EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE: PERFORMANCE, RHETORIC, AND SELF-MAKING FROM MARGUERITE PORETE TO MARGERY KEMPE

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis puts into conversation the work of four influential late medieval writers whose lives or writings skirted the fringes of Christian orthodoxy—Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, John of Morigny, and Marguerite Porete – in order to explore the way "autobiographical" theological and/or mystical writers asserted spiritual authority and subjectivity under the constraints of both the threat of condemnation for heresy and the inherent inexpressibility of mystical or visionary experiences. Beginning with Marguerite Porete and reverberating out, the performance-based rhetorical strategies in storytelling, in self-narrativization, in discernment, and in revision employed by writers in response to the dynamic, complex, and in many ways increasingly hostile social and religious environments of the long fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in France and England provide an important window into the relationship between these writers' ideas and the environment which shaped them. Each of these writers struggles with the limitations of the written word to express the truth of their spiritual experiences, and each engages in an experiential and bodily performative, rhetorical, and/or apophatic discourse in order to understand, assert, or make real their encounters with and understanding of themselves, the divine, and the relationship between the two.

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When I think back on the time spent working on this thesis and begin to catalogue all of the people whose impact on me and on my writing warrants, in my opinion, acknowledgement, I am almost overwhelmed. Of course, a thesis is meant to be a culmination of research, learning, and writing over the course of a graduate program, and so it is only natural that it envelops a lot of experience and emotion beyond itself as a simple manuscript. That is, behind the words in each chapter are memories of life as it went on the day that I first wrote them. And as I reflect on this project and what it represents to me, I am filled with gratitude for every experience that has led me to this point in my life, which I state despite cliché. Any writing is personal, and for a project that lived alongside me for such a long time, this thesis especially feels like an expression of myself. Like my subjects, from whom I am, in many ways, vastly and incomparably different, I too feel an impulse and an exigency to write myself, to seek and to learn and to grapple with what I find, in writing which expresses both this process and its processor.

And so despite the gulf of time and of culture which separates me from my subjects, I want to begin these acknowledgements by expressing my gratitude to them: Marguerite Porete, for her composure, her tenacity, and her dedication to the worth of her knowledge and of the writing down of that knowledge; to John of Morigny, for his vulnerability, his honesty, and his limitless desire for learning; to Julian of Norwich, for her thoroughness, her prose, and her mantra – "All shall be well" – which was a great comfort during the most stressful periods of revision; and finally to Margery Kempe, for her authenticity to her dynamic self, for her bravery, and for her dedication to her *Book.* Spending time with these texts has been a constant joy, and the lessons they share have shaped my thinking and being not just as a scholar but in all of my life.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1310 trial and condemnation of Marguerite Porete by the inquisitor of Paris, followed by her execution by fire at the stake, marked a significant development in the history of theology and of inquisition in Western Europe. Her work, *Le Mirouer des simples âmes anienties et qui seulement demeurent en vouloir et désir d'amour,* or *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* was condemned to be burned as heretical based on the opinion of a panel of theologians, and she herself condemned to the flame as a relapsed heretic following eighteenth months of imprisonment during which she refused to testify. In *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor,* Sean L. Field's thorough presentation of the trials of Marguerite Porete and her would-be savior, Guiard de Cressonessart, Field claims that her trial marked "the first known instance of an inquisitorial procedure ending with the burning of both a book and the accused author" (3). For Porete to be condemned as a relapsed heretic for the act of writing reverberated throughout Europe. While writers were certainly careful about how they expressed themselves before the Porete trial, afterwards, exacerbated by the increasing religious and political tensions of the later Middle Ages, religious writers, and particularly those who claimed some kind of mystical experience for themselves or their subject, had to be increasingly careful about what they wrote and how it was written.

Several years before the fateful trial at Paris, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* had come under scrutiny and been condemned by the Bishop of Cambrai, Guido of Collemezzo, who had commanded her to cease distribution of the work. It was Porete's determination to distribute copies of her work to prominent theologians against the prohibition of her bishop, along with her refusal to testify during her trial in Paris, that led to her martyrdom. Yet at the heart of her trial was her written work, and as Barbara Newman writes in *God and the Goddesses*, Porete was "the

only medieval woman, and possibly the only author of either sex, who died solely for a written text" (306). While Newman acknowledges the importance of Marguerite's actions surrounding her work and the inquisitorial procedure to the result of the trial, and Field, too, describes the entrenchment of the trial within the distinct political tensions in France at the turn of the 14th century, the trial produced an increased anxiety and awareness of heretical potential in religious writings, the effect of which can be seen across the span of the long fourteenth century.

A contemporary of Marguerite, the Benedictine John of Morigny, also came under suspicion and scrutiny for potentially heretical writing as he was revising his work, the *Liber florum celestis doctrine,* or *Flowers of Heavenly Teaching,* a manual for acquiring knowledge through divine contact, written under the guidance of the Virgin, who visited John in a series of visions while he was a student. To supplement his manual, he included a Book of Figures, which came under heavy clerical criticism in 1315 due to their resemblance to necromantic figures, which fell under ongoing condemnations of necromancy in general. John responded with an indignant revision and addition to his work in which he referred to his critics as "certain ones not of the stock of Judah but of Canaan, growling with rabid bite in the manner of barking dogs" (167). Yet despite his indignation, his response and revision, along with, most significantly, the autobiographical prologue which includes his careful descriptions of his private discernment of his own visions, suggest John's anxiety over the misinterpretation and potential condemnation of his work and of his own self. Indignant or not, John's writing betrays his apprehension. Nicholas Watson notably suggests that John's total revision of his figures may have even been because he was "mindful, perhaps, of the lethal recent heresy trials of the Knights Templar and of Marguerite Porete, both conducted under the aegis of Philip of Marigny, archbishop of Sens" (196). Just four years earlier, that is, Marguerite and at least fifty-four Templars were judged

relapsed heretics and burned in Paris, Marguerite in particular for her written work. The fact that Marguerite had evidently been condemned almost, if not entirely, on the grounds of the ideas expressed in her theological work made it even more important for John to be "mindful" of his own expression.

Around seventy years later, and some 400 miles away in England, the anchorite Julian of Norwich received a series of visions of the Passion of Christ as she lay critically ill and dying in her bed. As she recovered, she wrote of her experiences in two versions: an earlier, shorter account written soon after her recovery, and a much longer revision, written in reflection many years later and over a long span of time, likely between the 1390s and the 1410s or 1420s, after she became an anchorite (McGinn 425). The resulting text, usually called *Revelations of Divine Love,* is important for numerous reasons, not the least of which is its role in the development of vernacular mysticism in England. Julian's careful discernment and interpretation of her revelations earned her a position of spiritual authority in her community, and her writing circulated in England for centuries after her death. She did not face the kinds of criticism and condemnation to the extent which her contemporaries and figures like Marguerite Porete did. Yet her intensely careful discernment and interpretation itself, along with her meticulous and slow revisions, suggests Julian's awareness of the great potential for misinterpretation, and the threat that such misinterpretation might present.

Contemporary to Julian, the laywoman Margery Kempe dictated the story of her mystical union in the 1430s after a long struggle to find a scribe willing and able to record her. Often (albeit controversially[1]) referred to as the "first autobiography in English," *The Book of Margery*

[1] Clarissa Atkinson first described the *Book* as "the first autobiography in the English language" in *Mystic and Pilgrim: The* Book *and World of Margery Kempe,* Cornell University Press, 1983. The epithet has been copied and carried through many descriptions of Kempe and her *Book,*

Kempe chronicles Kempe's decision to pursue a spiritual life after receiving a vision of Christ in which she was called to a greater intimacy and spiritual life, which she believed would save her both physically and psychologically, having suffered from what we might understand as postpartum depression or psychosis after nearly dying in childbirth. Kempe was a provocative figure in her time as in ours, suggested both by the inclusion of the suspicion and vitriol of her travel companions and others in the *Book* and by her textual awareness of the label of "Lollard," a derogatory term for Wycliffites, followers of John Wycliffe, and the most significant symbol of heresy in England at that time. Anxieties about heresy pervade both in Kempe's narrative and in the scribal intrusions in which Kempe's confessor describes his involvement in the process. Kempe's scribe anticipates his subject will face suspicion and may be misinterpreted or disbelieved, and more importantly that such misinterpretation or disbelief could lead to the condemnation of the work, the subject, and the scribe.

On the surface, these figures and their works appear to share little except their interest in the divine and their awareness of the threat of prosecution for the expression and/or distribution of ideas that political or religious authorities might interpret as heretical. While this important similarity itself is worth analysis, a deeper exploration of the ways in which each writer wrestled with the inexpressibility of their divine experiences within their respective tense political contexts reveals the fascinating and complex possibilities for discourse in medieval Europe and the dialectic relationship between these works and the negotiation of both orthodoxy and of inquisitorial power. Through a careful engagement with the ways each writer recorded and described their experiences with the divine, which by definition must be indescribable, in

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though scholars have challenged the ubiquity of the epithet. For scholarship that interrogates the meaning of autobiography, see Ellen M. Ross and Cheryl Glenn.

historical contexts which both demanded such expression and made that very expression dangerous, we can see how, through compellingly similar narrative, performance, and recursive rhetorical processes, these writers constructed and communicated their spiritual subjectivities, in order to develop a greater understanding of the shifting religious climates in the long fourteenth century.

In the prologue to *The Book of Margery Kempe,* Kempe, via her scribe, recounts one of Margery's infamous weeping fits:

> And often times, while she was kept with such holy speeches and dalliance, she should so weep and sob that many men were greatly awonder, for they knew full little how homely our Lord was in her soul. Neither could she herself ever tell the grace that she felt; it was so heavenly, so high above her reason and her bodily wits, and her body so feeble in the time of the presence of grace that she might never express it with her word as she felt it in her soul. (Kempe 4)

Margery's profound spiritual experience in this moment was inexpressible not only to the world around her, but even to herself. She attempts to express it to those around her by the physical act or performance of weeping, and again by putting it to the written word in the narrative retelling in the *Book,* yet it remains something only fully accessible in the momentary experience as she "felt it in her soul" (4). This anecdote – a preview of the argument I will make in my third chapter – highlights the centrality of the inexpressible to the lives and writing of the late medieval devoted.

The inexpressibility of certain experiences or ideas, or perhaps more accurately the inability or limitations of language to express certain experiences or ideas, has been noticed and explored by an innumerable sea of thinkers and artists across genres, disciplines, and cultures,

and has almost certainly been experienced by every person on a private level. For medieval writers, there seems to have been a particular awareness of the power of language and the consequences of writing things down. Late medieval writers often grappled with the inexpressibility of certain ideas, manifest especially in anxieties around writing down – and thus giving credence to, suggesting, or *making real* – particular ideas. An especially clear example is the descriptions of sodomy found in penitentials. Carolyn Dinshaw, in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern,* begins with an exploration of the reasons given by medieval writers, especially authors of instructions and penitentials, for avoiding mentioning, or worse *describing,* sodomy. She uses John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests,* written sometime between the late-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries in Shropshire, as an example of a text in which a sin – perhaps sodomy – is described only in the author's refusal to describe it. Dinshaw translates the text:

> Also I find indeed in writing / that concerning sin in nature / you shall teach your parish nothing, / nor preach anything about that sin / But say thus, by good advice / that it is very great sin, indeed, / for any man that bears life / to forsake his wedded wife / and have sex in another way, / that is great sin, there is no gainsaying, but how and where he does that sin, / to his confessor he must such things relate. (222-33, Dinshaw 4)

For Dinshaw's purposes, these kinds of refusals and anxieties lead naturally to a Foucauldian analysis of the productive quality of taboo. That is, the imposition of silence functions to produce particular modes of speaking, acting, or thinking about the idea which itself is created by that production. I am particularly interested in what underlies this production: the fear that to describe (here the act of sodomy), either in the writing (here of the penitential) or the performance (here of the sermon) might produce it at all.

