Cal il sul est a tuz commun.
De sa grant largesce nus paist
E tut nostre bien del suen naist. (7-14)
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[For he who alone is good by his very nature gave us both precept and example. He wished to not conceal his goodness from us, but to reveal it publicly. His goodness suffices for everyone, for it alone is common to all. For his great bounty he feeds us, and all our goodness has its source in his goodness.]

After explaining that those persons who turn to God will undoubtedly enjoy his beneficence, Clemence relates the composition of her text with God’s goodness, suggesting that the former stems from the latter:

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Or li preum par sa dolçur
Qu’il nus doinst faire tel labor
E issi sivre ici sa trace,
Que la le veum face a face
U il regne en sa majesté
Uns Deus en sainte trinité. (23-28)
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[Now let us beseech him that in his grace he will allow us to perform this task and so follow his example here below that we shall see him face to face, where he reigns in majesty, one God in Holy Trinity.]

Clemence had good reason to appeal to God when undertaking the writing of the \textit{passio}, for it was God who held the greatest authority for her as an author: as Alexandra Barratt pointedly explains, “The concept of authority (\textit{auctoritas}), in its theological, political, and literary senses, was thoroughly male. The supreme and highest \textit{auctor} (the Latin word from which ‘author’ ultimately derives), the creator of the universe, the First Cause, was god Himself who in the Middle Ages was indisputably male.”\footnote{Alexandra Barratt, Introduction, \textit{Women’s Writing in Middle English}, ed. Alexandra Barratt, Longman Annotated Texts (New York: Longman, 1992) 6.} Clemence claims to have received the knowledge that she shares with her readers from this “supreme and highest \textit{auctor}.” She concludes her prologue by directing praise to the source of her text and the knowledge it contains: “Il sul en deit loenge aveir / De qui sai mun povre saveir” (49-50) [He alone should be praised from whom I derive my small amount of knowledge]. With no mention of her own gender, Clemence thus places herself as the direct recipient of knowledge passed to her from the most respected male authority of the medieval world.

Clemence’s prologue identifies a further connection between herself and the predominantly male transmission of knowledge: as demonstrated above, Clemence claims to have translated the text from the Latin despite the paucity of Latinity among women during the Middle Ages. She not only translates the text from Latin into the vernacular—“de latin respondre en rumanz” (33)—but also claims to perform this task better than a previous translator. She explains that while the earlier translator produced a
text “Sulunc le tens bien ordené” (36) [well set out according to the standards of the
time], the translation was “asquans corrumpue” (44) [defective in places] and needed
emendation because “li tens est mué / E des humes la qualité” (41-42) [times and men’s
quality have changed]. She then provides a rationale for her translation, which she
implicitly claims is of a greater quality than that of her predecessor: “Pur ço si l’estuet
amender / E le tens selunc la gent user” (45-46) [So it is necessary to correct it and to
make the times conform to the people]. Her proficiency in Latin—and her confidence in
her Latin translating skills—may distinguish her from the vast majority of her female
contemporaries, but this proficiency points to the extensive education and resources
available to her while living at Barking Abbey. Although medieval women were
excluded from the all-male institutions of higher learning, Barking Abbey was a locus of
female knowledge and learning. Of particular importance to the questions discussed
herein is the fact that the abbey was associated with Latin learning specifically; as
Wogan-Browne points out, Barking Abbey was “one of the longest-established and
relatively undisrupted institutional contexts for female learning in Britain” that “had a
tradition of Latinity which survived the Conquest, and it shared in the cultivated Anglo-
Latin and Anglo-French letters practiced at the Anglo-Normal royal court.”
Barking Abbey’s association with learning did not necessarily translate into confidence for the
women writers it produced; as discussed above, the anonymous nun of Barking who
composed La vie d’Edouard le confesseur felt great timidity concerning her translating

50 Wogan-Browne, “‘Clerc u lai, muïne u dame’: Women and Anglo-Norman
Hagiography in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” Women and Literature in Britain,
1150-1500, ed. Carol M. Meale, 2nd ed., Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17
skills and the fact that she presumed to translate the life despite being a woman. Unlike her fellow nun, Clemence offers no apology for being a woman but provides rationale for the quality and timeliness of her translation. Therefore, in addition to having a command of the Latin male tradition that few women possessed, Clemence displays a confidence that even fewer held.

For such an author, St. Catherine is an entirely appropriate subject. As depicted in the numerous accounts of her legend, St. Catherine was revered for her extensive knowledge—both academic and sacred—and, much like Clemence, she claimed God as the origin and authorization of that knowledge. The second half of this chapter considers how Clemence, while using the Passio Sancte Katerine as her source text, crafts her own version of Catherine’s passion. In Clemence’s text, Catherine possesses an exceptional command of both academic and sacred knowledge, and it is the necessity of possessing both that Clemence underscores in her account of Catherine’s legend. Indeed, the emperor Maxentius, who is devoid of both reason and faith, represents the folly of possessing neither, while the scholars with whom Catherine debates particularly demonstrate that academic knowledge is useless unless it is put in the service of the divine. Clemence’s account also emphasizes Catherine’s ability to adopt modes of instruction best suited to her specific audience. In particular, Clemence’s portrayal of St. Catherine’s conversion of the empress and of the captain of the emperor’s guard not only demonstrates her ability to effectively teach different audiences but also emphasizes the possibility of women teaching both men and women—who themselves then teach others.
Catherine thus stands as a powerful didactic figure adept at transmitting her knowledge to those she encountered.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, McGinn succinctly states a widely-accepted view among scholars that hagiography is a didactic genre, explaining further that hagiography was “intended not so much to give a historical account of a life as to teach a lesson about how to live.”\(^{51}\) However, the relationship between hagiography and didacticism is complicated when the author of a saint’s life is female—and even more so when that woman writer chooses to write about a highly educated woman who debates with, preaches to, and successfully evangelizes almost all whom she encounters, both men and women. As Lewis astutely notes in regards to Katherine as she was depicted in Middle English lives after 1300, “In many ways her example is inherently paradoxical,” since “she evidently provides a supreme example of faith and fortitude,” while at the same time “there are many elements of her life […] which provide not only opportunities for multiple readings but also potentially problematic models of religious and social conduct, perhaps particularly for women.”\(^{52}\) Taking a cue from Lewis, who examines specific aspects of the legend and how they were treated in different accounts and in different contexts, the argument below is built on the tenet that Clemence presented St.

\(^{51}\) McGinn xiii.

Catherine as a model of learning and teaching for both the men and women who made up her twelfth-century audience. As an educated and literate woman herself, Clemence did not shy away from depicting a woman who would have challenged contemporary concerns about learned women.

At the outset of the *passio*, Catherine is clearly associated with the male, learned elite of Alexandria, a city that was historically considered during the Middle Ages a great site of pagan learning. When Catherine is first introduced, she is described as the sole child of an Alexandrian king. While other early versions of Catherine’s legend based on the *Vulgate* only briefly mention her education or do not explain its source, in Clemence’s version it is her father who ensures that Catherine is extensively educated:

Sun pere ert rei tant cume vesqui;
Il n’oult fille ne fiz fors li.
D’escripture la fait aprendre,
Opposer alter e sei defendre.
El munt m’oult dialeticien
Ki veintre la poust de rien. (139-144)

[Her father was a king during his lifetime and he had no other son or daughter. He had her taught letters and how to argue a case and defend her position. There was no dialectician on earth who could defeat her in argument.]

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53 For example, in her comparative study of Clemence’s text with continental Old French Katherine legends based on the *Vulgate* written by men, Foster notes that “only Clemence points out that Catherine’s father had her educated” (20). Clemence’s text shares more similarity on this point with later versions of the legend written in England, which do include this detail. For instance, the Middle English version in the Katherine-group notes that “Hire feader hefde iset hire earliche to laire” (40-41), while the anonymous fifteenth-century prose version notes that Katherine performed so well after “she was sette to scole” that her father “had so gret joy of the wisdom of his doughter that he ordeyned hir a toure in his paleys wyth diverse studies and chambers” (*The Life of Saint Katherine, Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends*, ed. and trans. Karen A. Winstead (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 188).
With no emphasis on Catherine’s gender, this passage makes clear that Catherine’s extensive learning is sanctioned by male authority. Furthermore, by employing the term “dialeticien,” Clemence establishes Catherine as educated in an academic discourse that was integral to medieval university education, dialectics. Mastery of this highly formal method of debate signifies that Catherine possessed the sort of education available only to professional clerics and scholars—and certainly not to women—in Anglo-Norman England. Clemence thus depicts Catherine as a woman of exceptional education and knowledge among her twelfth-century readers. Moreover, this term indicates that Catherine is not a learned woman who confines her intellectual pursuits to studying privately or within the confines of female textual communities; rather, she employs her knowledge publicly among a diverse group of scholars trained in the art of dialectics, most of whom would be understood by her twelfth-century audience to be men.

Although Clemence first highlights Catherine’s academic knowledge, she quickly introduces a second, and more important, type of knowledge possessed by Catherine. Immediately following the above lines, Clemence describes Catherine’s disdain for worldly matters and her reverence for the divine:

Sages ert mult de choses mundaines,
Mai sun desir ert as suvereines.
En Deu mist tute sa entente,
Sa valur, sa bele juvente.
Tuz ses mortels amanz despit
Et a nent mortel amant se prist,
La ki amur est chaste et pure
Et dunt deliz tut tens dure. (145-152)

[She was very wise in the ways of this world, but her heart was set on higher things. In God she placed her whole mind, her worth and her fair youth, and she showed disdain for all mortal lovers, devoting herself to an]
immortal lover whose love is chaste and pure and everlasting in its delight.]

Catherine devotes herself not to scholastic learning, but to “suvereines” contained in neither scholastic books nor dialecticians’ debates. In addition to devoting her “valur, sa bele juvente” to God, Catherine places “sa entente” in him: she directs her entire self to the divine. In these lines Clemence also introduces an affective mode of piety that would be familiar to her twelfth-century readers: in reference to Christ, she notes that Catherine “a nent mortel amant se prist.” In addition to suggesting that one’s intellect is best put in the service of one’s faith, Clemence thus combines both intellectual and affective modes of devotion in her description of Catherine. Clemence takes care to not simply depict Catherine as an intellectual, but places particular emphasis on the saint as representative of a cross-section of twelfth-century religious and scholastic currents.

As Clemence continues her introductory description of Catherine, she reinforces Catherine’s distinction between worldly and divine matters as well as God as the true source of the saint’s wisdom. After cursorily describing her rule of the kingdom after her father’s death, noting that “Ele le maintint sagement / E entur li retint sa gent” (161-162) [She maintained it wisely and kept his household around her], Clemence returns to Catherine’s devotion to the Christian faith. Catherine shares her father’s wealth with others “Kar Deu sulement li suffist” (164) [for God alone was sufficient for her], and places no importance on treasure because she “del tut son soer i ficha” (166) [fixed her heart entirely on him [God]]. Notably, at the end of this general introduction to Catherine, Clemence notes that “De cuer fud noble e de parage, / E en Deu fud parfite e sage” (167-168) [She was of noble heart and lineage, and in God she was made perfect
and wise]. Clemence thus establishes God as the ultimate source of Catherine’s knowledge and perfection; while her birth had made her “De cuer fud noble e de parage,” it was God who made her “parfite e sage.”

In Catherine’s encounter with the pagan emperor Maxentius, Clemence demonstrates Catherine’s melding of intellectual and spiritual knowledge. After learning that Maxentius has required everyone in Alexandria to make offerings to the pagan gods, Catherine resolves to instruct the emperor on the erroneous nature of his beliefs. Leaving her palace to go to the temple where Maxentius is forcing Christians to make sacrifices, Catherine believes that she will be able to sway the emperor through logic:

L’amie Deu se purpensa
Que le rei a raisun metra
E par raisun voldra mustrer
Que il e sa lei funt a dampner. (189-192)

[This beloved of God thought that she would take the king to task and prove to him by logic that he and his law were worthy of condemnation.]

Her confidence in her ability to bring him into the fold of the Christian faith “par raisun” is explained in the subsequent line: Clemence describes Catherine as “En Deu e en sun sens si fie” (193) [Confident in God and in her own intelligence]. This combination allows Catherine to enter the temple “ne dute mie” (194) [without fear] and to address the emperor directly. After offering him a cursory greeting, Catherine begins her attempt to convert him from his pagan beliefs to the Christian faith:

Si volsisses Deu aurer
Ki dampner te puert e salver,
Lui sul amer e de cuer servir
Ki te fist naistre e ferad murir,
E si tu eusses en tei raisun,
Ne aoreies rien se lui nun. (203-208)
[If you were willing to honour God, who can damn or save you, and to love him alone, and to serve with all your heart the one who brought about your birth and will bring about your death, and if you had within you the faculty of reason, you would not worship anything other than him alone.]

Catherine thus argues that “raisun” will cause Maxentius to believe in Christ. Indeed, as she makes explicitly clear here, reason dictates belief in the Christian faith. As she continues, Catherine suggests that Maxentius is acting against reason by choosing to not adopt the Christian faith and to worship pagan gods. Stressing the illogic of worshiping pagan images, she argues:

E tu aures sa faiture  
Ki faite est de sa criature.  
Ço que aures, home le fist;  
Membres e cors sen sens i mist.  
Oir ne poent ne veer,  
De mal ne de bien n’unt poeir.  
Il ne funt bien a lur ami  
Ne nul mal a lur enimi.  
E tu les aores humlement. (209-217)

[But, instead, you worship the images made of him by his creatures. What you worship was made by man: they were given limbs and a body, but not intelligence. They can neither see nor hear; they have no power for good or evil; they do not good to their friends and no harm to their enemies. And yet you worship them humbly.]

It is clear that Catherine perceives the images of pagan gods as mere approximations of God, not only man-made but also “sen sens.” Although the ineffectiveness of worshiping such images is matched by the inefficacy of the images themselves, Maxentius still believes. Catherine therefore ends her address to the emperor by requesting him to explain why he chooses to remain a pagan: “Di mei pur quei, kar ne l’entent” (218) [Tell me the reason, for I cannot understand it]. She thus concludes by asking Maxentius to
use the same logic she has just employed in her defense of Christianity and criticism of paganism.

Maxentius is able to recognize Catherine’s extensive knowledge, but is neither able to contend with her intellectually nor rebut her theological arguments. After Catherine’s address, Clemence notes that Maxentius recognizes that “Bele li semble e culuree, / De bien parler endoctrinee” (223-224) [She seemed to him to be beautiful, fair-complexioned and well instructed in the art of speaking]. However, he does not recognize the logic of Catherine’s speech, which would have resonated with Clemence’s twelfth-century Christian audience. In response to Catherine’s request that he explain his pagan beliefs, Maxentius offers the only extended rebuttal to her theological arguments in the text. He begins by revealing that he does not see the reason of her argument:

Bele, fait il, mult bien parlex,
Mai pois de raisun i metez.
Vos diz ne poez pas pruver
Ne nostre lei issi dampner. (227-230)

[You speak very well, but there is little sense in what you say. You cannot prove your claims, nor condemn our faith in this way.]

He then offers two arguments for his continued belief in his gods. First, he calls on tradition: he explains that they have taken their faith from their ancestors “Ki furent maistre e prince en Rume / E de religiun furent sume” (233-234) [who were masters and princes of Rome; they were the embodiment of religious authority]. Second, he points to the “cruelty” of Christianity as a reason for rejecting it: “Mais vostre lei est si cruele / E a tuz ses creanz mortele” (235-236) [But your faith is so cruel and so deadly for all its believers]. Claiming that “N’est nule merveille greinur / Ne nule plus horrible errur”
(237-238) [There is no greater horror or more dreadful error] than Christ’s taking human form, his crucifixion and resurrection, Maxentius argues that worshiping the immortal sun and moon as gods is more reasonable. With his longest speech on theological matters finished—he has spoken for thirty-one lines—he instructs Catherine to respond.54

Catherine replies to Maxentius by relying again on reason and logic. She opens her response with a succinct rejection of his arguments: “La toe errur tant par est grande / Que nule verté ne demande” (261-262) [Your error is very great because it does not address the truth]. She continues by explaining that objects such as the sun and moon were created by God, and as his creations, they rightfully give praise to God. She implies that Maxentius has less sense than the heavens because he does not praise his creator:

Tute rien li rent sun servise
Sulunc ço que raisun devise;
E de tei fait mult a duter,
Si tu te susses purpenser
Cum as despit le criatur,
Ki t’a presté si grant onur. (275-280)

[Everything renders service to him in accordance with the dictates of reason and you would have great cause to fear for yourself if you would reflect on how you have scorned the creator, who has lent you such great honour.]

Catherine thus implies that Maxentius is not acting “Sulunc ço que raisun devise” by not worshiping the Christian God who has created everything—including Maxentius and his reign. After likening a person who did not acknowledge Maxentius as a lord despite Maxentius’s honoring him with position and power to Maxentius’s treatment of God, she concludes her address with a final instruction to the emperor:

54 Maxentius’s address to Catherine extends from l. 227 to l. 258. Catherine’s addresses to Maxentius extend across 17 lines (201-218) and 43 lines (261-304).
Abandon this error, in which you can find no truth. No one should choose error because he cannot put it to good advantage. You ought to abandon this error, since you cannot establish the truth of it.

As she had at the beginning of her reply to Maxentius, Catherine here draws an opposition between error and truth. Catherine claims not only that Maxentius cannot obtain “bele fin” by clinging to his false faith, but also that he ignores the “verrur” that Catherine has tried to reason him into believing.

Again, Maxentius demonstrates that he recognizes neither Catherine’s logic nor her faith as true. In his reply to her, he acknowledges her extensive knowledge, but refutes that knowledge’s premise:

Fair one, he said, it is apparent that you possess great knowledge. But you would be very much wiser if, from your earliest years, you had acquired your philosophy, which is so firmly implanted in you, from our masters.

Maxentius’s inability to accept the reason and faith represented by Catherine reflects larger and more fundamental flaws in his character. In opposition to the praiseworthy life that Catherine leads, Clemence crafts Maxentius as a character who is devoid of both true faith and reason. Indeed, Clemence prefaces Catherine’s first meeting with Maxentius.
with information that highlights Maxentius’s deficient nature. In a characteristic addition to the *Vulgate* in which she provides commentary on a character’s motives and nature (as discussed above), Clemence explains that Maxentius required his subjects to make sacrifices because he had to follow his evil nature: “Kar fel ne se puet celer; / Quant il veit liu de mal faire / Ne se puet mie bien retraire” (70-72) [For a wicked man cannot conceal his nature; when he sees an opportunity for evil deeds he is quite incapable of restraining himself]. Maxentius thus possesses a nature that is devoid of the goodness and restraint that come with faith and reason; Clemence’s addition emphasizes that the emperor is motivated entirely by evil—unlike Catherine, who is motivated first by faith and second by reason.

Unwilling to accept Catherine’s arguments and incapable of defeating her in debate, Maxentius must rely on others to contend with Catherine. Upon taking leave of Catherine in the temple, he sends out letters requesting the presence of those in his kingdom who can debate with such a learned mind. In her version of this letter, Clemence uses two terms to underscore Catherine’s exceptional ability for her Anglo-Norman readers. These terms occur in the opening of Maxentius’s letter:

Ço sachent tuit e pres e loin
Que l’emperur ad grant besoin
-- E meimement rethorien
Ki parler seivent e bel e bien --
S’onur e sa lei maintiengent,
Kar une plaideresse ad forte
Ki de sa lei duerpir l’enorte. (329-336)

[Let it be known by everyone far and near—especially rhetoricians, who are experts in fine and effective speech—that the emperor has a great need for everyone to come to him and maintain his honour and his law, for he]
finds himself confronted by a powerful woman advocating that he should abandon his law.]

By instructing “rethorien” to come to Alexandria in particular, Maxentius employs a term rarely used in the vernacular but that would have particular resonance for a twelfth-century readership: a rhetorician would have received formal training to which women would not generally be privy in Anglo-Norman England. Therefore, requesting the presence of rhetoricians highlights the formidable intellectual opponent that Catherine represents and the exceptional education she had received.\textsuperscript{55} Maxentius’s description of Catherine as a “plaideresse” employs a rare feminized form of “plaidur,” suggesting that Catherine has been trained in the disciplines of advocacy and pleading. In addition to using these terms to underscore Catherine’s knowledge, the emperor’s letter indicates the seriousness of the threat that Catherine represents to Maxentius’s rule in particular as well as to the kingdom in general: the very “onur” and “lei” overseen by Maxentius are at risk.

The narrative at this point turns to the debate between Catherine and the scholars. This debate has attracted a great deal of scholarship, much more so than Maxentius’s character or Catherine’s conversion of the empress and the captain of the emperor’s guard. Wogan-Browne, in particular, has studied the debate as recounted by Clemence in relation to other versions of the debate. Wogan-Browne notes that Clemence provides one of the fullest versions of the debate among twelfth-century saints’ lives and argues that Clemence draws on Anselm in her treatment of the debate: “Clemence gives the

\textsuperscript{55} The \textit{Vulgate} reads that the emperor sent letters “ad omnes rethores et grammaticos et quibus in doctrina fama celebrior nomen acquisierat” (211-212).
debate in full, and indeed restructures and extends it by drawing on Anselm’s distinctions between God’s nature and his power and his account of Christ’s human and divine natures.”

For the purposes of this chapter, the debate is especially significant not for its length or content, but because it introduces those who possess reason but not faith: the scholars with whom Catherine debates are highly trained in intellectual and academic matters, but apply that training to their pagan beliefs. Through the debate, Catherine teaches these scholars how to apply their reason and knowledge in order to convert to the faith she deems true, Christianity.

After the letters have been sent and before the debate begins, Clemence underscores Catherine’s combination of reason and faith. In response to Maxentius’s comment that “De tutes arz iés paree / E de tuz biens enluminee, / Fors tant que amer ne vels noz deus / Ki poant sunt e nient mortels” (369-372) [You are adorned with every art and illumined with every quality, except for your refusal to love our powerful and immortal gods], Catherine explains the relationship between her reason and faith in her own words. She explains that the extensive learning she gained as a result of the education her father provided for her is superceded by her faith:

Les arz me fist tutes aprendre,
Que de tutes sai raisun rendre.
Maistres oi bons, bien desputantz,
Nobles de cuer e puissanz.

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Tant cum afiert a vaine gloire
Sunt il assez de grant memoire.
Mais puis que jo le sens oi
Del evangelie mun ami,
Presai mult poi lur doctrine,
Car a lui [sui] del tut acline. (379-388)

[He had me instructed in all the arts, in such as way that I have a
command of them all. I had good masters who were powerful men, clever
in debate and noble in heart. In all that pertained to worldly renown they
were truly distinguished. But when I heard the substance of my beloved’s
gospel, I came to hold their learning in very low esteem, for I am
completely devoted to him.]

Such an education in “les arz” serves Catherine well in her debate with the scholars:
indeed, the vernacular disputatio into which she enters with them requires the extensive
formal training that she has received from these “Maistres oi bons, bien desputantz, /
Nobles de cuer e puissanz.” Like the scholars under whom she trained, however, the
scholars with whom she debates are only knowledgeable about those things that
appertained to “vaine gloire.”

In addition, Catherine is supported by two things which the scholars lack: the
authority of God and the divine wisdom he bestows. That Catherine enjoys the support
of God’s authority and wisdom has been made clear during the prayer Catherine makes
before she enters the debate. In her prayer to Christ, whom she names “O veire sapience,
/O altisme veire vertu” (526-527) [O true wisdom, O lofty and true strength], she asks
that he provide her with the comfort and wisdom he has granted to others:

Sire, le tun nun seit loé,
Ki si grant cunfort nus as dune
Par les tuens confortables diz
“Quant tu as jugemenz serrez
E devant les reis est[e]rez,
Ne pensez que dire poissiez,
Ne d’els nule pour n’aiez.
Buche te dunrai e science
E parler par sapience.” (539-544)

[Lord, may your name be praised, you who have given us such comfort by the words of solace which you spoke to your elected ones: “When you are to be judged and stand before kings, do not think about what to say, and have no fear of them. I shall give you eloquence, knowledge, and wisdom in speech.]

The statement attributed to God in this prayer appears to be an amalgamation of three Biblical passages recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which relate Christ’s instructions to his twelve apostles to preach. The account offered in the Vulgate shares characteristics of each of the three passages: “Dum steteritis ante reges et presides, nolite precogitare quomodo aut quid loquamini; ego enim dabo uobis os et sapientiam, cui non poterunt resistere et contradicere omnes aduersarii uestri” (299-302).

It is remarkable that despite medieval proscriptions against women preaching, Clemence includes this passage in which Catherine likens herself to Christ’s apostles—to those who were instructed by Christ in this passage to preach to all those they encountered and

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57 Wogan-Browne and Burgess note these Biblical passages in their translation, Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths 67, fn. 27. The passages read as follows: “And you shall be brought before governors, and before kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles: But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak.” (Matthew 10:18-19); “But look to yourselves. For they shall deliver you up to councils, and in the synagogues you shall be beaten, and you shall stand before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony unto them. And unto all nations the gospel must first be preached” (Mark 13:9-11); and “But before all these things, they will lay their hands upon you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, dragging you before kings and governors, for my name's sake. And it shall happen unto you for a testimony. Lay it up therefore into your hearts, not to meditate before how you shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay” (Luke 21:12-15).
convert them to the Christian faith. She underscores this link between herself and the apostles in her next statement, in which she asks, “Dune mei, sire, si parler / Que tun dreit puisse mustre / E rendre cez tyrant vencuz” (547-549) [Grant, Lord, that I may speak in such a way that I shall be able to show your righteousness and overcome these tyrants]. She thus asks God to be the source of her eloquence; he will provide to her the means for defeating these “tyranz” in debate. Upon finishing her prayer, Catherine receives confirmation that God will aid her in the debate: God sends her an angel who tells her,

Sens e raisun e habundance  
Averas de parler senz dutance  
El estrif que tu as enpris  
Pur li envers ses enimis. (567-570)

[In the debate against his enemies, which you have undertaken on his behalf, you will most certainly have good sense and reason and eloquence in speech].

As the angel promises in these lines, God will provide her with everything she needs—“sens e raisun e habundance”—to defeat the scholars. Furthermore, this passage clearly establishes that Catherine gains her authority from God; her *auctoritas* stems directly from his divine source.

Notably, Clemence modifies the *Vulgate*’s version of Catherine’s prayer in significant ways. Most notably, where the *Vulgate* states that God will provide her with “os et sapientiam” before claiming that no one will have the ability to resist or contradict Catherine, in Clemence’s version God promises “Buche te dounrai e science / E parler par

58 For an insightful argument regarding the connections between the Church’s position on women preaching, women’s attraction to unorthodox sects, and the precedents for a preaching role for women as evidenced by medieval hagiographies, see Blamires 135-152.
sapience” and does not include the Vulgate’s concluding statement. Clemence thus closes her account of God’s words with references to both scientia and sapientia, terms which had specific connotations during the Middle Ages: while scientia was associated with human wit and rhetoric, sapientia was associated with divine wisdom and eloquence. In Clemence’s adaptation of the passage, Catherine thus employs terms that would indicate to a twelfth-century audience that Catherine was asking that God provide her with both earthly and divine wisdom—again, Clemence emphasizes the necessity of possessing both. Furthermore, the prayer and the angel’s response indicate that scientia will be put in the service of sapientia: human intellect will be the vehicle through which God’s wisdom will be conveyed.

With this preface, in which Clemence repeatedly underscores the connections between reason and faith and emphasizes God as the true source of authority and wisdom, the encounter between the scholars and Catherine begins. As one of the clerks explains, these scholars are a formidable group of “Li meillur clerc” (488) [the finest clerks]: he announces to the emperor upon their arrival, “Li filosophe e li gramaire / […] / Ensurquetut retorien / E li bon dileticien” (489-94) [Philosophers and grammarians, especially rhetoricians and good dialecticians] have come at his request. This description indicates that the scholars are trained in the very disciplines in which twelfth-century clerks would have been educated; as Simon Gaunt notes, “Despite the fact that the fifty clerces are pagans, summoned to a pagan court by a pagan tyrant, they are remarkably
similar to contemporary Christian clerks.” An important distinction, however, is that these scholars, while “remarkably similar to contemporary Christian clerks,” are not Christian. It is crucial to not overlook this point, for then it becomes easy to focus on the debate as primarily a conflict between similarly-trained scholars in a battle of the intellect. In his analysis of the debate, Gaunt has followed this line of thinking, arguing that “Catherine’s opponents are repeatedly referred to simply as clerks […] whilst the confrontation is overtly portrayed as a formal contest in dialectic and rhetoric.” While the debate as depicted by Clemence is certainly a vernacular form of a disputatio that relies on dialectic and rhetoric, the debate demonstrates not only Catherine’s superior academic knowledge, but also—and more importantly—her ability to best apply that knowledge by putting it in the service of her Christian faith. She wins the debate not because of her superior intellect, but because of the application of her intellect to a superior subject than that espoused by the pagan clerks. The debate’s significance stems from the fact that it serves as the vehicle through which Catherine converts the pagan scholars into something that much more closely resembles twelfth-century Christian clerks.

At the insistence of the scholars, Catherine opens the debate. In her initial address, she rejects the very type of knowledge on which these scholars expect to rely. In response to a scholar’s opening statement that “Primes nus deiz tun sen mustrer, / Puis purra le nostre duter” (683-684) [You must first reveal your wisdom to us, then you can

60 Gaunt 231.
be suspicious about ours], she makes her most explicit claim on the worthlessness of knowledge without faith:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Certes tun sen pris jo petit} \\
E mult l’ai jo pois preisié poi \\
\text{Que mon Deu conuistre soi.} \\
\text{Pois que jo oi parler de li,} \\
\text{Tutes voz falses arz guerpi} \\
\text{Des queles ere ainz si sage} \\
\text{Que el munde n’oi per de mun eage. (686-692)}
\end{align*}
\]

[I certainly had little esteem for your wisdom, and since coming to know my God I have thought even less of it. Once I had heard him spoken of, I abandoned all your false arts, in which I was once so knowledgeable that for my age I had no equal on earth.]

Catherine here demonstrates her disdain for academic knowledge, dubbing it “falses arz” that she has rejected since learning of God. She thus implicitly undermines any subsequent effort of the scholars, who rely on this type of earthly knowledge for their success in debate. She further emphasizes the error of relying on reason without faith in her following statement, in which she tells the scholars that academic knowledge is without merit if it is not complemented by faith: “Bien soi que de fei furent veines / E [de] dreite veie lointaines” (693-694) [I was well aware that they were empty of faith and far removed from the true path]. As Burgess and Wogan-Browne note, in these passages Clemence abbreviates Catherine’s criticism of pagan learning found in the Vulgate, excising her source’s denunciation of classical scholars such as Homer, Aristotle, and Plato.⁶¹ Abbreviating this section makes good sense because denouncing the worldly knowledge so prized by the scholars and even her younger self is not Catherine’s aim here; rather, the aim is to demonstrate this knowledge’s shortcomings when not paired

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⁶¹ Burgess and Wogan-Browne, *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths* 68, fn. 32.
with faith. In this first address, then, Catherine begins to teach that faith must complement reason, or reason is useless.

As the debate progresses, Catherine teaches the scholars, who possess such extensive academic knowledge, how to direct their knowledge toward good ends by recognizing the truth of Christianity. As noted above, Clemence’s account of the debate is one of the fullest versions of a debate among twelfth-century hagiographies, and she both restructures and extends the argument as it is recorded in the Vulgate. The central issues of the debate are two of the foundational beliefs of Christianity: Christ’s incarnation and resurrection. After Catherine’s opening address, in which she offers a description of the major tenets of Christianity (671-732), a scholar scoffs at Christians’ belief in God’s incarnation and Christ’s resurrection. After he claims that she would not fare well since she had started her argument with the weak position that God was her creator, Catherine retorts, “Bon cumencement oi de lui, / Par ki tu es e par ki sui” (769-770) [I did begin well, through him who is responsible for your existence and mine].

After this statement, Clemence adds a significant portion to Catherine’s response, in which Catherine points to his method of criticism as proof that he cannot refute her argument:

De ço ne me deis tu pas reprendre
Se tu vels raisun entendre.
Pur ço me vels mes diz falsar
Quant tu les tuens ne sez pruver.
Puis que mez diz tiens a fable,
Mustre dunc pruvance raisnable
Pur quei me vels issi blasmer,
Quant tu ne me sez amender.
Or m’en di la veire pruvance,
Car jo l’escut senz dutance. (771-780)
[This is not something with which you should reproach me in any way, if you wish to understand what is right. Why do you want to refute my statements when you cannot prove your own? Since you consider what I say mere invention, provide me with a rational demonstration of why you wish to censure me in this way, when you do not know how to correct me. Let me now have clear proof of it, for I shall listen to it without fear.]

Her retort serves two purposes. First, it demands that the scholar demonstrate his skills in disputatio by offering not a reproach but a “pruvance raisnable” to contradict her argument. Second, it stresses the scholar’s inability to support his own argument for paganism and against Christianity. Claiming that he focuses on refuting her argument when “tu les tuens ne sez pruver,” Catherine welcomes the opportunity for him to provide a rational argument in defense of his position—knowing that his inability to do so, or her ability to logically refute his argument if he does attempt to do so, will only bolster her own position.

The scholar’s response to Catherine’s retort is one of only two that the clerks offer to Catherine (in addition to the initial rebuff the same scholar made to her opening argument). Both responses center on how Christ can be God and man at the same time; in particular, they focus on how Christ died if he were God and how Christ was resurrected if he were man. The scholar’s arguments are remarkably similar: in the first response, the clerk claims “Muir ne pot se il fu Deus / Ne revivre se fud mortels” (793-794) [He could not have died if he was God, nor come back to life if he was mortal], and in the second response the clerk argues, “S’il est Deu, ne murut naent. / S’il fud hom e mort senti, / Sa resurrectiun dunc desdi” (936-938) [If he is God, he did not die at all. If he was a man and did experience death, then I deny his resurrection]. In total, the
scholars speak three times in much briefer passages than those spoken by Catherine. Indeed, Catherine speaks at great length in her four addresses to the scholars: in contrast to the scholars’ 59 lines, Catherine’s speeches stretch across 246 lines. While this debate between Catherine and the scholars is one of the longest versions among medieval accounts of St. Catherine, it consists mainly of Catherine’s lengthy responses to the scholars’ briefly stated concerns.

The *disputatio* therefore develops into an opportunity for the scholars to voice their concerns with Christianity and for Catherine to respond to those questions by explicating the major tenets of Christianity at length. As a result, Catherine is able to teach the scholars about her faith and eventually convert them to it through her reasoned explanations. Her last two responses to the scholar are particularly extensive explanations of the Christian paradox that Christ is both God and man. In these passages, Catherine offers a wide range of evidence to support her argument. She cites God’s “disable poeir” (826) [ineffable power] as well as God’s taking human form and dying “Pur guarir le fait de la pume” (977-978) [in order to redress what had happened with the apple]. She refers to “les enimis […] / Ki mes diz testimonient / E Jhesu fiz Deu estre dient / Quant par sun nun sunt cunjuré / Que de li dient la verité” (879-880) [the devils who bear witness to my words and say that Jesus is the son of God]. In addition, Catherine points to references “Que jo en voz livres truvai, / Que Platun li sages escrist” (896-897) [which were written down by Plato and which I have found in your books],

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62 Catherine’s addresses are comprised of the following passages: 686-732 (46 lines), 765-780 (15 lines), 807-924 (117 lines), 942-1010 (68 lines). The scholars’ passages include the following: 737-762 (25 lines), 783-804 (21 lines), 927-940 (13 lines).
which were believed during the Middle Ages to be to the holy cross. As Catherine explains to the scholars at the conclusion of this address, she uses such a diverse body of evidence because she recognizes that they will not accept the authority of Christian writings:

Pur ço vuz di les diz des voz,
Car pas ne crerriez les noz
Ne en nostre seinte escriture
Ki nus muster tute dreiture.
Se les voz creire ne vulez,
Les noz malement dunc crerrez. (919-924)

[I have told you the sayings of your own people because you would not believe ours or our holy scripture, which shows us everything which is right. If you refuse to believe your own writings, you will have difficulty in believing ours.]

Catherine thus chooses her supporting evidence with her audience of pagan scholars clearly in mind. She shows great adeptness at debate and at teaching those with whom she debates in a manner that they will most easily believe.

By the conclusion of the debate, Catherine succeeds in bringing the clerks to Christianity through reason. She has instructed them to respond to her addresses as students to a teacher: after criticizing “Le grant orgoil de tun fals sens” (817) [the great arrogance of your false understanding], she directs them “Devien diciple pur aprendre / E jo te frai le dreit entendre” (819-820) [Become a disciple in order to learn, and I shall make you understand the truth]. The debate’s conclusion demonstrates that she has been effective at bringing the scholars to “le dreit” and that the scholars have indeed become disciples. In one of the longest additions that Clemence makes to the Vulgate, she describes the wonderment of all those who have heard Catherine (not just the scholars);
Clemence notes how many fell to arguing at the close of Catherine’s address, since many believed her while others disagreed with her or, because of their fear of Maxentius, “tindrent a la falseté / Qu’il ne firent a la verité” (1047-1048) [held rather to what was false than to what was true]. This statement is part of Clemence’s forty-five line addition (1011-1056) to the much shorter description offered in the Vulgate: “Hec et alia multa dum beatissima uirgo disseret, stupefactus rethor et cuncti oratores quid contrahiscerent nesciebant, sed, turbati atque confusi manifesta Dei uirtute, inuicem se contuentes obmutuerunt” (503-506). While she greatly extends the audience’s reaction as it is recorded in the Vulgate, Clemence specifically notes the scholars’ response only at the end of this passage:

Mais tuit li clerc s’en esbairent
Pur le sens qu’il i virent.
Sun sens lur ot fait si entendre,
Qu’il ne se soren mais defendre. (1053-1056)

[But all the clerks were abashed by the wisdom they saw in her. Her argument had given them so much understanding that they could no longer defend themselves.]

Clemence’s changes thus highlight the effectiveness of Catherine’s argument on the scholars; while others respond in various ways, “tuit li clerc” are amazed at her wisdom, causing them to forsake their position.

The scholars have come to believe in Christianity due to the reasoned arguments that Catherine has put forth in the debate. As one of the clerks explains to the enraged emperor, the scholars have never heard such an eloquent or wise woman: “Unques puis que nus porta mere, / N’oimes femme si parler, / Ne si sagement desputer” (1078-1080) [Since our mothers bore us, we have never heard a woman speak so, or debate so wisely].
Here Clemence differentiates her text from the *Vulgate* in two significant ways. First, she adds the reference to the scholars’ mothers, thereby suggesting a tradition of female authority. Second, she excises the scholars’ claim in the *Vulgate* that it was not Catherine who was speaking, but a divine spirit through her: “non animalis homo loquitur sed divinus quidam spiritus” (521-522). Clemence’s version both emphasizes Catherine’s gender and makes clear that Catherine has succeeded in debate due to her own skills. While Catherine has been promised both *scientia* and *sapientia* from God in response to her prayer before the debate, Clemence’s change here emphasizes that it is Catherine’s skills as a rhetorician that have allowed her to succeed in this debate. As a result of her using her worldly, academic skills in the service of her faith, the scholars come to believe in Christianity: as the clerk explains, “Unc ne vi cler ci vaillant, / Que nel rendisse recreant. / Mais ses diz desdire ne puis, / Kar falseté nule n’i truis” (1089-1092) [I have never seen a clerk, however skilled, whom I could not have forced to surrender. But I cannot refute her claims, for I see nothing wrong with them]. Because the clerks perceive her position to be founded on reason, they cannot refute it and, moreover, must convert to the position for which she has argued. The clerk closes his address to the emperor by informing them of their conversion and their unwillingness to engage in debate with him about the matter: “De tus nos cuers en lui creum, / Altre chose ne te dirrum” (1107-1008) [We believe in him [Christ] with all our hearts; we shall say nothing else to you]. Despite the emperor’s subsequent rage and his command that the scholars be burned alive, the scholars have been so thoroughly converted to the Christian faith that they pay the emperor no heed and embrace their martyrdom.
In Clemence’s account, Catherine has thus proven to be a remarkably effective apostle—a role first alluded to in her prayer preceding the debate—to the highly educated clerks by relying on her extensive rhetorical and reasoning skills. When visited by the empress and the captain of the guard, Porphyry, Catherine not only relies on these skills but also adopts didactic strategies that will be most effective for those not among the extensively learned. Showing remarkable command of different discourses, Catherine depicts Catherine as adept at teaching privately as she proved to be at speaking publicly during the debate.