For theologians, especially mystics, an additional layer of trouble arises, particularly around the difficulty – danger, even – in naming, describing, or interacting with the divine. Nancy Caciola's work in *Discerning Spirits* to investigate the way that divine and demonic possession manifested in almost identical ways in the body and thus presented a challenge and a threat for medieval authority suggests the importance of the process of discernment. Caciola describes the discernment of spirits as "a long-term labor of social interpretation" which often included a process in which "several competing definitions of the individual's status were successively proposed, debated, and refined by a community of observers" (2). As Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski puts it in her analysis of Ermine de Reims, whose experience with both divine and demonic spirits inspired her confessor to record her visions, "precise mastery of the discourse of discernment could make or break a visionary" and thus "much anxiety surrounded visionary experiences and their written record" (131). Recording in writing the discernment of spirits becomes a central part of the process itself, and perhaps the most important. As Caciola puts it, precise discernment was absolutely necessary because of the unknowable nature of the purportedly divine experience:

> On the one hand, a person encompassed by constant supernatural interventions might be defined as a divinely inspired prophet or visionary, a mouthpiece of God. Yet it was equally possible to categorize such an individual as a demoniac possessed of unclean spirits, as a false saint puffed up with pride, or as a victim of demonic delusion. (1-2)

Here, Caciola highlights the unknowable nature of any divine or demonic experience, not only for the observers of the individual, but even for the individual themselves. Thus to claim a divine experience of any kind involved not only the mitigation of external condemnation or misunderstanding, but also, and perhaps more importantly, an intense process of both private and

public discernment. For those who sought to put their experiences in writing and to make meaningful interpretations of them, the process of discernment had to be written in, that is, textually performed, in order to validate their orthodoxy.

The figures and texts I will engage with in the following chapters each come from their own unique temporal and geographic contexts, though none of these contexts were in isolation from the others. While part of my goal is to explore how, even across these disparate contexts, these writers engaged in similar forms of discourse and performance, it is useful to understand their important shared contexts, especially regarding the increasing suspicions, sometimes parallel and sometimes entangled, around magic and mysticism, concerning the uses and misuses of the divine. It is well known that the histories and cultures of medieval France and England were tightly entwined, and the cognitive remains from the Norman Conquest have been noted in English literature. Moreover, the ongoing political and territorial disputes leading up to and during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) signaled the extensive engagement of people across borders, and manuscript history suggests the potential range for ideas to spread not just between France and England, but throughout Europe and even globally. While each chapter will provide some overview of the particular relevant contexts to each text, a brief overview of their shared contexts is useful here as a basis for understanding my approach to this period.

My texts and figures span the length of a little over one hundred years: my earlier figures, Marguerite Porete and John of Morigny, were active and writing largely during the turn of the fourteenth century, while my later figures, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, were active in the early fifteenth. This range of time, which I refer to as the long fourteenth century, was marked by numerous crises in social, political, and religious spheres. A rising academic interest in magic and witchcraft has brought to the forefront these and other writers whose works were

subject to inquisition and heresy trials, and in particular, the last few decades have seen scholarly conversations grow around heretical material in the fourteenth century as it relates to the development of the concept of the diabolical witch at the heart of the witchcraft trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Scholars like Michael D. Bailey, Richard Kieckhefer, and Frank Klaasen have explored the ways in which, following precedents set in earlier centuries, heightened anxieties in the turbulent long fourteenth century around what was or was not orthodox were central to the development of the environment into which the diabolical witch of later centuries could exist. Bailey describes the "period of one hundred years," that is, the early fourteenth to early fifteen centuries, as a period of "heightened clerical concern over harmful sorcery and changing understandings of how magic operated" (961). These concerns mirrored and echoed equally heightened concerns about proper and improper religious rituals and practices, including the discernment of spirits, the threat of demonic possession, and the promulgation of heretical ideas.

The long fourteenth century was significant for many reasons aside from the religious upheavals, being filled with repeated and powerful crises which affected all of Europe: wars, epidemics, famines, and, of course, numerous significant political and religious upheavals. Julian Goodare argues that the precedents set for the persecution of heretics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries became irrevocably entangled with magic during the destruction of the Knights Templar by Philip IV of France between 1307 and 1314, the controversy over which Field ties directly to Marguerite Porete's trial in 1310 (37). It was within these often turbulent and contradictory times that Marguerite Porete wrote, defended, and was burned for her mystical *The Mirror of Simple Souls* and John of Morigny experienced divine intervention from the Virgin

Mary after experimenting with the secretly diabolical ritual magic of the *Ars notoria,* the effects of which resonate through the rest of the century and beyond.

By the early fifteenth century, England had its own concerns with increasing lay religious, visionary mystics, and heretics, like John Wycliffe, whose followers became the blueprint for heresy accusations in the time and to whom Margery Kempe was accused of following by her adversaries. While the mystical tradition is typically considered in continental terms, England was certainly no stranger to the reverberation of the preceding century's struggles over orthodoxy, and these anxieties crop up in the writings of Julian of Norwich and the record of Margery Kempe's life in her *Book* with intense intrigue.

But as scholars like Bailey and others have suggested, these moments did not happen in isolation from one another nor in isolation from external pressures and discourses surrounding heresy, and for a particularly turbulent and complex time, continued investigation and close reading of the texts can continue to deepen our understanding of the layered negotiations between heresy, orthodoxy, magic, mysticism, and prosecution in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In each of the texts I engage with in this project: Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* John of Morigny's *Liber florum celestis doctrine,* Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love,* and Margery Kempe's *Book,* it is clear that each writer rhetorically situated their authorship / authority to protect themselves from prosecution or disbelief, including accusations of heresy, in many ways. These strategies range from the prefacing of autobiographical material, to assertions of divine permission, to deliberate choices in style that provide multiple opportunities to reiterate their authority against hypothetical criticism. There was no monolithic approach to asserting authority or avoiding uncharitable readings or prosecution, and that in itself suggests the contemporary dialogue around the orthodox and the

heretical was not monolithic, either. The rhetorical moves made by these writers in dialogue with their critics, real or imagined, suggests the complexity of negotiations between conflicting notions of Christian theology and heresy that could occur in this period.

In my selection of texts, I have sought to bring together similar works in which an awareness is present of its potentially tenuous place among its contemporaries. These works each have an autobiographical angle and describe visionary and/or ecstatic experiences as a source of both spiritual knowledge and devotion as well as personal subjective life events. I have also sought to select a range of representative texts from both male and female, as well as from both religious and lay writers. My main reason for this approach is to highlight the ways in which ostensibly very different writers acted, wrote, or thought in similar ways in response to the environment in which they were writing, as well as to avoid the risk of making bioessentialist generalizations about the qualities of female spirituality. The scope is limited to works from the early fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries and geographically centered around France and England. By examining figures from this time whose mystical or visionary experiences were recorded in personal writing, we can begin to explore what it meant to exist on the fringes of orthodoxy in this moment in history. By juxtaposing the tensibly disparate literature of mystics and visionary clerics, including those who were subject to scrutiny and those who were not, like Julian of Norwich, Marguerite Porete, Margery Kempe, and John of Morigny, we can gain a fuller understanding of what it meant to claim experience and spiritual subjectivity in the long fourteenth century. My approach to understanding these texts mirrors my engagement with the texts themselves, in that I have drawn from a broad pool of sources across a variety of disciplines. Through this interdisciplinary approach, I am able to put these voices, which may seem disparate in their approaches, into conversations around their shared concerns: discourse,

epistemology, performance and the performance of writing, recursivity, and the expression of inexpressible.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter includes an overview of historical contexts relevant to each figure and text, then approaches each text with the goal of uncovering how each writer navigated these internal and external pressures. My central concern is of the relationship between the expression of inexpressible divine or spiritual ideas or experiences and the political climate in which these expressions happened, as I want to illuminate the complex relationships between modes of expression created in response to both sets of pressures.

I begin first with Marguerite Porete, whose trial, as I have said, reverberates throughout the later Middle Ages, directly or indirectly, in order to set the stage for both the inquisitorial climates faced by the remainder of my subjects and for the centrality of performance to the rhetoric and discourse they use in response, and end with Margery Kempe, whose *Book* takes performance as a response to the threat of condemnation to its highest degree. By structuring my project in this way, I show the significance of Porete's watershed trial and its related contexts, while allowing each following figure and text to bring us deeper into an engagement with the performative discourse developed by each.

In the first chapter, "Staging Rhetoric and Apophasis in Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*," I dive deeper into the Marguerite Porete trial, and its reverberated effects in France and beyond. I engage in a close reading of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, with attention to its dialogue and authorial forms, in the context of Porete's earlier condemnation by the Bishop of Cambria, in order to show how the form responds to both the tense climate and to the difficulty of Marguerite's subject. I argue that the dramatic dialogue style in *The Mirror of Simple Souls* adopted by Porete in order to perform the annihilation of the soul which is central to her

apophatic theology also serves as a way for her to rhetorically envelop the criticism she faced preceding her condemnation.

In the second chapter, "The Magician and the Anchoress: Experiential Authority, Recursive Writing, and the Making of the Self in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Divine Love* and John of Morigny's *The Flowers of Heavenly Teaching*," I widen my scope out to include two figures simultaneously near and distant to Marguerite Porete: John of Morigny's work occupies a very different space, but his physical and intellectual proximity to the University of Paris in the early fourteenth century put him in direct contact with Marguerite's trial. Julian of Norwich is the opposite: while her physical proximity – England, nearly a century later – make her quite distant from Marguerite, her commitment to her serious vernacular theological work is reminiscent of Marguerite's. I place them in juxtaposition in the chapter in order to explore each writer's use of what I call a kind of mystic rhetoric in their spiritual autobiographies in order to make sense of their own experiences and to express that self in response to potential (or actual, in John's case) criticisms or scrutiny.

In the final chapter, "Performance, Labor, and the Body in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," I come to Margery Kempe, and my analysis of her *Book* serves as a culmination of the arguments of the preceding chapters. I read the *Book* as a performance text, both in terms of its depiction of Margery's performances, and in terms of Margery's performance as storyteller in dictation, referring to the *Book's* creation. Both forms of performance include Margery's labor, and I argue that Margery uses the laboring, performing body as a site of religious devotion.

Taken together, these chapters provide a new way of approaching these troublesome texts. By placing them in conversation, we gain a greater understanding of the echoes of shifting theology, orthodoxy, and tolerance throughout the late Middle Ages, and particularly in the

turbulent fourteenth century. Religious writers in the fourteenth century struggled under two limits: one, the political climate, which involved ongoing power struggles between religious and royal authorities and increasing suspicion towards the written text, and two, the inherent inexpressibility of the profoundly spiritual experiences they sought to put to text. By paying close attention to the ways each writer navigated these two constraints, we uncover a pattern of performative styles, careful rhetoric, and self-narrativizing autobiographical moves.

CHAPTER I. STAGING RHETORIC AND APOPHASIS IN MARGUERITE PORETE'S *THE MIRROR OF SIMPLE SOULS*

Let us begin with Marguerite Porete. First, I will provide a brief overview of Marguerite's life and trial, which I believe is necessary to fully appreciate the importance of her work and the analysis that follows. Next, I will analyze the rhetoric of *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* with particular attention to Marguerite's use of a dialogue style to dramatize the journey of the annihilated soul. The dramatic dialogue form serves two purposes: one, it asserts her educational status and aligns her with a dialectic tradition in medieval thought, and two, it allows her to rhetorically situate and envelop objecting views into her process. While the necessity for such a rhetorical move suggests the threat of persecution Marguerite encountered, it also allows Marguerite to create and communicate in her work a performance of apophasis and annihilation which is central to her theology and allows her to express the inexpressible.

In order to fully understand and appreciate the layers of discourse in *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* an overview of Marguerite Porete's place in history as well as her trial is necessary. Most of Marguerite's life is lost to us, but a great deal of scholarship has attempted to extract as much as possible from the clues we do have. Most of what we know about Marguerite comes from documents related to her trial for relapsed heresy[2] or from her work, *The Mirror of Simple Souls.* Marguerite was born in Hainaut, an imperial territory which bordered France, sometime in the mid- to late thirteenth century, and was thus impacted constantly by the ongoing conflict between the Kingdom of France and the papacy. Philip IV (r. 1285-1314)'s reign

[2] The trial documents were edited and published by Paul Verdeyen S.J. in "Le procès d'inquisition contre Marguerite Porete et Guiard de Cressonessart (1309-1310)," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 81,1986, pp. 47-94. Sean L. Field provides a careful English translation in Appendix A of *The Beguine, The Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard de Cressonessart,* University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

brought to its height the development of the French royal family's presentation of itself as a holy lineage ruling over a French "chosen people," with roots throughout the Capetian line. Philip IV in particular was highly devout in his sense of the unity of Christian piety and French loyalty and his conviction that, as Joseph Strayer puts it, "no true believer could fail to see that the interests of the French monarchy and the interests of the Church were identical" (13). This conflation of royal and religious power resulted in a series of conflicts between Philip's court and Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303), as both leaders vied for their institution's supreme jurisdiction and power, laying the groundwork for continued strain in the fourteenth century. As scholars like Sean L. Field have shown, this conflict often played out in the enforcement of orthodoxy, notably in the controversial Templar trials concurrent with Marguerite's trial. The environment in which Marguerite wrote, defended, and died for her work was a direct result of this often violent negotiation of power, continuing with the Avignon Papacy beginning with Pope Clement V (r. 1305-1314).

Marguerite Porete's work was one of many in an emerging vernacular literary tradition of women, typically beguines or others on the edges of orthodox religious communities, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[3] Works by women across the continent, like Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth, Marguerite of Oingt, Beatrice of

[3] It's not completely clear whether Marguerite was or ever considered herself a beguine. There is reason to assume she resided in the beguinage of St. Elisabeth's in Valenciennes, as Robert E. Lerner suggests. However, she address beguines with an outside voice in *The Mirror*: "Beguines say I err, / priests, clerics, and Preachers, / Augustinians, Carmelites, / and the Friars Minor, / Because I wrote about the being / of the one purified by Love" (200). Regardless, ultimately, of whether or not Marguerite considered herself a beguine, her life and works were adjacent enough for many of her contemporaries to think of her as such, and the reputation of beguine spirituality certainly influenced the development and outcome of her trial. Significantly, she is referred to as a beguine repeatedly in her trial documents and in contemporary accounts of her trial by chroniclers. See Lerner, Robert E. "New Light on *The Mirror of Simple Souls*." Speculum 85, 2010, pp. 91-116).

Ornacieux, Felipa of Porcelet, and Agnes of Harcourt spanned many genres, from poetry, letters, vision literature, treatises, diaries, hagiographies, and more, and often reported mystical experiences in the assertion of theological ideas or arguments. Hadewijch and Mechthild in particular shared many ideas in common with Marguerite Porete, and the three, along with the mystic theologian Meister Eckhart, have been placed in conversation by numerous scholars. As Sean L. Field points out, while "the brand of love-drenched vernacular theology that these women favored may have been provocative, it was not necessarily heretical" (Field 7). What, then, made Marguerite Porete a target for inquisition? Bernard McGinn, in the introduction to a collection of essays on beguine mystics, argues that "while the mystical message of Hadewijch and Mechthild appears potentially universal […], Marguerite Porete's teaching in the *Mirror* involves a complex form of esotericism based on the conflict between Reason and *Dame Amour.* Her emphasis on the special position of a spiritual elite of annihilated souls was a root element in the difficulties she encountered with the institutional church" (11). Likewise, Field analyzes the particular sections of her work subject to inquisitional scrutiny and used by William of Paris in her trial and concludes that the damning idea in *The Mirror* was Marguerite's assertion that a soul perfectly annihilated no longer had any need for the mediation of the Church, which easily translated as a threat to Church authority and power. Her position as a suspect female writer and the perceived threat her ideas posed to papal authority made the atmosphere tragically perfect for her trial and for its result.

These contexts put Marguerite in a strenuous position of which she herself seemed aware. At some point, Porete sought the opinions and approval of at least three clerical witnesses, whose words she appended to the *Mirror* at the end. There is some scholarly disagreement over whether she sought these recommendations before or after the condemnation of her work by Guido of

Collemezzo, Bishop of Cambrai.[4] While there are important implications for either side, the underlying importance is the same: Marguerite knew that seeking and appending approving voices from authorized and respected figures would lend credence to her work, proving her assertions and protecting her, in theory, from increased scrutiny.

With these contexts in mind, we can begin our analysis. The work is bookended in attempts at cushioning the blow Marguerite seemed to suspect the text may land, especially to its clerical audience. First, Marguerite begins her work with a verse prologue that begins with a caution to readers. Here we have a rhetorical move – to address skeptical readers, and theologians and clerics directly—made to preemptively defend her work against uncharitable reads:

> You who would read this book,
>
> If you indeed wish to grasp it,
>
> Think about what you say,
>
> For it is very difficult to comprehend;
>
> Humility, who is keeper of the treasury of
>
> Knowledge
>
> And the mother of the other Virtues,
>
> Must overtake you.
>
> Theologians and other clerks,
>
> You will not have the intellect for it,

[4] It seems unlikely that respected churchmen, particularly Godfrey of Fontaines, would have engaged with a book which had already been condemned, much less risk authorizing it with their own approval and name. For reasoning to suggest otherwise, see Sean L. Field, "The Master and Marguerite: Godfrey of Fontaines' Praise of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*," Journal of Medieval History 35, 2009, pp 136-49.

No matter how brilliant your abilities,

If you do not proceed humbly.

And may Love and Faith, together,

Cause you to rise above Reason,

[Since] they are the ladies of the house.

Even Reason witnesses

In the Thirteenth Chapter of this book,

And with no shame about it,

That Love and Faith make her live

And she does not free herself from them,

For they have lordship over her,

Which is why she must humble herself.

Humble, then, your wisdom

Which is based on Reason,

And place all your fidelity

In those things which are given

By Love, illuminated through Faith.

And thus you will understand this book

Which makes the Soul live by love. (79)

This verse prologue is interesting for a number of reasons. She does not, interestingly, turn to divine experience, visionary or otherwise, to support the book in this prologue, though she does suggest that she is writing from the experience of having received "those things which are given by Love, illuminated by Faith" and as a "Soul" which is made to "live by love" (79). However,

this divine experience is not the crux on which she settles her authority. Rather, she defends her work against uncharitable reads by identifying the cause of a potentially uncharitable read itself: "if you do not proceed humbly," she warns, you will not be able to "rise above Reason" with the assistance of "Love and Faith together" (79). It is notable here, as throughout the *Mirror,* as I will argue below, "wisdom, which is based on Reason" is not simply an inhibitor to understanding Marguerite's argument and receiving the divine knowledge she describes, but a core part of the process: Reason must be "humble[d]" and "overcome" in order to progress through the stages described in the *Mirror* towards annihilation and union with God. Marguerite hints at this process here in the prologue, but it is through the ongoing dialogue in the following chapters that she is able to demonstrate her purpose. The operation of the divine through Porete is implicit, and readers of the book will come to understand how as they come to understand Porete's idea of the annihilated soul.

In addressing her readers, who may find the book "very hard to understand," she is able to engage them to approach the text with an open mind. Like Reason in the dialogue that follows, if the reader will "abase [their] learning now" and show "true and perfect trust" to Love, Love and Faith will give "understanding of this book […] which makes the Soul the life of Love to live" (9). As Field suggests, "the author's underlying message in a work with this format could be difficult to understand, and uncharitable readers could easily take particular remarks ascribed to particular personifications out of context, though he concedes this speculation, as no sources clearly indicate that was the case: "caution is required before assuming that specific elements of the way Marguerite constructed or justified her text explain why her book was condemned, since there is no record of any contemporary churchman noting these points, approvingly or disapprovingly" (9). These specific elements, however, allow us as readers to better understand

Marguerite's argument and her place within that argument: not as its originator, but as its mouthpiece, relaying the message humbly.

Crafting a text which humbly yet convincingly relays her message becomes extremely important for Marguerite, as Field points out her lack of a "known confessor to shield her from suspicion" (9). While the dialogue style may have made the underlying message more obscure or difficult to parse, it is in this deliberately woven chaos that Marguerite is able to express not only her complicated apophatic theology, but more importantly the inclusion of Reason's misunderstanding to the process of annihilation itself. That is, the rhetorical choices and textual structure mirror the message they convey: that only through openness and abasement can knowledge – divine or otherwise – be conveyed.

The *Mirror of Simple Souls* is, for the most part, written as a dialogue. While the final seventeen chapters switch rather abruptly to a more direct authorial voice and abandon the preceding dialogic style, as will be explored below, the main content of the *Mirror* – that is, the journey of the Soul through seven stages towards perfection – is told deliberately in dialogue. The style itself immediately suggests a level of sophistication that lends Marguerite the credibility of a high education, as it immediately recalls the dialectical tradition in classical and medieval thought and literature and posits Marguerite as an informed participant in ongoing philosophical and theological conversations. However, the dialogue style used by Marguerite also suggests a level of theatricality. In the first chapter, we first get a set stage and a stage direction:

> Soul, touched by God and removed from sin at the first stage of grace, is carried by divine graces to the seventh stage of grace, in which state the Soul possesses the fullness of her perfection through divine fruition in the land of life.

> *Here Love speaks:* As for you actives and contemplatives, and perhaps those annihilated by true love, you will hear some powers of pure love, of noble love, of the high love of the Unencumbered Soul. (80)

There are three notable points here: one, the introductory and summary statement which, as I said, "sets the stage" for the actions which follow; two, the indicator "*here love speaks,*" and, connected, three, Love's address to the audience in aural terms: "you will *hear*," rather than "you will *read,*" for example. Additionally, at various points, as early as chapter 6, when the Soul says "I can now say and sing," before breaking into 15 lines of verse (84), and as late as the final chapter before the *Explicit,* entitled "Here the Soul begins her song" (198), the characters are described as engaging in some kind of performance of prayer, poem, or song.

Perhaps most importantly, the dialogue style creates the space for Marguerite to suggest potential criticisms, misunderstandings, and accusations within her own work and in her own voice in order to envelop these into her larger construction. In the sixty-sixth chapter of Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* the allegorical characters Love and Soul begin to part from Reason. Reason questions the Soul's joy, to which Love responds:

> *Love:* It is from this, says Love, that she has taken leave of you and of the works of the Virtues. For as long as this Soul was cloaked in love, she took lessons in your school through desire of the works of the Virtues. Now she has entered upon and is so surpassing in divine learning that she begins to read where you take your end. But this lesson is not placed in writing by human hand, but by the Holy Spirit, who writes this lesson in a marvelous way, and the Soul is the precious parchment. The divine school is held with the mouth closed, which the human mind cannot express in words. (142)

For Marguerite, this inexpressibility is not a challenge to be overcome, but rather a part of the whole. Like the envelopment of Reason into the process of annihilation, the dialogic style allows Marguerite to envelop the inexpressibility into the expression through the discourse of apophasis.