Catherine’s conversion of the empress and Porphyry has been predominantly considered by scholars as secondary to the main narrative that includes Catherine’s encounter with Maxentius, her debate with the scholars and their conversion, and her eventual torture and martyrdom. In their editions of Clemence’s account and the Katherine-group version respectively, Wogan-Browne and Burgess as well as Nicholas Watson and Anne Savage describe the events surrounding the conversion of the empress and Porphyry as a “subplot.” This perspective may have been shared by some medieval authors of the legend: a number of versions based on the Vulgate such as the ‘Short Vulgate’ version of the Latin text and the Middle English version found in the Katherine-group abbreviate or excise altogether this aspect of the story. However, the conversion of these two characters is a crucial part of Clemence’s fashioning of the story; she not only chooses to include the episode but also adapt and expand it. Notably, Clemence’s account of this aspect of the narrative depicts Catherine’s teaching both men and women

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and the gendered approach she takes to their individual conversion. The significance of this episode generally is something that Watson and Savage briefly touch on, noting, “The plot is not strictly necessary to the main action […] but it serves to demonstrate Katherine’s evangelistic powers in the case of two individuals, and to put even more weight on the theme of Maxentius’ intractability.” As demonstrated below, Clemence carefully crafts Catherine’s speeches to the empress and Porphiry to provide a model for how to most effectively preach to men and women individually, and also the evangelistic effect that teaching men and women can have, as seen in the threat that Maxentius perceives when he realizes his queen and chief guard have been converted.

The empress and Porphiry visit Catherine together, but they are motivated to see her for reasons that are quite different—and it is these differences that will give rise to Catherine’s individual approaches to converting them. The empress explains to Porphiry that despite not having seen her yet, she has had a dream in which Catherine placed a crown on the empress’s head, explaining that “Ceste t’enveie Jhesu Crist” (1548) [Jesus Christ sends this to you]. This dream has given rise to the empress’s immense desire to see Catherine:

Unkes pois que ço sungié oï
Reposer ne dormir ne poi.
Einz sui mise en tel travail,
Que d’altre rien penser ne vail.
En ço ai mis tut mun desir,
Aue veer la posse e oïr. (1549-1552)

[Since having this dream, I have not been able to rest or sleep. Instead, I am so disturbed that I can think of nothing else. All my desire is centred on one thing, that I might be able to see her and hear her.]

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In response to the empress’s plea for Porphiry to help her see Catherine, Porphiry explains that he is amazed after having witnessed Catherine in debate against the scholars:

Mais merveilles vus cunterai,  
Que jo de ceste veu ai.   
Jo la vi as clers desputer  
E lur argument issi falser,  
Qu’ele sule fist tuz recreanz  
Cinquante clers bien desputanz. (1565-1570)

[But I shall tell you the marvel which I have seen concerning her. I saw her debating with the clerks and refuting their arguments in such a way that alone she defeated fifty clerks, who were expert debaters.]

After recounting the details of Catherine’s conversion of the scholars and their subsequent martyrdom, Porphiry explains that he, too, is desirous of seeing the prisoner:

Pois que [jo] ceste dame vi,  
Ai jo ested si esbai,  
Certes, que tut tinc a folie  
Que l’um a noz deus sacrifie.  
Or n’i ad el fors del penser,  
Cument nus i poussum parler. (1579-1584)

[Since I first saw this lady I have been so shaken that I certainly hold it utter folly that anyone should sacrifice to our gods. There is nothing for it but to consider how we can get to speak with her.]

The empress and Porphiry therefore approach Catherine for notably different reasons. On one hand, the empress, having not seen Catherine (let alone her impressive demonstration against the scholars), is moved by a dream that features not only the imprisoned woman but also a gift sent to her from Christ. Her response to this dream is overwhelmingly affective: her desire is so great that she cannot sleep, rest, or think of anything else. On the other hand, Porphiry, who was able to witness Catherine at the debate, is desirous to
see her based on her success against the scholars and his wish to speak with her on the subjects raised in the debate. While Clemence does not go so far here as to claim that Porphiry has been converted to Christianity, she makes clear here that the debate has convinced him of the “folie” of pagan beliefs. The empress is thus guided by her affective response to a dream in which she received a gift from Christ, while Porphiry is motivated by his desire to speak to the person who has effectively turned him away from his previously-held beliefs.

When the empress and Porphiry visit Catherine in her cell, the saint instructs her visitors in ways that highlight the differences between the two characters that are suggested by their distinct reasons for visiting Catherine. First directing her attention to the empress, Catherine relies heavily on the language of courtly love: “Reine, fait ele, bele amie, / Mun Deu a ses noces t’envie” (1633-1634) [Queen, she said, fair friend, my lord invites you to his nuptials]. Clemence’s use of the language of courtly love here is one example Clemence’s use of the courtly register throughout the hagiography; as Catherine Batt has cogently demonstrated, Clemence employs the language of courtoisie throughout the text in order to “signal social and/or moral status, and to explore social and moral relations, whether between God and his elect, or between human beings.”65 In Catherine’s address to the empress, Clemence employs this language to describe the relationship one should desire with God. As she continues, Catherine highlights the distinctions between one’s experience on earth and in paradise:

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Seiez dame de fort curage,
Ne dutez pas terrien ultrage,
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65 Batt 102-123.
Car n’est pas digne ceste peine,
Ne ceste grant dulur mundeine,
De la joie de pareis,
Que Deus pramet a ses amis. (1635-1640)

[Be a lady of high courage and fear no earthly torment, for pain here and
great worldly sorrow are as nothing compared with the joy of paradise,
which God promises to those who love him.]

Catherine here conveys to the empress what it means to be a “dame de fort curage”: one
who is not fearful of earthly pain and sorrow but looks to the greater reward offered by
God. Although the empress has expressed neither any sorrow nor any concern that she
will be tormented, Catherine prepares the empress for her martyrdom. Confident that the
empress will not only convert but also be martyred, Catherine teaches her the necessary
behaviors for her future role.

The instructional aspect of Catherine’s address to the empress is highlighted by
her use of the imperative: as seen in the above passage, she opens her speech to the
empress by twice employing the imperative mood (“Seiez” and “ne dutez pas”).
Catherine continues this didactic emphasis as she proceeds to instruct the empress on
how to appropriately direct her desire and love. Repeating the phrase “ne dutez pas,”
Catherine instructs the empress to turn her love away from Maxentius and extends her
discussion of the temporality of earthly feelings:

Ne dutez pas l’empereur,
N’aiez mais désir de s’amur.
S’amur est fraillé et decevable,
E sa poesté trespassable. (1641-1644)

[Do not fear the emperor; desire his love no longer. His love is weak and
deceptive and his power ephemeral.]
In this passage, Catherine instructs the empress to neither fear her husband nor love him; as MacBain has demonstrated, her admonitions to refrain from loving the emperor are an addition to Catherine’s sole instructions to the empress in the Vulgate to not fear him, with no attendant concern about her love for him.\(^66\) As she concludes her address to the empress, Catherine reiterates that the empress needs to neither fear her husband nor love him. Rather, again using the imperative phrase “ne dutez,” Catherine instructs the empress to direct her love toward God:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{Ne dutez cest mortel mari.} \\
&\text{Sa puissance ne deis duter,} \\
&\text{Ne s’amur guaires desirer.} \\
&\text{Mais met en lui tut tun desir,} \\
&\text{Ki dampner te puet e guarir,} \\
&\text{Ki pur cestes muables peines} \\
&\text{Nus dunrad les joies certeines. (1654-1660)} \\
\end{align*}
\]

[Do not fear this mortal husband. You must not fear his power, or even desire his love. But place all your desire in him who can condemn or save you, and who in exchange for these transient pains will give us everlasting joys.]\(^67\)

As this passage makes clear, although the emperor’s love is “fraille e decevable” and his power is “trespassable,” God not only rewards those who love him with “joies certeines,” but also has the power to judge all those on earth. Catherine thus teaches the empress that God is a much worthier focus of the empress’s love. Indeed, Catherine explicitly instructs the empress to “met en lui tut tun desir”; rather than focusing her desire on her mortal lover, the empress should redirect it towards God.

\(^66\) MacBain, “Five Old French Renderings of the Passio Sancte Katerine Virginis,” 71.

\(^67\) I have substituted “Do not fear” at the beginning of this passage for Wogan-Browne and Burgess’s “I beg you not to fear.” The basis for their translation is not evident in the Anglo-Norman source, and indeed obscures Clemence’s repetitive use of “Ne dutez” throughout this passage.
The courtly register’s focus on desire and love that characterizes Catherine’s address to the empress is not present in Clemence’s account of the saint’s speech to Porphiry. Maintaining her use of language and images that would resonate with her twelfth-century audience, Clemence employs the courtly register’s emphasis on honor and the make-up of the court itself rather than its emphasis on desire and love. This shift in register is evident immediately upon Catherine’s response to Porphiry’s question, which he asks at the conclusion of her address to the empress (indeed, a significant distinction between Porphiry and the empress as students of Catherine is demonstrated here: whereas the empress does not once speak to Catherine during the entire episode in the cell, Porphiry questions Catherine directly). After Catherine has stated that God rewards his followers with “les joies certeines,” Porphiry asks her, “[Q]ue est ço que Deu dune / A cels ki pur lui sueffrent mort? / Poent il puis aver cunfort?” (1662-1664) [What is it that God gives to those who suffer death for him? Can they have any consolation afterwards?]. Porphiry thus focuses his questions on the rewards gained by serving God rather than his earthly lord, a concern possibly shared by many of Clemence’s twelfth-century readers, whose rewards for service to a king were of crucial importance. Catherine replies by reiterating the temporal nature of earthly things: “Ami Porfirie, a mei entent. / Veis tu cum cest siecle est mueble, / Que nule rien n’i est estable?” (1666-1668) [Friend Porphiry, listen to me. Do you see how changeable this world is and that nothing in it is stable?]. Catherine continues for twenty-eight lines discussing the transience of the human world, particularly emphasizing the temporality of wealth and honor. In addition to telling him, “Ja nul si riche n’i sera, / Que la richeise ne perdra” (1669-1670)
[There will never be anyone so rich that he will not lose his wealth], she tells him that a man loses everything when faced with death:

S’il en sa vie ot grant honur,
D’itant est maire sa dolur.
Le guain del mund si turne a perte,
E sa richeise a grant poverte. (1675-1678)

[If in his life he had great honour, so much greater will be his sorrow. The world’s success turns to loss and its wealth to great poverty.]

By employing the terms “honur” and “richeise,” Clemence crafts this passage to appeal to her twelfth-century readers familiar with the life and literature of the court. She uses Catherine’s instructions to Porphyry to teach her readers that these things, so long as they are shrouded in the imperfections and transience of the earthly realm, are of no worth.

As Catherine continues her address to Porphyry, she demonstrates that honor and wealth in their true, permanent, and spiritual form are offered only by God, the ruler of a heavenly kingdom. Moving away from the transience of an individual’s life, Catherine points to the eventual downfall of even the greatest cities:

Ami, entendre le poez,
Se vus un poi i pensez.
[…]
Esguardez ore ces granz citez
Cum unt perdu lur dignetez.
Tu sez bien coment sunt muees,
Pois que primes furent fundees.
De mal en pis vait tut le mund
E tutes les choses ki i sunt. (1687-1688, 1691-1696)

[Friend, you can understand this if you give it a little thought. […] Consider these great cities and how they have lost their grandeur. You are well aware of how they have altered since their foundation. The world and everything in it does from bad to worse.]
The tenor of this passage is quite different than Catherine’s address to the empress. Rather than employing a strict instructional tone, she addresses Porphyry as “ami” and asks him to consider the information she is imparting. She continues this tone as she describes the rewards offered by God. After stating that God’s followers will receive “parmanable vie, / Ki par mort ne perira mie” (1699-1700) [eternal life, which will never be destroyed by death], she offers a long passage in which she describes heaven as a perfect kingdom, in which all courtly ideals are manifest. Telling Porphyry that she will now tell him “quells est cel pais, / Que Deu pramet a ses amis” (1709-1710) [what the country is like which God promises to his friends], she describes a city free of such things as “adversité” (1715) [adversity], “tribulance” (1716) [tribulation], “dolur” (1717) [sadness], “orgoil, envie ne errur” (1718) [pride, envy, or folly]. After this recounting of the things this kingdom does not have—which Clemence expands from the Vulgate’s much briefer description of heaven as “ubi nulla turbat aduersitas, nulla necessitas angustat, molestia nulla inquietat” (786-787)—Catherine paints a kingdom founded on spiritual courtliness. In God’s “pais,” courtly virtues are perfected:

Charité i maint e honur,  
Plenté, largesce e valur.  
Noblesce I est e beneurté,  
Richesce e grant humilité. (1731-1734)

[Charity dwells there and honour, abundance, generosity and worth. Nobility is there and felicity, magnificence and great humility.]

Clemence also alters and expands this passage from the original Vulgate, which had enumerated only heaven’s “perennis letitia, iocunditas eterna, felicitas regnat sempiterna” (787). Using a courtly register to describe the kingdom of God, Clemence instructs
Porphyry on the rewards he will receive if he turns from his lord on earth to the king of this divine court.

Catherine concludes her address to Porphyry by describing the members of God’s court—whom she instructs Porphyry to join by returning once again to the language of desire. In a lengthy passage that has no equivalent in the Vulgate, she enumerates and describes the members of the court, including “li reis nun mortal” (1737) [the immortal king], “la bele reine / Ki ambure est mere e meschine” (1745-1746) [the beautiful queen, who is both mother and maiden], “la grant bachelerie / E la noble chevalerie” (1773-1774) [the young men and noble knights] who died as holy martyrs, and others.

Catherine informs Porphyry that she is unable to fully describe God’s kingdom: “Ami, poi est ço que t’ai dit / D’icel nun disable delit / De la joie de parais” (1785-1787) [Friend, what I have told you is a tiny amount of the inexpressible pleasure created by the joy of paradise]. However, after quoting a biblical passage (1 Corinthians 2:9) on the impossibility of a person comprehending on earth the joy God provides to his followers, she tells him that there is one way in which he can know it: “Ço purras encore saveir, / Se tu en as parfit voleir” (1795-1796) [Yet you will be able to know it, if you have a

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68 The addition to the Vulgate extends from l. 1737 to l. 1788 in Clemence’s text.
69 As Catherine Batt has demonstrated, the Vulgate’s description of Heaven (785-800) does not mention the Virgin Mary, whereas “Mary is central to the […] account of the celestial kingdom” in Clemence’s version, as demonstrated by the lengthy description of her in lines 1745-1768 (Batt 108); for Batt’s discussion of the Marian references throughout Clemence’s text, see Batt 109-110.
70 These include “le grant compaignie / Des angles” (1769) [the great company of angels], “Li apostle e li bon doctur” (1777) [the apostles and the good doctors of the church, “li coer…des dameiseles, / Des verges e des chastes pulceles / Ki les moretels amanz despistrent” (1779-1782) [the choir of young women, virgins and chaste maidens who despised mortal lovers].
perfect desire for it]. Catherine thus returns to the language of desire, instructing
Porphyry that he will receive the rewards offered to God’s faithful if he has a “parfit
voleir.” To obtain the rewards she has described, Porphyry must direct his desire toward
this divine kingdom.

At the conclusion of Catherine’s address to Porphyry, Clemence thus creates a
connection between the saint’s instructions to the empress and to the captain of the guard:
Clemence crafts Catherine’s address to Porphyry to conclude with the language of desire
that characterizes her earlier address to the empress. In addition to the use of courtly
language and images in both speeches, Catherine’s instructions to both are similarly
founded on each addressee directing his or her desire towards the divine rather than the
worldly. Notably, however, Clemence crafts the speeches to have markedly different
emphases. While the language of desire characterizes both speeches, the objects of desire
for the empress (a divine lover) and for Porphyry (a divine kingdom, led by a divine king)
are distinct. This distinction is indicative of the different registers that Clemence
employs for Catherine’s two listeners: she melds the language of affective piety with
courtly love in Catherine’s address to the empress, while she infuses the saint’s address to
Porphyry with the language of a stratified kingdom based on service to a king. Clemence
thus draws on registers familiar to her twelfth-century audience along gendered lines. By
having Catherine use these different registers based on the gender of her audience,
Clemence provides a model for her twelfth-century Christian readers on how to instruct
both men and women on Christian matters.
Catherine proves to be such a model of effective Christian teaching that those she teaches become teachers themselves. Immediately after Catherine’s addresses, both the empress and Porphyry convert. Moreover, they are willing to sacrifice their lives for their new god: “Ja sunt tut prest de mort suffrir / Pur Deu, si li vient a plaisir” (1801-1802) [If it should please him, they were quite ready to suffer death for God]. Their conversions are not known to the emperor for several hundred more lines, coming to light first when the empress confronts the emperor for torturing Catherine and second when Porphyry shortly thereafter claims responsibility for burying the empress’s martyred body against the emperor’s orders. Maxentius’s response to these conversions has garnered a great deal of scholarly attention, most notably from William MacBain, who has focused on the emperor’s reactions to their conversions in five different renderings of the Vulgate text into Old French during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. MacBain’s argument that Clemence “makes the most radical modifications to this episode” is based on her extensive expansion of the emperor’s reaction to the queen’s conversion, in which Clemence employs the language of the “despair of the abandoned lover” and whose account displays “astonishing similarities with the style of some of the fragments of Thomas’s Tristan.”

MacBain’s attention to Maxentius’s reaction has been taken up by a number of other scholars, who have similarly seen a display of unspiritual fin’amors in the emperor’s long speech upon learning of his wife’s conversion; for instance, Wogan-Browne argues that “The emperor Maxentius’s terms of courtly love and seigneural

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sovereignty are contextualized as pagan parodies of the divine versions of love and power articulated by the saint herself. While Clemence’s expansion of this episode in the text is certainly significant, the attention to the emperor’s response to the empress’s conversion has overshadowed Clemence’s treatment of Maxentius’s concern about her teaching others, which he expresses at the end of his speech—immediately after his lament for his wife. Moreover, little attention has been paid to Maxentius’s response to Porphiry’s conversion, in which Maxentius indicates that he views his trusted friend as a similar threat.

Although Clemence greatly expands Maxentius’s speech in response to his wife’s conversion, she nevertheless retains his statements from the Vulgate in which he expresses his fears that the empress will be the first in a line of women who convert their husbands—and thus turn the entire empire against Maxentius and the pagan gods he worships. At the conclusion of Maxentius’s long lament for his wife, in which he draws on the language of courtly love complaint, he worries about the repercussions if he were to show mercy on her:

Si me destreint si nostre amur,
Que ne venge cest folur,
Ces altres dames, que ferunt?
Par fei, a li essample prendrunt,
Si enganerunt lur segnurs,
Qu’il crerrunt en ces errurs. (2231-2236)

[If our mutual love so constrains me that I take no vengeance on this folly, what will these other noble ladies do? Upon my word, they will take their precedent from her and deceive their husbands into believing these heresies.]\(^73\)

The emperor’s statement reveals two main concerns. First, he worries that the empress will be an “essample” to other women: she will provide a model for those he wishes to be under his rule. Second, Maxentius fears that the women who have taken the empress as an example will convert their husbands to Christianity. While Wogan-Browne has insightfully argued in regards to the relationship between Catherine and the empress in Clemence’s text that “a virgin instructs, comforts, and provides a model for a married woman: a queen of heaven gives leadership to a queen of earth,”\(^74\) Maxentius’s statements here reveal that the empress herself can also be a powerful model for other women.

Clemence emphasizes that women not only learning from one another but also teaching their husbands can have significant—and for the emperor, disastrous—effects. As he continues, Maxentius indicates what he perceives to be the threat of such modeling and teaching: “Mielz m’avient justise faire, / Que pur la folie de li / Seït tut le mien regne peri” (2238-2240) [It is more fitting that I exercise justice than my whole realm should be destroyed because of her folly]. Maxentius thus believes that the consequence of sparing his wife’s life is no less than the ruin of the entire kingdom, a sentiment he repeats when

\(^{73}\) The corresponding passage from the Vulgate reads as follows: “Porro, si me ita amor coniugalis emolliuerit ut pro regine erronea mutabilitate deorum contumeliam ego negligam, quid restat nisi ut cetere imperii Romani matrone, huius eiusdem erroris exemplum imitantes, uiros proprios a cultra deorum euertant et ad fabulosam Christianorum sectam totum regni corpus incuruare presumant?” (993-1003).

\(^{74}\) Wogan-Browne, “‘Clerc u lai, muïne u dame’” 68.
he claims, “Meuz voil destreindre mun curage, / Ke tuz eient pur mei damage” (2241-2242) [I prefer to act against my heart’s desires rather than that everyone should come to harm because of me]. In a perversion of the language of self-sacrifice, Maxentius chooses to murder his wife, rather than let her stand as a threat to the kingdom and its people.

Much like the empress poses a threat to her husband because she provides a model to other women in the kingdom, Porphiry threatens to undercut the emperor’s authority. Porphiry’s conversion is revealed when Maxentius accuses Porphiry’s men of burying the empress’s body against the emperor’s wishes. Learning of the emperor’s cruelty to his men, Porphiry asks him, “qu’as tu en pensé?” (2361) [What are you thinking about?] before chastizing him for acting against reason: “Tu eires encuntre raisun / Et ou false religiun” (2364-2365) [You are behaving contrary to reason and with false religion]. Porphiry has thus adopted the language that Catherine employed when she first encountered Maxentius at the beginning of the legend: Porphiry argues against the illogic of worshiping pagan gods. Evidenced in his emotional response to learning of his trusted advisor and friend’s new faith, Maxentius continues to refuse Christianity’s reason, blaming others for misleading his people. Maxentius claims that Christians have been remarkably effective at converting those most important to him: “Trestut le mieuz de mun regné / Munt il tolleit et engané” (2393-2394) [They have taken away and misled the very best members of my kingdom]. Unaware that Catherine has converted the empress and Porphiry, he similarly blames Porphiry for having a hand in his wife’s conversion: “Mes une rien sai beien et crey, / Que il enginna ma moillier, / Car il fud tut
sun counsellor” (2408-2410) [But I do know and believe one thing, that be misled my wife, for he was her counsellor]. Maxentius’s fear of Porphyry’s influence is not unfounded: while the captain of his guard did not convert the empress, he helped her obtain access to the imprisoned saint in addition to converting the two hundred knights under his command by briefly recounting what he learned from Catherine that caused him to repent. Although Maxentius offers reprieve to his great friend should he repent of his conversion, Porphyry remains steadfast in his Christian faith, choosing to be martyred along with his two hundred men.

Before putting her to death, Maxentius recognizes Catherine’s agency in converting the empress and others in his court:

Bele, fait il, ore sai de fi,  
Que par tei ma moillier perdi.  
Lui e les altres as engané,  
Si qu’il sun a mor livré. (2475-2478)

[Now, my fair one, he said, I know very well that I lost my wife through you. You misled her and the others so that they have been put to death.]

Aware that Catherine has been successful at converting his wife and others in his kingdom, he gives her an ultimatum: repent or be killed in as cruel a way as he can devise. Maxentius clearly believes that she is a threat to his rule and the entirety of his kingdom. Catherine gladly embraces her martyrdom and the eternal joy she will receive upon her entry into heaven: she tells Maxentius, “Le mien espus itant desir, / Que le mal m’est dulz a suffrir” (2503-2504) [I desire my bridegroom so much that to suffer pain will be sweet to me]. However, as the lone character who is unable to recognize the true

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75 Porphyry’s address to his soldiers (ll. 1807-1829) is quite brief in comparison to Catherine’s words to him in her cell (ll. 1666-1796).
faith and reason offered by Christianity, Maxentius is depicted as crazed and alone as the legend draws to a close.

Maxentius has good reason to perceive Catherine as a threat. As demonstrated in this chapter, Clemence has certainly crafted Catherine as such: Catherine proves to be a true apostle, as she had requested in her prayer to God. She stands as a powerful didactic figure who converts not only the greatest scholars in Maxentius’s realm, but also his wife and his most trusted advisor. Adapting the idioms and strategies that would be most effective for her diverse audiences, Catherine is able to convert the scholars through reason, the empress through the idiom of courtly love, and Porphiry through the language of the kingdom and its rule. The only one she is unable to convert, Maxentius represents the folly of clinging to the earthly realm and of possessing neither faith nor reason.

As a model of not only a knowledgeable Christian who is able to put her extensive learning in the service of her faith, but also an effective teacher who successfully shares her knowledge with the vast majority of the men and women she encounters, Catherine shares great similarity with Clemence, who establishes herself in her prologue and epilogue as someone who employs her learning in order to transmit knowledge of God’s goodness to a broad audience. Clemence’s text thus possesses layered components of didacticism and exemplarity: in the text, other characters learn from Catherine and imitate her example, while in the presentation of the text, Clemence instructs her own readers by providing them the model of St. Catherine for them to emulate themselves. Significantly, neither in the *passio* itself nor in her prologue and epilogue does Clemence offer an apology for the fact that she and the saint whose legend
she recounts are women. Indeed, she does not explicitly address this concern anywhere in her text. Certainly, unabashedly presenting such learned women was problematic in the context of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England, as many who have considered questions about the exemplarity of saints during the Middle Ages have pointed out. Clemence’s *La Vie de Sainte Catherine d’Alexandrie* suggests that it is the combining of sacred and academic knowledge and transmitting that knowledge adeptly to diverse audiences that is truly important, rather than the gender of the person doing so.
CHAPTER 2

“What strange thing is this?”: The Confounding of Reason and the Pursuit of Salvation in Marguerite Porete’s Le Mirouer des simples âmes

“Hee, Amour, dit Raison qui n’entend que le gros et laisse la subtilité, quelle merveille est ceci?”
[Ah, Love, says Reason, who understands only the obvious and fails to grasp what is subtle, what strange thing is this?]

The above question—the third statement spoken by the allegorical personification of Reason in Marguerite’s Mirouer—may very well reflect many readers’ responses to the text. From its opening pages to its conclusion, the Mirouer proves to be a complicated, convoluted, and often confounding text. Marguerite’s text invites such responses—indeed, embraces and encourages them—because Marguerite uses her text to teach her readers to progress beyond reason and embrace a more spiritual understanding in order that they might achieve a higher spiritual state that she argues lies well beyond...

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76 Marguerite Porete, Le Mirour des Simples Ames, ed. Romana Guarnieri, Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis 69 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1986) 18:3-4. All subsequent references to the French will be to this edition, which is a critical edition of the only accessible manuscript of the Old French (Chantilly, Musée Condé, F X IV 26, Catalog 157), produced toward the end of the fifteenth century. References will cite the chapter number(s) followed by line number(s).

77 Margaret Porete, The Mirror of Simple Souls, eds. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., J.C. Marler, and Judith Grant, Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture 6 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) 18. All subsequent English translations will be to this edition, which provides a modern English translation based on the surviving French text and incorporates readings derived from the English, Latin, and Italian versions of the Mirouer. References will cite the page number(s).
the realm of reason. Roundly critical of reason’s adherents (including theologians and scholars), she teaches her readers that reason is only a temporary necessity in their spiritual progression. As demonstrated below, the didactic purpose that underlies the Mirouer is most clearly evident at the end of the text: it is here that she most explicitly offers the allegorical character of the Soul as a model of salvation for her readers—salvation that ultimately requires not only the rejection of reason but also of the text itself, which is founded on reason. As this chapter argues, by modeling themselves after the Soul depicted in the Mirouer and rejecting reason along with all intermediaries between themselves and God, readers will no longer stand with Reason as those who “n’entend que le gros et laisse la subtillité,” but will begin to comprehend the “merveille” of which Marguerite writes. The prologue and glosses that the English translator appends to the text offer an opportunity to discover how medieval readers in England responded to the text and their ability to comprehend it. As this chapter demonstrates, through his textual additions the Middle English translator, known by his initials M.N., attempted to teach his readers how to read and comprehend the Mirouer—a text he was able to transmit in large part because he did not know its author was either a woman or a declared heretic—in ways that enforced and sometimes extended Marguerite’s own instructions to her readers.

This chapter will examine Marguerite’s text before considering the glosses added by the Middle English translator. The first portion will initially consider the text’s didactic purpose as evident within the extant historical documentation regarding the dissemination of Marguerite’s text and her trial for heresy. This portion will then turn to
considering the didacticism within the text itself, analyzing the audience Marguerite envisioned for her text and the lessons she wished to impart on that audience: ultimately, to move beyond reason and all intermediaries in their pursuit of salvation. The second portion of the chapter will examine the glosses added by M.N. to his translation of Marguerite’s text, with particular consideration given to the didactic role he adopts himself.

Marguerite’s *Le Mirouer des simples âmes* is a remarkably self-reflexive text. Marguerite frequently refers to the text itself, its authorship, and the process of writing it. Despite this self-reflexive emphasis, it is difficult to characterize the *Mirouer*: it is a unique text that defies generic categorization. Mainly a prose dialogue among allegorical personifications—principally, the Soul, Love, and Reason—, the *Mirouer* also includes a number of lyrics interspersed throughout its 139 chapters. The *Mirouer* thus brings together a number of different genres popular during the later Middle Ages, relying not only on verse forms but also the tradition of dialogues between allegorical personifications included in texts as diverse as Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, Christine de Pisan’s *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and *Le Roman de la Rose*. As will be discussed below, the work was deemed heretical by Church authorities after it was composed in the last decades of the thirteenth century, resulting in Marguerite’s being burned at the stake in 1310 in Paris.

Faced with this generic indeterminacy, Marguerite’s condemnation as a heretic, and the text’s complexity, scholars have most frequently treated the text as a work of Beguine mysticism and have examined its orthodoxy (or lack thereof) and its relation to
religious movements and figures of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Because Marguerite lived within the chronological and geographic parameters of the Beguine movement, she is often assumed to have been a Beguine herself. However, the only textual reference to the Beguines in the Mirouer suggests that if she had once been a Beguine, she was no longer at the time of the text’s composition: appearing dismissive of the Beguines, she claims that along with other religious and Church figures, “Beguines dient que je erre” (122:98) [The Beguines say that I am all astray (152)]. In addition, the highly intellectual Mirouer does not fit the dominant modes of mystical experience as it was predominantly recorded by women in the late Middle Ages: it does not relate an

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autobiographical visionary experience, an experience rooted in affective piety, or devotion to Christ’s suffering humanity and the Eucharist.⁸⁰

Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has recently added a significant study to the line of scholarship that focuses on placing Marguerite’s text—and its translations—in its cultural and religious contexts.⁸¹ Kerby-Fulton’s argument will be addressed further below, but at this point it is pertinent to note that in her study, which is primarily concerned with the glosses added to the text by M.N., the English translator, Kerby-Fulton argues that Marguerite’s text aroused significant amounts of suspicion, especially in England, despite the fact that many who read the texts were not aware it was written by a woman or by a judged heretic.

In addition to considering the Mirouer’s contemporary religious context and the suspicion it aroused concerning its (un)orthodoxy both in its original language and translations, scholars have focused on the text’s amalgamation of elements from different genres. Foremost among these scholars is Barbara Newman, who has argued that Marguerite, along with the Beguine writers Hadewijch of Brabant and Mechtild of Magdeburg, “fused the monastic discourse of bridal mysticism with the dominant secular discourse of love—the fine amour of the troubadours and romance poets” to create a new

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⁸⁰ For the seminal work on women’s devotion as it was associated with the Eucharist and Christ’s humanity, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

literary discourse, *mystique courtoise*. Newman has also been instrumental in studying the *Mirouer* within its literary contexts and influences; for example, she has examined the *Mirouer*’s literary relationship with *Le Roman de la Rose*.

Although Marguerite’s *Mirouer* is confounding at its most basic levels, this chapter demonstrates that one thing is distinctly clear: Marguerite conceived of the text as having a didactic purpose, and this purpose underlies the entirety of the *Mirouer*. This didactic purpose is made evident both within the text itself and the extant historical documentation regarding Marguerite and her text. While we know very little of Marguerite’s life other than what is offered in the records of her heresy trial, we do know that she was burned not only because her text was deemed heretical, but also

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because she adamantly refused to discontinue disseminating it. When she was brought in front of an inquisitional tribunal in 1309, it was revealed that her text had been condemned and publicly burned sometime before 1306 by Guy de Colmieu, the bishop of Cambrai. At that time, as the later trial records indicate, the bishop ordered that Marguerite was to be judged a relapsed heretic if she were to publish anything contained in the book: “Et per litteram predicti episcopi fuit ordinatum quod, si talia sicut ea que continebantur in libro, de cetero attemptaret verbo vel scripto, eam condemnapbat et relinquabat iustitiandam iustitie seculari” (78) [the above-said bishop had ordered in a letter that if she attempted again to propagate by word or writing such things as were contained in this book, he would condemn her and give her over to the judgment of the secular court]. However, she continued to circulate her book: during her trial, it was revealed that “se post contempnationem predictam habuisse librum dictum et alios” (78) [she still had in her possession, even after the condemnation mentioned above, the said book and others]. Moreover, the tribunal of 1309 uncovered that she had previously acknowledged to the next bishop of Cambrai and an inquisitor from Lorraine that she had sent her book to priests as well as “pluribus aliis personis simplicibus, begardis et aliis, tamquam bonum” (78) [to many other simple persons, beghards and others, as if it were good]. When she eventually attracted enough attention to be brought in front of an inquisitional tribunal in 1309, she refused to answer the tribunal’s questions or to retract


86 Translations of the Latin trial documents are from Babinsky 23-24.
any of her teachings despite many exhortations from the inquisitor and her defender: as the inquisitors claimed, “in rebellione et inobedientia nolens respondent nec iurare coram inquisitore de hiis que ad inquisitionis sibi commissem officium pertinent” (78) [in rebellion and insubordination, she would not respond nor swear before the inquisitor to those things pertaining to the office of the inquisitor]. Silent and unrepentant until the end, she was burned at the stake in 1310.

Therefore, it is clear that Marguerite attached great importance to the didactic purpose of her text, and disseminating the lessons it contained was crucial to her—so much so that she was willing to face a cruel death. Despite the fact that Marguerite repeatedly flew in the face of authority and worked so diligently to share the Mirouer with her readers, few scholars have examined the Mirouer in light of its didactic purpose: with the exception of the work of Robin Anne O’Sullivan, who has recently examined Marguerite’s didactic intent specifically in relation to her treatment of meditation in the opening passages of the Mirouer,87 most scholars have overlooked Marguerite’s text as a vehicle to transmit salvific knowledge to her readers. However, in addition to the implicit evidence provided by the trial documents, Marguerite makes explicit within her book that this is indeed the purpose that underlies it.

In one of the Mirouer’s most self-reflexive passages, Marguerite provides a narrative about the writing of her book and outlines her motivation for composing it. She opens this passage, which is spoken by the allegorical figure of the Soul, by focusing on

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her own spiritual progress and emphasizing that she was initially far from a perfect and free soul before writing the *Mirouer*:

Une foiz fut une mendiant creature, qui par long temps quist Dieu en creature, pour veoir se elle luy trouveroit ainsi comme elle le vouloit, et ainsi comme luy mesmes y seroit, se la creature le laissoit oeuvrer ses divines oeuvres en elle, sans empeschement d’elle; et celle nient n’en trouva, mais ainçoys demeura affamee de ce qu’elle demendoit. (96:9-14)

[Once there was a poor suppliant creature who for a long time sought God in his creatures, to see whether she would find him as she would have him be, and as he himself would be if the creature let him work his divine works in her without hindrance from her; and nothing did she find, but remained as she was, hungering for that for which she sought. (120)]

She references here the goal that she wishes each of her readers to attain: to annihilate her own soul so that God will “oeuvrer ses divines oeuvres en elle, sans empeschement d’elle.” This goal, which requires one to rid herself of her own will and let God’s will work through her, is the state to which Marguerite aspires and on which the book is primarily focused. However, like her readers, she is at this point only “affamee” for the greater divine understanding that she seeks. She continues to relate her progress towards this understanding, explaining that she realized that she must seek God internally, rather than “en creature” as she had previously: “Et quant elle vit, que nient ne trouva, si pensa; et sa pensee luy dit a elle mesmes, que elle le quist, ainsi comme elle le demandoit, ou fons du noyau de l’entendement de la purté de sa haulte pensee” (96:14-17) [And when she saw that she found nothing, she reflected in herself; and her reflection told her that she should go to seek him, as she would have him be, in the very depths of the core of the understanding of the purity of her exalted reflection (120)]. This statement exemplifies Marguerite’s riddling language, which requires her readers to move beyond the dictates
of reason in order to glean her meaning. Readers must rely on a deeper, more spiritual understanding to follow Marguerite as she seeks God “ou fons du noyau de l’entendement de la purté de sa hauté pensee.” This statement also suggests that understanding comes from becoming God’s mirror; Marguerite is not looking interiorly within herself, but looking interiorly to God’s presence within her. This paradox is just one of numerous that Marguerite includes in her text to confound one’s reason, leading her readers into untraditional ways of thinking and responding and thus to a greater, divine understanding distinct from that offered by reason.

Marguerite’s subsequent statements make clear that the *Mirouer* is written so that her readers can pursue God just as she had done. The Soul explains that Marguerite’s search for God gave her cause to write the *Mirouer*: “et la le ala querir ceste mendiant creature, et se pensa que elle escriroit Dieu en la maniere qu’elle le vouloit trouver en ses creatures. Et ainsi escripsit ceste mendiant creature ce que vous oez” (96:17-20) [and this poor suppliant creature went to seek him there, and she resolved that she would write of God in the manner in which she desired to find him in his creatures. And so this poor suppliant creature wrote what you hear (120)]. Marguerite thus indicates that she consciously records her own progress and that it is her intention to share this progress with her readers. However, Marguerite is not simply relating her experience, but providing a means for her readers to seek God through her book and the lessons it contains: the Soul continues, “et voult que ses proesmes trouvassent Dieu en elle, par escrips at par paroles. C’est a dire et a entendre, qu’elle vouloit que ses proesmes fussent parfaitement ainsi comme elle les diviseroit, au moins tous ceulx a qui elle avoit voulezé
de ce dire” (96:20-24) [it was her wish that her neighbors would find God in her, through her writings and her words. That is to say and to mean that she wished her neighbors to be perfectly as she would describe them, at least all those to whom she wished to say this (120)]. Along with her book, Marguerite thus becomes a mirror for others to “trouvassent Dieu en elle”; through her book, she provides a reflection for the reader’s pursuit of God.