Reason first appears – or speaks – in Chapter Seven: How this Soul is noble, and how she takes no account of anything. In the preceding chapter, the Soul takes leave of the Virtues in a verse, which "to them [ie, the Virtues] I can now say and sing" (84). Reason is set off by Love's proclamation that the Soul, now free of the Virtues, "takes account of neither shame nor honor, of neither poverty nor wealth, of neither anxiety nor ease, of neither love nor hate, of neither hell nor paradise" (84). Reason objects: "Ah, for God's sake, Love, says Reason, what does this mean, what you have said?" (85). Reason cannot comprehend the destruction of binary oppositions laid out by Love. Reason fails to comprehend an existence in the neither…nor. Love responds: "What does this mean? Says Love. Certainly the one knows this, and no other, to whom God has given the intellect – for Scripture does not teach it, nor the human mind comprehend it, nor does creaturely work deserve to grasp it or comprehend it" (85). That is, according to Love, it is impossible for Reason (or anyone else) to comprehend the Soul precisely, and, Porete seems to argue, this incomprehensibility substantiates the incomprehensible thing itself.

This is Porete's introduction, to her reader, of the apophatic theme central to her work. Love goes on: "Thus this gift is given from the most High, into whom this creature is carried by the fertility of understanding, and nothing remains in her own intellect. And this Soul, who has become nothing, thus possesses everything, and so possesses nothing; she wills everything and she wills nothing; she knows all and she knows nothing" (85). Thus apophasis becomes a kind of

performance, and the dramatic style of *The Mirror* mirrors this content with its form. That is, by crafting *The Mirror* in a performative dialogue, Porete emphasizes the importance of the enfolding performance of apophasis to her argument. This performance allows her to enact the process of annihilation, which includes the enfolding of Reason's questions in a recursive process. In Chapter Two, entitled "Of the work of Love and why she has this book made," Love explains that the audience, the "little ones of the Holy Church," might, in the reading or hearing of the book, may be "more worthy of the perfection of life and the being of peace," to which they may "arrive through the virtue of perfect charity, the gift given by the whole Trinity," and most importantly that this gift will be "explained in this book through the Intellect of Love and following the questions of Reason" (81). Almost immediately, Porete indicates the importance of the inclusion of Reason's incessant questioning and doubt. It is not – or at least it is not *only* – an impediment to the understanding of the book, as she suggested in the Explicit, but is a real part of the process of perfection.

Most often, critical perspectives, emotional reactions, skepticism, and offense are relayed through Reason. Reason is repeatedly amazed and shocked by the ideas expressed by Love and The Soul, and represents, as Marguerite suggests in her prologue, not just a skeptical reader, but the Church at large. Chapters 85 and 86 provide a clear example of this process which repeats throughout the *Mirror,* with the added significance of Chapter 85's provocative description of the annihilated soul:

> *Love:* This Soul, says Love, is scorched through mortification and burned through the ardor of the fire of charity, and her ashes are thrown into the open sea through the nothingness of will. This Soul is gently noble in prosperity, and supremely noble in adversity, and excellently noble in all places whatever they might be. This Soul who is

> such no longer seeks God through penitence, nor through any sacrament of Holy Church; not through thoughts, nor through words, nor through works; not through creature here below, nor through creature above; not through justice, nor through mercy, nor through glory of glory; not through divine understanding, nor through divine love, nor through divine praise. (160)

Here, *Love,* a persona which often functions as a divine voice, God's voice, describes the Soul in the highest of stages set forth by the *Mirror.* In the following chapter, Reason expresses distressed shock at Marguerite's suggestions of the simple, annihilated soul, suggesting Marguerite's awareness that her ideas were provocative:

> *[Reason]:* O God! O God! O God! says Reason. What is this creature saying? She is now completely beside herself! But what will my children say? I do not know what to say to them, nor how to respond to excuse this.
>
> *Soul:* I am not surprised, says this Soul, for these are folk with feet but no path, hands but no work, mouths but no words, eyes but no vision, ears but no hearing, reason but no reasoning, body but no life, and with a heart but no intellect, as long as they are at this stage. For this reason do your children marvel upon marvel of marvel.
>
> *Love:* True, these are astounded, says Love, well astounded, for they are so far from the country where one has such practice in order to possess the heights. But those who are from the country in which God lives, these are not astounded at all by it. (161)

In this way, Marguerite both validates and disproves the potential offense to her work that one "nurtured" by Reason may take: of course you are amazed, Love says, but those whose have ascended to annihilation will understand. She subsumes the criticism as a natural course of her

argument, which lessens the power that criticism wields. Notably, it is through the dramatic mode that Reason is subsumed and her apophatic language made clear. She continues:

> *Soul:* Not at all! If it please God, says the Unencumbered Soul, this would be a mark of crudity, and I will say to you and show you how by an example. IF a king should give one of his servants, who loyally served him, a great gift, by which gift the servant would be eternally rich, without ever doing any service again, why would a wise man be astounded by this? Without fail, he must not be astounded by it at all, for in doing so he would blame the king and his gift and the liberality of the gift. (161)

The analogy here is bold, yet it aligns Marguerite's ideas with orthodoxy—who are we to doubt God's gifts, or intentions? Again, we must remember that while Marguerite's work was provocative, it was not any directly blasphemous or demonic content which led to its designation as heretical. Marguerite's place was on the fringes of orthodoxy, not beyond it.

Scholars tend to agree that the final seventeen chapters, numbered 123-39, were added after the criticism and prohibition of the Bishop of Cambrai. If this is true, the chapters provide evidence for Marguerite's awareness of the dangers her work presented and represent most directly her response to the criticisms she faced. Notably, these seventeen chapters are directed at unenlightened readers, and seek to clarify her ideas, restating them in new forms, and providing supplementary biblical commentary to further assert her authority as a theologian, rather than to fix or censor any of the "errors" in the existing work. After the end of chapter 122, there is an additional heading after *Explicit,* which reads: "Here follow some considerations for those who are in the stage of the sad ones and who ask the way to the land of freeness" (202). And beginning with chapter 123, there is a new emphasis on an authorial voice: "I wish to speak about some considerations for the sad ones," she writes, "considerations which indeed helped me

at the time when I was one of the sad ones" (202). Here, we get an autobiographical gesture—we hear from Marguerite directly, and she will advise us based on her direct experience. This tone provides the reader with another assurance of Marguerite's credibility as an author and of the credibility of her ideas, along with the appended approvals and the rhetorical moves throughout, including the use of a dialogue style and the direct attention given to the potential for misunderstanding.

The Mirror continued to circulate anonymously after its author's death, inspiring and interesting readers and hearers across Europe, including, significantly, the English Carthusians in London in the fifteenth century. Justine Trombley has done extensive work to trace the reception and reproduction of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* in manuscripts across Europe, including its English, Latin, and Italian translations well into the fifteenth century. As Field reminds us, even in Marguerite's own time, her work was not universally despised, and Trombley's work suggests its continued relevance and interest for religious thinkers beyond Marguerite's contemporary time and place. For many of Marguerite's contemporaries and for future generations of clerical thinkers and writers, Marguerite's 'heretical' writing held largely positive responses, and in this way we can see that the dialogue between the heretical and the orthodox was not, or at least not entirely, one-dimensional.

Marguerite's work and trial have been clearly linked to two important decrees made after her death, the 1312 *Ad nostrum* and the *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus*, decrees developed during the Council of Vienne in 1311-1312 which focused attention on the Beguines and Beghards. At the Council of Vienne were many powerful men with direct knowledge of or involvement in Marguerite's trial one year prior. The *Cum de quibusdam* condemned, upon "frequently heard sinister rumor" by then Pope Clement and the council of certain women "known in common

speech as beguines" who disputed the Trinity, expressed contrary opinions on the sacraments, and lead their followers into error, "as though led by insanity of the mind" (Field 197). Field suggests the high likelihood that the "rumors" at the heart of the *Cum de quibusdam* involved Marguerite, as reports of her trial were sure to have been circulating among the clergy at the council (197). The *Ad nostrum* decree again condemns the Beguines, on account of their errors, eight of which are given in the canon: for example, that a person can attain a degree of perfection that he will be sinless, and that a perfected person is not bound to the church or the need to fast or pray. Sean L. Field argues that the list of heretical articles extracted from Marguerite's book were direct sources for these 'errors,' and that in this way "Marguerite's process […] did effect the creation of this canon" (199). In this way, we can elucidate a direct dialogue between the mystical writing of Marguerite Porete and the orthodox canon. For Field, "Marguerite Porete was a crucial (and yet textually invisible) figure who linked the misbehaving beguines of *Cum de quibusdam* to the antinomians of the *Ad nostrum*," forming the basis of the Heresy of the Free Spirit and "the idea that somewhere on the margins of European society lurked a sect whose secret doctrines justified gross immorality with the claim to be perfect and therefore free of all moral constraint" (199). Barbara Newman writes that, despite Marguerite's offense being her individual mystical claim to such perfect union with God that she no longer required the Church's mediations, "the inquisitors who condemned her were so accustomed to thinking in terms of organized movements that they invented one – 'the heresy of the Free Spirit – on the basis of her book alone" (306). The Heresy of the Free Spirit related to a loose set of beliefs the Church was concerned about, including the autotheistic idea of the perfected soul and God as indistinguishably one, often expressed through the language of indistinction or annihilation, concerns which increasingly get applied to lay religious groups like the Beguines and the

Beghards, whose increase in number/popularity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century was already a cause of concern and rising suspicion. Marguerite, ultimately, was a victim of time and place, whose work was divisive enough to implicate her in the larger churning discourse of heresy in the fourteenth century. We may look to her writing, then, to uncover the relationship between Margeurite and her world.

CHAPTER II. THE MAGICIAN AND THE ANCHORESS: EXPERIENTIAL AUTHORITY, RECURSIVE WRITING, AND THE MAKING OF THE SELF IN JULIAN OF NORWICH'S *A REVELATION OF DIVINE LOVE* AND JOHN OF MORIGNY'S *THE FLOWERS OF HEAVENLY TEACHING*

In this chapter, I want to place the writing of the magician John of Morigny next to the writing of Julian of Norwich, in order to develop an understanding of the kind of "mystic rhetoric" that I argue developed over the course of the fourteenth century in response to rising concerns about the power of writing and heterodoxy. By placing these writers side-by-side and reading them within the context of this anxious climate, we can develop a greater understanding of the ways in which each writer engaged in autobiographical modes to write their selves and their spiritual experiences in a way that was intelligible in their historical moment.

First, a defense of the inclusion of John of Morigny's work in a thesis largely focused on mysticism is necessary. First, it is important to remember that the idea of mysticism as a genre or an affiliation is a modern construction, and while I do not suggest that it be deconstructed, I do suggest that there may be some value in treating its boundaries loosely here. The inclusion of magicians or other figures on the fringes of orthodoxy in the period allows us to draw connections between the spiritual experiences of writers who may not normally come into contact in scholarship, but whose work was created under and in turn helped to create the same environment of curiosity, suspicion, and fear which marked the long fourteenth century.

The magician in particular shares a lot in common with the mystic. Like the mystics, magicians negotiated their relationship with God in methods that often, though not universally, created friction. Not altogether heterodox, especially due to its often-orthodox use, magic by the fourteenth century, while largely tolerated, was increasingly regarded with suspicion. However,

over the course of the fourteenth century, suspicion grew to outright condemnation, alongside the trajectory of increased suspicion over mysticism. Michael D. Bailey first placed the works and lives of Marguerite Porete and John of Morigny in dialogue which each other in his article "Magic, Mysticism, and Heresy in the Early Fourteenth Century," in which he connects the figures through the similarities in challenges they presented for the church. That is, while their writing and relationship with God constituted very different genres, they both occupied liminal spaces on the fringes of orthodoxy and required the Church's attention. He argues, "for the discerning Church, systems of mysticism and ritual magic raised similar problems" and that in order "to alleviate these ambiguities, the Church relied on broad stereotypes and invented categories," a process he suggests can be traced to the fifteenth century development of "the clarifying stereotype of diabolical, heretical witchcraft" (75). The climate for magicians in the early fourteenth century was influenced strongly by the pontificate of John XXII (1316-1334). John XXII's reign was marked by "growing concern over sorcery at the highest levels of the ecclesiastical structure" and was a time in which "the papal court, and particularly the pope himself, was beset by fears of demonic sorcery and magical plots" (Bailey 966). By the end of the fourteenth century, the theology faculty at the University of Paris drafted and approved a condemnation of the practice of ritual magic in the form of twenty-eight errors, which argued, among other things, that it is an error "to use magical arts or other kinds of superstitions prohibited by God and the Church for any good moral purpose" (Levack 49). This condemnation of magic would be reproduced and used by a number of later writers, including Jean Gerson's *De erroribus circa artem magicam* (1402), and a number of demonologists leading up to the height of the witchcraft panic period.

John XXII is also known for his papal bull *In agro dominico* (1329), which condemned twenty-eight propositions taken from Meister Eckhart's writings as heretical or suspect of heresy, and for ordering the bull to be publicized widely to reach those to whom Eckhart had preached. The *In agro dominico* was, in many ways, a continuation of the *Ad nostrum* decree drawn up at the Council of Vienne (1311-12) under Pope Clement V. Both were concerned with the invented Heresy of the Free Spirit, the ideology assigned to Marguerite Porete after her death and applied to writers like Eckhart who upheld similar ideas. For John XXII and his contemporaries, the heterodox practices of magic and of mysticism were equal and related threats.

John of Morigny was a Benedictine monk likely born in the late 1270s, whose visionary book, the *Liber florum celestis doctrine,* was heavily criticized in 1315 and burned in 1323. Until very recently, the book only existed in the nameless description of its burning: "According to the *Grandes chroniques de France,* an unnamed book of 'feigned' prayers to the Virgin, written by an equally unnamed monk of Morigny, was 'justly condemned in Paris as false and evil, against Christian faith, and condemned to be burned and put in the fire'" (Bailey 61, Watson). John's work is now accessible to a wide scholarly audience due almost entirely to the work of Claire Fanger, whose 2015 book *Rewriting Magic: An Exegesis of the Visionary Autobiography of a Fourteenth-Century French Monk* represents over twenty years of analysis and translation of the life and work of John of Morigny. Between 1301 and 1316, John of Morigny wrote and revised his *Liber florum celestis doctrine* in response to clerical criticism, and while revisions did not save it from burning in Paris, it "was widely copied, read, and used as an orthodox expression of Marian devotion for the next two centuries" (Watson 191). This is significant: despite increased

and ongoing suspicion of magicians and official condemnation of ritual magic by the pontificate, manuscripts indicate that John's work continued to circulate in orthodox spaces.

John of Morigny in particular makes sense here for two reasons. One, he would have been in direct contact with the Porete trial given his proximity to the University of Paris, and the criticism he faced came out of the same moment. Perhaps more importantly, however, John is useful here because of the fascinating visionary autobiography he wrote as a part of his *Liber florum.* Fanger puts John of Morigny into conversation with the mystical writings of the beguines McGinn describes in the thirteenth century in "Complications of Eros: The Song of Songs in John of Morigny's *Liber Florum Celestis Doctrine*." Likewise, Frank Klaasen points out that "John draws heavily upon the rhetorical approaches of mystical writers and the long-standing Christian principle that the truth could be revealed to the most humble of believers in visions or dreams" (84). It is these rhetorical choices that compel me to place John aside of Julian of Norwich in my analysis of the ways that each writer engages a narrativization of the self, drawing experiential authority with careful discernment and self-revision.

I. Mystic Rhetoric

To use and apply an idea of "mystic rhetoric" involves a great deal of positioning. As Bernard McGinn reminds us, "no Mystics […] believed in or practiced 'mysticism'. They believed in and practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole" (xvi). Denys Turner, building on McGinn, expresses discomfort with the inclination of modern readers to understand medieval mystical traditions in 'experientialist' terms, and argues that the medieval Christian soul meets God beyond experience, and locates the 'mystical' in the ordinary and everyday. Therefore, it is important to be clear about the criteria for analysis which groups texts or authors together under

a mystic label. Here, when I refer to John of Morigny as engaging with a kind of mystic rhetoric, what I mean is that he his work with a confessional autobiography which centers on the visionary, ecstatic, somatic – or somnatic – experience of the divine, and it is through his autobiographical work that he develops and maintains his spiritual subjectivity and authority. Like other writers we identify as being a part of a medieval mystical tradition, his experience of God is a dialectic of presence/absence, positive/negative. And as with other mystics, John finds the process of recording and interpreting his visionary experience as a viable way of introducing with authority new, potentially controversial, and certainly personal ideas into theological conversations.

Michel de Certeau describes a feature of the rhetoric of those we call mystics as "the need to *found the place from which he or she speaks,"* a place he describes as "guaranteed neither by authorized statements (or "authorities") supporting discourse nor by the social status of the speaker within the hierarchy of a dogmatic institutions," but rather, through experience (178). For John of Morigny, it is not exclusively the "barking dogs" he refers to who incentivize his revisions, though clearly the threat of societal consequences for his work is a concern, but his own personal experiences in his visions which lead him to question and revise his interpretation of the validity of the *Ars notoria* and of his own work. He does not, that is, cite any authority but Mary's (and by extension God's) over his work, nor does he give any real credence aside from a defensive, tactical revision to the voice of worldly authority.

De Certeau elaborates on this experiential authority, writing that even if the text quotes from or references "authorized statements (or 'authorities')," "it does not posit those authorities as legitimizing powers, as the theological or pastoral discourse of the theologian or pastor does" (178). Rather, he argues, "its value is derived from the sole fact of its being produced in the very

place in which the Speaker, the Spirit, *el que habla,* speaks. It is authorized solely by being the locus of that 'inspired' speech act, also designated by the term 'experience'" (178). We can see this experientiality very clearly in *A Revelation of Love,* where Julian's process of understanding is entirely internal. That is, she records the process of her own private discernment in her record of her visions: "and after this I sawe," she repeats throughout the Short Text, followed by her early interpretations, phrased in "it seemed to me" language (77). Her works, Watson writes, are "truer than many visionary writings to the logic of their genre, which attends to what can be known through a chosen individual's experience, rather than through the authoritative teachings of others" (6). Watson points out that Julian's work is relatively unique among other women's visionary writings, "which usually give much notice to priests or other educated men" (7). He describes the way Julian "by using the visionary 'I saw' to describe both kinds of activity, experiencing and interpreting," produces in *A Revelation* "a relationship of mutual care between the interpreter and the creature, in which neither forgets her final identity with the other," a relationship which echoes one of Julian's overarching arguments in her work, that "the soul's substance and its sensuality remain united by their very knowledge of their unity" (9). Watson's reading is useful here, as it suggests the union between the form and content of Julian's work. Like Watson, I am compelled by Julian's use of "I sawe" in her discernment, which, I believe, gives it a particularly powerful autobiographical element and assertion of spiritual authority with a profoundly inward, self-focused way.

In *The Darkness of God,* Denys Turner explores two "narrative models" – one of "self-making" and one of "self-discovery" – which form Augustine's story of his conversion in his *Confessions.* He uses the second of these to better understand the evident lack of expected "spiritual drama" in Julian's writings in his later book on Julian's theology. He writes:

> What one attends to when remarking upon the relatively "static" character of Julian's writing is the obvious absence of the dramatic personal narrative of a spiritual journey such as one finds in the first nine books of *Confessions*. What one would be omitting to notice, were one to conclude that Julian's *Revelation* thereby lacks the character of a 'spirituality,' is that even for Augustine that auto-biographical narrative of his life's restless 'seeking' gets its meaning only from what, at the end of the questing journey, he there discovers, namely, that what he saw as a series of time-bound events constituting his personal life of struggle for the truth was in fact the work of the truth that was already there within him, waiting to be discovered. (140)

For Turner, the trajectory of spirituality in Julian's writing appears static only because she works inwardly – that is, as she remembers her experiences in order to record them, she remembers them as narrative, and more importantly as narrative devised by God. We can see this very clearly in Chapter 11, Julian's Third Revelation, where she writes:

> And I saw truly that nothing is done by happe ne by aventure, but alle by the foresing wisdom of God. If it be hap or aventure in the sight of man, our blindhede and our unforsight is the cause. For tho things that be in the foreseeing wisdom of God bene fro without beginning, which rightfully and worshipfully and continually he ledeth to the best ende as it cometh aboute, falling to us sodeynly, ourselfe unweting. And thus, by our blindhede and our unforsighte, we say these things be by happes and aventure. Thus I understonde in this shewing of love, for wel I wot in the sight of our lord God is no happe ne aventure. (163)

Here, Julian explores God's omnipotence and ultimate knowledge of all things – here, even sin – as a part of the trajectory of each individual life. Nothing "is done by happe ne by aventure,"

including sin, and including, of course, Julian's visions. The content of Julian's writing mirrors her experience, and the knowledge and sense of self she generates from this idea is central to her understanding of herself and of God.

We might also better understand John's spiritual "self-making" through Turner's reading of Augustine's *Confessions.* Turner writes that it "is only by the hindsight of his conversion that Augustine can review the course of that restless seeking, with all its apparent aimlessness and randomness," and see it not as a record of his seeking God, but rather as "having been all along driven by the God of his seeking, working within the very seeking itself and not as if some object 'outside' himself" (139). In "What Does it Mean to Say 'I Saw'?" Barbara Newman describes the inevitable trouble which arose from an increase in lay participation in visionary experiences in the later Middle Ages, the "proliferation of visionary texts, experiences, and claims" which "led to massive confusion about their nature and validity" (6). Newman writes that "one way to avert" suspicion or confusion "was to interpret the would-be prophet's *vidi* more and more promptly as 'I hallucinated,' if not 'the devil deceived me' (6). John anticipates this in his own work, self-discerning his own experiences with careful perception, and ending his prologue with advice to readers on how to discern the source – that is, demonic or divine – of their own visions. His anxiety over the validity of his own visions points not just to his caution around his controversial subject, but also to a broader anxiety and caution in interpreting his own experiences, broadly. John is unable to make sense of his visions until after he has finally been effectively chastised and performed penance, which will be explored further below. Here, however, the point is that it is only after he has learned from his experience that he is able to communicate it in his writing, and that this learning is connected to God's overarching power over John's life, even his mistakes, which, as with all things, God turns towards good work.

For both Julian and John, self-reflection is central not only because of its significance to understanding their own more passive role in their spiritual journey – not as seeker, but as subject – but also because, through this understanding, they gain a greater sense of authority over their own experiences. The meaning, that is, of their visionary experiences changes when viewed in a hindsight which understands God's work in them, and thus they are compelled to revise their writing to better reflect their new experience of the initial, bringing those experiences forward in time to their present understanding, a kind of re-experiencing. It is the "narrativizing of the self" identified by de Certeau which allows writers like John of Morigny and Julian of Norwich to externalize their internal experiences and to make real their spiritual selves. Both texts draw attention to their own generation in a way which suggests the author's awareness of the importance of the process of writing to the process of knowing or understanding the experiences they write about.