Significantly, while writing the *Mirouer*, Marguerite is halting her own pursuit of God. As the Soul continues, she explains that while devoted to her writing project, Marguerite cannot rid herself of her soul: “et en ce faisant, et en ce disant, et en ce vouloir elle demouroit, ce sachez, mendiant et encombree d’elle mesmes; et pource mendioit elle, que elle vouloit ce faire” (96:25-27) [and in doing this, and saying this, and willing this, a suppliant she remained, know this well, and burdened down by herself; and she was a suppliant because this was what she wished to do (120)]. Because she retains her will, acting on her own desire to share her message with her readers, Marguerite remains a “mendiant” rather than an annihilated soul through whom God works his will. Marguerite has previously explained that the enterprise of writing her book has resulted in a halt to her own spiritual progress. Near the beginning of the *Mirouer*, the Soul, who is a representation of both Marguerite’s soul specifically and any individual’s soul generally, claims that Love, whom she describes as the book’s “maitresse” (11:141) [instructress (26)], informs her that in writing the *Mirouer*, “je y termine toutes mes entreprises. Car tant comme je demanderay aucune chose de moy a Amour pour elle mesmes, je seray avec moy en vie d’esperit, en l’ombre due souleil, ou l’en ne peut veoir
les subtilles ymagnacions des atiremens de divine amour et de la divine generacion”
(11:141-146) [I shall bring to an end in it all my undertakings.  For so long as I ask for anything of my own initiative from Love for her own sake, I shall be by myself, in the life of the spirit, in the shadow of the sun, where the subtle imaginings about how we are drawn by divine love, and about how the divine begetting cannot be seen (26)].

Marguerite’s writing of the Mirouer is therefore the last of her actions initiated by her own will and requires her to stay within the circumscribed realm of the human.

Marguerite believes that sharing her message with her readers and thus fulfilling her hope that “ses proesmes trouvassent Dieu en elle, par escrips at par paroles” is of such great importance that she is willing to temporarily keep herself separate from the divine—to remain “en l’ombre due souleil”—so that she can share her book’s instruction on how to become a free, annihilated soul. In this temporary state, Marguerite takes on the role of conduit for the words and lessons of Love. As noted above, Love is described as the “maitresse” of the Mirouer, and this indeed seems to be her role in the text: as a principal allegorical figure of the Mirouer, Love’s explanations and responses to Reason’s and the Soul’s questions form the vast majority of the text. Moreover, while Marguerite is certainly the human author of the Mirouer, the true author of the text is Love, who wrote the book through Marguerite. In the Mirouer, Love stands as a

88 I have substituted “cannot” for “can” at the conclusion of this statement, which better aligns with the passage’s meaning. While Colledge, Marler, and Grant’s edition reads “can be seen” (they note that the French does not support the negation of the verb), “cannot be seen” corresponds with the medieval versions in both Latin and Middle English. This reading is supported by not only Guarnieri’s emendation to the text, but also the translation provided by Nicholas Watson and Chrystal Phan in Watson, “Misrepresenting the Untranslatable: Marguerite Porete and the Mirouer des Simples Ames” New Comparisons 12 (1991): 130.
representation of God: as Love herself explains, “Je suis Dieu, […] car Amour est Dieu, et Dieu est amour, et ceste Ame est Dieu par condicion d’amour, et je suis Dieu par nature divine, et ceste Ame l’est par droicture d’amour” (21:44-47) [I am God, […] for Love is God, and God is Love, and this Soul is God through its condition of Love, and I am God through my divine nature, and this Soul is God by Love’s just law (41)]. It is therefore God, in the form of Love, who provides the lessons imparted to the readers through the Mirouer. As thus established, the text rests on the greatest authority possible, God himself.

Marguerite plays the crucial task of writer of the text because she has become God’s instrument in her progression towards the divine: as Love explains, “Si que ceste precieuse amye de moy est aprinse et menee de moy sans elle, car elle est muee en moy, et telle fin, dit Amour, prent ma norriture” (21:47-49) [So that this my precious beloved is taught and guided by me, without herself, for she has been changed into me. And this is the outcome, says Love, of being nourished by God (41)]. While not yet a free soul, Marguerite is nevertheless being “aprinse et menee” by God as she composes the Mirouer. Similar to what will be seen in the fourth chapter regarding Margery Kempe, Marguerite’s authority thus rests on the fact that not only is she taught directly by God, but also she speaks with God’s voice since, as Love here states, she “est muee en moy.”

The Mirouer’s authorship is thus layered and multifaceted, much as numerous aspects of the text reveal themselves to be—including the text’s intended audience. Similar to the prologue written by Clemence of Barking, the prologues to Marguerite’s book provide important information regarding the author’s consideration of her audience.
The *Mirouer* contains two prologues: a verse prologue with no identified speaker followed by a prose prologue in which the allegorical figures begin their dialogue. In the latter, Love’s first words directly address the text’s readers: “Entre vous actifs et contemplatifs et peut ester adnients par vraie amour, qui orrez aucunes puissances de la pure amour, de la noble amour, de la haulte amour de l’Ame Enfranchie, et comment le Saint Esperit a mis son voille en elle comme en sa naif’ (Prologue:6-10) [both actives and contemplatives, and those who may be brought to nothing by true Love, who will hear some of the powers of that pure love, that noble love, that exalted love of the Soul set free, and of how the Holy Spirit has set his sail in her as if she were his ship (10)]. From this statement, it is clear that the intended audience is quite broad, encompassing not only the religious who pursue both active and contemplative modes of religious devotion but also anyone “peut ester adnients.” This statement thus suggests that Marguerite envisioned the audience for the *Mirouer* to be universal. This universality is further indicated by a statement made later by Love, who again addresses the intended audience of the *Mirouer*: “Entre vous enfans de Saincte Eglise, dit Amour, pour vous ay je fait ce livre, affin que vous oyez pour mieulx valoir la parfection de vie et l’estre de paix, ouquel creature peut venir par la vertu de parfaicte charité, a qui ce don est donné de toute la Trinité’” (2:1-7) [Children of Holy Church, says Love, it is for you that I have made this book, so that you may hear of and so hold in greater worth the perfection of life and the state of peace, to which the creature can attain by the power of perfect charity, which gift is made to it by the whole Trinity (12)]. Here in the second chapter of the *Mirouer*, Love thus emphatically establishes that the didactic intent of the text is directed
to all Christians. Love claims that the “enfans de Saincte Eglise” can find significant instructional worth in the text that she writes through Marguerite.

However, the continuation of Love’s statement after her address to the readers in the prologue indicates that Marguerite is concerned with disseminating her text to such a broad audience because of her fear that not everyone will understand the text. While initially indicating a broad audience when she addresses “actifs et contemplatifs et peut ester adnientifs par vraie amour,” Love follows this with an indication that not everyone who hears the text will necessarily comprehend it: “Je vous prie par amour, dit Amour, que vouz oyez par grant estudie du subtil entendement de dedans vous et par grant diligence, car autrement le mal entendront toux ceulx qui l’orront, se ilz ne sont ce mesmes” (Prologue:10-13) [for love, I pray, says Love, that you listen with great attention of the subtle understanding within you, for otherwise all those who hear it will misunderstand it, if they are not so themselves (10)]. Love thus expresses her desire that the Mirouer’s readers take precaution against the possibility of misunderstanding the text by listening with “grant diligence” and employing their “subtil entendement.” Likewise, in the opening lines to the Mirouer’s verse prologue, Marguerite instructs her readers on the difficulty of understanding the text:

Vous qui en ce livre lirez,
Se bien le voulez entendre
Pensez ad ce que vouz direz,
Car il est fort a comprendre;
Humilité vous fault prendre
Qui de Science est tresorriere
Et des aultres Vertuz la mere. (1-7)

[You who will read this book that I have writ, / If you will please your heed to it to lend, / Consider well what you may say of it, / For it is very
hard to understand. / But let humility lead you by the hand, / She, keeper of the key to Learning’s treasure-chest, / She, the first virtue, mother to all the rest. (9)]

Marguerite suggests that despite the text’s difficulty, readers will come to know its meaning so long as they are willing to carefully and humbly study it. Significantly, it is humility—not intellect or reason—that will provide to the key to this difficult text.

At other times, however, Marguerite suggests that only a very few will ever comprehend her text. When speaking of the annihilated soul, Love claims that those who have reached this perfection live in an “estre a bon entendement, mais pou en y qui goustent de tel entendement” (17:9-10) [a state of being where they understand as should be understood; but there are few who taste such understanding (37)]. Marguerite does not provide reason here as to why these few are able to attain such understanding, but she returns to the selectivity of this group on several occasions throughout the Mirouer. Near the text’s conclusion, she again addresses her readers: after Love and the Soul discuss the need for the will to return to God, Marguerite instructs her readers, “Glosez, se vous voulez, mais se vous povez; se vous ne povez, vous ne l’estes mie; se vous l’estiez il vous ouvreroit. Ja ne seriez si parfont adnientie, se vous aviez de quoy vous le peussez oîr, car aultrement ne le dis je mie. Se sa bonté vous a toullu le oîr, je ne le desveil mie” (111:37-41) [Interpret this if you wish, provided that you can; if you cannot, you are not such as this; if you were such as this, it would be clear to you. If you had the ears with which to hear it, you would not be brought to such utter nothingness, and I cannot express it otherwise. If his goodness has deprived you of your hearing, I cannot reawaken it (135)].

Marguerite thus clearly delineates between those who can comprehend the text and those
who cannot. Citing passages such as these, Newman and A.C. Spearing have cogently demonstrated that Marguerite creates a hierarchy among her readers, modeled on the exclusivity of rank upon which the *fin’ amour* of courtly literature is built. According to Newman, the elitism of the beguine mystic writers is “in part a simple transposition of the courtly ethos into religious terms,” which “sets a limit to the democratization of mystical piety that beguines themselves were promoting.”

Spearing contends that “the tenor of her writing is esoteric and elitist” and that passages such as those above suggest that the *Mirouer* “will be of value only to those who already know from experience what it has to teach.”

Certainly, elitism is a significant theme of the *Mirouer*, and Marguerite clearly uses the language of *fin’ amour* to characterize the soul’s relationship with God. However, I argue that the elitism evidenced in such passages is not fully endorsed within Marguerite’s text. Rather, Marguerite seems to find herself pulled between that elitism and the universalizing tendency she expresses in passages such as those discussed above. Indeed, this is a major source of tension that underlies her book and is brought to a head in one of its concluding chapters. In this chapter, the Holy Trinity requests that the Soul

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ne veuillez plus dire les secrez,
Que vous savez:
Les aultres s’en damneroient,
La ou vous vous sauverez,
Puisque Raison et Desir les gouvernent,
Et Crainte et Voulenté.
Sachez pourtant mon eslite fille,
Que paradis leur est donne. (121:58-65)
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89 Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ* 142.
90 Spearing, “Marguerite Porete: Courtliness and Transcendence in The Mirror of Simple Souls” 122 and 129.
The Soul expresses great dismay at the Holy Trinity’s pronouncement, responding,

“Paradis? dit ceste eslite, ne leur octroiez vous aultrement? Aussi bien l’auront les murtriers, se ilz veulent mercy crier! Mais non pour tant je m’en veulx taire, puisque vous le voulez” (121:66-69) [Paradise? says this elected one; do you not award differently to them? So murderers are to have this too, if they are willing to cry for mercy! But even so I will be silent, since that is your wish (149)]. In this passage, it is evident that it is not for the Soul to understand who is saved and who is not, nor is it for the Soul to decide an individual’s salvation. Rather, it is God who understands, and it is God who decides. Despite her dismay and confusion, Marguerite must acquiesce to God’s will, much like Julian and Margery who, as demonstrated in the following chapters, must similarly accept God’s ability to show mercy or judgment. The Mirouer can be understood in a similar sense: while few may understand it, Marguerite must direct her text to all. It is not for Marguerite to know which of her readers will understand her book’s meaning or be able to attain the annihilation of their wills; therefore, she must disseminate her book as widely as possible.

The Mirouer indicates that Marguerite envisions the dissemination of the text predominantly occurring within textual communities in which it is read aloud and
discussed. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, textual communities have received increasing critical attention by scholars such as Felicity Riddy, Mary E. Erler, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, who have examined female textual communities in particular and argued that these communities provided networks for women to exchange and discuss texts. Evidence that Marguerite’s text was circulated in such communities includes her frequent references to her audience “hearing” her text. In her numerous addresses to her readers, she provides instructions on how to listen to her text. In one of her first articulations of the soul’s annihilation, she instructs, “Or oyez et entendez bien, auditeurs de ce livre, le vray entendant de ce que ce livre dit en tant de lieux, que l’Ame Adnientie n’a point de voulenté, ne point n’en peut avoir, ne point n’en peut vouloir avoir, et en ce est la voulenté divine parfaictement acomplie” (12:1-7) [Now hear and understand well, you who listen to this book, the true meaning of what it says in so many places, that the Soul brought to Nothing has no will at all, and cannot want to have any at all, and in this the divine will is perfectly accomplished (27)]. Later in the text, she indicates through one of her instructions that all of her readers may not have been women: “Or entendez, seigneurs amans, le demourant par meditacion d’amour, sans l’oïr

91 While the construction of Porete’s audience as it was depicted by Porete herself is of more relevance to this project than the actual audience who read the text, it is also necessary to focus on the former because there is little information regarding the latter. There are no contemporary manuscripts of Porete’s text; as Emery notes, “None of the manuscripts bearing texts of the Mirror that M wrote or supervised herself survives. The sole manuscript of the French text […] is remote from the original exemplars, lacks two folios, […] and evinces several other disturbances. […] The text of the Mirror survives in manuscripts of medieval Latin, Italian, and English translations that were based, directly or indirectly, on manuscript models of the French text” (Foreword, The Mirror of Simple Souls xxv).

92 See Introduction, fn. 3.
de creature” (26:10-11) [Now listen, you sirs who love, to what follows, with Love’s meditation and not with your creature’s ears (45)]. Instructing her readers to listen through meditation rather than to hear with only their ears, she thus reinforces her role as teacher, her readers as engaged listeners, and her text as something that cannot be understood by relying on traditional human faculties.

In fact, the very cause for Marguerite’s heresy trial points to her participation in a textual community: she was accused not only because of the content of her book but perhaps more importantly because of her continued dissemination of her text. As Kent Emery, Jr., astutely argues, “Despite her literary persona as an indifferent, wholly separated ‘one among the many,’ she was a participant and leader in some ‘textual community,’ for otherwise she would not have been so zealous to disseminate her writing and need not have endangered her life by doing so.” However, Emery’s argument does not capture the extreme measures that Marguerite was willing to go to in order to disseminate her text. She certainly went further than endangering her life: she sacrificed it in order that the Mirouer continue to be read. As noted above, despite the bishop of Cambrai’s condemning the Mirouer as heretical and ordering it to be publicly burned, Marguerite persisted in disseminating her ideas and was therefore burned at the stake as a relapsed heretic. Disseminating her text among a textual community may have been especially important to Marguerite because it provided a venue for persons at different levels of spiritual progress and understanding of her text to learn from one another. In one further address to her readers, she indicates such hope: she explains that she wrote

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93 Kent Emery, Jr., Foreword: Margaret Porette and Her Book, The Mirror of Simple Souls ix.
the *Mirouer* “affin que vous soiez ce mesmes [a follower of perfect love], sans arrest, au moins en voulenté, se vous l’avez encore; - et se vous estes ja descombree de toutes choses, et se estes gens sans voulenté, en vie qui soit dessus vostre entendement, affin que au moins vous diez les gloses de ce livre!” (60:42-46) [so that you may be like this [a follower of perfect love] without delay, at least in will, if that is still in you; and if you are already freed from all things, and are without will and living a life beyond your understanding, so that you may at least provide the glosses for this book! (81)].

Marguerite thus hopes that each person who hears the text will gain something from it, whether she independently and immediately understands the text or if she requires someone else to “diez les gloses.” These glosses may have been written within the text or provided orally among a group of readers listening to the text read aloud.

Among the readers that Marguerite imagines for her text, the ability to move beyond reason is of intrinsic importance to those who understand the text and are able to annihilate their souls. Although Marguerite establishes the *Mirouer* as a didactic text that seeks to teach its readers, she is explicit about the necessity of learning the text’s lessons without relying on reason: to understand how to become a perfect, free soul, one must move into a divine realm that far supersedes the limited, human faculty of reason. Much like Clemence of Barking, who emphasizes in her account of St. Catherine the need to move beyond reason to gain true faith, Marguerite instructs her readers that reason is insufficient in their pursuit of divine understanding.

Throughout her text, Marguerite uses the allegorical figure of Reason to demonstrate the limitations of human reason. Marguerite’s treatment of Reason is
exemplified in the quote that began this section: “Hee, Amour, dit Raison qui n’entend que le gros et laisse la subtillité, quelle merveille est ceci?” [Ah, Love, says Reason, who understands only the obvious and fails to grasp what is subtle, what strange thing is this?]. This statement—which establishes Marguerite’s critical view of Reason at the text’s outset—is typical in both its disparaging characterization of Reason, whose understanding is so egregiously limited, and its depiction of Reason as mystified by the dialogue in which she finds herself. Marguerite continues to criticize Reason throughout the Mirouer, such as when she depicts the Soul as chastising Reason for her inability to comprehend the annihilation of the Soul’s will:

Hee, Entendement de Raison, dit l’Ame Adnientie, que vous avez d’arbitres! Vous prenez la paille et laissez le grain, car vostre entendement est trop bas, par quoy vous ne povez si haultement entendre, comme il esconvient entendre a celluy qui bien veult entendre l’estre dont nous parlons. Mais Entendement de Divine Amour, qui demoure et est en Ame Adnientie et qui est enfranchie, l’entend bien sans arrest, car elle est ce mesmes. (12:28-35)

[Ah, Reason’s Understanding, says the Soul brought to Nothing, what strange conclusions you reach! You take the straw and leave the grain, because your understanding is too base, and so you cannot exercise that exalted understanding that he must apply who truly wants to understand the state of being of which we speak. But Understanding of divine Love, who dwells and is in the Soul brought to Nothing and set free, she understands this at once, for she is this very thing. (28)]

Reason, as a limited and human faculty, will never be able to overcome its “bas” understanding, and thus Marguerite makes her point that it is impossible to learn how to become a free, annihilated soul through the use of reason. As Marguerite expresses here, to comprehend such things requires an “haultement entendre,” an “Entendement de Divine Amour,” that cannot be contained within the circumscribed realms of reason.
Even this “haultement entendre,” however, stands in stark distinction to divine understanding. Love gives voice to this distinction when she compares the human with the divine: discussing those individuals who “sont venuz en cognoissance de leur nient” (45:6) [have come to the knowledge of their nothingness (65)], she states,

Car se on en cognoissoit autant oultre comme ce que on en cognoistra en paradis, et encore autant comme l’en pourroit comparer oultre par chose que on en puisse comprendre par parties ou autrement, encore tout ce que on en comprendroit fust nient; encore ne seroit ce nient, au regart de ce comprenement, a celluy que on y pourroit comparer, mais que on ne mette en celle comparaison ne son pouvoir, ne son sens, ne son savoir, ne sa bonté; mais sans plus, ne seroit que une estincelle de sa pure bonté, et encore ne seroit nient. (45:12-21)

[For if one could understand something as totally as one would understand in paradise, or again if one could compare [something] totally with something which one could comprehend by parts or otherwise, still all that one would comprehend would be nothing. Again, concerning this comprehension, this nothingness would not be something which one could compare, even if one did not place in this comparison his power, His judgment, His knowledge, His goodness. It might be only a spark of His pure goodness, and still it would be nothing.]94

Love thus argues that human understanding, in comparison with the divine, is nothing: the “estincelle” that humans are able to comprehend is entirely negligible. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Julian shares Marguerite’s belief in the gulf that separates divine and human understanding.

Marguerite indicates that persons who wish to learn from the Mirouer and to annihilate their souls do have recourse: they can rely on faith and love to further them in

94 Here I follow Babinsky’s translation of the French: see Babinsky 125. Colledge, Marler, and Grant’s edition follows the Latin in this passage because of their claim that it seems “clearer and more succinct” than the text in the Chantilly manuscript (65, fn 5). However, Babinsky’s translation demonstrates that while convoluted, the French text is worthy of attention (and may very well reflect the often convoluted and intricate expression that Marguerite frequently uses).
their spiritual progress. As she explains in her verse prologue, it is faith and love that will illuminate the meaning of the book:

Humiliez dont vos sciences  
Qui sont de Raison fondees,  
Et mettez toutes vos fiancés  
En celles qui sont donnees  
D’Amour, par Foy enluminees,  
Et ainsi comprendrez ce livre  
Qui d’Amour fait l’Ame vivre. (22-28)

[So you too must abase your learning now, / Built only upon Reason, and your true / And perfect trust completely you must show / In the rich gifts which Love will make to you / And Faith will cause to shine in brightest hue. / So understanding of this book they’ll give / Which makes the Soul the life of Love to live (9).]

Marguerite makes an important distinction between actively pursuing understanding through reason and the passive receiving of this understanding through faith and love. Understanding, as Marguerite explains here, is not achieved through the active employment of reason. Rather, Marguerite depicts the attainment of understanding as a passive act: one must receive understanding from faith and love. This passive acceptance can only occur once the reader has followed Marguerite’s instruction to “Humiliez […] voz sciences,” thus eschewing all knowledge built on reason. This distinction between active pursuing and passive receiving underlies the entirety of Marguerite’s text; the Mirouer constantly demonstrates that actively trying to logically reason one’s way to understanding the text’s meaning simply will not work.

The concepts of faith and love in the above statement have thus far been discussed as general abstractions; however, Marguerite may also be alluding to Faith and Love as allegorical representations of more specific concepts. While Faith is not identified in the
text as representative of a specific concept or entity, as discussed above Love is explicitly depicted as a representation of God. Therefore, Marguerite is suggesting that understanding of the *Mirouer*’s lessons concerning a soul’s annihilation comes from God. Further evidence for Marguerite’s belief in understanding as a gift from God is found near the beginning of the text, in an exchange between Love and Reason:

Amour. – Ceste Ame, dit Amour, ne fait compte ne de honte ne de honneur, de pouvreté ne de richesse, d’aise ne de mesaise, d’amour ne hayne, d’enfer ne de paradis. 
Raison. – Hee, pour Dieu, Amour, dit Raison, qu’est ce a dire, ce que vous dites?
Amour. – Que c’est a dire? dit Amour. Certes ce sçait celluy et non aultre a qui Dieu a donné l’entendement, - car l’Escripture ne le prent, - ne sens d’omme ne le comprent, - ne travail de creature ne desert l’entendre – ne comprendre. Ainsoyls est ce don donné du Treshault. (7:3-12)

[Love: This Soul, says Love, takes no heed of shame or honor, of poverty or of riches, of comfort or of hardship, of love or of hate, of Hell or of Paradise. / Reason: For God’s sake, Love, says Reason, what is the meaning of what you say? / Love: What does it mean? says Love. The one whom God has given understanding of it knows that, and no-one else, for no book contains it, nor can man’s intelligence comprehend it, nor can any creature’s laboring be rewarded by understanding or comprehending it. Rather this is a gift given by the Most High. (17)]

In this early discussion of the annihilation of the soul, Reason is already bewildered. Love indicates that Reason has no hope of being anything other than bewildered, because understanding must come from God. Love reiterates that understanding was given (“a donné” [l. 9]) by God and not attained through other means. Indeed, later in this passage Love describes this understanding as a “donné” (l. 12), a gift, which implies that it cannot be sought or worked for; rather, it is given solely at the discretion of God.

Marguerite is explicit on the fact that this understanding cannot come from worldly, human knowledge. As Love states above concerning the divine understanding
that accompanies annihilation of the soul, “l’Escripture ne le prent, - ne sens d’omme ne le comprent.” Marguerite distinguishes between sources of knowledge, privileging the divine knowledge that comes from God while debasing the worldly knowledge that is contained in books and human intellects. Knowledge from the divine source may only be comprehended for a moment, as Love explains: “Ce don, dit Amour, est aucunes foiz donné en ung moment de heure; et qui l’aura si le garde, car c’est le plus parfait don que Dieu donne a creature. Ceste Ame est escolrière de la Divinité” (9:39-42) [Sometimes, says Love, this gift is given in the twinkling of an eye; and let him who is given it hold fast to it, for it is the most perfect gift which God gives to a creature. This Soul is a schoolgirl of Divinity (21)]. Marguerite reiterates here that the knowledge that is gained as an “escolrière de la Divinité” cannot be pursued or gained through any other means than through a gift from God; indeed, this knowledge is “le plus parfait don que Dieu donne a creature.” Furthermore, she implies that gaining this knowledge is progressive, although not continuous. Although the Soul is learning, she is not yet the perfect, annihilated soul that she will become.

Later, in another interchange between Reason and Love, Marguerite provides a description of the wisdom gained through one’s learning from the divine. In response to Love’s statement that the annihilated Soul is wise, Reason begins a discussion regarding the nature of wisdom:

While all other translations provided in this chapter are from College, Marler, and Grant’s translation (as noted in fn. 77), I have translated this last line myself. While their translation states, “This Soul is leaning in the school of Divine Knowledge,” I have translated it literally in order to highlight that the term “escolliere” emphasizes that the pupil (the Soul) is female.
Raison. – Hee, dame Amour, dit Raison, que appellez vous saige?
Amour. – L’abismé en humilité, dit Amour.
Raison. – Hee, Amour, dit Raison, qui est ce qui est abysmé en humilité?
Amour. – Celluy, dit Amour, qui en nulle chose n’a tort et si scet qu’il n’a en nulle chose droit. (40:6-12)

[Reason: Ah, Lady Love, says Reason, what do you call wise? / Love: Being lost in the depths of humility, says Love. / Reason: Ah, Love, says Reason, and who is lost in the depths of humility? / Love: The one, says Love, who is wrong in no thing, and who yet knows that in no thing is he right. (59)

The most significant paradox in this passage is that wisdom does not stem from one’s intellect, reason, or logic. Rather, as defined here, wisdom is one’s complete immersion in humility and arises from one’s humble awareness that one knows nothing. True wisdom is thus humbly waiting for and accepting the gifts of understanding that God provides. In this passage, as is so often the case throughout the Mirouer, Marguerite asks her readers to re-conceptualize even their most basic assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and wisdom.

Having redefined the source and definition of knowledge, Marguerite establishes herself and her text squarely against the traditional transmitters of knowledge in medieval society: theologians and scholars. In addition to eschewing reason as a means to reach divine understanding, Marguerite thus shares another significant similarity with Clemence of Barking, whose account of St. Catherine criticizes scholars and their reliance on worldly knowledge. As she makes explicit in the verse prologue that opens the text, Marguerite distinguishes herself so stringently from these authorities because of their reliance on reason:

Theologiens ne aultres clers,
Point n’en aurez l’entendement
Tant aiez les engins clers
Se n’y procedez humblement
Et que Amour et Foy ensemnt
Vous facent surmonter Raison,
Qui dames sont de la maison. (8-14)

[Men of theology and scholars such as they / Will never understand this writing properly. / True comprehension of it only may / Those have who progress in humility; / You must let Love and Faith together be / Your guides to climb where Reason cannot come, / They who this house as mistresses do own. (9)]

Reiterating the intrinsic importance of humility and the subjugation of reason to faith and love, Marguerite emphatically excludes scholars and theologians from those who will understand her book and the lessons it contains regarding the annihilation of the soul. Comprehension only stems from humility—something that Marguerite apparently does not believe “theologiens” or “clers” possess. While she consistently displays a scorn for the type of knowledge possessed by these learned elite, this contempt is not an indication that Marguerite was not familiar with academic and theological reasoning and arguments. As Spearing notes, “Porete understands perfectly well how to conduct a logical argument, but when she does it tends to be in forms verging on parody.”96 Indeed, Marguerite consciously avoids constructing logical arguments and attempts to undermine any reliance on them; she parodies such arguments because of their inability to bring anyone to the divine understanding that she so prizes.

96 Spearing, “Marguerite Porete: Courtliness and Transcendence in The Mirror of Simple Souls” 123. Similarly, in his important and highly influential study of Porete, Peter Dronke argues that she “not merely flings down the paradoxes but seems to delight in demonstrating them, in a sublime parody of dialectic method” (Women Writers of the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 221).
The *Mirouer* suggests that Marguerite was particularly critical of those who transmit this knowledge through teaching it to others. In response to Reason’s questions regarding the annihilation of the soul, Love explains, “Comme je vous ay dit devant, et encore le vous dis je, que tous les maistres de sens de nature, ne tous les maistres d’escripture, ne tous ceulx qui demourent en amour de l’obedience des Vertuz, ne l’entendent et ne l’entendront, la ou il fait a entendre” (9:29-33) [As I have told you before, and yet again I tell you that every teacher of natural wisdom, every teacher of book-learning, everyone who persists in loving his obedience to the Virtues does not and will not understand this as it should be understood (20)]. Love’s statement warns Marguerite’s readers that they will not—that they cannot—understand her text if they attempt to comprehend it using the traditional means of “sens de nature” or “escripture.” Marguerite is emphatic on this point, and experience proved her right: the theological regents of the University of Paris were those who declared that fifteen articles taken from her text were heretical.

Among those who transmit knowledge that is inferior to the divine knowledge that she endorses, Marguerite is particularly critical of the leaders of the Church. Similar to the binary between the judgments of Holy Church and God in Julian’s text that will be discussed in the next chapter, Marguerite perceives a significant distinction between the Church on earth led by men and the Church in heaven led by God. For Marguerite, it is not judgment that separates God from the institutional Church, but the latter’s reliance on reason rather than love. Marguerite first introduces the distinction between the two churches in an exchange between Love and Faith, Hope, and Charity. In response to their
comment that “Saincte Eglise, se elle le [the Mirouer’s teachings on the annihilated soul] oyoit lire, s’en esmerveilleroit” (19:8-9) [Holy Church, if she were to hear it [the Mirouer’s teachings on the annihilated soul] read, would be dismayed by it (38)], Love clarifies that Faith, Hope, and Charity are speaking of “Saincte Eglise la Petite, dit Amour; celle Eglise qui est gouvernee de Raison; et non mie Saincte Eglise la Grant, dit Divine Amour, qui est gouvernee par nous” (19:11-13) [Holy Church the Less, says Love, who is ruled by Reason, and not Holy Church the Great, says Divine Love, who is ruled by us (38)]. Shortly thereafter, the allegorical character of Holy Church the Less proves that the Mirouer’s teachings are indeed confounding her because of her reliance on reason. After Love describes the annihilated soul, Holy Church enters the dialogue by asking the Holy Spirit to explain Love’s teachings: “Tres doux Saint Esperit, aprenez le nous, car ceste parole seurmonte noz escriptures, et si ne povons entendre par Raison, ce que elle dit; et si nous a si esbahye, dit Saincte Eglise, que nous n’osons estre contre elle [Love]” (41:31-35) [Sweetest Holy Spirit, teach this to us, for this word surpasses our writings, and we cannot understand through Reason what it conveys; and we are so filled with confusion, says Holy Church, that we dare not withstand her [Love] (61)]. Holy Church thus indicates not only her confusion and reliance on Reason, but also the limitations of the Church’s “escriptures.” Marguerite suggests here that divine understanding is not acquired through the study of patristic or biblical texts, but through the experience of divine love.

As the dialogue between Love and Holy Church continues, Marguerite provides information regarding the composition of Holy Church the Great. While Love has
previously claimed leadership of this church, it is the annihilated souls that constitute its members:

Amour. – Voire, Saincte Eglise, dit Amour, dessoubz ceste Saincte Eglise! Car telles Ames, dit Amour, sont proprement appellees Saincte Eglise, car elles soustienennet et enseignent et nourrissent toute Saincte Eglise; non mie elles, dit Amour, mais toute la Trinité parmy elles; et c’est verité, dit Amour, ne s’en doubte nul. O Saincte Eglise dessoubz ceste Saincte Eglise, or dictes, dit Amour, que voulez vous dire de cestes Ames, qui sont ainsi commandees et louees dessus vous, qui usez du tout par le conseil de Raison?

Saincte Eglise. – Nous voulons dire, dit Saincte Eglise, que telles Ames sont en vie dessus nous, car Amour demoure en elles et Raison demoure en nous; mais ce n’est mie contre nous, dit Saincte Eglise la Petite, mais ainoys la commandons et louons de cela parmy la glose de noz escriptures. (43:5-19)

[Love: In truth, Holy Church, says Love, you are inferior to this Holy Church! For such souls, says Love, are properly called Holy Church, for they support and teach and nurture the whole of Holy Church: not they, says Love, but the whole Trinity through them; and this is true, says Love, let no-one doubt it. O Holy Church, inferior to this Holy Church, say now, says Love, what do you wish to say of these Souls, who are thus commended and praised above you, you who in all things act by the advice of Reason? / Holy Church: We wish to say, says Holy Church, that such Souls are in an existence superior to ours, for Love dwells in them and Reason dwells in us; but this existence is not at all in opposition to us, says Holy Church the Less, but rather we commend and praise it for this through the gloss of our writings. (62)]

This last statement made by Holy Church raises the significant question of whether the two churches are, in fact, in opposition to one another. The statements of Love immediately preceding these last comments certainly indicate that Holy Church the Less is inferior to the Holy Church led by Love and composed of annihilated souls. However, Marguerite provides no response to Holy Church’s claim that the souls’ existence “n’est mie contre nous.” The dialogue turns away from this question due to Reason’s request to
hear more concerning Holy Spirit’s gifts to annihilated souls, and Love never replies to
Holy Church’s statement.

Marguerite’s silence on this question is revealing in and of itself, but she does
provide textual clues concerning what her answer may have been. As the Soul progresses
towards her own annihilation during the course of the *Mirouer*, she remarks generally on
those persons whom she terms Reason’s “disciples”:

Nul ne pourroit dire ne penser la rude
nen l’encombrier de Raison: a ses
disciples assez il appert,
ung asne n’y feroit oeuvre, qui les vouldroit oír.
Mais Dieu m’a bien gardee, dit ceste Ame, de telz disciples: en leur
conseil ne me tendront ilz mie, ne leur doctrine ne vueil je plus oír, car je
m’y suis trop longuement tenue, combien que ce m’ait esté bon; mais
maintenant ce n’est pas mon meilleur, combien qu’ilz ne le scevent mie;
car petit sens ne peut mettre en pris chose de digne value, ne entendre
chose dont Raison ne soit maistresse; et se ilz entendent, si n’est ce mie
souvent. (84:32-41)

[No-one could tell or conceive how crude and burdensome is Reason, but
it is plainly seen from Reason’s disciples that an ass would achieve
nothing which was willing to give them ear. But God has well protected
me, says this Soul, from such disciples; they shall not have me following
their counsel, nor do I wish to listen further to their teaching, for I have
followed it far too long, good though this may have seemed to me; but
now it is not my better, even though they do not know it, for little wit
cannot prize what is of great worth, or understand anything of which
Reason is not the mistress; and if they do understand it, that is not often.
(109)]

The statements discussed above draw an inexorable link between reason and Holy
Church the Less, so it can only be assumed that the reference here to Reason’s “disciples”
would necessarily include Church leaders. Scholars such as Colledge, Marler, and Grant
have pointed to such statements as evidence for what they perceive as Marguerite’s
“refusal of obedience to the Holy See, and, indeed, to any other ‘Church.’” However, as I demonstrate below, in its treatment of intermediaries, the *Mirouer* suggests that Marguerite’s attitude towards the Church and its leaders may be more complicated than Colledge, Marler, and Grant’s argument suggests.

Marguerite’s attitude toward the Church and its leaders is one manifestation of her perception of all intermediaries between one’s soul and God as worthy of contempt and rejection only once one has achieved annihilation of one’s soul. As will be seen in the third chapter, Marguerite’s perception of intermediaries is remarkably similar to Julian’s complex understanding of them. The annihlated soul, as Marguerite explains, requires no intermediary between herself and God: “il n’y a nul moyen entre leur amour et l’amour divine” (5:19-20) [There is no intermediary between their love and God’s love (14-5)]. Marguerite includes among these intermediaries the sacraments and rites of the church as well as those acts associated with the contemplative life: the annihilated soul desires “ne despit ne pouvreté, ne martire ne tribulacions, ne mesmes ne sermons, ne jeunes ne oraisons” (13:27-29) [not contempt or poverty, not martyrdom or tribulations, not Masses or sermons, not fastings or prayers (30)]. It is in her treatment of one intermediary specifically, the Virtues, that she reveals the complexity of her view towards intermediaries generally. In the sixth chapter of the *Mirouer*, the Soul sings a song to the Virtues: she begins the song by declaring, “Vertuz, je prens congé de vous a tousjours” (6:10) [Virtues, I take my leave of you for evermore (16)]. When Reason expresses great dismay at hearing that the Soul has taken leave of the Virtues, Love explains, “telles

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Ames ont mieulx les Vertuz que nulles des aultres creatures, mais elles n’ont mie l’usage d’elles” (8:11-13) [Souls such as she possess the Virtues better than any other creature, but they do not make use of them (18)]. Annihilated souls thus are not without virtue, but possess them in a superior way that does not involve willingly using them. Since the souls are completely at the will of God and have no wills of their own, they are far more virtuous than others who pursue the Virtues and act according to their own wills. Love further explains the relationship between the annihilated Soul and the Virtues when Reason claims that Love has spoken “paroles contraires” (21:7) [contradictory statements (40)] when she has stated that “ceste Ame prent congé aux Vertuz en tous faiz, et […] que les Vertuz sont toujours avec telles Ames plus parfaictement que avec nul aultre” (21:4-6) [this Soul takes leave of the Virtues in all matters, and […] that the Virtues are always with such Souls, more perfectly than with anyone else (40)]. In response, Love explains:

Au commancement ceste Ame fist, quequ’il luy coutast de cuer et de corps, tout ceu que Raison lui enseignoit, qui estoit maistresse de ceste Ame; […] Si que Raison et les aultres Vertuz estoient maistresses de ceste Ame, et ceste Ame estoit vraye obediente a tout ce qu’elles vouoient commander, pource qu’elle vouloit vivre de vie espirituelle. Or est il ainsi que ceste Ame a tant gaigné et aprins avec les Vertuz, que elle est dessus les Vertuz, car elle a en elle tout ce que les Vertuz scevent aprendre, et encore plus, sans comparaison. Car ceste Ame a en elle la maistresse des Vertuz, que l’en nomme Divine Amour, laquelle l’a muee du tout en elle, et unie a elle, par quoy ceste Ame n’est mie a elle ne aux Vertuz. (21:23-26, 32-37)

[At the beginning this Soul did everything which Reason indicated to her, whatever it cost her in heart and body, when Reason was her mistress…So Reason and the other Virtues were the mistresses of this Soul, and this Soul was truly obedient in all that they wished to command, because she wanted to live the life of the spirit. But now it has come about that this Soul has earned and learned so much from the Virtues that she is above
them, for she has within her everything which the Virtues are able to teach, and infinitely more, for this Soul has within her the mistress of the Virtues who is called Divine Love, who has wholly changed the Soul into herself and united her to herself, so that this Soul no more belongs to herself or to the Virtues. (41)

Love emphasizes that the relationship is one based on superiority: while “au commencement” the Virtues were the Soul’s “maistresse,” the Soul has now surpassed the Virtues. The Soul “est dessus les Vertuz” because her new mistress is Divine Love. Moreover, now the Soul is not only united to but also changed into Divine Love, the allegorical representation of God, and is therefore herself the mistress of the Virtues.