II. Experience and Body

In *Rewriting Magic,* Claire Fanger understands the *Liber visionum* as a memoir, a genre she distinguishes from diary or autobiography, as, for Fanger, "the story told in the Book of Visions is the one that John intended to represent him, a crafted product, a picture of his own state of understanding about his spiritual development as it probably stood" (32). Like Turner's description of Augustine's "self-making," John crafts a narrative of his own spirituality which, in its crafting, creates itself. Likewise, Julian's *A Revelation* expands her initial work from the vantage of post-reflection, yet still exists as a text which represents only her understanding and spiritual development as it stood in the process of its writing. The recursive process not only of the written text and generated knowledge, but also of the experiential moments embedded in the

narratives told by John and by Julian, are central to uncovering the process of self-making, spirituality, and understanding in their works.

The experiential may be most powerfully understood in the bodily. For Julian of Norwich, the bodily is inseparable from her work, both in terms of her own physical illness which begins her visionary journey and because of the extremely physical – even grotesque – nature of visions of the horrors of Christ's Passion. She describes her visionary experience parallel to her physical experience of sickness and death, as she sets the scene for her visions through a description of her illness. She writes that "God sent me a bodily sickness in the which I ley three days and three nights," after which she and her caretakers, thinking she would die, sent for her curate (130). In the cross held by the curate, she has her visionary experiences, prefaced and punctuated in her prologue by descriptions of the changes in her body as she labored in her sicknes: "by then was my body dead from the middes downward, as to my feeling," "my sight began to faile," "the over part of my body began to die," "my most paine was shortnes of winde and failing of life," etc (131-2). In drawing attention to her physical experience, Julian sets the stage for her ability to understand the suffering of Christ, and thus to act as the primary interpreter of the suffering shown to her. It is this bodily experience which creates in Julian the ability to see and understand the ensuing "shewing" of Christ's Passion.

Her experience of Christ's passion, then, is also concerned with the body. She sees first "the red bloud trekile downe from under the garland, hote and freshely, plentuously and lively" (135). Later, in the seventh chapter of *A Revelation,* Julian returns to the physicality of "bodely sight" after the theological articulations of the preceding two chapters. She again describes Christ's bleeding head: "the gret droppes of blode felle downe fro under the garlonde like pelottes, seeming as it had comen oute of the veines. And in the coming oute they were browne

rede, for the blode was full thicke. And in the spreding abrode they were bright rede" (147). Here and throughout her work, Julian describes her vision of Christ's blood in vividly physical terms, and through her experience of this physical suffering she begins to make sense of these things which Christ reveals to her.

While less overtly bodily, John's visions still take on a good deal of physicality, which allows him to better understand them and himself. John's bodily experience is tied up in the penitential form of his work. Fanger describes penance as "the sacrament of the middle of life" (59), a repeatable ritual of the self. She argues that, because "the autobiographical parts of John's work are refracted by the prayers, which are penitential as well" and because "even the Thirty Prayers are almost without exception concerned in some manner with purification of the soul and so are meant to incite penitential thoughts in the speaker," we should understand the entire *Liber florum* as "a meditation on – as well as a modus operandi for – penitential action" (59-60). John, whom Fanger describes as "an expert in the confessional," being one who both made and heard confession and knew from his training in canon law "what confession and penance were supposed to do" (59), treats his entire writing operation as a kind of penance.

In a striking vision at the end of the first part of the Book of Visions, John describes falling into an ecstatic sleep and experiencing the following:

> I saw a man robed in a red toga or surcoat coming into the solar where I was, along with some others clad in similar costume. He sat down there in the throne like a master. And seeing by the revelation of the Holy Spirit in my heart, I knew this to be the lord Jesus. Coming before him I sought mercy, prostrate, as the religious custom is in chapter before masters of the order. And then the lord Jesus, my master, ordered one of his associates to beat me harshly. One of them got up and began to hit me hard with his fist, saying, 'Take

> that, because of the things you have done and are doing that are contrary to your Creator.' And he beat me very hard, so much that I woke up because of the extreme pain and suffering I was enduring. I was much amazed, being in pain in my shoulders and the other places where I had been beaten, and I smarted for almost the whole of an hour. And thus the chastening Lord chastised me and did not deliver me to death.[5] (187)

There are two aspects of this vision I want to address. The first is the physical punishment enacted by Jesus upon John in the interior space of the visionary dream. The second is the miraculous externalized waking pain after John has awoken from his dream. Here, John connects the external authority of the church over the orthodoxy of his actions, an anxiety he clearly grapples with in his concern over the true nature of the *Ars notoria,* even before he faces the criticism of the "barking dogs," to the internal and higher authority of God himself, through Jesus, who directs John's punishment. The physicality of this penance – that is, the merciful punishment John has prayed for – becomes somatically realized in the waking pain John feels in his shoulders upon waking.

John's penitence is here both external and internal. That is, it comes from an external source (Jesus, in the form of an abbot) in a monastic structure familiar to John, but it occurs in the internal space of the vision. The penitential structure in general necessarily involves this internal-external precedent, as the penance itself is an internal process, but its antecedent is an external sin. Julian, too, in her bodily visions of Christ's Passions and in her physical suffering in sickness, derives her authority in the internal and experiential nature of her visions.

The writings of Julian of Norwich and John of Morigny provide a striking look into the relationships between experience, selfhood, reflection, and writing. Julian's interiority and

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[5] Translations from the *Liber florum celestis doctrine* are by Claire Fanger.

internal, experiential authority over the generation of *A Revelation of Love* out of her shorter text, *A Vision Shown to a Devout Woman* give us a way to understand how her spirituality, theology, and selfhood shifted over the course of her reflection and writing. Julian's text mirrors her conception of the unity of the soul and of God's ultimate providence and benevolence, represented most clearly in the oft-quoted passage "It is soth that sinne is cause of alle this paine, but alle shalle be wele, and alle manner of thing shalle be wele" (211). In the same way, John's text mirrors his confessional-penitential goals, with his autobiographical confession serving as a model refracted across the remaining work of prayers and meditative figures out of which John fashions his spirituality.

In his general prologue, John crafts an argument justifying the recording of his visions, setting up the book's existence as a consequence of the divine intervention of the Virgin to save him from the demonic practices he had fallen victim to in studying the *Ars notoria*:

> And so I, brother John of Morigny, unworthy monk, servant and humble minister of this same virgin, and of her son, our lord Jesus Christ, can no longer bear to keep hidden in my heart the things that she saw fit miraculously to show me and to fashion for me in my own time, when I was kindled with excess of love, delight, and charity for her. Instead, for the serenity of all I have proposed to lay it out most clearly in the present book, in particular through the spiritual visions and sacred warnings by which she mercifully deigned to call me back from my old errors when I was blinded by the tricks of the roaring enemy. (3-4)

By highlighting his own experiences and his ability to discern between true and demonic visions, he sets himself up as an authoritative, humble, and most importantly honest source. As the reader continues into the rest of the prologue, he presents an autobiographical recount of his visionary

experiences from sin to redemption, and the development of his discernment ability, and in this way portrays himself as a man who has learned a great deal from his own mistakes and is now, by the authorization of the Virgin Mary, in a position to teach others.

His autobiographical prologue allows him to present himself to his audience as an honest figure. That is, by admitting to his own mistakes and deception, not as a victim but as an active participant who fell into temptation, John gives himself a reflective form of authority. He describes how, early in his schooling:

> A book was passed on to me by a certain cleric in which there were contained many nefarious things of the necromantic art. I took a copy from it of as much as I could get, and after that I returned it to the cleric. I was noticed by the devil, and tempted, and blinded as the temptation prevailed, I began to think how I might be able to acquire expertise in this nefarious science. (7-8).

John is advised to seek the *Ars notoria,* and when he finds it, he "immediately set to the task of performing this work and obtaining its effect" (8). While this could be read as simply an attempt on John's part to separate himself from his history with necromancy by highlighting the fact that a necromantic book "was passed on" to him, a passive act, and that he was advised by another cleric to seek out the *Ars notoria,* and even that he was "noticed" and "tempted" by the devil (8), it also serves to implicate John in his own passivity. That is, his temptation and his susceptibility to these "nefarious things" is something for which he takes full responsibility, granting him, to the reader, a proper penitential humbleness. The autobiographical account continues as John walks the reader through his visionary experiences, explaining the moments which made him begin to doubt the sanctity of the *Ars notoria* and his use of necromancy, while offering explanations for his continued work with the book despite his growing doubts.

He warns his readers against scribal error, textual reductions, and concludes his prologue with a lengthy guide to distinguish demonic from divine visions, expressing repeatedly the importance for readers to seek aid in discernment and to be careful. By showing how he himself, an evidently very intelligent and learned man, had been unaware of the secret necromantic incantations woven into the corrupt text of the *Ars Notoria,* John cautions his readers against believing too strongly in their visions. The effect of this rhetorical move is twofold: one, he conveys the sense of honesty he maintains throughout the work, and two, he gives, in essence, a disclaimer. If, that is, someone were to misuse his work or carelessly induce visions and subsequently fall victim to demonic trickery, they could not say they had not been warned of the dangers.

In the revised Book of Figures in 1315, there is a chapter entitled "That this science should be permitted," where John relies on his knowledge of the Bible to point to the many locations in the scripture where God answers questions via dreams:

> It is said that in the gathering together of the whole army of Israel against the Philistines by King Saul, Saul was frightened, and so he consulted the Lord. And it says there that the Lord did not answer, neither by dreams, by priests, nor by prophets.
>
> Also it is said in the thirty-sixth chapter of Genesis that Joseph saw a dream through which was signified what was about to happen in his land.
>
> Also it is said in the first chapter of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar saw a dream through which was signified what was about to happen in the times to come.
>
> Also it is said that in the second chapter of Matthew that the magi having received an answer in dreams went back by another wat, etcetera. (5)

The repetitive structure – that is, the repetition of "Also it is said…" – punctuates John's conviction and authority, and his reliance on scriptural precedents reminds, in theory, his critics that his own work is within the realm of the orthodox. Like Marguerite Porete, explored in the previous chapter, John's rhetoric anticipates the provocation the work may cause, and, like Marguerite in the last seventeen chapters of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, he includes his own scriptural mastery to assert himself as a knowledgeable source and as one whose ideas operate within scriptural precedent. Throughout the *Liber florum,* John's humble mystical rhetoric, in which he attributes his work to the Virgin Mary and attains divine knowledge through mystical encounters converge with his scholarly rhetoric, in which he presents himself as a skilled and authoritative magician. For the magician, as Klaasen reminds us, an individual authority is a necessity: "as a magic operator, John's individual merits are important, but so are the practical abilities he acquires" (86) in the discernment of spirits and visions, in his knowledge of canon law and scripture, and in his experiential knowledge of necromancy.

CHAPTER III: PERFORMANCE, LABOR, AND THE BODY IN *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

The Book of Margery Kempe has enchanted – and frustrated – readers and scholars since its discovery and publication. Composed in the early fifteenth century, the book defies categorization and singular interpretation. Ostensibly autobiographical, the story in the book, which details the spiritual journey of Margery Kempe, from married laywoman and mother of fourteen to purified mystical wife of the Godhead, following her illness after childbirth, is told in fragmented memories, a stream of consciousness narration that defies linear conventions. Often over-the-top, *the Book of Margery Kempe* is a performative story, in which Kempe describes herself engaging in a variety of laborious performances in order to produce her *Book*, and, at the same time, her identity as a mystic.

Margery Kempe describes herself as illiterate, and the *Book* itself chronicles its own generation as she sought a scribe who would agree to record her tale. The generation and source of the *Book* is notoriously difficult to ascertain with any full confidence. As will be explored below, the text underwent several layers of dictation, copying, and compiling from multiple scribes. Clearly, then, there is a lot to unpack when approaching the *Book* in terms of compositional history and authorial voice, an idea frequently debated among scholars. Lynn Staley has suggested that Kempe's scribe is a fictional construct used by Kempe to give herself the masculine authorization,[6] Sarah Rees Jones has argued on the opposite end of the spectrum that Kempe herself is a fictional character created by the clergy responsible for the *Book*.[7]

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[6] Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions.* University Park, 1994, pp. 1-38.
[7] Jones, Sarah Rees. "*'A peler of Holy Cherch': Margery Kempe and the Bishops.*" *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy,* Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, Rosalynn Voaden, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson, eds., Turnhout, 2000, pp. 377-91.

Additional scholarship gives attention to various figures associated with the compositional and manuscript history: Margaret Gallyon and A. C. Spearing suggest the authorship of Robert Springolde, Kempe's confessor and likely second scribe,[8] and Anthony Bale has uncovered the role in production played by Richard Salthouse, a Benedictine from Norwich, whose name appears at the end of the surviving manuscript.[9] For John Hirsh, the compositional process of the *Book* points to the second scribe as the most relevant author,[10] and for Sebastian Sobecki, who has presented compelling evidence to suggest the role of Kempe's son as the first scribe, attention to her scribes supports the historicity of the text.[11] I tend, ultimately, to follow Nicholas Watson, who has argued that Kempe's *Book* is a production of the mediated conversations between herself and her scribes, and thus essentially her own.[12]

Obviously, however, we cannot take the text as Kempe's direct voice, as it is mediated through at least two male writers. And, on another axis, we must consider the relationship between Kempe and her presentation of herself in her narrative. That is, even if she had herself written the *Book* directly, her presentation of herself is fraught not only with the subjectivity – and fallibility – of memory, but more importantly with her distinct purpose in creating a narrative and a figure out of herself which is particularly spiritual. For the purpose of this analysis, what

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[8] Gallyon, Margaret. *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England.* Norwich, 1995 and Spearing, A. C. "Margery Kempe," *A Companion to Middle English Prose,* A. S. G. Edwards, ed., Cambridge, 2004, pp. 83-97.
[9] Bale, Anthony. "Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the Scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2017, pp. 173–87.
[10] Hirsh, John C. "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe,* Medium Ævum 44, 1975, pp. 145-150.
[11] Sobecki, Sebastian. "'The Writyng of This Tretys': Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book". *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: The Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society* (0190-2407), 37, p. 257.
[12] Watson, Nicholas. "The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe.*" *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages,* Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds., Notre Dame, 2005, pp. 395-434.

ultimately matters is the text as it stands and what it means to read a text ostensibly so distanced from the voice of its narrative "author." That is, whether we believe a real Margery Kempe existed, whether we believe her sincerity, or whether we believe her voice is accessible in the *Book* at all, the text itself describes an authorial Kempe dictating her story to her scribe, and it is this narrative form that interests me here. Likewise, while extended conversations about the boundaries between Margery Kempe the person and Margery Kempe the character are important, for the purpose of this exploration of performance the distinction it is not especially urgent, although it is useful to keep in mind and be attentive to the unknowability of the full relationship between the two. I will, for the most part, following other scholars, refer to the figure as Kempe and the character as Margery, if a distinction feels necessary. On the whole, however, I am interested in the ways in which Kempe – the person – performs through Margery – the narrative character – who engages in a variety of laborious performances and performative labors, and the conditions under which this performance occurs, and as such, the distinction between the two is not a roadblock to my analysis.

A small yet steady stream of scholarship has explored the performative elements – whether explicit or implicit – of Margery Kempe's narrative. Mary Suydam and Joanna Ziegler, through their own scholarship as well as in their work on collections, must be credited for their role in the expansion of studies in medieval performance. Nanda Hopenwasser analyzes Kempe as a performance artist, who, through going "on tour" via pilgrimage, reached and formed a broad audience and spiritual community. Hopenwasser argues that "as conscious author of her self-referential autobiographical construct," Kempe uses purposefully dramatic, theatrical, or performative forms "likely to capture her textual audience" (116). Hopenwasser's analysis focuses primarily on the directly theatrical aspects of Margery's performances, linking them to

the theatrical experience of the audience, whose familiarity with other medieval performers, such as mystery plays, made them particularly responsive to Margery's spiritual affect. Jesse Njus has analyzed Kempe's devotional practices and engagement with immersive spectatorship in relation to her attested attendance at the York cycle.[13] Laura Varnam argues that in her descriptions of her interactions with material objects on her pilgrimage, and particularly in her embodiment of the sorrow of the pietà, Kempe "presents herself not only as a proficient reader of devotional objects but also as a powerful reenactor of the meaning of that particular object" (212). These works highlight the presence and effect of distinctly theatrical and performative elements in *The Book of Margery Kempe,* elements which, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, allow her to most effectively access, process, and put to writing her spiritual experience.

Significantly, even beyond the overtly theatrical elements of Margery's narrative and the dramatic pilgrimage weeping scenes which can easily be read as performances, the *Book* is filled with – in fact generated by – performance. In recent years, scholars such as Evelyn Birge Vitz have worked to turn attention towards the history of performance and the performative impulse in all of medieval literature – not just plays, songs, or epics, which are traditionally read by scholars with the idea of performance in mind – as medieval works were "only rarely books that were meant to be read privately and silently" but rather "invited performance and *were* performed" (302). From the attention frequently given to storytellers and storytelling within medieval narratives, an inclusion which calls attention to its own form, to framing devices which emulate a speaker and an audience, to subtle invitations in language for bodily performance, medieval texts remind us of their performative history in a variety of ways. And for Vitz, "any

[13] See Njus, Jesse, and Edelgard E. DuBruck. "Margery Kempe and the Spectatorship of Medieval Drama." *Fifteenth-Century Studies 38*, edited by Barbara I. Gusick and Rosanne Gasse, vol. 38, Boydell & Brewer, 2013, pp. 123–52.

way in which a narrative is actualized can be said to be a performance," and so "even private, silent reading is one kind of narrative performance" (3). For Margery Kempe, who could not read and thus learned her scriptures "from sermons and from commoning with clerks" (23), this performative model would have been quite familiar. This knowledge allows us to more entirely appreciate Kempe as a storyteller, and more importantly to appreciate the act of storytelling itself as a performance Kempe engaged with not only to produce the *Book* but also as the form of the narrative itself.

The production of the book, then, is a kind of performative labor. Contemporary conversations around emotional labor may give us a useful lexis with which to explore the *Book.* Arlie Russell Hochschild begins *The Managed Heart* with parallel references to a child laborer described in one of the depositions examined by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* and to one of her own research subjects, a young female flight attendant. Just as she discovers that "some unexpected common ground" can be found in the examination of these figures who, "at first glance," seem to have circumstances which "could not be more different" (5), so too might we find common ground and relevant insights in the application of contemporary frameworks for discussing and understanding labor to the workers and performers of the fifteenth century.

Hochschild defines *emotional labor* as labor which "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others," it "calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality" (7). In utilizing theories of labor and of performance, we can develop a greater understanding of the ways in which Margery Kempe worked to maintain her spiritual identity and career. Kempe herself puts her spiritual career in dialogue with other forms of labor by referring to her failed careers in brewing and milling.

These careers serve as a kind of resume, building blocks towards her latest career as a holy woman. Of course, this change is facilitated by God. Upon the failure of her milling career, the text reads:

> as it was noised about the town of N. that neither man nor beast would do service to the said creature, then some said she was accursed; some said God took open vengeance upon her […] and some wise men, whose minds were more grounded in the love of our Lord, said it was the high mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that had summoned and called her from the pride and vanity of the wretched world. (9-10)

Her spiritual career is suggested as a substitute for the "pride and vanity" of entrepreneurship, signifying the mutual exclusion of a holy career and a worldly one. Margery's inability to be productive in the former signifies to the "wise men" her true calling in her new pious life and career. Drawing, as Hochschild describes, on "a source of self we honor as deep and integral to our individuality" (7), the validity of Margery's spiritual career derives from an assumption of an individual, "deep and integral" sense of spiritual self, called upon to serve God, and enmeshed with her inability to successfully labor productively in the worldly pursuits of milling and brewing.

Understanding the significance of labor to *The Book of Margery Kempe* gives us a deeper understanding of the performative elements of the text. There are two ways in which labor and performance most compellingly overlap: the first is textual, in Kempe's act of storytelling, in the act of dictation and in the narrative of the text itself, the second is in the depiction of labor and performance enacted by Margery's self-dramatized character. By exploring these ideas through the lens of labor and performance, we can gain valuable insights

and give some of the needed attention to a long history of women's work and performance in the context of the late Middle Ages.

The first and most lucrative site in which labor and performance overlap is in the form of the *Book* itself. As described in the beginning of the *Book,* Kempe herself was not able to write and thus required a scribe willing to record her dictations. Her first scribe, theorized by Sobecki and others to have been her son, "a man dwelling in Germany who was an Englishman in his birth," dies after writing "as much as she would tell him for the time that they were together" (5). Her second, "a priest for whom [she] had great affection," often identified as Robert Spryngolde, is initially unable to read the writing of the first scribe, "for it was neither good English nor German," and moreover is put off by Kempe's reputation, which suffered for her extreme displays of pious weeping, sobbing, and bodily twisting (5). However, "vexed in his conscious for he had promised her to write this book," he eventually agrees to try, and through Kempe's prayer to "purchase him grace to read it and also to write it," he miraculously gains the ability to read and rewrite what had been previously written by the first scribe. Neither scribe is particularly excited to work with Kempe, and it is only after she "spoke often to him about it" (5) that the final scribe comes around. Through these descriptions, we see the very material conditions under which Margery Kempe worked to produce her book, most importantly the work of petition she had to do in order to even find a scribe whose authority would corroborate her own.

These descriptions of the generation and production of the book form a prologue which primarily functions as a disclaimer for the scribe against uncharitable readers and to establish Kempe's authority. However, the *Book* draws attention to its own production later, too, when Kempe describes how "when this book was first in writing, the said creature was more at home

in her chamber with her writer and, for speed of the writing, said fewer beads than she had done fore years before. And, when she came to church and would hear mass […] her heart was drawn away from the saying and set greatly on meditation" (157). Here, audiences see how the writing of the *Book* fit into Margery's larger spiritual career, and that in order to do the work – both the physical dictation and the emotional meditation – other regular spiritual work, here praying and paying attention during services, had to be reduced.

But beyond even these literal forms of work involved in the production of the *Book,* the narrative form of the book reveals the performative labor of storytelling itself. The stream-of-consciousness and asynchronous style recalls the act of dictation, yet the careful construction and presentation reminds us that Kempe's storytelling style is purposeful. For Hopenwasser, Kempe, "as conscious author of her self-referential autobiographical construct […] re-creates herself as a unique personality capable of mesmerizing most audiences" (116). Beyond even the theatrical scenes analyzed by Hopenwasser, Kempe's production of herself as the protagonist of her *Book* is a dramatic work of storytelling. By dramatizing herself in these ways, Kempe creates spiritual authority for herself through Margery, and as readers we can see both the creative work of the writing of the book as well as the physical work of Margery's performances.

The second site in which labor and performance overlap, then, can be found in an analysis of what exactly Margery *does*. Throughout the *Book,* Kempe tells stories about work – as a wife and as a spiritual woman. While Kempe spends less time recounting her life prior to the catalyst for her spiritual journey, her experience as a wife comes up with decent regularity, as it is a great point of tension between her early life and career and her desired spiritual one because of its incompatibility with spiritual ideals. Robert Stanton, drawing on Gail Gibson's analysis of devotional theater in East Anglia, writes that Margery Kempe approaches theological concerns

and questions "through an intensely personalized autobiographical structure in which her own uniqueness is equally foregrounded with her work's utility for other sinners" and that she "does not deal in theological categories but in personal conversations with God and Jesus and in stories about flesh-and-blood people: herself especially, but also her husband, her children, and the rest of the world, broadly divided into those who supported her and those who opposed her" (170). Like Stanton, Gibson, and others, I find it striking that Kempe's narrative centers so heavily on her troubling material biography.