The superiority that the annihilated Soul gains over the Virtues and all other intermediaries often results in an attitude of contempt towards those things to which she had once been obedient but now no longer needs. Certainly, this contempt is expressed throughout the Mirouer, such as when Love explains that a soul brought to nothing “ne quiert pas la science divine entre les maistres de ce siecle, mais an vrayement despriser le monde et elle mesmes. Hee Dieu, comment il y a grant difference entre don d’amie par moyen a amie et don qui est sans moyen d’amie a amye!” (5:21-25) [does not seek for knowledge of God among the teachers of this world, but by truly despising this world and herself. Ah God, how great is the difference between the gift that a lover makes to his loved one through an intermediary, and the gift made directly to his loved one by a lover! (15)]. Love thus indirectly praises a soul’s contemning attitude toward anything of this world while encouraging a direct relationship without intermediaries. The Soul makes her contempt clearly evident in her vitriolic language towards those who seek God through earthly means: “Telz gens, dit ceste Ame, que je appelle asnes, quierent Dieu es
creatures, es monstiers par aouer, en paradis creez, en paroles d’ommes, et es escriptures” (69:35-37) [The men whom I call asses, says this Soul, seek God in creatures, through worshipping in churches, in paradises they create, in the words of men and in their writings (90)]. However, Love’s explanation of the Soul’s progression beyond Reason and the Virtues above reveals another important aspect of Marguerite’s view of intermediaries: they are temporary necessities along the Soul’s progress to becoming annihilated. Love indicates here that the Soul’s relation to Reason and the Virtues changed as the Soul came to greater understanding of the divine: while she first remarks that “Au commancement ceste Ame fist […] tout ceu que Raison lui enseignoit,” she then notes, “Or est il ainsi que ceste Ame a tant gaigné et aprins avec les Vertuz, que elle est dessus les Vertuz.” Certainly, Amy Hollywood is right to argue that “The Mirror continually insists that the truly disencumbered, free, and innocent soul has passed beyond the need for such intermediaries between herself and God.” What Hollywood fails to stress, however, is that only those souls that are “truly disencumbered, free, and innocent,” as described by Hollywood, can be “dessus” intermediaries such as the Virtues. Marguerite is not endorsing the notion that everyone should reject these intermediaries or hold them in contempt; rather, it is only those who have divine understanding and have experienced annihilation of their souls who no longer need these temporary intermediaries.

Similarly, Marguerite treats Reason as a necessary, albeit temporary, intermediary. As discussed above, Reason receives very critical treatment throughout the

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Mirouer as Marguerite criticizes its limitations and those who rely on such a limited faculty. However, Reason is intrinsic to the Mirouer; indeed, without the character of Reason, the book would not exist at all. As Love explains, the book is founded on the replies of “l’Entendement d’Amour aux demandes de Raison” (2:8) [Understanding of Love to Reason’s questions (12)]. Furthermore, as demonstrated by an early exchange between Reason and Love, Reason is the advocate for the book’s audience:

Raison. – Ores, Amour, dit Raison, vous vous estes condescendue a nostre priere, c’est assavoir d’avoir declaré les choses dessus dicte pour les actifs et contemplatifs; mais je vous prie encore que vous les declarés pour les communes gens, dont les aucuns pourront par aventure venir a cest estre, car plusieurs doubles mots y a, qui sont fors a entendre a leur entendement, lesquieulx se vous declarés, ce livre monstrera a tous vraye lumiere de verité, et la parfection de charité, et lesquieulx sont de Dieu precieusement esleuz et appellez et souverainement de luy amez. (13:4-13)

[Reason: Now, Love, says Reason, you have deigned to fulfill our request, and you have explained the things mentioned above for actives and contemplatives; but I ask you further, to explain them for ordinary people, for some of them will perchance manage to attain to this state of being; for there are several words here of two meanings, which as we seek understanding we find hard to understand; and if you explain them, this book will show to all the very light of truth, and the perfection of charity, and who they are who have received God’s precious election and call, and are loved by him above all things. (29)]

Reason thus provides a voice for all readers, whether actives, contemplatives, or “les communes gens.” Also, despite the disparagement that Reason often receives at the hands of Love, in response to Reason’s above request Love agrees to reply to her questions and continues to do so throughout the Mirouer. Love later explains that not all readers need the extended explanations that she provides for Reason: she tells Reason that “ceulx qui vivent comme dit ce livre (ce sont ceulx qui ont ataint l’estre de telle vie), l’entendent brefment, sans ce qu’il conviengne ja declarer les gloses. Mais aucune chose
vous declaireray je de voz demandes: ores entendez” (55:3-7) [those who live as this book says, that is, those who have attained to the state of being of such a life, understand this in a few words, with no need of explaining the glosses. But I shall give some explanation for your questions: so listen now (74)]. Recognizing that not all readers will understand quickly, Love again obliges Reason’s request for further explanations, thus providing further instruction to the text’s readers.

Because the Mirouer is not directed solely to those who have already attained annihilation of their souls, Marguerite uses Reason and the explanation she requires to give voice to and instruct her broader audience. Because the majority of her readers are not those who have attained annihilation of their souls and are thus dependent on reason, Marguerite is dependent on reason to help teach her readers, paradoxically, how to advance beyond reason and ultimately comprehend the book’s divine meaning. Marguerite’s simultaneous use and rejection of reason resonates the apophatic theme that Nicholas Watson has identified within the Mirouer, which he describes as a theme “that God cannot adequately be named or represented by any sign, and that the nearest approach that can be made to him thus consists in systematically rejecting words and images that attempt to express him, in a search for the ‘divine darkness’ that lies beyond language and the created.”99 However, Marguerite is bound by the words and images that she wishes to reject: as Watson argues further, “For while apophatic mysticism denies the value of words, it is also dependent on them in the very act of making such a denial.”100

99 Watson, “Misrepresenting the Untranslatable” 124.
100 Watson, “Misrepresenting the Untranslatable” 125.
To share any semblance of her divine knowledge and understanding with her audience, Marguerite must use that very faculty that annihilated souls find so contemptible.

Marguerite’s dependence on reason is starkly evident when she attempts to continue her book without the character Reason. In the eighty-seventh chapter of the *Mirouer*, the allegorical character of Soul has progressed to the stage where she finds Reason no longer necessary. The Soul therefore claims to kill Reason: “Car tant comme je vous ay eue, dame Raison, je n’ay peu tenir franchement mon heritage, et ce qui estoit et est mien; mais maintenant je le puis tenir franchement, puisque je vous ay d’amour a mor navree. Or est morte Raison, dit ceste Am” (87: 15-19) [For so long as I have had you, Lady Reason, I have not been able freely to hold my inheritance and what is mine; but now I can hold it freely, since in love I have dealt you your mortal wound. Now Reason is dead, says this Soul (112)]. Without Reason, however, the dialogue cannot continue: there is no one to ask questions and therefore no need for Love to expound her doctrine in detail. As a result, Love immediately adopts Reason’s questioning role: Love tells the Soul, “Donc diray je, dit Amour, ce que Raison diroit, se elle estoit en vous en vie. Elle demanderoit a vous, amye de nous, dit Amour a ceste Ame qui est mesmes Amour et nulle aultre chose que Amour, depuis que Amour eut de sa divine bonté Raison et les oeuvres des Vertuz dessoubz ses piez gictee et a mort menee, sans nul retour” (87:20-35) [So I shall say, Love says, what Reason would say, if she still lived in you and ask what she would ask from you, our beloved, says Love to this Soul who is herself Love and nothing else but Love, once Love in its divine goodness had cast Reason and the works of the Virtues under its feet and brought them to death, with no return (112)].
Love’s claim that Reason would have “nul retour” proves incorrect: ten chapters after Soul declared that Reason was dead, Reason returns to the dialogue with no explanation given for her reappearance. It is clear that Marguerite’s reliance on Reason remains—as it must, if she wishes to point all of her readers to the divine.

As the author of a text directed not only to those who have achieved annihilation of their souls but also to those who have not, Marguerite must rely on reason as a necessary intermediary. Importantly, just as reason is an intermediary between the divine and human, so too are Marguerite and her text: Marguerite transcribes the words of God that are spoken through the character of Love to all Christians, and her text is the vehicle that contains those words. However, all of these intermediaries between the divine and human are eventually surpassed by and no longer necessary to the soul in its progression toward annihilation. Marguerite provides a model for the rejection of these intermediaries near the end of the Mirouer, as the Soul moves toward and finally attains her own annihilation. Beginning in chapter 112, Marguerite does not assign a speaker to several portions of the Mirouer, which marks a significant change from the rest of the text. After a brief description of the enduring goodness of Love in chapter 112, Marguerite herself addresses her readers in the subsequent chapter:

Je fais assavoir a tous ceulx qui orront ce livre, que il nous convient retraire dedans nous – par pensees de devocion, paroeuvres de parfection, par demandes de Raison – toute la vie, a nostre povoir, que Jhesucrist mena, et qu’il nous prescha. [...] Et se nous faisions ce a nostre povoir, nous vendrions ad ce que nous aurions tout ce, en metant hors de nous toutes les pensees de devocion et toutes les oeuvres de parfection et toutes les demandes de Raison, car nous n’en aurions que faire. (113:3-6, 10-14)

101 See 98:3-4, where Reason reenters the dialogue when she asks Love to clarify the comments Love made in the previous chapter.
[I tell all who will hear this book that we must live again within ourselves—by pondering analogies, by works of perfection, by asking of Reason—the whole life, so far as we can, which Jesus Christ lived and which he preached to us. [...] And if we did this to the best of our powers, we should attain to possessing all this, putting beyond us our thoughts of analogies and our works of perfection and all our questions to Reason, for we should have no more call for them. (135)]

In her own voice for the first time since her verse prologue, Marguerite thus indicates that one begins one’s spiritual progress by relying on the written word, works, and the use of reason. She also stresses that as one progresses spiritually, one moves beyond such intermediaries and reaches a state where one no longer needs them.

The themes of spiritual progression and of moving beyond intermediaries that had previously been necessary continue throughout the concluding chapters of the Mirouer. Shortly after Marguerite’s address to the audience, the Soul speaks again, revealing that she has attained her soul’s annihilation and become a reflection of God. In a long, uninterrupted passage, the Soul explains that she has acquired God’s goodness because she is “la somme de tous maulx” (117:10) [the sum of all evils (138)] and God, who is “la somme de tous biens” (117:12) [the sum of all good (138)], must therefore give his goodness to her because of her need: “Par quoy est moye sa bonté, pour cause de ma necessité, et pour la droicture de sa pure bonté” (117:16-18) [and so his goodness is mine because of my need, and through the just nature of his pure goodness. Now I am all evil and he is all good, whereby I must have all his goodness (139)]. Significantly, acquiring God’s goodness has transformed her into God himself and annihilated her soul: “puisque j’ay toute sa [God’s] bonté, donc suis je ce mesmes qu’il est, par muance d’amour. Car le plus fort mue en luy le plus foible” (117:67-69) [since I have all his [God’s] goodness, I
am therefore what he is, through the transmutation of love. For the stronger changes the weaker into himself (140)]. This chapter thus marks the moment when the Soul, whose spiritual progression has driven the narrative of the Mirouer, has progressed to the desired state in which its will is annihilated and God expresses his will through her.

This process, in which the Soul becomes God as a result of God’s goodness and her evilness, also signifies to Marguerite that the Soul has achieved salvation. Moreover, the Soul has become not only a model of salvation but also the very salvation of every individual. The Soul explicitly declares this at the opening of the chapter, claiming that “Dieu n’a, dit il, ou mettre sa bonté, se il ne la met en moy, ne plus n’a de haberge qui soit pour luy convenable, ne ne peut avoir lieu ou il se puisse tout mettre, sinon en moy; et parmy ce suis exemple de salut. Mais encore, qui plus est, le salut mesmes de toute creature, et la gloire de Di eu” (117:4-9) [there is nowhere for God to put his goodness, the Spirit says, unless he put it in me: he has no other resting place which would be fit for him, nor can he find anywhere where he can put all he is, except in me; and so in this I am the example of salvation; but what is yet more, the true salvation of every creature, and the glory of God (138)]. Shortly thereafter, the Soul claims semblance to Jesus Christ as she reiterates that she is the salvation of all people:

Car Dieu le Pere a donné a son Filz toute sa bonté, laquelle bonté de Dieu est donnée a cognoistre a l’umain lignage parmy la mort de Jhesucrist son Filz; lequel Filz est la louenge du Pere parmanablement, et le rachat d’umaine creature. Pareillement vous dis je, dit ceste Ame, Dieu le Pere a en moy espandue toute sa bonté, et donnee. Laquelle bonté de Dieu est donnée a cognoistre a humain lignage par le moyen de ma mauvaisté. Par quoy donc il appert clere ment que je dus la louenge de Dieu parmanablement, et le salut d’umaine creature. (117:31-41)
[For God the Father has given to His Son the totality of His goodness, which goodness of God the human race comes to understand through the death of Jesus Christ his Son, who is the eternal praise of the Father and the ransom of the human creature. Similarly, I tell you, says this Soul, that God the Father has given and poured out in me the totality of his goodness. Such Goodness of God the human race comes to understand by means of my wretchedness. This it appears that I am the eternal praise of God and the salvation of the human creature.]  

It is thus revealed that the character of the Soul represents not only the soul of Marguerite and of each of the Mirouer’s readers, but also the salvation of all humanity. It is made evident here that the personifications in the Mirouer are not straightforward one-to-one allegorizations; as Hollywood explains, “One must avoid any reading of the Mirror that assumes a consistent allegorization in which all of the dialogical figures are static.”  

Building off of Hollywood’s general argument, it is clear that the Soul is not a static figure: rather, the Soul undergoes a radical transformation through the course of Marguerite’s text, from the unknowing student of Love to an annihilated soul transformed into God, and now represents God and the salvation he offers to all humanity. Simultaneously, she represents the possibility that all souls can progress just as she did throughout the text and become God, his salvation, and his glory.  

As the chapter continues, the Soul provides further explanation of what salvation truly is. In her explanation, she equates salvation with the knowledge of God’s goodness: “aultre chose n’est le salut de toute creature, que cognoissance de la bonté de Dieu. Et donc, puisque tous auront cognoissance par moy de la bonté de Dieu, laquelle bonté de

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102 I have used the translation offered in Babinsky’s translation; see Babinsky 187. College, Marler and Grant’s edition inserts text taken from one Latin manuscript in the first half of the passage, but their argument for the importance of the addition appears to be based only on personal predilection.

103 Hollywood, The Soul as Virgin Wife 95.
Dieu fait a moy telle bonte, ceste bonté donc sera par moy cogneue d’eulx; ne ja cogneue ne fust, se ce ne fust la mauvaistié de moy” (117:41-45) [the salvation of every creature is nothing else than the knowledge of the goodness of God, which goodness of God does me such goodness, this goodness will be known by them through me, nor would it ever be known, were it not for my evil (139)]. Marguerite suggests here that salvation is not based on works, sacraments, or the rites of the Church; rather, it is based on one’s personal and individual knowledge of God’s goodness. In addition, she claims that every creature will know this goodness—and therefore attain salvation—through the Soul. She thus implies that all persons can attain this knowledge through their reading of the Mirouer, which depicts the Soul and her spiritual progression. Through the Soul’s continued explanation, Marguerite reiterates the link between salvation and gaining knowledge of God’s goodness through the Soul: “Et puis donc que par ma mauvaistié est d’eulx cogneue la divine bonté, et que aultre chose n’est leur salut, que cognoistre la divine bonté; donc je suis cause du salut du toute creature, car la bonté de Dieu est d’eulx par moy cogneue” (117: 46-50) [since it is through my evil that the divine goodness is known by them, and since their salvation is nothing else than to know the divine goodness, I then am the cause of the salvation of every creature, for the goodness of God is known by them through me (139)]. Because knowledge of God’s goodness is attained through the Soul and because the Soul is a personification contained within the Mirouer, Marguerite’s text is the vehicle that enables the “salut du toute creature.”

In the last narrative that describes the writing of the Mirouer, Marguerite makes clear that once one has attained knowledge of God’s goodness—and therefore one’s
salvation—the book is no longer necessary. This narrative occurs in chapter 119, three chapters before the original conclusion of the text. After the Soul opens this chapter by addressing “dames nient cognueus” (119:5) [you unknown ladies (146)], she offers an apology for the length of the book: “Je me excuse, dit ceste Ame, a vous toutes celles qui demourez en nient et qui estes cheues d’amour en tel estre; car j’ay fait ce livre moult grant par paroles, qui vous semble moult petit, ad ce que je vous puis cognoistre. Or me vueillez excuser, par vostre courtoisie, car besoing n’a point de loy” (119:8-13) [I excuse myself, says this Soul, before all you who dwell in nothingness and who have fallen from love into this state of being, for I have made very big with my many words this book, which yet will seem very small to you, if I know you rightly. Now by your gracious leave excuse me, for necessity knows no law (146)]. Claiming that those who have attained the annihilation of their souls will perceive the book as “moult petit,” the Soul indicates that the Mirouer is of little use to them. As the Soul continues her address to those among her readers who have attained the annihilation of their souls, she reveals that the book’s worthlessness is inexorably linked to Reason’s role in the Mirouer:

Je ne savoie a qui dire mon entente. Or cognois je, pour vostre pais et pour le vray, qu’il est de bas. Couardise l’a mainé, qui a Raison a rendue l’entente par response d’Amour aux demandes de Raison; et si a esté fait par humaine science et humain sens; et humaine raison et humain sens ne

104 Scholars generally agree that the final chapters of the book (chapters 123-139) were added after the Mirouer was initially condemned by the bishop of Cambrai in 1306. In these chapters, Porete does not include any dialogue but speaks directly to her readers, recounting “certain considerations” that she had reflected on during her own spiritual progress to “the land of freedom” (154). As Newman explains, these final chapters draw on “more traditional genres: exegesis of Gospel passages, hagiography (the legend of Mary Magdalene), and spiritual autobiography (how she herself entered the ‘Land of Freedom’)” (“The Mirror and the Rose” 120, fn 21).
scevent rien d’amour denentraine, ne denentraine amour de divine science. (119: 13-19)

[I did not know to whom to make my intention known. But now I know, to set you at peace and to tell the truth, that it is base. It was Cowardice who guided it, and who surrendered this intention to Reason through Love’s replies to Reason’s questions; and so it has been made by human knowledge and human intelligence; and human reason and human intelligence know nothing of interior love, nor does interior love known anything of divine knowledge. (146-147)]

Marguerite’s book is therefore characterized by the limitations of human faculties: reason, knowledge, and intelligence. Far removed from the divine and the knowledge possessed by the divine, the Soul considers the book “bas.” In addition, the book is incapable of containing anything of the divine because of the limitations of human expression: the Soul continues, “Mon coeur est tiré si hault et avalé si bas, que je n’y puis actaindre; car tout ce que l’en peut de Dieu dire ne escrire, ne que l’en en peut penser, qui plus est que n’est dire, est assez mieulx mentir que ce n’est vray dire” (119:19-22) [My heart is drawn up so high and plunged down so deep that I cannot reach it; for everything which one can say or write of God, or, what is more than saying, than one can think of him is far more lying than it is speaking the truth (147)]. The inability of human words to convey the divine is so profound that speaking or writing of God is more akin to lying than speaking the truth. The Mirouer, therefore, is ultimately revealed to be incapable of relating anything but lies concerning its divine subject matter—the subject matter to which the previous 118 chapters have been devoted.

Before concluding this first version of the text with verses in praise of the annihilated Soul, Marguerite thus appears to repudiate the book in its entirety. However, in the last passage of chapter 119, Marguerite reminds the reader of her earlier claim that
Love was the true author of the *Mirouer*: “J’ay dit, dit ceste Ame, que Amour l’a fait escrire par humaine science, et par le vouloir de la mutacion de mon entendement, dont j’estoie encombree, comme il appert par ce livre; car Amour l’a fait, en descombrant mon esperit parmy ces trois dons [the death of the Soul to sin, nature, and spirit], dont nous avons parlé” (119:23-27) [I have said, this Soul says, that Love has caused it to be written by human knowledge, and by the will of the transformation of my understanding, with which I was burdened down, as it appears in this book; for Love has made it by unburdening my spirit through these three gifts [the death of the Soul to sin, nature, and spirit] of which we have spoken (147)]. Despite the fact that it was written “par humaine science,” it was God who caused it to be so. It was also God that caused the Soul to be unburdened of “le vouloir de la mutacion de mon entendement.” As indicated here, then, the Soul’s understanding has been transformed under God’s direction through the course of the book as the Soul has progressed towards its own annihilation. As the Soul has transformed into a vehicle for God’s will, her understanding of the book has also transformed: “Et pource dis je que il est de bas et tres petit, combien que grant il me semblast au commencement de la monstre de cest estre” (11927-29) [And so I say that it is base and very little, however great it seemed to me when I began to make this state of being known (147)]. This concluding remark reveals that the book, founded on Reason and human knowledge, is indeed another intermediary that was temporarily necessary on the Soul’s path to becoming a free and annihilated soul, but is now no longer needed. Indeed, it is worthy of the contempt with which the Soul regards it, for now that the Soul
has become free and God’s will works through her, the book is nothing but “bas et tres petit.”

Because of its reliance on reason, a limited human faculty that cannot comprehend the divine, the book can never truly convey the truth about God. However, as Marguerite demonstrates throughout the *Mirouer*, intermediaries such as reason and her book are necessary—although temporary—intermediaries for the soul who has not attained its own annihilation and become free. By providing the model of the Soul, who is transformed through a gradual spiritual progression over the course of the *Mirouer*, Marguerite instructs her readers on the necessity of ultimately moving beyond reason and even her own text in order to attain salvation.

Of particular interest to this study is the fact that the insular transmission of the text introduced additional levels of intermediacy to Marguerite’s text: her text was translated and glossed by fifteenth-century English readers, who then disseminated the book to others. Marguerite’s text circulated in England in two translations: a Middle English version translated from a French manuscript by an individual known only by the initials ‘M.N.’ in the early-fifteenth century and the translation from Middle English into Latin by the monk Richard Methley at the end of the fifteenth century. Both texts include extensive glosses provided by the translators: M.N. added a preface and fifteen explanatory glosses, and Methley included his own glosses when he translated the *Mirouer* from the Middle English.105 As one of very few texts that record a woman’s

mystical experiences that was originally written in the vernacular on the continent and then translated into the English vernacular, Marguerite’s text provides unique insight into the insular reception of a female-authored continental mystical text. In addition, it provides evidence of how English readers—both the translators and their readers—approached, read, and responded to Marguerite’s complex and often confounding text.

The discussion below will examine M.N.’s translation and glosses of Marguerite’s text into the English vernacular. In her important study of M.N.’s glosses, first noted at the outset of this chapter, Kerby-Fulton argues that M.N. “added glosses (and also emended) Porete’s texts most often at key points of doctrinal pressure associated with Free Spiritism,” the heresy associated with the belief that a soul can become one with God and in such a state can ignore moral law. She further notes that “the positioning and content of the glosses [are] persistently doctrinal in concern.” While she notes that the glosses provide evidence that M.N.’s main goal was “to teach a style of ‘safe reading’

di storia e letteratura, 1986) 243-355. All references to this text will be to this edition and will include the page number(s) followed by the line number(s). For an important study on the insular reception of Porete’s text and M.N.’s edition of the text, see Nicholas Watson, “Melting into God the English Way: Deification in the Middle English Version of Marguerite Porete’s Mirouer des simples âmes anienties,” Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996) 19-49. Watson includes in an appendix to this article a discussion of Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 221, the manuscript that contains Methley’s Latin version of the Mirouer, and a brief analysis of Methley’s glosses and translation. For a summary and analysis of each gloss with particular attention given to the Mirouer’s orthodoxy and relation to Marguerite’s trial as well as to differences between the French and Middle English texts, see Michael G. Sargent, “Le Mirouer des simples âmes and the English Mystical Tradition,” Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposion Kloster Engelberg 1984, ed. Kurt Ruh (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986) 443-465.

106 Kerby-Fulton 282. This definition of the Free Spirit heresy is based on that provided by Lerner 1.

107 Kerby-Fulton 282.
that will protect the reader’s orthodoxy throughout the book.” Kerby-Fulton’s main concern is to analyze what details in particular concerned M.N. and how his suspicions related to anxiety over unorthodox views—particularly as they related to women’s mysticism—in Ricardian England.\textsuperscript{108} Rather than focus on the content of his glosses and what the glosses say about M.N.’s concerns about orthodoxy, as Kerby-Fulton cogently does, in what follows I focus on M.N.’s didacticism—specifically, how he instructed his readers to read the text themselves and how he positioned himself as an instructional intermediary between the text and the reader.

As demonstrated below, M.N.’s translation and glosses reveal that despite his admiration for the text, M.N. struggled with both the complexity of the text’s language and the ideas it contained. Moreover, his glosses in particular reflect his concern about how his readers would respond to the text—concerns which caused him to provide guidance to his readers regarding how to best read and comprehend Marguerite’s book. These glosses thus provide direct evidence of one reader of the text, as well as indirect evidence regarding the audience of M.N.’s Middle English translation of Marguerite’s text. Additionally, M.N.’s glosses demonstrate that he shares Marguerite’s particular concern about how the text would be understood by its readers. Much like Marguerite, M.N. therefore attempts to instruct them how best to do so.

M.N.’s struggles with the text are particularly evident in his approach to translating as well as in his sixty-seven line prologue. His translation is unwaveringly literal, following the words of the original exactly; as Nicholas Watson has argued,

\textsuperscript{108} Kerby-Fulton 295.
M.N.’s procedures as a translator are “generally as crabbedly literal as possible…occasionally to the point of failing to make sense even on the level of syntax.”\(^{109}\) M.N.’s approach to translating the text may have stemmed from his previous inability to translate the text appropriately: he explains at the opening of his prologue that he “many þeeris goon wrote it out of French into Englisch aftir my lewde kunnynge, in hope þat bi þe grace of God it schulde profite þoo deuout soules þat schulden rede it. Þis was forsoþe myn entente. But now I am stired to laboure it aþen newe, for bicause I am enfourmed þat some wordis þerof haue be mystake” (247: 4-8). While M.N. employs a humility topos here, he indicates that the fault may also lie with his audience who “mystake” what he has translated. As he continues, M.N. expresses his hope that his readers will benefit from a second translation:

\[
\text{Þerfore if God wole, I schal declare þo wordis more openli; for þouȝ loue declar þo poynites in þe same booke, it is but schortli spoken, and may be taken oþirwise þan it is iment of hem þat reden it sodeynli and taken no ferþir hede. Þerfore suche wordis to be twies iopened, it wole be þe more of audience, and so bi grace of oure Lord goode God it schal þe more profite to þe auditoures. (247: 8-13)}
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Again, M.N. suggests that readers are (partly) at fault for not fully comprehending the text because of their hurried reading of the text that does not include the careful consideration the text requires. He evidently believes that readers must engage closely and actively to understand the text—a fact that Marguerite herself makes evident throughout her text.

\(^{109}\) Watson, “Melting into God the English Way” 42-43.
M.N. suggests that even when readers closely engage with the text, they may not entirely understand it—as discussed above, this is a concern that Marguerite shares. This failure stems not only from the readers’ own shortcomings but also the complexity of the text itself. As his prologue progresses, M.N. indicates that he fears he will once again be unable to successfully translate the text because of the difficulty of its subject matter and expression: “But boþe þe firste tyme and now I haue greet drede to do it, for þe boke is of hiþe diuine maters and of hiþe goostli felynges, & kernyngli and ful mystili it is spoken” (247: 13-15). Although he employs a typical humility topos immediately following the above lines, which he begins by declaring that he is “a creature riþt wrecchid and vnable to do eny such werk” (247: 15-16), he shortly thereafter reiterates the real difficulties presented by the text: “Þis is to seie, þat loue in þis boke leieþ to soules þe touches of his diuine werkis priueli hid vndir derk speche, for þei schulde taaste þe depper þe drauþtes of his loue and drinke, and also to make hem haue þe more cleer insiþt in diuine vnderstandinges to diuine loue & declare it hemself” (248: 19-22). M.N. was not simply hiding under a rhetorical stance of humility, but recognized that “cleer insiþt in diuine vnderstandinges to diuine loue” were not readily apparent in the book but “hid vndir derk speche” that must be studied carefully.

M.N.’s fifteen glosses provide evidence that he did he did not believe the text was easily understood, but required explanation. Indeed, he devotes a significant portion of his glosses to instructing the readers on how to read the text generally as well as specific passages particularly. Early in the text, M.N. expresses in his third gloss his concern that
his readers will be confused by not only the passage he is translating, but also the entirety of the text: “O, þese wordis semen ful straunge to þe rederis […] And not oonli þese wordis, but also many mo oþir wordis þat ben written before and aftir, semen fable or errour, or hard to vndirstande” (256:15-18). He follows this concern with instruction to his readers to reserve critical judgment of the text:

But for þe loue of God, þe reders, demeþ not to soone, for I am siker þat who so rediþ ouer þis booke bi good avisement twies or þries and be disposed to þo same felynges, þei shulen vndirstonde it wel ynowþ. And þouþ þei be not disposed to þo felynges, þitt hem schal þenke þat it is al wel yseid. But who so takeþ þe nakid wordis of scriptures and leueþ þe sentence, he may liþtli erre. (256:18-23)

Underscoring the difficulty of the text, M.N. thus encourages his readers to read the text “bi good avisement twies or þries” to glean its meaning. However, calling to mind Marguerite’s statements that not everyone who will read the text will comprehend it, M.N. distinguishes between those who “be disposed to þo same felynges” and those who are not. Also like Marguerite, he does not discount those who are not disposed to the spiritual experiences described in Marguerite’s text; rather, he believes that they will at least “þenke þat it is al wel yseid.”

Throughout his glosses to his translation of the Mirouer, M.N. emphasizes the need for his readers to closely engage with the text. After providing a nine-line gloss for a sentence that he found particularly confusing, M.N. explains that his readers must perform this careful consideration themselves throughout their reading of the text: he instructs, “Riþt þus alle suche wordis most be declared wiþinne hemsilf þat reden þis
boke” (304:35-36). He goes on to explain that the text demands the readers’ close attention so that they can attain the divine understanding it offers: “For þese derke wordis and hiȝe maters derkli spoken in þis writynge, it is don for to make þe soules of þe rederis þat ben disposed to goostli felinges to circuie and enserche bi sotilte of wit to come to þese diuine vnderstandinges, bi þe whiche þei may be þe more able to receyue and folowe þese heuenli usages of Goddes werk” (304:36-305:3). M.N. thus explains that the difficulty of the text’s language and the complexity of the text’s ideas are meant to encourage the readers’ active engagement with the text. It is only through the readers’ employment of their “sotilte of wit” that they will arrive at the “diuine vnnderstandinges” contained in the Mirouer.

The “sotilte of wit” that M.N. endorses here is neither purely intellectual nor academic. As M.N. makes clear in an earlier gloss, he prizes religious experience over scholars’ learning, proving himself an apt student of Marguerite’s text. This gloss, his sixth, is prompted by a shift in the allegorical dialogue from actives to contemplatives: while the previous chapter had concerned actives, Reason explains that he will now ask a question “for the sake of contemplatives, who always long to grow in divine knowledge” (11:22). At this point in the text, M.N. silently adds the following response from Love: “þei ben yuel constrained, seiþ loue, to þat þat þou seist” (261:1). Additionally, M.N. inserts the following gloss:

As who seiþ, þe verrei contemplatiues schulde haue no desire, but plaunte it al in diuine wil of God, and knyttte her willes al hole in him to his wil, and haue no proper wil ne desire, but willen parfitli þe diuine wil of God,
for as bi riʒ, þe contemplatyues schulde passe þe state of scolers, as maistres of diuinite ben passed scholes. (261:1-6)

Not only changing the text but also commenting on it signifies that this is a subject about which M.N. is particularly concerned. Indeed, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton astutely argues that these additions, which indicate that M.N. “is impatient with ‘scholastic’ approaches—those, that is, that privilege reasoning over religious experience,” provide “a clue to M.N.’s real interest and agenda in promoting *The Mirror* to a broader audience”: advancing the Carthusian contemplative project through a text that would reach a vernacular audience. Kerby-Fulton’s argument is certainly cogent, and I would like to extend it by pointing to an earlier gloss that demonstrates that M.N. clearly wishes his readers to move beyond their reliance on reason when reading his translation of Marguerite’s text. M.N. inserts this fourth gloss after a particularly troubling statement by Marguerite in which she seems to encourage the rejection of integral aspects of a Christian life by stating that annihilated souls neither desire nor despise “ne messe ne sermon, ne jeune ne oraison” (9:20-21) [Mass or sermon, fasting or prayer (9:20)]. In his gloss, M.N. exhorts his readers to not read the text literally, but to understand the spiritual and divine sense behind the text’s words: “Þerfore þis þat loue seiþ, þat þese soules ne desiren masses, ne sermons, fastinges ne orisons, it schulde not be so ytake þat þei schulde leue it vndoon. He were to blynde þat wolde take it in þat wise; but all suche wordis in þis booke moste be take goostli and diuineli” (259:8-12). In his instructions to understand the words “goostli and diuineli,” M.N. indicates that reason will not serve

110 Kerby-Fulton 291.
those who truly wish to comprehend the text. To gain the “diuine vnderstandinges” that he encourages his readers to discover in the book, they must not be “to blynde” by their reliance on reason, literalness, or scholastic approaches, but must be open to receiving understanding through “goostli and diuineli” means.

The last glosses M.N. appends to his translation of the *Mirouer* in particular demonstrate that he wishes to teach his readers how to read and comprehend the text at its outset so that they may do so independently throughout the text’s remaining chapters. In his thirteenth gloss, he states that he will no longer make additions to the text: “And now I schal stynte of my wordis but if it be þe more neede. I haue answerid to þo poyntes þat haue be mistake aftir my lewid kunnynge” (305:25-27). He evidently believes that he has addressed those points of the text that are most troublesome, and that the readers can therefore apply his glosses to the rest of the text—which continues for another seventy chapters in the French text.\textsuperscript{111} However, M.N. includes another gloss shortly thereafter. In his fourteenth gloss, M.N. notes that he had not intended to append anything further to the text: “A fewe wordis mo I seie in þis booke to brynge ȝou in þe weie, not wiþstondinge þat I was in purpos afor to haue glosed no more” (314:4-6). This gloss provides the opportunity for M.N. to reiterate his readers’ responsibility both to gloss the difficult words and passages to follow and to read the text numerous times in order to understand its meaning: “Lo, ȝe þat studien þis booke, þus ȝe most wiþynne ȝouresilf glose suche derke wordis, and if ȝe may not come soone to þe vndirstondinge þerof, offriþ

\textsuperscript{111} M.N.’s thirteenth gloss occurs in chapter 69 of 139 chapters in the French text, which corresponds to chapter 8 of 30 in M.N.’s version.
it mekeli up to God, and bi custom of ofte redynge þeron 3e schulen come þerto.” (314:1-4). Having modeled how to gloss the text and thus fully comprehend it, M.N. provides another instructional layer to Marguerite’s *Mirouer* by adopting a didactic role himself.

While M.N. may have taken particular care in translating and glossing the text as well as in instructing his readers how to fully understand the text, he did not appear to have any knowledge that the *Mirouer* was written by either a woman or a heretic. Indeed, none of the translations indicates that the translator was aware that the author of the mystical allegorical dialogue was a woman or that the text had been condemned as heretical. It was not until 1965 that the authorship of the *Mirouer* and its condemnation as heretical were discovered. This lack of connection between author and text allowed for the text to circulate widely despite the fact that Marguerite was the only medieval woman writer to be burned for heresy: including the three manuscripts of M.N.’s translation, the *Mirouer* is extant in four languages (Middle English, Latin, Italian, and French) totaling thirteen manuscripts. As McGinn notes, this makes Marguerite’s text “among the more widely disseminated of the vernacular mystical texts of the Middle Ages.”

The text’s transmission within England may have been occurred despite suspicion that surrounded the text, even in its anonymous form: as Kerby-Fulton argues, “this was a book that, even in utter anonymity, recreated new suspicions” and would have raised flags for reasons such as the need for glosses; the gendered, courtly language that would have associated the text with women’s mysticism; and knowledge in England of

continental heresy trials involving Free Spirit doctrine, that was in turn associated with female contemplatives. One consideration that Kerby-Fulton does not take into account is that the Mirouer was able to circulate without its translators and readers knowing of its authorship because Marguerite does not identify herself within her text. She neither provides her name nor indicates that she is a woman. The only direct description of her occurs when the Soul describes the author of the text as “a poor suppliant creature,” as discussed above. Although the Soul uses the female pronoun in reference to the author in these passages, this is due to the gender associated with the French noun rather than as an indication of the gender of the author herself. Both Watson and Alexandra Barratt have remarked on the relationship between the text’s circulation in England and its lack of known authorship: Watson posits that the Mirouer “did not circulate as a woman’s book, if only because it was assumed to be by a man,” while Barratt notes the Mirouer “was not perceived as a woman’s text, but this very fact is significant for it indicates the difficulty of assigning gender to texts in the absence of external evidence.” However, I argue that the Mirouer’s circulation in England points to something larger than the fact that it was not pigeon-holed as a “a woman’s book” or “a woman’s text” and indicates something more than “the difficulty of assigning gender”: Marguerite’s text was able to circulate because the author’s gender was unknown. It was because the text was anonymous that it was able to circulate so widely. Predominantly, texts written by women did not circulate widely during the Middle Ages; it was only

113 Kerby-Fulton 276 and 261-262.
114 Watson, “Melting into God the English Way” 26.
those texts written by women that were clearly authorized by a male authority that fared better reception. Marguerite may very well have avoided identifying herself or her gender so that her text could be received on the basis of its merits and the insight into the divine that it possessed, rather than on any association with its author.

Both the male Middle English translator and the female continental writer believe that the Mirouer has crucial information to convey to its readers, but they struggle with the medium of the written text to convey such important divine truths. Faced with the difficulty of instructing their readers on how to achieve greater understanding of the divine and therefore attain salvation, M.N. and Marguerite adopt didactic strategies that provide models for their readers. Using her text to teach her readers to progress beyond reason in order to embrace a more divine understanding, Marguerite employs the allegorical figure of Reason to demonstrate the inability of those who rely on reason to achieve understanding of the divine and the figure of the Soul (who rejects reason as well as all other intermediaries) as a model of salvation for her readers. Similarly, M.N. provides a model through his glosses on how to carefully read and therefore understand the text’s complex meaning so that they may comprehend the Mirouer’s divine lesson. Just as M.N. teaches his readers to learn from his glosses until they no longer depend on him to explain the text, Marguerite teaches her readers to ultimately reject the very book she wrote as they move forward in their spiritual progression. As demonstrated in the next chapter, the ineffability of God and salvation, as well as the impossibility of conveying truth about either, are the very things that Julian of Norwich is confronted with in her text as she, too, brings a message of salvation to her readers.
CHAPTER 3
IN DIALOGUE: DIDACTICISM AND EXPLICATION
IN JULIAN OF NORWICH’S A REVELATION OF LOVE

A great deal of recent scholarship on Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love* has focused on the relationship between the two extant versions of her text: the Short Text and Long Text. Whether attempting to explain changes and omissions from one text to the next or discussing Julian’s evolution as author and theologian, numerous scholars have examined these distinct yet related accounts of her visions and her meditations upon those visions. In one such analysis, Felicity Riddy focuses on Julian’s recording of her own authorial development in the Long Text:

[...] the differences between the surviving texts of *A Revelation of Love* can be related to Julian’s evolving sense of herself as an author under a divine imperative to write ‘for the profyte of many oder.’ A private experience which was originally part of a personal psycho-history thus enters the public domain as a book. This is of course what happens with much writing; an unusual aspect of Julian’s work is that this process is written into it. Insofar as *A Revelation of Love* records this transformation, it is a text about self-textualization.\(^{116}\)

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Riddy bases her argument on what she sees as the “archaeological layers” and “complex signification” of Julian’s increasingly convoluted meditations in the Long Text in addition to the changing form of the text itself, signified by the inclusion of chapter headings, a contents list, and cross-references. In her examination of the two texts, Riddy trenchantly observes that “the long version is a record of a mind in process, not just an achieved statement.”