Her spiritual journey begins after an episode of madness triggered by an unconfessed – perhaps unconfess*able* – sin, from which she finally "come[s] again to her mind" when Jesus appears to her "in likeness of a man" (8). This initial moment, in which Margery finds herself unnable to confess, to put to words, her sin, sets up the reader to understand beyond the directly written. Her spiritual journey which follows is not an easy one, as she first struggles to relinquish her pride and material wealth. Again, however, she experiences the divine, this time in the form of "a sound of melody so sweet and delectable, she thought, as if she had been in paradise" (10). This aural vision of heaven compels her to turn her attention fully toward heaven, and she recalls that "after this time she had never desire to common fleshly with her husband, for the debt of matrimony was so abominable to her that she would rather, she thought, eat or drink the ooze, the muck in the channel, than to consent to any fleshly commoning, save only for obedience" (10). Her husband continued to "use her" for "three to four years," a time which Kempe recalls as "years of great labor with temptations which she bore as meekly as she could" including sexual temptations from another man in her life (11). Her spiritual journey, including her temptations and failures, is the material work she must engage in in order to reach mystical union.

For her scribe, too, Kempe's material work – her sound business and legal advice – are crucial to lend credence to her spiritual authority. In an early chapter, the priest-scribe takes over the narrative for a moment to explain how he came to "prove this creature's feelings" (41). He recounts how, though he asked her "many times and divers times," he still did not fully trust her: "And yet he would not always give credences to her words, and that hindered him" (41). He goes on to tell two stories in which he was the victim or would-be victim of scams. In the first, a young man "complaining of poverty and trouble" (after allegedly accidentally killing someone) comes to the priest asking for aid (41). The priest, despite Margery's misgivings about the man, lends him "silver with a good will to help him" (42), after which the man leaves, promising to return and to return the loan. Margery "supposed that he would no more see him," and was right: "and then he repented that he had not acted after her counsel" (42). In the second, the priest encounters "another false scoundrel" who tries to sell him a book (42). Margery warns him to "buy no book from him, for he is not to trust upon," and, having learned his lesson, the priest heeds her advice and discovers the man had no book at all: "and then the priest knew well that the foresaid creature's feeling was true" (42-3). In the next chapter, Margery weighs in on a local conflict between parishioners over whether or not a font should be installed in a local chapel. The priest, "as he had done before in the time of legal action," asks Margery for her advice (44). Repeatedly, it is the soundness of Margery's material, worldly advice which wins her the trust of her community, or at least of her scribe, in her spiritual sincerity and authority.

The offering of legal advice is one of many labors apparently expected of Kempe as a spiritual woman. The development of her identity as a mystic, which Hopenwasser describes as being the development of her ability as a performance artist, involves a variety of laborious, often painful performances, punctuated by cyclic interactions with others in which she serves a

variety of needs. Chapter 23, for example, recounts a catalogue of instances in which Margery received revelations concerning the physical or spiritual health of people in her community: a vicar, a widower, a priest on behalf of a sick woman, a "good man who was a great friend," a clerk, a "worshipful woman," and "many more […] to write them all should perhaps be a hindrance to more profit" (40). These entries offer a glimpse into the kind of spiritual labor Margery performs throughout the *Book,* and, assumably, beyond. In some instances, she is approached: "a priest came to her and prayed her to pray for a woman who lay in point of death," while in others she is moved by Christ directly (40). In each of these various events, Margery performs the expected spiritual task: prayer, weeping, and/or advisement. After these descriptions, the *Book* tells us that for Margery, "these feelings […] of the living and of the dying, of some to be saved, of some to be damned, were […] great pain and punishing. She had rather have suffered any bodily penance than these feelings, and she might have put them away for the dread she had of illusions and deceits from her ghostly enemies" (40). Margery's preference for bodily penance over the emotional toll of these revelations – whether from the emotional labor of working with her spiritual clientele and absorbing/performing their feelings (ie, in weeping) and/or from the stress of the importance of discerning true revelation from "illusions and deceits" (something important to anyone claiming holiness, but especially to Margery, whose opponents and disbelievers frequently accuse her of heresy) – highlights the reality of such labor *as* labor.

Her physical travel is highly laborious and often dangerous, and she suffers especially because of the treatment of her company, the majority of whom dislike her: "they were most displeased because she wept so much and spoke always of the love and goodness of our Lord, as well at the table as in other places" (45). Their frustration with her extreme displays of piousness

leads them to threaten her repeatedly with expulsion from the group, as well as to "cut her gown so short that it came but a little beneath her knee and made her put on a white canvas in the manner of a sackcloth garment, for she would be taken as a fool" (46). The humiliating damage to her clothing recalls both the dangers faced by women travelers and the material cost of travel: in clothing, food, bedding, and other vital supplies. Later, her fellowship having begrudgingly accepted her again, the material conditions of pilgrimage become again apparent: "They ordained a ship for themselves to sail in [and] bought vessels for their wine and ordained bedding for themselves, but nothing for her" (49). When she is rejected by her fellowship, Kempe starkly reminds us of the dangers she faces travelling alone, as Margery prays for a leader and meets "an old man," William Weaver (48). He expresses concern for their prospects: "'I am afraid you shall be taken from me, and I shall be beaten for you and forebear my tabard'" (48). Margery assures him that God will protect them, and then prays: "'Lord, […] drive away my enemies, and keep well my chastity that I vowed to you, and let me never be defiled'" (48). Weaver and Margery are both concerned for their safety from thieves and in particular for Margery's safety from rape. Kempe's focus on the material concerns of the pilgrimage, from the navigation of supplies and sustenance to concerns for physical safety, is a storytelling tool with which she might directly connect with readers for whom the more intangible spiritual labor is less visible.

In addition to the labor of her physical journey, Kempe also engages in a more abstract labor, in the kind of emotional embodiment ascribed to an anchorite, both in the pilgrimage sites as well as in her own community, as if bringing the spiritual impact of the pilgrimage back with her. The weeping, which so enraged her travelling companions, reaches a peak when they approach and enter Jerusalem. At the Mount of Calvary, the site of the crucifixion, Margery "wept and sobbed so plenteously as though she had seen our Lord with her bodily eye suffering

his Passion at that time. Before her in her soul she saw him verily by contemplation, and that caused her to have compassion" (50). Margery here as in her first encounter with Jesus at the height of her despair engages in the mystical tradition of deriving spiritual knowledge and authority through a sensory experience. She translates this into a physical performance: she "fell down so that she might not stand or kneel but wallowed and twisted with her body, spreading her arms abroad, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart should have burst asunder, for in the city of her souls he saw verily and freshly how our Lord was crucified" (50). By performing in this way, Margery engages her live audiences, who are often described as "wondering" at her, and by crafting her narrative around these performances, Kempe engages her readers/listeners to do the same.

Later, she cries at even the site of a crucifix or any other reminder of the Passion, as she immediately and viscerally embodies the memory. While in Rome, if she "saw women […] bearing children in their arms" or "if she saw a seemly man" she "wept and sobbed full sorely" as if she had seen "Christ in his childhood" or "the manhood of Christ" (63). "Sometimes she wept on Good Friday an hour for the sin of the people […] Sometimes she wept another hour for the souls in Purgatory; another hour for those who were in trouble, in poverty, or in any distress; another hour for Jews, Saracens, and all false heretics" (106). To return to Varnam, here Margery "re-enacts" the sorrow through the emotional labor of spiritual compassion explored by Yu-Ching Wu. Margery tries, for a time, to restrain her weeping to protect herself from the slander of her companions but found that her "body" could not long "endure the ghostly labor" and was "overcome with the unspeakable love that wrought so fervently in the soul," and would cry even louder (51). The physicality of her emotional labor here again connects to the bodily and physical focus of the *Book* In this way, the weeping becomes both a part of the embodied

performance of spiritual sorrow and love as well as a tool, like prayer, for the worldly work of Margery's spiritual identity.

Considering the performative aspect of the labor of Margery Kempe both as storyteller/writer and as mystic and performer in the character which represents her in her *Book* gives us a way of approaching and appreciating her often excessive and difficult episodes. It allows us to see her as both a participant in a tradition of mysticism as well as a unique and creative personality, whose work to produce and to record her spiritual journey and her mystical performances has left us with access to a beautifully challenging and widely entertaining piece of literature and history, providing a valuable insight into a form of life and devotion for women in the churning, dialectical religious climate of the late Middle Ages.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how religious writers in the fourteenth century struggled under two limits: one, the political climate, which involved ongoing power struggles between religious and royal authorities and increasing suspicion towards the written text, and two, the inherent inexpressibility of the profoundly spiritual experiences they sought to put to text. Across analyses of Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* John of Morigny's *The Flowers of Heavenly Teaching,* Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Divine Love,* and Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe,* we repeatedly encounter similar rhetorical strategies employed in response to the weight of these constraints.

Significantly, we repeatedly see the centrality of performance to these works and those who created them: in recursive self-narrativizing, in discernment, and in storytelling. We have seen how each writer used careful rhetorical choices to position their selves and their experiences in a place of authority within their theological frameworks, and we have seen how performance was a central part of that rhetoric: the performance of apophasis and annihilation in *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* the recursive performance of self in John of Morigny's *Liber florum celestis doctrine* and Julian of Norwich's *Shewings,* and the performance of spiritual labor and of storytelling in *The Book of Margery Kempe.* In each of these performances, textual revision is embedded, and the process of the writing impacted on the text as we receive it. While we may not know everything about these figures and their writing, what clues we have from the surviving manuscripts in various translations provide a clear picture of the importance of these themes.

Through this analysis, I have placed a new emphasis on the relationship between England and France in this period, and in particular between English and French mysticism, or more specifically the similarities in discursive response to increased inquisitorial practices and

suspicion over visionary literature, lay or auto-hagiography, and evolving theological debates and the widening of the circle of those involved in them. However, as Margery Kempe reminds us, contact across Europe and Asia was a key feature of the late Middle Ages, and while particular contexts vary, the conversations the figures presented here participate in in their work and in the responses to their work – like Marguerite Porete's trial – were not unique to England or France.

As we conclude, the importance of these works to both their individual moments as well as to a larger history of orthodoxy and heresy in the later Middle Ages and beyond cannot be understated. As I have alluded to a few times throughout this project, the debates involving these and similar works, at both the individual and the institutional level, in the form of the works themselves, criticism and trials, papal decrees, and more were deeply influential in forming the basis for the stereotype of the diabolical witch at the heart of the European witch craze of later centuries. These debates were also at the roots of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-reformation. Finally, these works hold significance in religious communities today.

Notably, despite condemnation of even the most extreme form, each of the texts explored survived to be studied. Not only, however, did they simply survive: manuscript evidence points to their proliferation across Europe contemporary to and in the centuries following their composition. Marguerite Porete's work likely influenced others in her time, notably Meister Eckhart, as I have mentioned, and her work survives in manuscripts in French, in Latin, as well as in English, as her work enjoyed significant popularity in Carthusian circles in England in the seventeenth century. Several surviving manuscripts indicate John of Morigny's work was used by practitioners across Europe. We are reminded constantly when reading these works of the dialectic between orthodoxy and heterodoxy; the ways in which writers both created and

ruptured the boundaries of orthodoxy; the productive effect of condemnation as ideas expressed under a climate which required extreme care in expression took on innovative and recursive forms.

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