Indeed, as this chapter argues, the Long Text focuses continually on Julian’s personal attempts to comprehend her visions: it is not simply an account of the revelation she gained through her visions, but rather a detailed narration of how she came to know and understand that revelation. This focus of the Long Text stands in stark contrast to that of the Short Text; as Lynn Staley describes the Short Text, it is “for the most part, a record of the visions themselves and reads like the testimony of a singular experience.”

The question thus arises why Julian chose to record this process; why did she focus on her intellectual, theological, and personal evolution throughout the visions rather than develop the Long Text into a straightforward account of the revelation? In answer to this question, Riddy posits that Julian was influenced by certain individuals in her community who collaborated with her in revising and editing her text; therefore, the process of Julian’s textualization was “not solitary but social, not isolated but collaborative.”

This chapter extends this answer by further considering how Julian viewed her relation to

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117 Riddy 104.
118 Riddy 104.
120 Riddy 109.
her readers, and how her understanding of her self intersected with her understanding of her text’s audience.

I will argue here that, in the Long Text, Julian saw herself in the role of not only visionary and exegete of her own revelation, but also teacher. She thus records the process of her developing understanding in order to provide a model for her readers: by demonstrating how she came to understand her visions, she instructs her readers on how to respond to and meditate on the visions themselves. As this chapter demonstrates, Julian’s didacticism is particularly evident in her response to Christ’s words in the second half of her sixteen revelations. These last eight revelations include numerous oral visions—as Julian describes them, visions received “by worde formyde in my understondyng”—that have received significantly less critical attention than those visions she perceives visually.121 In these oral visions, Julian forms much of her theology by translating, interpreting, and explicating Christ’s statements to her. By performing these acts on Christ’s words, Julian becomes what she describes as the mene, or intermediary, through which her visions can be understood, a bridge between God’s ineffability and

121 Julian of Norwich, A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, ed. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. and James Walsh S.J., Studies and Texts 35, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978) 9:29-30. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references to the Short and Long texts will be to Colledge and Walsh’s edition, which includes the only extant manuscript of Julian’s Short Text (London, MS British Museum Add. 37790 (also known as the Amherst manuscript), as well as the Paris manuscript of the Long Text (MS Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds anglais 40). References to the Long Text will include the chapter number(s) followed by the line number(s); references to the Short Text will be indicated by the letters ST before the chapter and line citation. Additionally, I note here that I use the term “visions” to describe all the mystical experiences that Julian recounts, whether they are oral or visual. This follows scholarly convention as well as the example of Julian herself: she describes her experiences as “shewings” throughout her text.
human comprehension. As an instructional bridge between the human and the divine, Julian daringly adopts a role forbidden to women in an effort to instruct her readers on how to arrive at an understanding of the word of God on their own, independent of the Church, its teachers and hierarchy, and all others.

This chapter will first examine how Julian perceives her audience and her relationship to that audience, with particular attention to how those perceptions are guided by her beliefs regarding universal salvation. The next section will then analyze the number of binary oppositions that Julian emphasizes and explores in her text. In particular, this section will consider Julian’s complex understanding of *menes* and her argument for an unmediated relationship with God. The concluding portion of this chapter will examine how Julian provides instruction and a model for interpreting and comprehending her text and the visions it contains. This portion will first consider the didacticism underlying the visions she perceives through her sight before turning to the didacticism of the visions she perceives orally.

Very little is known about Julian and the composition of her text other than the few details offered within her text and from contemporary sources. Both the Short and Long Texts relate sixteen visions that she received when she was “xxxth yere old and a halfe” and experiencing “a bodily sicknes” for seven days (3:2-3). She does not provide the dates for when she composed either the Short or Long Texts, but does state in Chapter 2 of the Long Text that she was given the visions “the yer of our lord a thousannde and three hundered and lxxiiij, the xiij of May” (2:3-4). Later in the text, she provides clues for the composition of her Long Text, explaining in Chapter 86 that she only understood
the visions’ meaning “xv yere after and mor” and in Chapter 51 that she did not comprehend the most difficult of the visions—a vision which is not included in the Short Text—“for twenty yere after the tyme of the shewyng saue thre monthys” (86:14 and 51:86). Most scholars have thus dated the Short Text to shortly after she experienced the visions in 1373, and the Long Text twenty years following in the mid-1390s.¹²²

Julian’s visionary experience and the texts that relate that experience reflect some aspects of contemporary religious culture and literature, but in other ways are unusual. As her text relates, Julian’s visionary experience is initiated when, believing that she is about to die, a curate places a cross before her and instructs her to “looke there vpon and comfort thee ther with” (3:23-24). The figure of Christ transforms before her eyes, vividly reenacting Christ’s passion, and this central image underlies the entirety of her visions. As Julian explains, her visions are in response to “thre gyftes by the grace of god” for which she prayed at some earlier date: “The first was mynd of the passion. The secund was bodilie sicknes. The thurde was to haue of godes gyfte thre woundys” (2:4-6). She later explains that the three “woundys” are “the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion and the wound of willfull longing to god” (2:42-43). These elements of Julian’s visionary experience—the visual reenactment of Christ’s suffering and her three prayers—indicate that her text is grounded in the affective tradition; as Denise N. Baker explains, these elements “reveal the extent of Julian’s familiarity with

¹²² One notable exception is Nicholas Watson, who argues that the Short Text was written ten to fifteen years later than generally supposed and that the Long Text was therefore composed during the second decade of the fifteenth century. See Nicholas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love,” Speculum 68 (1993): 637-683.
the tenets and practices of late medieval affective spirituality.” However, other aspects of Julian’s text are not so clearly aligned with the affective tradition. Much of her text does not focus on an affective response to Christ’s suffering, but on an intellectual consideration of some of Christianity’s most difficult questions, such as the nature of sin and the relation between the human and the divine. The visions themselves are often overshadowed by the extensive questioning and thoughtful consideration Julian devotes to them in an effort to understand and explain their meaning. In addition, Julian explains that the visions, not simply vivid visual experiences, were received in three ways: “by bodily syght, and by worde formyde in my understondyng, and by goostely sight” (9:29-30). Thus, Julian’s text develops into something quite different than what one would expect from the affective experience that initiates her visions.

Moreover, the written account of a visionary experience by an English woman is itself unusual. Textual evidence indicates that women’s accounts of visionary experiences did not circulate in England, in large part because visionary experiences were not encouraged among women; as Watson observes,

The body of insular works for women religious that survives from this period [...] is full of material intended to help readers achieve an intense imaginative identification with Christ and his Passion in the context of meditation. Like their Continental counterparts, English nuns and anchoresses were clearly encouraged by their male directors to cultivate a sense of the immediate presence of Christ, their spouse and lover, and a strongly emotional response to that presence. Yet the same works are for the most part silent about specifically visionary experiences—and on the rare occasions these do receive some notice, it is invariably negative.  

Watson touches on two important points here. First, while affective experiences focused on the presence of Christ were encouraged for English religious women, visionary experiences were not similarly embraced and were even discouraged. Second, as indicated by the contrasting attitudes towards women’s visionary experiences in extant texts from the two regions, the religious cultures on the Continent and in England were markedly different for women. On the Continent, Marguerite Porete was one of a number of women religious and laity who not only experienced visions but also recounted them in written texts, and were able to do so because of a relatively sympathetic environment for both having such experiences and writing them down. England did not share in this number of women visionaries and writers, and Julian was writing before many written English translations of female visionary writers from the Continent were available, since they were predominantly made in the fifteenth century (although texts may have been orally transmitted before written manuscripts were made).  

125 Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love” 646-647.  
126 For detailed analyses of the transmission of texts by and about Continental holy women in England, see the essays in Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996). For a more specific consideration of Julian’s text in relation to the transmission of
visionaries were introduced into English religious culture, Julian is one of very few known English women visionaries as well as one of the small number of English women who composed texts.

Despite the unusual aspects of her text and her vision, Julian does not stress her singularity; indeed, she emphasizes her equality and communion with her readers. At the very outset of her text, Julian makes explicit that she holds no moral or spiritual superiority over her readers, but is their equal. Rejecting the notion that her visions distinguish her from her audience, she instructs her readers that she is a representative and model for them all:

I pray yow alle for gods sake, and counceyle yow for yowre awne profyght, þat ye leue the beholdyng of a wrec that it was schewde to, and myghtely, wysely, and mekely behold in god that of hys curteyse loue and endlesse goodnesse wolld shew it generally in comfort of vs alle. For it is goddes wylle that e take it with a grete ioy and lykyng as Jhesu had shewde it to yow. (8:35-40)

Including this statement within the discussion of her first vision, Julian establishes important aspects of how she views her readers and their relationships with her, her visions, and her text. Nicholas Watson aptly describes this passage as a “vital passage of hermeneutic reflection” which provides “two different hermeneutic instructions. First, we are to read every reference to Julian as indicating Christian humanity as a whole

By investigating this passage in further detail than what Watson offers, it is clear here that Julian instructs her audience to do so by describing herself as a “wrech” and thereby dismissing any notion of a higher status due to her roles as visionary and writer. Instead she equates herself with her readers, using the first-person plural pronoun “vs” and noting that God showed her the visions for the general comfort of all. Therefore, I argue, Julian not only claims to be representative of all readers in her being shown the visions, but also suggests that she is a model for the proper response to the visions, instructing her audience to accept the visions with “ioy and lykyng” as she herself does. Watson notes that the second hermeneutic instruction in this passage is that “it is God’s will that we should ‘take’—that is, appropriate—the revelation as though it is each of us who receives it.”

Positing that Julian’s belief in the universality of her revelation is reflected in her view of her written account, he claims that “for the slow, deliberate, and prayerful reader, the written Revelation of Love must be, or be meant to become, the showing.” By instructing her readers to receive the visions “for yowre awne profyght” and to treat them “as Jhesu had shewde it to yow,” Julian certainly invites her readers to appropriate the visions as their own. However, Watson does not explore fully how the readers may “appropriate” the revelation as his or her own. While this passage provides valuable insight into the relationship that unites Julian, her readers, and her text—her written account of her visions is to be understood as the reader’s own

128 Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic” 95.
129 Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic” 96.
revelation—this chapter will further consider how Julian perceived her audience and how her readers were to participate actively in the revelation’s meaning, thereby making it his or her own.

In the next chapter of the first revelation, Julian reinforces the idea that she does not consider herself unique or superior but rather believes that she is a representative of Christian humanity in general. Both minimizing her individuality and emphasizing her unity with her fellow Christians, she reminds her readers that “yf I looke syngulery to my selfe I am ryȝt nought; but in generall I am, I hope, in onehede of cheryte, with alle myn evyn cristen. For in thys oned stondyth the lyfe of alle mankynd that shalle be savyd” (9:9-11). Julian chooses not to look at herself “syngulery” because it only reveals her insignificance as “nought;” however, when she considers herself generally, she is joined in “onehede of cheryte” with her “evyn cristen.” Julian uses this last term frequently throughout her text, indicating a broad audience for her Long Text: as Watson notes, Julian directs her revised text to “a notionally universal public.” While Watson focuses on the implications of a universal audience as part of his concern regarding universal salvation and its relation to vernacular theory in pre-Reformation England, it is also important to stress here the shift occurring on a more local level, within the context of how Julian developed as an author and modified her perception of her audience between the composition of her Short and Long Texts. In this light, it is important to

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note that these references to a universal audience represent a significant shift from the readership Julian envisioned while writing her Short Text. As Frederick Bauerschmidt demonstrates in his analysis of changes from the Short Text to the Long Text, the latter does not include references to her audience as contemplatives, which occur twice in the Short Text.\textsuperscript{131} It thus seems apparent that Julian’s perception of her audience became more inclusive as she continued to meditate on her visionary experience.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know the constitution of Julian’s actual audience. This difficulty arises in large part from the lack of surviving medieval manuscripts of both her Short and Long Texts: there is a single manuscript of the short version, which is contained in a devotional anthology compiled around 1450, and there are no extant medieval copies of the complete longer version. The earliest manuscripts of the latter text date from nearly two centuries after Julian wrote down her visions: the manuscripts which contain the long version all date from the seventeenth century and seem to have been copied by English recusant nuns in France. Scholars who have attempted to wrestle with the question of the Long Text’s actual readership, such as Watson and Hugh Kempster, have focused their attention on what can be gleaned from the extant manuscripts. Watson analyzes the reading instructions at the end of the seventeenth-century Sloane manuscript, which were probably added by a cleric and not authorial. He argues that while the passage “seeks to restrict readers” in its opening lines to those who, as the text reads, “will be his faithfull lovers, and to those that will submitt

them to the feith of holy church and obey the holesom vnderstandyng and teching of the men that be of vertuous life, sadde age and profound lernyng,” (85:135), Watson points out that the passage also “links Julian’s supporters to a wider fourteenth-century movement of visionary religiosity” by claiming that Jesus “shall shew to all clen soules” how “all is according to holy scripture” (86:135). Watson’s analysis therefore suggests that Julian’s actual audience may have included members of the pious laity who were interested in religious visionary experiences. Kempster corroborates Watson’s claims in his analysis of the Westminster text, “a heavily edited, partial copy” of the Long Text which was included in a devotional anthology around 1500. While this manuscript has received little scholarly attention, Kempster argues that the text may reveal important information about the early reception of Julian’s work. Specifically, Kempster claims that the editor of the Westminster text may purposefully have engaged in extensive editing and simplification because the editor was not directing the text to “ex professo contemplatives” but to “an intended audience of active lay people” who would not have a contemplative’s spiritual director to iron out the theological difficulties it presented.


134 Kempster 268 and 272.
In addition to manuscript evidence, Julian’s role as an anchoress should be considered when attempting to reconstruct her audience, although it has not received sufficient attention in studies of Julian’s audience. Significantly, it is probable that Julian chose to become an anchoress after receiving her visions; although she had become an anchoress in Norwich by 1394, it is unknown what her status was preceding this date (including when she had her visions in 1373) and most scholars believe that she was a laywoman before entering the anchorhold. I argue that she may have chosen this devotional path because of the liminal space it afforded. This aspect of the anchoritic life has been considered by Ann Warren, who argues, “Encouraged, applauded, and supported by society and church, [anchorites] undertook their solitary life by encamping in the heart of the community. Enclosed and yet exposed, hidden and yet visible, shadows behind the curtains of their access windows, medieval English anchorites were

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135 Julian’s status as an anchoress in 1394 is established by the *incipit* attached to the only extant manuscript of the Short Text (see fn. 121 above), in which the scribe describes Julian as still living and an anchoress at this date: “Here es a visionn schewed be the goodenes of god to a deuoute womann, and hir name es Julyan, that is recluse att Norwyche and 3itt ys onn lyfe, anno domini millesimo CCC CCCCC xiij” (ST 1:1-3).

136 Benedicta Ward first advanced the argument that previous scholarship was incorrect to assume that she was a Benedictine nun before she became an anchoress, as had long been considered; see Benedicta Ward, “Julian the Solitary” *Julian Reconsidered*, eds. Kenneth Leech and Benedicta Ward (Oxford: Fairacres Press, 1988) 11-35. Ward’s argument has been generally accepted and, as Liz H. McAvoy notes, modern scholarship “is now tending towards a reading of Julian as probably a lay woman from the gentry class or the lower nobility who had been living in a domestic setting within the world prior to enclosure” (Liz H. McAvoy, “And Thou, to whom This Booke Shall Come’: Julian of Norwich and Her Audience, Past, Present, and Future,” *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, eds. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, and Roger Ellis (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005) 102).
daily reminders of the proper focus of Christian existence.”

As scholars such as Warren, Norman Tanner, and E.A. Jones have demonstrated, rather than being entirely secluded from the community in which their anchorholds resided, anchorites were often important actors within the community. Their engagement with the community took such forms as resolving disputes, schooling children, acting as a conduit of information, and providing a model of the devotional life in a central and stable location within the community. Anchorites, living outside the priesthood and the established religious orders but nevertheless devoted to a religious ideal and literally anchored to a church, inhabited a space that could allow both the individual, contemplative devotion that gave rise to visions and the dissemination of accounts of those visions among those who lived outside the confines of the anchorhold.

It is also significant that Julian chose the anchoritic path when she had no immediate predecessors. While anchoritism remained popular in England throughout the Middle Ages, Tanner points out that after a mention of anchorites in 1312/13 rolls, there is a gap until Julian of Norwich appears at the end of the fourteenth century. There is no obvious explanation for the gap, but Julian is all the more remarkable if she was not the product of a continuous tradition of recluses in the city. During her life the number of hermits and


138 Warren’s and Norman Tanner’s texts are the seminal works on English anchoritism in the Middle Ages. Warren’s text offers an excellent overview of anchorites and their position in medieval England; of particular relevance to this study is Part 1: The Anchorites, pp. 7-124. Tanner’s text more specifically examines the church in Norwich in late medieval England and uses Julian and her text as touchstones throughout; see Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich*, Studies and Texts 66 (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984). E. A Jones’s study of anchoritism and hermeticism provides an insightful addition to these two texts; see E.A. Jones, “Hermits and Anchorites in Historical Context,” Dyas et al. 3-18.
anchorites in Norwich increased from Julian alone to perhaps ten at the same time. There is no direct evidence that she gathered a school of recluses around her, but it seems probable that to some extent she was responsible for the increase.\footnote{Tanner 58.}

Tanner’s observations introduce two important facts. First, Julian’s choice to become an anchoress is especially notable since there is no extant evidence indicating that an anchorite resided in Norwich for nearly eighty years preceding her. Second, the evidence compiled by Tanner suggests that Julian was an inspirational teacher for others in her community. Together these suggest that despite having no immediate predecessors, Julian desired the opportunities offered by an anchoritic life, including being able to devote herself to interpreting her visions—and sharing those visions and her thoughts regarding them with those whom she inspired and taught.

While it may be impossible to know for certain if Julian’s actual audience extended beyond contemplatives and throughout her community, her intended audience for the Long Text at least seems clear. As demonstrated by Bauerschmidt’s and Watson’s analyses of Julian’s references to her audience, it certainly appears from her omission of any specific references to contemplatives in the Long Text that Julian had intentionally “broadened her audience to include all of God’s lovers, not just ‘contemplatives.’”\footnote{Bauerschmidt 203; also see fn. 130 above.} It is important to stress here the link between her audience and her argument for universal salvation: the reason for such a broad audience results in large part from Julian’s emphasis on universal salvation, as demonstrated when she claims that she stands united with her “evyn cristen,” who will all be “savyd” in the quotation above
(9:10, 11). Her belief that all Christians will attain salvation arises from the revelation at the heart of her text: Jesus’ statement to Julian in her thirteenth vision that “alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thynge shalle be wele” (27:13-14). Julian repeatedly returns to this statement throughout her text, questioning and considering it until she fully accepts it as establishing the truth of universalism.

Julian’s belief in universal salvation was grounded in the authority of her visions which were given to her directly by God. She certainly could not claim support or authority from the Church on this matter: belief in universal salvation contradicted orthodox salvation theology and therefore undermined the Church’s teaching on sin and damnation.141 While this chapter is not focused on Julian’s orthodoxy or lack thereof, it is important to note that Julian establishes her theological authority to propose unorthodox views on her visionary experience. As Caroll Hilles argues,

Julian’s visions authorize her vernacular theology, which diverges in important aspects from the orthodoxy of her time. In particular, Julian’s soteriology of universal salvation marks the Revelation’s most powerful and striking challenge to eschatological doctrines. Universal salvation is the Revelation’s open secret, the probable result of the mysterious act that will make ‘all things well’ on the last day.142

141 Watson explains that the idea that all humanity will attain salvation was “widely implied in early patristic thought and made explicit by Origin, but attacked in Augustine’s De civitate Dei, and condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553” (Watson, “Visions of Inclusion” 146). For an overview of patristic salvation theology, see Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1 of The Emergence of Catholic Tradition, 100-600 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 123-132, 141-155. For a discussion of how Julian’s thoughts contrasted with contemporary scholastic theology, see Baker 80-82.  
Hilles further notes that with her visions serving “as the crucial authorizing basis of her writing,” Julian articulates “a radically democratic theology” in her Long Text. What Hilles does not discuss and what I argue is that Julian’s ability to develop this theology so extensively and “radically” from its first conception in the Short Text stems from her evolving perception of her authorial authority and responsibility. As Staley argues in her examination of Julian’s development as an author, the Long Text “testifies to her growing understanding of her role as a writer,” positing that the years of meditation and study between the Short and Long texts caused Julian to comprehend her position as an author whose “authority is derived from God.” Extending Staley’s argument by applying it to Julian’s consideration of universal salvation, it is important to note that it is God who elucidates the universality of Julian’s visions, instructing Julian to take her revelation of universal salvation “to alle myn evyn cristen, alle in generalle and nothyng in specialle” (37:6-7). Authorized by this divine imperative, Julian continually presents herself as representative of all her readers: as Julian herself emphatically reminds her readers in Revelation 13—the passage in which Julian receives the crucial revelation that “alle maner of thynge shalle be wele”—“by me aloone is vnderstonde alle” (37:8-9).

Significantly, the authority that Julian gains from God and through her vision is therefore shared by her readers; all those who embrace the visions as their own enjoy the same divinely-given authority.

While Julian stresses unity by constructing herself as a model for all humanity, she also highlights division through her inclusion of binary oppositions throughout A

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143 Hilles 556.
144 Staley, “Trope of the Scribe” 833.
Revelation of Love. In her first revelation, Julian introduces a binary between high and low, which she then extends throughout her text. This first example of the binary establishes the divide between the divine and the human, represented by God’s goodness and human need: “For to the goodnes of god is the highest praier, and it cometh downe to vs to the lowest party of our need” (6:28-30). As this consideration of the relationship between God and humans suggests, Julian believed that the divide could be surmounted by God’s benevolence to his needful humankind. However, Julian indicates in Revelation 13 that it is impossible for humans to comprehend the greatness of the divine during their earthly life: “the vse of oure reson is now so blynde, so lowe and so symple, that we can nott know the hygh marvelous wysdom, the myght, and the goodnes of the blyssedfull trynyte” (32:14-16). Throughout her text she iterates that humans will only understand God at the time of judgment: as she explains at the conclusion of her text, “whan 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” (85:11-13).

In these statements, Julian touches on a recurring theme throughout her text: the gulf between human and divine comprehension. She continues to emphasize this gulf as she further discusses the revelation that suggests that God will save all:

And stondyng alle thys, me thought it was vnpossible that alle maner of thyng shuld be wele, as oure lorde shewde in thys tyme. And as to thys I had no other answere in shewyng of oure lorde but thys: That þat is vnpossible to the is nott vnpossible to me. I shalle saue my worde in alle thyng, and I shalle make althyng wele. And in thys I was taught by the grace of god that I shuld stedfastly holde me in the feyth as I had before vnderstond, and ther with þat I shulde stonde and sadly beleue that alle maner thyng shall be welle, as oure lorde shewde in that same tyme. (32:47-55)
As she notes at the beginning of this passage, Julian initially finds the message of universal salvation suggested by the revelation to be “vnpossible.” However, God explains to her that despite her inability to comprehend how “he shalle make althyng wele,” he will keep his word because that which is “vnpossible to the is nott vnpossible to me.” Julian is thus “taught by the grace of god” that she should steadfastly believe in the message of universal salvation suggested by Revelation 13. While she may not understand how “alle maner of thyng shuld be wele,” she must believe that it will be. Therefore, this passage both underscores the inability during one’s lifetime of completely comprehending the divine and establishes Julian’s visions as a means of approaching the truths—such as the universality of God’s mercy—that seem incomprehensible while on earth but are possible for God.

The binary between high and low does not exist solely between the divine and human: Julian also considers the opposition to exist within the human soul. In her discussion of the soul, Julian once again relates the ‘high’ with positive, godly attributes while linking the ‘low’ with the negative and fallible: “For in every soule that shalle be savyd is a godly wylle that nevyr assentyth to synne, nor nevyr shalle. Ryght as there is a bestely wylle in the lower party that may wylle no good, ryght so there is a godly wyll in the hygher party, wych wylle is so good that it may nevyr wylle evylle, but evyr good” (37:15-20). Julian’s assertion that those who will be saved may will ill with the lower part of their souls but remain pure in their “godly wyll in the hygher party” reveals a support for her belief in universal salvation. If all humans possess both a high, “godly wyll” that wills only good and a low, “bestely wylle” that is incapable of willing good, all
humans are equally deserving of salvation. In this chapter, she provides herself as an example of how God will forgive sin and bring comfort to all Christians due to their “hygher party.” She explains that “God brought to mynde that I shuld synne,” which causes her to have “a softe drede” since she realizes that therefore everyone must sin since “by me aloone is vnderstonde alle” (37:1, 8-9). However, her dread disappears when God tells her “I kepe the fulle suerly,” a statement which brings her comfort not only because of its inherent promise of salvation but also because of the “loue and suernes and gostly kepyng” with which God expresses it (37:10-11). She then realizes that God’s promise extends to all her fellow Christians: “for as it was afore shewde to me that I shuld synne, ryght so was the comfort shewyde: suernesse of kepyng for alle myn evyn cristen” (37:11-13). Because she stands as a model for all Christians and because she understands that God will save her despite her sin, Julian recognizes that all her “evyn cristen” will be saved due to their “godly wyll in the hygher party.”

Julian’s growing comprehension of the dual nature of all humans’ souls ineluctably leads her into an extended consideration of sin, eventually bringing to light another high/low binary, which she articulates in Revelation 14. In this revelation, Julian struggles with the opposition between two domes, or judgments or decrees: on one hand, the orthodoxy of the Church which preaches punishment for sinners; on the other hand, the revelation of love which she receives directly from God. After Christ has told her in Revelation 13 that “alle maner of thynge shalle be wele” (27:14), Julian explains that she “culde nott be fulle esyd” (45:17). Her uneasiness stems from the lack of certain qualities—blame and anger—which the teaching of the Church had taught her to expect.
from God: she explains that she cannot fully be at ease with the “swete and delectable” vision of universal salvation because of

[…] the dome of holy chyrch, whych I had before vnderstondyn and was contynually in my syght. And therfore by this dome me thought that me behovyth nedys to know my selfe a sinner. And by the same dome I vnderstode that synners be sometime wurthy blame and wreth, and theyse two culde I nott see in god. And therfore my desyer was more than I can or may telle, for the hygher dome god shewed hym selfe in the same tyme, and therfore me behovyd nedys to take it. And the lower dome was lernyd me before tyme in holy chyrche, and therfore I myght nott by no weye leue the lower dome. (45:16, 18-26)

Julian is thus trapped between her need to “take” the “hygher dome” which God demonstrated to her through his proclamation that “alle shalle be wele,” and her inability to “leue” the dome of the Church. She is confounde d by the opposition between what she has learned from the Church and what she perceives to be the true nature of God.

Julian indicates a reason for the disparity between the two domes by suggesting a link between the limitations of human understanding and the teaching of the Church:

“For I saw in the same shewyng that moch pryvete is hyd which may nevyr be knowen in to the tyme that god of hys goodnes hath made vs wurthy to se it. And ther with I am well apayde, abydyngoure lords wylle in this hye marveyle. And now I 3elde me to my modyr holy chyrch, as a sympyll chylde owyth” (46:46-50). Julian thus indicates that the Church is not able to fully comprehend God’s universal mercy but is only a provisional authority. While she “now” must yield herself to the Church, she must do so only “in to the tyme that god of hys goodnes hath made vs wurthy to se it,” which, as discussed above, will be on the day of God’s judgment. As Watson notes, her revelation has “open[ed] up a gulf, which the rest of the work concludes is finally unbridgeable in this
life, between what is at one point called the ‘heyer dome’ of the revelation and the ‘lower dome’ (or ‘dome of holy church’) of received Christian orthodoxy.” Watson argues that the tension between these two domes “can only be meaningful or productive […] if Julian’s experience can be regarded as being embodied in an authoritative and definitive form, accessible to all in the same way as the ‘feith of the holy church’ itself.” As this chapter demonstrates and what has not been sufficiently recognized is how Julian does just that, embodying her experience in an accessible, authoritative, and definitive text as the means by which the distance between these two domes can be bridged—so long as readers fully learn the lessons Julian imparts through her text.

Early in her text Julian demonstrates that her view of intermediaries—menes—between God and humans is rather complex. Her first use of the term occurs at the very beginning of her first vision and indicates that she believes that menes are unnecessary to experience the divine. Immediately after relating her vision of blood running down Christ’s face “right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head,” she explains that she was given this vision directly from God without any mene: “I conceived truly and mightly that it was him selfe that shewed it me without anie meane” (4.3-4 and 7-8, my emphasis). As she continues to recount her first vision, she includes a rumination and meditation on menes which resembles the monastic practice of combining lectio and meditatio, as described by Jean Leclercq: she contemplates the

145 Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic” 94.
146 Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic” 95.
word and its meanings as she attempts to understand the divine role of *menes*. While *menes* can be many things, Julian restricts her consideration of the term to common objects of affective devotion and prayer: she includes intercessors and intercessory objects such as God’s “precious bloud, his holie passion, his dere worthy death and worshipfull woundes,” “his sweete mothers loue,” “his holie crosse” and “speciall sainctes and of all the blessed companie of heauen” (6:13-14, 16, 18, 20-21). Within these confines, Julian carefully and thoroughly meditates on the worth of *menes* as intermediaries. The result of her meditation is a protracted and initially contradictory explanation of her understanding of *menes*. Following a vision in which “our good lord shewed þat it is full great plesannce to him that a sely sowle come to him naked, and pleaynly and homly” (5:34-35), which was given to Julian “to lerne our soule wisely to cleue to the goodnes of god,” Julian considers “the custome of our praier” (6:1-2, 3). Prayer immediately causes Julian to think of “how that we vse for vnknowing of loue to make menie meanes” (6:4-5). She thus begins her discussion of *menes* with what she sees as their origin in humankind’s ignorance—their “vnknowing of loue”—and thereby demonstrates that her fellow Christians focus on *menes* rather than on submitting their souls “naked, and pleaynly and homly” to God directly as she has just been taught to do.

By viewing *menes* as limited in their ability to join the human and the divine, Julian thus emphasizes, as Hilles notes, the traditional belief in a “hierarchy of devotional

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148 It is important to note that Julian does not discuss ecclesiastical institutions or figures which also act as intermediaries between God and humans, such as the priesthood and confessors.
practices, proceeding from the contemplation of an image to imageless devotion.”

However, what Hilles does not consider is that Julian espouses not only imageless devotion, but also devotion without any type of intermediary. As she continues to meditate on this vision, Julian offers an alternative to reliance on *menes:* she instructs her readers that “it is more worshipp to god and more verie delite that we feathfully praie to him selfe of his goodness, and cleue ther to by his grace, with true vnderstanding and stedfast beleue, then if we made all the meanes that hart maie thinke” (6:5-9). She thus eschews any devotional intermediaries between humans and God, encouraging direct prayer to God himself. This direct line between the human and divine overcomes human ignorance, as it is founded on “true vnderstanding and stedfast beleue.” By refuting the idea that any *mene*—any that the “hart maie thinke”—would be “more worshipp to god and more verie delite” than direct submission to God, she seemingly refutes the idea that any *mene* used in devotion or prayer can be wholly positive and beneficial. She justifies this view by further explaining that *menes* are limited in their power and ability to reveal the true nature of God: “For if we make all these meanes, it is to litle and not ful worshippe to god; but in his goodness is all the hole, and ther fayleth right nought” (6:9-11). Julian thus downplays the efficacy of and even need for *menes,* depicting intercessors as unnecessary and even distracting from the direct experience of the divine since they do not provide “ful worshippe to god.” Julian therefore encourages her readers to not focus on the lesser, lower devotional practices but rather strive to attain a more direct understanding and experience of the divine.

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149 Hilles 559.
Immediately following this critical evaluation, however, Julian’s meditation on *menes* undergoes a significant change. She begins to describe *menes* in a positive light, proclaiming that *menes* are ordained by God, lead to redemption and salvation, and please God:

> For the meanes that the goodnes of god hath ordeineth to helpe vs be full faire and many. Of which the chiefe and principall meane is the blessed kynde that he toke of the maiden, with all the meanes that went before and come after, which be langyng to our redemption and to our endles saluation. Wher for it pleaseth him that we seke him and worshippe him by meanes, vnderstanding and knowing that he is the goodnes of all. (6:22-28)

Her emphasis on Christ’s humanity as the “principall meane” can be understood by its fundamental importance to her revelation: it was her meditation on Christ’s dying body that initiated her visions. As a direct result of this meditation she concludes that *menes* can be a “helpe” which God ordains and whichplease him because he is being sought. However, she indicates that *menes* are only truly advantageous when they are employed by persons who understand that they are not a replacement for God: her readers must remember that God is the “goodnes of all” while *menes* are only a path to that goodness.

Julian’s complex understanding of *menes* can be further explained by examining the preceding chapter, in which she discusses her desire for an unmediated relationship with God. When God shows her “a little thing, the quantitie of an haselnott,” Julian understands that it has three qualities: “In this little thing I saw iiij propreties. The first is þat god made it, the secund is that god loueth it, the thirde that god kepyth it” (5:9, 5:17-18). However, her understanding ends there because she is unable to comprehend God himself: she remarks, “But what behyld I ther in? Verely, the maker, the keper, and the
louer. For till I am substantially vnyted to him I may never haue full reste ne verie blisse; þat is to say that I be so fastned to him that ther be right nought that is made betweene my god and me” (5:18-22). She thus explains that she does not possess the capability of “verely” understanding God while anything stands between them: she cannot find rest or complete happiness until she is integrally joined to God. Therefore, Julian wishes to bypass all intercessors and intercessory objects for herself in an attempt to establish a direct relationship with God and divine truth.

Julian indicates her reasoning for eschewing all intermediaries when she subsequently turns her thoughts to what prevents her—and by extension, all humans—from truly knowing God:

This little thing that is made, me thought it might haue fallen to nought for littlenes. Of this nedeth vs to haue knowledge, that vs lyketh nought all thing that is made, for to loue and haue god that is vnmade. For this is the cause why we be not all in ease of hart and of sowle, for we seeke heer rest in this thing that is so little, wher no reste is in, and we know not our god, that is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is verie reste. God will be knowen, and him lyketh that we rest vs in him; for all that is beneth him suffyseth not to vs. 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 willfully noughted for loue, to have him that is all, then is she able to receive ghostly reste. (5:24-33)

In this argument for “noughting” worldly and material things, Julian argues that it is necessary to understand the insignificance of everything created in order to love and possess God who is without creator. Failure to understand this results in a circumscribed theological understanding in which the focus remains on “this thing that is so little” rather than on God who is “almightie, all wise and all good.” God stands as the end of seeking, where humans no longer are at unease but find rest. She instructs her readers that all
things that are beneath God “suffysth not to vs,” and encourages them to “willfully” strip themselves of all created things to “receive ghostly reste” in God.

Julian’s mediation on menes and her desire for a direct relationship with God, articulated in Chapters 5 and 6 of her first vision, reveal that she sees menes as ordained by God and positive if and when those who employ them keep their attention focused on him and not the menes themselves. However, she herself desires a relationship with God devoid of all intermediaries and places emphasis on direct prayer to him: as she states in Chapter 6, it is best that “we feaithfully praie to him selfe of his goodnes, and cleue ther to by his grace, with true vnderstanding and stedfast beleue” (6:6-8). She reiterates this perspective in Revelation 14 during her extensive thoughts on prayer:

And thus shalle we with his swete grace in our owne meke continuall prayer come in to hym now in this lyfe by many prevy touchynges of swete gostly syghtes and felynges, mesuryd to us as oure symplhed may bere it. And this is wrought and shall be by the grace of the holy gost, so long tyll we shal dye in longyng for loue. And than shall we alle come in to oure lorde, oure selfe clerely knowing and god fulsomly hauyng, and we endlesly be alle hyd in god […]. (43:45-51)

Significantly, Julian had previously characterized herself as a mene through which her readers can obtain a more direct relationship with God. Discussing her thirteenth revelation, Julian explains that “I was lernyd to take it to alle myn evyn cristen, alle in generalle and nothyng in specialle” (37:6-7). Her authority as a mene stems from God himself, who instructs her to share her visions with her fellow Christians. In light of the passage above, her role as a mene results from her being privy to the “many prevy touchynges of swete gostly syghtes and felynges” which she explains will result from prayer, and which for her result from her visions. She is a beneficial mene because her
focus is constantly on God as the greatest good: she is teaching her readers to make
“meke continuall prayer” through their meditations on her visions in order that they will
“alle come in to oure lorde, oure selfe clerely knowing and god fulsomly hauyng, and we
endlesly be alle hyd in god.” Standing both as the intermediary between God and
humans and as a representative of all humanity, Julian employs her text and the visions
and meditations it contains as an authoritative mene through which her readers can gain a
direct relationship with God and thereby overcome the gulf between the divine and
human.

In their insightful examination of the apophatic in Julian’s text, Vincent Gillespie
and Maggie Ross make a related argument, positing that many mystical writers “struggle
to record or recreate their encounters with the ineffable” due to the limits of language and
the very incomprehensibility of the divine.\footnote{Gillespie and Ross 55.} They argue that Julian, as a mystic, seeks
to step outside the traditional bounds of signification and to “become the word uttered by
God, the prayer prayed by God through us. The necessity of interpretation, which we
tolerate as exiles from unmediated wisdom, becomes a struggle to escape the play of
signification.”\footnote{Gillespie and Ross 68.} They see Julian as stressing the lack of intermediaries between her and
Christ because she “is becoming the signifier, a means for the transmission of God’s
message in the way she opens herself to be read by God and by her readers.”\footnote{Gillespie and Ross 55.} While
their analysis is helpful in understanding Julian’s role as an intermediary and the
complexity and limitations of her language as she attempts to articulate her experience

\footnote{Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, “The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of
Effacement in Julian of Norwich” Glasscoe, \textit{The Medieval Mystical Tradition} 55.}

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with the divine, their focus is restricted to apophatic images and her movement from
discursive to apophatic consciousness. In my following analysis, which extends beyond
the apophatic, I argue that Julian does much more than “tolerate” interpretation, but
embraces it and discursive reasoning as fundamental to the instruction of her readers.

I argue that having established herself and her written account as authoritative
menes that will allow her readers to experience and understand the divine, Julian does not
simply offer the text to her audience to do with it what they will, but instead provides
instruction and models for interpretation and comprehension of the visions. It is apparent
that Julian was aware of the difficulties—and even dangers—of being perceived as a
teacher. In an addition to the beginning of the Long Text, Julian presents herself as
simple and unlettered: she opens her second chapter by stating, “This revelation was
made to a simple creature unlettered living in deadly flesh” (2:2-3). This statement has
received a great deal of scholarly attention, although there has been little consensus as to
what the statement means: scholars such as Colledge and Walsh have argued that it
reveals Julian’s comfort with the rhetorical strategy of captatio benevolentiae (and
therefore her extensive learning), others have argued that it indicates Julian was literate in
the vernacular only, and still others have argued that the statement means that Julian
experienced the visions when she was illiterate but became literate before composing the
Long Text.153 Of particular interest to this study is Baker’s analysis of two texts
contemporary to Julian that also use similar phrases: as Baker demonstrates, Richard

153 For Colledge and Walsh’s argument, see their Introduction 47; for an overview of the
scholarly positions regarding this statement, see Baker 8-9 and fn. 16 included on those
pages.
Rolle’s Latin *Incendium amoris* “identifies as ‘simple and unlearned’ those who, regardless of their expertise in theology, are approaching his text with a spirit of humble devotion” while Nicholas Love’s English *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* employs the term ‘simple’ to indicate both women and men who can read the vernacular but do not have scholastic training.\(^{154}\) Baker argues that Rolle and Love use phrases similar to the statement in Julian’s text because “they are conventional signals of devotional discourse rather than descriptions of the educational achievements of their readers” and that this “undermines the view that Julian of Norwich was unable to read or write in any language.”\(^{155}\) Baker’s argument is particularly useful because it focuses not only on what the statement reveals about Julian herself, but also on what the statement suggests about Julian’s relation to and perception of her audience. From this perspective and keeping in mind Julian’s depiction of her audience as discussed above, Julian’s statement underscores that she was shown visions and given the revelation of love *no matter* how learned she may or may not have been. The statement thus suggests that her readers, even though they may also be “vnletyrde,” can also experience the visions through Julian’s text and learn from them just as she has done. Moreover, much like Marguerite Porete does when she directs her book to “simples âmes,” Julian may use the term “symple” to indicate to her readers that if they come to God simply—or, as Julian describes elsewhere, “naked, and pleaynly and homly”—they will receive his beneficence.

\(^{154}\) Baker 9-11.

\(^{155}\) Baker 11.
Another change from the Short Text to the Long Text demonstrates Julian’s changing perception of her role as teacher. She takes pains to refuse the role of teacher in the Short Text, stating “botte god for bede that 3e schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nou3t soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a womann, leued, febille and freylle” (ST 6:40-42). Despite her explicit caution here, Julian omits the point entirely in the Long Text. This omission might very well indicate that Julian did see herself as a teacher and either dropped her previous rhetorical façade or developed her awareness of this role as she continued her meditations after completing the Short Text.\textsuperscript{156} Certainly her growing self-awareness as a teacher corresponds to her feelings of unity with her “evyn cristen,” for the model of teaching that she presents does not permit her authority over her readers, but rather instructs them on how to share in her visions as her equal. Her developing understanding of her unity with her readers is further underscored by Julian’s omission of the references to her gender that are included in the above statement as well as in the subsequent lines: “Botte sothelye charyte styrres me to telle 3owe it, for I wolde god ware knawenn, and mynn evynn crystene spede, as I wolde be my selfe to the mare hatynge of synne and lovyng of god. Botte for I am a woman, schulde I therfore leve that I schulde nou3t tell 3owe the goodenes of god, syne that I sawe in that same tyme that is his wille, that it be knawenn?” (ST 6:43-58). In the Long Text, she omits this defense for daring to transcribe her visions despite the fact that she is

a woman as well as her claim to be a “womann, leued, febille and freylle” because she wishes to depersonalize and de-gender her text so that she can avoid any claims to singularity and can stand equal and united with her readers. Furthermore, she may omit references to her gender so that her readers will not dismiss her text and the authority of her visions, but will learn from them without reservations regarding her gender. Julian’s didacticism is a radical and daring aspect of her text, for Julian is circumventing the authority of the Church as she teaches her audience how to share in the divine authority her visions possess.

Revelation 14 is Julian’s most explicit attempt at instructing her readers on her method of interpretation. Following the revelation that “alle shalle be wele” in Revelation 13, Revelation 14 includes the longest addition to Julian’s text: the Parable of the Lord and the Servant. Staley believes that this vision particularly demonstrates Julian’s development as theologian and exegete, arguing that “Julian’s reading of the example of the Lord and the Servant emphasizes how firmly she asserts her authority as seer and exegete” while it also provides a “screen […] to advance some of her most ambitious arguments” concerning theology. However, as will be demonstrated below, this revelation also clearly establishes Julian as a teacher, a mene between the divine and human who can instruct her audience on how to best read her visions and thus be active participants in the construction of her visions’ meanings. Julian’s role as a teacher is very briefly suggested by David Aers in the chapter that precedes Staley’s statements above, when he notes that Julian’s rhetorical strategies position her “in the role of theologian,

157 Aers and Staley 161 and 146-7.
exegete, and teacher."\textsuperscript{158} However, while Aers does not elaborate on this statement at any length, the addition of teacher to the roles of exegete and theologian is of particular significance. Julian’s role as teacher is crucial to understanding the relationships between Julian, her text, and her audience. As I demonstrate below, while she is presenting herself as an exegete and a theologian,\textsuperscript{159} Julian is much more interested in teaching her readers how to adopt these roles themselves.

In the Parable of the Lord and the Servant, which adds one-seventh to the length of the text, Julian sees a servant leave his lord’s side “in grett hast for loue to do his lordes wylle,” but then fall in a valley where he can neither rise up nor see his master’s face (51:14-15). The lord, in turn, does not blame his servant, but acknowledges that he “shulde be hyely and blessydfully rewardyd withoute end, aboue that he shulde haue be yf he had nott fallen” (51:57-59). After describing the vision in a relatively brief sixty lines, Julian does not immediately explain its significance or meaning. Rather, before moving into the lengthiest explication of any of her visions, she shares with her reader a detailed explanation of her response to receiving them, walking the reader through her process of reception and interpretation. She first confesses her incomprehension of the vision, for while she believes it to be an “answere to my desyer” to reconcile her understanding of human sinfulness with God’s mercy and forgiveness, she is unsure what

\textsuperscript{158} Aers and Staley 100. Staley’s quotations above, in which she emphasizes the roles of theologian and exegete, are taken from chapter four, “Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority” (107-78). The quotation from Aers is in the previous chapter, “The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love” (77-104).

\textsuperscript{159} In calling Julian a theologian, I am following the usage of Aers and Staley in The Powers of the Holy. Julian was not, of course, a professional theologian, as the term implied during the Middle Ages.
the answer actually is (51:66). Her incomprehension likely mirrors her reader’s bafflement after reading her vision, connecting author and reader, teacher and student, in their identical responses. She then explains that while she may not comprehend the vision immediately, she does realize that “euer shewyng is full of pryvytes” (51:73-74).

To comprehend “the full vnderstandyng of this mervelouse example,” she and her readers must uncover what is “yet moch hyd” (51:70-71, 51:72). She thus instructs her readers that her visions do not have ready-made meanings, but reveal their significance only if one is willing to respond to them by seeking out and understanding their “pryvytes.”

After sharing her realization that visions have hidden meanings, Julian explains that there is a three-fold process for interpreting her visions.¹⁶⁰ The first step in this process is what can be immediately gleaned from the vision as she is experiencing it, which is the “begynnyng of techyng” (51:76). Second is the meditation upon the vision after it is completed, which is “inwarde lemyng” and can take years and even decades of careful consideration (51:77). The third and final step in this process is “the hole revelation fro the begynnyng to the ende” (51:78-79). This last step can be understood as the revelation of love that was God’s meaning for the sixteen showings; it is the over-arching principle towards which the interpretation of the individual visions moves. The conclusion to this process can also be understood as the material book itself and the recorded response to her visions which it contains. The book and the revelation within are inexorably tied to the visions and her interpretation of them: as she explains, “theyse

¹⁶⁰ Julian’s discussion here has given rise to Watson’s argument that Julian’s text is founded on a Trinitarian hermeneutic; see Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic,” 79-100.
there be so onyd, as to my vnderstondyng, that I can nott nor may deperte them” (51:80-81). The book is part of this triune because it contains her visions and interpretation of them, which, by recording how she worked through the visions in her own intellect in order to achieve the greatest revelation of love, instructs her readers on how to do the same.

Julian closes this paragraph by declaring that the trinity comprised of visions, meditation, and revelation/book teach her that God will reveal his meaning “to vs when it is his wyll” (51:85, my emphasis). She states explicitly that these three provide the “techyng” through which she knows she ought to trust and believe in God to reveal the vision's meaning. She thus makes clear to her audience that should they follow the processes laid out in her book, they too will receive this teaching and be able eventually to glean meaning from her written visions. Thus, while the vision of the Lord and the Servant is an “example” shown to her by God in response to her questions concerning human sin and divine mercy, it is also—and simultaneously—an example of Julian instructing her readers on how to respond to and interpret her visions.

Following this passage in which she outlines her three-fold interpretive process, Julian models for her readers how she came to fully understand the Parable of the Lord and the Servant by explaining in detail the careful consideration of the vision that constitutes the second step of “inwarde lernyng” and how it led her to the third step of understanding the ultimate revelation of love. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Julian explains that she took almost twenty years to comprehend the vision’s meaning: “For twenty yere after the tyme of the shewyng saue thre monthys I had techyng inwardly
as I shall sey” (51:86-87). As she continues, Julian indicates that her readers should share in the “techyng inwardly” that she experienced after receiving the vision: “It longyth to the to take hede to alle þe properties and the condesciouns that were shewyd in the example, though þe thyngke that it be mysty and indifferent to thy syght” (51:87-89). She makes clear here that she recognizes that the vision may initially seem to her readers “mysty” and “indifferent to thy syght.” Indeed, she herself twice describes the vision of the Lord and the Servant in similar terms: she explains at the beginning of her description that her questioning of Revelations 13’s message of universal salvation was “answeryd in shewayng full mystely by a wonderfull example of a lorde that hath a servant” (51:2-3), while after her initial recounting of the vision, she describes it as a “mysty example” in which “the pryvytes of the reuelacyon be yet moch hyd” (51:71-72). Julian and her readers are thus united in their immediate response to the “mysty” vision.

While Julian expects that her readers will share her confusion at first, she instructs them on how to eventually understand the vision as she has done. Julian relates how she began to comprehend the vision despite her initial bafflement regarding its meaning: “I assentyd wylfully with grett desyer, seeing inwardly with avysement all the poyntes and the properties that were shewyd in the same tyme, as ferforth as my wytt and my vnderstandyng wylle serve” (51:89-92). Julian thus suggests that while she “assentyd wylfully with grett desyer” to God’s teaching, she also relied on her “wytt” and “vnderstandyng” to fully grasp the vision’s meaning; unlike Marguerite Porete, Julian endorses the use of reason in comprehending the divine, provided that its use is directed by God. Julian provides an outline for her readers of how she applied her intellect to all
“the poyntes and the properties” of the vision by carefully considering each and every detail from beginning to end of the vision:

[...] begynnynge my beholdyng at the lorde and at þe servannt, at the manner of syttyng of the lorde and the place he satt on, and the colour of his clothyng and the manner of shape, and his chere withoute and his nobley and his goodnes within; and the manner of stondyng of the seruannt, and the place where and how, and his manner of clothyng, the colour and the shape, at his outwarde behavyng and at his inwarde goodnes and his vnlothfulnesse. (51:92-98)

Julian has thus broken down the vision into its component parts, suggesting that the vision’s meaning will arise from an analysis of each of its parts.

Julian devotes over 240 lines to explicating the above details of the vision, pondering the meaning and significance of each. For example, she notes at her explication’s beginning that she perceived a relation between the lord and his servant and God and his human creation: “The lorde that satt solemly in rest and in peas, I vnderstonde that he is god. The seruannt that stode before hym, I vnderstonde that he was shewed for Adam” (51:99-101). However, as Julian makes clear immediately following these lines, there is not always a one-to-one correlation between each detail of the vision and what it signifies. Rather, the vision’s details can signify many things. As she notes, many details require a “doubyll vnderstandyng” (51:164), and her exploration of each detail reveals just how many layers the vision has. The multifaceted nature of the vision’s details is demonstrated by Julian’s continued explication of the servant: after stating that the servant “was shewed for Adam,” Julian further explains, “that is to sey oone man was shwewed that tyme and his falling to make there by to be vnderstonde how god beholdyth alle manne and his fallyng” (51:101-104). Later, she notes that the servant
is also Christ: “In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of þe trynyte, and in the seruannt is comprehended Adam, that is to sey all men” (51:211-212).

After exploring the complex signification of each detail of the Parable of the Lord and the Servant, Julian eventually spirals out from the particulars of the vision to the more general significance of the vision as a whole—thus moving into the third step of her process for understanding her visions. As suggested by the vision’s source as an answer from God to Julian’s questions concerning the possibility of universal salvation, much of Julian’s consideration of the vision revolves around the nature of sin and God’s mercy towards sinful humankind. For example, Julian links the lord’s response to his servant’s falling first to God’s response to Adam’s sinfulness and then more generally to God’s response to all human sin: “And thus I saw that he wyll that we know he takyth no herder the falling of any creatu or that shalle be saveyd than he tok the falling of Adam, whych we know was endlessly louyd and surely kepte in þe tyme of all his need, and now is blyssydfully restoryd in hye ovyr passing joye” (53:2-6). Later in her explication of the vision’s significance, she further reinforces the argument that God will forgive mankind’s sin by drawing on the link between Christ and all humanity that she previously established as present in the Parable: “And for the greate endlesse loue that god hath to alle mankynde, he makyth no depertyng in loue between the blessyd soule of Crist and the lest soule that shall be saveyd” (54:2-4). After a number of chapters devoted to unraveling the vision’s larger significance, her analysis leads to a reasoning for sin: “it nedyth vs to falle, and it nedyth vs to see it; for yf we felle nott, we shulde not so fulsomely how febyll and how wrechyd we be of oure selfe, nor also we shulde not so fulsomely
know þe marvelous loue of oure maker” (61: 18-21). Finally, in the final chapter of Revelation 14, Julian’s interpretation of the vision returns to God’s earlier statement that “alle shalle be welle” (63:46); she thus concludes her consideration of the vision by offering it as support for the promise of universal salvation. After having described the process that she undergoes to understand her visions, Julian thus provides further instruction to her readers by recording in detail her own progress through the entirety of the process. Her three-fold interpretation of the Parable of the Lord and the Servant, growing out of the experience of the vision itself to careful consideration of the vision’s details and then finally to the revelation of love to which all of her visions lead, provides a model for her readers for interpreting the visions they should receive as their own through her book.

Julian’s didacticism extends beyond the visionary experiences that she receives through her bodily and ghostly sight (such as the vision of the Lord and the Servant) to the visions that were shown “by worde formyde in my vnderstondyng” (9:30). Julian teaches her readers how to receive her revelation by explicating, translating, and interpreting Christ’s statements to her. In doing so, she provides a model for the process of “inwarde lernyng,” which, as noted above, is the second step in uncovering a vision’s meaning. Julian’s account of these words “formyde in [her] vnderstondyng” predominantly occurs in Revelations 9 through 16; there is a significant emphasis on the oral throughout this second half of the visions. This emphasis begins most notably in the first chapter of the ninth revelation, in which Julian and Christ share a verbal exchange before Julian receives any visions through either her ghostly or bodily sight:
Than seide oure good lorde asking: Arte thou well apayd that I sufferyd for thee? I seyde: ye, good lorde, gramercy; ye, good lorde, blessyd moet how be. Then seyde Jhesu our good lord: If thou arte apayde, I am apayde. It is a joy, a blysse, an endlesse lykyng to me that evyr I sufferd passion for the; and yf I myght suffer more, I wolde suffer more. (22:1-7)

Immediately after this conversation, Julian’s “vnderstandyng was leftyd uppe in to hevyn, and ther I saw thre hevyns” (22:7-8). Julian’s verbal exchange with Christ thus seems to be tied to her vision; speaking with God initiates her further mystical experience. Furthermore, Julian’s vision may be a result of her spoken response to Christ. He asks a question to which she replies positively and she is then granted another vision; Julian’s knowledge of how to converse with God allows her further revelations.

It is important to stress that this dialogue not only initiates other visions, but also stands independently as a vehicle for Julian’s understanding. In this passage she connects words with sights, the verbal with the visual, in a profound way: she indicates that she is able to see divine meaning in the words themselves. After her description of the “thre hevyns,” Julian states, “And in these wordes, If I myght suffer more I wolde suffer more, I saw truly pat as often as he myght dye, as often he wolde, and loue shulde nevyr lett hym haue rest tille he hath done it” (22:25-28). The connection between words, sight, and understanding occurs several more times in Revelation 9. At the beginning of Chapter 23, she states, “And in these thre wordes: It is a joy, a blysse and endlesse lykyng to me, were shewyd thre hevyns” (23:1-2). A little over twenty lines later, she explains that Christ’s joy at “oure saluacion” “was shewyd in thys worde: Arte thou welle apayde? By that other worde Crist seyd: Yf thou arte welle apayd, I am welle apayde […]” (23:26, 23:33-34). This example of what Watson describes as “the
flexibility with which she deploys words depicting her apprehension of the revelation”

requires her readers to move beyond traditional systems of categorization. As Watson explains, Julian does not “seem to resist this flexibility; on the contrary, she seems determined to use the language of revelation in as wide a variety of ways as possible, almost as though she is deliberately working against the restrictions of her own circumscribing hermeneutic structure.” I argue that this deliberate pushing of hermeneutic boundaries demonstrates to Julian’s readers that meaning is layered within God’s words, just as it is in visionary experiences such as the Parable of the Lord and the Servant. For her readers to be able to uncover the words’ meanings, Julian provides models of how to interpret and explicate the oral visions.

In Revelation 13, two paradigmatic examples of Julian’s explications of Christ’s words occur. Both explications arise out of Julian’s attempts to comprehend the revelation spoken to her by Christ that “alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and all maner of thynge shalle be wele” (27:13-14); she shares with her readers her process for coming to understand God’s meaning within his words. Denise Baker has commented on the oral emphasis of this revelation, noting its dialogic and conversational structure:

In its fourteen chapters, expanded from chapters 13 through 18 in the short text, Revelation Thirteen records the dialogue between Julian and God concerning the dilemma of evil. It proceeds as a conversation, with Julian either reporting or paraphrasing God’s responses to the questions and doubts she expresses. Interlocution structures the fourteen chapters diachronically as Julian moves logically from general questions about the

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161 Watson, “The Trinitarian Hermeneutic” 86.
nature of evil and the reason God allowed it to more specific questions about individual salvation.\textsuperscript{163}

However, as the first extended explication demonstrates, Julian does much more than “reporting or paraphrasing God’s responses.” She opens the thirty-first chapter by providing a written expansion of God’s earlier revelation that “alle shalle be wele” in Chapter 27: “And thus our good lorde answeryd to alle the questyons and dow3ts that I myght make, sayeng full comfortably, 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 al maner of thyng shall be welle” (31:1-6). She makes clear that God is responding to her doubts about his previous revelation of universal salvation, which would have brought many questions and doubts not only to her mind but also to those of her readers. By demonstrating how God responds to her anxieties, she presents a God open to her questions and doubts, who will converse “comfortably” with her.

After recording God’s statement, Julian offers a detailed explication of his words: “There he seyth: I may, I vnderstonde for the father; and there he seyth: I can, I vnderstonde for the sonne; and there he seyth: I wylle, I vnderstonde for the holy gost; and there he seyth: I shalle, I vnderstonde for the vnyte of the blessyd trinite, thre persons and oon truth” (31:6-10). Associating the components of the Trinity with certain capabilities, Julian provides a step-by-step explanation of each of the terms used in God’s words. Significantly, making such associations indicates that Julian has made an intellectual and theological leap in her interpretation: God does not mention the Trinity or its constituent

\textsuperscript{163} Baker 152.
parts and therefore Julian must rely on her own interpretation of his enigmatic words. Her repeated use of the word “vnderstonde” emphasizes that God does not explain his statements to her, but she must rely on her own understanding to uncover their meaning and significance.

Julian completes her explication by focusing on the first portion of God’s last statement to her: “and there he seyth: Thou shalt se thy selfe, I vnderstonde the onyng of alle man kynde that shalle be sauyd in to the blyssedfulle trynite. And in theyse v wordees god wyll be enclosyd in rest and in pees. And thus shalle the goostly thyrst of Crist haue an end” (31:10-14). In this explication, she reiterates her representative status as a model for humankind: “thou” and “thy selfe” are not only Julian, but also “al mankind” to whom she is joined. As a representative of all humanity, she interprets the phrase “Thou shalt se thy selfe” to indicate support for universal salvation: she along with all humankind will see themselves that they “shall be save.” Importantly, Julian thus makes a significant rhetorical move by demonstrating to her readers how to interpret statements through the lens of other revelations. She has been taught previously by God to consider herself a representative for humanity and to believe in universal salvation and it is these lessons that allow her to comprehend God’s statement.

Julian brings together two of God’s statements in the second paradigmatic explication in Revelation 13 in order to further understand their meaning: “Oone tyme our 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” (32:2-4). As she begins her explication of these two similar but distinct statements, she moves beyond the word-
by-word explanation she provided above. She first asserts that there are multiple
meanings revealed by these two statements and then begins to focus on more specific,
layered interpretations:

And in thes two the soule toke sundry maner of vnderstondyng. Oon
was this: that he wylle we wytte that nott oonly he takyth heed to nobylle
thynges and to grett, but also to lytylle and to small, to lowe and to
symple, and to oone and to other. And so menyth he in that he seyth, Alle
maner thyng shall be welle. For he wylle that we wytte that the lest thyng
shall nott be forgeten. Another vnderstandyng is this: that ther be many
dedys evyll done in our syght and so gret harmes take that it semyth to vs
that it were unpossible that evyr it shuld com to a good end. And vp on
thyss we loke, sorow and morne therfore so that we can nott rest vs in the
blyssedfulle beholding of god as we shuld do. (32:4-14)

By examining the “sundry understandyng” gained through these two statements, Julian
performs an act similar to what Gillespie and Ross claim that she does with apophatic
images. In their analysis of the role of apophatic images in Julian’s Long Text, Gillespie
and Ross conclude that these images are sites of numerous layers of meaning and are
frequently paradoxical, which can be highly productive by opening up new avenues of
understanding. Similarly, Julian gains new insight into the divine by examining God’s
words the same way she does apophatic images: as is evident in the example above, she
understands that his statements are layered with “sundry maner of vnderstandyng” and
can even be paradoxical. In “oon” understanding, God takes heed of everything, no
matter how small or simple; in “another vnderstandyng,” God is able to forgive “dedys
evyll done…and so gret harmes.” Through examining such layers and paradoxes, Julian
models for her readers the need to consider all possible interpretations of God’s words,
which do not negate each other but rather reveal a multi-layered divine knowledge.

164 See Gillespie and Ross 53-77.
In the above passage, Julian adopts the first-person plural pronoun as she shares her readers’ sorrow concerning sin’s presence in the world. She attributes this sorrow to human ignorance, reiterating her belief in the gulf between human and divine understanding:

And the cause is this: that the use of our reason is now so blind, so low and so simple that we cannot know that high marvelous wisdom, the might, and the goodness of the blessed Trinity. And thus men say: Thou shalt see thyself that all manner thing shall be well; as if he said, take now faithfully and trustfully, and at the last end thou shalt see verily in fulness of joy. (32:14-19)

While this binary between the human and divine has already been discussed, it is important to note that Julian claims this ignorance for herself along with all humanity even as she is simultaneously trying to explain the incomprehensible. She asserts that she understands what God “menyth” despite her—and all humankind’s—ignorance. Her confidence in understanding the divine stems from the insight offered by his words, a quality that she introduces earlier in her text when first discussing God’s statement that “sin is behooved, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well” (27:13-14). In this addition to the Long Text, she indicates that God’s words allow insight into divine knowledge that would otherwise only be known by humankind upon one’s death: “And in these same words I saw a high marvelous prevyte hyd in god, which pryuyte he shalle opynly make and shalle be knowne to vs in hevyn. In which knowyng we shalle verely se the cause why he sufferde synne to come, in which syght we shalle endlessly have joye” (27:39-42). It is God’s words that allow Julian to see the “hygh mervelous prevyte hyd in god” and thus these words, received by
Julian through her numerous oral visions, that offer particular and significant insight into God’s otherwise unfathomable mercy.

Julian concludes this second paradigmatic explication in Revelation 13 with an example of her most daring translation and interpretation of God’s words. Employing a rhetorical device used throughout the Revelation, Julian precedes her own rewording of God’s statement with the phrase “as yf.” She transforms God’s words into something new, in fact putting into God’s mouth words which are quite different from his original statement. She thus models the possibility of overcoming human ignorance through close meditation on God’s words, which, she concludes, will end the unease and sorrow humans experience: “And thus in the same v wordes before seyde: I may make all thyng wele, I vnderstonde a myghty comfort of alle works of oure lorde god that are for to come” (32:20-22).

The “comfort” which Julian ultimately experiences need not be hers alone; all readers willing to experience her visions through her text and follow the instruction provided therein can also finally be at ease. She has subtly and strategically employed her text and particularly her meditations upon God’s words to demonstrate that all humanity, independent of the Church and other intermediaries, can begin to attain understanding of divine truth through a careful process of meditation upon the visions in general and God’s words in particular that are recorded in Julian’s text. As such, her text stands as a profoundly didactic text, not simply providing a written account of Julian’s experience or revelations but inviting her readers to take part in the process of uncovering her visions’ meanings. This process is not an easy one, due to the enormous gulf between
the divine and human and the difficulties of comprehending God’s complex meaning; however, Julian dares to undertake this task just as she dares to adopt the roles of not only exegete and theologian but also teacher.

The following chapter will consider one of those who sought and benefited from Julian’s teaching, Margery Kempe. Unlike Julian, Margery presents herself as notably singular in her unusual text that blends elements of hagiography, mysticism, and continental religious culture. However, like Julian—and possibly encouraged by her example—Margery emphasizes the oral and aural nature of her relationship with God, includes an implicit didactic element in her text, and records her spiritual development in order to instruct her readers.
CHAPTER 4
“WONDERFUL SPECHYS & DALYAWNS”: SPEAKING AND TEACHING IN MARGERY KEMPE’S THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE

The Book of Margery Kempe begins with a clear statement of its purpose and audience:

Here begynnyth a schort tretys and a comfortabyl for synful wrecchys, wher-in þei may haue gret solas and comfort to hem and vndyrstondyn þe hy & vspecabyl mercy of ower souereyn Sauyowr Cryst Ihesu, whos name be worschepd and magnyfied wythowten ende, þat now in ower days to vs vnworthy deyneth to exercysen hys nobleley and hys goodnesse.¹⁶⁵

The Book thus announces at its outset that it is written for the rather general audience of “synful wrecchys” so that they may not only find “gret solas and comfort” but also learn from it, since it teaches them to “undyrstondyn” Christ’s mercy. In the subsequent lines, the Book further explains that the text presents Christ’s works as a model for its readers:

“All þe werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl & instruccyon, and what grace þat he werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce” (Proem, 1.7-10). As this statement makes clear, readers’ understanding of the Book rests in their own hands: the only hindrance to readers learning from Christ’s “exampyl and

¹⁶⁵ The Book of Margery Kempe, eds. S. B. Beech and H. E. Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (London, 1940) Proem, 1.1-7. All quotations from The Book of Margery Kempe are taken from this edition and cited by chapter, page, and then line number(s). Unless otherwise specified, quotations are taken from Book I.
“instruccyon” is their own “lak of charyte.” It is in the third statement that Margery Kempe is introduced, and then it is in reference to Christ’s works in relation to her: “And þerfor, be þe leue of ower mercyful Lord Cryst Ihesu, to þe magnyfying of hys holy name, Ihesu, þis lytyl tretys schal tretyn sumdeel in parcel of hys wonderful werkys, how mercyfully, how benyngly, & how charytefully he meued & stered a synful caytyf vn-to hys love” (Proem, 1.10-15). Margery, this “synful caytyf,” is thus presented in the Book’s opening lines as one recipient of Christ’s “wonderful werkys.”

The Book’s purpose and audience therefore appear to be made perfectly explicit in its first three statements. Indeed, a number of scholars have accepted this passage as indicating Margery’s purpose and audience for the text. For example, in her influential study of the Book, Clarissa Atkinson claims that in these opening statements, “She [Margery] was explicit about why she wrote, and for whom, and what she intended to write […]. The book was written as a testimony and inspiration to other Christians, designed to comfort them by displaying God’s gracious activity in the author’s life.”

However, these lines at the Book’s beginning do not record Margery’s voice. Instead, these lines record the voice of the scribe who transcribed her text: the scribe explains that he added the proem, from which these lines are taken, after he had completed the transcription of a quire of the book. In addition, his explanation suggests that he acted

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independently without input from Margery.\textsuperscript{167} Therefore, the opening lines of The Book of Margery Kempe should not be readily accepted as recording Margery’s voice, and they raise important questions: are the purpose and audience stated in the scribe’s proem in fact what Margery intended for her Book? What are readers supposed to learn and “undyrstondyn” from the text, and how should they garner such knowledge? Is the “exampyl and instruccyon” offered by the Book Margery or is it Christ? Should Margery, the outspoken, multifaceted, and oftentimes bewildering author and primary subject of the Book, be understood principally in the light of Christ’s moving her “vn-to hys love”?

This chapter explores these questions by considering what the Book itself bears out concerning the relationships between God, Margery, the text, and its readers. I argue that one of the most important aspects of the text for understanding these relationships is the colloquies between God (most often in the form of Christ) and Margery. These colloquies are a strikingly predominant but remarkably overlooked aspect of the text: dialogues between God and Margery occur in 63 of 99 of the Book’s chapters—nearly two-thirds of the text—but have received little scholarly attention. One of the few scholars who has considered them in any depth, Barry Windeatt, argues that the emphasis on dialogue is of crucial importance to understanding the text:

> The most significant continuum in her text takes the form of prayers, a kind of stream of consciousness reported through the inward dialogue between her own prayers and those divine locutions which she intuits through prayer, intuitions often more innovative than her visions. To look

\textsuperscript{167} The closing line of the proem reads as follows: “[W]han he had wretyn a qwayr, he addyd a leef þerto, and þan wrot he þis proym to expressyn mor openly þan doth þe next folwyng, whech was wretyn er þan þis” (Proem: 5.29-32).
more closely at how the Book defines, classifies, and categorizes these prayers— as various brief types of interchange seeking and understanding divine guidance, as prophetic revelation, contemplative visualizings, and more extended colloquies with Christ—is to reclaim one neglected but crucial key to the structure and unity of the Book. 168

While Windeatt considers these dialogues as a structuring principle to the Book and as a means for insight into Margery’s inner development, I move beyond his argument by examining these colloquies as integral to the text’s didacticism.

In this chapter, I argue that these dialogues perform two important didactic functions within the Book: they provide instruction to Margery on her own religious development as well as provide Margery the authority and ability to instruct others through speaking to them. Indeed, this chapter demonstrates that Margery undergoes a remarkable transformation during the course of the Book, from a woman healed and counseled by Christ’s words to a teacher who counsels and heals others by speaking with the voice of Christ. I argue that Margery’s instruction is directed in large part to the laity whom she encounters and may have read her Book; whereas much previous scholarship

168 Barry Windeatt, “Introduction: Reading and Re-reading The Book of Margery Kempe,” A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe, eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2004) 7. It is important to note here that Karma Lochrie, in Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh, has studied Margery’s voice in the Book at length. However, Lochrie focuses on Margery’s voice and the related issues of authority and literacy, not on the dialogues between God and Margery and their relation to the text’s didacticism with which this chapter is primarily concerned; as Lochrie outlines her argument, she considers the “context of Kempe’s search for authority in her life and book, the interaction between her dictating voice and written text, her use of English and Latin authorities, and her argument for her own voice. I argue that Kempe demonstrates a knowledge of Latin texts at the same time that she privileges her own voice, and in so doing, I reopen the case of her illiteracy” (Karma Lochrie, Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh, New Cultural Studies Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 6-7).
has focused on her encounters with male ecclesiastical and secular authorities, this chapter demonstrates that Margery was also significantly focused on teaching the laity who could choose to live devoted to God as she does. Furthermore, I argue that the didacticism extends outside of the Book, because Margery crafts the text as a vehicle to transmit God’s voice—both spoken by him directly and through Margery—and instruction to those who read the Book. However, this chapter demonstrates that Margery differs significantly from the other women writers considered in this study, for while her Book is intended for a wide audience, she makes clear that not everyone will attain salvation, and thus not all readers will comprehend the lessons imparted by the text or accept the text as recording the voice of God. Ultimately, I demonstrate in this chapter that Margery employs her text to teach the laity how to listen to God’s words, how to respond and take action based on them, and possibly how to attain salvation by leading a mixed life devoted to God. Margery is not only an example of someone lovingly devoted to God, as suggested by the Proem, but also—and most importantly—a teacher to all those whom she encounters and to all who read her Book.

In its examination of dialogue as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge, this chapter is structured around the three levels of didacticism contained within the Book: God’s instruction of Margery, Margery’s teaching of those she encounters, and the knowledge imparted to the readers of the Book. I will first look at the importance of language and speech in Margery’s Book by examining the forms and frequency of God’s speech to Margery. Particular consideration will be given to the dialogic nature of God’s speaking to Margery, in which Margery is not only a student receiving God’s instruction
but also an active participant in the dialogues who actively discusses, questions, and acts on the knowledge that she receives from God.

The second major portion of the chapter will examine how Margery employs her own voice, which she claims is in fact the voice of Christ. In particular, this second portion of the chapter will consider how Margery uses her voice to transmit knowledge to the diverse people she meets. As the Book clearly demonstrates, the manner in which Margery and her voice is received is quite varied: some readily embrace her as speaking with the voice of God, while others soundly reject her.

The concluding section of the chapter examines how the audience in the Book is a mirror of the audience of the Book, who hear the voices of God and Margery through the oral transmission of the text to its readers. Margery’s depiction of salvation—and the very real possibility of damnation—suggest that some of those who read her Book will believe it transmits the voice and knowledge of God, while others will not. The Book’s didacticism thus extends beyond what is depicted in the text to those outside it, some of whom will learn and be saved, while others will reject the knowledge and face God’s judgment.

_The Book of Margery Kempe_ is an unusual text with a remarkable textual history. Margery, the daughter of a prosperous burgess in Bishop’s Lynn who served five times as mayor of Lynn, recorded her account of her life in the late 1430s when she was over sixty years old and twenty years after her religious conversion.\(^\text{169}\) She begins her Book not

\(^{169}\) Book I, which comprises the vast majority of the book (89 chapters in addition to a proem and preface), is dated 1436 in the proem; Book II, which is substantially briefer (10 chapters in total) and is focused primarily on Margery’s experiences with her son, his
with her young life, as is often the case in hagiography, but with her marriage to John Kempe and subsequent pregnancy (the first of fourteen pregnancies). During the course of the *Book*, Margery also recounts her religious conversion after a mystical experience; her frequent visions of and conversations with God; her pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Italy, Santiago, and Prussia, as well as to sites across England; and her encounters with religious authorities who question her practices and beliefs. The proem and the preface (the former the words of the scribe, the latter apparently the words of Margery) provide insight into the difficulty that Margery experienced in recording her story. Both the proem and the preface explain that her first scribe, a native Englishman who had lived much of his adult life in Germany, composed an incomprehensible text. The second scribe, a “prest whech þis creatur had gret affeccyon to” (Proem: 4.12-13), was initially unable to decipher the first scribe’s text and had grave reservations about being associated with Margery and her text. He deferred writing it until four years had passed and he was assured of Margery’s goodness.

Margery’s *Book* is now available only in one fifteenth-century manuscript, which was probably copied from the now-lost original. This surviving manuscript was not discovered until 1934, and prior to that date, the *Book* was known in a radically different form: a brief selection of devotional material taken from her text that omits most of the autobiographical details contained in the original, which was published by Wynkyn de

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170 The first sentence of the first chapter reads: “Whan þis creatur was xx 3er of age or sumdele mor, sche was maryed to a worscepful burgeys and was wyth chylde wyth-in schort tyme, as kynde wolde” (1:6.25-27).
Worde in 1501 and reprinted in 1521 by Henry Pepwell. Margery, too, was not fully known to her readers until the manuscript was discovered in 1934, for Pepwell erroneously described her as “a devoute ancre” in his colophon.\textsuperscript{171}

In the scholarship which has increasingly flourished since the manuscript’s discovery, the Book has been described most often in terms of autobiography. Atkinson first described Margery’s text as an autobiography: “She was more than sixty years old

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\textsuperscript{171} \textit{The Cell of Self Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises Printed by Henry Pepwell in 1521}, ed. Edmund G. Gardner (New York: Duffield & Co., 1910) 49. Two excellent studies of the printed editions are offered by Jennifer Summit, \textit{Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Allyson Foster, “A Shorte Treatysse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe in its Early Print Contexts,” Arnold and Lewis 95-112. Of particular importance to this study is the fact that the printed editions excised most of Margery’s voice from the text. As Foster explains, “Of the twenty-eight passages that comprise the treatise, [Margery’s] voice is heard directly in only five (one of which is heard with Christ’s voice), while Christ speaks in twenty. […] The discrepancy between voices is even more startling when the comparative length of the passages is taken into account: the passages in which Kempe speaks are only one to five lines long, while some of Christ’s directives run as long as nineteen lines” (97). Moreover, as Foster argues, the way in which Margery’s voice functions within the printed edition is fundamentally different than what is evidenced in the manuscript version:

While at times the structure of the piece is reminiscent of a dialogue, it is by no means an equal exchange. When Margery does speak, she doesn’t deliver any spiritual guidance or recount any of her experiences as she does in the Book. […] Furthermore, her voice is not heard until nearly a third of the way into the treatise, and, unlike her Book, it is Christ who quite literally does have the last word. […] Margery’s voice seems to function primarily as a means of occasioning Christ’s doctrines […]. Rather than voicing her own understanding of spiritual matters, as she so often does in her Book, the Margery Kempe of the redacted version seems a rather passive receptacle of the knowledge Christ imparts to her. Moreover, the characteristic conversational and intimate exchanges […] have been replaced by a more didactic type of colloquy in which Christ instructs, guides and corrects her when she is engaged in the ‘wrong’ types of devotion, and she, for the most part, accepts without comment. (97-98)
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This chapter will not consider the printed editions of the Book, but it is important to note here that Margery’s voice and active participation in dialogue with Christ were certainly not always considered positively.
when she began, looking back over half a century of tumultuous experience. Hers is the first autobiography in the English language.”  

Atkinson’s description has been invoked numerous times since, and, in addition, the Book has been described as crossing the genres of autobiography and hagiography. For example, Gail McMurray Gibson argues that the Book is not only an autobiography but “also a calculated hagiographical text, a kind of autobiographical saint’s life,” while Carolyn Dinshaw describes it as “a spiritual autobiography.”

The scholarship on Margery Kempe and her Book since the manuscript’s discovery has given substantial attention to those instances in the Book that record Margery’s teaching and preaching, particularly in situations where she encountered male ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Recently, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has astutely argued, “One of the most extraordinary and downright puzzling things about Margery Kempe is her penchant for casual, public teaching in a variety of urban settings—and precisely during the period we are accustomed to think of as full of danger created by Arundel’s 1409 Constitutions.” Kerby-Fulton’s analysis focuses on two incidents in the text—Margery’s encounter with the archbishop of York as well as a York cleric’s testing of her regarding the Free Spirit heresy—in the context of semi-religious women

172 Atkinson 18.
on the Continent such as the Beguines. In addition, two scholars who have considered the didacticism of Margery’s *Book* have done so by analyzing the *Book* as a work of social criticism directed primarily at religious and social institutions; both Sarah Rees Jones and Lynn Staley have argued that Margery uses her text to scrutinize these institutions and their representatives and to instruct them on their faults.176

Margery’s encounters with male authorities—both ecclesiastical and secular—and her instruction of them within and through the *Book* certainly warrant close scrutiny by scholars such as Kerby-Fulton, Jones, and Staley. However, focus on these aspects of the text should not come at the expense of examining other important aspects of the text, particularly because the didacticism so remarkably on display in these encounters with authorities is integral to not only other aspects of the text but also the text as a whole. In addition, focus on Margery, the fascinating female ‘creatur’177 around which the text revolves, has overshadowed study of the text’s function, purpose, and relation to its

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176 Sarah Rees Jones, “‘A peler of Holy Cherch’: Margery Kempe and the Bishops,” *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, eds. Jocelyn-Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000) and Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Although not central to this chapter’s argument, it is constructive to address here Staley’s argument regarding the distinction between Margery, the subject, and Kempe, author of the *Book*. I believe that this argument draws too large of a distinction between the subject and author of the *Book*. To some extent, all autobiographers craft a persona within their texts, and Margery Kempe is no exception. I contend that it is important to keep in mind that the author and subject are one and the same, as well as two and different.  

177 This term is first used to describe Margery in the proem (see Proem. 5.11, 14, and 23), and Margery uses this term herself at the end of her preface: “And so he gan to wryten in þe yer of owr Lord a m.cccc.xxxvj on þe day next aftyr Mary Maude and after þe informacyon of þis creatur.” She also uses this term throughout the *Book*, which is written in the third person, as introduced in the first line of the first chapter: “Whan this creatur was xx yer of age or sumdele mor […]” (1:6.25).
audience—a fact that one could suppose Margery would not be pleased to know, since
she invested so much in carefully crafting the text she waited twenty years to write.

One aspect of the text that deserves much greater scrutiny is the dialogue that
takes precedence throughout the *Book*. Focus on the dialogues between Margery and
God is introduced in the proem:

> For euyr þe mor slawnder & repref þat sche sufferyd, þe mor sche incresyd
  in grace & in deuocyon of holy medytacyon of hy contemplacyon & of
  wonderful spechys & dalyawns whech owr Lord spak and dalyid to hyr
  sowle, techyng hyr how sche schuld be despysed for hys lofe, how sche
  schuld han pacyens, settyng all hyr trost, alle hyr lofe, and alle hyr
  affeccyon in hym only. Sche knew & vndyrstod many secret & prevy
  thyngys whech schuld beffallen afytrward be inspiracyon of þe Holy Gost.
  (Proem, 2:29-38)

As introduced in this passage, Margery enjoys what the scribe describes as “wonderful
spechys & dalyawns” from God—terms that Margery frequently uses herself throughout
her *Book*. In particular, Margery employs “dalyawns” (and its variants) to describe her
dialogues with God, which connotes a diversity of meanings beyond its general definition
of polite talk and conversation. “Dalyawns” can also suggest speech of a serious or
spiritual nature, or, alternatively, an intimacy or even amorousness between the
speakers.178 As will be demonstrated in this chapter, all of these connotations

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178 The diverse connotations of this term are substantiated by the definitions and citations
provided in both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary*. The
*OED* provides citations for its first definition—“Talk, confabulation, converse, chat;
usually of a light or familiar kind, but also used of serious conversation or discussion.
Obs.”—from as early as 1340. Its second definition, “Sport, play (with a companion or
companions); esp. amorous toying or caressing, flirtation; often, in bad sense, wanton
toying,” also has citations as early as the late fourteenth century (“Dalliance,” *The Oxford
<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.ohio-
state.edu/cgi/entry/50057227?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=dalliance&first=}
appropriately describe the speeches and relationship between God and Margery. In this passage itself, the “dalyawns” is associated with a remarkable level of intimacy between God and Margery. Indeed, the scribe’s claim that repudiation from her peers was balanced by the intimacy of her relationship with God, particularly as it was demonstrated in their verbal exchanges, is proven true throughout the *Book*.

As the scribe describes here, these “spechys & dalyawns” are transmitted “to hyr sowle”; much like is the case with Julian, God’s words are transmitted not through corporal means but to Margery’s soul. Also much like Julian, as well as Marguerite, Margery gains understanding of the divine through her intimacy with God: as stated in this passage, God shares “techyng” with her through his words, so that she “knew & undyrstod many secret and prevy thyngys.” As will be discussed further in this chapter, Margery is not simply a vessel into which this information is poured, but an active recipient of such knowledge who is expected to transform her life in response to God’s words.

The scribe’s claims concerning the primacy of God’s speaking with Margery and its effects on her life are evidenced in one of the first and most remarkable passages of the text: Christ’s visit to her during the madness which afflicts her after giving birth to

1&max_to_show=10>. The *MED* provides four definitions: 1. “Polite, leisurely, intimate conversation or entertainment; exchange of pleasantries; chatting, small talk, gossip; knightli ~, polite conversation; leued ~, rude talk; don ~, to engage in conversation, be sociable”; 2. Serious, edifying, or spiritual conversation; communion; godli ~, gostli ~, holi ~, vertuous ~”; 3. “Amorous talk or to-do; flirting, coquetry; sexual union”; and 4. “Delay, procrastination [prob. confused with delaiaunce]” (“Daliaunce,” *The Middle English Dictionary, The Middle English Compendium* (The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2001) 22 April 2009 <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED10503>.)
her first child. This passage is introduced in the proem: the scribe explains that Margery was “towched be þe hand of owyr Lord wyth grett bodily sekenesse, wher-thorw sche lost reson & her wyttes a long tym tyl ower Lord be grace restoryd her a-geyn, as it schal mor openly be schewed afyrward” (Proem: 2.6-10). As the scribe describes this event, Margery was afflicted with a bodily illness that caused her to lose her reason, which in turn was restored by God. However, the story as related by Margery differs in one significant way: as Margery recounts, she does not lose her reason due to the illness, but as a result of a critical oral exchange between her priest and Margery.

Margery’s description of this exchange emphasizes the negative repercussions that harsh words from a male authority have on her. Margery, while debilitated by the difficult childbirth, “dyspered of hyr lyfe” and turned to her priest for forgiveness before her seemingly impending death (1:6.31). However, she is unsuccessful in relating to the priest “a thyng in conscyens whech sche had neuyr schewyd be-forn þat tyme in alle hyr lyfe” because when she is just about to share her long-held secret with him, “hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyd hir entent” (1:6.33-1:7.1, 1:7.16-18). In response to the priest’s harsh words, Margery herself refuses to speak: “& so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do” (1:7.18-19). Significantly, the priest’s words and Margery’s subsequent refusal to speak are followed by a lengthy period of mental instability for her, which Margery explains as resulting from her being situated between Hell and her priest’s oral attack: “And a-noon, for dreed sche had of dampnacyon on þe to syde and hys scharp repreuyng on þat oþer
syde, þis creatur went owt of hir mende & was wondyrlye vexid and labowryd with spryritys half þer xiiiij wekys & odde days” (1:7.19-23). Margery thus equates the severity of the male religious authority’s negative speech with damnation and is so frightened by the possibility of both that she goes mad.

Following this retelling of Margery’s encounter with the priest and of her resulting madness, the Book records the healing and positive effect that Christ’s words have on Margery. Having been afflicted by devils who convince her to “forsake hir Crystendam” (1:7.29-30), Margery is visited by Christ in the likeness of a man: “as sche lay a-loone and hir kepars wer fro hir, owyr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu, euyr to be trostyd, worshypd be hys name, neuyr forsakyng hys seruawnt in tyme of nede, aperyd to hys creatur, whych had forsakyn hym, in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyuows, & most amyable that evyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye” (1:8.11-17). Despite the fact that Margery repudiated Christ during her madnes, Christ visits her in a fashion that seems to Margery as “most semly, most bewtyuows, & most amyable”—a far cry from the way in which the priest had related to her. Christ’s positive effect on Margery is immediate: Margery describes him as adopting a familiar demeanor, “syttyng up-on hir beddys syde, lokyng vp-on hir wyth so blyssyd a chere þat sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys” (1:8.17-19). But it is Christ’s words that fully restore Margery to health:

179 Margery’s statement here and my explication are at odds with Lynn Staley’s claim that “Because she cannot speak, Margery goes out of her wits” (Staley, Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions, 89). As I argue, Margery cannot speak as a result of her distress at the priest’s critical words, and she in turn goes mad because she is without a viable choice when faced with either the priest’s reproof or the fear of damnation.
[Christ] seyd to hir þes wordys: “Dowtyr, why hast þow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr the?” And a-noon, as he had seyd þes wordys, sche saw veryly how þe eyr openyd as bryght as ony levyn, & he stey up in-to þe eyr, not rygth hastyli & qwykly, but fayr & esly at sche mygth wel beholdyn hym in the eyr tyl it was closyd a-geyn. And a-noon þe creature was stabelyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was be-forn [...]. (1:8.19-27)

Margery’s description highlights the marked difference between the priest’s and Christ’s words and the relative effects of each on her: as Margery describes, Christ interacts with her “not rygth hastyli & qwykly, but fayr & esly” and as a result of his words—“as he had seyd þes wordys”—Margery is not driven mad but “stabelyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson.” The scribe’s description of this event in the proem thus fails to mention two important aspects of Margery’s madness and recovery. First, the proem does not indicate the powerful but distinct effects that the priest’s and Christ’s words have on Margery. Second, it does not suggest Christ’s role in undoing the harm that the male ecclesiastical authority had on her. Sarah Beckwith correctly notes that in this scene, “Christ the man is juxtaposed with the instructional church as an alternative source of mercy, forgiveness, and redemption.”180 However, there is evidence for this juxtaposition not only in this scene but also throughout the Book, since this distinction between Christ and the Church is clearly evident in the types of oral interactions that representatives of the Church and God speak to Margery.

Here and throughout the Book, Margery emphasizes the frequency of God’s “wonderful spechys & dalyawns”; indeed, it is something in which she seems to take

great pride. While Margery does not experience a profound conversion to a life devoted to Christ after the above conversation—the second chapter records how despite the fact that she believed she was “bowndyn to God & ṣat sche wold ben his seruawnt,” she

“wold not leeuyn hir pride ne hir pompows aray ṣat sche had usyd be-for-tym, neiḥyr for hyr husband ne for noon oḥer mannys cownsel” (2:9.8-9, 2:9.10-12)—it is an aural experience that eventually causes her to do so. In her third chapter, Margery recounts hearing “a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable, hir ḣowt, as sche had ben in Paradyse” which causes her to eschew sexual relations with her husband and commit herself to a penitential life (3:11.13-14).

As Margery recounts in the remaining 96 chapters of the Book, she not only has frequent colloquies with Christ subsequent to her conversion, but also shares with others the nature and frequency of these colloquies. One of her longest and most detailed descriptions occurs when she recounts in chapter 17 her meeting with the vicar of St. Stephen’s in Norwich, whom she has visited at Christ’s command and from whom she attempts to win support. She emphasizes to the vicar the intimacy and familiarity with which God speaks to her, as well as the different forms he takes: “Sche teld hym how sum-tyme ṣe Fadyr of hevyn dalyd to hir sowle as pleynly and as veryl as o frend spekyth to a-noḥer be bodily spech; sum-tyme ṣe Secunde Persone in Trinyte; sumtyme alle thre Personys in Trinyte & o substawns in Godhede dalyid to hir sowle” (17:39.16-20). Similar to Julian, Margery distinguishes between different forms of divine speech: she notes here that she received these oral revelations “be bodily speech” on some
occurrences while at other times the divine speaker “dalyid to hir sowle.” Margery is privy to God in all his forms, although the colloquies as depicted in the Book demonstrate that God takes the form of Christ most often when speaking with Margery. Whatever God’s form, he speaks to her “as o frend spekyth to a-noðer,” indicating an intimate familiarity not evident in either Julian’s or Marguerite’s texts.

As she continues to explain to the vicar the nature of God’s speaking to her, Margery indicates that her colloquies with God have an instructional purpose. She explains to the vicar that through his speeches and dalliances, God “informyd hir in hir feyth & in hys lofe how sche xuld lofe hym, worshepyn hym, & dredyn hym” (17:39.21-22). These colloquies thus offer personal instruction, as they “informyd” Margery how to live and worship God. Moreover, the information and insight that God shares with her when speaking to Margery is superior to other written records, which Margery mentions specifically: as she states, God instructs her through his speeches to her “so excellently ṣat sche herd neyur boke, neŷyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oðer ṣat evyr sche herd redyn ṣat spak so hyly of lofe of God but ṣat sche felt as hyly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche cowd or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt’ (17:39.22-28). Margery takes pains here to distinguish herself and indeed hold herself superior to near contemporaneous texts that provided instruction on or provided a model of how one could approach God, such as Walter Hilton’s The Scale of Perfection and Bridget of Sweden’s Revelations. She thus establishes early in her own text the superlative nature of her relationship with God. Furthermore, she implies
through such statements that the information she conveys through her *Book* is superior to that found in other texts.

Later depictions of God’s speeches to Margery, which occur throughout the text in general but constitute much of the closing chapters of Book I in particular, confirm the explanation Margery offers to the vicar of St Stephen’s in this early chapter of her *Book*. In chapter 86, which is dedicated in its entirety to Christ’s words to Margery, Christ underscores the importance of his speaking with her: he tells her, “For in no-thyng, dowtyr, þat þu myghtyst do in erth þu myghtyst no bettyr plesyn me þan suffyrn me speke to þe in þi sowle, for þat tyme þu undirstondyst my wyl & I undirstond þi wyl” (86:210.5-8). As Christ makes explicit in this statement, nothing pleases him more than her allowing him to speak in her soul, and he indicates that not only does she learn of his will, but also he learns of her will through his speeches to her. These later chapters also confirm two things that Margery introduced in chapter 17: the numerous representatives of God (in addition to the three persons of the Trinity) who speak to Margery as well as the instructional purpose behind their words to her. In the earlier chapter, Margery explains to the vicar that in addition to the personages of the Trinity, “Sum-tyme owyr Lady spak to hir mend. Sumtyme Seynt Petyr, sumtyme Seynt Powyl, sumtym Seynt Kateryn, er what seynt in Heuyn sche had deuocyon to aperyd to hir sowle & tawt hir how sche xuld louyn owyr Lord & how sche xuld plesyn hym” (17:39.28-32). In the later chapter, Margery expounds on both the personages who speak to her and the nature of their dialogue:
“Sum-tyme owr Lady spak to hir & comfortyd hir in hir sekenes. Sumtyme Seynt Petyr, er Seynt Powle, sumtyme Seynt Mary Mawdelyn, Seynt Kateryne, Seynt Margaret, er what seynt in Heuyn þat sche cowde thynke on thorw þe wil & sufferawns of God, þei spokyn to þe vndirstondyng of hir sowle, & enformyd hir how sche xulde louyn God & how sche xulde best plesyn hym, & answeryd to what þat sche wolde askyn of hem, & sche cowed vndirstond be her maner of dalyawns whech of hem it was þat spak vn-to hir & comfortyd hir. (87:215.10-20)

In this passage, Margery adds to her list of those who speak to her. Notably, all of the additions are feminine: in addition to Peter, Paul, and Katherine, whom she has already mentioned, Margery adds Mary Magdalene, Margaret, and most notably, the Virgin Mary. All of these saintly figures share with her instruction and information that will better Margery’s own life and dedication to Christ: significantly, Margery describes them as speaking “to þe vndirstondyng of hir sowle” as they inform her how best to love God. The dialogues are not one-sided: as Margery indicates, the saints “answeryd” the questions she “wolde askyn of hem.” At the end of this descriptive passage, Margery returns to the primary speaker, Christ, and emphasizes the remarkable frequency with which he speaks to her: “Owr Lord of hys hy mercy visityd hir so mech & so plenteuowslys wyth hys holy spechys & hys holy dalyawnce þat sche wist not many tymys how þe day went” (87:215.20-23). Margery’s colloquies with Christ and the saints are not exceptional and infrequent, but events that overwhelm her due to their frequency.

The didactic nature of God and his representatives’ speeches to her is explicit throughout the Book. Margery receives instructions on a wide range of topics, ranging from daily living to profound theological matters. For example, in the first extended passage spoken by Christ to Margery, recorded in the fifth chapter, Christ visits Margery
as she prays and weeps in her parish church. He informs her that he “forȝe ȝe ȝi synnes
to ȝe vtterest poynţ. And ȝow schalt neuyr com in Helle ne in Purgatorye,” further
explaining that upon her death she will experience the “blysse of Heuyn” (5:16.35-36,
5:16.38-5:17.1). In addition to informing Margery of her salvation, Christ instructs
Margery on the intimate nature of their relationship: as he continues, Christ tells
Margery that “I bydde ȝe & comawnd ȝe, boldly clepe me Ihesus, ȝi loue, for I am ȝi loue
& schal be ȝi loue wyth-owtyn ende” (5:17.4-6). After he shares significant information
with Margery regarding the state of her soul and the nature of her relationship with him,
Christ then instructs Margery on much more mundane matters: he instructs her to stop
wearing a hair-shirt, to give up the eating of meat, to receive Eucharist every Sunday, and
to “leue ȝi byddyng of many bedys and thynk swych thowtys as I wyl putt in ȝi mend,”
since he will “ȝeuyn ȝe leue to byddyn tyl sex of ȝe cloke to sey what ȝow wyld. Ȟan
schalt ȝow ly stylle & speke to me be thowt, & I schal ȝef to ȝe hey medytacyon and
very contemplacyon” (5:17.26-27, 5:17.28-31). This mix of the mundane and the
profound continues throughout the Book, as Jesus directs Margery on matters from the
color of her clothing to how to reply to ecclesiastical authorities and which pilgrimage
sites she should visit.\textsuperscript{181}

At several points throughout the text, God and his representatives instruct
Margery at length, providing detailed direction on aspects of the holy life she should lead.

\textsuperscript{181} See, for example, 15:32.1-23, 15.35.15-26, and 44.103.28-104.26.
The first of these passages occurs in chapters 36 and 37. At the close of the previous chapter, Christ underscores the importance of his speaking to her:

\[\text{[D]}\text{u hast as gret cawse to be mery as any lady in } \text{his} \text{ werld, } \& , \text{ yyf } \text{du knew, dowyr, how meche } \text{du plesyst me whan } \text{du suffyrst me wilfully to spekyn in } \text{he, } \text{du schuldist neuyr do oferwyse, for } \text{his is an holy lyfe } \& \text{ he tyme is ryth wel spent. For, dowyr, } \text{his lyfe plesyth me mor } \text{han weryng of } \text{he haburion or of } \text{he hayr or fastyng of bred } \& \text{ watyr, for, } \text{yyf } \text{du saydest euerday a thowsand Pater Noster, } \text{du xuldist not plesyn me so wel as } \text{du dost whan } \text{du art in silens } \& \text{ sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle. (35:89.15-25)}\]

Christ thus counsels Margery that nothing that she does—whether devotional practices such as wearing a hair-shirt or praying—is more important than allowing Christ to “spekyn in he.” In the two chapters that follow, Christ demonstrates the usefulness of allowing him to do so, for he provides insight into the varying significance he places on certain religious practices. While he tells Margery that “Fastyng […] is good for 3ong be-gynnars & discrete penawns,” he explicitly privileges a contemplative life that allows him to speak in her soul: “thynkyng, wepyng, & hy contemplacyon is he best lyfe in erthe. And he xalt haue mor meryte in Heuyn for 03er of thynkyng in hi mende hean for an hundryd 3er of preyng wyth hi mowth” (36:89.26-27, 36:89.37-36:90.2). Christ’s marked support of this life is mirrored in his praise for Margery, whom he praises for pleasing him and assures her that she will receive salvation for the life she has devoted to him.\(^{182}\)

Indeed, he expounds the intimate nature of their relationship, commanding her “whan he

\(^{182}\) 36:90.4-6 and 37:91.26-33.
art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth the modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to loue hir husbonde” (36:90.19-24). In this passage, not only does Christ present himself as Margery’s “husbond,” “derlyng,” and “sone,” but also he adopts the role of teacher.

In subsequent long passages which record God’s words to Margery, God instructs her, praises her, and emphasizes the importance of his speaking to her. One of the most notable of these passages, which is recorded in chapters 64-66, makes explicit another underlying commonality among the passages: God is her first, primary, and most important teacher. At the beginning of this passage, Margery asks Christ how “I myth best loue þe & plesyn þe & that my loue wer as swet to þe as me thynkyth þat thy love is vn-to me” (64:157.22-24). In response, Christ expounds on his love for her and explains that due to her limited understanding, only in heaven will Margery “se wythowyn ende euery good day þat euyr I ʒaf þe in erth of contemplacyon, of deuocyon, & of al þe gret charite þat I haue ʒouyn to þe to þe profyte of thyn euyn-cristen. For þis schal be thy mete whan þu comyst hom in-to Heuyn” (64:157.36-64:158.3). Similar to Julian’s text, Margery’s Book thus distinguishes between earthly understanding and the understanding that will be hers when she achieves salvation. Moreover, Christ here explains that he has

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183 The other significantly long record of God’s speeches to Margery occurs in chapters 84-88, passages from which have been discussed above. These chapters share great similarity with the broad outlines of the earlier chapters discussed here; to avoid redundancy, I will not discuss them in detail here.
given her the gifts of contemplation, devotion, and charity “to þe profyte of thyn euyn-cristen”—suggesting an additional similarity between Margery’s *Book* and Julian’s text. God continues to explain that despite her limited earthly understanding, Margery is privy to great knowledge due to his teaching: he tells her, “Þer is no clerk in al þis world þat can, dowtyr, leryn þe bettyr þan I can do, and, þyf þu wilt be buxom to my wyl, I schal be buxom to thy wil” (64:158.3-5). A few lines later, Christ reiterates this point, explaining to Margery that “Ther is no clerk can spekyn a-þens þe lyfe whech I teche þe, &, þyf he do, he is not Goddys clerk; he is þe Deuelys clerk” (64:158.12-14). As indicated here, a distinction between the Church’s representatives and God is drawn again, with the knowledge that the latter imparts held as vastly superior to any clerk’s. Moreover, any person who doubts the holiness of Margery’s life, as startlingly distinct as it may be from other medieval religious, is condemned by God as the “Deuelys clerk.” In this passage, Christ thus authorizes Margery, the knowledge she gains from God, and her life in unequivocal terms.

Despite being authorized by God in passages such as this, Margery is not readily accepted by many she encounters, as demonstrated by a number of instances throughout the *Book*. However, God provides support for her by offering her his wisdom when she is faced with such trying situations. Christ introduces this idea after instructing her on not wearing her hair-shirt, abstaining from eating meat, and taking Eucharist every week,

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184 Margery’s relation to her “euyn-cristen” will be discussed further within the context of Margery’s interactions with others within the *Book* as well as the *Book*’s relation to its readers.
as discussed above. Christ informs her that she will be criticized by many for her modes of devotion, telling her that she will “ben etyn & knawyn of þe pepul of þe world as any raton knawyþ þe stokfysch” (5:17.16-17). He consoles her by offering his own wisdom in response to such fierce criticism: “Drede þe nowt, dowtyr, for ðow schalt haue þe vyctory of al þin emys. I schal þe grace j-now to answer euery clerke in þe loue of God” (5:17.17-20). Similar to the angel’s promise to Catherine that God will ensure her success in the debate against the scholars, as discussed in the first chapter, Christ here claims that Margery will triumph over the doubt and questions posed by anyone—including “euery clerke”—due to his grace. Moreover, just as Clemence makes clear in her text, Margery’s *Book* does not claim that she will only be a mouthpiece for God—that her wisdom is not her own but that she is simply a vessel through which God speaks—but that his grace will allow her to satisfactorily answer all questions put to her.

Later in the text, when Margery finds herself surrounded by German-speaking people during her pilgrimage to Rome, God’s promise to teach her more capably than any earthly source is manifested. Ignorant of the foreign languages spoken around her, Margery bemoans her lack of understanding: “þe forseyd creatur was at sermownys wher Duchemen & oþer men prechyd, techyng þe lawys of God, sodeyn sorwe & heuynes ocupying hir hert cawsyd hir to compleyn wyth mornyng cher for lak of vndirstondyng, desyryng to be refreschyd wyth sum crumme of gostly vndirstondyng” (41:98.18-23). Her desire is immediately and directly fulfilled by God: upon her complaint, “Crist Ihesu, whos melydiows voys swetest of alle sauowrys softly sowndyng in hir sowle,
seyd, ‘I xal preche þe & teche þe my-selfe, for þi wyl & thy desyr is acceptabyl vn-to me’” (41:98.24-27). He then speaks her in her soul, evidently teaching her more than any other preacher is capable of teaching her: “Þan was hir sowle so defectably fed wyth þe swet dalyawns of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on þe o syde & sithyn on þe oþer wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng” (41:27-31).

Although she is in a foreign country, surrounded by persons who do not speak English, the knowledge that Margery receives directly from God allows her insight that raptures her soul and provides understanding beyond that which she can receive through human means.

Although Margery has God as her teacher, her limited human understanding prevents her from being a perfect student and from conveying perfectly the knowledge she does gain. On at least one occasion, during her interrogation in Lincoln, Margery impresses others with her knowledge, and while surely in part a strategy of self-preservation, she attributes that knowledge to God. When asked by men of law from whom she received her extensive knowledge, Margery concedes it is from her divine teacher: “Ther wer men of lawe seyd unto hir, ‘We han gon to scol e many ȝeries, & þet arn we not sufficient to answeryn as þu dost. Of whom hast þu þis cumnyng?’ & sche seyd, ‘Of þe Holy Gost’” (55:135.26-29). However, on other occasions throughout the text, Margery’s inability to fully grasp the knowledge shared with her is evident.

Windeatt notes Margery’s inability to communicate the knowledge she receives, arguing, “There is a strong emphasis, stronger later rather than earlier in the text, on what cannot
be communicated [...], of the daunting difficulty of interpreting what she apprehends.”

There are a number of instances later in the text that support Windeatt’s argument, such as when Margery remarks on the temporal nature of her knowledge in chapter 83: “3yf on of hir confessowrys come to hir whan sche ros vp newly fro hir contemplacyon er ellys fro hir meditacyon, sche cowde a telde hym meche thyng of þe dalyawnce þat owr Lord dalyid to hir sowle, & in a schort tyme aftyr sche had forȝetyn þe most party þerof & ny euerydeel” (83:201.39-83:202.5). However, the scribe notes in his proem that Margery struggled not only to convey the knowledge she gained through God’s speaking with her but also to comprehend the divine knowledge shown to her human intellect: “Ne hyr-self cowd neuyr telle þe grace þat sche felt, it was so heuenly, so hy a-bouen hyr reson & hyr bodily wyttys, and hyr body so febyl in tym of þe presens of grace þat sche myth neuyr expressyn it wyth her word lych as sche felt it in hyr sowle” (Proem: 3.3-8). The proem, which was written close to the beginning of the composition of the Book, thus suggests that Margery, due to her inability to truly understand the knowledge God shared with her, was strikingly similar to both Julian and to the souls who had not been annihilated in Marguerite’s text.

On at least one occasion, Margery proves to be not only an imperfect student, but also an entirely unreceptive student who refuses the knowledge given to her. This occasion centers on universal salvation—a topic not nearly as central to Margery as it is to Julian, but one that appears at a number of points throughout the Book. For example,

early in the text Margery recounts a colloquy between herself and Christ concerning universal salvation. Christ explains to Margery that he has charged her with praying for the salvation of others: “I haue ordeyned þe to knele be-for the Trynyte for to prey for al þe world, for many hundayd thousands sowlys schal be sauyd be þi prayers. And þerfor, dowtyr, aske what þow wylt, & I xal grawnt þe thyn askyng” (7:20.10-14). Christ’s instructions to Margery reflect what Barbara Newman has astutely argued was a particular emphasis placed on intercessory prayers for devout women by their spiritual directors in the later Middle Ages.¹⁸⁶ In response to Christ’s instructions, Margery requests that all souls be awarded salvation and protection from the fear of damnation: “Þis creatur seyd, ‘Lord, I aske mercy & preseruyng fro euyr-lestyng dampnacyon for me & for all þe world, chastysyse us her how þow wylt & in Purgatory, & kepe us fro dampnacyon for þin hy mercy’” (7:20.14-18). Margery thus follows in the footsteps of a small but significant number of holy women whose written records indicate an important move beyond intercessory prayer towards embracing the notion that Christ in his infinite mercy should share that mercy with all souls. Newman argues that women such as Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, Margery Kempe and

¹⁸⁶ See Chapter 4: “On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women” in Barbara Newman, From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 108-136. In this chapter, Newman argues, “Such prayer constituted a safe, invisible, contemplative mission that could put women’s devotion and compassion to work without violating any gender taboos. At the same time, it could be construed as a work of active charity, an apostolate requiring the same zeal for souls that men could express by preaching or hearing confessions” (111).
Julian of Norwich were acutely aware of the paradox of appearing more merciful than God himself:

[T]he more daring and theologically sophisticated mystics were aware of this potential and struggled with it, reflecting on their purgatorial piety to reach new and something frightening insights about the paradox of justice and mercy. These explorations left them to challenge the limits of their devotion and at time, almost unwittingly, to question its very basis—God’s sacrosanct right to punish.  

While the conversation between Christ and Margery ends immediately after Margery requests salvation for all the souls for whom she is charged to pray, the next instance in which universal salvation is central to the Book indicates that Margery overtly struggled with this paradox as she refuses the knowledge that God attempts to share with her.

Later in the text, Margery reiterates her request for universal salvation, initiating a series of events that underscores both her limited human understanding and God’s infinite power. In chapter 57, which is comprised mainly of accounts of occasions on which Margery wept extensively due to her mediations on Good Friday, she returns to the topic of universal salvation. As she explains, “Many tymes, whan þis creatur xulde makyn hir preyerys, owr Lord seyd vn-to hir, ‘Dowtyr, aske what þu wylt, & þu schalt have it’”

(57:141.5-7). In response, she asks for Christ’s mercy not for herself but for all souls:

Sche seyd, ‘I aske ryth nowt, Lord, but þat þu mayst wel 3evyn me, & þat is mercy whech I aske for þe pepil synnys. þu seyst oftyn-tymes in þe 3er to me þat þu hast for3ouyn me my synnes. þperfor I aske now mercy for þe synne of þe pepil, as I wolde don for myn owyn, for, Lord, þu art alle charite, and charite browt þe in-to þis wretchyd worlde & cawsyd þe to

187 Newman, From Virile Woman to WomanChrist 122.
suffyr ful harde peynys for owr synnys. Why xulde I not þan han charite to þe pepyl & desiryn forȝeuenes of her synnes?’ (57:141.7-16)

Margery thus calls on Christ’s “mercy” and “charite,” arguing that the grace which he shares with her should be shared with everyone. She seems to provide a model of—and possibly a model for—Christ, whom she describes in this passage as “alle charite,” by asking not for herself but for others. She continues on the topic of salvation at length, repeatedly emphasizing Christ’s mercy and charity as well as her own unworthiness: she describes herself as “so synful a woman & þe most vnworthy creatur þat euyr þu schewedist þi mercy on-to in alle þis werlde” and notes that despite her sinful ways, Christ is “as gracyows to me as þei I wer as clene a mayden as any is in þis worlde & as thow I had neuyr synned” (57:141.32-33, 57:141.18-20). Although she does not consider universal salvation very often throughout the Book, in this passage Margery indicates that she speaks frequently with Christ in her prayers about the salvation of others and the arguments she believes necessitates that salvation—Christ’s mercy and charity. Faced with the paradox between mercy and justice discussed by Newman that is outlined above, Margery comes down decidedly on the side of mercy.

Although Christ does not immediately respond to her request for universal salvation and her arguments for it, the topic resurfaces a chapter later in a manner which causes Margery to refuse God’s lessons concerning others’ salvation. The chapter begins by noting that Margery is increasing in her religious knowledge and devotion: “þorw heryng of holy bokys & þorw heryng of holy sermownys, sche euyr encresyd in contemplacyon & holy meditacyon” (59:144.5-7). Margery further notes that her
knowledge comes not only from earthly sources such as books and sermons but also God’s revelations to her: “It wer in maner vn-possibyl to writyn al þe holy thowtys, holy spechys, and þe hy reuelacyons whech owr Lord schewyd vn-to hir, bothyn of hir-selfe & of oðer men & women, also of many sowlys, sum for to ben sau禹 & sum for to ben dampnyd, & was to hir a gret ponyschyng & a scharp chastisyng” (59:144.7-12). Her extensive education as God’s student thus includes revelations she is clearly at pains to understand and accept: to her, knowledge of damnation is “a gret ponyschyng & a scharp chastisyng.” As the chapter continues, it becomes evident just how difficult it is for Margery to accept damnation as truth when she refuses a vision from God that provides evidence for the existence of Hell and damnation. As she explains, “whan owr Lord schewyd to hir of any þat xulde be dampnyd, sche had gret peyn. Sche wolde not heryn it ne beleuyn þat it was God þat schewyd hir swech thyngys & put it owt of hir mende as mech as sche myth” (59:144.15-19). Her understanding of Christ’s mercy and charity are thus at such odds with the vision of damnation that she refuses to believe that the vision is from Christ.

Christ’s response to Margery’s refusal indicates a resolution to the question of universal salvation which is radically at odds with what is seen in Marguerite’s and Julian’s texts. When Margery does not accept God as the source of her vision, Christ instructs her to believe the vision of damnation just as she believes visions of salvation: “Owr Lord blamyd hir þer-for & badde hir beleuyn þat it was hys hy mercy & hys goodnesse to schewyn hir hys preuy cownselys, seying to hir mende, "Dowtyr, þu must as
wel heryn of þe dampnyd as of þe sauyd” (59:144.19-23). Christ thus reminds her that all of her visions—those that she readily accepts and those that are at odds with her own ideas—are “hys preuy cownselys,” which are shown to her only because of “hys hy mercy & hys goodnesse.” Christ’s mercy and goodness are thus not depicted here as associated with universal salvation, but with his willingness to share his knowledge with Margery, who will be saved. When Margery continues to disbelieve her vision, Christ revokes the very things on which she relies in her close relationship with Christ: “Than for hir frowardnes & hir vnbeleue owr Lord drow fro hir alle good thowtys & alle good mendys of holy spechys & dalyawns & þe hy contemplacyon whech sche had ben vsyd to be-for-tyme, & suffyrd hir to haue as many euyl thowtys as sche had be-forn of good thowtys” (59:144.25-30). She suffers without “alle good thowtys & alle good mendys of holy spechys & dalyawns & þe hy contemplacyon” that Christ bestowed on her previously, leaving her instead with “horybyl syghtys & abhominabyl” for twelve days (59:145.8). This punishment ends with Christ speaking to her—again underscoring the importance of speech between Margery and Christ—and instructing her to “beleue now wel þat I am no deuyl” (59:146.23-24). She rejoices at his words, agreeing to believe the visions that he sends her: “Þan was sche fylled wyth joye, for sche herd owr Lord spekyn to hir as he was wone to don. Therfor sche seyd, ‘I xal beleuyn þat every good thowt is þe speche of God’” (59:146.24-27). Moreover, Margery tells God that she will readily accept the knowledge imparted that he imparts to her through the visions she experiences:
“Lord, now wyl I lyn stille & be buxom to þi wille; I pray þe, Lord, speke in me what þat is most plesawns to þe” (59:146.32-34).

Newman argues that this episode in the text demonstrates “an acute conflict between Margery’s desire for universal salvation and her orthodox belief that hell is essential to Christian faith.” However, it is clear that this episode not only demonstrates the conflict but also its resolution—a resolution founded on the existence of hell and God’s ability and willingness to punish. Indeed, Margery herself explains that the punishment he inflicted on her for refusing the vision was akin to hell: “I wold not, Lord, for al þis world suffryn swech an-oþer peyne as I haue suffryd þes xij days, for me thowt I was in Helle” (59:146.29-31). This episode thus demonstrates that God’s knowledge extends well beyond what Margery can readily accept as true, and that despite her prayers to the contrary, it is not guaranteed that all souls will be rewarded with salvation.

The episodes concerning salvation highlight another fundamental aspect of Margery’s relationship with God: while she is not always receptive to the knowledge offered to her by God, she is an active participant in the dialogues with him. Margery’s voice is a prominent feature throughout the text: she asks questions, responds to God instructions, and engages in dialogue with him on a notably regular basis. While there are passages in which God speaks to her at length without interruption, more often Margery’s voice is recorded alongside his. Indeed, the occasions on which she does not speak are highlighted as significant within the text. As discussed at the opening of this chapter, Margery’s refusal to speak in the first chapter signals her inability to choose between her confessor’s harsh words and damnation, which results in her madness. At
another significant moment in the text, Margery’s marriage to the Godhead, Margery has grave reservations about marrying the Godhead because she wishes to maintain her closeness with another member of the Trinity--Christ. When God assures her that he wishes to marry her in order to “schewyn þe my preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende,” Margery explains that she “kept sylens in hir sowle & answeryd not þerto” because “sche was ful sor aferd of þe Godhed & sche cowde no skylle of þe dalyawns of þe Godhede, for al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in þe manhode of Crist & þerof cowde sche good skylle & sche wolde for no-thyng a partyd þerfro” (35:86.17-18, 19-20, and 20-24). God’s offer to share his “prevyteys” and “cownselys” with her does not sway Margery, whose will is remarkably strong. When Christ intercedes, asking if she is pleased at the offer, she remains silent, still refusing to answer. Christ provides a reason for her silence that reveals that not speaking is a sign of ignorance and youth: “Fadyr, haue hir excused, for sche is yet but yong & not fully lernyd how sche xulde answeryn” (35:87.11-13). The marriage continues and Margery eventually thanks God for his beneficence, and the text returns to Margery’s frequent dialogues with God and his representatives.

One representative example of the dialogic nature of Christ and Margery’s relationship is provided in chapter 77, which is dedicated to the topic of Margery’s weeping and the lessons her weeping provides. The chapter opens by noting that the conversation concerning Margery’s weeping occurred shortly after she had received the gift of tears and “on a tyme was in gostly dalyawns wyth hir sovereyn Lord Crist Jhesu”
(77:181.17-18). She asks Christ “why wilt thou gyf me swech crying” before enumerating the reasons she believes she should not weep so excessively and, should he not take away the tears entirely, why Christ should set parameters on when and where she weeps (77:181.18-19). In response to her questions and arguments, which comprise twenty-two lines (77:181.18-77:182.4), Christ offers an extended rebuttal that itself spans sixty-two lines (77.182.5-77:183.31). He begins by stating that he will not answer her prayer: “Dowtyr, prey not þerfor; þu xalt not han thy desyr in þis thow my Modyr & alle þe seyntys in Heuyn preye for þe, for I xal make þe buxom to my wil  þat þu xalt criyn whan I wil, & wher I wil, bothyn lowde and stille, for I teld þe, dowtyr, þu art myn & I am thyn, & so xalt þu be wyth-owtyn ende” (77:182.11). He then offers an extensive explanation for his refusal, noting the many ways that his will is shown to humans and explicating the five ways in which her tears are a “tokyn” of such things as his love for her, his mother’s sorrow, and the promise of salvation for those who repent their sins as Margery does (77:183.8-28). In her response to his explanation, Margery implies that Christ has shown her great love by teaching her in this manner and by providing a model for her own behavior: “A, Lord, blissyd mote þu be, for me thynkyth þu dost þisef þat þu biddist me don. In Holy Writte, Lord, þu byddyst me louyn myn enmys, & I wot wel þat in al þis werld was neuyr so gret an enmye to me as I haue ben to þe” (77:183.32-77:184.1). She concludes by noting her inability to show as much goodness as he has: “þerfor, Lord, þei
I wer slayn an hundyd sithys on a day, 3yf it wer possibyl, for thy loue, 3et cowde I neuyr 3eldyn þe þe goodnes þat þu hast schewyd to me” (77:184.1-4).

At this point, the dialogue between Christ and Margery turns to this related topic, love, and how Margery can best demonstrate her love to Christ. He instructs her that she should “3eue me not ellys but lofe,” which is the best way to please him (77:184.5-6). Furthermore, he instructs her to constantly remember him and his omniscience: “kepe me al-vey in þi mende as meche as þu mayst & forȝete me not at þi mete, but thynk alwey þat I sitte in þin hert & knowe every thougt þat is þerin, boþe good & ylle, & þat I parceyue þe lest thynkyng and twynkelyng of thyn eye” (77:184.10-14). Margery’s response indicates that she takes Christ’s instructions to heart: she describes the extent she would go to in order to demonstrate her love for him. In addition, she acquiesces to Christ’s will, as he had instructed her to do when she first prayed to be relived of her tears: she says she would be shamed publicly and extensively “3yf þu wer plesyd þerby & no mannys sowle hyndryd, þi wil mote be fulfilyd & not myn” (77:184.23-25). This chapter thus exemplifies how Margery and Christ converse with one another as well as how Margery learns from these dialogues. In this chapter alone, she has developed under Christ’s tutelage from asking for those things that she desires in a personal and human way to understanding the reasons for her weeping and its relation to Christ’s larger lesson of love and then eventually to embracing God’s will in her life.
As the dialogue in chapter 77 demonstrates, the knowledge Margery gains through her dialogues with God and his representatives is not at all confined to profound theological matters or cerebral revelations. As demonstrated earlier in this study, Marguerite’s and Julian’s mystical experiences are more theological and cerebral in nature. Indeed, Margery’s Book repeatedly demonstrates the practical applicability of the knowledge that Margery receives from God. One of the oft-cited episodes from the Book, Margery’s negotiations with her husband regarding her desire to have a celibate marriage, exemplifies the very practical application that her dialogues with Christ can have. Her colloquy with Christ concerning this matter also demonstrates the regular and easy access that Margery has to Christ and how she translates the knowledge she gains into action. When faced with the very real fear that her husband will not agree to a celibate marriage as she desires, Margery turns to God to help her. Her husband informs Margery that he will agree to her request so long as she agrees to three stipulations:

“Margery, grawnt me my desyr, & I schal grawnt 3ow 3owr desyr. My fyrst desyr is þat we xal lyn stytle to-gedyr in o bed as we han do be-før; þe secunde þat 3e schal pay my dettys er 3e go to Iherusalem; & þe thrydde þat 3e schal etyn & drynkyn wyth me on þe Fryday as 3e wer wont to don” (11:24.12-17). Margery initially refuses, but then prays to God for guidance in the matter. She explains the situation, noting that so long as God agrees to let her break her Friday fasts, she will finally be granted the celibacy that she has wished for three years. She further notes that she will not willingly break God’s will, so he must instruct her: “I wyl not contraryen þi wyl, and mekyl now is my sorwe les þan
I fynde comfort in þe. Now, blyssed Ihesu, make þi wyl knowyn to me vnworthy þat I may folwyn þerafty & fulfyllyn it wyth al my myghtys” (11:24.30-34).

While this episode has rightly received a great deal of scholarly attention to its treatment of marriage and celibacy, it is also very important to note the role that dialogue between Margery and Christ plays. One of the most astonishing things about Christ’s response to Margery’s prayer is its immediacy, indicating an always-accessible channel for oral communication between Margery and Christ. Christ’s response demonstrates that he is readily accessible to Margery as soon as she is in need of help—more so than even her own confessor would be—and Christ’s response is immediate and conclusive. Christ instructs Margery to accept her husband’s terms concerning fasting on Fridays, since this is what Christ had intended when he had previously asked Margery to fast: “þis was þe cawse þat I bad þe fastyn for þu schuldyst þe sonar opteyn & getyn þi desyr, & now it is grawntyd þe. I wyl no lengar þow fast, þerfor I byd þe in þe name of Ihesu ete & drynk as thyn husbond doth” (11:24.38-11:25.2). Margery is therefore able to return to her husband and strategically bargain for a mutually-beneficial arrangement: she concedes to him two of those things for which he asked—the payment of his debts and eating and drinking together on Fridays—while ensuring that she guarantees his commitment to celibacy. As she explains to her husband, she will offer him something in return for what he asks, so that they both have their “desyr”:

Sere, yf it lyke 3ow, 3e schal grawnt me my desyr, & 3e schal haue 30wr desyr. Grawntyth me þat 3e schal not komyn in my bed, & I grawnt 30w to qwyte 30wr dettys er I go to Jerusalem. & makyth my body fre to God so
Having gained a majority of what he asks, Margery’s husband accepts her offer while Margery successfully secures the celibacy that had so long been her desire.

The dialogue between Christ and Margery as well as Margery’s strategic bartering with her husband presents an example of the “sexual economics” which Sheila Delaney discusses in her seminal essay as central to texts such as Margery’s Book. An important aspect of sexual economics, as Delaney notes, was a “cash nexus”—an acute awareness of money and everything’s monetary value, which became increasingly prevalent in the later Middle Ages—that is clearly evident in this instance as well as throughout Margery’s Book: as Delaney astutely argues, “With Margery Kempe, one is kept constantly aware of the ‘cash nexus’; it pervades her consciousness as it pervaded her world, part of every human endeavor and confrontation.”

Building on Delaney’s argument, I argue that what is particularly remarkable in this instance is that the economics that pervade the Book also pervade Margery’s relationship with Christ. Christ is clearly aware of how to strategize around issues of money and sex in order to obtain larger and more religious goals. In this dialogue with Margery, Christ is seemingly aware of the importance of using aspects of Margery’s marital and sexual relationship with her husband to barter for what she desires in her relationship with Christ. He is thus able to strategize for Margery and demonstrate to her how to gain what she most desires within

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the confines and expectations of her bourgeois life. For her part, Margery is able to take this information back to her husband and secure his promise of a celibate marriage.

The colloquies throughout the *Book* that often bring God into dialogue with Margery are thus a source of instruction for Margery that have implications in Margery’s personal, religious development as she learns the “preuyteys & […] cownselys” of God as well as practical implications for her bourgeois, married, mercantile life. It is important to note that the dialogic nature of Margery’s text—a fundamental aspect of the *Book*—distinguishes it from other texts by and about medieval religious women. This point has been made by Liz McAvoy at the end of her analysis of Margery’s *Book*:

> [T]he *Book* is heavily reliant on dialogue for its impact and authority, a fact which again seems to escaped [sic] many commentators. Comparative works, such as Birgitta’s *Revelations* or Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue* are often less dialogic than monologic. What seems to be important to these highly literate disseminations of the mystical utterance is their prioritizing of the long monologic utterances of Christ, with the mystic remaining largely the silent conduit.\(^{189}\)

Certainly, this is a notable break from Margery’s models. As has been discussed at length by a number of scholars, Margery modeled her text and life after other holy women, most notably Bridget of Sweden.\(^ {190}\) Comparisons between Margery and


\(^{190}\) See, for example, the following excellent studies: Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997) 33ff; Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 121ff; Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim* 168ff. The affinities between Bridget of Sweden’s and Margery’s texts that are most often considered are the women’s vows of chastity, devotion to the Passion, weeping, and concern for reforming the priesthood and encouraging others’ faith.
medieval holy women arise not only from critics’ perspectives across medieval literature, but also from the explicit references that Margery makes to these women and their texts within her *Book*. In addition to references to holy women such as Marie d’Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary, Margery frequently references Bridget of Sweden. For example, as discussed above, Margery claims that her text is superlative to texts such as Bridget’s *Revelations*. Similarly, during an oral exchange between Margery and Christ concerning Margery’s visions during the sacrament of Eucharist, Margery refers to Bridget in order to demonstrate her visions’ exceptionality. Christ tells Margery after she receives the vision, “Þow xalt no mor sen it in þis maner, þerfor thank God þat þow hast seyn. My dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in þis wyse” (20:47.25-27). Shortly thereafter, Christ instructs Margery to share her revelation that there will be an earthquake: “Þer xal be an erdene, tel it whom þow wylt in þe name of Ihesu. For I telle þe forsoþe ryght as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to þe, dowtyr, & I telle þe trewly it is trewe euyer word þat is wretyn in Brides boke, & be þe it xal be knowyn for very trewth” (20:47.30-35). This passage demonstrates that Margery and Bridget share great similarities. Indeed, Margery is established as possessing the same authority that Bridget had to share her revelations with others. However, Christ himself distinguishes Margery from her predecessor when he states that Margery receives visions that even Bridget did not. On one hand, in this situation as well as throughout the *Book*, Margery emphasizes her similarities with other holy women and apparently models herself after them in part. On the other hand, she clearly distinguishes herself from these women and their texts in significant ways.
The question that presents itself is why Margery focused so predominantly on these dialogic exchanges, which are such a significant departure from Bridget’s *Revelations* and other holy women’s texts. McAvoy’s study offers little in the way of answers, for while she continues briefly to describe what she calls Margery’s “insistent orality,” she focuses her argument on how this orality has led to negative criticism among Margery’s contemporaries and scholars since the discovery of the manuscript. In what follows, I argue that the dialogic nature of the text was instrumental to Margery’s strategy to present herself as an authoritative figure who did not passively receive knowledge from God, but who actively sought that knowledge, implemented its lessons in her own life, and shared it with others both during her own lifetime and through her text. As will be demonstrated, her colloquies with Christ provided Margery with the knowledge and authority to speak with others, whether responding to the questions of ecclesiastical authorities, telling tales, or speaking on a more mundane level to the numerous persons she encounters during her travels and experiences. The next section of the chapter will thus turn from Christ’s speaking with Margery as her divine instructor to Margery’s speaking to others with the voice of Christ. Through her speaking, Margery is able to become for others what Christ is for her: a teacher and model.

Early in her text, Margery establishes her authority to speak to others as Christ speaks to her. This authority is established in a truly remarkable way, because Margery indicates that she and Christ are one, and that Christ’s voice is her voice. During a dialogue with Christ in which she shares her concern that she would become vainglorious

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because of the positive response she receives from many, Christ assuages her fears by telling her that it is he who is working through her:

Drede þe not, dowtyr, I xal take veynglory fro þe. For þei þat worshеп þe þei worship me; þei þat despysen þe þei despysen me, & I schal chastysen hem þerfor. I am in þe, and þow in me. And þei þat heryn þe þei heryn þe voys of God. Dowtyr, þer is no so synful man in erth leuyng, yf he wyl forsake hys synne & don aftyr þi cownsel, swech grace as þu behestyst hym I wyl confermyn for þi lofe. (10:22.37-10:23.7)

As demonstrated in this passage, Margery is more than a representative of Christ: she is Christ. Of particular note is Christ’s claim that “þei þat heryn þe þei heryn þe voys of God,” therefore indicating that that her voice is his. Nancy Bradley Warren correctly argues that this passage indicates that Margery possesses what Warren describes as a “superclerical” status: “A priest is Christ’s earthly representative, but Margery is more than a simple representative; she and Christ are one, and this union gives her power beyond those of clerics.”

Moreover, as Warren argues, “Margery is able to provide direct access to God’s voice, and, if her council is obeyed (a proviso that gives her striking spiritual authority), the effectiveness of her prayers is divinely guaranteed. What cleric could make such a promise?” While Warren focuses her attention on the redemptive power of Margery’s weeping and praying, I will turn to how Margery employs her voice to spread Christ’s word among both those who encounter her and those who read her text.

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One of the most frequent ways in which Margery’s voice is heard is through her defending herself to religious authorities, fellow pilgrims, and her community. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, Margery’s interrogations by ecclesiastical authorities have been discussed by scholars at length. One of the most frequently cited encounters is with Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York. This encounter certainly deserves close attention because the interrogation provides evidence of Margery’s justification for teaching and preaching as she does.\footnote{As noted above, Kathy Kerby-Fulton considers this episode in detail in \textit{Books Under Suspicion} 247-260. In what follows, I am not as interested in the encounter itself as I am with what is reveals about how she explains her approach to speaking with others. Other insightful studies of Margery’s encounters with ecclesiastical authorities include Karma Lochrie, \textit{Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh} (1991) 109ff; David Aers, \textit{Community, Gender and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430} (New York: Routledge, 1988) 98-103; and Atkinson, \textit{Mystic and Pilgrim} 103-128. Because these aspects of the text have been studied in such detail, and because my interest lies primarily in how she disperses her knowledge orally with a wide and diverse audience, I will not consider these instances in detail here.} When the Archbishop commands that she “schalt sweryn þat þu ne xalt ne techyn ne chalengyn þe pepil in my diocyse,” Margery refuses, citing the teachings of the Church and Gospel as justification that she can continue as she has done (52:125.38-52:126.1). Of most importance for this chapter’s argument, Margery explains that she does not preach because she does not use a pulpit: “I preche not, ser, I come in no pulpytt. I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys, & þat wil I do whil I leue” (52:126.18-20).\footnote{For a detailed analysis of Margery’s claim to neither preach nor teach, see Lochrie, 109-113, who considers this claim within the context of contemporaneous understanding of preaching and teaching as well as women’s authority to speak.} Margery’s last statement—that she uses “but comownycacyon and good wordys”—is of particular significance because it reveals how she approaches sharing Christ’s word through her own voice.
As her *Book* demonstrates, Margery uses a variety of forms of “comownycacyon” and methods to share her “good wordys.” On occasion, there is an overt relationship between what God tells her and what she tells others. For example, early in the *Book*, Margery is able to convert a disbelieving monk into believing the veracity of her claims by being a conduit of information between Christ and the monk. She encounters this monk during a time when she “was sent of owyr Lord to diuers placys of relygyon,” where she meets individuals both receptive to and critical of her” (52:25.28-29). As she explains, at one of these sites, she was welcome by all of the monks of an abbey “saue þer was a monk whech bar gret offyce in þat place despysed hir & set hir at nowt” (52:25.30-31). The monk seeks for proof that God does in fact speak to Margery—or, more likely, he is more keen to seek for proof that she is fraudulently claiming to hear God—by asking her to tell her “wheþyr I schal be sauyd or nowt and in what synnes I haue most dyspliesyd God, for I wyl not leuyn þe but þow con telle me my synne” (12:26.10-12). Margery successfully asks for time while he is at mass to pray for him. While he is at mass, Margery relies on the readily-accessible channel of communication that she enjoys with Christ to ask him how she should respond to the monk. Her request begins an oral exchange between her and Christ:

“My derworthy dowtyr, sey in þe name of Ihesu þat he hath synned in lethery, in dyspeyr, & in wordly goodys kepyng.” “A, gracyows Lord, þis is hard for me to sey. He schal do me mech schame yf I telle hym any lesynng.” “Drede þe not but speke boldly in my name in the name of Ihesu, for þei arn no leesynys.” And þan sche seyd a-3en to owyr Lord Ihesu Crist, “Good Lord, schal he be savyd?” “‘3a,” seyd owyr Lord Ihesu, “‘3yf
he wyl forsakyn hys synne & don aftyr þi cownsel. Charge hym þat he for sake hys synne & be schreu þerof & also hys offyce þat he hath wythowtyn-forth.” (12:26.18-29)

In this passage, Christ not only tells Margery the specific sins of which the monk is guilty, but also reaffirms that Margery is to “speke boldly in my name in the name of Ihesu.” Moreover, Christ explains that the man will be saved should he “don aftyr þi cownsel” and gives Margery leave to “charge hym” with actions to ensure his salvation. In addition to being the voice of Christ, Margery is therefore given authority to counsel the monk concerning how to obtain salvation—a role traditionally reserved for male ecclesiastical authorities—which underscores Margery’s remarkable authority, which is given to her directly by God.

In the subsequent dialogue between Margery and the monk, Margery uses the term “cownsel” three times to describe what she offers to the monk. When he returns from mass, asking if she knows his sins, Margery informs him that he will be saved “yf 3e wyl do aftyr my cownsel” (12:26.32-33). The monk initially dismisses her response, demanding that she explain what his sins are. When she does enumerate them, just as Christ had shared them with her, the monk then turns to the question of his salvation. Margery again assures him that he will attain salvation “yf 3e wyl do aftyr my cownsel” (12:27.4-5). She then outlines her “cownsel,” instructing him on the actions he should take to ensure his salvation, which include leaving his office. The monk’s response is immediately positive: he takes her by the hand, provides her with a large dinner, and offers her gold to pray for him. Margery concludes the story by noting the reward the
monk receives as a result of following her counsel: after forsaking his office “at hir counsель, & was turnyd fro hys synne,” the monk was made sub-prior of the monastery and had become “a wel gouernyd man & wel dysposyd” (12:27.13-14, 12:27.15). The episode thus demonstrates the positive and powerful effect that Margery can have on those she encounters, particularly if they follow her counsel. This episode also demonstrates the overt influence that God sometimes has on Margery’s “comównycacyon & good wordys.”

The relationship between what Margery tells others and what God tells Margery is not always so clear. Particularly as the Book progresses, Margery’s voice is heard without the overt accompaniment of God’s voice. A frequent form of communication that does not explicitly include God’s voice is Margery’s tale-telling. Found throughout the Book, the tales she shares take greatest precedence during the series of arrests and interrogations that constitute a large portion of the middle of the text. In chapter 52, shortly after Margery has explained to the Archbishop that she does not preach or teach but refuses to quit speaking through “comównycacyon & good wordys,” one of her examiners claims that she “sche telde me þe werst talys of prestys þat euyr I herde” (52:126.22-23). Hearing this accusation, the Archbishop asks her to recount the tale, which she introduces by explaining, “I spak but of o preste be þe maner of exampyl” (52:126.24-25). She then tells a parable of a priest who sees a bear devour the flowers of a pear tree. Notably, she explicates the story at its conclusion by introducing in the tale a “massanger of God” who explains the vision of the bear as representative of the priest’s
Margery thus couches her teaching two-fold: first, she speaks not directly about a specific priest’s sins, but by “maner of exampyl”; second, she offers an explication of the story not in her own voice, but in the voice of the “massanger of God.”

Margery’s penchant for telling tales may very well result from her ability to use the tales to transmit knowledge to her audiences without explicitly preaching or teaching. In the subsequent three chapters, as Margery faces a number of situations in which she is interrogated and condemned by townspeople as a Lollard and heretic, Margery records three instances in which she tells tales. The first occurs when she is arrested by the men who take her to the Duke of Bedford in Beverly. As they travel, “sche telde hem good talys,” which causes one of the duke’s men to regret having met her for, as he tells her, “me semyth þat þu seyst ryth good wordys” (53:130.7-8 and 53:130.10). He is so converted by her tales that he asks her, should she be sent in heaven, that she pray for him. Margery shows him no ill will for arresting her, telling him, “Doth yowr Lordys wille, & I trust al schal be for þe best, for I am ryth wel plesyd þat 3e met wyth me” (53:130.12-14). Her tales again prove to be a powerful tool: they convince this man of Margery’s goodness, despite the man’s initial suspicion of her, so much so that he requests her prayers. For her part, Margery is able to take advantage of a dire situation by employing it as an opportunity to instruct others through her tales.

Lochrie examines this tale through the lens of Margery’s use of humor and laughter in her discourse; see 149-151.
The next two records of Margery telling tales share important similarities with the two instances above: faced with a situation in which she is in grave danger of being declared a heretic, Margery makes her voice heard through stories that instruct through example. However, what sets these latter two instances apart is that Margery shares her tales with female audiences. When brought to Beverly on her way to her second audience with the Archbishop of York, she is locked in a chamber of a house belonging to one of the men who arrested her. Despite her confinement, Margery speaks to the crowds who gather outside her window: “Þan stode sche lokyng owt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to hem þat wolde heryn hir, in so meche þat women wept sor & seyde wyth gret heuynes of her hertys, ‘Alas, woman, why xalt þu be brent?’”

(53:130.34-53:131.1). Again, Margery describes her actions here not as teaching or preaching, but as “tellyng many good talys.” Moreover, many members of her audience are women—many of whom respond positively to her. Embedding her instruction within tale-telling, Margery is thus able to teach both men and women.

Similarly, in the final of the four instances of Margery telling tales within the span of these three chapters, Margery recounts sharing two tales with Lady Greystroke, a baron’s wife and daughter to Lady Westmorland. Near the end of Margery’s extensive interrogation before Archbishop Henry Bowet, she is accused of counseling Lady Greystroke to leave her husband. However, Margery refutes this charge, claiming that she told the Lady “a good tale of a lady þat was dampmyd for sche wolde not louyn hir enmijs & of a baly þat was savyd for he louyd hys enmys & for þæf þat þei had trespasyd
a-3en hym, & 3et he was heldyn an euyl man” (54:134.8-12). Her tale to the woman, despite apparently being misinterpreted initially, proves to be effective in disproving the charges against her; indeed, “The Erchebischop seyd it was a good tale” and shortly thereafter provides her with a letter that declares her innocence (54:134.12).

As the contexts for Margery telling these tales attest, Margery’s voice was embraced by many while condemned by others. Such insight into her reception is possible because Margery’s Book is unique among the texts considered in this study, for she provides accounts of how she and her voice were received among her contemporaries: other than the extant manuscript evidence and, in the case of Marguerite Porete, trial records, we know little of the response to the previous three women writers. What is most remarkable about the response to Margery’s speaking is its diversity: while some respond vitriolically to her, others embrace her. David Aers notes the markedly different responses Margery causes within the clerical community:

> Among the diverse and complex contexts in which Margery’s version of herself was formed, combative interactions with clerics played a notable part. In this connection, it is also noticeable that we get an image of a clerical community whose responses to her were so far from homogeneous that they would range from the most intimate and reverential support to the most aggressive dismissal.\(^{197}\)

However, it is important to note that Margery encounters a diversity of people—not limited to the clerical community—whose responses range from “the most intimate and reverential support to the most aggressive dismissal.” Certainly, Margery’s reception among the lay people she encounters throughout the Book provide an important

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\(^{197}\) Aers, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity* 109.
perspective on Margery’s place within the community. During the time she is interrogated on several occasions by the Archbishop of York, she is alternately received with warmth and threatened with death. For example, as she travels into Bridlington during this time, she explains the markedly mixed reactions among laypeople: “Many oþer folke seyd þat sche xulde be set in preson & madyn gret thretyng. And not-wythstondyng al her malyce þet a good man cam & preyd hir to mete & mad hir ryth good cher” (53:129.8-11). As she continues her travels, she is instructed to return to womanly tasks: “as sche went forth to-Beuerleward wyth þe seyd þemen & the frerys be-forn-seyd, þei mettyn many tymes wyth men of þe cuntre, whech seyd vn-to hir, ‘Damsel, forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne & carde as oþer women don, & suffyr not so meche schame & so meche wo’” (53:129.32-37). Most threateningly, she is threatened by those who believe her to be a heretic: in Hessle, “þer men callyd hir loller, & women cam rennyng owt of her howsys wyth her rokkys, crying to þe pepil, ‘Brenyth þis fals heretyk’” (53:129.29-31).

Margery faces such negative reaction in large part because of the threat she presents. Margery attracted the attention of ecclesiastical authorities as a potential heretic and, at the very least, a very real and public nuisance. As recorded in the text, she was examined for heresy five times: once in 1413 and four times in 1417. On the first of these occasions, Margery was examined in Norwich (ch. 18); subsequently, she was brought before the authorities in Leicester (ch. 46-48) as well as before a doctor of divinity at York and then the Archbishop of York himself twice (ch. 52 and 54).
Notably, it is Margery’s incessant speaking and the potential for her speeches to be interpreted as preaching or teaching that result in a great deal of the trouble and danger she faces. In particular, her speaking causes others to associate her with Lollardy, as evidenced by the explicit mentions of Lollardy within the Book (such as when the townspeople above threaten her with burning for being a “loller” and “fals heretyk”).

In addition, on at least one occasion Margery is deemed a threat because she presents a model for women that her accusers decidedly oppose. In Leicester, during her interrogation before the mayor, the Abbot of Leicester, canons of the abbey, and the dean of Leicester, the mayor accuses her of being a threatening example to other women due to her choice of clothing: “Than þe Meyr seyde to hir, ‘I wil wetyn why þow gost in white clothys, for I trowe þow art comyn hedyr to han a-wey owr wyuys fro us & ledyn hem wyth þe’” (48:116.11-14). Indeed, as suggested by the layman’s instruction above to Margery to “go spynne & carde as oþer women don,” Margery stirs up much ire because of her refusal to remain within the parameters of expected behavior for women—a threat in itself as well as a threat should it encourage other women to follow her example.

However, as Margery’s reception among the laypeople during her interrogations before the Archbishop of York attests, Margery was embraced by many. The women who listen at her window and the duke’s man who initially arrests her but who recognizes her goodness through hearing her tales are examples of the numerous individuals who

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198 A number of scholars have examined Margery and her text in light of the Lollard threat she presents; see, for example, McAvoy 179-185; Staley 5ff; Atkinson 103ff; and John H. Arnold, “Margery’s Trials: Heresy, Lollardy, and Dissent,” Arnold and Lewis 75-93.
consider Margery to be receiving revelations from and speaking for God. Throughout the
Book, Margery recounts not only those who wish her ill but also those who believe her to
be a true holy woman: one anchoress rejects Margery while another defends her; fellow
pilgrims refuse to associate with her while others protect and support her; townspeople
work to run her out of town while others provide her with food and drink. Lynn Staley
has insightfully analyzed such responses to Margery as indications of the fissure and
fragmentation within the community that Kempe (as Staley denotes the author of the
Book) wishes to highlight in her text.\textsuperscript{199} I would like to build on Staley’s argument by
pointing out the importance that Margery’s voice in particular plays in her acceptance
and rejection within the community. Just as some believe Margery’s words to be a threat
and an indication of heresy, others respond positively to her words, recognizing hers as
an authoritative voice of counsel.

One particularly significant example of the powerful effect that Margery’s
counsel can have on others who accept her as speaking with the voice of God is
Margery’s healing of a woman who, like Margery at the beginning of the book, suffers
madness after giving birth to a child. In chapter 75, near the end of the first book,
Margery is approached by a man whose wife “was owt hir mende” following the recent
birth of their child (75:177.34-35). Margery offers to visit the woman, and, as Margery
recounts, “as sone as þe seke woman þat was alienyd of hir witte saw hir, sche spak to hir
sadly & goodly & seyd sche was ryth welcome to hir” (75:178.7-10). When Margery
leaves, however, the woman continues to suffer bouts of madness and is so repelled by all

\textsuperscript{199} Please see fn 176 above, in which I address Staley’s argument for a distinction
between Margery, the subject, and Kempe, her author.
other visitors that she “cryid & gapyd as sche wolde an etyn hem & seyd þat sche saw many devuelys a-bowtyn hem” (75:178.15-16). Margery’s speaking with the woman during her subsequent visits benefits the woman greatly: Margery “went to hir iche day onys er twyis at þe lest wey, &, whyl sche was wyth hir, sche was meke a-now & herd hir spekyn & dalyn wyth good wil wyth-owt any roryng er crying” (75:178.24-27). Additionally, Margery prays to Christ to restore the woman’s health, which he promises to do when he tells Margery, “Sche xulde faryn ryth wel” (75:178.31). As a result of Margery’s visits and prayers on behalf of the woman, eventually the woman is completely restored to health, the miraculousness of which gives rise to one of the few overt intrusions of the scribe’s voice into the Book:

It was, as hem thowt þat knewyn it, a ryth gret myrakyl, for he þat wrot þis boke had neuyr be-for þat tyme sey man ne woman, as hym thowt, so fer owt of hir-self as þis woman was ne so euyl to rewlyn ne to gouernyn, and sithyn he sey hir sad & sobyr a-now, worschip & preysyng be to owr Lord wythowtyn ende for hys hy mercy & hys goodnes þat euyr helpith at nede. (75:178.36-75:179.5)

As the scribe describes it, this episode is a “ryth gret myrakyl,” thus ending the description of this event by explicitly drawing attention to the extraordinary nature of Margery, who, through the mercy and goodness of Christ, is able to save a woman “so fer owt of hir-self.”

Indeed, the miracle that Margery performs here is remarkably similar to the miracle that began the Book: Christ’s healing of Margery during her post-partum madness. Much as Christ’s presence calmed Margery when he visited her while she lay
in bed, Margery’s arrival at the woman’s bedside has an immediate calming effect on the woman. Moreover, it is the act of speaking that fully effects the woman’s restoration to health. The women’s “spekyn & dalyin”—words that Margery uses frequently to describe her own colloquies with God—gradually help heal the woman. The power of Margery’s speaking in the form of prayer is also manifested: her intercessory prayers cause God to give the woman “hir witte & hir mende a-3en” (75:178.34). Margery’s “myrakyl” demonstrates that Margery has undergone a remarkable transformation during the span of the Book: she has grown from a woman saved by the voice of God to the source of salvation for another woman. Margery’s transformation has been primarily founded on the power of speaking: God has instructed her through his frequent colloquies with her; Margery has been an active participant in this oral instruction by not only dialoguing with God but also implementing that knowledge into her life and encounters with others; and finally, Margery’s voice has become God’s voice as she speaks to a diversity of people, some of whom accept her and some of whom do not.

The orality that pervades the text is thus instrumental in Margery’s own development, and as a result, her influence on those around her. One of the questions that arises, then, is what is the relationship between the orality of Margery’s experiences and the written form in which she chooses to record those experiences? The answer to this question proves to shed light on the question, which I posed at the beginning of this chapter, concerning the relationship between God, Margery, the text, and those who read her Book, because the orality of Margery’s text is of crucial importance to understanding this relationship. By recording these oral experiences in her Book, Margery in fact
extends the orality that is so central to her, her relationship with God, and her encounters with others in two crucial ways. First, she records the text orally, while it is her scribe who transcribes the text. Margery’s voice is therefore captured in written form. Unlike Margery or Julian, whose texts provide no evidence of a scribe, Margery does not transcribe her own text, but speaks aloud for the scribe to write down. Indeed, the scribe emphasizes in his proem that Margery not only speaks her story for him to record, but also has the scribe read back to her what he has written so that she can assure that his recording has been faithful: “& so he red it ouyr be-forn þis creatur every word, sche sum-tym helpyng where ony difficulte was” (Proem: 5.10-12). Margery’s crafting of her Book is thus a fundamentally oral and aural process.

Second, Margery’s text was most probably transmitted primarily through oral and aural means. Reading in Margery’s late medieval manuscript culture was often both an oral and aural experience: texts were read aloud, even when one was reading alone. Therefore, Margery’s Book was probably received by most of her audience through hearing it read aloud. This is of particular significance because this meant that her audience heard the voices of God and Margery as if they were spoken to them. The Book thus provides a way for the words of God that were originally spoken to Margery to be heard as directly as possible—barring God speaking to them individually—by those who read the text. Margery may very well have chosen to record her experiences in written form in part because the Book was a vehicle to transmit God’s voice—both spoken by

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him directly and through Margery—to a more diverse and broader audience than those she was able to encounter during her own life.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Margery expected all of her readers to fully understand God’s instructions, to model themselves off of Margery, or to undergo the transformation she did in the course of the Book. Indeed, Margery provides a likely model for how her audience will receive her text in her depictions of those she encounters in person: some will embrace her text as recording the voice of God, while others will reject it. Evidence for the argument that her audience within the Book provides a mirror for the audience of the book is provided by Margery’s depiction of salvation and damnation. Margery differs radically from Marguerite and Julian because she demonstrates in her Book that not all will be saved: as discussed above, although she wishes to believe that God will show mercy on all souls, Margery is clearly instructed on the fallacy of this belief and is taught that God will judge some souls worthy of damnation. Margery’s text therefore is a tool to instruct her readers on the possibility of salvation by proving a model and instruction for those who may be saved by Christ’s mercy. They, too, can listen to God’s words, learn from the knowledge he shares, actively take part in acquiring instruction as well as implementing that instruction into their own lives, and share that knowledge with those they encounter. Some will be saved, but it is only God who will decide their worthiness.

To conclude, I would like to return to the scribe’s passage that begins his proem (and this chapter), which outlines his claims for the intended audience, purpose, and subject of Margery’s Book. The scribe, as noted at the chapter’s outset, states that the
purpose of the *Book* is to offer “gret solas and comfort” to “synful wrecchys” and provide them with the means to “vndyrstondyn þe hy & vnspecabyl mercy of ower souereyn Savyowr Cryst Ihesu.” The scribe does touch on the didactic nature of the text, explaining, “Alle þe werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl & instruccyon, and what grace þat he werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth yf lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce” and further states that Margery is offered as an example of how Christ “meued & stered a synful caytyf vn-to hys love.” In the end, this claim proves to be borne out partially by the *Book*, but does not tell the full story. Certainly, the *Book* provides instruction to its readers on Christ’s “hy & vnspecabyl mercy”: he chooses Margery, “a synful catyf,” to receive seemingly constant guidance and instruction from him as well as to speak with his voice. However, the *Book* also demonstrates that Christ may not be universally merciful, since he explicitly demonstrates to Margery, despite her desire to not believe her vision, that he has the power and will to damn those he deems worthy of such punishment. The *Book* does prove to be for the “exampyl & instruccyon” of its readers, since those who read the *Book* may find themselves mirrored in those whom Margery encounters, and can receive the instruction God offers to Margery and, in turn, Margery offers to others, through the oral and aural nature of the *Book* and its transmission. The scribe is right to suggest that all will “profyth” from Christ’s grace as it is manifested in “any creatur” so long as “lak of charyte be not ower hynderawnce”: as Margery’s text demonstrates, an individual’s failings will impede their reception of God’s instruction and therefore their possibility for salvation. Lastly, the scribe’s suggestion that Margery should be understood as an example of someone “meued & stered […] vn-
to hys love” profoundly minimizes the roles that Margery possesses in and through her

*Book*. Margery is not only lovingly devoted to God, but also the recipient of his
instruction, an active participant in dialogues with him, the transmitter of his voice, and a
teacher of his mercy and judgment to all those whom she encounters and to all who read
her *Book*. 
CONCLUSION

This examination of the texts of four female medieval writers began with a consideration of the meeting between the English mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. This meeting is the occasion on which Margery shares the knowledge she gained from her visions and dialogue with God and Julian instructs Margery to be obedient and fulfill the will of God for both “þe worsep of God & profyte of hir euyn-cristen” (18:42.21-22). In examining the works of Julian and Margery as well as those of Clemence of Barking and Marguerite Porete, this dissertation has demonstrated that all four women writers were compelled to do just as Margery did and as Julian instructed: not only to share their knowledge but also to do so for the honor of God and the benefit of their fellow Christians. All four medieval women acting under this compulsion therefore took the unusual step of crafting texts to disseminate their knowledge among those who read and heard their written records.

Certainly, these women writers were exceptional: they number among the few women known to have written texts which circulated in England during the Middle Ages. As such, they adopted public roles: as Liz McAvoy cogently argues, “The very act of writing, be it performed within the confines of the private chamber, anchorhold, or monastery, constituted a type of public speech-act directed at a real or imagined audience
which necessarily moved the writer from the realm of the private into the public.\textsuperscript{201} However, the public nature of their authorship and of the texts which they wrote has not received the attention which it deserves. While scholars have studied how women crafted themselves as authors, much less attention has been paid to how women authors conceived of their audiences and their texts as public vehicles to transmit knowledge to an external audience. Similarly, women’s involvement in literary culture has increasingly received attention from scholars who are interested in providing a full and accurate picture of the literary culture of the later Middle Ages. Within this line of study, however, emphasis has been placed on the transmission of texts among women, their reading practices, and their patronage; far less attention has been directed to how women authors crafted themselves and their texts as an integral part of the transmission of knowledge within that culture.

When we examine, as I have here, the relationship between these women, God, the vernacular religious texts they authored, and the audiences to whom they directed their texts, we discover from their texts three common overarching traits. First, and most significantly, the women writers use their texts as vehicles to transmit their knowledge, thereby building their texts on a didactic purpose. As demonstrated here, each of the texts authored by these medieval women contains a significant didactic element that encourages—and, in fact, \textit{requires}—its readers to actively engage with the text in order to acquire the knowledge it contains. As their texts make clear, the writers are acutely

aware of their audiences and the necessity of their audiences’ participation in grappling with and accepting the lessons that the texts offer. This examination of their texts demonstrates that these women writers conceive of broad and diverse audiences for their texts. These audiences were comprised of readers who all four women writers hoped would learn the lessons contained within the texts and thus, importantly, move forward in their progress toward salvation.

Second, as demonstrated by this examination, Clemence, Marguerite, Julian, and Margery were all bolstered by the greatest authority possible to transmit the knowledge they possessed: each writer cites God as the authority that rests behind both her knowledge and her textual project. The divine authority on which their texts rested allows the women authors to assume roles that may have otherwise remained outside their purview—such as the role of teacher.

Third, the four women also demonstrate a common concern regarding salvation in their texts. All of the texts are fundamentally concerned with the question of who will attain salvation. The question of universal salvation in particular occurs throughout the texts, particularly in the later texts. Clemence recounts the pagan scholars, empress, and captain of the guard obtaining salvation after St. Catherine successfully converts them; Marguerite and Julian share a vision that God promises universal salvation; and Margery tells of Christ’s refutation of her belief that all will be saved. While the writers do not offer a consensus on this theological issue, which Watson identifies as a particularly pressing issue in the later Middle Ages, they do indicate that they perceived their

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202 See Introduction, fn. 7.
vernacular texts as a medium for exploring such questions—and for offering answers based on their own experiences and knowledge.

This dissertation thus demonstrates that there exist remarkable similarities among these four women writers and their texts, despite their more immediate dissimilarities. The texts examined in the four preceding chapters span four centuries and represent the diversity of genres composed in the vernacular during this time period. In addition, these four women not only wrote in different languages but also wrote from very different perspectives as a result of their religious, social, and cultural contexts. Yet they employ their texts as didactic vehicles, establish their authority, and perceive their audiences in remarkably similar ways. Most remarkably, they do all of this with little or no attention given to the fact that they are women writers. Indeed, one of the most significant similarities among these texts is something which they all lack: specifically, none of the four authors emphasizes her gender in regards to her authorship (or the didactic role which her authorship allows) within her text. The authors minimize consideration of the fact that they are women writers—if they even mention it at all. Significantly, when they do include reference to their gender, they do not relate this to their abilities as an author—indeed, as we see with Julian, the one writer who initially indicates that her authority to teach her readers is undercut by her gender excises that claim from her revised text. The four women writers thus position themselves as authoritative transmitters of knowledge given to them by God, who didactically employ their texts to engage and instruct their readers by minimizing or disregarding their own gender.
This study thus demonstrates that while these writers reflect women’s increasing involvement in the rise of vernacular literature and theology, as they presented it in their texts, their involvement was primarily as writers rather than as women writers. Despite—or regardless of—their gender, by positioning themselves as individuals authorized by God to transmit their knowledge, Clemence of Barking, Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe become “God’s teachers” for both “þe worshep of God & profyte of hir euyn-cristen.”
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